

THE MOVEMENTS IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Three talks by John Paul II,

Documents 5 – Supplement to “Litterae Communionis-CL,” n. 11/1985, pp. 3-8

[Corrected typos in the 1985 Italian edition]

Introduction

1. Speaking to the participants at the conference on “The Movements in the Church,” John Paul II affirmed that “they must reflect in themselves the mystery of that love from which the Church was born and is continually born,” so that “in the heart of the Church, the People of God, they may express the many-faceted movement that is the answer of women and men to Revelation, to the Gospel.” In a few lines the Pope outlined a singular vision of the Church as movement, born of the eternal love of the Father, through the mission of the Son and the Spirit, to be written “in the history of humankind and of the human communities” (Castelgandolfo, September 29, 1981).

The Holy Father cast an initial and meaningful light on the nature of the movements through the nexus of the Church and mission. They are understandable only within the mission of the Church; in fact, they were born for the mission of the Church. For the most part, they arose in connection with the Second Vatican Council, which energetically re-proposed the missionary nature of the Church, inviting Christians to “raze the bastions.” The dynamism of growth of the Church, and analogously of the movements, must be promotion of a message to the ends of the earth, and never self-consuming collective egoism.

Since then the Holy Father has returned many times to the theme of the movements, further exploring that first meaning. His last address to the Schönstatt movement, on the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of its founder, offers us a second meaningful element for better understanding the nature of the movements and the concept of charism. “You have come here from many countries to thank God for the gift He gave you in the person of Fr. Kentenich. With the living memory of his figure and message you wanted to renew your spirit, to continue his spiritual legacy and to spread it, to become more and more a spiritual family that lives through the *charism of his foundation* and with this realizes its own vocation in the service of the Church and the world” (September 20, 1985, n. 2).

A few days before he had underlined the same theme speaking to the priests of Communion and Liberation. “Continually renew the discovery of the charism which has fascinated you and it will more powerfully lead you to make yourself servants of that one power which is Christ the Lord!” (To Priests of the Communion and Liberation Movement, September 12, 1985, n. 3).

Thus the charism is recognized and affirmed as the way that leads to Christ, or better, as the concrete, historical actuation of that pedagogy with which God, continually and in many ways, revives and leads the body of Christ that is the Church.

The category of charism, employed in this outlook to establish the genesis of the movements, takes on an important ecclesiological character. The Spirit, who instructs and directs the Church, rejuvenates and renews her with hierarchical and charismatic gifts rooted in the Gospel, leading her in this way to the perfect union with her spouse (cf. LG, 4). The renewed faithfulness of the charism of foundation will amplify the missionary power intrinsic to the movement, making it more adapted to serving the Church and the world.

The Church, the people of God journeying in history, encounters ever-new realities, ever-different human conditions within which she must affirm the lordship of Christ in a way that is concrete, understandable and convincing. Evangelizing in a missionary way today does not mean just departing for far-off continents, but also penetrating new spheres of life that are continually created by the

transformations of our society, to show how affection for Christ humanizes people's lives and enables them to journey toward the truth. The great newness of the Council was its emphasis on how this task is typical of all the faithful, and thus also of the laity.

It seems to me that these two factors, the mission of the Church and the foundational charism, represent the challenge that the Pope and the Church are bringing to the movements in this moment of the second millennium. It is the challenge of Catholicity.

In fact, in it the movements are destined to grow according to the measure of God's will, or to dwindle away to the point of disappearing. According to the many indications of the Holy Father, Catholicity means the capacity to live the charism in relation to the totality of the implications of the mystery of Christ that the Church untiringly re-proposes, without paralyzing it by cutting out some aspect. But Catholicity also means the energy for testifying, in the change of one's own existence, to how crucial the "phenomenon" of Jesus Christ is for people today.

2. "We believe in Christ, dead and risen, in Christ present here and now, who alone can change and changes people and the world, by transfiguring them" (Speech to the Communion and Liberation Movement on the 30th Anniversary of its Foundation, September 29, 1984, n. 3). Therefore, for Christians, the yearning of the human person for change, documented in many ways throughout the world today, rests on this firm conviction that is the principle of authentic culture. The Holy Father has called the movements to live the mission of the Church through his repeated invitations to build a civilization of truth and love.

For this reason, the Pope never tires of speaking of evangelization of culture, and does not fear calling the movements to bring forth "new forms of new" from the culture generated by faith (Speech to Participants of the 3rd Meeting of Friendship Among Peoples in Rimini, August 29, 1982). This demands a method of education of mature personalities, which, without renouncing the singularity of the charism, is faithful to the four pillars of full participation in the Church, as identified by the Council: faith, sacraments, communion and "ecclesiastical regime" (cf. LG, 14).

It seems to me that the pastoral problem of integrating the action of the movements into the ordinary activity of the Church can be illuminated by the urgent need for "evangelization" of culture, and by the Church's need for renewed efficacy as a role model and leader in the life of society (cf. Speech to the Conference of the Italian Church, held in Loreto, n. 7). In fact, the answer to similar problems will not come primarily from a proliferation of theological studies or pastoral projects. Rather, it is necessary to look to the Spirit, to see what He brings forth in the life of the Church, to see where the right missionary relationship between Church and world is manifested concretely and begins to bear fruit. The answer to this crucial problem today does not lie in a human project, but in an initiative of the Spirit. It is not an exaggeration to acknowledge humbly that the movements are the emergence of this road.

Just as the movements must live the necessary mortification for the sake of unity, so a true pastoral project, to be truly "spiritual," must promote and valorize these presences.

3. "The rising up of an ecclesial body as an Institution, its persuasive force and binding energy, has its roots in the dynamism of sacramental Grace. However, it finds its expressive form, its operative modality, its concrete historical influence, through the diverse charisms that characterize a personal temperament and history." (To the participants in a course of Spiritual Exercises for Priests promoted by CL, n. 2). This continual exchange between institution and charism is an undeniable need of the incarnation. In no way can this relationship between grace and freedom be thought of in terms of alternative dialectics, as if the institution were not charism and the charism had no need of the institution. In the end, they are the *only* reality of the Church. Could we think of the human

organism without the skeleton that supports it? It would be just as unthinkable that the Church could live without the institution.

Saint Augustine's great intuition against the Donatists that considers the institution as the expression of the *objective holiness* of the Church marks the road of the indispensable sequela that the charism owes the institution. In this, too, one can see the Pope's invitation to the young realities of the movements to invent more authentic forms of relationship with the ordinary life of the Church. Then again, the Church is the eminent place of freedom, of the freedom of the children of God.

Thus, the movements are called to two fundamental dimensions that in a certain sense certify their authenticity. The first is the filial reference to the Bishops and the Pope. The hierarchy does not have a monopoly on the charisms, but it possesses the charism of discernment and of the ordering of all the charisms for the common good of the Church. Secondly, the authentic charism must encourage fraternal openness to all the other experiences, which in a different way lead to the one truth about God and the human person revealed in Christ.

In this outlook, the Pope understands very well that the movements are not "associations of the laity." Thus the presence of priests in the movements is not in some way accessory; it is not a service rendered "from the outside." On the contrary, it is an answer to a personal appeal that in some measure constitutes also the concrete vocation of the individual person. For this reason, membership in a movement, far from being contrary to the priestly vocation, is a help to better understand and live one's own ecclesial belonging (Cf. To Priests of the Communion and Liberation Movement, cit., n. 3).

4. It seems to me that the Holy Father's words are a great gift to the movements and also an invitation to further theological and practical exploration of their vocation and specific function in the Church. "They are the sign of the freedom of forms in which the one Church is expressed, and they represent a secure newness, which still awaits being adequately understood in all its positive efficacy for the Kingdom of God at work in the present moment of history" (To the Communion and Liberation Movement on the 30th Anniversary of its Foundation, September 29, 1984, n. 3).

It is right to respond to this invitation with a sincere effort to build in the direction that the Holy Father has indicated. For this reason, Communion and Liberation, which with hope is looking forward to the results of the imminent Extraordinary Synod on the Council, is at work to contribute to the 1987 Synod on the Ecclesial Mission of the Laity.

Luigi Giussani