

# A Vision Of The Charismatic Renewal

by James Byrne

O give thanks to the Lord for He is good; for his steadfast love endures for ever! Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands, from the east and the west, from the north and from the south.

Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in; hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble and he delivered them from their distress; he led them by a straight way, til they reached a city to dwell in. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to the sons of men! For he satisfies him who is thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things....

Whoever is wise, let him give heed to these things; let men consider the steadfast love of the Lord. (Ps. 107)

## What God Has Done

In many ways this psalm describes what God has done through the outpouring of His Spirit in our midst. In 1967 when a small group of Catholics gathered at Notre Dame for what would later be called the 1st National Conference of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, God foretold what was about to happen in very similar terms. In prophecy He said that His Spirit would sweep across this land from east to west. He told us that what was happening among us was His work and

that we could not understand its magnitude. At that time we certainly could not even really begin to imagine the scope of what He was doing. At this time, three and one half years later, we can only survey what is happening with awe and wonder. Personally, as I travel from coast to coast and from north to south, I marvel at the Spirit's work in so many places.

This renewal is not just a matter of numbers--although it already involves between 10,000 and 20,000 Catholics--but a matter of powerful transformations, as well. To be involved in the Charismatic Renewal is not like joining an organization or espousing certain devotions. Instead, it opens a person's whole life, relationships, and life style to the power of God in a radical way. The fruits of this transformation are simply amazing. In my own experience, I have come to know approximately 100 people whose lives have been deeply touched by God through this renewal. People with deep seated emotional and psychological problems have experienced the healing power of Christ. Others, searching for meaning for their lives, have found it in Christ. And in situation after situation men and women have come to want to praise the Lord Jesus. In the groups around the country there is a growing spirit of selflessness. God seems to be binding together the lives and hearts of men and women into communities of deep fellowship. The genuineness of this fraternal love is attested to not simply by the degree of mutual responsibility, but

by the deep seated desire to minister to others materially and spiritually as individuals and communities.

In short, the Charismatic Renewal is an amazing reality. It is a powerful force which God seems to have unleashed in our midst. It is an historical and sociological phenomenon which in a short time has already demonstrated its power and appeal. It is something which even its sharpest foes--the intellectual humanists in the Church--are being forced to face and attack. To ignore it becomes increasingly difficult.

In the face of such impressive evidence of God's work, we would do well to reflect upon His intentions; as the psalmist suggests, "Whoever is wise ...let him give heed to these things." We need not look far to see God's purpose. From the outset He has revealed it to us. He intends to renew His Church. He longs for the full renewal of the whole Body of Christ. This is what He wants. We would be woefully mistaken were we to say in our hearts 'God has forsaken His Church' or to say 'The time of the historical churches has passed.' Let there be no mistake: what God has done for us He has done for the sake of His Church! God wants to make her into his spotless bride. The promises of God do not fail. He has not forsaken the Church. He is always faithful, even when men are unfaithful. And for us, as Roman Catholics, what that means is that this renewal, in its essentials, is for every Catholic, for every parish, for every diocese.



## ..... Important To Grasp Vision .....

God wants every Catholic to live in the fulness of His life and to live a Spirit-filled life. This is the vision which God has given to us and the great strength of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is that we have held firm to that vision.

### Our Response

It is important that we grasp this vision because our cooperation is important to God. So often we fail to see the importance of our cooperation and impose our ideas of the way God should work upon Him. For example, we think that God is all powerful and so should work with us as we would with an inanimate object--as a man might work with a hammer. He, however, has always chosen to work with us as men with free wills. And so, our response to God's actions makes a difference. If it were up to God alone, the Charismatic Renewal would succeed in renewing the Church. As a matter of fact, though, it is up to us. That is, He has done everything necessary to make that possible. The issue now rests with us.

We must be candid in recognizing man's ability to thwart God's plans. In the Old Testament, time and again God wished to act in a certain way and men would not. Even Moses, his faithful servant, cried continually 'Lord, send someone else!' And throughout the history of the Church men have failed Him. God initiated something and their failures brought it short of its goal. Let us be frank. The history of the Church is filled with the stories of spurious enthusiastic movements which began with power but which ultimately brought division, dissen-

sion, and finally schism. On the other hand, we can look to examples such as the Franciscan renewal of the 13th century to see the fruit for the whole Church which faithfulness can bring.

And so, our response matters very much. God has moved; He has revealed a part of His will to us. It is important that we respond deliberately, wholeheartedly, and generously to Him. Our cry should be, 'Here I am, send me!' Already we can point to a few examples of the results of a narrow response through which a few individuals have left the Church amid scandal and dissension. It is important to recognize that God is not just calling us to a religious experience. Religious experiences are of limited value. God is really calling us to the full Christian life. It is important that we see that we are called to be more than a prayer group movement. God is calling us to be assemblies of praise in which we gather primarily to worship Him and listen as He speaks. And it is important that we understand our relationship as potentially deeper than a once a week prayer meeting, but in terms of full fledged Christian communities. For this kind of total response we have to be willing to be transformed and to have our thought, value, and life patterns transformed. We must be willing to be changed and ready to sacrifice. God will not make us do these things; we must be willing. And so, our commitment is crucial. We must say, 'Lord, if you want to use this charismatic renewal in your Church, I'm willing to put my life at your disposal. Use me anyway you can.'

### Historical Perspective

The significance of the charismatic renewal and our response becomes clearer when it is considered in its historical perspective. At this time and place in history we are confronted with the phenomenon of an increasingly secular environment. This is something which many deplore. It is, however, a fact. This society and its ideals have less and less to do with the ideals of Christianity as time goes on. From a nominally Christian society in which Christian morality was the ideal (though not necessarily the practice), our society is opting for standards which are inimical to Jesus and His Church. Marriage is a good example. Twenty-five years ago Our Lord's teaching on marriage was socially acceptable. Today, divorce is acceptable even among Catholics. And among the young the ideals of fidelity, loyalty and commitment in terms of sexual relationships are increasingly alien. Laws and social codes are ceasing to reinforce Christian morality and many are wavering. Abortion and the family could also serve as examples. Indeed, it is fast becoming the case that the values and ideals which this society and its institutions foster are selfishness, individualism, and egotism.

In the face of this secularization, attitudes and strategies which were based on different social circumstances require change. And as the structures which formerly supported American Catholic life are collapsing about us, the need for a new strategy becomes more apparent each year. It is therefore of the greatest



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## .....The Strategy Of The Early Church.....

significance that what God is doing through the Charismatic Renewal answers real needs of the Church in this time of unprecedented change. The Church today is in the midst of what Pope Paul has accurately described as a crisis of faith. Large numbers of Catholics are confused about the significance of Jesus of Nazareth for their lives and an influential group of secular humanists is actively prompting views which either de-emphasize or deny personal faith in Jesus. In the face of this crisis, it is significant that numbers are finding a deeper personal commitment to Jesus as their Lord in the charismatic renewal. Their desire for common worship and praise is equally impressive.

The Church is also in the midst of a severe leadership crisis. Her natural leaders, and especially the priestly order, are experiencing a large scale identity crisis often compounded with a faith crisis. The result is a leadership void. And seminaries offer little encouragement that this crisis is being met. On the other hand, through the charismatic renewal there is a

wide variety of leadership from laity, priests, and religious. The groups seem to foster indigenous leadership. Again, pastoral theologians eloquently predict severe pastoral crisis, but are unable to offer practical solutions. Pastoral structures and methods which formerly worked do so no longer. In the charismatic renewal, however, vital Christian communities are emerging. They encompass a variety of life styles and vocations. Within them, households tend to emerge which provide a primary environment, while the whole group provides a social context in which all essential spiritual and most essential social needs can be met. And, as fewer Catholics find themselves prepared to share the Gospel and the number of converts generally decreases, through the charismatic renewal nominal Catholics are being brought to a living faith, other Christians are entering the Church, and non-Christians are being baptized in impressive numbers. These developments are significant. I know of nowhere else in the American

Church where such things are occurring on such a large scale. In fact, they offer a glimpse of a new strategy for the Church--one which has proven its effectiveness in the face of a hostile culture. That is the strategy of the early Church. It focused upon living Christian communities which realized the Body of Christ in a given geographical situation. Such communities are beginning to emerge through the charismatic renewal and already it is possible to envision several units in each parish grouping. The charismatic renewal then should be a source of great hope and encouragement to what often appears as a beleaguered Church and merits the prayerful attention of all Catholics.

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"I am not asking you to remove them from the world, but to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world."  
(Jn.17:15,16)

## News And Notes Of Interest

### HELP US WITH FUTURE ISSUES

As well as reporting the "new thing" the Lord is doing in raising up renewed Christian communities around the country and the world, we would like, in future issues, to report on the work of the Holy Spirit in the major traditional areas of Church apostolate. We would like to serve as a vehicle for sharing news about how those living the life of the Spirit are being used in elementary school teach-

ing, high-school teaching, religious orders and family life to bring about a deeper life in the Spirit. We would like to devote future issues to such topics as these. For the sake of Christ and your brothers and sisters will you take time right now to write down your experiences or concerns in this area, or to recommend to us people we could contact to provide material for these upcoming issues. Thank you.

### A NEW NAME

We feel that the title "The Pastoral Newsletter" no longer adequately describes the function or goals of the newsletter since the function and goals have changed considerably since the newsletter was begun two years ago. In short, we need a new name. We would like to get your ideas and suggestions since this newsletter serves you. We want to change the title  
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