

**THE PENTECOSTALS
AND CHARISMATICS**
A Confessional Lutheran Evaluation

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INTRODUCTION

On New Year's Eve, December 31, 1900, just a few hours before the start of the 20th century, a religious movement began that would have a tremendous impact on the religious world. Begun in very inauspicious circumstances, this movement has influenced more lives and done more to shape religious thinking than any other since the Protestant Reformation.

For one hundred years, the movement has been spreading throughout the world. For the first 50 or 60 years, it was called the Pentecostal movement. People who received the Pentecostal "spirit" joined together in churches and denominations devoted to Pentecostal teaching. Pentecostal churches were broadly shunned by the middle and upper classes of society as being anti-intellectual and even weirdly elitist.

In the 1960s, however, something happened that the members of the original Pentecostal churches probably never thought they would see. The movement spilled over into traditional Christian denominations. Large numbers of people experienced the Pentecostal "baptism in the Holy Spirit" and speaking in tongues. The Pentecostal movement had produced a clone, the charismatic movement, which swept like a fast-rising tide into every major denomination in America, Catholic and Protestant. It lent an aura of sophistication and respectability to some of the very teachings and practices that had kept many people at a distance. The rapid growth of Pentecostal churches and the even more rapid growth of the charismatic spirit within traditional denominations have given rise to a movement that Christians must come to grips with.

Unprecedented growth

A brief look at the statistics will show us how quickly the Pentecostal/charismatic movement has spread and why it is important for us to know something about it. Richard

Ostling, writing in *Time*, concluded that the growth of Pentecostal groups far outstrips that of all other Christian groups. In 1980 there were an estimated 345 million Protestants worldwide, with Pentecostals (not including charismatics) comprising the largest denominational subgroup, numbering over 51 million members.¹

Of the Pentecostal denominations, the Assemblies of God (AOG) is the largest. In 1914 it numbered ten thousand members in the United States. By 1940 it had grown to two hundred thousand, and by the early 1980s it had grown to ten million members worldwide.² It is predicted that by 2000 or shortly thereafter, the AOG will be larger than the Episcopal church or the Presbyterian church (USA).

Starting in the early 1960s, the charismatic renewal movement shared the same spectacular growth. In 1967 Pentecostalism poured into the Roman Catholic Church—a truly amazing development. By mid 1988, 12% of all Roman Catholics in the world could be given the Pentecostal/charismatic label.³

Dr. David B. Barrett's *Global Expansion of the Renewal across the 20th Century, A.D. 1400–2000*, helps us put the movement into perspective. According to Barrett, who in 1982 published a nation-by-nation survey of church demographics, in 1993 there were 429,523,000 Pentecostals/charismatics.⁴ He estimates that 70 percent of all church growth worldwide is among Pentecostal/charismatic groups. He notes that 54 thousand people a day, or over 19 million people a year, become Pentecostal/charismatic. Two-thirds of the current global evangelization plans can be credited to Pentecostal/charismatic churches or church agencies. They account for one hundred new mission agencies in the Western world and over three hundred in the Third World.⁵ Among the fastest growing churches in 1990 was World Changers Ministries, a black charismatic congregation in Atlanta, Georgia. The Church of God in Christ, a black Pentecostal group based in Memphis, Tennessee, is reported to be the fastest growing denomination in the United States.⁶

Barrett estimates that by 2000 there will be a total of 562,526,000 Pentecostal/charismatic church members world-

wide. This, he points out, will represent 28.6 percent of the membership of Christian churches. He further points out that there will be another 56,800,000 Pentecostals/charismatics who are unaffiliated with any church, bringing the total to 619,326,000 professing Pentecostals/charismatics.

How accurate are these figures? That is difficult to determine. However, they do illustrate a point that is indisputable. The Pentecostal/charismatic movement is a force to be reckoned with. It invites—even demands—close and thorough examination. Its history, teachings, philosophies, practices, claims, strengths, and weaknesses all must be evaluated in the light of God’s Word.

Our course as Christians is clear, for the Lord’s apostle has warned, “Test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4:1). God’s Word is the only basis of our Christian religion. It is our spiritual chart and compass to which we must turn to find direction also in settling the questions and issues raised by the Pentecostal/charismatic movement.

Part One

THE HISTORY OF PENTECOSTALISM:

OLD AND NEW

1

PENTECOSTAL FERVOR BEFORE 1900

Before we speak about the outbreak and growth of the modern Pentecostal/charismatic movement, it would be good to examine church history. The modern Pentecostal/charismatic movement puts much emphasis on “experiencing” the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals and charismatics look for signs that the Holy Spirit is working in the believer, his work being manifested by supernatural charismatic gifts, especially speaking in tongues. Are there parallels in church history?

Did the early church, the Middle Age church, or the church at the time of the Reformation stress a “baptism of the Holy Spirit” accompanied by sensational works such as speaking in tongues (glossolalia), prophesying, and healing? What about the post-Reformation church? Were there groups that taught that the church should reenact Acts 2, with each believer experiencing his own little Pentecost? A study of church history

reveals that the modern Pentecostal/charismatic phenomenon is nothing new. When and where this phenomenon is found, however, will help us establish a pattern that will be useful when we analyze the modern movement.

The apostolic church

Some supernatural charismatic gifts continued to be practiced in the church for a period of time after the apostles had died. The gift of speaking in tongues disappeared quite early. This would agree with the lesser value the apostle Paul placed on speaking in tongues and with the fact that speaking in tongues often gave rise to confusion, jealousy, and dissension in the early church. It was also a gift that was easy to counterfeit. Gifts such as healings seemed to remain for a longer time.

From the apostles to the Reformation

Clement I, bishop of Rome (ca. 91–100), was the first of the apostolic church fathers. He supposedly traveled with Paul and Peter. He recorded what he considered to be a “plentiful outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all.”¹ While he did not specifically mention supernatural charismatic gifts of the Spirit, some think he alluded to them. If this is so, Clement may have been referring to some who were still alive in his day to whom the apostles had conferred miracle-working power by the laying on of hands.

Another apostolic church father, Ignatius, who was martyred by Trajan in 107, wrote a letter to the church at Smyrna in which he concluded that the church was blessed with every good gift. Perhaps he also was referring to gifts of supernatural character.²

By the second century, the number of people upon whom the apostles had laid hands and bestowed miracle-working power was dwindling. Only the apostle John lived to the end of the first century (or close to it).

Justin Martyr (ca. 100–166), a so-called Christian philosopher, claimed that miraculous powers such as healing and the ability to exorcise demons were practiced by Christians in the face of pagans who were powerless to imitate them. Justin

claimed that Christians were also endowed with the gift of prophecy. Yet he referred to “no particular instance of an exercise of miraculous power.”³ In Justin’s description of an early church service, he made no mention of anyone speaking in tongues or performing miracles.⁴

The Shepherd of Hermas (ca. 100–140), a deeply religious man, wrote a Christian allegory in which he incorporated visions he supposedly had seen.⁵

Irenaeus (ca. 115–200), bishop of Lyons and a highly respected theologian of the early church, claimed that Christians exercised miraculous powers in his day. He wrote about healings, prophecies, insights into secrets, exorcisms of demons, speaking in tongues, and the dead being raised to life.⁶ Yet he was the only one to report these phenomena in the early church, and he himself does not claim to have witnessed anyone being raised from the dead. Irenaeus, like Justin, “speaks altogether generally, adducing no specific cases, but ascribing miracle-working to ‘all who were truly disciples of Jesus,’ each according to the gift he had received.”⁷ Yet Irenaeus, in his writings, could have been referring to the practices of the Montanists, a heretical Pentecostal sect of that day.

Benjamin Warfield concludes, “The writings of the so-called Apostolic Fathers contain no clear and certain allusions to miracle-working or to the exercise of the charismatic gifts” in their day.⁸

A converted pagan priest named Montanus began opposing the secularization and worldliness of the church in the latter part of the second century. Montanus claimed to possess the gift of prophecy. He prophesied in the first person, causing many to believe that he was actually the manifestation of the Comforter promised by Christ in John 14 and 16. According to Eusebius, a historian in the early church, Montanus would suddenly fall into an ecstatic frenzy and utter strange things. Eusebius quotes Apolinarius, bishop of Hierapolis, who maintained that Montanus’ prophesying was “in a manner contrary to the constant custom of the Church handed down by tradition from the beginning.”⁹ According to Apolinarius, the Montanists “talked wildly and unreasonably and strangely.”¹⁰ The

followers of Montanus claimed to have received visions and at times subordinated the apostles' teachings to these revelations. Though Montanism became widespread, it eventually lost its "Pentecostal" character, and prophetic tongues ceased to be mentioned in their writings. Finally, in the sixth century, this ancient sect disappeared.

Tertullian (ca. 150–230), considered one of the greatest teachers of the Latin Church, was enticed by the asceticism of the Montanists. He reported that the Christians of his time were daily expelling demons from the possessed.¹¹ He also adduced "one case of a prophetically gifted woman."¹²

Another church father, Origen (ca. 185–254), reported that miraculous signs given by the Holy Spirit were less pronounced in his day and that, while there were still visible traces of the Holy Spirit's presence in divine healings, they were becoming less common. Origen flatly denied that living Christians still spoke real prophecies, whether in intelligible or ecstatic speech.

Gregory (ca. 210–270), bishop of Neocaesarea, was known in his day as The Wonder Worker. He was credited with performing many different miracles. Yet the record of his works seems so embellished that it is hard to determine how much is fact and how much is fable.

The same is true of another church father, Hilary (ca. 291–371). Claims about his supernatural works seem to be a mixture of fact and legend.

Ambrose (ca. 340–397), bishop of Milan and staunch defender of orthodox Christianity, is said to have cured the sick and expelled demons. We don't know if there is any truth to these claims. He himself expressed surprise at the report of miraculous events accompanying the discovery of the bodies of two martyrs. When he heard the news, he cried out, "The miracles of old time . . . are come again."¹³

Martin of Tours (ca. 316–400) was one of the founders of the Celtic church. Many have shaken their heads in disbelief while hearing about Martin's deeds as they are reported by Sulpitius Severus in the second book of his *Dialogues*.¹⁴ While many miracles were ascribed to Martin, fact cannot be separated from fiction. We should bear in mind that he lived in an

age when “pious” legends were considered a valid remedy against claims made by pagans and heretics.

Warfield gives us the big picture: “There is little or no evidence at all for miracle-working during the first fifty years of the post-Apostolic church; it is slight and unimportant for the next fifty years; it grows more abundant during the [third] century.”¹⁵ He states that by the end of the third century, the records show an ever-increasing stream of the miraculous but “without a single writer having claimed himself to have wrought a miracle of any kind or having ascribed miracle-working to any known name in the church, and without a single instance having been recorded in detail.”¹⁶

However, things change in the fourth century. The greatest writers record instances of miracle-working they themselves witnessed “with the greatest circumstantiality.”¹⁷ Warfield concludes, “Thus, if the evidence is worth anything at all, instead of a regularly progressing decrease, there was a steadily growing increase of miracle-working from the beginning on.”¹⁸

These testimonies to miraculous occurrences in the fourth century are by no means proven historical fact. Most of them seem to have arisen from fertile imaginations. Warfield writes:

What are we to think of these miracles? There is but one historical answer which can be given. They represent an infusion of heathen modes of thought into the church. . . . Every religious possession the heathen had, indeed, the Christians, it may be said broadly, transferred to themselves and made their own. As one of the results, the whole body of heathen legends, in one way or another, reproduced themselves on Christian ground.¹⁹

Warfield summarizes the situation this way: “In one word, what we find, when we cast our eye over the whole body of Christian legends, growing up from the third century down through the Middle Ages, is merely a reproduction, in Christian form, of the motives, and even the very incidents, which already meet us in the legends of heathendom.”²⁰

While there were some reports of speaking in tongues in the Roman Catholic Church from the postapostolic period to

the church at the time of the Reformation, there were no genuine manifestations of tongues-speaking. Tongues-speaking is supposedly a long-standing tradition in the monasteries of the Eastern Orthodox (Greek) church. Still, the history of Eastern Orthodoxy is marred in general by reports of strange and excessive behavior in the monasteries.²¹

During these years there were also reports of healings, visions, and the dead being raised to life. Yet many of these “miracles” were done in connection with relics taken from dead saints (the bones of Saint Stephen were extremely popular in this regard). This was a far cry from the miracles performed in the apostolic age!

During this period many individuals and groups claimed personal, direct, inner revelations from the Holy Spirit, also referred to as an “internal” word. Not infrequently, however, those who claimed to have had such “immediate” revelations from God also disclaimed the Holy Scripture as the Holy Spirit’s tool to reveal God’s truth. Some considered Holy Scripture to be of only minor importance.²²

The Reformation era

During the days of the Reformation, a radical reform group emerged. Its members were called Anabaptists and were similar to Pentecostals. They thought Luther and the other reformers were not going far enough in their attempts to reform the church. The reformers called these agitators *schwaermer*, which we might translate “enthusiasts.” These enthusiasts rejected infant Baptism and rebaptized members who had been baptized as infants. (*Anabaptist* means “rebaptizer.”) They disdained state churches and created their own church—a new family of holy persons. And they subordinated the Holy Scriptures and the sacraments to a higher guidance, an “inner light” from the Holy Spirit.²³ The Anabaptists believed that each member of the family of holy persons was meant to enjoy the gift of prophecy and had the skill to interpret divine revelations.

The radical reformers came in many different stripes and shades—all of them a mar on the Reformation and many of them a blight on society as well. Some were called quietists.

They did not foment revolution or believe in the use of force but were content to spread their doctrines by quiet and peaceful means. Their leader was Menno Simons, who still has followers today, called Mennonites. On the other hand, the “radical,” or revolutionary, Anabaptists were fanatical and fostered revolt against the state and against ecclesiastical authority.²⁴

The Anabaptist movement began in Zwickau, Saxony. Three members of the group were expelled from Zwickau and went to Wittenberg, the home of the Reformation. These Zwickau prophets, as they were called, began to preach about their heavenly visions and revelations. These and other “heavenly prophets,” as Luther dubbed them, aroused and excited the citizens of Wittenberg. Their chief prophet, Thomas Muenzer, boasted of having prophetic visions and dreams and of receiving direct communication from God.²⁵

Caspar of Schwenkfeld in Silesia is another man who claimed to receive direct revelations from God. He also is noted for his doctrinal errors. He denied justification by faith, he attacked Luther’s position that the Word of God is the only source and norm of faith, he denied that the Holy Spirit works through the sacraments, he refused to baptize children, and in general he took doctrinal positions that were in direct opposition to Bible truth. Some of his followers migrated to America early in the 18th century. They settled in counties around Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where their descendants can still be found.

One of Luther’s own coworkers, Andreas Karlstadt, became an enthusiast and caused the Reformer no little grief. Luther judged the spirit of Karlstadt and of the other “heavenly prophets” as not being the spirit of God but of the devil.²⁶ The *schwaermer* wanted to take the lead in reforming the church. Their cry was, “The Spirit! The Spirit!” Luther replied, “I will not follow where their spirit leads.” On another occasion he said, “I slap your spirit on the snout!”

The years after the Reformation

The Cévennot prophets

In 1685 when the Edict of Nantes, which allowed religious freedom, was revoked by the French king Louis XIV, a new

wave of terror broke out against the French Huguenots. These Protestants, who lived in the Cévennes mountains in the south-eastern part of France, put up a stiff resistance to the Catholic forces of the king. At the height of the brutality imposed on them, the people—males and females, young and old—underwent a remarkable ecstatic experience. They heard music such as the singing of psalms and strange sounds and saw visions and apparitions. They spoke in tongues and prophesied. They exhorted the people to repent and denounced the Roman Catholic Church, which in itself was not unusual; nevertheless, they spoke in eloquent French, a language completely unknown to them. Their religious frenzy was accompanied by severe physical contortions, foaming at the mouth, and sobbing.²⁷

This movement continued for over ten years, and finally it turned political. The Cévennot people attacked the French government but were defeated and punished.

The Jansenists

A few decades later, an emotional outbreak occurred among the Jansenists, a French Catholic holiness sect. Those involved had revolted against the spiritual coldness and immorality of the Jesuits. In 1731 the Jansenists began to experience speaking in tongues. Their tongues-speaking was described as a “meaningless torrent of syllables.”²⁸

The Ranters

We also discover Pentecostal-type movements in England during the post-Reformation period. The Ranters were religious radicals of the mid 1600s. They spoke in tongues. Like the Anabaptists, they gained an unsavory reputation for themselves and were frequently accused of lewdness and irreligious actions and utterances. According to a contemporary, Samuel Fisher, some of them even went so far as to claim to be Christ and God.

The Quakers

The Quakers arose in England about the middle of the 17th century. The Religious Society of Friends, as the members

called themselves, was founded by George Fox, who believed that he received revelations from God. Divorcing “Christian truth” from Holy Scripture, he laid all the emphasis on an “inner light,” which he claimed came by direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Following his leadership, the Quakers regarded the inner light to be superior to Holy Scripture, as is evident in their assemblies. The members gather and sit quietly until one of them feels moved by the Holy Spirit to speak.²⁹

The Shakers

In 1747 the Shaker movement began in England. In 1774 the Shakers migrated to America and settled in Watervliet, New York. The Shakers spoke in tongues, sometimes accompanied by singing and dancing. In their ecstasy, they composed many hymns, but without recognizable linguistic form or meaning.³⁰ People were convinced of the validity of Shaker doctrine and practice from the so-called gifts of the Spirit they displayed. These included, according to one observer, a variety of marvelous operations, signs and visions, as well as speaking in tongues and prophesying.

Pietism in Scandinavia

In Scandinavia religious revival accompanied the pietistic movement. Pietism’s emphasis on religious experience sometimes gave it a Pentecostal flavor. In northern Sweden the pietists were called readers. Some of them sought Pentecostal experiences, including speaking in tongues. In another area of Sweden, Smaland, a large number of people of all ages went into trances, saw visions, jerked, contorted, shouted, and groaned.³¹

A leader of the pietistic movement in Finland, Paavo Ruotsalainen, emphasized looking to Christ in faith, trusting Christ to act in one’s life, and experiencing an “inner feeling” of grace.³²

Pentecostal-type outbreaks in Russia and Armenia

In 1855 Russia experienced a great revival that included speaking in tongues. This movement spilled over into Armenia. Though of great intensity and scope, it was short lived.

There was another movement 25 years later. It was similar to the first and also included speaking in tongues. A small group of Armenian Presbyterians joined together to form a Pentecostal worship group. Included in this Pentecostal group was the Shakarian family. Beginning in 1900 many of these Russians and Armenians immigrated to America. After settling in Los Angeles, the Shakarian family opened their home to Armenian and Russian Pentecostals for group worship. The Shakarian name will come up again.³³ The family had connections with the Azusa Street mission in Los Angeles, and Demos Shakarian became the founder of the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International.

Others

There are other examples in church history of individuals or groups that have spoken in tongues. For example, in 1854 V. P. Simmons reported tongues-speaking in New England. Elder F. G. Mathewson spoke in tongues, and Elder Edward Burnham interpreted.³⁴ In 1875 R. B. Swan, a pastor in Providence, Rhode Island, together with his wife and some others, spoke a few words in what they referred to as an "unknown tongue."³⁵ A few years later, in 1879, W. Jethro Walthall in Arkansas spoke in tongues yet knew nothing of the Holy Spirit's giving of this gift in Bible times.³⁶

The Mormons

Although not a part of the Christian church, the Mormon church used speaking in tongues. In article 7 of the official digest of Mormon doctrine, Joseph Smith promoted the gift of tongues and the interpretation of tongues. Tongues-speaking was finally discouraged in public because of the ridicule it brought from those outside of the Mormon church. Heber Grant, the seventh president of the church, and his wife experienced speaking in tongues and interpreting tongues. He subsequently called the lack of the gift of tongues and interpretation a sign of the lack of true faith.

Summary

From what we have seen, we can make the following generalizations. Tongues-speaking seems to have disappeared very early from the church, except for spurious manifestations of ecstatic tongues in the ancient Pentecostal sect of the Montanists. In later church history, tongues-speaking is confined almost entirely to heretical sects and non-Christian groups. At times it was evident in groups undergoing severe religious persecution. In historical accounts speaking in tongues is generally confined to a form of irrational speech, often in the company of bizarre conduct.

References to exorcisms, healings, and other miracles, including restoring the dead to life, multiplied in the centuries following the apostolic period. However, the reports of these are subject to great exaggeration and to conflicting testimonies, and they often appear to mimic the stories and legends of heathendom.

The true miraculous gifts of the Spirit were confined mostly to the apostolic age and carried over to some extent in the postapostolic age. Genuine displays of supernatural charismata—displays that can be properly identified and validated—are missing from most of church history. Those modern-day Pentecostals and charismatics who claim that they are sharing in a long tradition reaching back to the early church cannot prove that claim from church history.