

The Committee on the Holy Spirit and Frontier Missions: "An Ongoing Dialogue and a Coming Event"

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The 1977 convention of charismatic believers in Kansas City has been regarded by some as the high-water mark of the renewal movement. Some who attended that meeting, however, were disappointed by the almost total absence of any mention of the missionary task of the church. To those from a traditional Pentecostal background, this was an especially glaring omission, since Pentecostal churches have often maintained a tradition of strong involvement in foreign missions.

While Kansas City 1977 served as a rallying point for the various denominational renewal groups, it failed to produce any clarifying sense of purpose for the movement. Further, it confirmed the conviction of many, both within and without the movement, that it was suffering from a "Dead Sea" syndrome. Without a larger purpose than merely being a "blessing movement", the renewal could not survive. Kansas City 1977 would indeed have been a high-water mark, and the years since would have been marked by a slow but sure decline.

That this tragedy has been averted is evidenced by a new sense of purpose which seems to be emerging in many quarters. A growing number within the renewed and renewing churches are discovering a vital reason for renewal. It is to fulfill the Father's purpose in sending the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost—the proclamation of the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth, to panta ta ethne, and indeed to every creature.

Studies in church growth worldwide reveal that not only are more churches becoming renewed, but that these renewed churches are growing more rapidly than any other segment of the Body of Christ. Without a doubt, the largest "pool" of potential resources (both of personnel and finances) for world evangelization is within the renewal movement. Furthermore, because of their emphasis upon giftedness and spiritual power, the renewed and renewing churches hold the spiritual potential for mighty breakthroughs in all areas of missionary outreach.

BEGINNINGS OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE HOLY SPIRIT AND FRONTIER MISSIONS

In response to these perceptions, several individuals began meeting at the U.S. Center for World Mission early in this decade to consider how best to mobilize the resources of the charismatic and Pentecostal fellowships toward reaching those 17,000 people groups in which the church of the Lord Jesus Christ has not yet been established.

One of this group's first actions was to bring together Dr. David Du Plessis and Rev. Harald Bredesen, representing the charismatic renewal, with Dr. Ralph Winter of the U.S. Center for World Mission. In that meeting, the participants hoped to begin the fusing of the charismatic renewal and the frontier missions movement. They were not disappointed.

Dr. Du Plessis shared how God had spoken to him concerning the work of the Spirit in these days. Du Plessis observed that the Spirit has so mightily worked in penetration of churches that now virtually every segment of the worldwide Christian community has experienced renewal. Hence

the Spirit no longer will work primarily in penetration of churches, but in penetration of nations, Du Plessis concluded.

Sensing God's direction in these encounters, the participants in this discussion issued a call for a more general meeting with larger participation. This was held on March 16, 1983 at the Sheraton-Universal Hotel in Universal City, California, a meeting which marked the birth of the Committee on the Holy Spirit and Frontier Missions (CHSFM). Dr. Du Plessis was asked to serve as Honorary Chairman, and this writer was appointed Chairman of the Working Committee and Executive Secretary of the CHSFM.

This committee, in turn, has asked for and gained the endorsement and support of a larger group representing a wide spectrum of Christian leadership. These leaders have been asked to endorse a call (see below) for a World Consultation on the Holy Spirit and Frontier Missions and to provide spiritual covering for the Working Committee. While the initial planning and activity of the Committee centered upon the call for a consultation, the work has been viewed from the start as both "An Ongoing Dialogue and a Coming Event."

PURPOSES AND PRIORITIES OF THE COMMITTEE

As talks have continued, it has become obvious that the Holy Spirit has directed the Committee to the priority of establishing strong lines of communication between the Charismatic-Pentecostal community and the frontier missions movement. While the Consultation remains the prime objective, a larger and more urgent task is right at hand, that of becoming a channel for the exchange of information and ideas concerning frontier missions to the church at large, and to the Full Gospel community in particular.

The primary purpose of the Committee on the Holy Spirit and Frontier Missions is "to promote an understanding of frontier missions among the leadership of the Body of Christ; to encourage support for frontier missions as a priority of the Body of Christ; and to provide a means of communication and dialogue between those whose primary concern is frontier missions and the leadership of the church."

It is the intent of the Committee to call the church to the fulfillment of Christ's stated purpose in the Pentecostal effusion, that is, the thrusting forth of the infant church from its point of origin to "the uttermost parts of the earth." The "uttermost parts" are not to be perceived as simply geographical, but are to be understood in the context of our Lord's other utterances to disciple "all nations" (ethne), indeed to communicate the gospel "to every creature." The Committee thus seeks to bring together those whose special area of concern is the renewal and nourishing of the Body with those whose special area of concern is the unreached, to determine how (not if) the Holy Spirit would have us unite to reach these 17,000 unreached people groups.

PLANS FOR A WORLD CONSULTATION

It is for this reason that the proposal has been made for a World Consultation on the Holy Spirit and Frontier Missions. Recognizing the propensity for consultations and conferences to "generate more heat than light", this is a call that "we", representing the Body of Christ, should come together to "hear what the Spirit saith to the churches" today. It is a call both from and to the leadership of the church.

It is a call to the leadership to hear what the Spirit is saying through those (often unheard) spokespersons who have an ear for His voice concerning the fulfillment of the missionary mandate. From the leadership, it is a call to those missionary spokespersons to be sensitive to the spiritual dynamic of His work in the world today. As the perceived leadership of the Body of Christ responds to the Spirit's promptings, the missionary mandate will take on new importance on every level of church life: it will issue in a call to every pastor, teacher and elder in the Body of Christ to respond to the Word of the Lord for this day.

It is the intent of the originators of this call that the participants meet in an atmosphere of prayer and submission to the will of God and to one another. It is hoped that such a consultation would not merely generate papers and reports (as important as these may be), but will result in a continuing worldwide movement toward the final frontiers of the gospel.

The Call for a World Consultation on the Holy Spirit and Frontier Missions was drawn up by this writer, then amended and approved by the members of the Committee. It is the basic document which all who lend endorsement to the work of the Committee sign. The Call is as follows:

Acknowledging that God's redemptive purpose for all peoples is clearly revealed throughout Scripture;

And acknowledging the primacy of the command of the Lord Jesus Christ to be His witnesses even unto the uttermost parts of the earth;

And acknowledging that this command to be witnesses extends to all nations (ethne) and to every creature;

And acknowledging that the highest priority ought to be given to extending this witness to those 16,750 people groups (nations, ethne) yet unreached;

And further, as those who have a particular regard for the present-day workings of the Holy Spirit, acknowledging that direct relationship which exists between the Promise of the Father, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and the command of our Lord to be His witnesses even unto the uttermost parts of the earth,

We do hereby propose that the leadership of the Church be convened in a Consultation on the Holy Spirit and Frontier Missions for the purpose of calling and equipping the church to utilize more effectively the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit in planting the church of the Lord Jesus Christ within the remaining unreached people groups—the final frontiers.

A date in the fall of 1987 has been proposed for this major consultation. Preparatory to such a meeting, the Committee has set up task forces on Mobilization, Strategy and Theology. These groups will research their respective areas and prepare statements in preparation for the Consultation.

The members of the Committee realize that many Christians shy away from the terms "Pentecostal" and "charismatic." While this article and other CHSFM documents utilize these terms, they are not meant in any sense to be exclusive. The title "Consultation on the Holy Spirit and Frontier Missions" has been deliberately chosen rather than "Charismatic Consultation" or some similar term. It is the intent of the Committee that participation include all those, whether they fit within those terms or not, who have a particular regard for the present-day activity and ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is of special concern that there be representation from all segments of the Body of Christ around the world.

This, of course, implies active participation by representatives of young churches throughout the non-Western world. It is the desire of the Committee that there be multi-national participation in all phases of the Consultation. To this time, such participation has been limited by budgetary considerations, but this is a prime objective for the immediate future.

While anticipating the broadest possible participation and maintaining an attitude of openness regarding input from all participants, this Committee has been called together around a particular focus. It is incumbent that we maintain that focus to justify our reason for being. The foundational principles are:

1. That the emphasis upon the present-day work of the Holy Spirit in power remain intact.
2. That the nature of our work remain that of a consultation as opposed to a conference or convention.
3. That the focus of our activity will be on planting the church among previously unreached people groups.

PRESENT AND FUTURE ACTIVITIES

The CHSFM is actively engaged in promoting dialogue between leaders of the renewal movement and leaders of the frontier missions movement. This is accomplished by Leadership Seminars utilizing well-known resource persons from the frontier missions movement. For example, a February 1985 meeting, held at Fuller Theological Seminary, featured insights from Don Richardson and Peter Wagner. Representatives of a number of church groups, seminaries, training schools and missions agencies participated.

The Committee also sponsors a special monthly edition of the Frontier Fellowship Global Prayer Digest. This is mailed to a paid subscription list, as well as to many pastors and church leaders on a complimentary basis. This tool not only serves to open doors of communication, but actively engages participants in prayer and support of the CHSFM.

Two additional publications are planned for future release. The Acts 1:8 Newsletter will go to pastors across the country, and will feature short, useable news items about frontier missions activities, up-to-the-minute statistical data, and brief Biblical notes for sermon suggestions. The Occasional Journal of the Holy Spirit and Frontier Missions will serve as a means for theologians, missiologists, and missions spokespersons to exchange papers on significant topics.

Many leaders within both the renewal movement and the frontier missions movement have suggested that the CHSFM has the potential to make a significant impact on the global church community. While currently seriously understaffed and underfinanced, the Committee office maintains a strong commitment to its stated purposes.

As we progress, we who are members of the Committee will continue to highlight the reason for renewal, the purpose for which we are healing and equipping the multitude of saints in our churches. Focusing upon Kingdom priorities, we hope to better utilize the resources of persons and goods in obedience to the express command of our Founder.