



**The Pentecostal-
Charismatic Movements:**

**THE HISTORY
& THE ERROR**

DAVID W. CLOUD

The Pentecostal-Charismatic Movements:

The History and the Error

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Second edition August 22, 2008

Third edition November 2009

Fourth edition February 2011

Fifth edition November 2014

Sixth edition August 2019

ISBN 1-58318-099-0



Published by Way of Life Literature
P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061
866-295-4143 (toll free) • fbns@wayoflife.org
<http://www.wayoflife.org>

Canada: Bethel Baptist Church,
4212 Campbell St. N., London, Ont. N6P 1A6
519-652-2619

Printed in Canada by
Bethel Baptist Print Ministry

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*The Pentecostal-Charismatic Movements:
The History and the Error*

Dimitri Clozza

Sample

“Experience prevails over doctrine and they all go with the flow. Mystic exaltation is appreciated. Serious and in-depth study of the Word of God is supplanted by stories, experiences, testimonies, visions and prophecies. It is the ideal ground for the abdication of reason. Each one feels under the obligation to give testimony to what he has already received, even if he has not received it, or is never going to receive it” (Fernand Legrand, *All about Speaking in Tongues*, 2001).

“The Christian faith is unchangeable, which is not to say that men and women of every generation do not need to find it, experience it, and live it; but it does mean that every new doctrine that arises, even though its legitimacy may be plausibly asserted, is a false doctrine. All claims to convey some additional revelation to that which has been given by God in this body of truth are false claims and must be rejected” (George Lawlor in Jude 3)

The carnal enthusiasm for the miraculous is the atmosphere that has produced every variety of strange and unscriptural thing. It appeared in May 1993 at Carpenter’s Home Church in Lakeland, Florida, where Pentecostal evangelist Rodney Howard-Browne called himself “the Holy Ghost Bartender” and people laughed hysterically and staggered around like drunks. It appeared in June 1993 at the Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola, Florida, where the pastor lay in a drunken stupor on the church platform for four hours and was so “drunk in the spirit” at other times that he had to be carried out of the church in a wheelbarrow and when he tried to operate his automobile he ran into things. It appeared again in 1994 at the Airport Church in Toronto, Ontario, where people not only laughed and got drunk but also barked like dogs and roared like lions.

New Illustrated Edition 2019

The Pentecostal-Charismatic Movements book, which has been in publication since 2006, has been enlarged and rewritten for 2019 and produced for use as a training course.

It now includes a series of eight PowerPoints that cover every part of the material. There are about 1,400 slides. There are many photos taken firsthand at historic locations (such as John Dowie's Zion City and Frank Sandford's Shiloh community), Pentecostal-Charismatic conferences attended with media credentials (such as New Orleans '87 and Indianapolis '90), and churches we have visited for research purposes. Also included are video clips of Pentecostal-Charismatic experiences such as spirit slaying, holy laughter, and spirit drunkenness.

The PowerPoint presentations are as follows:

- #1 Early History
- #2 Healing Pioneers
- #3 New Order and Word Faith
- #4 Charismatic Movement
- #5 Third Wave
- #6 Women Preachers
- #7 Pentecostal Prophets
- #8 CCM and Conclusion

Note on obtaining the Powerpoints

A Powerpoint download is made available from the cart at the time of purchase. An email with download information is also sent to the email address used in the cart. If, for any reason, you do not receive links, or if you cannot download the Powerpoints, contact support@wayoflife.org.

Introduction

The Pentecostal-Charismatic movements are founded on a belief in the continuation of apostolic sign gifts.

The term “Pentecostal” dates to the turn of the twentieth century and describes a desire to recapture the miraculous experience of Pentecost. Many denominations have grown out of the Pentecostal movement, including Assemblies of God, the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, the Church of God in Christ, the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), the Pentecostal Church of God, the United Pentecostal Church, and the Church of God of Prophecy.

The “charismatic” movement is of more recent origin and refers to the ecumenical tongues speaking phenomenon that has spread through non-Pentecostal Baptist and Protestant denominations as well as the Roman Catholic Church since the 1960s.

While there used to be significant differences between old-line Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement, the differences are rapidly blurring. The terms are often used synonymously today. Even the *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* notes this.

“The terms Pentecostal and charismatic are often used interchangeably. Indeed, they do have many features in common, and even for the expert it is frequently difficult to draw a dividing line. ... [by the 1990s] many Pentecostals recognized that the Holy Spirit was accomplishing a new work and sensed an affinity with it. The charismatic renewal brought pressure on the Pentecostals to broaden their identification within the universal church to groups previously considered apostate” (*International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, revised and expanded, 2002, pp. xxi, xxii).

Though there are some notable exceptions, the mainstream, old-line Pentecostal denominations have by and large imbibed the worldly, ecumenical spirit of the charismatic movement.

Churches cannot ignore the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement.

It cannot be ignored, first of all, because of its claims to operate in all spiritual gifts, signs and wonders, and kingdom authority, and to have a superior level of sanctification.

It also cannot be ignored because of its amazing influence. It is the fastest growing segment of Christianity. According to the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (2000 edition) more than 523 million people are Pentecostals or Charismatics. That might be an exaggeration, but there can be no doubt that the number is very large. The ten largest churches in the world are Pentecostal or Charismatic. The largest is Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea, founded by David Yonggi Cho.

The charismatic philosophy has permeated “evangelicalism.” By 1992, some 80% of the National Association of Evangelicals was charismatic. By 1999, it could be said of the Evangelical Alliance in England that Pentecostals were found at every level of leadership and “no group on the council is opposed to the Pentecostal position” (*Renewal*, March 1999).

The charismatic movement dominates the Christian media. It permeates such influential organizations as the Christian Booksellers of America and the Christian Broadcasting Association, and controls much of the Christian television and radio programming. Bookstores are filled with Pentecostal-Charismatic heresies. Trinity Broadcasting Network has spread these heresies throughout the world.

Some of the largest mission groups are Pentecostal or charismatic, and most of the rest are at least sympathetic to charismaticism.

The Pentecostal-Charismatic movements dominate the field of Contemporary Christian Music. We have documented this extensively in *The Directory of Contemporary Worship Musicians*, which is available for free viewing and downloading at www.wayoflife.org. Consider, for example, Stuart Townend, who works closely with Keith Getty. Townend supports the “extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit,” referring to the demonic/fleshly charismatic mysticism such as meaningless gibberish “tongues,” spirit slaying, holy laughter, and holy shaking. Townend believes that contemporary worshipers can hear a “full blown ‘thus saith the Lord’ prophecy” during worship times (Townend, “Preparing to Worship,” Oct. 1, 2012, stuarttownend.co.uk).

The wide acceptance of Contemporary Worship Music has brought charismatic-style worship into every type of church, including Baptist and staunch Reformed Calvinist such as Bethlehem Baptist Church of Minneapolis, Minnesota, where John Piper was the senior pastor until his retirement in 2013.

The Pentecostal-Charismatic movement is the strongest element of the ecumenical movement at a practical level and is therefore building the “one world church.”

My Experience with Pentecostalism

I grew up in Southern Baptist churches but rejected the Lord in my youth and went very far away from the God of the Bible. I started drinking and getting into trouble in junior high school, and this set the course of my life for the next decade. When I was in high school I stopped attending church, and after I graduated in 1967, I left home and rented a little apartment with some of my reprobate friends. After a year at Jones Business College in Jacksonville, Florida, I was drafted into the Army.



David Cloud c. 1972

While stationed at the U.S. Army Record Center in St. Louis, I was assigned as a general's driver, in spite of the fact that the state of Florida had taken away my license because of my madness behind the wheel. I had a brand new 1968 Chevy Nova that we souped up for racing, and I got many speeding tickets. One time I was clocked by the highway patrol going 130+ miles per hour on Interstate 4 between Lakeland and Tampa. That was before I went into the Army. I didn't go that fast

with the general, of course, but I definitely zipped him around St. Louis in a speedy fashion. The general liked me and didn't criticize my driving, but one day a major shouted, "Slow down, young man! Don't you know that the general has back problems!" When my name came down on a levy for Vietnam, the general got me a job as the company clerk for a military police unit at Tan Son Nhut Airbase outside of Saigon. We were based at the MACV headquarters R&R center and had an Olympic-size swimming pool, gymnasium

and weight rooms, tennis and racquetball courts, a photographic developing room, music recording rooms, large PX, clubs, and more. (It was hard duty but someone had to do it.) It was there that I began abusing drugs.

By the time I was discharged from the Army after a year and a half in Vietnam I was a full-fledged “pot head.” I moved into a hippy apartment in Hollywood, Florida, with some buddies. At first I got a job working in the children’s unit of a psychiatric hospital, and I enjoyed the work but my heavy drug usage made it impossible to maintain the schedule. We picked psilocybin mushrooms and made our own nasty psychedelic brew that would keep me high for days on end. It was devastating psychologically.

After I quit that job I made a living selling coconuts and marijuana. We would pick the coconuts off of golf courses and sell them for ten cents each to nurseries. We bought marijuana in bulk in South Florida and sold it in small packets in our hometown two hundred miles to the north.

After a buddy and I were arrested and charged with public drunkenness and possession of illegal substances, we decided to travel to South America. On bicycles. Three of us bought fancy bicycles and far too much equipment and headed out one fine Florida morning. The problem was that we were totally out of condition for such a vigorous journey and had made no physical preparations whatsoever. By the time we had cycled about 20 miles we decided there had to be a better way to see the world. We put the bicycles on a Greyhound bus and traveled to New Orleans where we sold them and most of our equipment. After working a few day jobs to increase our finances (one was washing sticky syrup off of barges with a high powered water hose) we hitchhiked out to California. We split up in the southern part of the state, and I traveled alone as far as Lake Tahoe. I worked odd day jobs along the way, stayed in some rescue missions, and spent some nights in the pop-up tent I kept in my backpack.

As I was hitchhiking back to Florida, I was picked up by some young people from India who were in America to proselytize people into Hinduism. I was soon enamored with the stories they told me about miracles performed by gurus in the Himalayas. They also recounted experiences pertaining to reincarnation and taught me a technique whereby I could allegedly see my past lives. After devouring the books they gave me (*The Autobiography of a Yogi* and *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*) I joined the Self-Realization Fellowship Society, which was founded by Paramahansa Yogananda. I was so excited about my new spiritual path that I traveled back to California to visit the Self-Realization headquarters in Los Angeles.

When I stopped in Panama City in the Florida panhandle, I found a box of Gideon Bibles on a sidewalk. I looked around, but there weren't any stores or houses nearby. I had not seen a Bible for a long time, so I picked up a copy, went down to a little dock on the Gulf of Mexico, sat down and flipped it open. My eyes fell on the words of Christ's sermon in Mark 9:43-48:

"And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

I thought to myself, "I don't believe God would cast people into hell forever. What about the people who have never heard of Jesus?" I left the Bible behind and continued my

Hindu pilgrimage to the Self-Realization headquarters, but I was praying earnestly that God would show me the truth.

I stopped in Las Vegas and won \$60 or \$70 in a slot machine. "Now, God is surely blessing me!" I thought. I had been praying for the money to buy a guitar and I thought this was an answer to prayer. I wanted to sing songs like "My Sweet Lord" by George Harrison.

After returning to Florida I moved back to the Hollywood area and got a job driving a tow motor in a lumberyard. As was my custom, I quit after a couple of weeks with the lure of the road beckoning me.

As I left the Hollywood area in my car, heading north, I passed a man who was riding a bicycle and appeared to be on a long journey. I decided to turn my car around and find out where he was going. I pulled alongside of him and he told me he was headed to Mexico. Since I had wanted to bicycle through Mexico myself a few months earlier, I was interested. I offered to take him as far as my hometown in central Florida and he agreed. We put his bicycle into the trunk of the car and headed out. I had some of my Hindu materials with me and thought perhaps that I could proselytize him, though it didn't work out quite that way!

I asked if he believed in God, and he replied that he did and pulled out a pocket Bible. I began to explain my religious views, and he replied with Scripture.

I said, "I believe in reincarnation; what about you?"

He replied, "In Hebrews 9:27 the Bible says, 'And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.' Since the Bible says we die one time and then the judgment, I don't believe in reincarnation."

I said, "I believe a man should follow his heart."

He replied, "The Bible says in Jeremiah 17:9, 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?' We cannot trust in our own hearts."

I said, "I believe that as long as a man is sincere in his beliefs God will accept him."

He replied, "Proverbs 14:12 says, 'There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.' According to the Bible, a man can be sincerely wrong and be judged of God."

I said, "If a man can't trust his own heart and his own sincerity, how is it possible to know the truth?"

He replied, "Jesus Christ said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.' Also God has given us His revelation in the Bible."

I was so interested in the conversation and so impressed with the man's knowledge of the Bible that I drove right past my intended destination in central Florida. I asked the man, whose name was Ron Walker, if I could travel to Mexico with him, and he said I would be welcome. We stopped somewhere in Alabama along the Gulf Coast at a Christian bookstore and he bought me a large print King James Bible and told me that I would find the truth in this Book. He also told me that I had to be very careful about Christian books because many of them contain error. He said that I must test everything by the Bible. He also bought me a *Strong's Concordance*, which was the first Bible study tool that I ever owned.

He told me that some years earlier he had a wife and a baby boy, but when God called him to preach, his wife gave him an ultimatum. She said that if he did not give up preaching she would leave him and take the baby. Though he begged her to stay, she refused to listen. He determined that he would not remarry but that he would spend the rest of his life traveling and preaching the gospel. He had already made one or more trips to Mexico. He told me some stories about his travels and about how God had answered his prayers.

That night we found a place near the highway and got out our sleeping bags. After Ron was asleep, I lay under the stars

and thought about the things we had discussed that day. I decided that the Bible way was too dogmatic and narrow and that I should go off and find the truth for myself. I thought about getting up and driving away, but I fell asleep before I could act on the impulse.

The next day as we were driving along I decided to throw out a “fleece.” It was something I remembered from the story of Gideon that I had heard in Sunday School. I told God that I was confused and that I wanted to know the truth. I could see that the road curved in the distance and there were telephone poles along the highway. I said, “God, if the Bible is the truth I want there to be a bird on the second pole after the curve, but if the Bible is not true I want there to be no bird on the pole.”

There was no bird.

That day I got upset with Ron and said “All you do is quote the Bible. Don't you have any thoughts of your own? Why don't you throw that Bible out the window and we can have a good conversation?”

He replied something like this: “My thoughts aren't important. I know that the Bible is the Word of God and it holds the answers.”

When we reached the Mexican border at Brownsville, Texas, the agents gave me a difficult time because I had a drug arrest record. I got very angry when they demanded that I be strip-searched. By then I was convinced that I should get away from the Christian man and his Bible and go off and find the truth for myself, so after we had driven only a few miles into Mexico I told Ron that I was going back to Florida. When he unexpectedly asked me if he could continue traveling with me for a while, I couldn't say no. I told him that we would travel together back to Daytona Beach and split up there. All of this was God's hand of mercy upon a very foolish young man and was an answer to the prayers of my parents and my godly maternal grandmother. Unknown to me at the

time, it was also an answer to my own misguided but earnest prayers.

When we got to Daytona Beach we rented a motel room and got cleaned up. We were sitting on our individual beds that night and Ron started talking again about Jesus Christ and the truth. Prior to that I had opposed everything he said, but that night God mercifully turned on the light in my darkened heart. I repented of my wicked ways and rebellion and cast myself upon God's grace. Repentance means to turn around and go the other way, and that is what I did. In one brief instant I was changed from a Bible mocker to a Bible believer, and I can sincerely say that I have never looked back! When I think of the days before I came to Christ, I think of them only with regret as a time of utter folly; I have never wanted to go back there.

After I cried out to the Lord to have mercy upon me that night, Ron prayed that I would speak in tongues. That confused me. Though I didn't speak in tongues, I was eager to have everything God wanted me to have in my new Christian life.

The next morning we split up. After we had breakfast in a little café, Ron got on his bicycle and headed out. He said he was going on to Mexico, and I have never heard from him since. He graciously gave me some money to help me begin my Christian life and to tide me over until I could get a job.

I headed west down Interstate 4 to Lakeland to tell my parents what had happened and to apologize to my dad for my rebellion against him. The last time I saw him a few weeks earlier he had gotten down on his knees and begged me to get right with the Lord and to settle down and not to go back on the highway. Tears were streaming from his eyes, but at the time I hardened my heart and drove away.

Now things were completely different. I remember that Mom and Dad were sitting at the kitchen table when I entered the house. I told them what had happened and

apologized to Dad for my rebellion. They were thrilled at my conversion.

I wanted to settle down and get grounded in the Bible. I don't remember a lot about what Ron taught me, but I do remember two promises that he gave me from Scripture.

"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7:17).

"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

These are wonderful promises about knowing the truth, and the requirement is two-fold. We must be willing to do God's will as He reveals it to us, and we must continue in God's Word.

I was confused about where to go, to church and what doctrine to follow, but I determined to hold fast to these promises and to trust the Lord to guide me.

I began to study the Bible for hours a day. I had the *Strong's Concordance* that Ron gave me, and I filled up notebook after notebook with the things I was learning. I did my own topical studies, copying out key verses from the Bible and arranging them topically in my notebooks. I developed an index card system and kept detailed notes from the books that I read. By the time I graduated from Bible School in 1977, I had thousands of index cards organized alphabetically.

The life of sin and the drug abuse in particular left deep scars, and though healing began the night I turned to Christ and has continued through the years, it was neither instantaneous nor entire. I believe the psychedelic drugs especially, the psilocybin and the LSD and even the marijuana, left deep psychological wounds. Though God is very merciful and forgives sin and gives eternal life to those

who repent and believe in Christ, He does not necessarily remove sin's consequences in this present life, and I will bear the scars of that foolish period in my life until I die.

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Galatians 6:7-8).

I also want to point out that drug usage is definitely a slippery slope. When I graduated from high school, I had nothing to do with drugs and would not have dreamed of using something like LSD. The path to drugs started by not taking Christ seriously and pursuing Him and His will when I heard Him preached in my childhood church, then running with the wrong crowd, then using marijuana to fit in that crowd. That broke down my resistance and changed my thinking and I gradually moved to other types of drugs. It did not happen overnight and it is not something I planned to do.

Soon after I came to Christ, I got a job working as an offset printer for the Florida Citrus Commission and stayed there until I went off to Bible school about a year later.

I wanted to go to church but I didn't know where to go at first. I attended some Pentecostal meetings and a Nicky Cruz crusade and some other types of churches and meetings. I listened to preachers on the radio, including Garner Ted Armstrong of the Worldwide Church of God. I found a book in the public library that both fascinated and confused me. It was *Planet in Rebellion* by George Vandeman. He taught soul sleep, annihilation of the unsaved, and the necessity of Sabbath worship. Though the book nowhere identified the author's affiliation, I found out later that he was Seventh-day Adventist.

I did not have peace about joining any of the churches I visited during those first few weeks. Then the married sister of one of my unsaved high school friends invited me to attend

their church. It was in Bartow, Florida, and it was only a couple of years old, but the Lord was blessing and lives were being changed. A couple of families had left the First Baptist Church because of compromise and worldliness and had started the Bartow Bible Baptist Church. There were several other young people my age in the church in their early twenties, and I loved the expository Bible teaching and the spiritual zeal that I saw there.

About nine months later, I went off to Bible School. I got married during my third year, and after graduation my wife and I went to the mission field in South Asia.

At this point, some will probably wonder about Ron Walker. If he knew the Bible so well and if he advised me to follow the Bible alone as my authority, why did he hold to a different doctrine? I can't answer that and I don't have to answer it. I only have to answer for myself. I am instructed, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). I have the responsibility to study diligently that I might rightly interpret the Scriptures. I am told that if I continue in God's Word and am willing to do His will, I can know the truth (John 7:17; 8:31-32).

I know that I have done this by God's grace and if the result is that my doctrinal convictions are different from that of another man, I am not answerable for that. I don't know about another man's study habits or the sincerity of his heart or to what extent he has been obedient to God or to what extent he has questioned the doctrine that he has been taught or to what extent he looks to God for wisdom rather than to man. Furthermore, Ron was a young man in 1973 and he might not be a Pentecostal today. He might have joined the many others who have left the movement.

In the more than three decades since I first looked at Pentecostal-Charismatic doctrine, I have re-examined it at many levels. I have built a large library on this subject. I have

subscribed to publications such as *Charisma* magazine. I have interviewed Pentecostals and charismatics and attended their churches in many parts of the world including the USA, Canada, Slovakia, India, Thailand, England, Nepal, Korea, South Korea, Australia, and Singapore. I have attended large charismatic conferences with press credentials, including New Orleans '87, Indianapolis '90, and St. Louis 2000. I have attended many prominent charismatic churches, including Vineyard Anaheim when John Wimber was pastor, Yoiddo First Baptist of Seoul, City Church in Singapore, and IHOP of Kansas City.

I have also studied the contemporary music produced by charismatics in great detail.

As far as I know I have approached these studies with an open mind in the sense of having a commitment only to the truth and not to anyone's tradition. I am a member of an independent Baptist church but fundamental Baptist doctrine and practice is not my authority; the Bible is my sole authority for faith and practice.

Each fresh evaluation of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement has brought an increased conviction that it is unscriptural and dangerous.

In this book I document the reasons for saying this.

Refusing to Ask Hard Questions and to Test Everything by Scripture

One thing I have found is that Pentecostals and charismatics typically do not ask hard doctrinal questions nor do they carefully test their experiences with Scripture nor do they want others to do so.

Every time I have attempted to do this in a Pentecostal-Charismatic context, I have been criticized. At a press conference at New Orleans '87, when I asked the leaders why the "tongues" spoken during the sessions sounded like

gibberish, I was attacked not only by the conference leaders but by members of the Pentecostal-Charismatic press that were in attendance. Such questions are simply out of bounds.

At St. Louis 2000, I walked around the area where various organizations had set up display booths to advertise their ministries and products. Targeting the Roman Catholics who were present, I asked one simple question: "When were you born again?" These were supposed to be the "evangelical" Roman Catholics that had been "renewed" by the Spirit, but not one person gave a biblical answer. Some replied that they were born again when they were baptized; others replied that they were born again when they had some sort of charismatic experience. Some did not know what I was talking about. One man replied, "That is not a Catholic term, is it?" The general feeling in such forums is that you should not be asking such questions because it is divisive!

During one of the evening sessions at New Orleans '87, a salvation invitation was given and it appeared that roughly half of the crowd stood to indicate that a large percentage of the attendees did not know for sure that they were saved. The same people had been speaking in tongues and dancing in the aisles and saying, "Praise you, Jesus; praise you, Jesus; praise you, Jesus" for the two or three previous days. The speakers had referred to them repeatedly as "the people of God," and the prophecies had referred to them as "my people."

The next day during the press conference, Dennis Costella of *Foundation* magazine asked the conference leaders (Pentecostal Vinson Synan and Roman Catholic David Sklorenko) some questions about this important matter. When asked if the large response to a gospel invitation the previous night surprised them, Synan replied, "Probably the majority who were standing were Catholics, who would see this as a kind of a renewal of their baptismal vows, or receiving Jesus tonight like they do every Sunday." Of course,

that only raises a slew of other important biblical questions. Costella pursued the question further by asking:

“Well then, wouldn’t it seem that something as major as the definition of the gospel itself and what effects or what brings about the conversion of a lost soul to where they are saved, if there is that much difference and misunderstanding among Catholics and Protestants at this congress, wouldn’t it be crucial to, not just have a workshop but a plenary session to speak definitively as to what the gospel message is so that there isn’t this confusion?”



The author with Dennis Costella, New Orleans '87

To this wise and reasonable question, Vinson Synan eventually replied: “WELL, WE DON’T HAVE TIME TO DO THAT.”

Press conferences at Pentecostal and charismatic meetings are definitely not for the purpose of examining everything by the Word of God!

I discovered the same thing in the early days of our missionary work. At an all-day seminar for pastors that I taught in South Asia in about 1980, I learned that one of the pastors had three wives. He had children by all three women, and each little family group lived on a separate piece of

property. Though he spent most of the time with the latest and youngest of the three, he also visited the others from time to time. I was teaching from the book of Titus that day, using it as an outline of how to organize New Testament churches. My goal was to help strengthen the existing churches in that country. I decided to bring up the issue of polygamy before the group of men and see what they would say. We had already studied God's standards for pastors in Titus 1, one of which is that he must be "the husband of one wife." It doesn't take a theologian to know that one and three are different!

When I mentioned this case, the polygamist in question stood up and explained that God had called him to preach through a vision in which he had seen "the sheep scattered across the mountains." He was charismatic. When I pointed out the simple fact that he did not meet God's standards for a pastor and should therefore resign and perhaps preach the gospel in some non-pastoral capacity, he felt at first that I was right and was on the verge of doing this. The rest of the men, though, supported his pastorate unequivocally and stayed up all that night encouraging him to continue, giving more credence to a "vision" than to the Bible itself. And because I was questioning the doctrine and practice of these men, I was marked as a troublemaker.

A little later a charismatic "prophet" came to Nepal from England and conducted a meeting in the largest church in the capital city. When I met with the "prophet" to challenge him about some of his doctrine, he charged me with not being "a part of the body of Christ" because I had not been "baptized in the Holy Spirit" and spoken in tongues. After I told him my testimony of salvation he revised his charge and said that while it appeared that I was a part of the body of Christ after all, it was obvious that I was not a part of the "functional body of Christ." He said I needed a second experience.

I questioned him in some detail about what this "second experience" had done for his Christian life. I asked about his

marital life and learned that it was not perfect. I asked if he had complete victory or if he still had problems with sin in his life, and he acknowledged that he was not sinless. He admitted that he got frustrated and angry at times when he was traveling. Finally I replied, "You don't have anything I don't have; you are simply making false promises to the people."

At the evening service, he taught the congregation that he had seen a vision of how the angels were "filled with the Spirit" by dancing and humming and that we should imitate this practice. Many of the preachers jumped right into the act and danced around the building while humming away like madmen.

But woe unto that man who questions such foolishness!

After these and similar experiences I was marked as a dangerous man. A group of Christian leaders that included a heavy representation of Pentecostals and charismatics brought charges against me, claiming that I was "dividing the body of Christ in Nepal" by my "unprecedented experiment." Of course, rebuke of and separation from error is not unprecedented. It was practiced by the apostles and by Bible-believing people through the centuries, but these men had a very limited understanding of such things, to say the least. They demanded that I stop all my work and leave the country, which I refused to do, and the Lord greatly blessed our ministry in the years after that.

The simple biblical questions that I was asking and that I was encouraging the brethren in these churches to ask were considered troublesome and divisive. If you would have asked them if they believed the Bible was the sole authority for the Christian life and ministry, they would have said yes, but in practice it was no such thing.

Any movement that does not encourage people to open the Scripture and to analyze its doctrine and practice carefully and prayerfully is dangerous.