

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement: Forgiveness and Healing

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Abstract

In a world that is far from perfect, people hurt themselves and others. Every person is in need of forgiveness and has the need to forgive others. True forgiveness liberates a person from deep-seated hurts, wounds, and resentment. This may eventually lead to healing of the body, mind, or spirit. Love is the principal teaching of Christianity. To love also means to forgive and accept self and others. The Catholic Church considers the sacrament of reconciliation as an important step towards healing of a person. However, due to a variety of reasons, the number of Catholics receiving the sacrament of reconciliation is decreasing. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement, which started in 1967, has emphasized the importance of the sacrament of reconciliation. This paper will examine the Catholic Church's view on forgiveness and its relation to healing. Furthermore, it will examine the role of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement in convincing Catholics to receive the sacrament of reconciliation as an essential step towards the process of healing. The study will be based on the Church documents and the literature on Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement.

Introduction

Human beings err at one time or another. Hence, all people have the need to forgive

others and to ask forgiveness from others. Forgiveness may lead to inner healing as it removes emotional stress from a person's heart and sets him or her free. The Catholic Church believes that the sacrament of reconciliation helps a person recognize the need to ask pardon for one's shortcomings and the need to forgive others for their failures. However, the number of Catholics receiving this sacrament has dropped significantly over the years. Nevertheless, ecclesial movements, like the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement (CCRM), emphasize the importance of this sacrament in connection with conversion, forgiveness, and healing.

This paper will examine the role of the CCRM in spreading awareness about the importance of the sacrament of reconciliation among Catholics. In addition, it will review the Catholic Church's teachings on forgiveness in the light of the Holy Scriptures and the documents on the CCRM, which stress the relationship between forgiveness and healing. We shall examine the concrete steps that the CCRM offers to help people to make a right choice to forgive and pray for healing of their spiritual wounds.

The Catholic Church's Teaching on Forgiveness

Jesus taught His disciples to forgive others (Matt. 5:23-24; 6:14-15; Luke 6:37; 17:3-4). When Peter asked Jesus, how many times one ought to forgive a trespasser, He indicated that a person should forgive an infinite number of times (Matt. 18:21-22). Jesus not only taught His disciples to forgive but also practiced it. He forgave His persecutors on the cross (Luke 23:33-34). These passages illustrate the inter-relationship between reconciliation with God and one's neighbor.

The Roman Catholic Church follows the teachings of Jesus and calls on all people to forgive and ask forgiveness. Even though the sacrament of baptism washes away all the sins of a person, he or she has the potential to sin in the future due to frailty of human nature.¹ Thus, the Church believes that the sacrament of reconciliation, which Jesus instituted, is a channel of grace to restore the relationship between God, penitent, and others.² Church teaches that,

Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God's mercy for the offense committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example, and by prayer labors for their conversion.³

The Second Vatican Council changed the understanding of the sacraments of penance and extreme unction.⁴ The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council interpreted the sacrament of penance as a sacrament of reconciliation and the sacrament of extreme unction as a sacrament of anointing of the sick.⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches these two sacraments as sacraments of healing.⁶ Earlier the Church associated

guilt and forgiveness as two essential components of these sacraments. However, presently the Church considers the sacrament of reconciliation as a holistic sacrament, which includes not only guilt and forgiveness but also healing of the inner self. Similarly, earlier the Church taught that the priest could administer the sacrament of extreme unction only to gravely ill people. However, the new interpretation is that any person who is ill can receive the sacrament of anointing of the sick and pray for healing. This change of interpretation of these two sacraments greatly influenced the CCRM in its view on forgiveness and healing.⁷

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement: Forgiveness and Healing

The Second Vatican Council laid the foundation for a new understanding of the sacrament of reconciliation. However, the number of Catholics participating in the sacrament of reconciliation is steadily decreasing. A survey by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) pointed out that 42 percent of U.S. Catholics did not participate in the sacrament of reconciliation in 2005. This figure swelled to 45 percent in 2008.⁸ The same is true with Catholics around the globe. There may be various reasons behind this significant decline. Nevertheless, the CCRM, which is one of the ecclesial movements, has consistently emphasized the importance of sacraments in the life of a Christian. It gives importance to forgiveness and considers the sacrament of reconciliation as an important grace for genuine conversion of heart, forgiveness, and healing. Some Protestant Pentecostals differ with the Catholic Charismatics on their belief in sacraments. They suspect sacraments as mere rituals and formalities.⁹

Conversion of Heart

Conversion of heart is one of the main causes and effects of baptism in the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ The CCRM emphasizes the phenomenon of baptism in the Holy Spirit. It has taken this terminology from the Pentecostals. However, the CCRM and the Pentecostals differ in the theological understanding of this phenomenon.¹¹ The CCRM does not consider baptism in the Spirit as a sacrament or a substitute to a sacrament.¹² Further, unlike some Pentecostals, it does not consider speaking in tongues as a sign of receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit.¹³ Although the Catholic Church does not have an official teaching on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, within the CCRM, various schools of theological interpretation exist.¹⁴ In spite of the various theological interpretations, individuals associated with the CCRM agree with the common effects of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. In the CCRM, leaders ask people to open up to the Holy Spirit and pray for the grace of true conversion. Christian tradition uses two Greek terms to refer to the process of change of heart: *metanoia* (a turning from sin) and *epistrophe* (a turning toward God).¹⁵ Every individual has to undergo spiritual conversion in order to become a Christian. Cardinal Suenens makes the following observation:

A Christian is radically a “convert.” The first Christians, those of Pentecost morning, had to undergo a complete change of mind and heart, a *metanoia* a break with manifold ties. Baptism meant for them: death to the “old man,” deliverance, liberation, a new life.¹⁶

The CCRM believes that the baptism in the Holy Spirit initiates the process of change in a new way. The person who receives baptism in the Holy Spirit becomes aware of

his or her shortcomings and, thus, sincerely repents for his or her sins. He or she resolves to forgive others, just as God has forgiven him or her (Mark 11:25). Conversion of heart or interior conversion is a “radical re-orientation” of one’s entire life.¹⁷ There are many visible signs of interior conversion. Reconciliation with one’s neighbors, admitting one’s faults and working for the good of the others are some of the concrete actions that follow this change of heart.¹⁸ The CCRM organizes retreats and seminars to teach people about the necessity of interior transformation and openness to the workings of the Holy Spirit. One of the main blocks to receive the empowerment of the Holy Spirit is hardness of heart (Zech. 7:12; Eph. 4:18; Heb. 3:7-9). The Prophet Ezekiel noted that God wants to give humans a new heart of flesh by removing the heart of stone and put a new Spirit within (Ezek. 36:26). As conversion of heart and the phenomenon of baptism in the Holy Spirit have close connection, Charismatics aim for this internal transformation. Further, the conversion of heart of an individual has a salutary effect, not only on the individual’s life, but also on the whole society. John Paul II, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, noted the importance of a change of heart. He wrote that if an individual does not take responsibility for his or her sins and repent then it would lead to more evil in the society. John Paul II believes that every individual sin has an effect on the human society:

It is a case of the very personal sins of those who cause or support evil or who exploit it; of those who are in a position to avoid, eliminate or at least limit certain social evils but who fail to do so out of laziness, fear or the conspiracy of silence, through secret complicity or indifference; of those who take refuge in

the supposed impossibility of changing the world and also of those who sidestep the effort and sacrifice required, producing specious reasons of higher order. The real responsibility, then, lies with individuals.¹⁹

Therefore, conversion of heart or *metanoia* is an important step towards reconciliation with oneself, others, and God.

Forgiveness and Healing

Forgiveness is a process, which includes forgiveness of self, others, and society.²⁰ Every person has the need to forgive and ask for forgiveness. Jesus taught His disciples to pray for forgiveness as they forgive others (Matt. 6:12; Luke 11:4). In other words, a person who is not willing to forgive others cannot expect God to forgive him or her.

Even though forgiveness is unconditional, it is inter-related. Forgiveness is not a gesture of the weak but of the strong.²¹ A person who resolves to forgive recognizes God's magnanimous love and overlooks personal ego and hurts to forgive the other person, even if the other person does not reciprocate the kindness. Further, to forgive does not indicate self-righteousness or an elevation of oneself above the offender. It is not an act to seek self-satisfaction or gratification.

Forgiveness is a conscious act that accepts the graciousness of God, who forgives all people.²² Second, it accepts the vulnerability, weakness and sinfulness of all people before God. Thus, all people experience the need for God's mercy and forgiveness.

The CCRM emphasizes the meaningful celebration and rediscovery of the significance of the sacraments.²³ It encourages people to participate meaningfully in the sacrament of

reconciliation to seek healing of their painful memories. Usually the CCRM organizes retreats and seminars to teach people on the importance of recognizing their own shortcomings (sin) in the light of the teachings of the Bible.

Charismatics also teach people to recall the occasions when others have hurt them and resolve to forgive them. During the CCRM retreats and seminars, the organizers usually make adequate arrangements for people to participate in the sacrament of reconciliation. Leaders encourage people to spend time in prayer and reflection before participating in the sacrament of reconciliation. Thus, people prepare themselves by a thorough examination of conscience with the help of the Holy Spirit. The CCRM believes that there is close relation between forgiveness and inner healing.²⁴

The CCRM also encourages reconciliation between denominations and communities. It tries to organize forums for people of different denominations and communities to come together as members of the same human family and pray together. Such reconciliation between the groups may eventually lead to healing of the bitter memories of the past and build friendship.²⁵

Sacrament of reconciliation has a therapeutic effect.²⁶ It may lead to inner healing of a person, which deals with the healing of the wounds in the inner being (spirit) of a person. Scientific data also indicates a correlation between forgiveness and healing of emotions.²⁷ The sacrament of reconciliation has some similarities with psychotherapy.²⁸ Just like a psychotherapist, a priest patiently listens to the penitent and tries to understand his or her pain or feelings. Further, the penitent can freely unburden all the internal problems before a priest or a psychotherapist with

confidence.²⁹ The profession of the priest and the psychotherapist requires utmost secrecy and confidentiality. Thus, both the sacrament of reconciliation and psychotherapy can help a person, to a certain extent, to experience healing and peace within themselves. However, the sacrament of reconciliation and psychotherapy have certain differences.³⁰ Unlike the priest, the psychotherapist does not touch on the spiritual dimension of a person. He or she is not interested in his or her client's sins, forgiveness, or relationship with God.³¹ The psychotherapist focuses on the psychological well-being of the person. On the other hand, the priest helps the penitent to examine his or her relationship with God, others, and oneself. He encourages the penitent to seek the Holy Spirit's guidance in the examination of his or her conscience.³² He encourages the penitent to pour out his or her feelings of guilt, negativity, resentment, hurt or any other thing that blocks his or her relationship with others and God. At times, the priest also prays for the inner healing of the penitent. This gesture makes the penitent comfortable and helps the person experience the love of God. The penitent begins to recognize the suffocation and deprivation with which he or she lives, while also realizing that God desires to give freedom.³³

Charismatic retreats and seminars focus on the relationship between forgiveness and healing. People attending these events realize the importance of the sacrament of reconciliation, as an instrument of God's love and grace. Below there will be presented a couple life-changing testimonies that occurred as people participated in the sacrament of reconciliation. They testify that the sacrament of reconciliation helped them receive inner healing and renewal of their spiritual lives.

Testimonies

Good News (Magazine and Website of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, UK) published the testimony Shaun Growney, who had a transformation of life after he received the sacrament of reconciliation.³⁴ Growney, in his testimony, noted that he was an agnostic and had not gone to the Church for nearly forty years. The sacrament of reconciliation changed his entire life. He repented of his sins and accepted the healing touch of the loving God. He gave the following testimony:

I realized at that moment that even when I had said "Yes" to confession, I had not really thought I would be considered worthy of absolution . . . Then I felt the forgiveness welling up inside me like a gigantic spiritual embrace. Some might say that it was just a very emotional thing—to be reminded of my many errors and failings. But I have since come to understand that the Holy Spirit was moving me at a very deep level. That was the turning point in my life . . . Since then, little by little, my faith has grown anew, only not as it had been before when I was just a schoolboy. Then it was a matter of habit, and guilt, and a fear of damnation. Now it is a source of great joy and strength. Not that I am perfect yet—not by a long way. But the change God has made in me is so great that I am daily in awe of it. I was a lump of dead wood which He grafted onto the healthy vine and by and by, I have come back to life and I have even sprouted some new green leaves. The fruit is yet to come.³⁵

Ikeru Mizu (Official Newsletter of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services, Japan) published the testimony of Tsue Watanabe, who experienced the power of

the Holy Spirit in her life through the sacrament of reconciliation.³⁶ Her testimony is as follows:

The talks and the grace of God helped me to do a sincere confession. Confession helped me to remove all the blocks in my life, which were not allowing me to grow closer to the Lord. Now I have tranquility in my heart. I feel that there is flowing stream of water in my heart. Now I am emptying myself so the Holy Spirit can fill me and work through me. The Sacrament of reconciliation brought a true renewal in my life.³⁷

Ikeru Mizu also published a testimony of Kuniko Kitamura, who had a strong aversion towards the sacrament of reconciliation.³⁸ She had difficulty confessing her sins before a priest. However, when she participated in the sacrament of reconciliation, there was an internal transformation within her. She realized the efficacy of this sacrament. She noted the following in her testimony:

I received Baptism 10 years ago but I always had a difficulty in doing confessions. I used to think that if there were no confessions in Catholicism, it would be a wonderful religion. God loves us and forgives us, then why do we need to confess. If we do something wrong, we can directly ask pardon from the Lord. It is something between God and the person who sins. I came to the convention with these negative thoughts about the Sacrament of Reconciliation. After the talk, we had sharing and somebody shared that I confess once in a month and always tears flow down my cheeks. I shared that I do not have such experience and I told them about my thoughts about confession. After the

sharing, it was time for receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I still had reservations about confessions in my mind and I did not want to go to the priests because they knew me. However, I decided to go a priest whom I knew in order to discuss some spiritual things. Then I went to the confessional box of Fr. Hashimoto. However, no sooner I reached there than tears started flowing through my eyes. I do not know why tears came out of my eyes. I shared with my younger sister this experience and told her that God has delivered from all the negative thoughts towards the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I think it is God's grace and work. After that confession, I felt a deep peace and serenity in my heart. I thank God for His marvelous work in my life.³⁹

Riko Ashio noted in her testimony, published in Ikeru Mizu, that the sacrament of reconciliation had a great impact on her spiritual life.⁴⁰ This sacrament delivered her from all egotism and made her humble. It also reignited the desire to serve the sick with a humble heart. She noted the following in her testimony:

This year I attended the Life in the Spirit Seminar. I made it a goal to complete successfully all the seminars. Had I not done it I would remain in my tiny hole as before. I had strong desire to get out of my world. Now I experience a deep joy and peace in my heart as I have completed the seminar. From childhood, the self-defense mechanism would work very strongly in me and even for silly things, I would try to justify myself. I thought faith is human made concept. I need not care about it. Soon I realized that my spiritual life is dry and dying. I wanted to deliver myself with my own power. I had a great difficulty in doing a

genuine surrender to Jesus Christ. It was during the seminar that I received the infilling of the Holy Spirit and a tremendous grace to make a good confession. ...I was delivered from egoism and I restarted the service towards the sick. All my sufferings and worries disappeared. I thank God for His graces.⁴¹

Thus, the above testimonies prove that the CCRM has been instrumental in promoting the meaningful celebration of sacraments. It has also shown that conversion and forgiveness may eventually lead to holistic healing of a person. Even though these testimonies are from different parts of the world with entirely different cultures, they have commonalities. People, irrespective of their nationalities or cultures, have a common need to forgive and to be forgiven. Further, reconciliation with oneself and others brings healing in one's inner being.

Conclusion

Humans are prone to sin because of the frailty of their nature. They hurt one another due to the stresses of living and working in the contemporary world. Hurts in a person's spiritual life can rob one's peace and tranquility of heart, leading to various

physical and psychological disorders. The Catholic Church has constantly advocated the need to forgive and ask forgiveness for healing. However, the number of Catholics who are receiving the sacrament of reconciliation is declining. It is in this context that the CCRM has contributed in the spiritual renewal of the Church by emphasizing the importance of the sacraments. Charismatic Christians have highlighted the inter-relatedness of conversion of heart, forgiveness, and healing. The Charismatic spirituality of relating forgiveness with healing is very helpful as it offers a concrete way to people who are struggling to forgive. It convinces them that by not forgiving they are harming their own selves. Charismatics organize various programs to guide and encourage people to meaningfully receive the sacrament of reconciliation and earnestly pray for healing of the painful wounds and memories in the spirit. Through the initiatives of the Charismatics, many Catholics are rediscovering the importance of sacrament of reconciliation, the need to forgive others and to seek forgiveness. Charismatics have the potential to spread the message of forgiveness and reconciliation in the society. Their efforts may promote peace and harmony not only in the Church but also in the entire society.

¹ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1426, 1446, (accessed January 12, 2015), http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM

² *Ibid.*, no. 1455.

³ *Ibid.*, no. 1422.

⁴ Catholic Church, Conciliar Document Constitution on Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* no. 72, (accessed January 21, 2015), http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html. See also Catholic Church, Conciliar Document Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* no. 11, (accessed on 21 January 2015), http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

⁵ Herbert Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology*, trans. by Linda Maloney (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 207-219.

⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1421.

⁷ Thomas Csordas, *The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 16. See also Thomas Csordas, *Language, Charisma and Creativity: Ritual Life in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2001), 44.

⁸ Statistics by Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, (accessed on January 12, 2015), <http://cara.georgetown.edu/reconciliation.pdf>.

⁹ Wesley Scott Bidy, “Re-envisioning the Pentecostal Understanding of the Eucharist: An Ecumenical Proposal,” *Pneuma*, 28, no. 2 (2006): 228-251.

¹⁰ ICCRS Doctrinal Commission, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (Vatican: ICCRS, 2012), 64-65.

¹¹ See Peter Hocken, “Baptized in the Spirit—An Eschatological Concept: A Response to Norbert Baumert and his Interlocutors,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 13, no. 2 (2005): 258.

¹² See ICCRS, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 77.

¹³ See *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁴ See Reginald Alva, *The Spirituality of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement* (New Delhi, India: Christian World Imprints, 2014).

¹⁵ Richard Fragomeni, “Conversion,” in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 230-235.

¹⁶ Léon Joseph Suenens, *A New Pentecost?* (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1975), 117.

¹⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1431.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 1435-1436; see also John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, no. 4, AAS 77 (1985): 189-190, (accessed on 17 January 2015), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_02121984_reconciliatio-et-paenitentia_en.html.

¹⁹ John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, no. 16.

²⁰ Catherine Dooley, “Forgiveness, Theology of,” in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter Fink (Collegeville, IN: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 473-480.

²¹ Julia Frazier White, *Forgiveness* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2011), 31.

²² Celestin Musekura, *An Assessment of Contemporary Models of Forgiveness* (New York, NY: Lang Publishing, 2010), 73-93.

²³ Suenens, *A New Pentecost?*, 78; Kilian McDonnell, *Theological and Pastoral Orientations on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal* (Notre Dame: Word of Life, 1974), 57; Paul Josef Cordes, *Call to Holiness: Reflections on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal* (Collegeville, IN: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 22-23.

²⁴ Donald Gelpi, “Conversion: The Challenge of Contemporary Charismatic Piety,” *Theological Studies* 43, no. 4 (1982): 624.

²⁵ Peter Hocken, *Pentecost and Parousia* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 86-89; Knud Jorgensen, “Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation: Hope in a Fragile World,” *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 31, no. 4 (2014): 264-272.

²⁶ Francesco Pio Tamburrino, “Healing and the Sacraments,” in *Prayer for Healing: International Colloquium – Rome, 10-13 November, 2001*, ed. International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services (Vatican, Rome: International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services, 2003), 134-135.

²⁷ See Brandon Griffin, Caroline Lavelock, Everett Worthington, “On Earth as it is in Heaven: Healing through Forgiveness,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 42, no. 3 (2014): 252-259.

²⁸ See William Barry, “Reconciliation and Therapy,” in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter Fink (Collegeville, IN: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 1039-1042.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Francis MacNutt, *Healing* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 1974), 290.

³³ Ibid., 172-174.

³⁴ Shaun Gowney, “Evangelistic Powers of the Sacraments,” *Good News: Catholic Charismatic Renewal Serving the Church*, (accessed January 19, 2015), <http://www.ccr.org.uk/testimon/shaun.htm>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Tsue Watanabe, “*Dai JuuYon Kai Seirei ni Yoru Sasshin Hokkaido Taikai Hirakareru*” [14th Hokkaido Regional CCRM Convention Opens], *Ikeru Mizu*, no. 53 (Summer Edition 1999): 3. Original in Japanese. [Translation mine]. See also Reginald Alva, *Spiritual Renewal in Japan: Journey of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement* (New Delhi, India: Christian World Imprints, 2015), 129-130.

³⁷ Watanabe, 3.

³⁸ Kuniko Kitamura, “*Dai JuuYon Kai Seirei ni Yoru Sasshin Hokkaido Taikai Hirakareru*” [14th Hokkaido Regional CCRM Convention Opens], *Ikeru Mizu*, no. 53 (Summer Edition 1999): 3-4. Original in Japanese. [Translation mine]. See also Alva, *Spiritual Renewal in Japan*, 130.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Riko Ashio, “*Inori no Tsudoi ha Ikiteiru*” [The Prayer Meetings are Alive], *Ikeru Mizu*, no. 70 (Fall Edition 2003): 10. Original in Japanese. [Translation mine]. See also Alva, *Spiritual Renewal in Japan*, 131.

⁴¹ Ibid.