



WORKSHOPS – C4.1 TITLE : SPREADING THE GRACE OF BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT	SPEAKER : Fr FIO MASCARENHAS, SJ
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1. A Golden Jubilee brings golden memories! Joyful memories of 50 years of blessings, blessings which endured over a long “honeymoon” period, followed by times of challenges and trials, leading in some cases to stagnation or even death, but in other cases to *more* renewal and *more* new life. What was this “honeymoon” period like? I am thinking of the first 25 years or so.
2. From firsthand experience in India, in Malaysia/Singapore, in Uganda, and elsewhere in the world where I helped start the CCR, I know that in those early days the CCR was a gushing spring of new life in the Spirit, and it made its mark felt all over the Church. St John Paul II testified to this grace: (Quote) *“As you celebrate the 25th anniversary of the beginning of the CCR, I willingly join you in giving praise to God for the many fruits which it has borne in the life of the Church. The emergence of the CCR following the Second Vatican Council was a particular gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church ...”* (March 14, 1992). At an earlier audience granted to the international leaders of CCR, His Holiness said, *“The vigour and fruitfulness of the CCR certainly attest to the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit at work in the Church after the Second Vatican Council ...Because of the Spirit, the Church preserves a continual youthful vitality, and the CCR is an eloquent manifestation of this vitality today...”* (May 14, 1987 – I introduced the leaders to the Pope at that meeting as I was then the resident Chairman of the ICCRO Council in Rome.)
3. I also remember with awe how the Catholic Bishops Conference of the USA, in its 1984 *Pastoral Statement*, declared: *“Since our last two statements, we have seen the CCR mature in its grasp of the core of the Gospel and those realities which belong constitutively to the inner nature of the Church... Many lives have undergone a deep conversion, and have radically reoriented their lives toward God... Many have rediscovered the meaning of Church, Eucharistic life, Mary's role, and the ancient discipline of fasting... Many too have rediscovered the centrality of the cross, which remains at the heart of Christian discipleship even after the glory of the resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit...”*
4. Now let us look briefly at the challenging situation of the CCR *today in 2017*. Here is a letter I received just last week from a leader in a neighboring country: *Dear Fr, The charismatic prayer group that I'm committed to was established in the mid-70s and has been operating continuously since 1986. We've had our ups and downs. There are about 30 people coming to weekly prayer meetings. However, we are struggling these days with leaders and members needing to remain on fire by the Holy Spirit. We have had formations but the spiritual level of the group seems to have stagnated. The majority of the core team has served for more than 25 years and we have difficulty finding people to step forward to serve.”* Are things very different elsewhere? I get similar feedback from many groups in India, and from the UK, and other countries where I am still invited often to speak. Nevertheless, there are still many good things happening in the worldwide CCR today,



which is why Pope Francis is encouraging us to spread the grace of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit to the whole Church.

5. What does the Pope mean by this? Is it more prayer groups of predominantly senior citizens singing hallelujahs and occasionally using charismatic gifts like tongues? Or is he referring to the power of the Spirit making Christians more Christlike, empowering them to show the world what the Resurrection of Jesus means for humanity, and what is the “life in abundance” which his Holy Spirit wants to give our post-modern, self-centered, hedonistic and atheistic world? Let us remember that the BHS is not primarily an external happening, but an inner God-experience, it is not just yielding to charismatic gifts and being set free psychologically to praise God with joyful song and upraised hands, *but first of all the BHS is a new, or renewed, experience of **four personal, intimate relationships: with God as Father, with Jesus as Lord and Brother, with the Spirit as indwelling Divine Paraclete or Encourager, and with the Body of Christ as the new People of God.*** This is what the USA Bishops Conference acknowledged (I quoted it earlier), that the BHS was significantly helping Catholics to “*mature in their grasp of the core of the Gospel... to rediscover the centrality of the cross at the heart of Christian discipleship, even after the outpouring of the Spirit, etc.*”
6. To spread the grace of the BHS, therefore, I suggest that a new emphasis on this *interiority of spiritual experience* is needed, so that it becomes clear to all that the CCR is not interested in just becoming a bigger “movement,” but in bringing more and more people in our parishes to enter what Pope Francis has defined (once again) as a powerful “**current of grace.**” Our great leader of happy memory, Cardinal Leon Josef Suenens, whom I had the good fortune of working with for several years both in Brussels and in Rome, had often declared (quote), “*The CCR does not wish to be just one of several spiritual movements but can best be described as ‘a current of grace’... valid for every Christian, regardless of the ‘movement’ or association to which he/she belongs, regardless of whether one is a lay person, a religious, a priest or a bishop... We do not ‘enter’ the Renewal: it is the Renewal that enters into us, if we accept its grace*” (*Resting in the Spirit*, Veritas, Dublin, 1987).
7. My own experience of the BHS bears this out. I was “baptized in the Holy Spirit” 45 years ago, on 11 February 1972, when I was 28 years old. While alone in prayer in my room in a Jesuit House in Mumbai, God unexpectedly and sovereignly blessed me with a totally undeserved “*ABBA experience.*” As I knelt in solitary prayer before my Vows Crucifix, surrendering my broken life to Jesus as Lord, the Father spoke words of affirmation and empowering to me, saying, “*Fio, you are my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased!*” This was my BHS, and it changed my life completely, bringing new life in spirit, mind and body.
8. Most importantly, I was enriched with a new and gratuitous “spiritual connection” with the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. This connection was nothing but the grace of “infused contemplation” (as Fr Ed O’Connors describes it in his book, *The Pentecostal Movement in the Catholic Church*), and this unmerited grace of infused contemplation endures in me till today. Through it, the familiar greeting of 2Cor 13:13 has become a lived experience. “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God our Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit*” are experienced by me not as three vague blessings but as three real **relationships.**



Through my BHS, God has given me an invincible faith-conviction that Christianity (and my life as a Jesuit priest) is not first of all a matter of external commandments and rituals but of a *network of relationships*. It is God who always takes the initiative in establishing these personal and intimate relationships with each disciple, and to which we must then personally respond. I am continuing to learn that I must cooperate with the Holy Spirit daily to strengthen and deepen these relationships.

9. *So many* Scripture texts have come alive for me since then, especially from *The Gospel according to John* and from the *Letters of Paul*. I have also realized that a fourth intimate and personal relationship necessarily flows from the first three, that is, a relationship *with the Church*, the Body of Christ, and that Jn 13:34, Jesus' new commandment of love, is a non-negotiable sign of my Christian identity. From these four fundamental relationships with Father, Son, Spirit and Church, flow all my other human relationships with family, neighbors and friends of whatever creed, and with creation itself. Such was and is my BHS experience.
10. And over the last 45 years, this BHS has brought me innumerable recognized blessings in "*spirit, mind and body*" (1Thes 5:23). First of all, priestly and servant-leadership for over 20 years of the CCR, worldwide in Rome (from 1980 to 88, and later too) and in India (from 1977 when we started the first NST, and again from 1993 to 2002, after which I retired from active leadership to become more involved in the pastoral biblical apostolate of the Catholic Bible Institute, Mumbai). More recently, I have had the joy of being nominated as a biblical "expert" by Pope Benedict XVI to participate in both the 2005 and the 2008 Synod of Bishops at Rome. And recently, Pope Francis appointed me a Missionary of Mercy, so that at the age of 73 plus, I can still be active in ministry, as a Jesuit, *For God's Greater Glory*.
11. To answer, therefore, the call of Pope Francis about spreading the authentic grace of the BHS over the next 50 years, I suggest that we need to focus our emphasis on *spiritual interiority*, and help all our people in prayer groups to "***Be aglow with the Spirit***" (Rom 12:11). This felicitous phrase of St Paul applies to today's CCR, because the Letter to the Romans, *in the whole of chapter 8*, offers a splendid description of *the work of the Holy Spirit* in charismatic Christians. Note however that chapter 8 is not about an empowering with the charismatic gifts but about the "***character-building work***" of the Spirit, who works interiorly within each Christian's *spirit* and *psyche* (or 'soul'). Romans 8 tells us that in our *spirit*, the Holy Spirit is making us reborn sons and daughters of God and "co-heirs with Christ," and that in our *psyche* or *mind*, the Holy Spirit is trying to form a very attractive, Christ-like *character* or personality.
12. Character-formation has always been a major part of the Spirit's activity, first of all in *Jesus* himself, and then in those of his disciples whom we call Saints, for God wants every "co-heir of Christ" to grow "*to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ*" (Eph 4:13). This means that charismatic disciples must not only be known for their *zeal and piety* but even more for their authentic *Christlike character*. St John Paul II explained well in his famous encyclical on the Holy Spirit that: "*The Church is supremely aware of the reality of the inner man, of what is deepest and incorruptible. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit*



this inner ‘spiritual’ man matures and grows strong ...The hidden breath of the Divine Spirit enables the human spirit to open in its turn before the saving and sanctifying self-opening to God. Through the gift of grace, man enters a ‘new life,’ ‘he lives according to the Spirit’ ...The Triune God transforms the human world from within, from inside hearts and minds ...and enables man ever more fully to find himself through a sincere gift of self’ (The Lord and Giver of Life, n.58).

13. In today’s world too, the Spirit wants to transform each Christian, and especially those “baptized in the Spirit,” to manifest a Christlike *character*. The “current of grace,” which is the term Pope Francis favors, is all about the sanctification of the human spirit, mind and body. And this sanctification is manifested by “***the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control***” (Gal 5:22). These nine “fruit” must be seen in our daily life precisely as our character strengths, as the main effects of an authentic BHS! They are not just emotions, but character-strengths! Joy, patience, kindness, self-control, etc., are not passing emotions but stable character-strengths that the Holy Spirit wants us all to have.
14. Perhaps in recent years, as the CCR has grown bigger as a “movement,” we have been tempted to focus more on charismatic gifts, and praise and worship gifts. But now as part of our Golden Jubilee vision, we must decide to make strenuous efforts to spread the grace of the BHS as a forming of Christ’s character in us. Pope Francis has been speaking again and again about “life in the Spirit,” not only for “charismatics,” but for every Christian, pointing to the interior work of the Spirit, to the transformation of life that the Spirit offers.
15. A very important prayer of the Church from the alternative Collect of the Mass for Pentecost says, “*O God, send forth your Spirit again with the force of a mighty wind, to broaden the horizons of our minds,*” etc. The *Life in the Spirit Seminars* and other similar programs have done, and are still doing, a great job in introducing people to the essentials of the Good News (to the *kerygma*), but the follow-up to this powerful introduction is rather poor in many prayer groups. The leaders must help their people to grow continuously in “broadening the horizons of their minds” so that they reflect “the mind of Christ.” St John Paul II, besides praising and encouraging the CCR, had also warned the CCR leaders: “*Real openness to the Holy Spirit as he vivifies and guides the Church helps you to live in union with the Lord Jesus. It is your strength and your special treasure, and you are striving to exercise it in various ways. But this gift from God is also a fragile treasure, and one which you must take special care of.*” It is we, the leaders, who must “take special and wise care of” the CCR. Are we doing this? Are we focusing on “broadening the horizons of our minds” in a Catholic way?
16. In the early days, the CCR in India organized what we called “*Fully Catholic, Fully Charismatic*” Seminars, for leaders and core-group leaders, in which we helped the participants “to broaden the horizons of their minds” by studying the key documents of the Second Vatican Council, and key encyclicals of the Popes. The leaders of today must also make real efforts to study and to teach from Pope Francis’ superb encyclicals on *The Joy of the Gospel*, etc., Pope Benedict’s timely encyclicals, and of course St John Paul II’s great encyclicals on all aspects of modern life. Or will we be complacent and lazy and give the



same teachings about charisms and prayer meetings week after week to bored and small audiences? And there is also the whole field of Scripture study, becoming Scripture-literate in a Catholic way, being nourished by our “daily bread,” the word of God. Is the CCR leadership organizing serious study programs of the Bible and biblical spirituality for leaders on a national or local level, and for members of our prayer groups? I am not talking about occasional talks on the Bible, but a serious study program which is ongoing and not sporadic, so as to truly “broaden the horizons of our minds.”

17. I conclude with a stirring text from Vat II’s Church in the Modern World: *“The brothers and sisters of Jesus must build a new society, a new civilization of love. In obedience to their Lord, and in his Spirit, they must develop on earth the values of human dignity, brotherhood and freedom, and indeed all the good things that come from our nature and our activity...”* (GS, 39). Far from making charismatic Catholics "elitist" or "clique-ish," the Spirit rather wants to improve their ability to relate with their peers in the Church and in the world. Hence, charismatic Catholics are not to be afraid, nor out of prejudice or a false religiosity to reject anything that is genuinely human, but taking their cue from the Church, "feeling" with the Church (and with the recent Popes) they must be empowered by their BHS to involve themselves in every area of human activity, for the sake of the Kingdom of God. The fields of science, culture, the arts, politics, business, etc., must each find committed Spirit-filled Christians immersed in them at every level, ready to give courageously and generously of what they are receiving from the Spirit. Thus they will be contributing to the fulfillment in history of the divine plan. And thereby they will themselves personally grow in the Spirit, for faith is meant to be shared, not hoarded, and a lamp is meant to be held aloft, not hidden under a bed. Each charismatic must *"grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth, and upbuilds itself in love"* (Eph 4:15f).
18. May our Golden Jubilee celebrations lead us all to be immersed anew in the “current of grace” which is the CCR, as we attempt to spread the grace of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit to the whole Church! Let all charismatics show the world that *“under the influence of the Holy Spirit their inner ‘spiritual’ man has matured and grown strong”* (J.P.II). Using the list of the “fruit of the Spirit” of Gal 5:22, let every charismatic Catholic prayerfully examine his/her own life, and evaluate their personal openness to *that Spirit* whose only wish is to make us more like Jesus, *“aglow with the Spirit!”* Thus it will not be “we who enter the Renewal,” but we will show that “the Renewal has entered into us.” Amen! Praise the Lord!