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New report on global Christianity

John L. Allen Jr. | Oct. 6, 2006 All Things Catholic

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A new report from the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life gives voice to an enormously important and growing force within global Christianity, including Roman Catholicism -- a voice which, as it turns out, tends to speak in tongues.

The detailed report, released today, profiles Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity based on a survey in 10 nations. While beliefs and practices are basically the same, Pentecostals form their own denominations, while charismatics remain within their churches of origin, whether Protestant or Catholic.

The Pew report uses the generic term renewalist to describe this option within global Christianity.

The report analyzes data from Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, India, Kenya, Nigeria, the Philippines, South Africa, South Korea and the United States. Three of the four largest Catholic countries in the world (Brazil, the Philippines, and the United States) are included; only Mexico is absent. The combined Catholic population of those 10 nations is 322.8 million, representing almost 30 percent of all Catholics worldwide.

Combing through the data, substantial percentages of Catholics in all 10 nations describe themselves as charismatic, ranging from a high of 62 percent in Guatemala to a low of 8 percent in India. In the three largest Catholic nations, 57 percent of Brazilian Catholics are charismatic, 44 percent of Filipino Catholics, and 36 percent of American Catholics.

Overall, 43 percent of Catholics in these nations say they are charismatic, representing a block of 141.7 million people. Even though the numbers are skewed by the unusually high percentage in Brazil, the findings leave no doubt that the renewalist block in the Catholic church is enormous, perhaps as much as one-third of all Catholics in the world, and it represents an especially substantial percentage in parts of the global south. Moreover, because renewalist Christians tend to be more practicing, the percentage of active Catholics who are charismatic is likely even greater.

What all this means is that the renewalist outlook, in its various permutations around the world, is likely to have an enormous influence in shaping the future of Roman Catholicism.

The Pew report finds that renewalist Christians tend to have the following characteristics:

- Church services include the gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, or prayer for

miraculous healing, even though not all renewalists engage in these practices themselves;
- Many say they have personally witnessed or experienced the divine healing of illness or injury;
- Many also say they have witnessed the devil or evil spirits being driven out of someone;
- A strong emphasis on a literal reading of the Bible;
- Belief that miracles still occur as in biblical times;
- A more explicitly evangelical commitment to sharing the faith with non-believers;
- A more exclusive emphasis on Christ as the lone path to salvation;
- At least as strong a commitment to engaging social and political questions as non-renewalist Christians;
- A conservative moral code on issues such as homosexuality, extra-marital sex, abortion and divorce;
- Higher-than-average rates of attendance at church services.

In some cases, these markers of identity are more pronounced among Pentecostals than charismatics, and there are a few clear differences between the two. In three nations, for example, more than half of Pentecostals said the government should take steps to make it a special Christian nation, while in no country did more than half of charismatics share this view. In general, however, the renewalists are much closer to one another than to other types of Christians.

Anyone looking for insight into the future of global Christianity, including global Catholicism, would do well to give the Pew report a careful read. It can be found here: http://pewforum.org/ [2]

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