

## No Need to Fear Charismatic Renewal

CASTEL GANDOLFO, Italy, SEPT. 26, 2003

Baptism in the Spirit makes the Catholic Charismatic Renewal a formidable means willed by God to revitalize Christian life, says the preacher of the Papal Household.

Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa made that point Thursday as a gathering of more than 1,000 delegates of Catholic Charismatic Renewal from 73 countries drew to a close.

The delegates had gathered for a spiritual retreat and to reflect on holiness in light of John Paul II's apostolic letter "Novo Millennio Ineunte." Father Cantalamessa was the retreat master.

Taking into account Protestant, evangelical and Pentecostal denominations, and some members of the Orthodox Church, it is estimated that 600 million Christians have had the charismatic experience.

Given his knowledge of the "charismatic" experience, ZENIT interviewed Father Cantalamessa just before the conclusion of the meeting.

**Q: There are those in the Church who think that "baptism in the Spirit" is an invention of the charismatics, and that a name has been given to an experience that is not "catalogued" in the Church. Could you explain, from your own experience, what baptism in the Spirit is?**

Father Cantalamessa: Baptism in the Spirit is not a human invention; it is a divine invention. It is a renewal of baptism and of the whole of Christian life, of all the sacraments.

For me, it was also a renewal of my religious profession, of my confirmation, and of my priestly ordination. The whole spiritual organism is revived as when wind blows on a flame. Why has the Lord decided to act at this time in such a strong way? We don't know. It is the grace of a new Pentecost.

It is not about Charismatic Renewal inventing baptism in the Spirit. In fact, many have received baptism in the Spirit without knowing anything about Charismatic Renewal. It is a grace; it depends on the Holy Spirit. It is a coming of the Holy Spirit which is manifested in repentance of sins, in seeing life in a new way, which reveals Jesus as the living Lord -- not as a personage of the past -- and the Bible becomes a living word. The fact is, this cannot be explained.

There is a revelation with baptism, because the Lord says that whoever believes will be baptized and saved. We received baptism as children and the Church pronounced our act of faith, but the time comes when we must ratify what happened at baptism. This is an occasion to do so, not as a personal effort, but under the action of the Holy Spirit.

One cannot say that hundreds of millions of people are in error. In his book on the Holy Spirit, Yves Congar, that great theologian who did not belong to Charismatic Renewal, said that, in fact, this experience has changed profoundly the lives of many Christians. And it is a fact. It has changed them and initiated paths of holiness.

**Q: How do you carry out your ministry as Papal Household preacher given your experience in Charismatic Renewal?**

Father Cantalamessa: For me, everything that has happened since 1977 is the fruit of my baptism

in the Spirit. I was a university professor. I was dedicated to scientific research in the history of Christian origins. And when I accepted this experience, not without resistance, I then had the call to leave it all and be available for preaching.

My appointment as Papal Household preacher also came after I experienced this "resurrection." I see it as a great grace. After my religious vocation, Charismatic Renewal has been the most marked grace in my life.

**Q:** From your point of view, do the members of Charismatic Renewal have a specific vocation in the Church?

Father Cantalamessa: Yes and no. Charismatic Renewal, it must be said and repeated, is not an ecclesial movement. It is a current of grace that is meant to transform the Church -- preaching, the liturgy, personal prayer, Christian life.

So it is not a spirituality as such. The movements have a spirituality and emphasize a particular aspect, for example, charity. First of all, Charismatic Renewal does not have a founder. No one thinks of attributing a founder to Charismatic Renewal because it is something that started in many places in different ways. And it does not have a spirituality; it is Christian life lived in the Spirit.

However, it can be said that as the people who have lived this experience are, socially, a reality - - they are people who do certain gestures, pray in a certain way -- then a social reality can be identified whose role is simply to be available so that others can have the same experience, and then disappear.

Cardinal Leo Jozef Suenens, who was the great protector and supporter of Charismatic Renewal in its beginnings, said that the final destiny of Charismatic Renewal might be to disappear when this current of grace has spread throughout the Church.

**Q: As you are about to finish preaching a retreat attended by 1,000 Charismatic delegates from all over the world, what message would you like to give believers who do not know the Renewal?**

Father Cantalamessa: I want to say to the faithful, to bishops, to priests, not to be afraid. I don't know why there is fear. Perhaps, in some measure, because this experience began in other Christian confessions, such as Pentecostals and Protestants.

However, the Pope is not afraid. He has spoken of the ecclesial movements, and also of Charismatic Renewal, as signs of a new springtime of the Church, and he often stresses the importance of this. And Paul VI said it was an opportunity for the Church.

There is no need for fear. There are episcopal conferences, for example in Latin America -- this is true of Brazil -- where the hierarchy has discovered that Charismatic Renewal is not a problem. It is part of the solution to the problem of Catholics who have left the Church because they don't find in it a living word, a lived Bible, the possibility of expressing the faith in a joyful manner, in a free way, and Charismatic Renewal is a formidable means that the Lord has given the Church so that one can live an experience of the Spirit, Pentecostal, in the Catholic Church, without the need to leave the Church.

Nor should Charismatic Renewal be regarded as an "island" where some emotional people get together. It is not an island. It is a grace meant for all the baptized. The external signs can be different, but in its essence, it is an experience meant for all the baptized.