

2010 ASSISI TALK: A HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC FRATERNITY

By David A. Peterman, Ph.D.

Greeting

Brothers and sisters in Christ, may – *The (redeeming) grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the (agape) love of God and the (unifying) fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

Introduction

I've been asked to review the historical 'journey' that led to the founding of the Catholic Fraternity 20 years ago. I've been privileged to participate in this journey (since) 1970, so I'm happy to provide some highlights seen from my perspective.

I believe the Fraternity's future depends on our being collectively faithful to the founding charism given us by the Holy Spirit during the 70's and 80's. To capture a sense of that reality, it's important to know how it happened.

This talk is based on the one I gave last year at our Regional conference in Dallas. An expanded version of the original text is available as well as a companion document with key quotes and web links to the most relevant Papal statements. Both are available from our community website, GodsDelight.org or upon request by e-mail through your Moderator

Precursors

Like most historical events, the start of the Fraternity didn't just 'happen' in 1990. It was built on two "movements" of the Holy Spirit.

The first "movement" surrounded Vatican II **and** its origins,

- beginning with Pius XIII's prayers and encyclicals calling for Church unity and a New Pentecost,
- scriptural and theological renewal enhancing our practice of Catholicism during the early 20th century, and finally
- their fulfillment in the 60's as answers to John XXIII's prayer and initiation of Vatican II that resulted in the Council and its documents.

New Pentecost

This 'journey', to a "New Pentecost" in the Catholic Church, actually began near the beginning of the last century when Pius XIII prayed for Church unity and a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. While the Holy Spirit immediately created a Pentecostal Revival among Protestants beginning January 1st of 1901 at Topeka Kansas, seeds were also growing within the Catholic Church.

A steady biblical and theological renewal was occurring in Catholic scholarship, leading to an explosion of related events in the 60's:

- Pope John XXIII also prayed for a new Pentecost as we all know, then
- Vatican II happened and its documents were published,

Peterman – CF History (cont.)

- renewal movements such as the *Cursillo* spread,
- an explosion of biblical literacy occurred among Catholics,
- the unprecedented outpouring of the Holy Spirit started the Charismatic Renewal after the Duquesne weekend,
- Cardinal Suenens was appointed as a strong advocate of the Charismatic Renewal, and
- many lay “covenant” communities were formed to help us faithfully live out the Gospel.

Fraternity’s Founders

The second “movement” toward foundation of the Fraternity was shaped by the many events and experiences in the lives of the individuals who were to become its Founders. This group included mainly those who were to follow Brian Smith and Bobbie Cavnar’s leadership on this ‘journey’ by becoming a “brotherhood” in Christ. Most of them are pictured in this 1992 photo – taken at the 3rd International Conference of the Catholic Fraternity held in Dallas.

CFCCCF Founders in 92



Pictured: Hervé-Marie Catta, Benedict Lye, Shayne Bennett, Brian Smith, Kevin Horgan, Bishop De Monleon, Bobbie Cavnar, Bishop Paul Cordes, David Peterman (Sr.), Fr. Denis Phaneuf, Dan Pope, Jim Jones

Not pictured: Joseph Chee, Daniel Kong, Ray Stewart, Dennis Powell

Peterman – CF History (cont.)

Founders Formation

Each founder brought a unique Catholic perspective of strong faith and practice, which was a unique product of their individual formation, experience and YES response to God's call. They came from diverse backgrounds – from “deep in the heart of Texas” to “the outback of Australia”, but each had responded also to God's grace and word with docility to the Church's pastors.

Scripture

I can't overemphasize the importance of these early leaders' immersion in scripture, the Word of God. The sacramental graces actualized by the Baptism in the Holy Spirit resulted in a great hunger for reading and studying scripture. We carried our bibles everywhere to use at any opportunity. Gradually this produced a radical change in our “way of thinking” about our Catholic faith. We grew quickly to have a “biblical worldview”, rather than a secular one. Along with many others, Brian and Bobbie were strong inspirations and teachers for us all during the early years.

As a result, the biblical texts and the teachings and sacraments of our Church came alive and changed our lives. Like the disciples following Jesus, we were radically transformed by a “renewal of our minds”, as St. Paul encourages in Romans 12:2.

² Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

This ‘conversion’ resulted in a deep desire and call to live out the gospel in authentic Christian communities – like those we found described in our studies of the New Testament.

Covenant Community

By the mid 70's, most of the Fraternity's founders were making the transition from leading large charismatic prayer groups to forming lay Christian Communities. This was happening around the world and generally followed the experience and witness of the two pioneering communities Word of God in Ann Arbor, Michigan and the People of Praise in South Bend, Indiana.

Why Covenant Community?

It is important to understand why the Holy Spirit led us to call ourselves “**covenant**” Communities. Some of you may not be familiar with this dimension of our Fraternity charism and why we have the name: “Catholic Fraternity of **Charismatic Covenant** Communities and Fellowships.”

Our response to the Holy Spirit and the inspiration to form community by making a “covenant” with God and one another was simply a concrete way to express our common biblical desire to live out the life in the Spirit that Jesus had inaugurated in His New Covenant or New “Testament” Community. Making a covenant is analogous to marriage or religious vows. Responding to God's call, we declare before God and the community our commitment to live this New Covenant life in the Spirit together in a particular way. Our covenant statement, like marriage or religious vows, serves to express and remind us of our common commitment to live as Christ's disciples. It is like the bond or “life line” tied between climbers of the mountain of holiness.

Peterman – CF History (cont.)

During the 70's such conversions and strong filial bonds empowered a full-fledged Pentecostal Renewal in the Catholic Church, with the lives of many Catholics around the world being touched by the Holy Spirit and "turned on" to live their faith authentically. I was one of them – by the grace of God.

Charismatic Renewal

God was working with not only in our minds and hearts, but also in our **relationships** with each other and with the Persons of the Trinity. We had awakened to the realities of our ecclesial identity, as the Family of God the Father, as brothers and sisters of His Son Jesus and as temples of the Holy Spirit. This shared awareness drew us into deepening personal relationships, especially as together we responded to God's call to serve His people and this renewal. As leaders we were often together – learning and serving those God was sending to us.

In the case of our Community in Dallas Texas, we were serving and leading a large public prayer meeting and met weekly as a service team at Bobbie's home to seek the Lord and His guidance. In March of 1973 this group responded to God's call and made a covenant together with Him. We were much less sure of **what** we were doing than we were that this **was** what God wanted us to do. Life in the Spirit is like that.

As St Paul says in 2 Cor 5:7 - *We walk by faith and not by sight.*

We had this same "faith walk" experience later with the formation of the Catholic Fraternity in the 80's. Only then there was a change. We were now doing it with both the inspiration of the Holy Spirit AND the discernment of the Magisterium. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

70's Impact

The 70's were a time of youthful exuberance in the history of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. We also grew in the authenticity of our Catholic faith. We also learned from and related to many devout non-Catholics. We were formed by a ravenous hunger for studying scripture. We celebrated our new-found life in the Spirit in large conferences where we learned how to praise and worship God with abandon. It was exhilarating!

During this 'honeymoon' period we were served by many wonderful brothers and sisters, especially those from the South Bend and Ann Arbor communities, who worked together to promote the worldwide Renewal and provide many many inspired books, pamphlets and music that both unified and helped us in our Christian growth as individuals and as leaders. This Renewal "leadership team" truly unified and "fanned the flames" of the Renewal around the world. These common sources of teachings, conference addresses, retreats, workshops, leaders' meetings and later Elder's conferences all formed us and built our relationships as a body of unified leaders of this "New Pentecostal Renewal" of the Church.

Seeking Greater Unity in Spirit

After several successful "Elders" conferences of leaders from the growing number of covenant communities from around the world, a strong desire developed to relate to each other more formally. We wanted to encourage and learn from one another in serving the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and building Christian Communities.

Peterman – CF History (cont.)

Several attempts were made from 1977 to 1982 to form an association of our communities. They had several titles – including Community of Communities and Federation of Communities. Each annual leaders' meeting was a glorious experience of fellowship, but it never crystallized into a firm identity, due to a growing tension among its top leaders.

Leadership Divided

In 1982 the leaders of the Ann Arbor/South Bend alliance “agreed to disagree” resulting in two separate groups of communities following each side. The People of Praise and its associated communities remained a loosely connected group of autonomous non-denominational communities while the Word of God and some of its associated communities united into a single organization named the Sword of the Spirit.

A New Association of Communities

Thus in 1983 we found ourselves at a meeting announcing this separation and the options we faced. Afterwards, Brian Smith and about six other community leaders from Oceana and Asia came back to Dallas to discuss the situation with us and try to decide what to do. Basically, we had related to the Word of God and its associated communities for over a decade and were now faced with their transformation into a single international community, the Sword of the Spirit. Neither Bobbie, Brian nor any of us wanted to **lose** our relationships with the leaders of these communities, but we were not comfortable with joining the Sword of the Spirit as a single international community.

The result of our first Dallas meeting in 1983 was that we needed to pray about it, speak to our bishops and other leaders and come back together in Dallas the following year to seek God's will. We did this in Dallas in 1984 and concluded unanimously that what we really wanted was to stay related, not as a single body, but as “brothers” in Christ. So we decided to form an association of locally autonomous communities where we could continue to relate like adult brothers and sisters in Christ, members of God the Father's family. So we agreed to form a new association of communities that we called: “The International Brotherhood of Communities” or “IBOC”.

Hierarchy Gets Involved

In the meantime, this “splintering” of the renewal leadership was being observed closely by the Catholic Hierarchy. A deep concern developed for the faith lives of the multitude of Catholics involved in the general Charismatic Renewal and particularly in its Covenant Communities.

Papal Intervention

New Episcopal Advisor

The strong conviction and support of Pope John Paul II for the Charismatic Renewal in the Church soon brought decisive action. The Holy Father asked his friend, an outstanding German Bishop, Paul Cordes, to assume the Episcopal Advisor role – previously held by Cardinal Suenens – as his personal envoy to the Charismatic Renewal and appointed him as Vice-President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

Cordes Intervention

Bishop (now Cardinal) Cordes then went around the world visiting Charismatic groups of Catholics and their bishops. He came to Dallas in 1984 and visited with Bobbie and our bishop Thomas Tschoepe,

Peterman – CF History (cont.)

who had long guided Bobbie and our community. He returned to visit our IBOC meeting in 1985 and laid a “bombshell” on us. He had completed his visits with the key Renewal groups and their bishops around the world and reported to the Holy Father. The “bombshell”, as it felt at the time, was that they wanted us, as a strong group of Catholic leaders, to become their primary interface with the Charismatic Renewal. We were dumbstruck – but agreed.

A New Association

Cardinal Cordes explained that this required establishing a new fully Catholic Association that could seek to receive official Canonical recognition from the Holy See as a Private Association of the Faithful of Papal Right. Most of us were not familiar with the new 1983 Code of Canon Law that had added provisions for such recognition of private lay associations. He explained that IBOC, as a non-denominational association that included non-Catholics, could not fulfill this role. So we agreed to proceed with his help.

Lay Ecclesiology

Role of Laity in Church

Cardinal Cordes also told us about the vigorous debate at the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops and how it was resolved in a consensus support of the laity’s role in the Church – based on Vatican II’s core understanding of the Church as Communion. The published proceedings of this Synod provide a clear and essential understanding of how new movements and communities relate to the Church as a spiritual communion as well as a visible institution. Our community and parish identities were now clearly reconciled.

Soon afterwards in 1988, John Paul II issued his great Encyclical *Christifideles Laici*. It is kind of a *Magna Carta* on how the Laity relate to the Church. Cardinal Cordes encouraged us to study both these documents, and he particularly pointed out the latter’s listing of essential marks or Criteria of Ecclesiality for Lay Groups as guides for our new association.

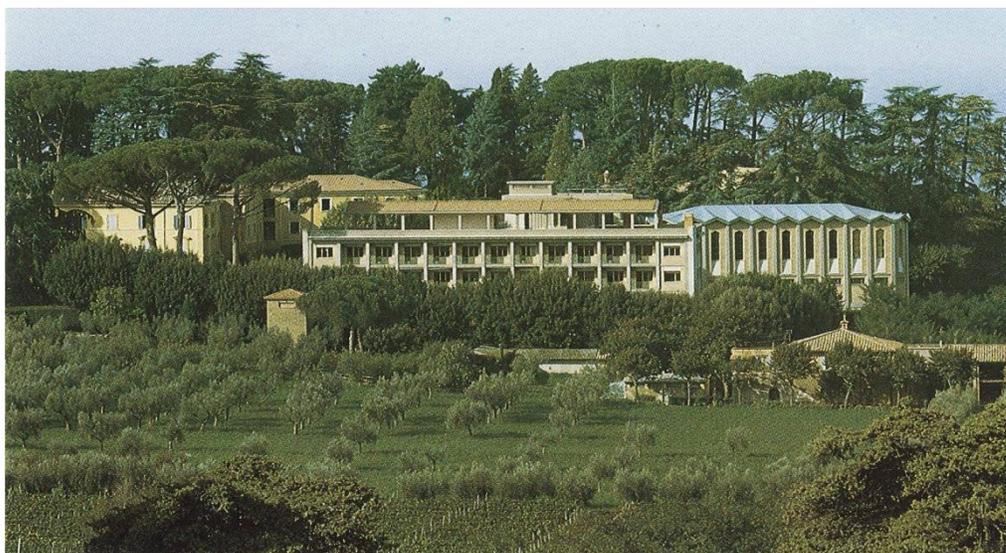
- ▶ Primacy given to the call of every Christian to holiness
- ▶ Responsibility for professing the Catholic faith...as the Church interprets it
- ▶ Witness to a strong and authentic communion in filial relationship to Pope
- ▶ Conformity to and participation in the Church’s apostolic goals, ...evangelization, sanctification and Christian formation of conscience
- ▶ A commitment to a presence in human society...at service of total dignity of the person

90’s – Official Recognition as Catholic

Finally, in early 1990, we learned that our statutes would be officially approved by the Holy See at our upcoming International Conference planned for late November in Rome.

Peterman – CF History (cont.)

The conference was held at *Villa Cavaletti*, a religious retreat center south of Rome near *Castel Gandolfo*, the Pope's summer residence.



A highpoint of my life was the privilege of attending mass with John Paul II in his chapel followed by a private audience in his residence on the occasion of our 1990 Conference to formally recognize the Catholic Fraternity.



Peterman – CF History (cont.)



With the Catholic Fraternity established, we began to experience the richness of our Catholic faith, the strong encouragement of the Council for the Laity and were fraternally bonded together around the small group of 'friends' the Founders of the Fraternity.

In the past 20 years since that historic event we've had many fruitful conferences and leaders' meetings. We've received even stronger support from the Hierarchy and have grown in numbers into a much larger international presence. But we also have had some struggles with, diversity, leadership transition and economic realities.

1990's Conferences

- ▶ 1990 International CF & IBOC in Rome
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- ▶ 1992 International CF & IBOC in Dallas
- ▶ 1993 International CF in *Paray-le-Monial*
- ▶ 1994 International CF in Rome
- ▶ 1995 International CF in Fortaleza, Brazil
- ▶ 1996 Int. in Rome & NA Regional in Phoenix
- ▶ 1997 NA Regional in Kansas City
- ▶ 1998 International in Rome
- ▶ 1999 NA Regional/Exec. in San Luis Potosi

Peterman – CF History (cont.)

2000 Conferences

- ▶ 2000 International in Bari, Italy
- ▶ 2001 Council + Executive in Rome (elections)
- ▶ 2001 NA Regional in Phoenix
- ▶ 2002 International in Rome, Italy
- ▶ 2003 NA Regional in Augusta, GA
- ▶ 2004 International in Fiuggi, Italy (elections)
- ▶ 2005 NA Regional in San Luis Potosí?
- ▶ 2006 International in San Palo, Brazil
- ▶ 2007 Only Council/Executive in Assisi (elections)
- ▶ 2008 International in Assisi, Italy
- ▶ 2009 NA Regional in Dallas/Ft. Worth

Personal Reflections

I have chosen to focus this talk on the early history from a personal perspective to give you a background on the Fraternity's founding 20 years ago rather than focus on what has happened since, which many of you have participated in. You can read my handout text for more detail. Shayne will take up the story from here, but first I want to conclude with a few personal reflections or conclusions from this historical "journey."

Challenges to Unity

Necessity of Unity

We all need to study the Fraternity Statutes and ask ourselves how we can be more faithful to God's call on us as individual communities and as a Fraternity. Our effectiveness at this depends heavily on our unity. We must realize we are truly in a spiritual battle and should act accordingly. Catholicity demands holding to unity at all levels and no matter the cost.

Spiritual Warfare

Generation to generation leadership transitions in our communities and the Fraternity provide abundant opportunities for Satan to attack us. Within individual communities we are vulnerable to conflicts over succession of the founding leadership. We can easily succumb to the world's democracy way of popularity voting as preferable to an ecclesial model of collegiality and discernment. We have to take up our sacrificial crosses.

Leaders Relationships

On the larger front of the Fraternity itself, we face a different challenge. New leaders are coming to our Regional and International meetings that have not had the opportunity to develop close filial relationships with the other leaders. Being strangers weakens us. Learning from our Founders, such relationships are vital to the unity and effectiveness of the Fraternity. But as we have grown the international forum for building these relationships has become limited, especially with larger numbers, multiple languages and high costs.

Peterman – CF History (cont.)

Within our Regions we have similar challenges due to differences in language, culture and nationalism. We must overcome these challenges by providing an expanded meeting structure and ongoing cooperation at the Regional level including stronger formation of leaders to assure we remain one in the mind of Christ for His Church.

Relating to Hierarchy

At the same time, we must continue to strengthen our ecclesial understanding and relationships with the Church's Hierarchy – under the encouragement and tutoring of our local bishops and the Council for the Laity. An open dialogue and reconciliation with leaders of other communities and the broader Renewal is also essential to carrying out our mission as the Catholic Fraternity. We also need more informed ecumenical interactions with leaders of non-Catholic communions.

Supporting Fraternity Initiatives

Matteo and other leaders are working on these challenges and the new Rome office should be a great asset for us, but we must all sacrifice to support them and also carry on this work in our Regions so that together we accomplish the Aims listed in our Fraternity Statutes. All of these depend on further strengthening our relationships as leaders at all levels.

Closing

As we celebrate this 20th anniversary, I ask for your prayers and enthusiasm in following together in the footsteps of our Founders, especially our brothers Bobbie and Brian.

I want to thank you for your attention.