

Charismatic communities

This is the fourth article in a series on covenanted communities and leadership in the U.S. charismatic movement.

By Rick Casey

Special to the National Catholic Reporter

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — "The Catholic charismatic renewal is a broad, diverse and considerably unorganized movement in which a variety of ideas and practices are current," said Kevin Ranaghan in an official statement last May on behalf of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Service Committee.

The statement, which is very much the image leaders here and in South Bend, Ind., promote, was made in response to criticisms of the movement by one of its founders, Dr. William Storey, Notre Dame church historian.

The statement technically may not be false. But left by itself it masks a more accurate picture, which is that a few men here and in South Bend wield extraordinary influence over what the hundreds of thousands of Catholic pentecostals and Protestants associated with them in the United States and elsewhere read, what they are taught and what direction they are likely to take.

In fact, far from being "considerably unorganized," the charismatic renewal is supported and directed by a tightly knit group of leaders who exercise absolute control over a \$1.7 million operation fueling the movement with books, cassettes, conferences and an official magazine.

This group of men not only has designed a seven-week seminar course used throughout the movement to initiate new members, but also conducts intensive regional training sessions for leaders of local prayer groups and charismatic communities.

The charismatic renewal is not organized in a way that can be shown on management charts as strictly hierarchical. But in a movement where members are expectant and anxious for the word of God telling them what to believe and how to live, control over official teachings is a powerful force. And the charismatic leadership exercises precisely this control.

Structurally, this leadership is made up of the 10 members of the Service Committee from around the country. In practice, however, the most influence is wielded by leaders of the People of Praise community in South Bend and the Word of God community here, both charismatic communities dedicated to an "apostolate" of serving the international charismatic renewal.

Two representatives of each of these communities — Steve Clark and Ralph Martin of Ann Arbor and Paul DeCelles and Kevin Ranaghan of South Bend — are among the 10 committee members. Their influence is greater than their numbers, however, because they are involved daily in running the committee's operations, while the other members serve more as outside directors.

The operations conducted by the Ann Arbor and South Bend groups are impressive for their scope and sophistication. Under the umbrella name of Charismatic Renewal Services, they have nearly 60 persons on a \$25,000 per month payroll, plus a substantial corps of volunteers. Persons on payroll are paid not according to their job, but according to the number of dependents they have.

Steve Clark, the director of the operation, is single and receives \$300 monthly. Andrew Coles, controller, has a wife and three children and receives \$1,180. (This is about half what he made as an accountant for a real estate developer in Phoenix before moving here to join Word of God.)

The South Bend and Ann Arbor operations are seen as two divisions of one corporation. Ann Arbor acts roughly as a production arm, said Coles, while South Bend serves as a retailer. The Ann Arbor operation is crammed into a two-story building which formerly housed the University of Michigan band.

"South Bend is running a \$1.3 million

mailing operation out of a basement," said Cole, accurately describing the cramped quarters near Notre Dame. This problem has been alleviated, however, by the recent purchase for \$150,000 of a nine-story hotel in South Bend.

From a financial standpoint, the major portion of the operation is the production and distribution of books and tapes. The charismatics have their own publishing house, Word of Life, which in four years has published about 15 books by movement members. Three more are in the works.

The books, as well as more than 125 cassette tapes of talks on charismatic topics, are marketed through the Communication Center in South Bend.

In addition, scores of books from other publishers, selected "after careful screening," according to marketing director Steve Peterson, are distributed as part of the Communication Center's \$1.3 million in annual sales. (This is the most recent figure. Sales have doubled in each of the past three years, said Cole.)

What results in a reading and listening list carefully chosen by charismatic leaders for members of charismatic prayer groups around the country. The handsome catalogue mailed to 83,000 movement members this summer includes the Word of Life books and Charismatic Renewal cassettes,

as well as a selection of other books ranging from mainstream Catholic authors such as Lois Bird and Jesuit Father John M. McKenzie, to classical pentecostalists Bob Mumford and Derek Prince.

No material is included which deviates from the major teachings of the movement as determined by Steve Clark and other leaders here.

More than half the Communication Center's sales are through the "Good Shepherd Program," which provides books on the literature tables set up at charismatic prayer meetings around the country. From the joyful fervor of a prayer meeting, participants turn to find in the same tables of books offering further teaching on prayer, spirituality and lifestyles. Leaders here and in South Bend determine what is on these tables.

Under the Good Shepherd Program, Peterson's sales are given in the form of books, but a manual on inventory, accounting, sales tax and "how to keep the IRS Revenue Service off their backs."

Peterson said a growing number of books, now 22 per cent, are being sold through Christian bookstores, where promoters "are catching on that these charismatics are absolutely crazy about buying books."

With a circulation rapidly approaching 60,000, *New Covenant* magazine has

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Suenens turns critic: Jo Ford 'adversary'

By Patricia Lefevere

Special to the National Catholic Reporter

MALINES, Belgium — The charismatic renewal movement will be done more harm than good if the book *Pentecostal Poise* by University of Notre Dame theologian Josephine Massynberde Ford is published.

This is the view of Cardinal Leon-Joseph Suenens of Belgium, who has studied the pre-publication manuscript and found its criticisms of certain U.S. pentecostal movements neither "constructive" nor done in a "loving way."

In a letter to Ford, the cardinal said her article "was not written in a spirit of critical discernment but rather by one who takes the position of an adversary. Also, the criticisms have a quality of personal bitterness which obviously influence and diminish the necessary serenity for an objective study."

"As far as the content itself is concerned, it seems to me that the writer too easily schematizes the various charismatic groups into 'types.' She mentions the good reasons there may be for doing this. However, her criticisms of the covenanted communities as para-ecclesial structures are greatly exaggerated. These communities are fully committed to the church and to her teaching authority."

The cardinal found fault with two specific points in the text: "The oft quoted phrase

'normal church life is not enough' by Dr. Ford to show the 'elitist' character of the renewal, has not the strong positive meaning and implications suggested by the writer" and "the alleged contradiction between 'baptism in the Spirit' and the sacrament of baptism is not widespread in the renewal."

He went on to state that while criticisms of the Catholic charismatic renewal are welcome, "controversies of this kind rarely create an atmosphere in which a poised judgment can prosper." And thus thought "in the interest of charity and justice" her book should not be published.

In his own recently published book *New Pentecost?*, the prelate outlined attitudes that were likely to crop up in trying to ascertain the meaning and relevance of the charismatic experience. He cited as "critical, but disposed to be favorable; distrustful and therefore disposed to listen; and uncritical enthusiasm." In the same chapter he argued "whether they like it or not, the charismatics are required to speak out and in that direction."

In the light of these comments and the implication in his statement to Ford, the cardinal has taken a stand against publishing the Ford manuscript and has communicated his criticisms to the apostolic delegate to the U.S., Archbishop Jean Jadot, and to Kevin Ranaghan in South Bend.

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COMMUNITY: Members of Word of God, Ann Arbor. — Rick Casey

... an attempt at coping

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an influential force as the charismatic renewal's official publication. A professionally packaged month-long magazine includes inspirational articles, feature stories on successful charismatic communities, thoughtful treatments of problems in the movement and news of interest to charis-

led by Ralph Martin and staffed by members of the Word of God community; it is read to find the leadership's cur-



JESUS IS LORD: Charismatic prayer.

rent positions the way *L'Osservatore Romano* can be read to find those of the Vatican.

Phil O'Mara, Word of God member in charge of editing book reviews for the publication, said he has been given a list of approved book reviewers by the community's leaders. O'Mara was neither defensive nor critical regarding this practice. The *New Covenant* is not seen as an open forum for ideas, but as a teaching tool, so such arrangements make sense. But it does indicate the tight control of those who have become the chief teachers.

At least as important in determining the direction of the charismatic renewal as the publications are the various conferences arranged by Charismatic Renewal Services. The largest is the annual international conference, which draws tens of thousands to the University of Notre Dame each summer.

This year the international conference was held in Rome to celebrate Holy Year. It drew 10,000 from around the world.

Regional conferences around the country each draw thousands who are not able to make it to the annual international conference. Participants enjoy an exciting atmosphere of prayer and celebration, as well as major talks and small-group workshops where charismatic teachings are presented.

Speakers are carefully chosen. In addition, "prophecy" during prayer sessions is screened by leaders before being admitted. (This is common practice at large, weekly prayer meetings around the country, partly to avoid the problem of mentally unbalanced persons commandeering the microphone.)

Another key element in the movement's direction are national and regional leadership conferences directed by leaders here and in South Bend to train local prayer group leaders around the country. This is perhaps the most effective way the teachings developed here are passed on.

One former national leader and speaker

at these leadership conferences, who asked not to be named, said he and other speakers received outlines of their talks from Steve Clark. They then would write out the full talks from the outline and return them to Clark for final approval before presentation.

Clark, Martin and others wield such power, it should be noted, not by coercion but by virtue of the respect they have acquired as bright, mature and committed leaders. Still, it is an awesome amount of power, and an aspect of the movement they take pains to play down.

The influence of Ann Arbor leaders reaches into prayer groups around the world in yet another way. In late 1969, Ralph Martin was concerned that charismatics were being "baptized in the spirit" in a haphazard and somewhat ineffective way. To correct this he conceived of a series of seminars which would serve as an initiation to the charismatic renewal.

As developed by Martin and other leaders at Word of God, the course became a set of seven weekly one-hour sessions known as the "Life in the Spirit Seminars." In the course of these seminars, new recruits were given basic instructions on teachings of the movement, and prepared for the "baptism of the spirit" and such "gifts" as speaking in tongues.

In 1971, Charismatic Renewal Services published a 183-page detailed manual for members of teams in prayer groups around the country to be used for initiation programs identical to that developed at Ann Arbor. Now in its third edition, the team manual has sold more than 70,000 copies and has been translated into Korean, Chinese, French, Dutch, Spanish, Italian and Sotho, a Bantu language spoken in South Africa.

Finding New Life, a devotional booklet for those taking the seminars, has sold more than 250,000 copies.

Since developing the initiation seminars, Word of God leaders have developed a number of courses called "Foundations in Christian Living" detailing teachings on such subjects as sex and marriage, handling of emotions, headship and submission and so on. Manuals to promote the widespread teaching of these seminars are in the works.



HEADQUARTERS: Harris houses the Charismatic Renewal Services headquarters in Ann Arbor.

-Rick Casey

Suenens, cardinal who came in from the cold

By John Wilkins

Special to the National Catholic Reporter

MALINES, Belgium — "If you want to get out of your car," said Cardinal Leon Suenens, "then you have to exit every part of the motor and the rest of the mechanical system. But in the end if you want it to go, then what you need is gasoline."

Cardinal of Malines-Brussels, Belgium, was explaining to me how his current relationship with the charismatic movement has led to the concern for the structure of the church which made him such a controversial figure after his famous press conference in May 1969. "At that time," he said, "I insisted on institutional reform; I am insisting more on spiritual renewal. In my view both are complementary parts of one reality — the logic of the Gospel."

While visiting the cardinal in this city of Malines, where he has his residence, I entered the room quietly, dressed in simple, ascetic, with a deeply spiritual atmosphere. He has become known for his boldness and courage, but people do not usually realize what it costs him to overcome his reserve.

In a new memoir about him (*Cardinal Suenens: A Portrait*, published by Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd.) Elizabeth Hamilton relates the cardinal's own word for this confidence he has to fight is *timidite*, which it goes with a disinclination to suffer or distress that at times makes him suffer anguish before he can bring himself to intervene.

Becoming the charismatic movement's most notable adherent, Suenens has given a new impulse to the devotional life

which is the spring of all his actions, including his ecumenism. He can never be understood in terms of church politics. His first writings, such as his book *Mary, Mother of God*, were pastoral and devotional and now his latest book, *A New Pentecost* (Seabury Press, New York), with its impressive and moving witness, is pastoral and devotional again.

Suenens is now in favor again in Rome. When the pope embraced him during the recent charismatic congress there, it was compared to Peter embracing Paul. But such an analogy recalls also that Paul once opposed Peter to his face, and the cardinal made it clear to me that he had not gone back on any of his previous convictions.

On the contrary, his experience of the shared life that is central to the charismatic movement makes it the more impossible, for him, that the pope should ever be seen in an isolated position within the church. He quoted to me the saying of Patriarch Athenagoras, "The pope needs brothers," and he smiled as he recalled a phrase he had just been reading in the Bible: "And now, my people, let us discuss things together."

But the cardinal now is looking forward with a certain impatience past the controversy between the left and the right in the church. The extreme right, he told me, fails to make the distinction between real tradition and sociological tradition: "So many things which we think are traditional were not traditional at all three centuries ago or 15 centuries ago." The extreme left, on the other hand, "takes Christianity too much as an ideology and tends to leave out the living Christ."

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