

## Obedience to Christ - Launch Out into the Deep

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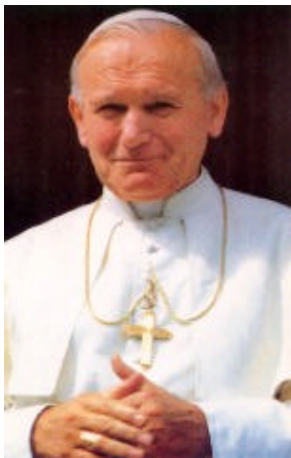
I am going to give a talk that situates the Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church and focuses in a particular way on the importance of being obedient to the call that is ours as leaders in the Charismatic Renewal.

The phrase, “*Launch Out into the Deep*” comes from Luke 5:1-7. Read the story of the calling of the first 4 apostles:

Now he was standing one day by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the crowd pressing around him listening to the word of God, when he caught sight of two boats close to the bank. The fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats - it was Simon's - and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.

When he had finished speaking he said to Simon, “***Put out into deep*** water and pay out your nets for a catch.” “Master,” Simon replied, “we worked hard all night long and caught nothing, but if you say so, I will pay out the nets.” And when they had done this they netted such a huge number of fish that their nets began to tear, so they signaled to their companions in the other boat to come and help them: when these came, ***they filled the two boats to sinking point.***

The reason this phrase “*Launch Out into the Deep*” is our focus today is because it was used over and over by John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, The New Millennium released January 2001. In it he invites us to reflect on what the



Spirit is saying to the People of God from the time of the Second Vatican Council to the Great Jubilee.(2) So one of the focuses of the letter is to identify what the Holy Spirit's plan for the Church. I want to give you an overview of the progress the Church has made since Vatican II in accepting it's charismatic dimension.

The revelation of the plan began back on January 23, 1959, when Pope John XXIII announced his plans to convene the Second Vatican Council. He desired to throw open the windows of the Church to let the Holy Spirit blow however he willed. His prayer to open the conference was:

“Holy Spirit,  
renew your wonders in this our age,  
as in a new Pentecost,  
and grant that your Church,  
praying perseveringly and insistently  
with one heart and one mind,  
together with Mary, the Mother of Jesus,  
and guided by blessed Peter,  
may increase the reign of the Divine Savior,  
the reign of truth and justice,  
the reign of love and peace. Amen

He gave the Holy Spirit permission to sweep away the deadness and bring renewal. The bishops, at the time, referred to the Council as the ‘Seminary of the Holy Spirit.’ They began to understand that the Council was the beginning of an era of grace for the Church. It called the Church to rediscover the gift of the Holy Spirit and so rediscover the Church's own charismatic dimension.

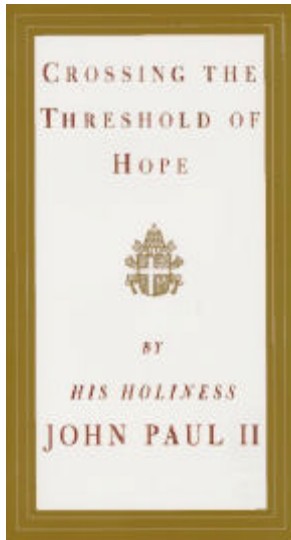


In John Paul II's address to the World Congress of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities in Rome, May 30, 1998 he said:

“The Spirit is always awesome whenever he intervenes. He arouses astonishing new events, he radically changes people and history. This was the unforgettable experience of the Second Vatican council, during which, guided by the same Spirit, the Church rediscovered the charismatic dimension as being essential to her identity.”

And so I think it is clear that the Second Vatican Council ushered in a new era of Church history. An

era of openness to the Holy Spirit. It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that the Lord's revealed plans for the Church were to be accomplished. It was a moment of grace and it is to this day a sure compass by which to take our bearings.



It didn't take long before the impact of the renewed openness to the Holy Spirit started to have an effect. What began to slowly happen after the Council was a shift in what stirred the Church to life. In *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, in referring to this shift, John Paul II gives the following example to show how the Holy Spirit was guiding the hierarchy:

“The diocesan synods for example almost spontaneously got rid of the old unilateral emphasis on clergy and became a means of expressing the responsibility of each person toward the Church. The sense of communal responsibility toward the Church, felt especially in lay people today, is certainly a source of renewal. In view of the third millennium, this sense of responsibility will shape the image of the Church for generations to come.”

This movement of the Spirit that caused this ‘almost spontaneous’ shift, made room for the laity to have an effect on the life of the Church. In the next chapter of the book, John Paul II makes the following observation:

“Since the Council, we have been witnessing a *primarily qualitative renewal*. Although priests continue to be scarce and the vocations are still too few, *religious movements are being born and are flourishing*. They arise from a background which is somewhat different from the older Catholic associations, which were more social in nature. These had been inspired by the Church's social doctrine and

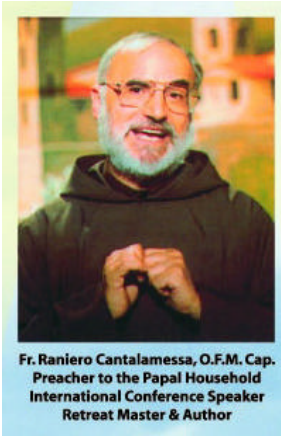
aimed at the transformation of society, at the establishment of social justice.

*The new movements, instead, are oriented, before all else, toward the renewal of the individual.* Man is the first agent of all social and historical change, but to be able to carry out this role he himself must be renewed in Christ, in the Holy Spirit. *This is the direction which holds great promise for the future of the Church.”*

No more was the renewal of the church taking place solely through religious orders. The laity was beginning to feel that they too had a call and a responsibility to participate in mission of the Church. The formation of Church Movements and New Communities erupted. This response of the laity was another action of the Holy Spirit that made those in tune, conscious of their baptismal identity and their vocation to the Church. Their strength is their personal relationship with the Lord.

Perhaps one of the most poignant moments illustrating this point is what is now commonly referred to as the Duquesne weekend. It happened at 1967 at Duquesne College near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania soon after the close of the Vatican Council. A group of Catholic college students and faculty were on a retreat at the Ark and the Dove retreat house praying for a new Pentecost. Saturday evening a few students gathered in the chapel and totally surrendered to the Lord's desire in their life. There came an incredible outpouring of the Spirit in which the students experience **God's personal love for them**. As other retreatants came to the chapel, the outpouring began for them as well. This group continued to meet weekly for a prayer meeting allowing the Holy Spirit to gift them with the charisms they needed to fulfill his desire.

This outpouring was the humble beginning of the Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church. The

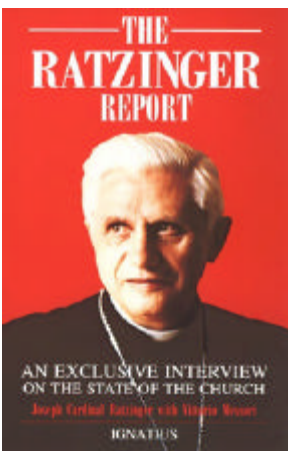


Renewal has become the fastest growing and largest Lay movement with the Catholic Church.

The Charismatic Renewal was not the only new movement that the Spirit stirred to life. In the years following the Second Vatican Council more

than fifty new Ecclesial Movements and Communities sprang to life throughout the world. These include the Focolari movement, Cursillo, Regnum Christi and L'Arche among others. These movements of the Holy Spirit have brought new life to individuals, parishes and whole dioceses. This work of the Spirit is a work in progress and the Church has yet to experience the full effect of this blessing

Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, in the *Ratzinger Report* says this about the new movements and communities:



“What is emerging here is a new generation of the church which I am watching with great hope. I find it marvelous that the Spirit is once more stronger than our programs and brings Himself

into play in an altogether different way than we had imagined... The new is making headway... Our task – the task of the officeholders in the Church and of theologians – is to keep the door open to them, to prepare room for them.”

There is no question that Cardinal Ratzinger has the right attitude. His realizes that his role as one of the highest officeholders in the Church is to create an environment in which the Holy Spirit can do what the Holy Spirit wants to do. *The resistance we feel in the*

*Charismatic Renewal does not come from the hierarchical Church, it comes from individual priests, people and parishes that don't support the Renewal either because they don't know how it should fit in, they are afraid of not being able to control it or they have had a bad experience with a person or persons in the Renewal.* Again Ratzinger has the right attitude.



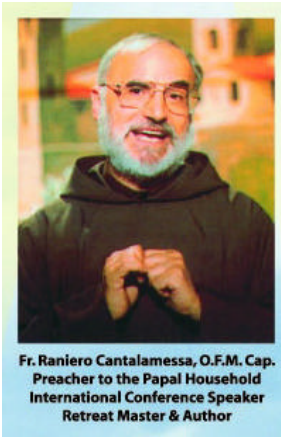
*“Certainly, all these movements also give rise to some problems. They also entail greater or lesser dangers. But that happens with all living beings.”*

Jean Paul II in his 1998 Pentecost Address shows his insight into why there is a problem and the benefit that has resulted.

Their (new movements and communities) birth and spreading has brought to the life of the Church an unexpected and, at times, explosive innovation. This prompted questions, uneasiness, tensions, at times, it involved presumption and intemperance on one side, and many prejudices and reserves on the other. It was a period which tested their faithfulness, an important opportunity for verifying the authenticity of their charisms.

In this statement the Pope used the past tense, ‘it was a period which tested their faithfulness’ which means that the time of testing is over. It also means in the eyes of the Church, *these new movements and communities have been found to be faithful and their charisms authentic. This necessitates a attitude change for both those in the Renewal and the rest of the Church.*

In September 1999, Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, who serves as preacher to the papal household, addressed



a gathering of priests and he made a statement that gets at the heart of why an attitude change is essential.

“It is with infinite sadness that I see that the Charismatic Renewal has ended up confined to one part of the Church only, and regarded by the rest as something so alien that they feel fully

justified in keeping well clear of it. Let me say again, *the Charismatic Renewal was born to renew the whole church and not just one part of it.*”

If the Church is not to lose the gift that the Charismatic Renewal can bring birth to in it, *there must be a concerted effort by the hierarchy, the priests and the faithful to allow the Renewal to give birth to the gifts the Holy Spirit wants to give the Church.* John Paul II representing the hierarchy is definitely doing his part. In fact in that address on Pentecost, May 1998, he called the whole Church to the attitude shift.

*“I want to cry out: ‘Be open and docile to the gifts of the Spirit!’ Accept with gratitude and obedience the charisms that the Spirit never ceases to bestow. Do not forget that each charism is given for the common good, that is, for the benefit of the whole Church!”*

This is a wake up call to the sleeping giant. The Pope has seen what the Holy Spirit is doing in the Church. He is trying to break down the walls that keep the Renewal, and so to a large extent the Holy Spirit, sidelined in the Church. What a wonderful sign of hope for the Renewal to see the Pope cry out to the world to be open to the Holy Spirit. What a beautiful sign of hope this is for those of us that know and understand the plan the Holy Spirit has for the Church. It is essential that an environment is created within the Church that cultivates a discovery of the person of the

Holy Spirit and the charisms that he never ceases to bestow on those who are open. *The clergy and the laity need to understand that one of the reasons the Holy Spirit gave birth to the Renewal in the Church so that the Renewal could give birth to the charisms of the Holy Spirit and so equip the Church to accomplish her mission of ecumenism and evangelization as laid out in Vatican II.*

To create this environment an attitude change is also essential in the Renewal itself. The Charismatic Renewal cannot afford to let itself continue to be seen as a fringe movement for the ‘odd’ Catholic. The Renewal sidelines itself when it allows itself to get caught up with one segment of the Church population. There are two ways the Renewal has done this; with its conservative stance and its tendency towards devotionalism. . Fr. Cantalamessa addresses both dangers:

“Reading religious publications from various countries, it is clear to me that some of them see the new ecclesial movements, including the Renewal, as conservative forces, if not as downright reactionary.

*The Charismatic Renewal is a gift for the whole church, not for just a particular part, and so it must remain. Indeed, in its early days, like every prophetic movement, it was seen as a great sign of newness and openness, a forward thrust on various fronts, the ecumenical outreach included. As such, it was welcomed by the Catholic*



*Church hierarchy, and it has no need to change its appearance to make itself acceptable. Cardinal Suenens, who was for years its principal sponsor and ecclesiastical spokesman, was, during and after the Council, one of the most authoritative promoters of the need for aggiornamento – giving contemporary impact to the practices and beliefs of the church.*

In other words, *we have to be open enough to allow the Holy Spirit room to make our religious rituals and beliefs real and relevant to the people that are the Church today. We can not be so caught up in the way we used to do things that we are not open to the new things the Holy Spirit wants to do* because with these new things will come new life. We may be hanging on to the old because we are comfortable with it but it is alienating us from much of the Church that cannot relate.

*Our attitude towards devotionism is the second danger that threatens to sideline the Renewal.* Since particular devotions to Our Lady or to a particular saint are optional in the church and not necessary for salvation, is it proper for the Renewal, that is a gift for the whole church, to be identified with this devotion or that one? Fr. Cantalamessa has this to say on the gradual return to devotionism.

*“There has been a return to an excessive insistence on what is optional.* The Charismatic Renewal itself has become sucked into this whirlpool, to such an extent that in some places it has become identified merely by association with certain devotions, apparitions, individuals and particular messages. Certain of these things are in themselves quite legitimate, and a sign of the richness of the Catholic Church, but *they need to be kept within their proper sphere and not imposed on all and sundry as a measure of the greater or lesser extent of their ‘catholicity’.*



This is not a question of taking positions against any of these things. The point is whether the Charismatic Renewal ought to be characterized by this kind of thing, or by something else. We already have all that we need to

become holy and to spread the Gospel.

*It is not the mission of the Renewal to spread particular devotions.* These devotions are gifts from God and *beneficial* for the building up of our faith communities, but the Renewal can not be sidelined from its primary mission in order promote these devotions. The goals of Vatican II were evangelization and ecumenism and these are *necessary* for the life of the Church. This is the direction the Holy Spirit is moving the Church. These are the missions it desires to equip the Church to handle. In supporting this movement of the Holy Spirit, *we must not confuse what is demanded of everyone with things that are to be left to individual choice.*

As the Church begins to open itself to the Renewal in a new way, we need to consider the words of the Pope in that Pentecost Address of 1998:

“Today a new stage is opening before you: that of ecclesial maturity. This does not mean that all the problems have been resolved. Rather, it is a challenge, a path to follow. The Church expects from you ‘mature’ fruits of communion and commitment.”

We have weathered the storm to prove our authenticity, the Church’s hierarchy has made room for us and now it is time for the Renewal to produce mature fruits so that the whole Church will be blessed. I suppose the Charismatic Renewal could say like the disciples, “We have fished all night and caught nothing” (Luke 5:5) and yet the Pope is calling the faithful to “launch out into the deep”.

At the close of the Great Jubilee, the Pope released his Apostolic Letter entitled “*Novo Millennio Ineunte*” The New Millennium. Throughout the letter, the Pope encourages the faithful to look ahead and ‘launch out into the deep’ trusting in Christ’s words: *Duc in Altum!*

There are two aspects of this call. We are to first look ahead, praying maturely and faithfully, ‘planning for

the future, so that the new evangelization to which the Church is now summoned will through prayer help us to receive the grace of our calling. Grace is the ground of all our action' (38); and holiness is the goal to which all our planning looks. The pope has placed a special emphasis on 'the call to holiness' and the need the Church and the world has for saints. He refers to the Vatican II document, *Lumen Gentium*, chapter 5 which reminds us that all the baptized without exception are called to be saints! (31) When writing an address to a conference of Charismatic Renewal communities meeting, the Pope issued the following challenge to the Renewal:

"Let your communities, therefore, be more and more "genuine 'schools' of prayer, where the meeting with Christ is expressed not just in imploring help but also in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening and ardent devotion, until the heart truly 'falls in love.'" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 33) For this is what the saints are: people who have fallen in love with Christ. And this is why the Charismatic Renewal has been such a gift to the Church: it has lead a host of men and women, young and old, into this experience of the love which is stronger than death."

The second aspect of the pope's call has to do with 'launching out,' taking the risk to live out the mission. So often in the renewal I have seen prayer reveal a call to a mission and but the mission never materialized because the members were not obedient usually because they feared to risk. (Tell story of lady who prophesied her own demise.) She was so good at hearing the word of God but had such difficulty being obedient to it. The blessing isn't in hearing the word: the blessing is in being obedient to it. And this, I believe, is a major reason why the Charismatic Renewal has not been as successful in fulfilling it's mission over the last 35 years as we would have liked. ***If we don't allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit, we will be bypassed.***

Let me put it this way: Our obedience to the word of God reflects our love for him.

*"If anyone loves me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make our home with him. Those who do not love me do not keep my words. John 14:23-26*

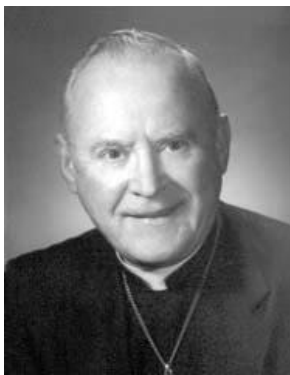
Being obedient to the Lord's word reflects our love for him. For us in the Charismatic Renewal, gift of prophecy allows the word of the Lord that we need to hear to be spoken in our midst. I still remember the first time I heard a prophetic word spoken at a prayer meeting. I was totally awed that God, in that day and age, would use someone to speak his mind and heart. What an incredible gift this is. To be able, in a sense, to hear God give direction, speak words of consolation or encouragement, correct or foretell his plans.

The problem to some degree is that prophecy is becoming familiar. In the Charismatic Renewal we have heard so many prophetic words, they have lost their luster. The experience has become ordinary. We are no longer in awe that God would speak to us. We no longer approach the prophetic word with reverence considering that this is Almighty God speaking. We may no longer listen with a heart ready to obey. As a result many of us have become complacent to the prophetic word especially when it calls us to action.

We have to be on our guard against this. CCRSO is actually a good concrete example of the importance of obedience. I remember four or five years ago, the Lord told us that we were making idols of the work we were doing. It took us about a year and a half to get our heads around what he meant. What became clear was that we were following our own plans, our own agendas, doing the work we thought was prudent and reasonable from a human stand point. We were having difficulty taking our direction from the prophetic word the Lord was giving in order to guide

us. We have gotten better at doing this though, as we have consciously tried to be attentive and obedient.

Often it meant and still means, changing the course we set, altering the agenda to be responsive to the “now” word. And look at the blessings we have reaped because of our obedience. We have never been more financially secure. Representation at our meetings has grown. The activities that we are involved with are producing fruit. I think of our newsletter “*Stirrings*”, our leadership retreat, our Web site, and the development of the CCRSO Resource team. At our last meeting the Lord invited us to consider forming Traveling Timothies that could evangelize our prayer groups and parishes. This wasn’t a new idea. A number of years ago the Lord made the same invitation. But this time we gave the Lord permission to do what he wanted and to use us to do it and then we acted on it. We began not sure of where we were headed but willing to risk that first step!



When we presented the completed document to Bishop Sherlock, (the Ontario Bishop’s liaison to CCRSO) he was so excited. He told me that we had to call this document “Launch Out Into the Deep” because immediately he saw that we

were in line with the Pope’s call in *Novo Millennio Ineunte* and that we being obedient to the invitation of the Holy Spirit to Launch Out. He has supported this effort whole heartedly and has presented our plans to the Ontario Bishops. The blessing comes not in hearing the word but by obeying it.

I take consolation from these two scriptures when I find myself struggling with “plans” or “visions”. In Amos 3:7 we read, “*No more does the Lord Yahweh do anything without revealing his plans to his servants*

*the prophets.*” In Jeremiah 29:11 the Lord says “*I know the plans I have for you – it is Yahweh who speaks – plans for peace, not disaster, reserving a future full of hope for you.* So the Lord already knows the plans, wants to reveal them to us and His plans are always going to bless us if we are obedient.

So, if our prayer is fervent, it will lead us to fall in love with Jesus and perfect love drives out all fear. (1 John 4:18 ). And so the pope gives this caution:

“Let this experience (of Christ’s love) now more than ever spur you on to mission. For contemplation which does not give birth to mission will eventually wither; and mission that does not spring from contemplation is doomed to frustration and failure. I pray most fervently that your communities and the entire Charismatic Renewal will ‘put out into the deep’ of prayer in order to ‘put our into the deep’ of mission. Then you will help the whole Church still more to live that life of action and contemplation which is the womb of evangelization.”

Very clearly Pope John Paul II has laid out the path for the Charismatic Renewal to take in the beginning of the third millennium. Initially we need to teach people to pray with conviction so that they encounter and fall in love with Jesus. Then when pray clarifies a mission for a person, prayer community or service team, we must be supportive and call those involved to action. As we live out the call to prayer and action, slowly at first and then with an exponential explosion we will witness the ‘new evangelization’ the Pope is calling forth and this will eventually lead the Church to the ‘new springtime’ he has promised.

This simple plan is the Holy Spirit’s. It is not a program put together by the Vatican but it is a call to the faithful who have eyes to see and ears to hear. It is an orchestration by the Holy Spirit who is always able according to Irenaeus, ‘to create a beautiful symphony out of many voices’ as he did on the day of Pentecost. We each have a melody to sing. It’s

success hinges on our faithfulness and obedience to the prompting's of the Holy Spirit.

Does this mean that the world is going to stay in an apparent state of peace and tranquility as we get our act together and become docile to the Holy Spirit? Most probably not. Apparitions of Mary are unprecedented across the world and she warns of imminent danger. She calls the faithful to prayer, fasting, repentance and conversion. She does however, promise the triumph of her Immaculate Heart. These are troubled times particularly in the wake of the terrorism the States has experienced recently. In troubled times people search harder and are more open to the truth. This is a time when we have to pull all the 'stops out' do our best to save those the Lord puts on our path.

So what awaits us. I believe we are in for a **new Pentecostal outpouring opportunity** for the Church that will lead to the **new evangelism** that the Pope has promised, which in turn will lead to a "**new springtime**" for the Church. I'm in with good company thinking this way because the Pope and Ralph Martin both agree with me! Ralph calls this a time of visitation from the Lord and he adds this message:



*"A visitation from God is a two-edged sword; peace, the fullness of God's blessing, for those who are prepared for it and welcome it, destruction for those who have failed to heed the preparatory messengers and are not prepared to recognize and respond when the fullness of the visitation arrives."*

The road we've come down and the path ahead is so clear for those that have eyes to see and ears to hear!

We need to walk the path of faithfulness to prayer and obedience to the prompting's of the Holy Spirit. We need to be examples for the world that despite the calamities and the upset, we can be at peace.

Let me close with the words of hope from John Paul II:



*"Let us go forward in hope! A new millennium is opening before the Church like a vast ocean upon which we shall venture, relying on the help of Christ. The Son of God, who became incarnate two thousand years ago out of love for humanity, is at work even today: we need discerning eyes to see this and, above all, a generous*

*heart to become the instruments of his work. Did we not celebrate the Jubilee Year in order to refresh our contact with this living source of our hope? Now, the Christ whom we have contemplated and loved bids us to set out once more on our journey: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19) (58)*

***Let us prayerfully launch out into the deep, and be obedient to Jesus like Peter and his companions who "When they had launched out into the deep caught a great number of fish." (Lk 5:6) "Duc in Altum."***

