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Pentecost in St. Peter's

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Pentecost in St. Peter's

Pentecost Sunday, 1975, will live in church history as the day when the charismatic movement in the Catholic Church arrived in St. Peter's with full force. During the pontifical mass presided over by Pope Paul VI on May 18, the sound of tongues and charismatic singing filled the massive nave of the ancient mother church of Roman Catholicism. Of the 25,000 who jammed the basilica, about 10,000 were participants in the third International Conference on the Charismatic Renewal (an estimated 4,000 were from North America and 1,000 from Latin America). In four remarkable days, these Pentecostal Catholics found that their movement had gained warm acceptance at the highest levels of the Roman church.

The conference, which in previous years had met at Notre Dame University, convened in Rome in conjunction with the Holy Year proclaimed by Pope Paul. The theme was the same as that for the Holy Year—"Renewal and Reconciliation." Participants came from over sixty nations representing more than one million Catholic charismatics in several thousand prayer groups.* Several Protestant Pentecostal and charismatic leaders also attended as "official ecumenical observers."

Conference sessions were held on the outskirts of Rome in a large tent over the catacombs of St. Callixtus, a meeting and burial place for early Christian martyrs. Many difficulties had to be overcome. Communist-run labor unions delayed construction of the five tents used for the conference. They also closed the airports and railway stations temporarily, stranding thousands of travelers in France.

The sights and sounds of the conference were similar to those of a backwoods Pentecostal camp meeting. Thousands stood and sat outside the tent because there was no room inside. The testimonies, sermons, and impassioned singing resulted in much rejoicing and

"dancing in the Spirit." The *Daily American*, an English-language newspaper, reported that "bishops, archbishops and cardinals, struggling to keep their hats in place, sang and danced in ecstasy, embracing one another and raising their arms to heaven." Another Roman newspaper characterized the meeting as a "mass illusion."

Although traditional Pentecostal manifestations claimed the headlines, the major work of the conference was devoted to workshops on healing, parish renewal, sacramental renewal, life in the Holy Spirit, and family life. The leading figure in the conference was Cardinal Josef Suenens, primate of Belgium; who welcomed the conferees and celebrated the final charismatic mass. Practical leadership was given by chairman Ralph Martin and the Word of God Community of Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Although no individual "messages" in other tongues were given, many "prophecies" were delivered. These were handed to the leaders in written form and communicated to the conference. Testimonies of the movement's burgeoning growth around the world were greeted with enthusiastic applause.

On Pentecost Sunday, the conference moved to St. Peter's for the mass celebrated by Pope Paul. Although the charismatics were a minority in the throngs who filled the church and the square outside, their presence was apparent as the mass progressed. Spontaneous singing of the charismatic anthem "Alleluia" competed with the pipe organ at the beginning and end of the service. At the consecration of the host, a soft murmur of "singing in the Spirit" (chanting in harmony in glossolalia) filled the cathedral. While the Pope continued the mass, hands were raised in praise, and at one point, a priest fell to his knees and asked to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Several persons laid hands on him and prayed quietly.

At the end of the Pope's sermon on Christian joy, which was delivered in five languages, he exclaimed, "Jesus is Lord," evoking thunderous shouts from

the charismatics. As the Pope was carried out on his throne, the chorus "Alleluia" was sung so lustily that the organist finally joined in and accompanied the singing.

On Sunday afternoon the conference returned to the tent to hear Cardinal John Willebrands, president of the Secretariat for Christian Unity in the Vatican. While praising the charismatics for their joy and use of the Spirit's gifts, he counseled them to share their gifts with all mankind. He further admonished that holiness is the greatest object of Christian living.

The climax of the conference came at St. Peter's on Monday, May 19, in a mass conducted by Cardinal Suenens, who was assisted by twelve bishops and more than 800 priests. This was the first specifically charismatic service ever held in St. Peter's. Suenens delivered his sermon in typical Pentecostal style. The cathedral reverberated with the shouted responses to his "hallelujahs." Such Pentecostal choruses as "Spirit of the Living God" and "Alleluia" were sung with hands upraised. Several times the well-filled basilica resounded with singing in the Spirit.

A striking moment in the service came when two young lay leaders, Ralph Martin and Bruce Young, prophesied from the high altar of the basilica. Their prophecies spoke of "days of darkness and tribulation" for the world and the faithful, but also a "time of evangelism, victory, and triumph" for those in Christ. Several similar prophecies were given over microphones in the choir area by members of the "word-gift unit."

At the close of the mass, Pope Paul arrived to give special greetings to the conferees. As he entered, the congregation broke into cheers and applause. Most of his message was given in French, with short summaries in Spanish and English.

His message to the Catholic charismatics was one of encouragement and exhortation. Using the word "spiritual" instead of "charismatic" to describe the renewal, he called for "fidelity to the authentic doctrines of the faith," for "all the spiritual gifts to be received with gratitude," and for greater emphasis on love, because "the fruit of the Spirit is love." Could not this spiritual renewal be a chance for the church and for the world? he asked, adding, "Why, in this case, do we not take every means to continue it?"

At the end of his prepared text, the Pope broke into impromptu remarks in his native Italian. Reflecting on his encyclical on joy that was proclaimed the day before, he exhorted the charismatics to share their joy with the world. The conference erupted in applause as the

*Catholic sociologist Andrew Greeley estimates that two million Catholics have attended charismatic meetings.

Pope ended with, "Glory to the Lord, hallelujah!" Before he exited, the Pope embraced and kissed Cardinal Suenens and greeted about twenty of the leading charismatics. Many wept openly.

At a closing theological conference and reception attended by more than sixty theologians and observers, attempts were made to explain the Pentecostal experience in terms acceptable to the Catholic Church. Leading professors from several theological faculties in Rome questioned members of a panel of charismatic theologians from Europe and the United States on the validity and evidences of tongues and miracles of healing.

Observers at the conference felt that the words and actions of Pope Paul amounted to tacit support for the charismatic movement. Even though the Pope's remarks did not constitute "official" approval, they agreed, they indicated an acceptance that could spur even greater growth of the movement in the church.

According to Catholic theologian Kilian McDonnell of Minnesota, it was a "triumphant day," while to Balthasar Fisher of Trier University, Germany, the meeting was "historical—of enormous importance." To Protestant Pentecostal spokesman David du Plessis, it was "the greatest charismatic and ecumenical event in ecclesiastical history."

Cardinal Suenens summed up the feelings—and hopes—of many when he declared that by his actions and warm words of approval, "the Pope opened his arms and heart to the charismatic renewal."

VINSON SYNAN

Optimism in Canada

The eleven-year-old Evangelical Fellowship of Canada tried a new format for its annual meeting last month and got its biggest turnout ever.

Plans called for around 800 registrants at what was billed as a "Christian Leadership Seminar" May 13-16 at York University in Toronto. But more than 1,000 registered, and the main meetings had to be held in the university's large ice arena. Ministers and lay leaders from all ten provinces and from nearly every Protestant denomination were there.

Business items, financial reports, election, and house matters were kept low key, being dispatched by the EFC's dedicated core in the dead hours between supper and the evening session.

Attention was focused on the main ring at the arena and on the seminar room where Anglican rector John Stott of London, television minister Stephen Olford, and Fuller Seminary missions specialist Donald McGavran dealt with expository speaking, evangelism, and

X-RATED SERMON

In Richardson, Texas, they're still talking about the worldly ways of First Unitarian Church. On a recent Sunday Pastor William Nichols invited Diana King, a Unitarian from Fort Worth, to take part in the service. She did, and when she was through, Miss King—an exotic dancer at a Dallas nightspot—was wearing only a G-string. The congregation of 200 adults and children watched in fascinated silence as she shed her clothes in time with recorded music.

Nichols said the dance fit "very well into our service" and nobody complained. He also said he didn't think anyone was aroused, "but I don't consider the erotic aspect of the dance wrong. After all, that's the way we were conceived."

Miss King said it was something she wanted to do for a long time, and she would like to conduct classes for women church members.

"I would like to do a sermon using the exotic dance, and members of the congregation could join me if they liked," she commented.

The three delivered daily addresses and conducted workshops.

The choice of the speakers and the theme of the gathering ("Let Canada hear his voice") gave the impression of a mini-version of the recent Lausanne Congress. Some 1,300 people filled the arena each night to hear Olford.

McGavran sounded a ringing, optimistic note in his concluding address. "We live in the sunrise, not the sunset of the Christian enterprise," he contended. Speaking during the days of the Cambodian seizure of the *Mayaguez*, he called on his hearers to shake loose from the "vast pessimism" that, he said, too often characterizes evangelicals.

He had earlier accused some conciliar churches of a "sour grapes" attitude in their rejection of evangelism and church growth. Their dependence upon "biological growth" could be their downfall, he warned, citing Canadian census statistics. "The dynamics of the pill may open the eyes of some major denominations to the necessity of vigorous evangelism," he chided.

Resolutions, sounding a positive note, dealt with issues under debate throughout Canada. At a time when the government is conducting a cross-Canada immigration inquiry to sample public opinion, EFC delegates unequivocally called for immigration laws, policies, and regulations that "reflect the biblical principles of love, justice, liberty, and equality for all, without discrim-

ination by reason of age, color, creed, nationality, race, or sex."

An EFC resolution on overseas development aid called on Canadians to sacrifice to relieve suffering in other nations and asked provincial and federal governments to allocate at least 1 per cent of the gross national product to such international aid. Evangelicals particularly were asked to support *Share, Canada!*—the EFC's own relief agency.

Other resolutions dealt with the status of women (they are divinely entitled to enjoy "the high calling of full personhood") and education (provincial governments were asked to honor "the plurality of different educational convictions by equitably supporting all primary, secondary schools, colleges, and universities" that provide quality education).

Elected EFC president for a two-year term was Charles Bidenstinner, president of Emmanuel Bible College (Missionary Church) in Kitchener, Ontario. He succeeds Toronto Presbyterian minister A. Donald MacLeod.

Since making provision in 1972 for denominational membership, the EFC has received ten denominations*, and two others have membership under active consideration. A large segment of support still comes from para-church agencies, mission boards, and individual members.

LESLIE K. TARR

Chad:

After the Coup

The general who led the coup against Chad president Ngarta Tombalbaye is an evangelical believer, and the man who replaced Tombalbaye has strong Christian ties. Also, the persecution of Christians that marked the last months of Tombalbaye's régime (see November 8, 1974, issue, page 40) has apparently ceased, according to a report by General Secretary Byang H. Kato of the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar (AEAM). Kato visited the central African state last month. (Tombalbaye, who had personally enforced an edict requiring all Christians to undergo an idolatrous tribal initiation rite, was assassinated on April 13.)

General Noel Odingar, the officer who led the coup, told Kato that no one would be forced into any rite against his religious conviction. Although some members of the nine-man ruling Supreme Military Council have undergone the "Yondo" initiation rites required under Tombalbaye's African

*Member denominations are: Brethren in Christ, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Evangelical Church, Evangelical Free, Evangelical Mennonite, Free Methodist, Mennonite Brethren, Missionary Church (Ontario District), Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, and Pentecostal Holiness.