

Philippines: Roman Catholic Charismatics

The Anglican evangelical leader Dr. John Stott said about the current trends within the Roman Catholic Church: "The Roman monolith, which for centuries has appeared inviolable, has at last cracked open. Conservatives and progressives, traditionalists and radicals, are engaged in a fierce power struggle. Because the issues were still open during Vatican II, the Council endorsed opinions which oppose, contradict and exclude each other. To many observers the whole church seems to be in unprecedented disarray. Moreover, it is by no means clear whether the final outcome will be the triumph of biblical truth or a disastrous lapse into some kind of existential subjectivism. All Christian people should be praying for those who are caught willy-nilly in this transitional agony."

The confusion reigning within the Roman Catholic Church is nowhere better demonstrated than in the rapid growth of the Roman Catholic charismatic movement. Protestants tend to welcome this charismatic movement as an infiltration of Protestantism into the Roman Catholic Church. This is not true to fact. The charismatics have some warm advocates among bishops. There is a deep loyalty to the conservative hierarchy.

The Catholic charismatic movement is a very new phenomenon in the long history of the Roman Catholic Church. The first meeting of the Catholic charismatics was at Duquesne University in 1967, and attracted only 90 people. In 1973, 25,000 charismatic Catholics met at Notre Dame. In July 1977, 45,000 met in their first interdenominational assembly. Said Kevin Ravaghan, a Roman Catholic who was chairman of the conference: "I believe this is the largest grass-roots ecumenical movement in 800 years." U.S. President Carter's sister Ruth Carter Stapleton made her appearance. She testified how prayers had resolved her daughter's emotional problems. Among the feature speakers was Leo Jozef Cardinal Suenens of Belgium, a leader of the Catholic liberals, who celebrated Mass at the stadium.

The catholic charismatic movement has also come to the Philippines. We hear of charismatic healings by priests and nuns. The best known Jesuit priests who perform healings are Fr. Herbert Snyder, head of the New Testament department of the Ateneo De Manila University, pastor teacher of the Catholic Renewal; and Rev. Emmanuel Cannistrace, a noted healer. The MAP (Missionary Assistance Plan) sponsored the "Spiritual Renewal '77" conference, which had the approval of Cardinal Sin. The renewal meeting was an ecumenical event. Catholic and Protestant leaders were joined, according to a newspaper report, "in spiritual (not doctrinal) unity." Invitations were extended to religious executors (clergy and laity); local pastors, missionaries, priests, Cursillistas, KC's, nuns, sisters, Bible women, seminarians, Bible school teachers and their students, pastors, full time church workers, government officials and church administrators."

The introduction of the catholic charismatic movement raises some serious questions. I will suggest a few. Does it not make Christianity a matter simply of personal success

and an uncritical adaptation to the status quo? Does it not obscure or even completely ignore the social aspect of the Gospel message? (This is a crucial question in a Third World, under-developed nation.) Are the charismatics not emphasizing experience at the expense of doctrine? The charismatic movement's emphasis on experience rather than doctrine is keeping with much of progressive theology and not with those Catholics who are seeking renewal through turning to objective Biblical standard. Unless the movement becomes grounded in the Word of God, it will be increasingly swayed by every wind of theological opinion, and it will get lost in a sea of subjectivism.

Wealth of the Catholic Church

As you travel through the country side, you come through many barriers and small towns. Many of the inhabitants live in hovels, nipa huts and shacks that are poor beyond description. But in every place you find a large Roman Catholic church. The architecture is Spanish and the interior is beautiful. Many churches have art treasures. One of the famous works of art and object of adoration is Cebu's image of the Jesus child. The image of the Santo Nino de Cebu was made in Flanders in the early 16th century. On the feast day of "Santo Nino" pilgrims come from all over to the city of Cebu. They come to prostrate themselves before the image, decked for the occasion in its fiesta finery-rich fabrics embroidered with gold and silver thread scepter in one hand and globe in the other, symbols of Christ's power, and an ornate crown of massive gold upon its head.

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