

Thy Kingdom Come!

Central Commission for the Review of the Statutes of Regnum Christi

Theme for Study and Reflection Number 4

The Movements and New Ecclesial Communities

Goal

We want to understand the identity, nature and principal characteristics of ecclesial movements more deeply so that we can more firmly ground our love for God's call to be a part of the Regnum Christi Movement.

In order to do this, we will try to understand what characterizes these new ecclesial realities: how have they developed through history – in broad strokes – and the encouragement given them by the Second Vatican Council, what are their features, as well as the reasons for their existence from the theological point of view and their place within canon law.

Outline

A. A Look at History: The movements as an expression of the action of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church through the ages. Their originality starting with the ecclesiology of communion of the Second Vatican Council and the rise of the movements as answers to the needs of the Church and the World.

B. Nature of ecclesial movements: 1) Their place in the Church: the co-essentiality of the institutional dimension (Petrine and episcopal ministry) and the charismatic dimension (the action of the Holy Spirit that bursts into the life of the Church) and the apostolicity in the movements (as a continuation of the evangelizing mission of the Church). 2) Definition of movements starting with their essential elements, like the participation of faithful from different states of life, a journey of faith and witness of Christian life, the unique charism and the apostolic dedication with a unique missionary drive. 3) Place in canon law.

C. Criteria of Ecclesiality (what makes them part of the Church): the primacy of the universal vocation to holiness. The witness of a firm and convinced communion, with the Pope, the Bishop and all the forms of apostolate in the Church. Participation in the evangelizing mission of the Church. Presence in human society, at the service of the integral dignity of humanity.

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D. Closeness of the movements to the recent Popes: The encouragement of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI through the world congresses of ecclesial movements. The movements as gift and richness for the Church's going forth, in the Magisterium of Pope Francis. Joy as a characteristic of the movements.

Key Concepts

Movement

New Ecclesial Communities

New Forms of Consecrated Life

Apostolicity

Association of the Faithful

International Association of the Faithful

Criteria of Ecclesiality

A. A Look at History

In his conference on *The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements* at the World Congress for Ecclesial Movements in 1998, the then Cardinal Ratzinger said that throughout history “there are the ever renewed irruptions of the Holy Spirit, which ceaselessly revitalize and renew this structure [of the Church],”¹ identifying different “apostolic movements” that have appeared throughout the centuries. One of the first of these movements, was the monasticism of St. Anthony (250-356) and St. Basil (330-379), in which we find the desire to live the Gospel radically in its fullness and to establish a rule for living Christianity in an integral way. Another was the movement of monastic reform of Cluny (in France in the 10th and 11th centuries). Afterwards there followed the mendicant orders of the 13th century (the

¹ Joseph Ratzinger, “The Theological Locus of the Ecclesial Movements”. Discourse at the World Congress of the Ecclesial Movements, Rome, May 27, 1998.

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Franciscans of St. Francis of Assisi and the Dominicans of St. Dominic Guzman). In the 16th century, there were important movements of evangelization, among them the Jesuits. In the 19th century there was the “missionary” movement with the birth of many new congregations dedicated to evangelization. We can see how the Holy Spirit constantly has inspired new charisms in the Church and how historically there have been “movements” that have promoted conversion and reform in the *Ecclesia semper reformanda* (Church is always in need of reform).

Nevertheless, the movements – as we understand them today – constitute an innovation in the life of the Church born from the vision of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). As we have seen in a previous theme, this council returned to the concept of the Church as a mystery of communion. The movements base their own essence on the “ecclesiology of communion”. The constitution *Lumen gentium* helps us to understand this innovation by turning to the theology of the charisms (which is valid in all times and places):

It is not only through the sacraments and the ministries of the Church that the Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the people of God and enriches it with virtues, but, "allotting his gifts to everyone according as He wills (1st Corinthians 12:11), He distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church, according to the words of the Apostle: "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit" (1st Corinthians 12:7). These charisms, whether they be the more outstanding or the more simple and widely diffused, are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation for they are perfectly suited to and useful for the needs of the Church."²

Although some of these great associative realities were founded before the Second Vatican Council (for example, Chiara Lubich founded the Focolare Movement or Work of Mary in 1943, during the Second World War, and Communion and Liberation was born from the initiative of Fr. Luigi Giussani in 1954), it is since the time of the Council that we have witnessed an exceptional flowering of the movements, their world-wide diffusion and multiplicity, and other group realities, especially with a lay character. It has been a flowering that as St. John Paul II would say:

We can speak of a *new era of group endeavours* of the lay faithful. In fact, "alongside the traditional forming of associations, and at times coming from their very roots, movements and new sodalities have sprouted, with a specific feature and purpose, so great is the richness and the

² Second Vatican Ecumenical Council Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 12.

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versatility of resources that the Holy Spirit nourishes in the ecclesial community, and so great is the capacity of initiative and the generosity of our lay people”³

As Pope Benedict XVI said, “the Ecclesial Movements and New Communities are one of the most important innovations inspired by the Holy Spirit in the Church for the implementation of the Second Vatican Council.”⁴ He also emphasized in an address to the German bishops:

After the Council, the Holy Spirit endowed us with the "movements". They sometimes appear to be rather strange to the parish priest or Bishop but are places of faith where young people and adults try out a model of life in faith as an opportunity for life today. I therefore ask you to approach movements very lovingly. Here and there, they must be corrected or integrated into the overall context of the parish or Diocese. Yet, we must respect the specific character of their charism and rejoice in the birth of communitarian forms of faith in which the Word of God becomes life.⁵

The flowering of the Movements throughout history is related in a very constant way with moments of confusion and crisis in which “man, having lost his clear and defined identity, in his disorientation reacts by seeking reference points through which he can find again and redefine his identity.”⁶ Therefore, St. John Paul II believed that “here are the movements and the new ecclesial communities: they are the response, given by the Holy Spirit, to this critical challenge at the end of the millennium.”⁷ Benedict XVI emphasizes that the Movements should commit themselves to enlighten “the darkness of a world overwhelmed by the contradictory messages of ideologies!”⁸

B. Nature of the Ecclesial Movements

1. The Place of the Movements in the Church

Beyond the socio-cultural and historical context in which they are born, these associative realities have a deeper meaning – a theological one.

³ John Paul II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, 29.

⁴ Benedict XVI, Address to the participants in a seminar for Bishops organized by the Pontifical Council for the Laity, May 17, 2008.

⁵ Benedict XVI, Address to the German bishops on their *Ad Limina Apostolorum* visit, November 18, 2006.

⁶ Fr. Gianfranco Ghirlanda, SJ, “Le nuove esperienze associative”, in *Esperienze associative nella Chiesa. Aspetti canonistici, civili e fiscali*, (studi Giuridici CV), Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2014, (pp. 47-78). Our translation.

⁷ John Paul II, Address to the participants in the Congress on the Ecclesial Movements, May 27, 1998.

⁸ Benedict XVI, Message to the participants in the Second World Congress for the Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, May 22, 2006.

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In Cardinal Ratzinger's conference that we cited at the beginning (and whose content is valid for all the movements that have enriched the Church throughout the centuries), he tried to clarify the co-essentiality of the institutional and charismatic dimensions of the Church. The institutional dimension is characterized by the episcopal ministry, a permanent structure that carries the Church through time. The charismatic dimension, on the other hand, consists in the continual "irruptions" of the Spirit, in fact, the Church as an institution has passed ceaselessly in its history "through waves of new movements, which reinvigorate the universalistic aspect of its apostolic mission and precisely in so doing also serve the spiritual vitality and truth of the local churches."⁹ The complementarity of these dimensions already had been illustrated by St. John Paul II who affirmed:

The Church, born of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ and the effusion of the Spirit, spread throughout the whole world and through all times on the the foundation of the Apostles and their successors, has been enriched during the centuries by the grace of gifts that are eternally new. These gifts in different epochs permitted the Church to be present in new and different forms adapted to the thirst for truth, for beauty and for justice that Christ raises up in the hearts of men and to which he himself is the only satisfying and fulfilling response.¹⁰

From this point of view we can affirm that "the correct theological place of the movements in the Church has to be distinguished in apostolicity,"¹¹ since they contribute to "ensure the carrying on of Jesus' mission to make all nations his disciples and to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth."¹² From this apostolicity "rises the particular bond that unites the movements with the ministry of the successor of Peter."¹³ In the words of Ratzinger:

The papacy did not create the movements, but it did become their principal reference-point in the structure of the Church, their ecclesial support. [...] The pope has to rely on these ministries [the missions of the movements], they on him, and the collaboration between the two kinds of ministries [the pope's ministry with the movements' ministry] completes the symphony of the Church's life.¹⁴

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ John Paul II, Address to the priests participating in the experience of the Communion and Liberation Movement, September 12, 1985. Our translation (no official translation into English on Vatican website).

¹¹ Stanislaw Rylko, Press conference presenting the Second World Conference of the Ecclesial Movements, May 30, 2006. Our translation.

¹² Joseph Ratzinger, "The Theological Locus of the Ecclesial Movements"

¹³ Stanislaw Rylko, Press conference presenting the Second World Conference of the Ecclesial Movements, May 30, 2006. Our Translation.

¹⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, "The Theological Locus of the Ecclesial Movements"

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2. *Defining the Movements*

In order to attempt a definition, we need to consider what Cardinal Ratzinger said: “We ought also to beware of too strict a definition, for the Holy Spirit always has surprises in store, and only in retrospect do we recognize that the movements have a common essence in the midst of their great diversities.”¹⁵ Nevertheless, some attempts at a definition are worth mentioning. For example, for St. John Paul II, a movement is “a concrete ecclesial reality with predominantly lay membership, a faith journey and Christian witness which bases its own pedagogical method on a precise charism given to the person of the founder in specific circumstances and ways.”¹⁶ Another attempt at a definition is that of Fr. Fidel Gonzalez Fernandez, MCCJ, for whom the ecclesial movements are “Those realities born in the heart of the Church from particular Christian charisms and experiences that have generated a new life in the Church itself and in society.”¹⁷ According to Fr. Gianfranco Ghirlanda, SJ:

Synthetically we can consider the ecclesial Movements as those associative forms that have their root and origin in a specific gift of the Spirit, an element that unites different vocations of both sexes, different orders or categories of the faithful (bishops, priests, deacons, seminarians, and laity [whether married, single, widowed, religious, or consecrated] in the Movement in a form that is contemplative, apostolic, secular, etc.), characterized as much by diversity of ages as by diversity of the socio-economic groups they belong to. What’s more, in them there is a commitment of the person in his entirety, in that it demands a way of life that conforms with the charism, that often carries with it the sharing of goods and fraternal life in common, as well as in all cases a submission to an authority, dedication to the apostolic works of the Movement, in many with motivation towards missionary activity and a strong ecumenical orientation.¹⁸

3. *The Place of the Movements in Canon Law*

In reference to the associative realities of the faithful, today we usually speak of “associations”, “ecclesial movements” and “new communities.”

In canon law there does not exist a juridical definition of “movement” and as a consequence, the movements are usually juridically configured as *associations of*

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ John Paul II, Address to the participants in the Congress on the Ecclesial Movements, May 27, 1998.

¹⁷ Fr. Fidel Gonzalez Fernandez, MCCJ, “Carismi e movimenti nella storia della Chiesa”, in Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis, *I Movimenti ecclesiali nella sollecitudine pastorale dei vescovi*, 2000. Our translation.

¹⁸ Fr. Gianfranco Ghirlanda, SJ, “Le nove esperienze associative.” Our translation.

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the faithful – although not all the associations of the faithful are movements – or more precisely as *international associations of the faithful* when they have an international character because of their existence throughout the world, placing them in direct dependence on the Holy See.

The Second Vatican Council affirms the right of association of the faithful, who, because of their baptism and participation in the mission of the Church, can associate themselves in light of spiritual and apostolic goals. This right of association of the faithful legitimizes their establishing and directing associations within the Church and joining those associations already established. In past centuries, the Christian faithful have exercised this right in many and varied forms, instituting, for example, confraternities, secular institutes, societies of apostolic life, etc. In this form, the teaching of the council has emphasized the need, validity and freedom of the faithful to associate with others within the Church; in such a way that ecclesial authority juridically favors, motivates and regulates the associations born from the free will of the faithful.

The “new communities”, frequently born from the environment of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (for example, the Community of Emmanuel, the *Shalom* Catholic Community, the Community *Cancao Nova*, etc...), can be distinguished by the strong sense of community, uniting priests, lay men and women – single and married, that share a lifestyle. These communities can be of an apostolic, monastic or secular type.

There also exist the so-called “new forms of consecrated life,”¹⁹ that are characterized by the taking of the evangelical counsels with a particular sacred bond, but that are distinguished from the institutes of consecrated life by being made up of members of a priestly branch, a masculine lay branch and a feminine lay branch, all consecrated with one charism, one goal and one government, to which single and married laypeople (not consecrated) also affiliate themselves (for example the Missionary Fraternity *Verbum Dei*).

All these realities, very different from one another, are distinguished from what we could call the tendency towards “traditional associations,” that throughout the history of the Church, has produced specialized and organized apostolic associations (for example, Catholic Action and the different forms of association

¹⁹ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, 605 and John Paul II, Postsynodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, 12 and 62.

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born within it), apostolic associations of genders (the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations, the International Federation of Catholic Men), associations of different work or professional categories (catholic teachers, doctors, pharmacists, etc.) among others.

C. Criteria of Ecclesiality

St. John Paul II, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, established some criteria that the movements should observe to correctly live their membership in the Church.²⁰

- *The primacy given to the call of every Christian to holiness*, as it is manifested "in the fruits of grace which the spirit produces in the faithful" and in a growth towards the fullness of Christian life and the perfection of charity.

In this sense whatever association of the lay faithful there might be, it is always called to be more of an instrument leading to holiness in the Church, through fostering and promoting "a more intimate unity between the everyday life of its members and their faith".

- *The responsibility of professing the Catholic faith*, embracing and proclaiming the truth about Christ, the Church and humanity, in obedience to the Church's Magisterium, as the Church interprets it. For this reason every association of the lay faithful must be a *forum* where the faith is proclaimed as well as taught in its total content.

- *The witness to a strong and authentic communion* in filial relationship to the Pope, in total adherence to the belief that he is the perpetual and visible center of unity of the universal Church, and with the local Bishop, "the visible principle and foundation of unity" in the particular Church, and in "mutual esteem for all forms of the Church's apostolate".

Communion with the Pope and one's Bishop must be expressed in loyal readiness to embrace the doctrinal teachings and pastoral initiatives of both the Pope and the Bishop. Moreover, Church communion demands both an acknowledgment of a legitimate plurality of forms in the associations of the lay faithful in the Church and at the same time, a willingness to cooperate in working together.

- *Conformity to and participation in the Church's apostolic goals*, that is, "the evangelization and sanctification of humanity and the Christian formation of people's conscience, so as to enable them to infuse the spirit of the gospel into the various communities and spheres of life".

From this perspective, every one of the group forms of the lay faithful is asked to have a missionary zeal which will increase their effectiveness as participants in a re-evangelization.

- *A commitment to a presence in human society*, which in light of the Church's social doctrine, places it at the service of the total dignity of the person.

²⁰ John Paul II, Postsynodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, 30.

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Therefore, associations of the lay faithful must become fruitful outlets for participation and solidarity in bringing about conditions that are more just and loving within society.

Besides these criteria of ecclesiality, there are some distinctive features of spirituality and apostolic action that characterize all these associative realities – among them we can mention the appreciation for our baptismal identity and the rediscovery of the path of Christian initiation; the desire to radically live the fullness of the Gospel; the strong sense of belonging to a community (diocese – parish, movement – new community); the complementarity of the different states of life and the co-responsibility of the lay and consecrated members; the “pillar of ecclesiality” understood as a strong link with the Holy Father; missionary and apostolic zeal, including in reference to the “new evangelization.”

D. The Closeness to the Movements on the Part of Recent Popes

The support that St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI have shown ecclesial movements and new communities has been emphasized by a continual pastoral attentiveness and solicitude toward these realities during their respective pontificates. St. John Paul II undertook the first world meeting of the ecclesial movements in 1998 (May 30, 1998, the vigil of Pentecost in St. Peter’s Square in the Vatican) and Benedict XVI called these ecclesial groups to Rome again for Pentecost 2006 (June 3, 2006).

Pope Francis, while he was still the Cardinal Archbishop of Buenos Aires, was the president of the commission that edited the conclusions of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops’ Conference (Aparecida, Brazil, May 13-31, 2007), which says: “The new movements and communities are a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church. In them the faithful find the opportunity to be formed as Christians, growing, and committing themselves apostolically as true missionary disciples.”²¹

From the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis has demonstrated his support to the ecclesial movements and new communities, meeting with them shortly after his election to the papacy during the Year of the Faith, on the Solemnity of Pentecost, 2013, and before the *Regina Coeli*, directing these words to them: “You

²¹ V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin American and the Caribbean, Concluding Document, Aparecida, May 2007, 311. Antilles Episcopal Conference translation.

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are a gift and a richness for the Church! [...] Always bear the strength of the Gospel! Always have joy and passion for communion within the Church!”²² (May 18, 2013) Afterwards, Pope Francis published the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* to start a new stage of the evangelizing mission of the Church characterized by renewed drive and joy and by a “dynamic of missionary going forth.” In it, the Holy Father affirms that:

The Holy Spirit also enriches the entire evangelizing Church with different charisms. These gifts are meant to renew and build up the Church. They are not an inheritance, safely secured and entrusted to a small group for safekeeping; rather they are gifts of the Spirit integrated into the body of the Church, drawn to the centre which is Christ and then channelled into an evangelizing impulse. A sure sign of the authenticity of a charism is its ecclesial character, its ability to be integrated harmoniously into the life of God’s holy and faithful people for the good of all. Something truly new brought about by the Spirit need not overshadow other gifts and spiritualities in making itself felt. To the extent that a charism is better directed to the heart of the Gospel, its exercise will be more ecclesial. It is in communion, even when this proves painful, that a charism is seen to be authentic and mysteriously fruitful. On the basis of her response to this challenge, the Church can be a model of peace in our world. The Holy Spirit also enriches the entire evangelizing Church with different charisms. These gifts are meant to renew and build up the Church. They are not an inheritance, safely secured and entrusted to a small group for safekeeping; rather they are gifts of the Spirit integrated into the body of the Church, drawn to the centre which is Christ and then channelled into an evangelizing impulse. A sure sign of the authenticity of a charism is its ecclesial character, its ability to be integrated harmoniously into the life of God’s holy and faithful people for the good of all. Something truly new brought about by the Spirit need not overshadow other gifts and spiritualities in making itself felt. To the extent that a charism is better directed to the heart of the Gospel, its exercise will be more ecclesial. It is in communion, even when this proves painful, that a charism is seen to be authentic and mysteriously fruitful. On the basis of her response to this challenge, the Church can be a model of peace in our world.²³

The element of “joy,” “the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing,”²⁴ which Pope Francis in *Evangelii gaudium* considers to be the motive of missionary conversion and the reform of the Church’s “going forth,” was identified as the essential element of the life of the ecclesial movements by St. John Paul II, when, referring to the associative realities said that “They are an antidote to the spread of sects and an invaluable aid to the spread of joy and life in the Church,”²⁵ and by Pope Benedict XVI, who, speaking of Christians in “movement” in the Church

²² Our translation. Extemporaneous remarks not found on Vatican website.

²³ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 130.

²⁴ Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 80.

²⁵ John Paul II, Postsynodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, 16.

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through the centuries, mentioned the “newness of life of persons and communities capable of bearing an incisive witness of love, unity and joy.”²⁶

Assimilation Questions for Team Reflection

1. What is it that the popes have valued in the movements? Why do they value it so highly?
2. What do you understand by an “ecclesial movement”?
3. What are the criteria for ecclesiality listed in the Postsynodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*?
4. What characteristics of the movements do you consider to be especially fruitful for the mission of the Church?
5. What does the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* tell us about the movements and how can we apply it to *Regnum Christi*?
6. What brought me to participate in *Regnum Christi*, rather than trying to live my Christian life without belonging to a movement?
7. How do I live the complementarity of my state in life with the other vocations of *Regnum Christi*? With the Legionary priests? With the consecrated women? With the consecrated men? What do I receive from them and what do I give them as a member of the 1st or 2nd degree?

Recommended Reading

Joseph Ratzinger, “The Theological Locus of the Ecclesial Movements”. Discourse at the World Congress of the Ecclesial Movements, Rome, May 27, 1998.

²⁶ Benedict XVI, Message to the Second World Congress on Ecclesial Movements and New Communities “The beauty of being Christian and the joy of communicating it”, May 22, 2006.

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(English translation found here:

http://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/library_article/549/Theological_Locus_of_Ecclesial_Movements_Joseph_Cardinal_Ratzinger.html

and here: <http://www.communio-icr.com/articles/view/the-theological-locus-of-ecclesial-movements>)

John Paul II, Address to the participants in the Congress on the Ecclesial Movements, May 27, 1998.

Benedict XVI, Message to the Second World Congress on Ecclesial Movements and New Communities “The beauty of being Christian and the joy of communicating it”, May 22, 2006.

Benedict XVI, Address to the participants in a seminar for Bishops organized by the Pontifical Council for the Laity. May 17, 2008.

Fr. Fidel Gonzalez Fernandez, MCCJ, Los movimientos en la Iglesia, Encuentros, Madrid, 1999 (No English translation available).

Fr. Gianfranco Ghirlanda, SJ, “Le nove esperienze associative.” In *Esperienze associative nella Chiesa. Aspetti canonistici, civili e fiscali*, (Studi Giuridici CV), Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2014 (No English translation available).

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