

SPS PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

1974

Vinson Synan, President

I. The Vision for SPS

On November 6, 1970, an international society for the purpose of studying the pentecostal movement was formed in Dallas, Texas, in connection with the 9th World Pentecostal Conference. This constitutive session was arranged by three young pentecostal college teachers who shared a common vision for a scholarly ^{pentecostal organization} ~~phenomenon~~. Earlier in the summer of 1970, these three, William Menzies of Evangel College, Horace Ward of Lee College, and Vinson Synan of Emmanuel College, had met as an ad hoc committee to plan a banquet meeting in Dallas. A proposed constitution was written and the banquet was placed on the program of the World Conference. All this was done with the approval and encouragement of the leadership of the World Conference.

The first name projected for the group was "Society of Pentecostal Scholars." This was quickly changed to "Society for Pentecostal Studies" after some people expressed reservations about their qualifications for being called scholars. The planning committee ^{Israel} ~~planned~~ for about 25 persons at the banquet; but such great interest prevailed that 139 persons filled the dining room. Klaud Kendrick, author of The Promise

Fulfilled was the first lecturer for the society. He pointed out several important areas of research for pentecostal scholars.

Listed as purposes of the SPS were (1)"to offer pentecostal scholarship in all academic disciplines as a spiritual service to the Kingdom of God," (2)"to recognize and publicize the work of pentecostal scholars," (3)"to serve pentecostal graduate students in non-pentecostal schools," (4)"to serve pentecostal ministers and leaders with opportunities for continuing education and resource materials," and (5)"to serve the church world by providing an authoritative interpretation of the pentecostal movement." A provisional constitution was adopted and 108 persons joined as charter members from over 20 nations. (ORIGINS WERE THUS CLASSICAL PENTECOSTAL)

The first officers elected to lead the new society were: President William Menzies (Evangel College); Vice-President, Hollis Gause (Lee College); Secretary, Vinson Synan (Emmanuel College); Treasurer, Edward Wood (Eugene Bible College). Full membership was restricted to those who (1)held a bona fide graduate degree in any field, (2)were able to subscribe to the PFNA Statement of Faith (the only interdenominationally approved doctrinal statement in the pentecostal world). All others who were interested in pentecostalism, regardless of background, could join as associate or student members. It was also decided to hold annual meetings in the United States where scholarly papers could be read and discussed. It was hoped that regional components of the society would develop for members on other continents who could not attend the sessions in the United States.

To the great comfort and relief of the sponsors of that banquet, the receipts collected at the door exactly paid to the penny the cost of the meal. We thus started with a balanced budget. ⁴0.

II. Annual Meetings

1. 1971 - Des Moines, Iowa

After the organizational meeting of the society, plans were laid for the first "annual meeting" of the SPS and for a permanent constitution to be adopted at that meeting. It was decided to conduct this session at the close of the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America meeting which was scheduled to convene in Des Moines, Iowa, at the headquarters of the Open Bible Standard Churches.

This session from November 5-6, 1971 hosted by the Open Bible College of Des Moines and its gracious President, Rev. John Groen. The program devoted to "Higher Education Within the Pentecostal Perspective" was organized by Hollis Gause of Lee College. Speakers included R. O. Corvin, Jon Ruthven, Myrtle Fleming, Zenas Bickett, William Menzies, and Winston Elliott. A highlight of the meeting was the announcement by Killian McDonnell and David du Plessis of a five-year dialogue between the Vatican and representatives of some classical pentecostal and neo-pentecostal groups. Of interest was R. O. Corvin's proposal for "mini-seminaries" consisting of liberal arts junior colleges with the traditional three-year Bible

College superimposed on the top. A total of 38 persons registered for this conference with 25 at the banquet to hear President Menzies' presidential address. Christianity Today gave excellent coverage of this brave new venture.

2. 1972 - Oklahoma City

Elected to prepare the 1972 program was Russell Spittler of Southern California College. During the year, the society was incorporated in Oklahoma by John Wagner, an Episcopalian lawyer and member of the group. The ^{SPS} board also met in April, 1972 with the board of the PFNA where the purposes of the SPS as an autonomous scholarly society was explained. Out of this meeting came invitations to conduct "special interest" sessions at the PFNA and World Pentecostal Conference gatherings in the future.

The second annual meeting which convened on the campus of Oklahoma City Southwestern College, November 10-11, 1972 was a turning-point in the history of the society. Program chairman Spittler arranged an excellent session around the theme "Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism." In this meeting, for the first time, Pentecostals and newer charismatics engaged openly in theological discussions concerning the new pentecostalism. Of interest was the appearance of a group from Present Truth magazine representing a strongly anti-pentecostal position. They paid booth rental for the opportunity of listening to several hours of pentecostal theology.

A new feature of this meeting was the Thursday night "All

Pentecostal Charismatic Service" which convened in the Muse Memorial Pentecostal Holiness Church near the campus. Speaker for this service was Bishop J. Floyd Williams, General Superintendent of the Pentecostal Holiness Church. The "Great Life Singers" of Southwestern College contributed to this program.

The sessions of this meeting were greatly significant. Speakers included such notables as: Stanley Burgess, Hollis Gause, Donald Gelpi, William MacDonald, Killian McDonnell, Clark Pinnock, David du Plessis, J. Rodman Williams, ^{and} Richard Baer, Dean Kristler Stendahl of the Harvard Divinity School was the banquet speaker. Many facets of the new pentecostalism were presented and discussed. Critics of pentecostal theology such as Anthony Hoekema were cordially received and differences discussed in a cordial Christian atmosphere of mutual respect.

An unforgettable moment came at the close of Richard Baer's paper when a holy hush fell over the group as a prophetic utterance was given. All were deeply moved by the presence of the Holy Spirit. (As president-elect, Vinson Synan ^{I, & others}) predicted that the issues dealt with in these papers would be the basis for charismatic study throughout the churches for the next decade. This is certainly proving to be true.

About 500 attended the Thursday night service of this conference while 190 registered for the lecture sessions. Total membership for the society reached 243 in 21 nations. In this meeting Vinson Synan was chosen as President-elect while James Beaty was elected Secretary and Donald Bryan, Treasurer.

3. 1973 - Cleveland, Tennessee

Between the 1972 and 1973 annual meetings, the World Pentecostal Conference convened in Seoul, Korea in September. The SPS was given a banquet slot on the program. President Russell Spittler gave an excellent paper there entitled "The Theological Opportunity Lying Before the Pentecostal Movement." He continued this theme in his Presidential address to the society which convened in November, 1973 at Lee College in Cleveland, Tennessee.

The 1973 annual meeting was devoted to the theme "Aspects of Pentecostal Origins" and was put together by Vinson Synan, program chairman. This was the first program devoted to pentecostal history. Speakers on this program included Larry Christenson, Charles W. Conn, Melvin Dieter, Ray H. Hughes, General Overseer of the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), Leonard Lovett, William Menzies, Edward O'Connor, David Reed, Russell Spittler, and Horace S. Ward, Jr. The Thursday night service was celebrated in the beautiful North Cleveland Church of God and was addressed by Thomas F. Zimmerman, General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God. The banquet was unique in that Martin Marty, ^(Dean, School of Divinity - U. of Chicago) lectured to the assembled group by a special telephone hook-up. It turned out to be delightful in spite of the inconvenience.

A highlight of this conference was the presence of observers from the World Council of Churches, the Vatican Secretariat for the promotion of Christianity, and the Wesleyan Theological

developed Society. The student essay winner was Donald Dayton of the Wesleyan church. Of major theological interest was ^{a floor} the ^{that} debate between Ray Hughes and Edward O'Connor. This event revealed major areas of differences between the classical Pentecostals and the Catholic charismatics. All was done, however, in a spirit of love and freedom.

This meeting illustrated one of the major hopes of the society—to serve as a forum between the major sectors of the pentecostal-charismatic revival, where representatives can discuss honest differences in ^{an} our academic atmosphere without making any ecclesiastical commitments that would be binding on any party. This, we hope, will continue to be the case in the future.

III. Scholarly Production

The SPS is primarily a scholarly society, however, with an overriding goal of encouraging research and publications in the area of pentecostal studies. The intellectual ferment of the annual meetings has encouraged such influential non-pentecostal religious leaders as Krister Stendahl and Martin Marty to come face to face with the pentecostal phenomenon.

In the area of publications, the SPS has a growing record of success. The quarterly Newsletter serves as a continuing register of scholarly pentecostal research around the nation and the world. The ongoing activities of the society are also regularly reported in this organ.

Already two publications have appeared under the imprimatur

of the society. In 1973, William Faupel's, The American Pentecostal Movement, A Bibliographical Essay, appeared (free to SPS members). No person interested in pentecostal research can afford to be without this valuable tool. Just recently (1974) another bibliography appeared which was also given free to members of the society. It was compiled by Watson Mills and is entitled Speaking in Tongues, A Classified Bibliography.

In 1975 it is hoped that two major books will appear which will exist completely as a result of the SPS. Russell Spittler is in the final stages of preparing the papers from the 1972 meeting for publication with Baker. This book should appear this year under the title, Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism. The papers from the 1973 meeting have already been edited by Vinson Synan and will be published by Logos early in 1975. This volume will be entitled Aspects of Pentecostal and Charismatic Origins. It is hoped that both publications will be available to SPS members at a special low pre-publication price.

In addition to these projects, papers read at the society have appeared in various influential publications. For instance, Christianity Today has published papers by Clark Pinnock and Ray Hughes; while Theology Today in its current issue contains Richard Baer's paper from the 1972 meeting. In addition, members of the society have published a great deal on their own in addition to the foregoing society projects.

Members of the SPS have furthermore contributed much to the Vatican-Pentecostal Dialogue since it began in 1972. Serving

at different times has been: Russell Spittler, William Menzies, Vinson Synan, Leonard Lovett, and David du Plessis, Pentecostal Chairman. Society members will also probably be called upon to serve in the Lutheran-Pentecostal Dialogue which is now in the planning stage.

IV. Future Prospects?

This the fourth annual meeting of the SPS will in many ways be the most important meeting yet. It is the first one on the West Coast. We hope that many more persons from this part of the nation will now become involved with the Society.

The very theme of this program-"The Third Force and the Third World" points a finger at a fundamental strength of world Pentecostalism, that is its appeal to the underdeveloped nations and the disinherited in the developed nations. It is our hope that this meeting will, in particular, tie the vast and growing army of Black Pentecostals into the mainstream of Pentecostal life in a way that has not been known before. For example, many of us hope that the Black Pentecostals will soon become an integral part of the PFNA as they are already joined to the World Pentecostal Conference.

*Chile
Brazil
S. Africa
Indonesia
Korea*
*50% of
all
districts*
*Journal
upgrading
newsletter?*

*Black history - tell your own story
but we have one pentecostal theology
however! !!*

We sincerely hope that this program will be able to build bridges of fellowship and understanding between white and black Pentecostals as well as those from other minority groups.

Forum for scholarly inquiry