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Pentecostal Theology

ONE OF THE most significant features of twentieth century religious life has been the phenomenal growth of Pentecostalism. Although this development has not been so dramatic in Great Britain, certain parts of the world have witnessed its sudden upsurge. People react to the word "Pentecostal" in many ways. On the one extreme there are those who dismiss the whole movement as mere fanaticism and the product of an unbalanced mind. The other end of the spectrum is the belief that the distinctive Pentecostal theology is the one exclusive way of understanding God's activity today. We must beware of prejudice on this matter, from all our viewpoints. The aim of this article is to give an outline of the main theological beliefs which Pentecostals hold in common. At the outset it is important to define what we mean by the word "Pentecostal". Our main task is to consider the beliefs of the so-called "classical" Pentecostal groups in this country which developed in the earlier part of this century, the major ones being the Apostolic Church, the Assemblies of God and the Elim Pentecostal Church. Since the 1960s many people within the main denominations, including the Roman Catholic Church, have entered into a new experience of the reality of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes these people are called Neo-Pentecostals or members of the "Charismatic Movement". They owe much to the earlier Pentecostals although there are certain differences. However, within the limitations of this article we will not be able to discuss this later development in detail.

It is important to realise that the Pentecostal believes he can align himself with the traditions of the main body of the Church. A publication written on behalf of the British Pentecostal Fellowship states: "Indeed, it could be safely affirmed that the Pentecostal Movement as a whole could heartily subscribe to the Apostles' Creed."¹ It is an unashamedly fundamentalist movement, taking a literal interpretation of scripture. Biblical criticism is rejected, often as satanic. This attack was particularly vicious in the embryonic stages of the movement. The theory of evolution is frequently criticised. There is a great stress on a particular view of eschatology. For instance, every Elim minister must adhere to the tenet: "We believe in the personal and pre-millennial return of our Lord Jesus Christ to receive unto Himself the Church, and afterwards to set up His throne as King".² Pentecostal hymns look forward with joyful anticipation to the imminent Second Coming of Christ. Of course, this particular interpretation of Christian faith is by no means the exclusive preserve of Pentecostals. Also, there is increasing interest in academic attainment in the second and third generations of Pente-

costals. Yet, the academic study of theology in a "secular" university is still looked on with some suspicion.

Within this framework, the distinctive theological doctrine within Pentecostalism is the emphasis on the "baptism in the Holy Spirit" as a subsequent experience for Christians after conversion, and the manifestation of the nine gifts of the Spirit as outlined in I Corinthians 12, vv. 8-10. The Pentecostal uses the Bible as the source book for doctrine and uses the book of Acts as normative for receiving and understanding baptism in the Holy Spirit. According to the Pentecostal, there are about six occasions mentioned in the book of Acts when people received the Holy Spirit in a special way. At Pentecost "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance".³ Peter saw this as the fulfilment of prophecy and, at the end of his speech, said, "Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him".⁴ When Philip visited Samaria, many believed and were baptised in water but for some reason did not receive the Holy Spirit. Peter and John came from Jerusalem and laid hands on them and "they received the Holy Spirit".⁵ After Paul's conversion Ananias was sent so that "you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit".⁶ Paul then saw again and was baptised.⁷ When Peter was speaking in the house of Cornelius at Caesarea, "the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God".⁸ After this the people were baptised. Lastly, when Paul visited Ephesus he asked the disciples: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" When they replied in the negative "they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied".⁹

Whilst the Pentecostals in Great Britain regard the baptism in the Spirit as subsequent to conversion, it must be clearly understood that spirit baptism is not seen as a final stage in salvation. The late W. G. Hathaway, a well respected Elim pioneer, wrote: "At conversion the believer is indwelt by the Spirit, who takes up his abode in the human spirit, regenerating and revitalising it by His presence. But this second experience, the 'baptism into the Holy Spirit', is an expansion of the Spirit's indwelling. The Spirit not only takes possession of the human spirit but permeates the whole personality: the will, the emotions, the mind."¹⁰ Whilst the day of Pentecost events, recorded in Acts chapter 2, describe the inauguration of a new era with the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church, this experience of spirit baptism is appropriated by individuals later in time. Conditions for receiving this experience vary from situation to situation. The indivi-

dual must recognise his need of the Holy Spirit and believe that this has been promised. Often the rite of the laying on of hands is employed here; the New Testament precedents for this are stressed.¹¹ Sometimes this takes place in "waiting meetings" where a group of people remain together in prayer and praise until the individual "receives his Baptism". Pentecostals practise water baptism by total immersion but this is not associated with the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Again, the book of Acts is used to support this "separation" between water baptism and spirit baptism.

Usually the experience of spirit baptism is accompanied by "speaking in tongues"—glossolalia. Again the Pentecostal finds evidence for this in the Acts.¹² Further biblical reference is found in I Corinthians, chapters 12 and 14. Paul is concerned here with certain excesses, but he does not invalidate the experience: "for one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit".¹³ Paul also writes: "Do not forbid speaking in tongues".¹⁴ According to the Pentecostal, in glossolalia one's vocal organs are taken over and the voice emits the sounds of a language which has not been learned previously.

Much debate centres on the question of whether glossolalia is the initial evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The Assemblies of God claim that it is, basing this judgement on the book of Acts and Mark 16, v. 17 ("And these signs will accompany those who believe . . . they will speak in new tongues."). As Donald Gee comments: "The doctrine that speaking with other tongues is the initial evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit rests upon the accumulated evidence of the recorded cases in the book of Acts where this experience is received".¹⁵ However, against this, there are many Pentecostals who do not accept that a person has not received the baptism in the Holy Spirit if he has not spoken in tongues. This is the official position of the Elim Pentecostal Church, the Swiss Pentecostal Mission, the Chilean Pentecostal Movement and the German Pentecostal Movement.

Great unanimity is displayed in the Pentecostal Movement when one considers the purpose of the baptism in the Holy Spirit—it is *power*. Pentecostals quote Acts 1, v. 8 as a key text. Jesus promised: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judaea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." This power provides a living experience for the individual. Some Pentecostals would claim that this experience eliminated any doubts they possessed regarding their faith, not just at the time of the experience but for all subsequent occasions. However, many Pentecostals, whilst not compromising on the vitality and assurance the baptism in the Spirit brings, do not enjoy such freedom from doubts. Many stress that spirit baptism has opened up the way to a new dimension of experience.

The effects of this experience of spirit baptism are very apparent in worship, whether in private or in public. The individual, in his

private devotions, is assured of God's presence and he claims that his spirit baptism enables him to worship his Lord more freely and meaningfully. Bible reading becomes more of a joy than a discipline as he learns daily what God is saying to him from its pages. Of course, not only Pentecostals would want to speak in these terms, but the one "baptised in the Holy Spirit" usually claims that it enables him to be more devoted to Bible reading and gives him a greater desire to worship and to glorify God. The experience enables his relationship with God to become more personal, and it is marked by joy. Thus, when Pentecostals meet together for worship, their meetings are often characterised by spontaneity and joy. In this, they point out the similarities with life in the Early Church.¹⁶ Everyone participates, singing hymns or choruses with a decisive rhythm and often clapping enthusiastically. In each service, the believer awaits the Spirit's 'power' to intervene in some way. As Donald Gee remarked: "A Pentecostal meeting where you always know what is going to happen next is backslidden."¹⁷ Yet, many Pentecostals today bemoan the fact that these high ideals are infrequently attained.

Whilst the baptism in the Spirit gives power for the individual and for worship, it is stressed that this is designed mainly for service. "Saved to serve" is a popular Pentecostal epigram. One's quality of service is greatly enhanced by spirit baptism. The front cover of the weekly *Elim Evangel* often used to proclaim the words "Fundamental, Pentecostal, Evangelical". Certainly fervent evangelistic activity is one of the most striking marks of the Pentecostal Movement. The book of Acts records the courage which the early Christians possessed as a result of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ Donald Gee, in attempting to put glossolalia in perspective, once wrote: "The steam in the locomotive is not there principally for blowing the whistle but for making it go!"¹⁹ Thus, the power resulting from the baptism in the Spirit is harnessed for service. Though this has usually been seen in terms of the spoken word ("witnessing for Christ"), the Pentecostal also claims that this power gives him a loving concern for his fellow member's wellbeing. More recently, there are growing signs of this loving concern also involving responsibility for those outside the Christian community, but there is some reluctance in case this should lead to a social Gospel. Again, this understanding is by no means confined to the Pentecostal Movement.

The second distinctive area of Pentecostal theology is the practice of the nine gifts of the Spirit as listed by Paul in I Corinthians 12, vv. 8-10. Again, these are not seen as essential for salvation but the absence of them will severely frustrate and curtail the effectiveness of service. Harold Horton, in a Pentecostal classic on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, writes: "You can live without eyes and ears and speech. Spiritual gifts are as optional as eyesight . . . you can be holy without Gifts but you cannot be mighty in God without them."²⁰ It is to be noticed that, according to Pentecostals, these nine gifts are regarded as in a different category from those in Romans 12, vv. 6-8,

and Ephesians 4, vv. 11, 12. Those listed in I Corinthians are "spiritual" gifts whereas the others are "natural" gifts. The charismata in I Corinthians 12 are "divine bestowals" and "not quickened human faculties". These nine gifts are usually classified in three categories—Gifts of Revelation (words of wisdom, knowledge and the gift of discernment of spirits), Gifts of Power (faith, miracles and gifts of healing), and Gifts of Inspiration (tongues, interpretation of tongues and prophecy).

Firstly, we consider the Gifts of Revelation. The word of wisdom is "the supernatural revelation, by the Spirit, of Divine Purpose; the supernatural declaration of the Mind and Will of God; the supernatural unfolding of His Plans and Purposes concerning things, places and people".²¹ This is not identified with human intellect and can be mediated through the gifts of prophecy, tongues and interpretation. The word of knowledge is also a supernatural revelation, "perhaps of the existence, condition or whereabouts of some person or object or place, or of the location or occasion of some event".²² Again it is not identifiable with any natural ability. This gift can reveal the cause of sickness, and the root of a particular problem which needs pastoral care. The gift of discernment of spirits enables people to recognise the presence of demon possession, and to exorcise this evil in the name of Jesus.

Under the heading of the Gifts of Power, we first note the gift of faith. Distinguished from the faith necessary for salvation, this gift enables the possessor to "sustain an unwavering trust in God for his personal protection, and for the provision of his needs".²³ The gift of miracles involves for the Pentecostal an interruption of the system of nature as we know it. The gifts of healing receive prominence in Pentecostal life and practice. The healing miracles of Jesus in the Gospels are quoted and it is held that the same healing resources are available for people today. Certain individual evangelists, recognised by the Pentecostal Movement in this country, may specialise in a healing ministry. However, people will be prayed for in the local congregation as part of normal church life in accordance with James 5, v. 14 ("Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. . ."). In the early days of Pentecostalism there was a measure of suspicion towards the work of doctors as being the "worldly" way of healing. However, this has changed and there is a growing understanding of the medical profession as in some sense agents of God's healing purposes.

Under the classification of Gifts of Inspiration we consider first glossolalia. Horton defines this as "a supernatural utterance by the Holy Spirit in languages never learned by the speaker—not understood by the mind of the speaker—nearly always not understood by the hearer".²⁴ This gift enables people to express their innermost feelings of worship and prayer. A distinction is made between the "speaking in tongues" accompanying spirit baptism and the gift as it is publicly

uttered in the Church. People with this gift may exercise it privately or in public, when it is to be accompanied by an interpretation. The possessor of the gift is usually in complete control and can cease the utterance when he wills (under the leading of the Spirit). The instruction of Paul in I Corinthians 14, v. 27 is adhered to: "If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two, or at the most three, and each in turn". The gift of interpretation is not a verbatim translation; it may be an outline which can be revealed to the interpreter word by word, sentence by sentence, or just as one "impressing" thought. Since this is mediated through the personality, the interpretation may bear the individual's particular characteristics. The third gift of inspiration is the gift of prophecy. This is in the mother tongue and, in content, is similar to the public use of the gift of tongues coupled with interpretation. Its purpose is to build up the Church and this can occur through preaching and teaching. However, a prophecy is not prepared beforehand.

Pentecostal leaders do show an awareness of the possible dangers in some of this theology. They are conscious of an unhealthy fanaticism and many leaders exercise caution and strict discipline over the manifestations of the Spirit in the local church. Concern is expressed within the Pentecostal movement about the personality cult which surrounds various healing evangelists. Further there is an increasing concern to avoid the criticism of anti-intellectualism. Donald Gee was one such leader who was called "an apostle of balance" because he was careful to avoid unbridled hysteria, yet he did not want to stifle the Spirit. There is a great emphasis on doctrine and practice conforming to the word of God as in Scripture and it is held that the manifestation of the Spirit should produce a more Christ-centred community.

The main purpose of this article has been to attempt a straightforward description of Pentecostal theology. There is little space here for discussion of the Neo-Pentecostal phenomenon (or Charismatic Movement) which has developed in recent times in all the major denominations, or for making a detailed assessment. Some brief comments must suffice. Neo-Pentecostalism is indebted to Pentecostalism for its inspiration historically, but it is more flexible in biblical interpretation and allows for a greater diversity in practice. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are not linked exclusively with the nine in I Corinthians 12. Neo-Pentecostals are not necessarily allied to a fundamentalist view of Scripture. When the experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit is described, there is a diversity in terminology, and it may be linked with conversion or water baptism or a subsequent occasion. Neo-Pentecostals are more concerned with relating this experience to a renewal of the social order and the life of the community. Also, Neo-Pentecostals have a greater concern for the role of the intellect and are not afraid of self-criticism.

In my view, the Church in the twentieth century should acknowledge with gratitude the great contribution of Pentecostalism and Neo-

Pentecostalism. Of course there are the dangers of fanaticism and unbridled individualism. Vigour and sincerity are not enough. Yet we should not suspect any particular experience simply because it is unusual. This is especially valid concerning the gift of tongues. It cannot be denied that on some occasions glossolalia is the result of pure emotionalism. Certain types of personality are susceptible to fanaticism in highly charged emotional situations. We have however, no scientific grounds for explaining away all glossolalia as pathological.²⁵

Three criteria can be noted for establishing the presence of a genuine expression of the Holy Spirit. First, that it is in harmony with the revelation of God in Christ, with the Bible as the basic witness. Secondly, that it leads to the fruit of the Spirit, which is Christlikeness. This in itself should lead to a growth in maturity and personal integration. Thirdly, that it is related to the community of the whole Church as the body of Christ and is prepared to listen to others, as well as share the new experience. Within this framework of the Christian Church Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism are making a contribution. They have stimulated interest, both academically and experientially, in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, which had been neglected in the Church for some time.

The Pentecostal phenomenon has provoked much thought on such questions as the nature of the Holy Spirit, the definition of a "gift" of the Spirit and the "supernatural", the nature of religious experience and the varying views on Christian initiation. For many, the movements have brought a sense of liberation in worship and spirituality in an age when there appears to have been a period of tiredness and dryness. They have promoted a strong sense of fellowship and love for one another, both within and outside the Church.

There have been excesses in the Pentecostal movement and many leaders within the movement acknowledge this with regret. Nevertheless, we must attempt to eliminate our own prejudices. R. P. C. Hanson has remarked about the attitude towards the Holy Spirit in Christian history: "When truth is suppressed or sidetracked it is apt to manifest itself again in the form of an explosion and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit reasserted itself from time to time in an explosive and unorthodox but compelling way on the fringes of the Church."²⁶ The rediscovery of the work of the Holy Spirit in the twentieth century may seem like an explosion to some and now it is being integrated into the corporate experience of the "body of Christ". We should desire and expect a much wider range of spiritual experience in the Christian Church—from silence to a more open exuberance. Paul's teaching on the body of Christ reminds us of unity in diversity, each gift being for the good of the whole and each respecting the gift of others.²⁷ So long as no part of the body claims exclusive control over the understanding and experience of the Holy Spirit we can face the future with renewed confidence. The way is open for mutual enrichment in realising the vast resources of grace available for us in the

Holy Spirit. When we are all more open to the Spirit's power we will be better equipped to carry out our prime task as a Church—being the body of Christ in a rapidly changing world.

NOTES

- ¹ *What is this Pentecostal Movement?* (Assemblies of God, undated), p. 10.
- ² Declaration of Faith, Elim Pentecostal Church.
- ³ Acts 2, v. 4.
- ⁴ Acts 2, vv. 38-9.
- ⁵ Acts 8, v. 17.
- ⁶ Acts 9, v. 17.
- ⁷ Acts 9, vv. 18-19.
- ⁸ Acts 10, vv. 44-6.
- ⁹ Acts 19, vv. 2, 5-6.
- ¹⁰ W. G. Hathaway, *A Consideration of Modern Pentecostal Phenomena* (Heath Press, Croydon, 1967), p. 14.
- ¹¹ Acts 8, v. 17; 9, v. 17; 19, v. 6.
- ¹² Acts 2, v. 4; 10, v. 46; 19, v. 6.
- ¹³ I Corinthians 14, v. 2.
- ¹⁴ I Corinthians 14, v. 39.
- ¹⁵ *Redemption Tidings*, 31st May, 1963, p. 10.
- ¹⁶ Acts 2, v. 47; 4, v. 33.
- ¹⁷ *Pentecost Magazine*, 1932, p. 36.
- ¹⁸ Acts 4, vv. 8, 13.
- ¹⁹ D. Gee, *Concerning Spiritual Gifts* (Gospel Publishing House, 1937 edition), p. 93.
- ²⁰ H. Horton, *The Gifts of the Spirit* (Assemblies of God 1934 edition), p. 35.
- ²¹ Horton, p. 64.
- ²² Horton, p. 46.
- ²³ Howard Carter, *Gifts of the Spirit* (1946), p. 47.
- ²⁴ Horton, p. 141.
- ²⁵ W. J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (S.C.M. Press, 1972), pp. 490-1.
- ²⁶ R. P. C. Hanson, *God: Creator, Saviour, Spirit* (S.C.M. Press, 1960), p. 79.
- ²⁷ I Corinthians 12, vv. 5-7.

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