

## AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT

Seventeen years ago Dennis Bennett, rector of the 2600-member St. Mark Episcopal Church in Van Nuys, Calif., received national recognition by being removed from his church for speaking in tongues. At that time the charismatic movement was looked upon as another religious fad which would soon pass away.

But to the amazement of many--and the fears of some--the charismatic movement did not die. Today it is still flourishing, strongly entrenched in every major denomination in the world.

Still central in the movement is the "baptism" of the Holy Spirit, which charismatics believe occurs subsequent to salvation rather than at the time of salvation, which most evangelicals believe. However, unlike the doctrine held by many old-line Pentecostals, most modern charismatics do not feel that speaking in tongues is necessarily the initial sign of the Spirit's arrival. One leader puts it this way, "It's something you get to do, rather than something you have to do."

The sign gifts of the Spirit still play a major role among most charismatics, but the emphasis is shifting to other priorities as well: the fruit of the Spirit, biblical soundness, personal holiness, individual freedom and authority, and church structure.

Denominational Infiltration

Nearly all denominations now have recognized groups of charismatics. While a few, like the Southern Baptists, still reject charismatics, most denominations recognize the movement as being "of God" and are cautiously accepting both individual charismatics and charismatic congregations.

A recent conference in Orlando, Fla. sponsored by the Methodist Hour was charismatic. There were no tongue utterances, but the emphasis was on the sign gifts of the Spirit in today's world. No one, including the denominational leaders, seemed offended.

The most articulate spokesman for the Lutherans is pastor and author Larry Christenson. The Episcopalians have a number of well known leaders including Bennett, Terry Fulham, and a number of bishops who are charismatic in persuasion. The Presbyterians have passed a resolution at their General Assembly which included a statement expressing that tongues is a valid spiritual experience. Many churches, such as First Presbyterian Church in Winston-Salem, N.C. and St. Giles Presbyterian Church in Richmond, Va. are charismatic--not only in worship, but also in their church structure. The elders at St. Giles were recently under fire by a commission of the presbytery, but have since weathered the storm with the support of many Presbyterian leaders at higher levels.

The denomination which is drawing charismatics, literally by the thousands, is the Roman Catholic Church. The strongest voices here come from Notre Dame and the Word of God community in Ann Arbor, Mich. *New Covenant Magazine*, published by the Word of God community, is a semiofficial magazine of the Catholic-Pentecostal movement. Although David Wilkerson has prophesied that the Roman hierarchy will persecute charismatics, a recent blessing by the Pope seems to be moving Catholics in another direction.

Itinerant Teachers

One of the earmarks of the movement has been strong, individual teachers who have moved about the country, cross-pollinating various groups. Best known are the teachers from the Christian Growth Ministry (CGM) in Ft. Lauderdale--Derek Prince, Bob Mumford, Charles Simp-

son, and Don Basham, editor of *New Wine Magazine*. Caught in a recent controversy over how to make disciples, the CGM men are still moving away from the big meetings and toward an emphasis on personal discipleship. Their cause has been strengthened by the teaching of Argentine pastor Juan Carlos Ortiz, who wrote the best known book on the subject, *Call to Discipleship*.

Other teachers are rising on the scene and giving additional respectability to the movement. Among them is Ruth Carter Stapleton, who recently received an unconditional blessing from Billy Graham at a meeting of the National Religious Broadcasters.

A large number of independent charismatic churches have been established, mostly pastored by former denominational ministers. Typical is the 10,000-member Melodyland Christian Center in Anaheim, Calif. which not only baptizes 50 new converts a week, but has its own school of theology. Tulsa Christian Fellowship, under the gentle leadership of former Southern Baptist pastor Bill Sanders, has an extended ministry to many of the students at Oral Roberts University, the best known charismatic school. New Covenant Fellowship which draws more than 3500 each Sunday from the St. Louis area, has moved rapidly under the pastoral care of another former Baptist, Bob Beckett.

Many of these groups seem to focus on dynamic pastoral leadership such as Morris Sheats in Lubbock, John Poole in Philadelphia, James Beall in Detroit, Paul Walker in Atlanta, and Ken Sumrall in Pensacola, but most fellowships are beginning to ask pastors to submit to a ruling board of elders.

Charismatic Communications

Foremost in publishing is Logos International in Plainfield, N.J. Publisher Dan Malachuk has shocked the publishing world with innovative ideas, including the establishment of *National Courier*, a Christian newspaper designed to bring unity to the body of Christ. *Logos Journal* is perhaps the best known charismatic publication. Both have a growing circulation of over 100,000. Logos books are known the world over in spreading charismatic teaching.

The greatest phenomenon of the decade, however, has to be the explosion of the airwaves. Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) with its 700 Club, under the leadership of Pat Robertson, is building an international communications center in the tidewater area of Virginia. It is designed to use satellites to beam the gospel to the world. The newer PTL Club in Charlotte, with former CBN'er Jim Bakker at the helm, is now seen in more than 105 cities with a potential viewing audience of almost 70 million. Only Rex Humbard of the Cathedral of Tomorrow in Akron has a larger viewing audience.

What trends should emerge during the next ten years among charismatics? One will be a shift to community, with a strong emphasis on Christian coming together in emphatic family relationships. Another will be a softening of the reactionary concepts of the past and an even stronger emphasis on the Body of Christ. A third will be a decided emphasis on foreign missions, with many charismatics cooperating with existing missions groups. There will be an increasing infiltration of denominational churches. Some churches will continue to resist, but a growing number will join with their brothers and urge the denominations to move toward a stronger charismatic emphasis.

--Mr. Buckingham is pastor of Tabernacle Church in Melbourne, Fla. and serves on the board of Logos International.