

# WHAT IS THE CHURCH SAYING TO COVENANT COMMUNITIES?

## The 2001 North American Regional Conference of the Catholic Fraternity

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Mother of God Prayer Meeting  
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### What was this conference and why is it important to us?

Held in Phoenix last weekend, hosted by City of the Lord Community.

The Catholic Fraternity: an international association of Catholic charismatic covenant communities, and Catholic fellowships within ecumenical communities.

Two bishops came all the way from Europe to Phoenix to present the Church's message to covenant communities - a very strong statement:.

- Bishop Stanislaw Rylko, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, which is responsible for pastoral care of all ecclesial movements, including covenant communities.
- Bishop Albert de Monleon, bishop of Meaux, France, and moderator of the Catholic Fraternity.

My experience and that of the other participants: the conference is a grace not just for us but for everyone back home in our communities. A grace of hearing the bishops' message, but also of meeting each other, discovering each other's gifts and experiencing the "flavor" of other communities.

Theme of the conference: "*Duc in altum!* Put out into the deep!" The main message was a resounding affirmation of covenant communities, and a call to ecclesial maturity.

### Summary of Bishop Rylko's talks

Personal greetings and the apostolic blessing from Pope John Paul II, who is accompanying us in prayer. The pope always emphasizes that the ecclesial movements are "a special gift of the Spirit and a sign of hope for the Church and all humanity."

What are ecclesial movements? Vibrant Christian communities with predominantly lay membership, a journey of faith, and a Christian witness based on a precise charism given to the person of the founder in specific circumstances and ways. [For instance, Focolare, Neo-Catechumenal Way, Communion and Liberation, St. Egidio Community, l'Arche Communities, Regnum Christi, the Charismatic Renewal and covenant communities.]

The meeting of the Pope with movements and new communities in St. Peter's Square at Pentecost, May 30, 1998, was an ecclesial event of great significance. The Pope said: "In our world, often dominated by a secularized culture which promotes models of life without

God, the faith of many is sorely tested, and is frequently stifled and dies. Thus we see an urgent need for powerful proclamation and solid, in-depth Christian formation... There is a great need for living Christian communities! And here are the movements and the new ecclesial communities: they are the response, given by the Holy Spirit, to this critical challenge at the end of the millennium." Who can forget how the Pope proclaimed aloud, "Christ depends on you! The Church depends on you!" This was a milestone in the life of the movements, a qualitative leap in their lives and service to the Church.

John Paul II also called the movements to a new stage: that of *ecclesial maturity*, that is, a clear awareness of being an integral part of the Church. This entails: 1) giving paramount importance to the call to holiness; 2) orthodoxy; 3) communion with the Pope and bishops; 4) a commitment to evangelization; and 5) a committed presence in society. At the same time, he said to the whole Church, "Accept gratefully and obediently the charisms which the Spirit never ceases to bestow on us!"

The movements should never close in on themselves with a sense of self-satisfaction. If they do not wish to betray their own charism, they must continuously have a missionary thrust towards the world.

The movements are called to be a sign of contradiction. To be a disciple of Christ requires sacrifice and is very demanding. The world accepts a simple, soft Christianity, but the martyrs remind us that Christ is counting on us. He expects and is demanding radical choices. Martyrdom is a horizon always present in the life of a Christian, even if it does not always culminate in the shedding of blood. The Christian is called to live in the world as *salt* and *light*, to have the courage to go *against the current*.

Relation to parishes: even today the parish constitutes the main structure for pastoral care and the apostolate. However, to be a truly missionary community, it needs a vibrant network of communities of different kinds, including ecclesial movements. The parish needs the ecclesial movements to help achieve a high standard in religious instruction for the lay faithful, and the ecclesial movements need the parish. For the movements, the parish is a school of communion and of mission. The ecclesial movements are a privileged place where the gospel is announced directly in a personalized and clear manner, and where lay men and women play a major role. They are jointly responsible for the mission of the Church in a practical and visible way. Each movement has its own charism. It carries within it a mark of originality, of extraordinary persuasive and efficacious strength. Nowadays the movements are giving the Church a great service - they really are "a gift of the Spirit."

In missionary formation, the movements have brought extraordinary fruits: missionary courage and dynamism, helping many lay people to overcome a certain shyness and inferiority complex when confronting the world. They also brought creativity and originality to the methods of evangelization.

The process of formation is demanding. Christ requires radical choices from his disciples. The whole gospel needs to be taken seriously and lived to the fullest. Sweetened forms of Christianity in the long run do not convince anybody. We need to have the courage to aim high, especially with the youth. One of the secrets of success of the movements is that they do not restrain from demanding decisive choices from people. The movements are not afraid of placing high demands.

*The Church needs the ecclesial movements! The Church needs the Renewal in the Spirit!* In order to answer the tremendous challenge of formation, all ecclesial movements - so also

the Renewal in the Spirit - need to grow in "ecclesial maturity" in order to gather the mature fruits of communion and mission.

### **Summary of Bishop Monleon's talks**

Baptism in the Holy Spirit is a personal encounter with Christ as Lord and Redeemer.

"Put out into the deep!" God is calling us to a new beginning. How can we awaken, stir up the grace of the beginning? Maybe our love has been lukewarm. How can we bring about a renewal of the Renewal? We have to open ourselves anew, through a new encounter with Christ. The first step for putting out into the deep is contemplating Jesus, being renewed in him.

Our first call is a call to holiness. What is holiness? It is not stiff moralism. It is to approach God, to be seized by him as a consuming fire. Pope John Paul II says to the laity, "If you live Christianity without compromise, you will set the world ablaze!" We are all called to be canonizable saints. It is a false humility to say "I can't be canonized."

The *primacy of grace* is the remedy for a watered-down, secularized Christianity. We all tend to be Pelagians - we think we'll do things, and God will help. One of the graces of the Charismatic Renewal is to recognize that God calls us first. We're not baptized in the Spirit because we repented or prayed, but because God touched us.

A big problem in the Church today is the lack of a sense of community. Any period of renewal is marked by a rediscovery of community life. This is a grace of the Renewal; it is a delicate and fragile treasure.

There is a false opposition between the hierarchical and charismatic dimensions of the Church. They are really "co-essential" (John Paul II).

The disciples on the road to Emmaus: their experience of Christ was renewed, deepened, nourished and authenticated by their going back to the Church in Jerusalem. The role of the Church is in confirming what they received from the Lord.

The spirit of communion includes openness to ecumenism, and an attitude of not criticizing others. With the charisms and the wisdom we've gained over the years, we have a fantastic way to evangelize ([Mk 16](#)). We shouldn't get used to them; we have to constantly rekindle them. The Lord in his love is making sure we have to depend on each other, serve each other. Be renewed in the exercise of the charisms - their source is still overflowing!

### **Graces of meeting leaders and members of other communities**

Many have experienced struggles similar to our own in recent years. One woman, who has known MOG from the early '70s, gave me a prophetic word for us: "I will make up to you for all the years the locusts have eaten ([Joel 2:25](#)).... Behold, I make all things new" ([Rev 21:5](#)).

Seeing the variety of gifts in different communities. This is not for comparison or competition, but for rejoicing in the manifold gifts of the Spirit which contribute to the richness of the whole Body.

## **Prophecies given at the conference**

Fr. Mike Scanlan: "'Put out into the deep.' I find fire in that statement! I find fire in that document! This is the greatest mandate the charismatic renewal has ever received. This is the first time a pope has said in clear and unmistakable terms that we are all called to holiness, to go out, to evangelize. We *all* have a story to tell. We're no longer in training camp, we're no longer preparing. We're empowered to go forth! We're going into the deep!...

Going into the deep is going over your head, going into the deep is going down. We have a word of humility and repentance. Only in humility do you receive charisms, do you go down far enough that God can rush in. He wants to bless us out of humility, not out of our self-concern and self-importance. Let us decide to go deep. It's going over our heads. Recently I went scuba diving on the Cayman Islands. The instructor kept saying, 'Follow me.' When we went to 20 feet, I thought, 'OK, surely this is enough. Now I can say I've scuba dived.' He kept saying, 'Follow me.' I thought my ears were going to burst. We went all the way to 40 feet, and it was the most magnificent nature experience I've had in my life (the fish, coral, etc.). The Lord says, 'This is the way it is in my kingdom. It may be uncomfortable, but when you go deeper, the blessings and glory are there. Deeper in prayer, deeper in openness, deeper in the charisms. We're the ones who must lead those who've been given to us. We must go deeper. No excuses. Now is the hour. Let us really respond to the new springtime in the Church.'

A COTL member: "Many of you I called years ago when you were young and full of energy. Don't say, I'm too old, I'm too sick now. None of you are too old or too sick to do my will. You've been tried and tested, and now I need you more than ever. Don't leave me now."

Another participant: "The deep into which God calls us to cast ourselves is Himself. How easy it is to dive into you, my Father and my God!" (Similar to a recent MOG prophecy.)

Brian Smith: The difference between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea: with the Sea of Galilee the water flows in and out, and it is alive; with the Dead Sea it flows in... and stagnates.

## **Questions for Study and Small Group Discussion**

1. Do you see any ways that you have opted for a "soft" or "sweetened" Christianity? What are some of the radical choices that Christ is calling you to make?
2. Read [Lk 2:34](#). Why was Jesus a sign of contradiction? In what ways was the early Church a sign of contradiction? How can we be a sign of contradiction?
3. Find two or three scriptures which show the importance of being vitally rooted in the universal Church. What do you think these teach us as a community?
4. Read and meditate on [Eph 2:1-10](#). What is the primacy of grace? Why is this the remedy for a watered down, secularized Christianity?