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PENTECOSTAL, CHARISMATIC OR WHAT'S IN A NAME?

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Whatever a person's view of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements, it is clear that most Christians are at least familiar with the terms. It is also fair to say that most denominations have been, in recent years, affected and influenced by both groups, and yet it is obvious that much confusion exists concerning exactly what the terms refer to and the relationship between the Charismatic (ie Restoration/Renewal) Movement and the older Pentecostal Movement. This article is an attempt to clarify this confusion by outlining briefly the origins and theological emphasis of both groups. In doing this I am in no way trying to compete with the many books that have been written recently,¹ rather I am attempting to present an overview for those with little time or inclination to read more detailed works.

Throughout the history of the church there have been isolated reports of people speaking in languages "unknown to themselves", prophesying or experiencing the Charismata listed by Paul in I Cor. 12: 8-10.² The roots of Pentecostalism however, are based in the United States during the latter part of the 19th Century. Those concerned were almost entirely drawn from what has been termed the "Holiness Movement". This Movement was comprised of some Methodists (who in the main followed Wesley's teaching on holiness), some members of the recently formed Salvation Army and others who were associated with the Keswick Convention.³

By 1906 there were approximately a thousand people in the United States who claimed to have experienced a "baptism in the Holy Spirit" which they linked to the phenomena of glossalalia or speaking in tongues. Initially they were shunned by other Christians. However in 1906 a small church was established in Azusa St. in the negro quarter of Los Angeles.⁴ The services there drew not only the attention of local people but attracted visitors from all over the world. From these visitors returning to their own countries Pentecostal churches were established throughout Europe and the rest of the world.

In spite of great numerical growth, particularly in North America and Scandinavia, these groups were not accepted by the established churches and for almost 50 years were classed as fanatics and sectarians, outside mainstream Christianity. In the United Kingdom the three main groups formed were Assemblies of God, Elim Pentecostal Church, and the Apostolic Church, each functioning as a separate denomination, having different systems of church government, yet maintaining some links,⁵ with Elim and Assemblies of God remaining more closely linked. In 1960 the situation was to change dramatically. Up until then Pentecostals had remained isolated in this country, a situation not helped by their rejection of the World Council of Churches. Once again following events in the United States, Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists and others began to experience similar phenomena to those occurring in the Pentecostal churches.⁶

Despite the initial expectation of Pentecostals, that this would bring unity by these new "charismatics" leaving their own denominations, most decided, at least at first, to remain where they were. Indeed it soon became clear that as a result of the differences in backgrounds there were major disagreements of doctrine. For example William Kay states in an article on Charismatic theology, "When we heard... Roman Catholics, who had been baptized in the Holy Spirit, saying that they could now appreciate Mary more, we were taken aback".⁷ In scenes reminiscent of Acts 11 both sides eyed each other with a certain amount of suspicion.

With the birth of the house church movement in the mid 1960s, there began an exodus from the established churches of charismatics who found it more and more difficult to remain in the older denominations. Faced with endless battles concerning worship and the gifts of the Spirit, and often branded as fanatics, many charismatics decided to leave their own churches. By the seventies the argument became less centred on the "Baptism" of the Holy Spirit and more concerned with whether Charismatics should leave or stay in their own churches.⁸ Those remaining in the denominations being generally known as "the renewal movement" and those who left as "the restoration movement".

Before examining the current situation a look at the differences in doctrine is necessary. As a result of the Pentecostal movement's origins being so firmly rooted in the Holiness movement, not surprisingly, much of its teaching is based on Holiness movement doctrine and practice. Methodism had taught both the decisiveness of the conversion experience and also a further experience variously called "entire sanctification", "holiness", "perfect love" and "the second blessing". Pentecostal doctrine similarly is expressed in terms of two distinct experiences. A new believer repents, receives Christ and is then "baptized" in the Holy Spirit. In some people these two distinct experiences can occur almost simultaneously or be separated by days, weeks or even years. Water baptism (by total immersion) may occur after conversion and before "Baptism in the Spirit", or after conversion and after "Baptism in the Spirit". In addition glossalalia (or "speaking in tongues") has always been held to be the initial evidence of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit.⁹ This emphasis on glossalalia, however, is not to the exclusion of the other charismata listed in I Cor. 12 (e.g. the gifts of interpretation, prophecy, healing, wisdom, knowledge, faith etc.) all of which play an important part in Pentecostal teaching and worship. Indeed in many Pentecostal churches glossalalia have tended to take a less central position in services. In addition some Pentecostals, seeing the experiences of the charismatic movement, have re-examined their personal position and no longer feel able to maintain a doctrine of a second experience, with "tongues" as the initial evidence of it. Nevertheless the mainstream Pentecostal churches still include this point in their declarations of faith.¹⁰

Aside from their distinctive teaching on the Holy Spirit, Pentecostals, as one would expect, hold beliefs in many ways similar to most other Protestant churches with perhaps a closer similarity to the Baptist denomination. Along with other evangelical churches they hold a

high doctrine of the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture.

Criticism has often been levelled against Pentecostal churches concerning their lack of academic theologians and their emphasis on personal experience rather than dogmatic theology. Happily this situation in recent years has begun to be rectified. Donald Gee, one of the founders of Pentecostalism in Britain, went so far as to warn the charismatic movement against falling into the same trap as the Pentecostals by emphasizing personal experience over doctrine.¹¹

It is, however, important to note that all of the mainstream Pentecostal churches have detailed and clear cut declarations of faith. The charismatic movement, on the other hand have often been accused of having a nebulous and inconsistent theology caused by embracing and accommodating people from many varied backgrounds. By emphasizing experience without attention to doctrine they have been able to unite people with very different theologies. Thus charismatics whilst accepting most of the Pentecostal teaching concerning the gifts of the Holy Spirit and their importance to church life and worship, have no clear cut position on the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

In some cases, Charismatics have changed their positions since the 1960s. Michael Harper, one of the leaders of the Anglican Charismatics, for example, has become much less dogmatic concerning glossalalia as the initial evidence of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit.¹² In addition there has been a gradual recognition that the list of charismata in I Cor. 12 is not exhaustive.¹³

Some have accepted a two-fold experience as a way of explaining their experience. Others however hold what might be termed a "one stage" theology, thus avoiding the inherent tension in the two-stage position, often expressed as first and second class Christianity. To explain the often sudden and life changing experience accompanied with a deeper spirituality and an increase in commitment, devotion and love for others, that both Pentecostals and Charismatics claim, they argue that at Baptism (adult or infant, depending on background) or at conversion a person receives the Holy Spirit; and at some point in a Christian's life, either immediately or at some time later, by a working of the Holy Spirit comes into a heightened awareness of God, often manifesting various charismata. Tom Smail expresses this position thus: "it is important to notice that it is one thing to testify to a new experience of the working of the Holy Spirit and quite another to identify this experience as 'the second blessing'. The one is a description of what has happened, the other presupposes a particular theological interpretation of it."¹⁴

The problems that Charismatics have in accepting a two stage experience have been highlighted by Anglicans and Roman Catholics who have stayed in their denominations, thus having to come to terms with their churches' teaching on the Sacrament of infant baptism. Some charismatics for example have begun to feel that there is an inadequacy in supposing that water baptism must produce new birth by the Holy Spirit. They feel that to hold that an infant who has been baptized with

water in the name of the Trinity must be considered as a child of God, fully equipped with the Holy Spirit, has a weakness in the areas of personal experience, faith and allegiance. Michael Green, an Anglican clergyman, expresses it thus: "There are millions of people who have been baptized in infancy without their knowledge or consent... They neither believe in the Christian story themselves nor do those who brought them to Baptism, except perhaps in the most general, not to say superstitious way."¹⁵ He goes on to ask in what way it is meaningful to speak of such people as Christians when they do not go to church or believe the creeds, and claim no knowledge of the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit, and yet have been baptized in water in the name of the Trinity.

To answer this problem many Roman Catholic Charismatics have tended to argue that it is not Baptism alone, but Baptism accompanied (normally years later) by the laying on of hands in Confirmation, which imparts the Holy Spirit. Passages such as Acts Chapters 8 and 19 are usually quoted in support of this position (which interestingly enough are the same passages quoted by Pentecostals to support a "two-stage" experience). Some Catholics such as Simon Tugwell have however tried to maintain a more orthodox position.¹⁶

Charismatic Anglicans, on the other hand, have on the whole tended not to challenge their church's doctrinal position, rather just postpone the Baptism of their own children until they are old enough to be personally involved in what the sacrament signifies. John Gunstone feels¹⁷ that the indications are that infant Baptism will become less widespread in Anglican families and virtually non-existent amongst non-church attenders. He also mentions that the Alternative Service Book does already provide a service of thanksgiving for the birth of a child (similar to infant dedication in many Free denominations). Other Catholics and Anglicans, feeling infant baptism to be inadequate, have left their churches, often joining house groups who have rebaptized them by total immersion. In fact rebaptism is often, although not always, a pre-requisite of membership.

The Lambeth Conference in 1978 acknowledged this problem saying, "A... pastoral problem arises when a person baptized in infancy experiences the renewing power of the Holy Spirit as an adult and asks to be baptized again. Such a request must be declined, as it suggests that the efficacy of Baptism lies in the effects on the individual's feelings and denies the fact that Baptism incorporates the person who receives it into Christ."¹⁸ The Conference also suggested that some other form of affirmation of renewal was required to meet this need. In some cases, faced with the loss of a committed member of their church, Priests have either "borrowed" the facilities of another church and quietly rebaptized the person or have asked a local Free Church minister to perform the rebaptism.¹⁹

The situation in the House Church movement is even more confused. These independent groups are led by individuals, whose interpretations of the Bible are taken as authoritative by their members. As much of their teaching is experience-based, the theology that is expressed sometimes appears contradictory. For

Example, Anne Mather reports an interview with an elder of one of the largest House Church groups (which gives the impression in its literature that it is firmly promulgating a two-stage doctrine of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit), in which he said “Baptism in the Spirit is part and parcel of the whole salvation package. We don’t really believe in two stages, but because of deficient teaching and understanding many get it in bits and pieces.”²⁰ In the main, however, most areas of the Restoration movement hold the traditional Pentecostal two-stage doctrine of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. They also hold firmly to a doctrine of Believer’s Baptism which is similar to traditional Pentecostalism. It can however be argued that their “Baptist” views owe as much to Brethrenism as to traditional Pentecostalism. The same could be said of their attitude to sacraments and liturgy. Like all Brethren and Pentecostals they abhor ritualism and sacramentalism of any kind. However given that in the main the Restorationist position on the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and the Gifts of the Spirit is also substantially the same as that of the Pentecostals, one might reasonably expect to find a close link between the two groups. In reality this is not the case. One of the most distinctive beliefs of the Restoration movement (which they state either explicitly or implicitly) is that the early Church very early on fell into the trap of denominationalism. The Restorationists therefore see themselves as returning to a Christianity based on New Testament lines without denominational barriers. They therefore believe that all denominations are wrong and no longer useful or part of God’s purposes. They therefore feel that the Pentecostals have fallen into the same error of denominationalism as the older denominations have done. What this has meant in practice is that although there are greater doctrinal differences between Pentecostals and Renewalists they have tended on the whole to be more closely related to each other. The Restorationists therefore have remained more isolated.²¹

THE PRESENT AND FUTURE

Whatever the shortcomings of both the Pentecostals and Charismatics (and I believe there are a number), it has become clear that the established churches ignore them at their peril. At a time when overall church attendance in the UK has fallen, most Pentecostal and Charismatic churches have shown large increases, unfortunately in part at the expense of other churches. The Anglican church in five years, on the other hand, has suffered 10% drop in church attendance, figures which have been mirrored in the Roman Catholic church.²² The failure of these churches to welcome and accommodate charismatics, I believe, must to some extent be the cause of this.

Cardinal Suenens in a call to church leaders says “Let us open our hearts to the grace of the Renewal, grasping its meaning and wealth”. He finishes by saying “The Holy Spirit works in many ways, and no one can claim to have an exclusive monopoly of His action. But we have to recognise with Paul VI that the Renewal is an opportunity for the church and the world.”²³

Within the last ten years there has been a further development, caused in the main by the charismatic movement, of whole churches of the Baptist and other free Church denominations, including Pentecostals,

breaking away to become independent. The normal reason given is that denominations are a hindrance to unity and are therefore wrong and outdated. However most of these churches seem to end up joining groups such as the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (F.I.E.C.) or House Church groups, which appear to function in a similar way to the denominations that the churches have broken away from in the first place. The reports of the F.I.E.C. Annual Assembly in their magazine *Fellowship*²⁴ mention a central headquarters, a home missions fund, Youth Committee, etc., much the same as other denominations. Far from breaking down barriers to church unity they have erected another and caused a further splintering of the Christian Church. Another result is that by placing the authority in a church in the hands of one, two or three men, as in the House churches, there have sometimes been excesses in areas such as the control and disciplining of church members, including in some cases financial control.

In addition there has been a tendency towards what has been termed “judgmentalism.” No longer do we have Pharisees and Tax Collectors (see Luke 18:9 ff); instead we have charismatics and non-charismatics often both thanking God they are not like each other. However, in the past few years there have been hopeful signs concerning unity. Many leading churchmen, theologians and evangelical leaders have appealed not for a unity of all charismatics, but for a unity of all Christians, that comes from accepting each other’s differences: not by merging denominations but rather by accepting and tolerating one another in love and working together where possible, when differences in doctrine allow it. A large number of books and articles putting forward this view have been written recently,²⁵ and I believe that if the church is to see growth and renewal in the future, this must be the way forward.

FOOTNOTES:

1. For example J. Gunstone, *Pentecostal Anglicans* (Hodder, 1982), R. Laurentin, *Catholic Pentecostalism* (DIT, 1977), A. Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom* (Hodder, 1985), P. Hocken, *Streams of Renewal* (Paternoster, 1986)
2. For a brief historical outline see Michael Harper, *As at the Beginning* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1965) pp.17ff.
3. For further details see Vinson Synan, *The Holiness – Pentecostal Movements in the U.S.A.* (Eerdmans, 1971).
4. For an eye witness account of the services there see F. Bartleman, *Azusa St.* (Logos, 1980)
5. For details of the differences in origins and practices etc. of these groups see W.J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (SCM 1972).
6. For details of the developments in Britain in the 1960s see Michael Harper, *None can guess* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1971), P. Hocken, *Streams of Renewal* (Paternoster, 1986)
7. *Redemption Tidings* (Assemblies of God) Vol 61 No 27 p.4.
8. For details of both sides of the argument see: Edward England, *The Spirit of Renewal*, (Kingsway, 1982) pp.87ff.
9. For detailed exposition of Pentecostal teaching on spiritual gifts see: Harold Horton, *The Gifts of the Spirit*, (AOG Publishing House, 10th ed. 1976).
10. For Pentecostal declarations of faith see Hollenweger, pp.513ff.
11. Donald Gee, *Pentecost* (Vol 68, 1964) p.17.
12. To see how his position has changed see *As at the Beginning*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1965) pp.102-4; *Walk in the Spirit* (Hodder & Stoughton 1968) pp.20-21; *This is the Day* (Hodder & Stoughton 1979) pp.60-61

13. See A. Bittlinger, *Gifts and Ministries*, (Hodder & Stoughton, 1974). An excellent book from a Roman Catholic theologian.
14. Tom Smail, *Reflected Glory* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1975) pp.17-18.
15. Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (2nd edition, Hodder, 1985) p.149f.
16. Simon Tugwell, *Did you Receive the Spirit?* (DLT, 1972).
17. John Gunstone, *The Pentecostal Anglicans*, (Hodder & Stoughton, 1982) p.134.
18. *The Report of the Lambeth Conference 1978* (C.I.O. Pub., 1978) p.73.
19. In my own church Anglicans have been baptized, with their Priest's blessing and on the understanding they remain within their own church.
20. Anne Mather, 'The Charismatic Movement' (*Themelios*, Vol 9 No 3) p.19.
21. For further details of the distinctive teachings and structure of the Restoration movement see A. Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom* (Hodder, 1985).
22. All statistics are taken from *U.K. Christian handbook 1983 and 1985*. (Marc Europe)
23. Cardinal Suenens, *Renewal and the Powers of Darkness* (DLT, 1983) pp.102 ff.
24. *Fellowship* (July/August 1985) Vol 7 No 4.
25. G.W. Kirby, *All One in Christ?* (Kingsway, 1984), M. Harper, *That We Might be One* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1983), Paul Billheimer, *Love Covers* (CLC, 1981), Michael Griffiths, 'Handling Differences' (*Fellowship*, May/June, Vol 7 No 3; July/Aug, Vol 7 No 4.)

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