There's More, So Much More!

CHARLES WHITEHEAD

Charles Whitehead, Papal Knight and Former President of the Pontifical Council for the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal, shares an insight into his role and what charismatic renewal means for individuals and the church today through the power of the Holy Spirit.



WHAT IS A PAPAL KNIGHT?

A Papal Knight is a person who has been given a papal knighthood – an honour conferred by the Pope to recognize individuals for their service to the Catholic Church.

MY JOURNEY TO BECOMING A PAPAL KNIGHT

I was educated by the Jesuits and left school to go to Durham University in 1961. My faith was intellectual rather than alive. I met Sue at Durham and we married in 1966 after leaving university. Both of us experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit in 1976 and became very active Christians together, and remained in our respective churches – the Catholic church for me and the Anglican church for Sue. We both became very involved in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

In 1988 I was elected to represent Northern Europe on the Pontifical Council for the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal. The Council met in Rome twice a year for three or four days, and consisted of about 20 leaders from all over the world. We had an office in Vatican premises with a staff of two full-time workers.

At my second meeting they elected me their President, a position I held for 15 years. I had regular meetings with the heads of various Vatican departments, and Pope John Paul II welcomed me whenever I was in Rome. I had a permanent invitation to his Daily Mass at 7 am in his private apartment, and he often asked me to join him for breakfast afterwards. We met regularly and became friends. He invited me several times to give talks to him and his Papal Household. On one occasion, on the eve of Pentecost 1998, he had an international meeting in the Square outside St. Peter's, Rome, for 455,000 leaders of the new movements in the church. He invited me to give a 20-minute response to his talk which was in Italian about the charismatic and the hierarchical dimensions of the church being co-essential to her health and life.

During my time as the Council President, I met leaders and gave talks in 85 countries around the world. Pope John Paul II usually wanted to hear my views on the countries I visited when I was next in Rome. In 2003, he awarded me a Papal Knighthood for my services to the church.

CHARISMATIC RENEWAL FOR INDIVIDUALS AND THE CHURCH TODAY

Two thousand years ago, Jesus said to his disciples, 'I am sending down to you what the Father has promised.

Stay in the city then, until you are clothed with the power from on high' (Luke 24:49). So they stayed in the city, received this 'power from on high' and then went out and preached the gospel throughout the world.

In 1967, a group of Catholic students from Duquesne University in the USA gathered for a weekend retreat and prayed for the same power. What began then among them has become known as the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

As I reflect on this, I rejoice that all over the world people have been baptised in the Holy Spirit, and have experienced a new freedom and reality in their Christian lives. Some have met Jesus Christ for the first time. Others have become men and women of a new and richer faith. Many have answered the call to live and preach the gospel in a radical way – challenging the values of our materialistic world.

It hasn't all been easy – there has been a price to be paid. I must also admit that we have often failed, turning back to the safe and comfortable instead of moving on into the unknown. It seems a good time to take stock. After all, the Charismatic Renewal is well established, even though it is still often misunderstood. Perhaps we can learn from the mistakes we've made and so face the future with a new confidence.

The coming of the Spirit is an integral part of our normal Christian initiation. Through it, we are called to be more committed to Jesus Christ and his church. This is why we emphasise the need to be at the heart of the church – part of normal parish life. However, there can be few 'card-carrying charismatics' who have not experienced tolerant smiles, mocking laughter, unloving remarks or outright rejection from their fellow Christians. These things can hurt. We are, after all, only trying to do what we believe the Lord is asking.

We love Christ and we love his church – imperfect as it is – but then we are far from perfect ourselves. As we are the church, how can we expect it to be perfect? With all our faults, we are called to serve in the love and power of the Holy Spirit, accepting rightful authority and praying that the Spirit of Pentecost will continue to bring new life to the whole church. We are all working to see the world committed to Jesus Christ as Lord. If the Charismatic Renewal is to fulfil its role in this, we must remain properly rooted in the life of the church whilst retaining both our charismatic and ecumenical dimensions.

We must also recognise that we are called to be prophetic. We have to challenge and disturb the comfortable – and much of the church is very comfortable indeed and set in its ways. This calls for the courage to speak out when things are wrong, and it is not going to make us popular. It has always been so for those who are Christians in word and deed rather than in name only, so why should we expect anything different?

Rejection comes not only from the world, but also from the church. Yet, we have no right to challenge the church unless we love and remain part of it. There is, however, a danger here which needs to be avoided – the danger of developing an excessive desire to be accepted and approved. Such a desire may lead us to compromise and conformity, so that we no longer teach and practise those things which cause others discomfort. I am, of course, thinking of such things as asking for baptism in the Spirit, speaking in tongues, prophesying, and praying for healing. It is certainly true that these things are open to abuse and are sometimes misused, but the answer is proper teaching and practice, not embarrassment and prohibition.

To walk in the Holy Spirit is to realise that, in everything, we are to live not out of ourselves and our own efforts, but out of the Father's provision of life, love and power in Jesus Christ. It means turning from self to God, from works to faith, from law to Spirit.

The Spirit brings us a new freedom (Galatians 5:1) and there should be a passion in our hearts for his freedom. We need to be filled and filled again with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). Every Christian needs to know the love, power and freedom of the Holy Spirit if we are to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to our needy world.

Through the Charismatic Renewal, the Holy Spirit has reminded us that we are his temples (1 Corinthians 6:19), and he wants to work in and through us. He has brought the charisms to our attention again, and taught us how to use them. This is a sacred trust for which we are accountable.

If we are to be faithful to what God is asking of us, the Charismatic Renewal must remain a move of the Holy Spirit and never be allowed to become a bureaucratic structure. History has seen too many moves of the Spirit fail when the prophetic vision has died and over-organisation has strangled their life.

If we restrict the Spirit, the gifts will disappear again. The Lord doesn't baptise techniques, systems or programmes in his Spirit – he baptises men and women. Let's keep asking him to do that. We must let God be God, and do things his way – not ours. This renewal must remain fully charismatic. Then in thanksgiving for all that is past, and in eager anticipation of all that lies ahead, we can say with Paul: 'Glory be to him whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; glory be to him from generation to generation in the Church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen' (Ephesians 3:20-21).

I believe we are part of something very important that God is doing – but we're only seeing the first fruits. There's more, so much more, still to come!

CHARLES WHITEHEAD KSG

Charles is a Knight of St Gregory the Great, awarded by Pope John Paul II in 2003 for his services to the universal church. Charles continues to serve the church in many different ways, maintaining contacts with Pope Benedict, and then with Pope Francis whom he knew when he was Cardinal Bergoglio in Buenos Aires. He is married to Sue and is an active member of the Carmelite parish of St. Joseph's in Gerrards Cross.



PRAYER FOCUS

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Pray for all parts of the church to seek deeper faith, from the leadership to people sitting in the pews; the raising up of more people willing to speak boldly about receiving the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit; for an awareness of the intensity of the spiritual battle and of the necessity for complete and continued reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit and closeness to our Lord, through prayer and Bible study (Acts 2:38-40; Matthew 10:16-20).

FOCUS ON THE CHURCH

Children and young people: Pray for the Methodist Youth President, Genesis Padgett; for all youth and children's workers across the Connexion; for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to guide children and young people into biblically based teaching. Pray for 3Generate (2-4 October); for all young people to find the joy of a loving relationship with the Lord Jesus and to spread the Good News enthusiastically to their peer groups (Matthew 18:5-6; Titus 2:6-8).

Local Churches: For every member and attendee of the church to have a desire to read and study the Bible and a thirst for prayer, to seek the power of the Holy Spirit, to seek God's agenda and strategy for each individual church, to eagerly desire biblical holiness (Luke 11:9-10; Matthew 24:12-13).

FOCUS ON NATIONAL ISSUES

Political Landscape: Pray for the promotion of and funding for hospices and End of Life Care; for the protection of children and teenagers from all sexual distortions; for the rights of Christian parents to teach biblical truth; for freedom for the gospel to be preached across our land (Genesis 1:27; 1 Corinthians 6:18-20).

Terrorism and National Security: Pray for the perpetrators of terror to encounter God, and for victims to find healing and peace. Pray for a change to regimes across the world which encourage acts of terror, cyber-attacks and international espionage, particularly from Russia. Pray for a readiness in the nation to combat any attack to our national security (Proverbs 28:13: Acts 3:19).

FOCUS ON WORLD ISSUES

Planet in crisis: Give thanks for initiatives tackling our exploitation of the planet to bring renewal and change – for conservation areas on both land and sea; for projects and initiatives seeking to bring change and restoration to stricken areas. Pray for a worldwide commitment to reduce all plastics; for the world to wake up and take seriously the stress the planet is under, and to commit to the funding of initiatives to bring about improvements including the clearing up of polluted habitats (1 Timothy 4:4-5; Isaiah 24:4-6).

THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Focus on Eritrea, the fifth most dangerous country in the world for Christians. Pray for hope and freedom for the many imprisoned Christians who exist in appalling conditions. Pray that God will provide for the daily needs of Christians who are arrested or detained; that President Afwerki's heart will be turned away from oppression and toward the love of Jesus.

Focus on Syria, the sixth most dangerous country in the world for Christians. Pray for the shocked and frightened survivors of the Damascus church attack in June 2025, particularly as they are still under persecution. Pray that Christians who live with constant uncertainty will know God as their rock; that new believers rejected by their Muslim families will find love and fellowship (James 1:12; Hebrews 12:2-3).