



Charismatics--- Serious Problems

The interview which takes up most of this issue is probably the most significant article I have published in my 22 years as an editor.

Significant both in its substance and in its probable effects.

For the first time, to my knowledge, we have a public, radical, negative criticism of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement by a person who is informed, who possesses the scholarly credentials for such a task, who has in the past been sympathetic and supportive of the movement.

Indeed, Doctor William Storey was one of the few founders of this movement when it originated at Duquesne University less than 10 years ago.

Most observers of American Catholicism would recognize that the growth and appeal of the charismatic prayer groups represented a unique vigor during a time of religious confusion.

The movement has been extraordinary in many ways — in the rapid development of startling religious phenomena (speaking in tongues, the baptism in the Spirit, the ministry of healing and the rapid growth of communal life).

One of the most extraordinary things about it has been the absence of serious critical evaluation. The American bishops have had groups studying it, but I suspect that even the people conducting the study would admit that theirs was less than a hard, extensive, probing investigation. While some theologians have written about the movement, there has been little if any of the tough-minded study which one would expect.

Now, a personal note. Our publishing house has put out a good deal of literature written by and used by people in the movement. While I have never been part of the movement, I have been generally sympathetic to the good I have seen in it. Several members of our staff are involved.

Doctor Storey's severe criticism came as a complete surprise to me. I had set up the interview as an update of a very understanding, generally sympathetic conversation we published several years ago.

He has been Associate Professor of Liturgy and Church History at Notre Dame and is currently director of its Graduate Program in Liturgical Studies.

After being part of the group which founded the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement, he remained a participant for a number of years. During this time and in the five years since he withdrew from participation he has been close to many of the people prominent in its leadership.

Also, during the past two years he has travelled widely and, because of his past prominence in the movement, he has had an opportunity to meet participants in many parts of the country.

As he states in the interview, he has voiced mild doubts and criticisms to leaders of the movement. In recent weeks, he has felt compelled to express stronger doubts to Catholic authorities at several levels.

This is the first time he has formulated them for publication.

The effect is bound to be serious; both he and I realize that. These are criticisms which cannot be ignored by Church authorities. They will have to be investigated.

Also, they are bound to be a cause of anguish and misunderstanding for many of the good, devout people in the movement. Unquestionably, they do not apply to some of the groups involved in the movement, even though he maintains that his judgment, as it is, applies to trends in the national leadership.

Doctor Storey's evaluations are only that. They should not be accepted because he expresses them. They should be investigated carefully, tested for validity.

The strength of the movement, the sincerity of the participants and the seriousness of the charges demand sensitivity in the response of Church officials.

None of us takes pleasure in presenting such criticism. We offer it because it is too important to suppress.

Reform or Suppression

Alternatives Seen for Catholic Charismatic Renewal

In a previous interview published in A. D. Correspondence on September 14, 1972, Dr. Storey described and evaluated some aspects of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement as it existed at that time. He characterized it as basically a prayer movement within the Church, but a movement which had far-ranging effects on the lives of its members. Concern for scripture, the desire for a deeper prayer experience involving the whole person, and the experience of a shared faith and openness to God's inspiration were described as the most positive aspects of the movement.

Dr. Storey saw the leadership as "generally intelligent, informed, dedicated and free from a cult of personality" . . . and also open to and seeking leadership from Catholic Church authority. He predicted that the movement would remain essentially Catholic, perhaps even phasing out as a movement and becoming more completely an influential part of the existing communities of the Church.

Several dangers were recognized: a tendency toward literal, almost superstitious use of biblical texts, a blurring of the theological differences separating Catholics and non-Catholics, and the possibility of a leadership paralleling but separate from the hierarchy.

Because the rapid growth of the movement seems to have produced a number of new characteristics, we invited Dr. Storey to reflect now, nearly three years after his previous evaluation, on the directions of the movement and its relation to the Church.

jr, csc □

Q. Doctor Storey, we've just reviewed your general evaluation of the movement from three years ago. I would like this to be an update, explaining some of the more recent developments. But, first, do you want to affirm or qualify those judgments you made in the last conversation?

A. At the beginning, let me say something just for the record. I have not been personally involved in the movement for the past five years. I broke with the local group in South Bend partly because of certain leadership policies which troubled me and also because of theological positions which I felt were either exaggerated or incorrect.

Also, my break was partly motivated by the use of certain styles of worship which were not my personal style. More importantly, it seemed to me that they were not of a style which I think befits Catholicism. I don't want to make too much of this particular point, but I am convinced that even perfectly valid modes of prayer and worship may still be outside the Catholic style or tradition, and I don't think most Catholics can be really at home with them.

This separation from the movement should be understood in evaluating the rest of the comments I might make.

As to your question, yes, I would stand by most of those judgments of the earlier conversation, even though I would now qualify them with a number of very serious reservations.

Q. But you would still consider yourself an informed observer, a person with sufficient background and information to be knowledgeable about what is going on within the movement?

A. Interestingly enough, I am always being approached, in other parts of the country, by people who knew of my involvement at the very beginning of the movement. Because I have not publicized my withdrawal from it, these people assume that I am still committed to it wholeheartedly. At times they come rushing up to me in the most embarrassing ways to share their problems, their perspectives, their insights, their new theology. In this way I have been able to observe a great deal just by standing around at seminars and conferences. Also, I have followed the literature and retained contact with many people in the movement.

I realize that this is a selective source of information, but I'm going to be speaking about trends rather than about specific incidents. For such observations, yes, I feel confident of my knowledge.

Q. To put your comments in perspective, would you want to identify the major qualifications which you would now want to make on your previous position?

A. All right. My general judgment would be the same even though the original thrust of the movement contained valid, valuable and authentic elements which belong in the prayer life of the Church, recent developments, including trends encouraged and established by the national leadership, have contributed

Some churchmen are so impressed with the movement's good elements that they have overlooked what they regard as isolated excesses.

abuses and conditions which constitute very serious dangers, theological errors and patterns of religious response which cannot be reconciled with authentic Catholic tradition.

I would identify several sources of such problems. And I would say that almost all of them represent distortions of motivations and insights which were originally valid and laudable.

First, I would say that the effort to build ecumenical bridges of reconciliation with Protestant and denominational Pentecostal groups has created two very serious problems, one of literature, the other of community.

In the effort to be open to the Pentecostal experience, the leadership of the Catholic Charismatic movement has permitted and even encouraged a flow of literature through the movement which promotes theological positions and religious attitudes which cannot be reconciled with the authentic Catholic tradition.

And the effort to share community with Protestant Pentecostals has created a strain which encourages a shift of the center of worship from the sacramental life, primarily the Eucharist, to the functions of the prayer group.

Second, there has been an extraordinary, dangerous development of authoritarianism, which has produced conditions in which very serious abuses have taken place and which, in my judgment, make similar abuses possible and even likely.

And, third, this authoritarianism, combined with certain prayer practices, has produced a coercion of consciences, an invasion of the internal forum which Catholics identify with the privacy of the confessional. Such practices have given leaders a frightening control over the lives of participants; they have also resulted in outrageous violations of privacy, situations in which confessional matter becomes a subject of open conversation within the communities and even to outsiders like myself.

Q. I know this comment is probably unnecessary, but you realize the seriousness of such charges coming from a person with your credentials and experience within the movement?

A. I'm fully aware of the consequences of these statements. I make them only because I think the problems and errors are so serious that they must be dealt with openly.

Q. Why are you telling this to me?

A. Because you asked.

Q. That's not what I mean. Obviously, we don't answer every question just because someone asks us. Would you think the proper channel for such comments

would be more direct, perhaps approaching the leaders of the movement and Church authorities.

A. I have approached Church authorities directly, on several levels, and I have sent several leaders of the movement a report on my correspondence with Church authorities.

Q. You have made these charges to Church authorities? When?

A. It was a week or so before Easter of this year.

Q. Then, clearly, there's a formal, if not a confidential aspect to such reports. I won't ask any more about that. You are now making a public statement, I assume, because you feel there is also need for a public awareness and evaluation of your criticisms?

A. That's right. What the Church authorities decide to do is one thing. There is also a proper role for public discussion, and there's been very little serious examination and evaluation of the movement as it actually exists. In a sense, the movement has suffered from the good press it has received. Criticism that has been published has been relatively uninformed. And this situation has been compounded by a deliberate policy on the part of the leadership to suppress criticism and dissent, to conceal—at times even from Church authorities—elements which might occasion criticism. This policy is based on the notion that community is built by constantly dwelling on the positive, the enthusiastic, and by suppressing and concealing any dissent or difference of opinion.

Q. Let's go back to your basic criticisms. Has this authoritarianism you mentioned been a result of the enormous growth of the movement during the few years of its existence?

A. The growth factor is terribly important. It forced the movement to organize itself—with a high degree of organization.

As an example, look at the Communication Center, which distributes books and tapes throughout the movement. Five years ago it was a small, *ad hoc* sort of thing which simply tried to respond to the need for literature. Now it is big business. I don't say this in any pejorative sense; it is necessarily a big enterprise because of the number of people served, but also it has become a major instrument for the control of ideas, practices, values and personalities in groups throughout the country.

Decisions are made that only certain books, certain authors and tapes by certain speakers are to be distributed through the Communication Center, and that others are to be avoided. Many, if not most of these decisions are for ideological reasons deter-

mined by the leadership. It amounts to a combined system of *Imprimatur* and Index for members of the movement across the country.

Q. What is the size of the movement now? What is the structure of the leadership?

A. The membership figures have always been imprecise, but the most recent figures cited estimate a membership in the United States of approximately 200,000. That's a minimum; the leaders have not been known to exaggerate their statistics.

As the movement began to grow, obviously there was need for some national leadership. You might compare it to the growth and the leadership personalities of the Christian Family Movement. Usually the founding fathers of such a movement tend to perpetuate themselves, partly because they're the first witnesses, and partly because they are often significant people anyhow. I think this is true of the present national leadership; they are significant people, members almost from the beginning, and have spent endless time and energy pulling the whole thing together, coordinating it, and controlling it.

They are the ones who have accepted the basic responsibility and people have recognized their dedication, their interest and their talent.

There is an executive steering committee called the National Service Committee. It has seven members and an advisory committee of 37 members.

I have the impression—and I am open to correction on this—that the executive committee is a very select, closed group, which tends to perpetuate itself. I believe that it chooses replacements for members who drop out. The advisory committee is made up of representatives from across the country. What method of election exists, if any, seems hard to determine.

As for the leadership, I have the impression that the Ann Arbor group is pretty much in control. This is not necessarily something objectionable in principle; the movement is not very old, and these people are the dedicated core. They have worked together and it is only practical to keep the machinery of the national structure close at hand.

As an example of this practicality, I admire them for spending very little money on themselves, or on their travel or organizational structures. They want the money that is available to be used in purposes which are directly spiritual. They earn very little, and of this they tithe. I found it interesting to notice that in the Service Committee's budget for last year the largest expenditure was for communications with bishops.

Q. About this pattern of authoritarianism?

A. Yes, it is rooted in the fundamental notion of direct reliance on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit even in deciding routine, ordinary details. I see it as a complete dismissal of the notion that God often guides us through secondary causes.

Well, if you attribute *everything* within the movement to the direct working of the Holy Spirit, then there's obviously no need to be concerned about

checks and controls within your organization. You don't have to be concerned about struggling for reform of policies. The only option for those who disagree is to resign from the leadership, as Father Edward O'Connor did.

Q. But pretty clearly you see other dimensions to this problem of authoritarianism.

A. Yes, and this extends down into many of the local groups, but it is tied to the same concept of the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The national conference of 1973 was an extraordinary manifestation of what I mean. For a movement which was originally based on the notion of spontaneous community prayer, this was an amazing spectacle. The opening speech forbade any outbreaks of spontaneity; everyone was asked to promise not to do anything that was not commanded from the central platform. Only those whose gift of prophecy was "recognized" were permitted to speak; control was exercised by control of the microphone.

Q. The gift of prophecy was recognized by whom?

A. By the national leaders. It should be said that most of the style of this conference could probably be attributed to the person who organized it. The next year, the planning and organization were taken over by the National Service Committee, but the problem of the Spirit-inspired control of who and what is said is built into the whole system, from national conferences to local prayer groups, and certainly exists in the communities which have been growing rapidly in the past few years.

It doesn't take much imagination to realize the problems involved in individuals handling the burden of such authority.

Q. You say the community pattern of life is growing?

A. Yes, during the past two years I've had occasion to do a lot of travelling in different parts of the country. There seems to be a clear pattern of purpose: the small, informal, fairly disorganized and spontaneous prayer meetings become groups in which people surrender their lives and consciences and property, all in the name of community. Where no such communities already exist, the effort and the official teaching are directed toward establishing them. People are encouraged to pool their lives and their property.

Q. Is this pattern arising from a central, deliberate effort, or is it a response to the felt need of the people in the prayer groups?

A. Honestly, I can't evaluate how much of a felt need or actual attraction is there. It might be a real factor. But I know the leadership is tending toward what I think is an incredible authoritarianism. I think they really want highly structured, highly integrated communities in which there is a growing focus of the life on the community itself, including an entire

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revelation of a person's whole life process to his immediate superiors.

It's enlightening to see that one of the books which is promoted by the Communication Center and which is widely read throughout the movement is an enthusiastic account of a very highly structured community in Pennsylvania which stands in the Hutterite tradition. This seems to characterize what the leadership sees as a model for charismatic communities.

Q. You've mentioned control of consciences.

A. Yes, in many of these communities, a manifestation of conscience procedure exists which I find highly dubious.

Again, the seeds of this practice are understandable. When people take their religious response very seriously, the state of their consciences is a real factor in that response. It's easy to understand how a person experiencing a deep conversion would talk with unusual freedom about the things of which he repents.

But it's something far different when leaders of a community see themselves as inspired by the Spirit to provide spiritual guidance for the people in their groups, to motivate repentance, to elicit a manifestation of conscience.

And this occurs not with one person under privacy, the method which the Church has authorized and protected with the seal of confession; commonly, several of the leaders or people with a recognized charisma will be involved in such a session. And the knowledge of sins revealed is discussed by members of the community with astonishing openness. I personally know of such a revelation made in one city and then mentioned to me two weeks later in another city.

Q. You used the word "sin." Are you talking about external offenses against the community, the things that would be mentioned in the chapter of faults of a religious community?

A. I'm talking about *sins*, things like fornication. I had a woman come up to me in a strange city and say, "Oh, Doctor Storey, you must join us in our prayer for We all know that he's a homosexual and that he's frequenting these gay bars."

Well, that's the kind of thing I see coming from this pressure to manifest one's conscience. Leaders will share their concern for the faults of one of the members; the community will be asked to pray for his deliverance from his sin. And it's a frightful invasion of the internal forum of conscience.

I know of instances in which such manifestations of conscience were written down and kept on file. In one group, the procedure was to have the individual confess, in the presence of selected witnesses

from the community, every serious sin he had committed, at times in writing.

I've even heard of people talking about the sins of their parents. This sets up a terrible instrument of coercion and manipulation of lives.

This is not something I'm saying lightly, and I understand the seriousness of my statements. My only hesitation is that I don't actually know how widespread it is. I'm sure that it is happening in some segments of the movement and the atmosphere which would encourage it exists throughout the movement.

Q. Don't some of these issues of manifestation of conscience come to the surface when some of these members consult their confessors or other priests who are not in the movement?

A. As a matter of fact, in some communities the sacrament of Penance is discouraged, particularly if it involves going to confessors who are outside the Pentecostal community. They are considered not "Spirit-filled," not "spiritually authorized" to direct people within the community. I have in my office a list prepared some time ago by the True House Community which designated priests who were permitted to celebrate Mass with the community, and I believe there was a similar list of approved confessors. In fairness, I should mention that this community was eventually dissolved—but not on these grounds.

I am very serious about these problems because as a historian I can see that such trends have emerged in other times with tragic consequences. I don't want to see a repetition of past mistakes.

Q. Considering the growth of the movement, how does it happen that such a bizarre development has not come to public attention?

A. This, too, is part of the control of elements which would create dissent or make for public criticism.

This sort of thing does not go on in the prayer meetings which are open to visitors. It takes place in private rooms and individual households, among the people who are committed to the movement. Again, I have known of the public prayer sessions being purposely designed for the benefit of visitors.

And generally there is a benign presumption favoring the movement, arising from the obvious goodness and sincerity of many of its participants. If a bishop or his theological advisor does come to a prayer meeting, he is likely to see what he is intended to see. He might feel that it's not his style because of the "emotionalism," but it seems harmless enough.

Or when the bishop, for the first time in 20 years, finds a group of people praying enthusiastically and joyfully, he may be so surprised that he's not inclined to examine the phenomenon very carefully. But,

again, he will usually see only what he's intended to see.

Q. But there are good, sound theologians who are associated with the movement. Why haven't they raised objections?

A. Quite honestly, I can't answer that. I could speculate that some have been so impressed by the good elements that they have overlooked some things they might regard as isolated excesses. Or they may have been exposed to some dimensions of the movement without ever being very close to some of these more highly structured communities. And the fact is that the spread of this development is fairly recent.

Q. Earlier you mentioned serious abuse. Is this what you meant?

A. There was one situation, pretty widely known within the movement, in which the abuse was a serious—you could use the word notorious—matter of moral dimension. It was dealt with by the leadership, but it was concealed from the local Ordinary, who certainly had a right to be informed.

I don't want to suggest that I have knowledge of this situation existing anywhere else.

What I am saying is that the authoritarianism, the invasion of conscience, the absence of structured procedures and laws which allowed this incident to develop are common through the movement. They are conditions which could allow similar scandals to develop elsewhere, especially as the force of authority and community become more oppressive with the passing of time.

Q. Turning to another one of your criticisms, you spoke of problems arising from the influence of Protestant Pentecostal and denominational Pentecostal thought and practices.

A. Yes, the sympathetic links with Protestant and denominational Pentecostalism go back almost to the beginning. Again, this is very understandable.

Catholics who discovered a style of prayer which had not been part of their recent tradition naturally felt a bond of experience with Pentecostals who have had a recent tradition of such prayer. The two groups found much in common in their prayer experience. The problem comes as the links grow stronger, as some of these close communities include people from both traditions, as the exchange of experience grows to include exchange of theological presuppositions, as Catholics begin to drift away from what are important, legitimate styles of prayer rooted in their own tradition.

One example of this was the embarrassment caused the national leadership by David Wilkerson, author of *The Cross and the Switchblade*. Wilkerson is credited with a recent revival of Protestant Pentecostalism, and his writings were recommended in many Catholic groups.

A year or so ago, he felt called to prophesy, in bitter terms, against Roman Catholicism. As many other Protestant fundamentalists have done before, he denounced Rome as the "whore of Babylon."

This obviously presented a problem for the Catholic charismatic leaders who had been recommending him. They were reluctant to take a position which would destroy the links they had established with Protestant Pentecostals, but they could hardly remain silent. Finally, they did testify against him but it was an awkward moment for them.

Nevertheless, such influences still permeate the list of literature distributed by the Communication Center; such authors appear regularly in the pages of *New Covenant*, the magazine which is the voice of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement throughout the English-speaking world.

Another very serious, though less dramatic, problem which arises from the approved use of this literature comes from its pervasive biblical fundamentalism.

Q. You mean a constant literal interpretation of biblical accounts, using isolated texts as absolute norms without reference to other portions of scripture or to the literary circumstances of the particular document?

A. Right. Protestant Pentecostalism comes from the fundamentalist tradition of Protestantism, and its whole understanding of scripture is fundamentalist.

Now certainly contemporary Catholics have an acceptable range of interpretation somewhere between the extremes of radical fundamentalism and an extreme liberalism which would reduce scripture to pious documents.

But considering the major developments in scripture studies and the general approval of much of this work by Catholic authorities, it seems to me that this pervasive fundamentalism of the Protestant Pentecostals is inconsistent, unacceptable, for the community of Catholics.

A book by Don Basham, *Deliver Us from Evil*, and books by Derek Prince and Larry Christenson are promoted in the movement, sold at the national conferences. Prince and Basham (neither Catholic) are devoured by an attitude which sees the devil everywhere. They combine a rabid biblical fundamentalism with extensive meddling in peoples' individual lives.

These books, coming out of an entirely different ecclesiological and spiritual tradition, are being distributed to Catholics under the authority of the national leadership.

In our tradition, exorcism, which is what "deliverance" or "breakthrough ministry" (terms used in the Catholic Pentecostal Movement) actually amounts to, is a very rare occurrence and is always under episcopal authority.

Q. You're not speaking about the ordinary prayers in the liturgy and the sacraments asking that we be

I would like to see an investigating committee appointed to visit a good sampling of local prayer meetings and communities, and to examine carefully all the literature distributed by the movement.

reed from the influence of Satan?

A. No, that's something else. This is much closer to what we would call formal exorcism. It is meant to deal with the presence of real evil spirits and it is often done in small groups or by people who are seen to have a special charism of exorcism.

I think it is practiced far too freely, far too widely and far too ambiguously. It is practiced under the auspices of a literature I judge to be hysterical, on one hand, and completely outside the Catholic tradition, on the other.

Apparently one reason they promote these books is to remain on good terms with Prince and Basham, who are very important Pentecostal spokesmen and who already have a huge audience, even among Catholics. Removing these books from the Communication Center catalogue would cause a lot of tension because there is great demand for them.

Q. Isn't there an additional problem within the movement if the criteria for discernment rest in a personal or group discernment of "what the Spirit is saying"—rather than in the theological disciplines and the guidance of Church authority?

A. Of course. And this is the crux of the problem. For example, a great problem for many communities is: What do you do about Communion? In the Catholic tradition, the sharing of the Eucharist with non-Catholics is forbidden. Now in an ecumenical community like the Word of God in Ann Arbor, you either have the Eucharist, with all the attendant problems of obedience or a sign of division (rather than a sign of unity) within the community . . . or you don't have the Eucharist, with even more problems attendant. You're in a dilemma.

What do Catholics do when they discover that the center of their spiritual lives is not at the altar but in the ecumenical community? Let me give you an example of this kind of attitude.

At a recent meeting of people working in campus ministry in Florida, the priests all wanted to talk about the experiences they had been having with Pentecostal communities. That wasn't the subject of our meeting, but that's what they wanted to talk about.

One man mentioned that on his campus all the people in the Catholic Pentecostal community absented themselves from the Holy Thursday liturgy. The priest was surprised because he had been trying to be as sympathetic and helpful as possible to the group. When he inquired, he found out that they were not present because this liturgy, one of the most significant of the year, conflicted with their regular prayer meeting.

Now there's something very inconsistent with the Catholic tradition when you get a decision like that. It tells you something of how the Eucharist is valued; it tells you something of a divisiveness which is willing to separate itself from the community of the Catholic Church.

Q. Would I be right in seeing this as just the sort of problem that occurred in the early Church, the kind of problem which brought forth a systematic theology of doctrines such as that of the Eucharist?

A. Exactly. As a matter of fact, early Catholicism—particularly the second-century Church in Alexandria—is a fascinating analogy because the real problem of the early Church, the essential problem, was how to tell the Catholics from the Gnostics, of whatever variety. The Gnostics were very pious people, very spiritual, very Christian and utterly convinced they had the correct view of Jesus and his gospel.

How do you deal with people who seem to have so much in common with you and yet so much that is different? How do you deal with a community in which the two groups are mingled? How do you keep them from influencing people with their writings and arguments, which can be very persuasive?

Well, one of the things the Church leaders did was to draw up the canon of scriptures. The real problem in the second century was that Christians were reading a whole library of books, some of which were good and some erroneous. But by the end of the second century the Church at Rome, for example, drew up a list of books which could be read in the liturgy, and another list which could not be read under any circumstances because they taught heretical doctrines about Jesus.

It was an incredible difficulty for the early Church because it generated a sifting out, a separating, and it ended in a wave of excommunications.

Of course, I'm in no position to say that history is going to repeat itself, but the early Church was very careful about what it believed, and the Catholic Church has been responsible for preserving that belief. It's a responsibility which no Catholic should take lightly.

Q. You've formulated some very serious criticisms of a movement which has been characterized by a phenomenal growth and a profound personal commitment on the part of many individuals. Suppose that Church authorities investigate and concur with most of your judgments. What do you foresee? A schism?

A. (After a long pause.) I would have to say that if it's a head-on clash, a flat condemnation of the

**This movement will have to take our Catholic tradition seriously,
and not let enthusiasm get the upper hand.**

movement, yes, there will be a schism.

The bishops should move very, very carefully. Any precipitous action would be extremely dangerous. Many of these people are profoundly convinced that they are following the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If Church authorities told them to abandon what they see as this inspiration, it would be terribly hard for them to do so.

Q. What course of action do you think would be advisable—again, assuming the validity of your evaluations?

A. First, I would hope that no authority, pastor or individual bishop, would take sudden, isolated action. This is now a national, even an international problem (though I don't pretend to be speaking of the movement outside this country). Separate, conflicting policies in various jurisdictions would destroy credibility and effectiveness. When Church authority responds, it should do so with its collegial leadership.

Obviously, my opinions should not be taken for anything more than they are, a reason to investigate and evaluate more thoroughly than has been done in the past.

I would like to see an investigating commission which would include, at least, a very able professional theologian, a very good canon lawyer of the stature of Monsignor Fred McManus, and a competent Catholic psychologist.

Such a committee should begin with two assignments. They should examine very carefully the literature and tapes being distributed under the auspices of the movement by the Communication Center.

They should also visit a good sampling of local communities and prayer groups, including those of the national leadership, and insist on finding out all the patterns which exist, not just those which are ordinarily put on display for observers.

If such investigations should substantiate the kind of judgments I have made, then it seems to me that the Church authorities would have to take action. I hope they would do so with sensitivity, compassion, patience and persuasion, recognizing the many valid and valuable insights which have emerged from the movement. They should seek to correct rather than simply condemn or destroy.

But, eventually, they have to face the burden of safeguarding the authentic Catholic tradition and the rights of conscience.

Q. And what would you yourself say to members of the movement who have not experienced any of the situations you are describing? I'm sure that there must be thousands of good people involved in prayer groups that do not have these characteristics.

A. I'm sure there are, but I would repeat that the pattern of a very forceful national leadership is moving the movement more and more in this direction.

I don't know if saying this would mean much to these people, but there's an old phrase about the Spirit: "The Holy Spirit is the tradition." This has become a more and more powerful truth to me. Tradition, as such, has a built-in problem associated with it. It tends to become fossilized. But even in its fossil form it's a powerful indicator, a powerful warning and a bulwark against religious mania.

The Church has had a long experience in determining how to balance personal rights against communal rights, or the rights of conscience against the rights of authority. Anyone who knows anything about the Catholic tradition, even insofar as it may be enshrined in canon laws which now seem irrelevant to us, has to ask, what is the ultimate reason for all those safeguards? Maybe such cautions and laws were a lot more helpful and meaningful than a lot of us once thought.

Movements like this have to be very careful; they have to take that tradition and that experience seriously and not let their enthusiasm get the upper hand.

Q. From your present perspective, do you think the movement will eventually be condemned by the Church?

A. It will either have to be radically demythologized or identified as being separate from the Catholic tradition. The demythologization would be terribly difficult unless the most important influences in it, those men with the greatest mediating force, can persuade the national leaders to oust from the movement those teachings and policies which have produced the present de-Catholicization.

Unless there is a reemphasis on the importance of liturgical prayer and sacraments, it will have to be suppressed.

It is becoming more and more a phenomenon in its own right rather than a movement within the Church. □

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