A Survey of Independent Charismatic Churches

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During the first months of 1994, I sent out a questionnaire to a number of pastors of independent or non-denominational Charismatic churches. The pastors to whom the request was addressed fell into three categories: (i) pastors known to me personally, (ii) pastors to whom I was given an introduction, (iii) pastors and churches listed in issues of The Morning Star Journal. The questionnaire was primarily designed to find out the church backgrounds of people joining independent Charismatic churches, and the reasons for their change. The questionnaire was deliberately kept short, so that it would be easy to complete, in the hope that pastors would be more willing to distribute it to church members.

The churches sending in the questionnaire were the following: Immanuel's Church, Silver Spring, Maryland (1); the Samaritan Fellowship Church, Gibbstboro, New Jersey (2); Christ the King, Conroe, Texas (3); New Covenant Church, Maryland Heights, Missouri (4); the Vineyard Christian Fellowship, Framingham, Massachusetts (5); Northgate Community Church, Gaithersburg, Maryland (6); Christian Covenant Church, Rockville, Maryland (7); Cornerstone Community Church, Paducah, Kentucky (8); Fellowship of Christians, Russellville, Arkansas (9). The first questions concerned the year of joining, age-group, sex, and marital status. The answers to these questions are tabulated in Table A. Where the number of responses to the questions are less than the number of respondents from that church, the deficit represents the number of persons not answering that question.

Table B presents the answers to question 5 on the questionnaire: "Which Church were you brought up in as a child?" Only those denominations are listed which featured in the responses.

Table C tabulates the answers to the following question concerning the respondents' church practice immediately prior to joining the independent Charismatic church:

6. Were you an active member of another Church immediately before you joined your present Church: Yes / No. If yes, please indicate which denomination.

1 Edited by Rick Joyner from Charlotte, North Carolina.
2 The questionnaire asked for the actual year of joining the church. For this article, I have classified these answers into five-year periods.
3 Tables begin on page 99.
4 The word "active" was chosen in an attempt to cover all types of Church affiliation, so that those who were regular worshipers and participants would answer "Yes."
Table D tabulates the responses to question 7 concerning the reasons for joining the new church. Respondents were here asked to indicate as many reasons as were applicable without any attempt at prioritizing them. The question was worded as follows:

7. Why did you join your present Church. Please mark off any reasons that apply:
   * This is where I came to know the Lord
   * I wanted to join a church where the gospel is clearly preached
   * I was looking for clear orthodox teaching
   * I was looking for a church with lively worship
   * I was looking for a strong and caring fellowship
   * We/I had just moved to the area and We/I was looking for the right church
   * My experience of the Holy Spirit was not affirmed and supported in my previous church
   * We were thinking of the needs of our children

Although the statistics are from only 9 churches, three of them in the Washington metropolitan area, there are a remarkable number of consistent features found in virtually all these churches. First, all are growing churches. All except the Samaritan Fellowship Church in Gibbsboro, New Jersey, have a higher number of new members in the last five years than in any previous five-year span. In all—except the Samaritan Fellowship Church in Gibbsboro, New Jersey, and the New Covenant Church in Maryland Heights, Missouri—over half those compiling the questionnaire joined in the 1990s. Secondly, the age distribution shows the highest percentage in the 31-45 age bracket for all the churches surveyed except the Christian Covenant Church in Rockville, Maryland, for which the highest percentage was in the 15-30 range. On average, two-thirds of the membership is 45 and under.

Of the church of childhood upbringing, much the largest figure was for Roman Catholics, 164.5 out of 718, that is 22.9%; then the Baptists 118.5 (16.5%) and the Methodists 112 (15.6%). Then there is a notable gap until the Pentecostals with 41 (5.7%), the Presbyterians & Reformed with 34.5 (4.8%), the Episcopalians with 26 (3.6%) and the Lutherans with 24 (3.3%). The distribution of the “childhood Catholics” exceeds 20% everywhere except the churches in Kentucky and Arkansas, with the highest percentages in order: Massachusetts, suburban Maryland, and New Jersey; these reflect fairly accurately the Catholic population in these states. The distribution of the “childhood Methodists” is fairly even, setting aside Christ the King, the tiny Texan church in Conroe, with only a 11.9% variation between highest and lowest. By contrast, the “childhood Baptists” vary greatly between highest incidence (Cornerstone Community Church in Paducah, Kentucky, at 35.8% and Christ the King in Conroe, Texas, at 30.0%) down to the lowest (Christian Covenant Church in Rockville, Maryland, at 3.4% and the Vineyard Fellowship in Framingham,