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A GROUP OF MEN in the balcony began to sing, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised." In an instant the entire congregation was singing, hands clapping, voices raised in praise. They slipped easily into another scripture chorus, "Thy loving kindness is better than life . . . I will lift up my hands in thy name."

A thousand hands were raised before God.

More than 500 pastors from throughout the southeastern U.S. had gathered in this the Westside Baptist Church of Leesburg, Florida for a three-day, history-making charismatic shepherd's conference.

In attendance were pastors elders, home church leaders, FGBMFI presidents, ministerial students and wandering shepherds. It marked the first time in recent history that charismatic leaders had come together in such a show of unity.

There was a Pentecostal Holiness pastor from Mississippi who had been dismissed from his denomination and had joined a Southern Baptist church. There were two Southern Baptist pastors from Kentucky, both seminary trained, who were involved in interdenominational ministries. A Presbyterian pastor had hitchhiked from North Carolina because his congregation wouldn't pay his expenses. The room was sprinkled with men with clerical collars, some bearded "hip-

pie" types, and others whose white hair and lined faces showed many years of labor in the vineyards.

A Southern Baptist Medical missionary to Africa had come with a group of seventeen men from the Louisville, Kentucky, area. He sat on the front row, drinking in the teaching from the Word of God. Everyone, it seemed, meant business. All seemed to sense it was God's time.

Host pastor Dick Coleman had invited some of the outstanding teachers in charismatic circles to lead. Derek Prince, Greek and Latin scholar, spoke twice. Charles Simpson, Southern Baptist minister, also spoke twice. Sharing the program was Jim Moore, another Baptist from Louisiana, and Ken Sumrall, pastor and missionary leader from Pensacola. All took part in the noon panel sessions.

Pastor Coleman set the keynote the first night when he read John 17:21 to the packed audience. "May they all be one . . . that the world may believe that thou didst send me."

He also laid the foundation for the conference. "We have more than five hundred men registered," he said. "They are from more than twenty denominations. But if you've come representing your denomination you're in the wrong place."

There was a roar of applause. Coleman continued. "For years, denominations have been trying to have ecumenical meetings. But in these

Many



latter days God is pouring out His Spirit on all flesh, and men are coming together because God has drawn them together, not some organization."

The rumble of "Amens!" indicated he had touched a precious truth shared by all.

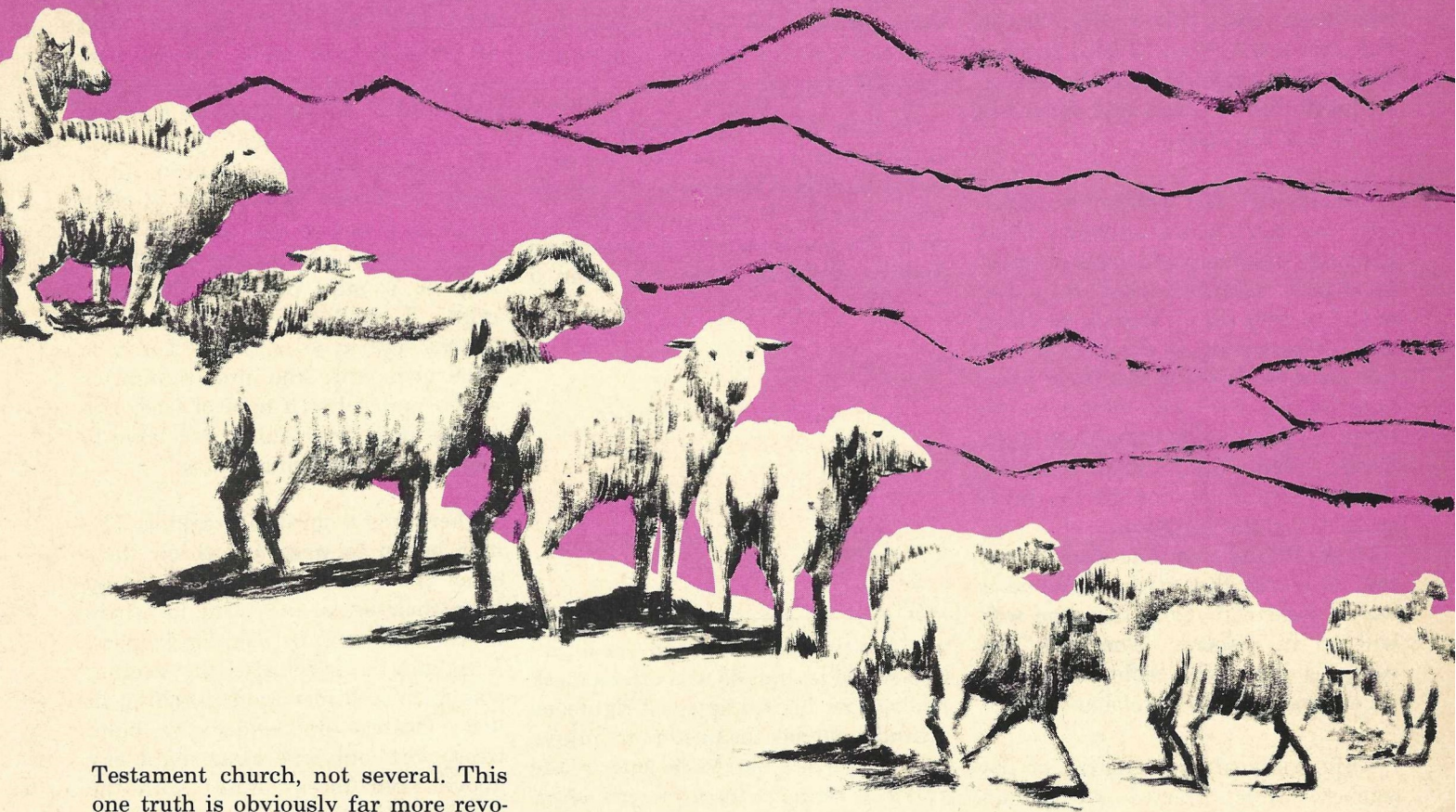
Division to Unity: It was obvious that Satan's method in dividing sheep has been to divide shepherds. Now, however, as the shepherds willed themselves to flow together, there was a feeling the sheep would also soon be one.

Derek Prince, the opening night speaker, followed through on the theme. Calling the meeting "a history making epic," Prince went on to say that what appears to be disagreement among shepherds is often merely a misunderstanding of words, blown up to be a major doctrinal difference. He made reference to how reports had been circulated that charismatics barked like dogs. His own ministry of deliverance had sometimes been misunderstood through lack of communication, he confessed.

Prince's message on "Who Are the Elders?" was one, which if taken seriously by those present, could totally revolutionize the concepts of the church in the world today. Prince pointed out that the Greek words translated in the KJV as bishop, pastor, elder and overseer all mean "shepherd" or elder." All describe one governmental office in the New

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Shepherds - One Flock



Testament church, not several. This one truth is obviously far more revolutionary than either speaking in tongues or deliverance. If put into practice in the modern ecclesiastical structure it would do more than rock the boat, it would turn the boat upside down.

He backed his teaching, however, with Scripture. In Acts 20, he pointed out where Paul called for the elders of the church (one church, several pastors) and then reminded them they were overseers and told them to shepherd the flock. Several titles, one function: to shepherd.

The men knew this kind of message could cause havoc in many existing church structures. However, they seemed tired of hearing man's ideas and hungry to hear the Word of God on the matter.

"I hope you didn't come here with something to protect," Prince chided.

"Almost every group has some special doctrine they need to defend. But I want to tell you that if God is in it you don't have to protect it. It will protect you."

To illustrate his point he told the story of a native in Asia whose village was being threatened by an invading army. The native was seen running through the village holding a huge wooden idol. "What are you carrying?" a missionary asked him as he ran by.

"This is my god," the man answered. "I'm saving it."

Every man in the room knew what he was talking about.

The evening closed with a prayer for the "breaking, smashing of our precious alabaster boxes that the fragrance of God's grace might fill the room."

Much of the preaching and teaching in the conference centered in on the book of Ezekiel, where condemnation is heaped on shepherds who spend their time feeding themselves rather than feeding sheep. In fact, at least one speaker spoke about "professional conference-goers" who show up at every charismatic meeting sitting on the front row with their tape recorders, but never pass the good news along to starving sheep.

Come and Die: Charles Simpson, speaking the next day, told the men that in order to make it as a pastor they had to die first. A pastor needs to lay down his life for the flock. He also mentioned that the ability to lead stops at the limits of a pastor's per-

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sonal experience. No flock will ever grow beyond the personal experience of the shepherd.

Simpson's reference to the Asian flocks was well received when he reminded the men that a shepherd does not drive his sheep before him, as a cowboy drives cattle, but he leads his sheep. They follow him because they know his voice. "I used to think I had been called to beat the sheep," he joked, "until I read that Jesus told me to feed the sheep."

Throughout the conference, reference was made to the necessity of the homes of the shepherds being in order. Shepherds minister what they are, not what they say. If there is rebellion and unforgiveness in the shepherds it will manifest itself in the flock. Problems in the flock are simply extensions of the problems among the shepherds. "The flock," said Simpson, "is the outer reflection of the inner condition of the shepherd."

Derek Prince went one step beyond that and said that if the husband is out of tune with God, then the wife will be in discord. "The wife," he said, "is the visible reflection of the inner condition of the husband."

While most of the remarks of the teachers were greeted with loud "Amen!" this particular statement by Prince was first greeted by nervous laughter, and then, as he stood looking sternly out over the congregation, simply by the guilty shuffling of feet.

Another emphasis, this one voiced primarily by Simpson, called for cooperation and understanding with denominational pastors who might not be charismatic. "How many of you men found Christ in a denominational church?" Simpson asked. A show of hands indicated that nearly all present had first found Christ in an established church.

Simpson went on to talk about the three young men in Daniel who came out of the fiery furnace and were so pure that even the smell of smoke did not linger on them. Many charismatics, he inferred, have been singed in their churches and still like to remind people to sniff them and smell

the smoke of the furnace on their clothes, rather than pointing them to the God who keeps his promises.

Part of the call for unity came through a call for recognition of others. "God blesses lots of people I wouldn't bless," Simpson laughed. "We need to show Christ in our attitudes as well as in our preaching. You can't *defend* the Holy Spirit and *reveal* Him at the same time."

He then related an incident in his early ministry when he had the opportunity to defend his position on speaking in tongues. It was a called meeting of all the Southern Baptist pastors in Mobile, Alabama. However, when it

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was his time to stand and speak, all God would let him do was offer a meek apology for his frumpy, self-righteous attitude and ask the pastors to forgive him. It turned out to be one of the greatest sermons he ever preached.

Men of God: This same attitude was exhibited the second night when Jimmy Moore, a virtual unknown to most of the men present, was scheduled as the main speaker. It was an envious position — to speak to five hundred key charismatic leaders — and many of the preachers present would have jumped at the chance. Moore, however, stood before the group and made a few introductory remarks about being delivered from the necessity of having to be recognized. Then in a surprise move, he stated that Bob Mumford was in the audience and he felt God would have him speak that night. Moore turned and sat down.

It took Mumford several minutes to overcome the shock of being called on spontaneously when he had not expected to speak. Then, however, Moore's prediction came true and the

anointing of God descended. Mumford opened the Bible to Ezekiel 1 and 2 and gave forth with a tremendous exhortation for the men to become, first of all, men of God. It was the night the fire was to fall.

Mumford called the shepherds to keep their feet on the ground. "But be willing," he said, "to let God stretch you out until your head is in the clouds." As the dynamic message came to a close, men all over the room fell to their knees — at the altar, down the aisles, in the pews. "I challenge you not to get up from your knees until you are willing to go home and be a man of God," Mumford cried. "I challenge you to let it be known first in your homes. Let it be your own wife who first recognizes she is married to a man of God. Until she does, everything you have to say elsewhere will ring hollow."

There was a spirit of breaking. The men began to weep and throw their arms about each other. Many got up from their seats and went to others in the building to ask forgiveness. Long into the night after the meeting was dismissed men were standing in little clusters out under the palm trees, with only the clear night sky above, their faces fanned with the warm tropical breeze, hugging one another, weeping, and making things right among the shepherds.

No one doubted, however, why the Heavens had opened up so fully that night. It started when a quiet shepherd from Mississippi demonstrated submission to the will of God and relinquished his choice place on the program so another man could stand in the spotlight.

Ken Sumrall spoke the third day from his background of a local church. He chuckled about the time in his early ministry when his people were putting great emphasis on "Body Ministry." One Sunday morning, he said, after about nine utterances in tongues and an equal number of prophecies, he received a vision. The vision was of a body without a head.

Sumrall didn't need to elaborate his

point. Every man present who had ever attempted to lead in body ministry, identified, and recognized the growing need for pastoral authority among the sheep. Simpson, in his night message, elaborated on the theme. He pointed out the difference between engery (dunamis) and authority (exousia). "To have authority one must be under authority", he said, indicating that many men minister in the power of energy (noise and activity) but not in the power of authority.

Submission: Again there was a call for men to submit to the Chief Shepherd in order to qualify as undershepherds. It became quiet, so quiet one could almost hear the breathing of the Holy Spirit through the pews, and then the meeting was dismissed.

One shepherd summed it up. "I wanted to prostrate myself before the Lord. I wanted to lie down and turn into tears so all the impurities could be washed out of me."

The many references to the book of Ezekiel brought to mind Ezekiel's vision in Chapter 37 concerning the valley of dry bones. "It doesn't matter what graveyard you come from," Prince had said, "What matters is finding your function in the Body of Christ."

Those attending the conference were strongly impressed that the bones in Ezekiel's vision *are* coming together. There is still much clattering, for dry bones make a lot of noise as they bump against each other. There are still a lot of mistakes. Footbones are joining themselves to elbows, making it easy for some to get their foot in their mouth quite often. Some bodies have the wrong heads. But things are being made right and even though there is still division, and a lot of scrambling around in the valley, by and large the bones are coming together, "until the whole body be fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth . . ."

The body is coming together. All that is needed now is the final breath of God that all may march out of the valley as one army. ♦♦

Those interested in information on how to set up a charismatic shepherd's conference in your area should contact Dick Coleman, Westside Baptist Church, 2508 Westside Drive, Leesburg, Florida 32748.