

A New Generation Embraces the Holy Spirit's Fire

At the Empowered 21 Conference last week in Tulsa, thousands of people celebrated the renewal of a movement.

At a time when many Christian conferences are suffering from sluggish attendance, at least 10,000 people jammed into the Mabee Center on the Oral Roberts University (ORU) campus last week to honor the pioneers of the Pentecostal movement and to pass the torch of Holy Spirit renewal on to the younger generation.

The Empowered 21 event, nicknamed E21, was a bold attempt to bring every stream of the charismatic and Pentecostal movements together under one huge roof. When I arrived on Wednesday night for a welcome dinner, I met leaders from the Assemblies of God, Church of God in Christ, Foursquare Church, Pentecostal Holiness, Church of God of Prophecy, Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.) and even the United Pentecostal Church International—plus directors of such varied ministries as Teen Mania, Every Home for Christ, International House of Prayer and Convoy of Hope. We even had Matteo Calisi, an Italian man who gives leadership to thousands of charismatic Catholics.

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The
real purpose of E21, aside from this obvious show of unity,
was to bridge the
generation gap and call younger Christians to take
responsibility for the
future of the charismatic renewal. The question on everyone's
mind during those
three days was a serious one: Is this movement going to
survive? Or will it die
off in a few more years because of religiosity and
irrelevance?

I
came away from E21 with so much hope for the future—mostly
because at least
half of the crowd in Tulsa was young. Many of the kids were
from ORU. But I
kept bumping into young people who traveled a long way to grab
the Holy
Spirit's torch from the older generation. On Friday I had
dinner with a young
guy from Ecuador who is starting a publishing company to
distribute Christian
materials in Spanish. On Saturday I ran into a group of 20-

some things from
Wisconsin who had driven down to Oklahoma with their pastor.
That same day I
met a young Nigerian who has just started pastoring a church
in Seattle.

Everywhere
I went on the ORU campus I kept bumping into younger
Christians who are stoked
and on fire for God. Many of them stayed late into the night
each evening for
extended times of worship with musicians including Kari Jobe
and Desperation
Band.

But
what blessed me most during the three day conference was a
message by Georgia
pastor Jentezen Franklin. He reminded us on Friday night that
when God brought
His Son into the world, He did a two-fold miracle. Not only
did He overshadow a
virgin and cause her to conceive the Messiah, but He also
visited an older,
barren woman named Elizabeth and caused her to conceive John
the Baptist. God
was working with two generations at one time to bring about
His redemptive
purpose.

Franklin
reminded us that in the next move of the Holy Spirit, God will
not only release
fresh new anointing upon young people, but He will also bring
vitality and
growth to older movements that have stayed faithful to His
Word. God loves the
Marys as well as the Elizabeths.

There

are naysayers who insist that heaven has no intention of renewing older denominations. They insist that groups like the Assemblies of God or the Church of God in Christ have become too rigid; that such “old wineskins” can’t be revived. They even teach that people should leave these groups if they want to be on the cutting edge of God’s work.

After

listening to Franklin’s message, and after seeing thousands of young people from these groups streaming to the altars at E21 for a fresh impartation of the Holy Spirit, I have no doubt that God has some surprises up His sleeve. We are headed toward a massive movement of renewal—and we will be surprised by the way some older groups are reborn in the coming season. If God can quicken the dead womb of Elizabeth and bring forth one of the greatest preachers in biblical history, surely He can visit the dead wombs of Pentecostalism and bring forth an army of young spiritual warriors.

We

are helpless to break the power of spiritual barrenness on our own. If this task depends on us, we are doomed—because so many of our churches and denominations are currently paralyzed by tradition, lukewarmness and political division. But in Elizabeth’s case, all it took was a visitation from God. Only

nine months later she was holding a baby who would eventually prepare the way for the Lord.

God

can do the same amazing miracle for us. I encourage you to embrace the call of the E21 conference—and expect a new generation to arise.

J. Lee Grady served as editor of Charisma for 11 years and is now contributing editor. His new book, *The Holy Spirit Is Not for Sale*, is now in stores.