

Comments on the History of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal

By Steve Clark

These comments are about the “founding phase” of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. By “founding phase”, I am referring to 1967–1979 (the last date is a bit arbitrary). In this period, the renewal came into existence, grew very rapidly, and gave birth to most of the entities that have come to contribute to it in a long-term way.

The history of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is the story of God’s work through many years, and it is worth the effort to remember the full story of how it began.

1. The Duquesne weekend was the “inaugurating event”, the event that gave a kick-start to the renewal. The best account of it can be found in Patti Gallagher Mansfield’s book *As By a New Pentecost*. It can, however, be presented in a way that leaves out important aspects of the story. One account for example states “Many of the students there experienced a powerful outpouring of the Spirit in response to fervent prayer asking God to deepen the grace of their baptism and confirmation” [no other detail is given]. This, while not inaccurate, leaves out some very important matters:
 - a. The weekend was not just a “bolt from the blue” due to a completely unexpected action of God. It had been prepared. As Patti Mansfield’s book makes clear, the two professors (unnamed in her book, but they are William Storey and Ralph Keifer) set up the weekend so that (hopefully) people would be baptized in the Spirit. The two professors had already been baptized in the Spirit in a neo-Pentecostal prayer group.
 - b. It is true that there was an emphasis in the weekend on renewing the grace of baptism and confirmation (the Catholic sacramental side) and the chief event occurred in a chapel in which the Eucharist was reserved. But also central to what happened were the daily presentations on the Acts of the Apostles (the scriptural side), and the chief presentation was given by a non-Catholic neo-Pentecostal, the leader of the prayer group in which the two professors were baptized in the Spirit. In the words of Patti Mansfield, “Many of the testimonies mention this presentation on Acts 2 because it was a pivotal moment in the Weekend. The faculty advisors had invited the Spirit-filled Episcopalian woman they had met at the Chapel Hill prayer group, to come and speak. Her presentation was on the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. She may not have used this terminology, but that was her theme.” In other words, the actual event was caused by the confluence of two somewhat different streams, a Catholic one and a neo-Pentecostal one. The whole event had a marked ecumenical aspect (though clearly in a Catholic context) and was based on scripture, especially the Acts of the Apostles.
 - c. There was a pre-history, and the prehistory had a great deal to do with the Cursillo movement and a pre-charismatic community of Cursillo Movement members at Notre Dame University. That community provided many of the most important leaders of the initial charismatic renewal and they also influenced the Duquesne Weekend. Humanly speaking, the Duquesne weekend would not have occurred without this pre-history. Patti Mansfield makes that clear. The best account I know about of the antecedents of the

renewal is the article by James Manney in the February 1973 issue of *New Covenant*, entitled “The Duquesne Weekend: Sources of the Renewal,” and it documents the Cursillo connection. It was written within 10 years of the events — it was written for an audience that contained many eyewitnesses.

2. It is also often said that “The Catholic Charismatic Renewal does not have a founder or group of founders as other movements do — it’s a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit.” There is truth in that. The Catholic charismatic renewal did not have a founder or group of founders like the Catholic orders (e.g., the Franciscans, the Jesuits) or many of the new Catholic movements (e.g., the Neo-catechumenate, Focolare). But there was a group from which it originated, and they gave the most significant leadership to it in its original phase. Manney’s article gives a clear description of this. In this respect it was like the Cursillo Movement, which also was begun by an originating group.
 - a. This is important, because it indicates the role of a feature that has been a constant for successful charismatic renewal, namely, a team of leaders (with different gifts) working together in good order.
 - b. The impression is sometimes given that the charismatic renewal spread by spontaneous action of the Holy Spirit all over the world. There are certainly many events that could be narrated that would document such an aspect of the spread of the renewal. More numerous, however, are the number of people who heard about the beginnings of the renewal and went to some Pentecostal (very often the Full Gospel Businessmen’s Fellowship) or Neo-Pentecostal group. However, the bulk of the original spread of the renewal came through personal contact with the participants in the Catholic charismatic renewal, either through attendance at prayer meetings, or visits to groups or charismatic conferences, usually followed by attendance at a Life in the Spirit Seminar.
 - c. More importantly there was a well-developed structure established for the charismatic movement from almost the beginning. It was adopted largely from the approach of the Cursillo Movement by people who had been leaders in that movement. There were “charismatic” additions (much more prayer for guidance, for instance, and prayer sessions), often learned from the Pentecostals or from Catholic tradition. The charismatic renewal grew as successfully as it did because the original leaders worked at promulgating it and did so reasonably successfully. The structure they developed included:
 - A national service committee (the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Service Committee) that was the recognized “authority” for the renewal in the US and internationally
 - A national communications office and bulletin
 - Eventually an international communications office, slowly evolving towards an international committee
 - Two effective and widely-used publications: *New Covenant* and *Pastoral Renewal* (for leaders).
 - A series of publications (books and tapes), both practical and theological
 - A series of major events, both local regular events (Days of Renewal) and national, regional and eventually international conferences
 - Early and positive contact with the Catholic hierarchy
 - Early and sound theological work

- A practical approach to local prayer groups and communities that was widely taught in the leaders' conferences and publications.
3. The impression is sometimes given that integration into the Catholic Church occurred later than the original phase. This too is misleading. Certainly Cardinal Suenens was instrumental in getting papal (Vatican) approval, a process that began in 1974 and made a important difference. Also the Malines documents gave a theological prestige to the movement that was very valuable. Nonetheless:
- In many local dioceses and in the US (and other countries), the movement was officially recognized and blessed by the hierarchy. This began within the first couple of years.
 - The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement in 1969 in support of Catholic Charismatic Renewal.
 - Cardinal Suenens was instrumental in getting papal (Vatican) approval, a process that began in 1974.
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 - The theological content of the Malines documents had been in core worked out long before 1974 by leaders who were theologically educated and articulate.
 - Our first Episcopal advisor, Bishop McKinney, was very influential in getting hierarchical approval for the movement.
 - Fr. Kilian McDonnell, not officially a member of the renewal but theological adviser to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Service Committee, was very significant in getting theological acceptance of the movement.