

International Council of the *Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships*

Assisi (*Domus Pacis*), October 29th 2013

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- 1.** I am happy to greet all of you! I bring with me to Assisi the warm greetings of my superiors at the Pontifical Council for the Laity, His Eminence Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko, President of the Dicastery, and Bishop Josef Clemens, the Secretary. They are well-informed about this important meeting of the Catholic Fraternity's International Council and follow with great attention the work that you began yesterday, here in Assisi, close to the place where Saint Francis gave up his soul to God on October 3rd 1226.
- 2.** As you know, Pope Francis came to Assisi on October 4th of this year, the very day of the Feast of Saint Francis. It was a much-desired pastoral visit from a Pope who had chosen the name of Assisi's saint, a historical first. It was an intensive day with many highpoints: Holy Mass, a silent prayer in front of the Cross of San Damiano, meetings with the sick and the needy, with the diocesan clergy, with people committed in consecrated life, with cloistered nuns and then, finally, with youth from across the Umbria region and Italy. That this meeting of the Catholic Fraternity's International Council takes place a matter of days after Pope Francis' visit to Assisi is of significance for each one of us, and invites us to manifest our unity in prayer with the successor of Peter the Apostle and for his intentions. Each one of you belongs to one of the communities within Catholic charismatic renewal that is represented on the International Council of the Catholic Fraternity.
- 3.** Professor Matteo Calisi is leaving the Presidency of the Catholic Fraternity. It is clearly right to thank him for the work he has done in these years. It is necessary and, at the same time beautiful, to consider authority in the Church as a service. Recent popes have spoken much of this. A service undertaken for a fixed time,

passionately done, but that one is able to leave to others when a mandate comes to its end, in order to offer one's contribution in other fields. There is no lack of work to be done in the Church, thanks be to God!

- 4.** This Council meeting is a moment of particular responsibility for all of you, because you must choose the new President of the Catholic Fraternity. Please allow me to briefly recall the history of the Catholic Fraternity, so as to offer, also, a contribution from the Pontifical Council for the Laity. The Catholic Fraternity was born out of the requirement to build a network among the many charismatic communities springing up from the diffusion of Catholic charismatic renewal across the whole world. During the 1970's, many associative realities of a charismatic type were born in the United States, Oceania and Europe - and then in Asia, Latin America and Africa-, with common characteristics like charismatic prayer and praise, the use of the charisms of which Saint Paul speaks in the first letter to the Corinthians (chapter 12), a committed fraternal life following the example given in the Acts of the Apostles (chapter 2), etc.. Each of these realities came into being autonomously. The requirement of building a certain relationship among them was felt not only - and not even first of all - by these charismatic communities, but also - and above all - by the institutional Church, that is to say the bishops and, ultimately, the Holy See, in order to identify an interlocutor for all of these realities. Many communities were already linked together through the *International Brotherhood of Communities*, a body which also included communities open to the baptised of other ecclesial communities. Therefore, there was a need for an organism that that could help the many charismatic communities dispersed across all the continents to grow in a clear and strong Catholic identity and in a deep communion with the Holy See.
- 5.** On November 30th 1990, after several years of dialogue between the Pontifical Council for the Laity and Brian Smith and Bobbie Cavnar, an organism connecting Catholic communities born from Catholic charismatic renewal was instituted, having among its principal goals the affirming and deepening of the Catholic identity of its member communities.

The Catholic Fraternity has been indispensable in the orientation of all the other realities that became part of it in the following years, and this has given good results in safeguarding their Catholic identity, particularly in some geographical contexts (Oceania, North America, Asia). The Catholic Fraternity has always identified itself as a concrete reality coming from the broad and deep current of Catholic charismatic renewal, and recognised itself as an instrument in its service. With the recognition of *International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services* (ICCRS) in 1993, there has also been a greater cohesion between charismatic communities and the other realities of Charismatic renewal (prayer groups, schools of evangelisation, ministries and services organised to a greater or lesser degree etc.).

6. Today the relationship and dialogue of these charismatic realities with ecclesial authority is much changed in comparison to its beginnings. The attention shown by bishops is more welcoming and open.¹ Many communities have developed internationally, and some of them have obtained recognition from the Pontifical Council for the Laity. It seems possible to affirm that the initial scope - that of giving a profoundly catholic identity to these communities - has been achieved. The communities that enter the Catholic Fraternity have all received recognition from a Local Church and, as mentioned above, bishops are more and more prepared to welcome and accompany them. Certainly, the existence of the Catholic Fraternity has borne fruit. The Pontifical Council for the Laity, which has always been and will remain the reference point for each single community that belongs to the current of Catholic charismatic renewal, has provided a guarantee for the Church's bishops; and at the same time the Holy See has found an interlocutor for the dialogue, understanding and discernment of these realities - so varied and yet so similar in some ways, each one with its own

¹ This can be seen in the testimony of Pope Francis during the press conference on the return flight from Rio de Janeiro. The Pope answers a Brazilian journalist: "You asked about the Charismatic renewal movement. I would say this to you. At the end of the 1970's and the beginning of the 1980's I couldn't bear it. Once, speaking about it, I said this: "These people confuse a liturgical celebration with a Samba school!" I did say that. Then I regretted it. Then I got to know them better. It is also true that the movement, with good guides, has gone along a good path. And now I believe that this movement does much good to the Church in general. In Buenos Aires, I often brought them together and one once a year said Mass with all of them in the cathedral. I have always helped them, once I had been *converted*, when I saw the good they were doing. Because in this moment for the Church - and here I broaden my reply to you a little - I believe that the movements are necessary. The movements are a grace of the Spirit." (Papal flight, July 28th 2013).

founders and government. Pontifical Magisterium on “the new associative season” has also given to each of these realities a sense of belonging in the Church.

7. In conclusion, I would like to ask three questions, linked to each other, that I hope will be part of your reflection:

1^a.- Which of the Catholic Fraternity’s current objectives need to be re-launched in order to avoid the risk of it becoming a “superstructure” whose necessity is no longer understood? How does the sense of belonging to the Catholic Fraternity express itself for all of the members of the different communities? Can the sharing of spiritual gifts and the fruits of Christian life among single communities (see Statutes, art. 1.6-a) be one of the objectives that requires renewal? Can the communities that are numerically bigger and more widespread humbly help the others to grow? Are the objectives of formation in the ecumenical context and promotion of spiritual ecumenism according to the teaching of the Catholic Church (see Statutes, art. 1.6-i and j) still pursued in all communities?

2^a.- What are the prospects for the Catholic Fraternity at this moment in its history? What service can the Catholic Fraternity offer in the near future?

3^a.- What is the quality of the relationships between the international charismatic communities which have even gone as far as receiving recognition from the Holy See and the communities that are local in dimension? Do all take part in the general or regional assemblies, that is to say the events organised by the Catholic Fraternity in order to allow the communities to gather and live things in common? Is there absenteeism among communities? Is it always the same member communities that take part in these meetings, sending a few delegates who, in turn, are always the same?

My hope is that these questions might stimulate your reflection at this very particular moment for the future of the Catholic Fraternity.

Thank you very much for your attention!

