

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR): an Historical Analysis Between US and Europe

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Introduction, State-of-the-art, Overview of the Action

The research project aims to analyze the origins of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (hereafter, CCR). Founded in the late 1960s in the United States of America, it's a movement within the Catholic Church which spread rapidly around the world, and that today has more than 120 million followers. For the most part secular, multi-faceted and non-hierarchical, it fits into the broader charismatic movement that had already affected Protestantism, especially Pentecostalism, as well as that of spiritual renewal in the wake of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). More precisely, the CCR was founded in 1967 at Pittsburgh's Duquesne University (Pittsburgh, PA), when two theology professors were baptized in the Holy Spirit, or rather had an intense inner experience of prayer through which their own faith was personally experienced.

The practice soon spread to the University of Notre Dame (South Bend, IN), Michigan State (East Lansing, MI), Iowa (Iowa City, IA) and Portland (OR), before moving into Latin America, Europe, and Asia, gradually acquiring particular indigenous traits. Due to its emotional and shared spirituality and an intensive evangelization, the CCR expanded dramatically, soon coming to the attention of the pontiffs who perceived it as an effective tool for the dissemination of the Catholic message, useful to some extent in competing with the rampant Pentecostalism in the Global South.

Despite the existence of several historical works on the CCR, they appear to be for the most part outdated and are frequently presented with an apologetic purpose: most of these works were in fact written soon after the birth of the movement, between the late 1960s and early 1980s and were often worked on by priests or lay people who had become members of, or were at least sympathetic to the movement, e.g. husband and wife Kevin and Dorothy Ranaghan (1969)[\[1\]](#) and the priest Edward D. O'Connor (1971)[\[2\]](#) which are not only the very first attempts at analyzing the CCR, but also serve as real memories and a series of testimonies about the birth of the movement. What's more, almost fifty years after the founding of the CCR, the first sociological surveys carried out in the field, such as those of Fichter (1975)[\[3\]](#) or Bord-Faulkner (1983)[\[4\]](#), and the first theological explanations of the spirituality of the movement[\[5\]](#), written not only due to the urgent need to understand the new reality but also to legitimize it, now need to be upgraded, having been done so only partially[\[6\]](#). The lack of exhaustive recent works historicizing and contextualizing the CCR within Religious Studies or within Studies in World Christianity, and that emphasize the importance of charismatic movements in understanding the transformation of Christian religiosity over the last few decades around the world and in Europe, means that this research is both timely and appropriate. The project is also in line with the research guidelines of the Horizon 2020 program (Societal Challenge, "Europe in a Changing world"), which highlights the study of cultural heritage and European identities in order to foster a greater understanding of Europe and its relationship with a global world.

The overall innovational objective of this project is not only to use the historiography "from the very beginning" of the CCR, but also the timely theological responses that it has elicited and the first sociological investigations carried out on the field as primary sources in understanding its origin and evolution, and in particular to analyze the reaction of the Catholic ecclesiastical world when faced with this North American renewal, that is for the most part secular, with alternative spiritual content originating from the Protestant world.

Objectives

The research project intends to focus on three specific objectives:

SO1. The first specific objective is to survey the relationship between US Catholicism and European Catholicism through the history of the CCR: what different traits does it take on as it expands into Europe?

Does it maintain its principal characteristics or is it transformed? How is it perceived from a European Catholicism point of view, inevitably affected by its strong ties with the Vatican? Is it subject to greater institutionalization or more strict control? What dynamics were involved in the passing of the CCR's decision-making center from Notre Dame (1972) to Brussels (1976) and then to Rome (1981)?

SO2. The second specific objective is to analyze the reaction of the Catholic Church hierarchy to the CCR, especially that of the pontiffs, through the analysis of official pronouncements made during meetings with the charismatic groups or at other specific times. The starting point will be the work of Cardinal Léon Joseph Suenens (1904-1996), the first intermediary between the CCR and the Vatican and among the movement's leading figures in its expansion from the U.S. to Europe, and the Malines documents, six texts outlining the theological and pastoral profile of the renewal, which took place in the post-council years. The project will also focus on the particular way in which pope John Paul II welcomed the renewal, very much part of his strategy of "new evangelization", and the consequent promotion of lay groups.

SO3. The third specific objective is to define the role of women within the CCR: do they have a broader scope than in other movements or institutions within the Catholic Church? Do they have particular powers in a non-hierarchical and lay movement such as this? If so, has this been the case since the movement was founded? And in what way? Is this a moment of effective representation for women within the Catholic Church, a kind of compensation for the fact that the ordination of women is not permitted?

With this in mind, the general expected results of the project are:

- to historicize one of the most important and widespread phenomena of contemporary Christianity on a global level like that of the charismatic movement within the Catholic Church
- to study the mutual relationship between Europe and the United States with regard to the religious phenomenon under consideration
- to problematize the issue of gender within Catholicism

Research Methodology and Approach

The research approach is primarily historical, however in order to better explore the theme and to render it multidisciplinary, one needs to refer to the sociology and theology fields.

The research can generally be considered to be a part of World/Global Christianity Studies, seen from a cross-cultural perspective. It foresees the use of archive material and the first historiographical, sociological and theological texts on the CCR as primary sources in approaching the history and nature of the charismatic movement:

SO1. Consultation of the "Charismatic Renewal" section of the University of Notre Dame archives (<http://archives.nd.edu/collections/subjects.htm>, archivist Kevin Cawley contacted), that is unpublished material on the True House, a charismatic community in South Bend, and on charismatic conferences held at Notre Dame. Personal documents of the protagonists of the charismatic movement at Notre Dame will also be consulted, as will newspapers and magazines published at the time of the founding of the CCR, as well as a large amount of printed material made available by the Hesburgh Library of the University of Notre Dame. The Malines Documents and other works by Cardinal Suenens will also be analyzed. The ICCRS (International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Service), the CCR's current international body based in Rome, has produced booklets, various collections, audiovisual materials, a newsletter and a bimonthly bulletin which it has made partly available on its website, that contains a large quantity of important information, news and updates about meetings and conferences of the movement, and is well worth a thorough exploration.

SO2. Consultation of texts written by bishops and pontiffs published in the Holy See official or semi-official press, such as the *Acta Apostolice Sedis*, *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, *L'Osservatore Romano*, *La Civiltà*

Cattolica, etc. If necessary a brief visit to the Brian Smith Library in Rome – the ICCRS internal library that houses a wide range of material on the CCR – can be arranged.

SO3. In addition to the historical material for the study of the role of women within the CCR, the theory of the sociology of gender and feminist theology will also be studied.

Originality and Innovative Aspects of the Research Program

The project in itself is original because there is no recent and complete account of the Catholic Charismatic movement, especially from a multidisciplinary point of view such as this. In terms of the state-of-the-art, it will also be an opportunity to update Prof. Susan Maurer's *The Spirit of Enthusiasm: A History of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, 1967-2000*^[7], which despite being the only monograph written on these topics is somewhat synthetic and does not expand upon the Notre Dame experience or the CCR's expansion in Europe. The topic is particularly auspicious from the point of view of academic exchange between Europe and the United States, as it serves as a moment of reflection and dialogue on the theme of the history of Christianity; also opening up prospective collaborations between the University of Notre Dame, renowned for its studies on global Catholicism, and Ca' Foscari University of Venice, where its Department of Linguistics and Comparative Cultural Studies (DSLCC) and the future Center for Historical Research on Christianity (Centro di studi storici sul cristianesimo, CISC) have a particular focus on the comparative study of contemporary religious history. There being no expert on the subject of the charismatic movement in the Catholic Church at any of the European universities, this research project could be a unique opportunity to forge personal career possibilities and new international contacts. Finally, it should be pointed out that the project would contribute to the History of Christianity, Studies in World Christianity, American Catholic Studies and European History on an international level.

[1] Ranaghan Kevin and Dorothy, *Catholic Pentecostals*, Paulist Press, Nuova York 1969.

[2] O'Connor Edward, *The Pentecostal Movement in the Catholic Church*, Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame 1971.

[3] Fichter Joseph, *The Catholic Cult of the Paraclete*, Sheed&Ward, New York 1975.

[4] Bord Richard J. and Faulkner Joseph F., *The Catholic Charismatics: the Anatomy of a Modern Religious Movement*, Pennsylvania State University Press, Pennsylvania 1983.

[5] Among others, Laurentin René, *Pentecôtisme chez les catholiques*, Editions Beauchesne, Paris 1974 and Sullivan Francis A., *Charisms and the Charismatic Renewal. A Biblical and Theological Study*, Servant Publication, Ann Arbor 1982.

[6] Cfr. Roldán Verónica, *Il rinnovamento carismatico cattolico. Uno studio comparativo Argentina-Italia*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2009.

[7] Maurer Susan A., *The Spirit of Enthusiasm: A History of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, 1967-2000*, University Press of America, Lanham 2010.