

The State of the Renewal

In 1962, Pope John XXIII issued a call for a “new Pentecost.” The result was the charismatic renewal, which has touched tens of millions of people both within and outside the Roman Catholic Church. The word “charismatic” refers to the charismata, or gifts of the Spirit, and today identifies all who believe in the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

It’s long been obvious that the initial outpouring has ended. Most of the early leaders—David du Plessis, Dennis Bennett, Don Basham, Jamie Buckingham—are dead.

However, the renewal is not dead. It continues to grow and develop, especially overseas. Pentecostal scholar Vinson Synan believes there are 400 million Catholics and Protestants worldwide who have received the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

In 1975, Charisma began covering “the work of the Holy Spirit in the world today.” That’s not an easy task given the enormity of the renewal.

But the task is also difficult because there is such a mix of good and bad. Consider these positive trends:

******There is a new wave of revival among African Americans that has birthed megachurches such as New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Atlanta, pastored by Bishop Eddie Long. Leaders such as Fred Price and T.D. Jakes have emerged who influence a wide spectrum of the church.

****A renewed emphasis on the fivefold ministry, spearheaded by leaders such as Rick Joyner and Peter Wagner, has led to increased understanding of the roles of apostles and prophets.**

*** Kenneth Hagin's faith teachings have spawned ministries such as Rhema Bible Training Center.**

****Healing ministry pioneered by Oral Roberts and others is now gaining wider acceptance among all evangelical Christians.**

****There is less hostility among conservative evangelicals toward charismatics.**

****Nearly a decade ago revivals occurred in Argentina; Toronto; Sunderland, England; Pensacola, Florida; and Smithton, Missouri. Promise Keepers events filled football stadiums with men hungry for God.**

****Teaching and books by men such as Mike Bickle and Dick Eastman re-established a healthy emphasis on prayer and intercession.**

Not all the trends are positive, however. Consider these:

****Racism continues to be a serious problem in the church.**

****Much misunderstanding still exists regarding the function of the prophet. Often the emphasis is more on the title than on the operation of the prophetic gift.**

****Though healing is emphasized in churches, many are not**

healed—including several prominent leaders who died recently.

* The gulf between evangelicals in the charismatic and non-charismatic camps remains wide, partly because evangelicals think some of the extremes they see are representative of the entire charismatic community.

* Sadly, the “revivals” have died down.

During my six-month sabbatical from writing, I had time to reflect on other unfortunate trends I see. One is that although Christian television proclaims the gospel to millions, a spirit of entertainment seems to be taking over. If a person is good on camera, he is promoted, even if his lifestyle does not bear up under scrutiny.

Another is that church growth depends on meeting “market needs” rather than on promoting New Testament Christianity. Most growth, according to George Barna’s surveys, is not new, but transfer growth. And calls for world evangelism seem to have little long-term effect.

One trend that concerns me is the tendency of leaders to tolerate sin in their lives. It seems that nearly every month we get word of one more Christian leader facing a moral failure or one more ministerial couple going through a divorce.

Sin in the church is certainly not new. But recent events indicate there are serious problems that must be addressed.

Thankfully, God is raising up a new generation of leaders who

want holiness. Not everyone has bent his knee to Baal.

It's a new day, and we need a new renewal—a return to the power of

Pentecost—to clean up the church and reach a generation that will go to hell if we don't.

Stephen Strang is the founding editor of Charisma. He invites all of our women readers to attend the Charisma Women's Conference, to be held April 18-20 in Daytona Beach, Florida.