

BUCKINGHAM REPORT

AN IN-DEPTH CRITIQUE BY AMERICA'S FOREMOST
CHRISTIAN ANALYZER OF THE ISSUES, PEOPLE, &
EVENTS AFFECTING TODAY'S SPIRIT-LED LEADERS

KEY EVANGELICAL BECOMES ROMAN CATHOLIC

Thomas Howard, professor of English at Gordon College in Wenham, Massachusetts, and well-known evangelical author—**Christ the Tiger** (Harold Shaw) and **Evangelical Is Not Enough** (Thomas Nelson)—has converted to Roman Catholicism. Howard's switch has soundly shaken many old-line evangelicals, so much so that **Christianity Today** devoted almost eight pages in its May 17 issue to try to clarify the issue.

A graduate of Wheaton College, Howard is the son of the late Dr. Philip Howard, for many years editor of **The Sunday School Times**. One of his brothers is a pastor, and four of the other Howard children are missionaries. Most famous among the siblings is Elisabeth Elliot, former missionary to the Auca Indians in Ecuador and now a writer and frequent speaker in the United States.

Two days after formally joining the Roman Catholic Church (Howard had previously been an Episcopalian), he resigned from the faculty at Gordon College, since its creedal statement reflects Protestant Reformational doctrine.

Thomas Howard—and to some degree his sister Elisabeth Elliot—has long been a maverick among old-line evangelicals. Friends and family say his conversion to Catholicism is not a surprise, but the natural culmination of a 20-year spiritual pilgrimage. Howard maintains he is still a fundamentalist when it comes to the Scriptures, but also feels the Roman Catholic Church is the "appointed guardian of the Scriptures."

Many of Howard's friends think he is pursuing what Harold O. J. Brown calls an "idealized version of Catholicism that never existed." Howard sums up his reason for joining the Catholic Church saying, "I became convinced that the claims of the ancient church are true." At the same time, he faults Protestantism on two fronts: (1) no infallible teaching office to guarantee an infallible understanding of the Christian faith, and (2) a poverty of authentic spirituality and meaningful worship.

Christianity Today points out that while it is uncommon for evangelicals to convert to Catholicism, many are joining the Episcopal Church. Robert Webber, a Bob Jones graduate but now a professor at Wheaton (who also has switched from fundamentalism to the Episcopal Church), examines this in a soon-to-be-published book, **Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail** (Word).

BAPTIST PASTOR "MARKETS" MINISTRY

Gerald Mann, pastor of Riverbend Baptist Church, Austin, Texas, says his new TV commercials are packing his church with people. In one commercial, Mann and

Texas comedian Cactus Pryor stand on a golf course, preparing to putt.

"Preacher, you sink that putt and I'll join your church," Pryor says.

The ball rolls around the green, then glides right into the cup, as though divinely guided.

In the next scene, Pryor is seated in a pew at Riverbend Church, rolling his eyes. Mann is saying, "At Riverbend, we'll take 'em any way we can get 'em."

Mann, a former businessman who is independently wealthy, says after the commercial began airing, his church had its largest attendance in history. The church, which has a membership of 1,000, recently bought 36 acres in west Austin for \$700,000. Since then the property value has escalated to more than \$12 million.

Air time in Austin is expensive, though. The golf course commercial airs in prime time. (Mann even bought a spot during the Olympics last summer.) The 30-second spots, which cost \$5,000 apiece, are seen by more people per dollar than an hour of televised worship on Sunday mornings.

Mann's latest TV commercial shows two men stranded on a desert island. They launch a bottled note which says they'll do anything to be rescued, even go to "that church that advertises on TV."

The next scene shows Mann, in the style of George Washington crossing the Delaware, leading the men off the island in a rowboat. Riverbend, the message says, gets 'em "anywhere we can find 'em."

HEALING MINISTRY

John Wimber of the Vineyard Christian Fellowship says the ministry of healing, from a biblical perspective, is divided into three categories:

1. The gift of healing (1 Cor. 12:8-12). Here God blesses others through you.
2. The office of healing (James 5:13-16). Those in the office, such as elders, are commissioned and empowered to officiate—and healing comes forth through obedience.
3. The role of healing (Mark 16:17-20). In this ministry believers, accepting the Great Commission, go out and heal.

IN THIS ISSUE I AM SPOTLIGHTING...

NOTES FROM CHARISMATIC LEADERS' MEETING IN ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

On May 6-7, about 40 Christian leaders, representing all the major "streams" of spiritual renewal and Charismatic activity in the United States, met at the Airport Marriott Hotel in St. Louis to give prayerful consideration to the possibility of a second "Kansas City" conference to be held in 1987—10 years after the first conference which drew 50,000. The consultation group agreed to form a steering committee which will plan, first of all, a leadership conference to be held in 1986. This would be a forerunner to the North American Congress to be held in the fall of 1987.

Attending were Roman Catholics Kevin Ranaghan, Fr. Ken Metz, Fr. Stephen Barham, and Pepe Alonzo; Glenn Rochell from the Covenant churches (representing Charles Simpson); Nelson Litwiller and Roy Koch from the Mennonites; American Baptist Gary Clark (who has recently moved from the pastorate in New England to assume editorship of **World Christian** in Pasadena, California); Donald Fike from the Church of

the Brethren; Karl Strader from the Assemblies of God; Vinson Synan from the Pentecostal Holiness churches; Harold Hunter of the Church of God in Prophecy (who is moving from Cleveland, Tennessee, to a professorship at Oral Roberts University); Presbyterian leader Brick Bradford; Methodist leaders Ross Whetstone and Gary Moore; Dennis Pedersen from the Lutheran churches; Episcopalians Fr. Terry Fullam and Fr. Charles Irish; Vernon Stoop of the United Church of Christ; Wilbur Jackson from the Wesleyan Methodist churches; Bob Weiner from Maranatha Campus Ministries; Bob Walker from **Christian Life** magazine; Stephen Strang and myself from **Charisma** and **MINISTRIES** magazines; John Wimber representing the Vineyard Fellowships; Charles Green representing the Network of Christian Ministries; Jim Jackson from the National Leadership Conference; Gerald Derstine from Gospel Crusades; plus representatives from Jews for Jesus and Women's Aglow.

World Evangelization and the Holy Spirit

John Wimber suggested the title theme for the conferences: "World Evangelization and the Power of the Holy Spirit." He had suggested that same title to Billy Graham for the last world conference on evangelism held in Amsterdam, but Graham's people rejected it, fearing it might sound like an endorsement for the Charismatic movement. The St. Louis committee agreed unanimously to Wimber's suggested theme. Specific care was made to stay away from buzz words which would tend to exclude various groups. The word "renewal" was avoided because Pentecostals might connote it as association with liberal or Catholic churches. Likewise the word "Charismatic" was eliminated, allowing evangelicals and others who are Spirit-filled (but not normally associated with Charismatics and Pentecostals) to feel comfortable attending.

After hearing from Michael Harper, Anglican Charismatic from England who told of the European conference called Acts '86 to be held in Birmingham, England, next year, the group tentatively adopted similar purposes for the North American Congress. They are:

- (1) world evangelization,
- (2) signs and wonders,
- (3) church growth,
- (4) personal holiness.

The purpose of the leaders' conference in 1986 is to prepare for the North American Congress in 1987, similar to the great Kansas City conference in 1977. This, in turn, will look forward to a world conference in 1990 with a thrust toward world evangelization. The dates and places of the conferences will be announced following the next meeting of the steering committee to be held August 29-30 in Chicago.

Reflections

Kevin Ranaghan put forth the idea that the leadership conference is not something we need to obtain unity to have, but the conference will create the kind of unity God wants. I stated that unity itself is the wrong end. World evangelization, I urged, should be the goal. Unity will be a by-product when leaders focus on the common goal. After a good bit of discussion, the committee agreed we should not wait for unity, or even work toward it as a prerequisite to come together, rather we should act on the revelation we have. That meant going ahead with the leaders' conference even though no one seemed to know what the next step would be—or the results of the first step. I liken that to the example of the children of Israel: At the Red Sea obedience

followed a miracle. At the Jordan River the miracle followed obedience.

There is a growing feeling among Catholic and Protestant Charismatic leaders that God has designated the last decade of this century as a decade of world evangelism—a time to finish carrying the gospel message to the entire world. Look for possible recognition of this by Pope John Paul II. Of course, evangelism to most Catholics does not mean what it means to Protestant Christians.

Spearheading the thrust of world evangelism is the fact that, within the next few years, funds and technology will be available allowing the Christian TV networks to beam the gospel to Europe, most of Africa and all of South America via satellite. All that will be necessary is a small receiver dish—and electrical power, of course.

Karl Strader of the Carpenter's Church in Lakeland, Florida, says 70 percent of the Assembly of God pastors believe the Charismatic movement was just a fad and is dead or dying. That same group would not support any kind of ecumenical meeting which would involve cooperation with Charismatics and (especially) Roman Catholics. On the other hand, Strader says, there are approximately 20 percent of the AOG ministers who are highly cooperative. Most Assembly churches which flowed with the Charismatic movement, he says, are flourishing. But as a denomination, Strader does not believe the AOG is making spiritual progress. Some of the churches are moving—and growing—rapidly, and this gives the impression that the entire denomination is becoming progressive, which is a false impression.

Vinson Synan of the Pentecostal Holiness Church confirmed this is true among nearly all classic Pentecostals.

Michael Harper reports of a great Charismatic revival which is sweeping through the Iron Curtain nation of Romania, causing it to be called by some the "Korea of Eastern Europe." At the same time, reports Harper, there are now more Moslems in France than born-again Christians.

Confusion

There were the usual points of confusion, of course, which are as prone to happen in leaders' meetings as in a normal church service. For instance: conflicting prophecy. The first evening, following a time of prayer, one of the men spoke a prophecy. He said he felt the Lord was not calling us together—he was calling us to Himself. As soon as he finished speaking, another man uttered a second prophecy. He said, in essence: God is calling us together in unity, and we must work at it.

The problem was not the conflicting prophecy, rather it was the fact that the men "AMENed" both prophecies, and no one in the room seemed to realize the messages conflicted. I had the feeling that no one was really listening. Perhaps, like so many Christians, we have been lulled into insensitivity by hearing the "Yea-I-the-Lord-love-you" types of prophecy so much that when a real word comes—any word—no one is listening enough to discern whether God has spoken or not.

Someone commented to Brick Bradford, executive director of the Presbyterian and Reformed Renewal Ministries—and a former B-25 bombardier in World War II (that dates him without telling you how old he is)—on how well he looked. Bradford quipped: "The older I grow, the more I realize I don't have to feel responsible for what everyone is doing. The Lord has been in charge all along. I don't need to worry—or take charge of affairs."

Bishop Nelson Litwiller of the Mennonite Church, a former missionary to Argentina, is now 87 years old and recently celebrated 66 years of marriage. (He left last week to return to Argentina on a mission trip.) The old Mennonite reminded the

group of his former anti-Pentecostal, anti-Catholic stance. That was before he received the baptism of the Holy Spirit under the prayer ministry of Roman Catholic Kevin Ranaghan. Litwiller, a pacifist who opposes use of force and the use of weapons, told of being in a meeting with U.S. Army General Ralph Haines, former commander of the Continental Army and now a Spirit-filled Christian. He said the Lord convicted him of his poor attitude toward Haines and all he represented as a military man. He approached General Haines and said, "Please forgive me. I've held bitterness against you and all you represent. I want to wash your feet." The general replied kindly, "I forgive you." He then offered a word of encouragement and told the old Mennonite: "Stick to your guns."

Vernon Stoop, president of the Fellowship of Charismatic Christians of the United Church of Christ, reports that the UCC has formed a committee on spiritual development to study the "move of the Spirit." However, none of those on the committee seems to know who the Holy Spirit is. They are planning a conference this fall to check it (Him) out. One of those on the program is an Indian medicine man.

Quotable Quotes

Don Fike: "As we give depth to our servanthood, we give breadth to our ministry."

John Wimber: "You've let your experience qualify the Word of God."

"A growing church will always be a messy church. Our task is to build up the Body. God will send the increase."

"Key to success of growth is fasting and prayer."

Russ Spittler: "So far we've seen the evangelicalism of pentecostalism and the pentecostalization of evangelicalism. What is needed is the Christianization of both."

David du Plessis: "Norman Vincent Peale once asked me how, with all my traveling, I have time to prepare my sermons. I told him I do not prepare sermons. I prepare myself, and the Holy Spirit gives me sermons."

"It is wicked to ask Jesus to baptize me in the Holy Spirit and refuse to accept the consequences."

"Never say, 'I got saved.' Say, 'Jesus saved me.' Never say, 'I got baptized in the Holy Spirit.' Say, 'Jesus baptized me in the Holy Spirit.' "

Glencoe Conference

The St. Louis meeting preceded the annual meeting of a small group of Charismatic leaders who have been meeting together since 1970. For the last several years the meetings have been held at the Marinist Apostolic Center at Glencoe, outside of St. Louis. This four-day meeting, sponsored by the Charismatic Concerns Committee (Vinson Synan is the new chairman, replacing Kevin Ranaghan), is a by-invitation-only gathering of men with translocal ministries. It is one of the few times during the year this group of leaders can come together in an informal atmosphere, hear one another, sense the movement of the Spirit, and renew friendships and pledge loyalties. Although most Charismatics know nothing of it, it has been—across the years—one of the primary spiritual forces in America as Catholics and Protestants join together in friendship to hear each other and seek God's guidance for the nation as well as the groups each oversees.

One of the founders of the Glencoe meeting was former Catholic priest Francis MacNutt. When MacNutt, now 60 years old, married several years ago and was excommunicated as a Catholic, he was not invited back to the annual May meeting. This was

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due primarily to the deep wounding his action caused to the Catholics on the Charismatic Concerns Committee. MacNutt was issued an invitation to return in 1984, but declined. This year he did return, and was embraced by all the Catholics present—including Kevin Ranaghan. The welcome and forgiveness on the part of all set the tone for the meeting and will be reflected out across the nation in a new wave of love and respect for men who believe—and act—according to conscience—even when they are in disagreement with brothers.

This year the group—about 50 men from all over the nation—gave a full day to hear the exciting testimony of John Wimber, a man God has singled out to help bring Holy Spirit power to the evangelicals. Wimber spoke one morning on signs and wonders, then came back that afternoon and fielded questions until time for supper. The men were particularly interested in the course he teaches at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, as an adjunct professor, on “signs and wonders.” The course has caused great interest among the student body, and, according to Dean Russ Spittler of the School of Theology (he was also at Glencoe), a great deal of controversy among the theological faculty. (I’ll address that entire matter in an upcoming issue of the **Buckingham Report**.) Wimber seems unfazed by the entire thing. Along with Peter Wagner, church growth expert, Wimber continues to travel and minister in the areas of signs and wonders. He has been especially effective among evangelical pastors and estimates he has helped lead at least 3,000 Southern Baptist pastors into the baptism in the Holy Spirit over the last few years.

My Assessment:

There is a new move of the Holy Spirit taking place. It is not so much a wave as a flowing of the tide—rising and lifting without the froth and foam experienced in the early days of the Charismatic revival—but with even more power and stability. There are those who say the Charismatic movement is dead. Not so. It has been sleeping. Resting. That’s not bad, for solid growth happens during sleep times. Now there is an awakening taking place. Men like John Wimber and Southern Baptist evangelist James Robison are leading the way—boldly proclaiming the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit with signs and wonders, the necessity of the church (and Christians) being delivered from demonic forces, and a fresh call for men and women to return to their first love—Jesus. There has been an ebb of the tide over the last few years—but now it is coming in with even greater power—and much of it is happening among evangelicals.

James Robison, by the way, was the closing speaker at the huge National Leadership Conference held annually the third week of May at Ridgecrest, North Carolina. More than 2,000 were in attendance when Robison told the group that even though he knew he could speak in tongues and was liable to at any moment, he did not do so because God had told him to hold back for the sake of evangelicals and Southern Baptists who might not give him a hearing if they knew he did. The crowd, nearly all Charismatic pastors and leaders, gave him a loud round of applause and amens.

