

Charismatic Renewal: The Conference 'Heard Around the World'

Note: This article originally appeared in the September-October 1977 issue of Charisma magazine.

When I was asked to write this article I accepted readily. But, later it hit me.

How does one write about the powerful acts of God in our midst? What words can describe the most historical, the largest and most powerful ecumenical conference ever held—the 1977 Conference on Charismatic Renewal in the Christian Churches?

I have an inkling of what Luke went through in describing that first Pentecost in Acts 2.

“Kansas City was super, great, dynamite and all the other adjectives young people use today,” wrote a person who attended the conference.

These words only begin to describe the fantastic experience in the Holy Spirit that we all had as we gathered 50,000 plus strong in Kansas City, Missouri on July 20-24 to witness that “JESUS IS LORD” and to praise His Holy Name.

One newspaper headline read “City Enjoying Biggest, Cleanest, Happiest Rally.” News articles included stories like this one: “These people are just amazing, they always have a smile on their face,” Sgt. Kirk, a police traffic supervisor, said. One of the strongest pictures he has in his mind is of the woman who got out of a car in front of the auditorium, walked about five steps and, in turning around, saw a facial tissue that

had fallen out of the car. She went back and picked it up. 'Now when's the last time you saw that,' he said."

The Arrowhead Stadium clean-up crew was utterly amazed to find all the trash from some 20,000 meals neatly stacked around the Dempster Dumpsters rather than strewn among the seats. Examples of Christians who witnessed to their Lord by their actions as well as their words go on and on.

The conference was really a "conference of conferences." Eleven denominational conferences were held each morning. The afternoons included workshops led by almost all the charismatic leaders and teachers in the country. The selection of which workshop to attend often became a major decision. How does one decide between teachers like Father Francis MacNutt, Bob Mumford, Derek Prince, Roy Harthern, Larry Christenson or Mike Evans?

Each evening the day was climaxed as we gathered at Arrowhead Stadium to praise Jesus as Lord in one united body. Each night had a different theme given by the Lord to which the major speaker addressed the body.

Wednesday night Dr. Kevin Ranaghan spoke on the "Lordship of Jesus." He said, "Few of us here are bishops or theologians. We are just people of God. The Lord is saying if you want to be together, to be one, then love one another."

It has been more than three years since several charismatic leaders discussed the possibility of holding leadership conferences for the whole church. It seemed a waste of time, talent and tithe for each denomination to hold its own conference.

From that seed the Lord continued to widen our vision until the fullness of His Will came into being with the commitment to hold the Kansas City Conference.

A Planning Committee was formed 18 months ago from leaders of charismatic organizations and was added to as other groups and denominations became part of the conference. Meetings were held every three months as we prayerfully and carefully planned each part of this great task.

The Catholic Renewal Services volunteered their expertise to do the physical planning and handling of the conference. Their obedience to the Lord was the key factor in making the conference a success. Ranaghan was selected as planning committee chairman and the Lord's anointing became obvious. Through his guidance the complexities were made plain and the decisions were made in unity.

The planning committee itself was a miracle of the Lord. Who would have thought that church and organization leaders from such diverse backgrounds and set ways could ever be molded into a unified body?

Just look at the diverseness of the members of the committee: Kevin Ranaghan, Catholic; Larry Christenson, Lutheran; Brick Bradford, Presbyterian; Vinson Synons, Pentecostal Holiness; Bob Hawn, Episcopalian; Ithiel Clemmons, Church of God in Christ; Bob Mumford, nondenominational; Nelson Litwiller, Mennonite; Howard Courtney, Four Square Gospel; Ross Whetstone, Methodist; Carlton Spencer, Elim Fellowship; David Stern, Messianic Jews; Ken Pagard, American Baptist; Roy Lamberth, Southern Baptist.

Other church bodies sent official representatives to the conference. The Assemblies of God was represented by Thomas F. Zimmerman, the General Superintendent, and others.

From this diversity the Lord brought a unity in the Spirit that molded us as true brothers in Christ to the degree that I believe any one of us would give our life for any of the others. This is a miracle.

On Thursday night, Larry Christenson spoke about "wholeness"

and how there are many doors in the house we live in and Jesus comes to knock on any one of them. He went on to say, "We did not choose these gifts (of the Spirit). The Lord has chosen to come knocking at these doors, and we have responded to His knocking. The controversy over these gifts has to be with the Lord Jesus and not with us. The issue is not spiritual gifts; the issue is the Lordship of Christ."

Friday night, Bob Mumford spoke about "holiness" and, as the Holy Spirit swept over the stadium, Bob stopped for what he called a "Holy Ghost Break."

He shouted "JESUS IS LORD!" and a thunderous response initiated a period of exultant praise as the crowd acknowledged that Jesus was Lord. Meanwhile, the electric scoreboard flashed alternately "JESUS IS LORD" and a picture of Jesus Christ with outstretched arms. That "Holy Ghost Break" lasted about 15 minutes.

Saturday night was a night of commissioning us to go into the world with a powerful talk by Rev. James Forbes Jr. of Union Theological Seminary in New York. He said the Lord's message was, "See Me, saith the Lord" and everyone in the stadium lifted their hands and eyes toward heaven as they gave themselves totally to Jesus.

One of the most powerful moments of the conference came when a prophecy on repentance manifested. More than 50,000 people responded immediately to the call to "fall on your knees before the Lord." People knelt on the hard concrete in between the tightly spaced stadium seats, or they prostrated themselves in the aisles and on the staircases. Those in wheelchairs on the stadium floor struggled to get out of them and many came to their knees or were prostrate on the turf.

Tears of repentance fell from the eyes of both men and women as every soul knew that we all were part of the sin of the broken and separated body of Christ. That night I believe we

all vowed to the Lord Jesus that we would work toward coming together as one united body regardless of the cost to each of us.

The conference message as given to us by the Lord Jesus was: "Love one another and come together as My body that the world may truly know that I Am Lord."

This message was manifested in the great outpouring of love among the conferences and reached out to not only Kansas City but the world. It was manifested in the deep realization that Christ's broken, separated Body MUST be brought together in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

The message was "Unity but not uniformity," and everyone realized that we must apply this in our local church situations.

We must begin to come together regardless of denomination, that the world can see the One Body of Christ in each place. Only then will the world notice the church. Only then will God pour His power fully through that body.

Only then will the church be obedient to her Lord. Only then will we bring a new hope, a new message and a full salvation to the world. Only then, when we have put aside our man-made laws, doctrines and prejudices and have begun to witness as one united Christian body will we truly be able to proclaim to the world that "Jesus Is Lord."

Only in our unity will the world hear and repent and also come to know Him and His love.

We have been given our marching orders and the time for the battle is not far away. Our individual and collective obedience to the call for unity in the body of Christ is the key to the fulfilling of God's mission for His church in the world.

The words of a song sum up what I believe our Lord Jesus wants in His Church: "One body, One Spirit, One faith, One Lord. One people, One nation praising the Lord."