

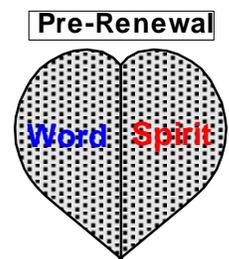
Why a "Pleromic" Church?

A Vision for Unity as both an Evangelical and Charismatic Church.

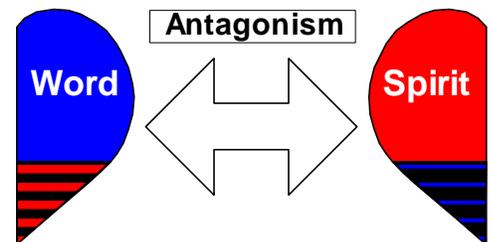
"For in Christ all the fullness (pleroma) of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness (pleroo) in Christ . . ." Colossians 2:9-10a NIV)

The battle is over. Have you noticed? I speak of the forty-year struggle toward renewal that has pitted evangelicals who emphasize the foundation of the Word of God, and the charismatics who emphasize the power of the Holy Spirit. Once it was a hot war, then a cold war, then a bi-polar détente. Peace has come, together with some respect and cooperation. But now it is time for true unity. For four decades, I have watched the drama unfold. Here is my sketch of the journey toward church renewal, and a challenge to please the heart of Jesus by taking the next step – a true unity which I will call "pleroma."

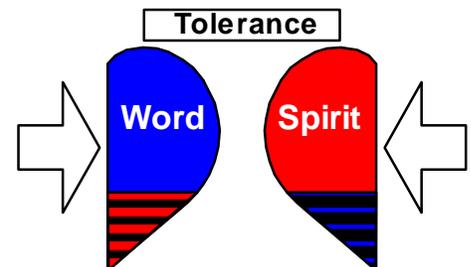
1. Pre-Renewal: In the second half of the Twentieth Century, the church was showing the classic signs of having become an "old wine skin." Christ's words to the Laodicean church aptly exposed the contemporary church: *"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; . . . Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, . . ."* (Rev. 3:15a, 17). The Lord began to renew His church in truth and power by a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Beginning in an Episcopal Church in Van Nuys, California in 1960, a display of the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit signaled the beginning of a movement we now call the Charismatic renewal.



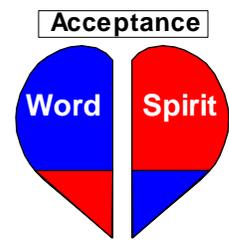
2. Period of Antagonism: But something went wrong with the "blessing." During the decade of the sixties, immature actions and reactions among believers caused major division, distrust, and a need for definition. Evangelicals retreated to the safety of the Word of God as foundational, developing a "theology of cessation" regarding the sign gifts. Charismatics moved ever farther into the experiential realm of the Spirit with joy, along with some abandonment and excess. They turned their backs toward one another, sometimes competing, sometimes attacking, but ultimately just ignoring each other.



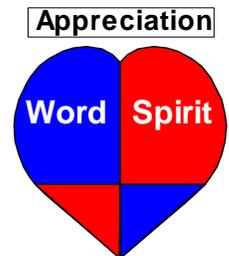
3. Season of Tolerance: The seventies and eighties, the Holy Spirit faithfully worked in each camp, maturing, mellowing and closing the breach. Evangelicals, now safe behind their protective theological positions, still hungered for spiritual reality in the midst of their orthodoxy. They began to ask, "What does the Word of God really teach about the Holy Spirit?" Meanwhile, after the meteoric rise of highly visible and growing charismatic churches, some notable moral and financial failures on the part of certain media personalities, coupled with some doctrinal error and practical excesses caused many charismatics to ask, "What are the biblical boundaries which hold our movement accountable to Christ and true holiness?" Although not obvious to many observers at the time, the two traditions, having tolerated and coexisted, were in fact moving closer together.



4. Awakening Acceptance: During the eighties, a new relationship between many churches of these differing traditions began to develop. Acceptance became the watch word. "We are different, but we are united in our love for the Lord and commitment to the spread of His gospel." Missionaries led the way in forming real cooperation. Bible teaching became a stronger feature of many charismatic churches, as modeled by Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa. Spiritual experience was increasingly measured by the Word of God. Meanwhile evangelicals discovered the music! Moving praise songs, often allowing the Word of God to be sung in contemporary voicing, became a unifying spiritual language, drawing everyone's attention upward to the throne of God in true worship.

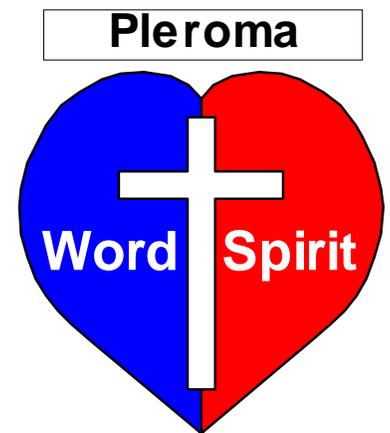


5. Growing Appreciation: As moderate evangelicals and charismatics continued to find common ground, the way was prepared for the walls to come down yet further. The present writer has seen it in the most profound move of the Spirit which can only be described as true revival. All over the nation, pastors and intercessors began getting together to pray. In extended seasons of prayer, often called "prayer summits," focused on humble openness to the presence of Christ, ministers began to discover deep kinship. Repentance and brokenness opened the way for Christ to speak clearly and collectively. Since the ground is level at the foot of the cross, relationships of trust and love were deepened. Differences no longer divide these believers. Rather, differences of gifting began to be appreciated. We are members of one body, in fact, and each of us is completed by the gifting of the other.



6. The Final Step: As the Twenty-First Century begins, completing the healing is our challenge. Our Lord Jesus will be pleased to have His saints fully embrace His presence in unity, both in the gift of the Word and the gift of the Spirit. We need to move beyond the "separate but equal" acceptance of one another, embracing only from a distance. We should work to get the hyphen out of our "Evangelical – Charismatic" détente.

I call this new wholeness "*pleroma*." This Greek term means "fullness." I use *pleroma* to describe the evangelical and charismatic strengths united in one body of believers. Central to our purpose as a church is to open the door to the full enthronement of Christ. The fullness of Christ is only possible through the fullness of the Word (our evangelical roots) and the fullness of the Spirit (our charismatic side). As an independent church, we have a blended body of people from many denominational backgrounds, evangelical and charismatic. We welcome and value every gifted saint God leads into partnership with us. Together, we will focus on Jesus Christ, and allow Him to be Head of His diversely gifted body.



After forty years of strain between these two great traditions, let us be committed to develop a full, functional unity of evangelical and charismatic believers. Healing the breach would please Jesus. So, is my church "Evangelical" or Charismatic?" My answer: It is both, for it is "Pleromic!" May God bless us to discover together ...

The Fullness of Christ through . . .
The Fullness of the Word and . . .
The Fullness of the Spirit!