

# PENTECOSTALISM, EAST AND WEST

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I see this writing assignment on Pentecostalism not so much as an attempt at an exposé of the movement, or as an exegesis of the Scriptural doctrine associated with it, but as an examination of certain of the phenomena that are identified with the movement.

The distinctive ecclesiastical position chosen by the Pentecostal movement, to quote a statement of belief, is:

‘We believe that the Baptism of the Holy Ghost and Fire is the coming upon and within of the Holy Spirit to indwell the believer in His fulness, and is always borne witness to by the fruit of the Spirit and outward manifestation, so that we may receive the same gift as the disciples on the Day of Pentecost’.

The implications of this statement of belief, together with the outward manifestations evidenced in practice, have given to the modern movement its distinctive name and emphasis. The extreme element in the Pentecostalist movement will insist that if there are no ‘outward manifestations’ or ‘signs following’, such as listed in the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, then the professing Christian has not been ‘Baptised with the Holy Spirit’. But others within the broad spectrum of Pentecostalist emphasis—see previous article—may take the more moderate line that it is possible to ‘have the Baptism of the Spirit’ without ‘outward manifestation’ of ‘signs following’, especially the practice of ‘tongues’.

The key verse used by Pentecostalists in support of their emphasis is taken from the controversial later section of Mark 16: 15-18:

‘Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; and he that disbelieveth shall be condemned. And these signs shall accompany them that have believed; in my name shall they cast out demons; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall in no wise hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover’.

But the criterion of the Pentecostal spiritual experience is that the one evidence, among the others listed above, that a person has received the ‘Baptism of the Spirit’ is that he or she speak with tongues. ‘Healing’ follows as a close second; ‘casting out demons’ a distant third; and ‘taking up serpents’ is only practised, to my knowledge, in certain Pentecostalist groups—known as ‘the snake handlers’—in the United States South, (See *Battle for the Mind*, by William Sargant), while ‘drinking any deadly thing’ is not practised at all.

The Pentecostalist movement is recognized by the World Council of Churches as probably the fastest-growing in modern Christian witness in some parts of the world, and Pentecostalist phenomena—not associated with the Pentecostalist movement—are now emerging in Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Lutheran and other circles in the United States, in Roman Catholic circles in South America, and in some of the potentially influential indigenous churches in Asia. It is important, therefore, to examine the significance of this growing force in modern Christian witness to see if there is something which—through complacency, superciliousness or cliché-ridden traditionalism—we may have missed in our desire to be effective Christians.

Pentecostalism as a sectarian practice is fairly recent, but the phenomenology associated with the movement is of ancient origin—even before Christ. Clemens Alexandrinus, one of the early fathers of the Church, wrote:

‘Plato (born 427 B.C.) attributes a peculiar dialect to the gods, inferring this from dreams and oracles, and especially from demoniacs, who do not speak their own language or dialect, but that of the demons, who are entered into them’.  
(*Miscellanies* Book I, p. 443)

Virgil (70-19 B.C.) in the *Aeneid*, gives the description of a pagan prophetess filled with the ‘divine afflatus’—quickly changing colour, panting breast, dishevelled hair, apparent increase of stature as the god or demon draws near, and then finally the voice losing its ‘mortal ring’ as she spoke in strange tongues.

These features are still produced in persons of different nationalities in various parts of the world when they set themselves to ‘speak with the dead’, ‘consult the gods’, ‘call down the gods’, to use some of the expressions given to describe the experience of making contact with the spirit world, some of which I have personally witnessed.

In the first centuries after the founding of the Church speaking with tongues is said to have been used by the Montanists, spreading through Italy, France and North Africa, before the practice was condemned at Iconium in 235 and the Council of Constantine in 381. In succeeding centuries the practice appeared to grow when the Church became formal and dead in its witness and fall away when the Church was healthy and vital.

In Britain, during the first half of the nineteenth century, when there was mounting concern over the state of the Church, there was recorded an outbreak of unknown tongues in the West of Scotland in 1830. A noted minister of the Caledonian Church, Regent Square, London, Edward Irving, heard of these happenings, made enquiries and began teachings and practices which foreshadowed the modern Pentecostalist movement, his followers being known as the *Catholic Apostolic Church*. He was excommunicated at about the same time (on different grounds) by the Presbytery of London, and later deprived of his ministry by the Church

of Scotland, but he influenced many sincere and able Christians of his generation.

For instance, Sir Robert Anderson has described a close associate of Irving, Robert Baxter, as 'a typical English parliamentary lawyer, reserved, slow of speech, and noted for soundness of judgment'. Baxter later became disillusioned with the movement and gave an account of his experience in a book entitled *Narrative of Facts*. In the book he relates how he, with many other men and women of education and culture, were drawn into the movement, how it seemed as if they were, indeed, under the mighty power of God when they spoke in tongues. He also describes how the spirit of praise to the Lord was strong within them, the ecstasy of soul, the mighty uplifting of spirit. There just could not seem to be any possibility of mistake about the spirituality of the movement.

But then came his growing suspicion that all was not well, that statements were not always being made under the influence of God, that when the time came for prophecies to be fulfilled and nothing happened casuistry was used to explain failure. He concluded:

'Indeed the whole work is a mimicry of the gifts of the Spirit—the utterance of tongues, a mimicry of the gift of tongues—and so of the prophesyings, and all the other works of power. It is Satan as an angel of light, imitating, as far as permitted, the Holy Spirit of God. According to the degree of unfaithfulness of the individuals or congregations with which it is present, so, I am persuaded, is the degree of power and consequent deceit which is put forth'. (*Narrative of Facts*, p. 45)

I do not myself wholly agree with Baxter's over-simplified conclusion. While I would not question his judgment or his integrity I think it is based on insufficient experience, and to dismiss 'the whole work' as 'mimicry of the gifts of the Spirit' by 'Satan . . . imitating the Holy Spirit of God' indicates a lack of knowledge of the workings of the Satanic realm in counterfeiting the divine and of the psychical possibilities dormant in men and women for which provision has been made by God.

My qualifications for disagreeing with what after all is the accepted opinion of thousands of intelligent Christians is that I have had unique opportunities to study demonic practices at first hand. I spent several months on the Tibetan border in association with H.R.H. Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark, who was Leader of the Third Danish Anthropological Expedition to Central Asia, and Dr. René Nebesky de Wovkovitz, the noted Austrian authority on demonism, studying the practice and significance of spirit possession. Dr. Nebesky de Wovkovitz has published his evidence and conclusions in *The Oracles and Demons of Tibet* (Oxford University Press), and H.R.H. Prince Peter recorded comprehensive and detailed films and tapes, now with the Copenhagen University. I went on to do a further three-month study in the British Museum Reading Room of ancient writings on demonic practice, so that I could reach some satisfactory scriptural explanation of the phenomena.

Briefly, the Tibetan oracle who was the subject of our studies was young, 32 years old, a layman, who could be possessed by nine different demons (or, as the modern psychical research people prefer to call them, 'control personalities'). I use the term 'could be' advisedly, for he selected the particular 'deity' to suit the particular occasion and applicant for his services, set himself by certain chants, rhythms on cymbals and hand-drums and different items of dress to call down the 'deity' to indwell him. The presence of the 'deity' was apparent in his changed appearance and voice, and, of course, in the type of message communicated in 'tongues' or in demonstrations of the 'super-normal'—to use a more cautious term than 'super-natural'. The oracular message required an 'interpreter', and was couched in the same variegated glossolalia and ambiguities associated with the Delphic Oracle and modern Pentecostalist practice. Some of the 'super-normal' demonstrations consisted of being struck by a razor-edged sword yet not being marked, or in his taking the sword, normally scarcely bendable, and twisting it into a figure-of-eight. This particular oracle was only a small-time operator, the really powerful practitioners being able to 'reactivate' the dead in a ceremony known as 'ro-lang', or 'resurrection of the corpse', for a period of several hours. (See *With Mystics and Magicians in Tibet*, by Madame Alexandra David-Neel; *Battle for the Mind* by William Sargant; *Where the Mountains are Gods* by Renè Nebesky de Wovkovitz).

In my subsequent investigations into the psychical and spiritual realm I met and had long conversations with Eileen Garratt, probably the world's greatest living medium. Strictly speaking, I suppose that description is not correct, for she only spent some ten years as a medium and thereafter provided herself as a guinea-pig for psychical and para-psychological investigation with J. B. Rhind (*Frontiers of the Mind*), at Duke University, and others. She herself, or some of those working with her (non-spiritualists), classified two 'control personalities' who were identifiable, and who responded to names given and the questions asked through her.

I mention these two people as examples of what is described in scores of books on the subject of 'demonism', 'spiritism' or the more modern 'psychic phenomena' because I wish to draw a significant parallel between their experiences and the experience of Pentecostalists, and also a significant difference between their experience and the 'Holy Spirit possession' of the Christian.

The parallel is fairly obvious (and has been made cogently in psychological terms by William Sargant in his *Battle for the Mind*, although he misses completely the spiritual significance) in that tongues, healings, exorcisms, ecstasies and demonstrations of super-normal powers are not the sole prerogatives of Christians. 'He that is in us' is only greater than 'he that is in them' in the measure in which the Holy Spirit has freedom in us to demonstrate His power. The 'outward manifestations' of the spirit-possessed non-Christians are not only similar, they are usually greater in kind and degree than anything normally produced by phenomena-practising Christians.

The difference between the two experiences is of major importance. When a Tibetan oracle, or Indian shaman, or tribal animist, or Western medium, calls a demon, or control personality, into himself or herself *they immediately lose all powers of ratiocination*. That is, from the time when the 'other' occupant takes over, the person 'possessed' does not know, is not able to influence or analyse, and cannot recall what was said or done through him or her at the time of the 'possession', conscious only of a 'feeling of ecstasy'. He or she is simply a mindless vehicle of communication. Whereas the Scriptural Christian, when 'filled with the Spirit' not only retains his or her powers of discernment and judgment but is actively commanded to 'prove all things; hold fast that which is good', 'test the spirits whether they be of God' and 'above all, get understanding'. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the holy is intelligence.

Therefore, I suggest that while the modern Pentecostalist may often be an unwitting 'Christianized' dupe of Satan, 'Pentecostalism', in the sense of Spirit-filled Christians outwardly manifesting power and profit to others by super-normal but scripturally acceptable and explicable means, is something that twentieth-century Christians have lost, in the main, need desperately and must have and demonstrate if they are going to make any impact on this generation at all. This is not only a pious hope on my part, but a firm conclusion from the evidence gathered in direct experience of God's working in Asia in the past twenty years.

The greatest evidence of God's presence and power is not being manifested by the traditional churches, or even by Brethren meetings, but by a growing number of thousands of large and small independent groups of Christians, who spurn names but don't feel they must make an issue of it, and who are in overall greater conformity to the Scriptural 'church' concept. In various parts of Asia these thousands of companies (including Communist China; see my article *Christianity Behind the Bamboo Curtain*, in *Christianity Today*, out soon) are emerging from a period of internal disquiet and difference of opinion over whether to be more 'exclusive' in their fellowship or more 'open', and seeking to find their way back to the earlier power of God which they have known.

In Taiwan, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand the renewed interest in and commitment to a revitalized Christian witness is leading many of these groups into accepting Pentecostalist practices, without directly associating themselves with the Pentecostalist movement. The emphasis in their preaching is on Baptism of the Spirit with signs following, tongues, healing, holy laughter, dancing, holy rolling, healing; although this is not true of the majority.

The most noted figure in the recent Asian Pentecostalist upsurge is a converted Chinese film actress, Mui Yee, who has been influencing groups in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Thailand. A gifted and attractive woman, after a few years of orthodox gospel activity of big campaign testimony meetings she 'had the Baptism' and has since become virulently anti-denominational and divisive.

I investigated some of her claims and churches and in two long interviews with her challenged her with their unscriptural and unspiritual practices making them no different and even worse than those they had left. She pleaded immaturity and lack of workers as causes, and lamely excused the inability of 'the Baptism of the Spirit' to bring about better conditions in individuals and churches by claiming that they were still 'babes in the experience'. This group, in my opinion, and its activities will continue to grow for another year or so then will follow the usual Pentecostalist pattern of internal disruption, growing disillusion, defections and diminishing impact.

However, this movement apart, there are other more definite indications of a mounting, powerful Church witness in Asia, including Communist China (see my *Christianity Behind the Bamboo Curtain*). Some of these, such as the Bakht Singh movement in India, are very definitely anti-Pentecostalist in every way, even declaring the tongues and teaching as 'Satanic'. The majority of the exclusive wing of the Little Flock groups in Asia are also opposed, but many of the new break-away 'open' groups of the Little Flock, and other spontaneous independent groups in Taiwan, Philippines, Hong Kong, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia are either interested in, or concerned with, or attracted by, or indulging in, the physical power-gifts of Pentecostalism—depending on the depth of teaching and spirituality of the particular group. Among these groups there is talk of a charismatic revival (of a manifestation of the gifts of I Cor. chs. 12-14), and of what emphasis this new and growing movement of the Spirit in Asia is taking.

In investigating the Pentecostalist phenomena manifested by the extreme groups I am convinced that they are psychical rather than spiritual, and that the teaching with which their manifestations are connected make the Holy Spirit pre-eminent rather than Christ. It lays an undue emphasis on signs and gifts, and chiefly those—tongues and healings—which affect the physical senses. Finally, these signs and gifts are disturbingly acquired, or accompanied, for the most part by the sacrifice of the person's will-power and the surrender of the power of ratiocination. The whole of the teaching rests upon a misapprehension of the New Testament doctrine of the Holy Spirit. But having reached this conclusion about the Pentecostalist emphasis I also want to state that the growing awareness and concern with some aspects and manifestations of the experiences of early 'Pentecostalism' are of considerable significance and value to modern Christian witness.

Bishop Moule has written: 'There is no *separable* "Gospel of the Spirit"'. Not for a moment are we to advance, as it were, from the Lord Jesus Christ to a higher and deeper region, ruled by the Holy Ghost'. But it is equally true that there is no Gospel apart from the Holy Spirit, and it is this latter error into which most present-day Christians—including Brethren—have fallen. They hold meetings decided upon by rational discussion, the same as the non-believers. They conduct meetings in the same way as a group of Quakers or even of Communists do, according to

a 'sense of the company', or 'consensus of the majority', or in formal conformity to a sterile traditional pattern. The Holy Spirit might as well not exist in either the gatherings or lives of the participants. They choose their wives and husbands, take their business decisions, build their houses, fill their diaries and even prepare their sermons without conscious acknowledgement or even awareness of the presence, work or responsibility of the Holy Spirit. To them, the Holy Spirit is just a subjectively-experienced agent rubber-stamping decisions reached by the same rational methods as the non-Christian. In short, they get along all right with God, Christ and their own common-sense. Like Samson, the loss of power brings with it no realization that an essential member of the Trinity has departed from them.

In other words, might it be said that a large number of the people now meeting in evangelical churches and Brethren assemblies are not Christians at all—in the scriptural sense of the term? The Roman believers made the profession and had the reputation of being true Christians, and their faith was even spoken of throughout the world, but Paul assesses their real character as determined not by their profession and reputation but by the decisive test of the life of the Spirit within them. It is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God in the believer as a constantly ruling power which is all important. Paul made it very clear: 'If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His'; that is, he has no part in Him Who is 'the life'. Unless the Holy Spirit is in a man or woman in a more significant way than simply by an intellectual acknowledgement of Romans 10 verse 9 that man is not a Christian.

Let us not forget, there will be many who can quote Romans 10 verse 9, there will be many who will have lived in the spirit of Romans 10 verse 9, there will be many who have done many wonderful works in the name of the Lord, and have even cast out demons, and the Lord will acknowledge none of them—'I never knew you'. 'You never asked me for anything. You used your common sense. You were never baptised by the Holy Spirit into the Church in the first place, and so you never came to know me and I never knew you'.

The 'sons of God' are those who are 'led by the Spirit of God'. This is the true Pentecostal significance. Pentecost to the apostles and others made the Holy Spirit a real person instead of just a theological proposition. They were now different from all others around them because the departed Christ had indeed sent the promised Paraclete for witness, power and profit, to guide them into all truth and teach them things to come, so that the illimitable wisdom, knowledge and understanding of God might be sifted through them that all might know by the Christ-like change being wrought in them that there was a God in heaven Who had indeed revealed Himself to men in the person of Jesus Christ. This change was wrought in their being 'transformed by a renewing of their minds'. Henceforth, it was to be God working 'in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure', and this was to be done by the Holy Spirit taking control of their minds, in

a voluntary submission and recognition that His direction was best, and thereby having the 'things of God' revealed to them in their daily experience. This transforming of the renewed, Spirit-directed mind resulted in a combination of super-normal tongues (*glōssa*) and linguistic ability (*dialektos*). The new communication meant a new perception of the mind of God and so 'healing' took on a new dimension and significance. The other charismatic gifts likewise.

Previously they had been those who in the vanity of their minds 'walked after the flesh' in a blind obedience to the 'mind of the flesh'. Now the governing principle of their lives must be not conformity to the world but a 'walk after the Spirit' by minds guided and controlled by 'the mind of the Spirit'. In this way they—and we—can say 'Not I-prompted, but my will persuaded, instructed and obedient through Holy Spirit direction to Christ after a Spirit-communicated dialogue with God, resulting in Christ working God's will and His pleasure through me'. No mindless vehicle here, but an assured and intelligent co-worker with an omnipotent and risen Christ. The outcome must be, and is, a power-display of super-normal phenomena which God, providing the *energēmata* of the diversity of operations in I Corinthians 12 verse 6, in His sovereignty and according to the pleasure of His own will distributes to the individual or group of individuals at any place or time.

In my opinion, it could well be that, because we have entered into another long period of deadness in Church witness, we have the current concern with and manifestation of Pentecostalist phenomena. But we must not overlook the possibility that God, in this generation of stiff-necked traditionalism, is really trying to break through to His own in calling their attention to the neglected Third Person of the Godhead in their lives and Church witness.

A renewed consecration does not require a Second Baptism, but it does require a second, third, or fourth filling of the Spirit. Least of all does it require an empty, dessicated exposition of the supposed withdrawal of the Pentecost signs and Gifts in a supercilious prose. Far too often the Scripture is forgotten among Brethren which says 'The gifts and calling of God are without repentance' or, as Darby puts it, are irrevocable. The most that can be argued by the western conservative-claimed non-existence of certain gifts is that Christians have been too lazy, too unconcerned, too proud or too complacent to appropriate what has never been withdrawn. It might equally be argued that they are for the 'beginning stage' of any new church founding or expansion in any generation in any part of the world, and not just limited to the beginning stage of the apostolic period.

Certainly, what cannot be argued is that these phenomena still exist, but that Satan has almost the whole uncontested use of that part of the constitution of man, and that in many places at many times there has been an understanding and use of them to the benefit of the Church which we could well be doing with today.