

# Christian Reconstruction

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## NO LONGER STRANGERS, BUT STILL HERETICS: A Report on "Pentecost 1988: A Gathering of Christians"

"Pentecost 1988: No Longer Strangers, A Gathering of Christians" was an unofficial meeting sponsored by the National Council of Churches (NCC) and held in Arlington, Texas, in early June. There were about 1500 people there. The goal of the gathering was to get Catholics, Eastern and Russian Orthodox, Mainline Protestants, and Evangelicals together for several days of "worship experiences" and workshops. No official documents came out of all this. It was just an "event." The idea in general was that several days of talk and dialogue would help break down barriers and create more informal unity among Christians in America.

What did go on? Each morning there were Morning Prayer Options, including Prayer Through Yoga, Prayer Through Mime, Dance, and Song, Personal Prayer Based on the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius and Buddhism, and a Bible Study hosted by the homosexual Metropolitan Community Churches. There were a few more conservative options, but not many.

Besides the Morning Prayer Options, there were "worship events" every morning and evening. Each of these had songs and then a Bible Study by a noted speaker, followed by a sermon by another noted speaker. In most of the services, one speaker was a man and the other a woman. For these people, the ordination of women, strictly forbidden in the Bible (1 Cor. 11:34-35) and unknown in the tradition of the Church, is taken for granted. (Of course, the Eastern Orthodox and the Catholics do not do it, and I couldn't help wondering how they felt about it all.)

### Day One

Sunday evening's sermon was by Emilio Castro, president of the World Council of Churches. He basically gave us a moderate-sounding version of liberation theology. "Christ" identified Himself with the poor, he said, and "Christ" is with us when we do the same. The way to overturn oppression is by mobilizing for love, not for hate and revenge. He talked about Apartheid and about Central America, but not much about the Soviet Union. I wondered how the Russian Orthodox felt about all this.

Actually, the poor were not at this meeting. They never are. The "poor" in American Christianity are the fundamentalists and conservative evangelical. They are the tattered remnant of historic Christianity in the United States. They are not present at such gatherings. Their opinions are neither heard nor wanted. They are not feted by the rich of the world, nor do they make loud claims to speak for the poor of the world. They are invisible, the salt of the land. When they spoke up briefly, in the "Moral Majority," they were hissed into silence. But, then again, being Christians, such "poor" would not have wanted to be at a thing like

this. Besides, fundamentalists do not have the kind of money that these people do, and could not have afforded to stay at the Arlington Hilton Hotel, which is not a Holiday Inn, let alone a Motel 6 (meaning Motel \$19.95, plus tax).

### Day Two

On Monday morning we heard a sermon by Anthony Campolo. Now, to give the devil his due, I have seldom heard so competent and entertaining a speaker. There is no doubt why Campolo is so popular today on neo-evangelical college campuses: his dynamic presentation of baptized humanism. He was billed as an "evangelical," which he most assuredly is not. He is a modern gnostic, through and through. His sermon pitted power against powerlessness. The power-impotence axis is fundamental to modern Gnosticism.

Campolo told us we should not spank our children. (He should read Hebrews 12.) He told us that if we take power and drive out the homosexuals, we cannot later on come back and tell them about God's love and redemption. I wondered how Campolo would respond to the Bible's account of God's treatment of Israel at Sinai and in the wilderness. I suppose he would say that the reason Israel rejected the Lord was because He scourged them. It was God's fault. Campolo also blasted Constantine, a popular target of modern Gnosticism. I wondered how the Eastern and Russian Orthodox felt about this.

### Day Three

Tuesday morning was really fun. The "sermon" was "preached" by the Body and Soul Dance Company. Tears sprang to my eyes as we were treated to the thighs and tummies of scantily-clad young women "dancing the gospel." It was truly moving, and I had to choke and swallow a lot. This was because stuff kept moving up from my stomach into my throat, and I did not have anything to throw up in, so my eyes watered. I managed to make it to the end of the performance without having to leave the room, however. (This was an exercise in spiritual discipline.) Religious dancing in the Bible is either festive dancing after victory in battle, or processions in worship. Modern interpretive dance is about as appropriate for worship as, well,

Incongruously, after this performance the message came from Stanley Harakas, a professor of ethics at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Seminary. He called us back to guard the historic faith. He told us to forget about sociology (Campolo's speciality). He said that one-half of the Northern Hemisphere was persecuting Christians, and the other half was trying to force the privatization of the faith. He attacked the new theologies. From hearing him this

once, I was favorably impressed. I wondered what he thought of it all. I wondered why he was even present.

Tuesday evening was a marathon. After an opening hymn, we heard a very long message from a liberal **pentecostal**. Then we heard three long "testimonies." Then we had an Eastern Orthodox service of the "Blessing of Bread," a service used when bread is given to the poor. (The Eastern Orthodox figure that if you are going to do something anyway, you might as well throw in some Scripture and prayer along with it, so they turn everything into a liturgy.)

It was interesting to observe. When they started giving out the bread, they turned out all the lights, and people were supposed to go to the microphones and offer intercessory prayer. The first guy that prayed told God that the Palestinians were being oppressed by the Jews and that the Palestinians were the righteous ones. I do not take sides on this issue myself, but I began moving toward the door. As I left, some other guy was telling God about apartheid. I wondered if anybody was going to tell God about the Soviet Union. Somehow, I doubted it. I had been there three hours, and a good science fiction book was calling me from my cheap motel room several miles away. I left. I heard the next day that it lasted a long time. True revival.

#### Day Four

The wrap-up was on Wednesday morning. We sang "The Church's One Foundation" – four stanzas anyway. The verses about "false sons in her pale," and standing against "foe or traitor," and "by heresies distrest," were not among them.

Throughout each day, there were Forums, Workshops, and Explorations. I could only attend four of these. The best one I attended was on Christianity in Russia. It was hosted by an Eastern **Orthodox pastor and historian**, Vladimir Berzonsky. I asked him if he thought *Glasnost* might be Gorbachev's attempt to quiet anticipated uprisings during the Millennial Year. He thought this might be true, because the Soviets cannot be trusted, but he hoped that the Spirit was really doing something. He reminded us that the Russian church had been suppressed before, under the Tarfar yoke and later by Peter the Great, and had learned to be patient with oppressors.

The literature room had lots of stuff on gay churches and women's movements. There were "inclusive language" (Mother-Father God) Bibles, **lectionaries**, and hymnals to peruse. I glanced at them, but again I had forgotten my barf bag, so I did not spend much time with them.

#### A New Agenda?

Gary North had instructed me: "This meeting may set the agenda for the next ten years. Find out." Well, they appear to have no agenda left. As I see it, what we have here are a bunch of old-line liberal **gnostics** in cahoots with new-breed liberal **Baalists**. The **gnostics** are the old Biblical criticism types who have run the historic churches into the ground for 75 years. Gnosticism turns the faith into an ideology. Where Christianity teaches the historical truths of creation, the virgin birth, and the empty tomb, the **gnostic** has an "encounter" with the idea of creation, the idea of the virgin birth, and the idea of resurrection. Gnosticism

is the heart of liberal and "neo-orthodox" pseudo-Christianity. The Apostles' Creed, a recitation of **historical events**, was written precisely to counter Gnosticism. It is still a good safeguard against liberal Gnosticism.

The liberal **Baalists** are the homosexuals, feminists, and Marxists, who basically want the old Canaanite and **Sodomite** religions. Like the **Baalists** of Jeroboam's day, who wanted to do **Baalism** but call it Yahwism, so these people want to call themselves Christians. Like the **Baalists** of old, they do not hesitate to murder their children, justify sodomy, worship female spirits, and promote a religion of political manipulation. These **people** are even farther from Christianity than the **gnostics** are.

Most of the **gnostics** and **Baalists** at the Gathering were "Protestants." These same trends are found in the liberal wing of Catholicism. Eastern Orthodoxy has stood against many of these ideas, and as I say, I wondered what they thought about it. Perhaps their philosophy is that they just ought to get involved anyway. But then, just how conservative can they be with such bed-fellows?

The "evangelical" were represented by **Campolo** and Ron Sider. I do not think there were many other "evangelicals" there. If the evangelical and the Eastern Orthodox continue to get revolved in the NCC, they will lend new strength to it, but **heresy is so entrenched that I do not think** they will dislodge it. Before the Flood, the **descendants** of Seth (the "sons of God") lent their strength to the increasingly impotent descendants of Cain (the "daughters of men"). The result was the corruption of the Godly, not the salvation of the wicked.

#### Old Wineskins, Old Vinegar

I do think I see a shift in all this. I have not been close enough to liberalism to be certain of what I am about to say. I did not hear much political preaching at this conference. This may be due to two reasons, both of which are probably involved. For one thing, heresy is now orthodoxy for these people. I do not think they regard abortion, feminism, homosexuality, pacifism, leftism, and the like as subjects for debate. They take their positions for granted. Sure, they mentioned apartheid a few times, but even this seemed kind of weak. They just take it all for granted. Their platform does not need to be stressed.

Second, though, it looked to me as if the steam has just gone out of it all. I mean, who cares what these people think? The world today is shaped by secular Marxists, not by "Christian" Marxists, by secular feminists and homosexuals, not by "Christian" **Baalists**. They are dead as a force in the church, because they now own the mainline churches, which in turn are dead as a force in society. These people have no future. (Their eternity will not be worth writing home about, either.)

Thus, the big deal seemed to be "worship experiences." I believe that they are collapsing into Irrelevance and mysticism. They have forsaken the God of their fathers, and there is no other god for them to pray to. Their prayers really are yoga and **Buddhism**. They talk only to themselves. I think, though, that they want to rejuvenate themselves by drawing on all kinds of worship traditions. In so doing, they are moving from the marijuana of political activism to the heroin of mysticism. Good-bye to them all.