

# INTRODUCTION—

## THE DIVINE ENCOUNTER

When we approach any subject which arouses such deep emotional conflict as does that of pentecostalism, among defenders and opponents, we are wise if we define the main point at issue in our discussion clearly and early.

The main point in the pentecostal dispute reduces itself to this: at what part of human experience may we expect that God will most strongly and intimately encounter the individual? All schools of pentecostal thought have this in common: that they believe that the most powerful encounter takes place, or at least is signified, in the extraordinary; in an experience which superficially appears supernatural. For that experience, they encourage men to seek of God.

### **What is NOT our concern**

Our concern in this issue of the C.B.R.F. journal is *not* related to the Pentecostal Churches themselves. They have at least faced and wrestled with many of the issues which we are only beginning to discuss, and even where we may disagree with their emphases, we readily acknowledge their deep devotedness, and the grace of God which has been given to them. God has mightily used their evangelistic gifts and their zeal, and we believe that their own experiences in seeking to contain sign gifts within a stable church life will lead many among them to acknowledge the strength of many of the points made here.

Second, our concern is *not* as to whether or not the Holy Spirit can or does use the sign gifts as His sovereign act. To put the point at its lowest, we acknowledge that He did so in New Testament times, and we acknowledge that it is within His sovereign disposition to bestow them at any other time of His choosing. It is not for us to dictate the workings of God, either by insisting that He must use certain channels of action, or conversely that He never uses certain channels.

Third, our concern is *not* with the personal devotions of the individual. Not one of us has the right to interfere with the direct relationships of a soul with its Maker. We may have our own thoughts, and express our own opinions, but for the ultimate freedom of the individual before God we must remain for ever vigilant.

### **What IS our concern**

Our concern in this journal is with the claims of pentecostal teaching, when it enters local churches which have not known it, often disruptively,

and always to puzzle and disturb many of the Christians in those churches. At that point we are entitled and obliged to ask for its credentials. If an event in my local church is the work of God, then it is my duty to acknowledge it as such, at whatever cost to my prepossessions and prejudices. But how am I to satisfy myself that it *is* the work of God? There can be only one final answer. Experience may help, but the world is full of conflicting experiences. The generally accepted teachings of the Church of God may be immensely important, yet the Church itself has been known to oppress the truth. Ultimately, we can only go back to the Biblical foundations, and ask if the teaching is true to those foundations. This, and not a literalistic bandying of proof texts, is what we mean by the authority of Scripture.

### **The claims of experience**

The necessity of this appeal to the Scriptures becomes plain when the problem faces us at first hand. When men come to us and claim with enthusiastic conviction that they have had certain experiences, that those experiences are in fact *the filling of the Holy Spirit*, and that we too must earnestly seek and find Him by those same experiences or remain for ever upon a lower plane of spiritual life; then we are not permitted to accept those claims at their face value until we have first tested them deeply. God has entrusted to each of us experiences of Himself. We ask whether we do Him despite, and despise our own birthright, if we grasp for these other things as something better—things, as they are, which seem by comparison grotesque and immature. Some of us have known the quiet immensity of silent worship. Others have felt His presence in moments of intense need. Others of us have known Him in a fellow man or woman. Others of us have felt our hearts burn within us at some advance in intellectual understanding. Others of us have ‘thought His thoughts after Him’ in study of His world or of the men He made. Were these experiences but the antechamber of His presence, and does the full glory only await us in experiences of which Paul himself wrote ‘If . . . all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?’ It is when we are faced with teachings thus seemingly arrogant, that we pause to ask whether they have overstepped the balance of Scripture.

### **The contents of this issue**

We have allowed the contributors to this issue full freedom of expression, and for that reason it will be found that their views at times conflict. In this, we do our readers the compliment of believing that they will prefer to have it this way, that they may reach a more informed judgment of their own, and not one presented ready-made by others. If any would have it otherwise, we can only reply that we are sorry, but that we do not believe that a controversial subject can be constructively dealt with by suppression.

This introduction itself will cease at the end of this paragraph to be

mere introduction, and will attempt to cover the Scriptural and doctrinal background to the subject. It is followed by two articles of general information: in the first, Mr. J. C. Cotterill explains from first hand knowledge something of the birth and growth of the Pentecostal movement in the United Kingdom, and in the second Mr. George Patterson surveys a somewhat wider field, with particular reference to his own experiences in the East. Mr. Patterson's own attitude is somewhat ambivalent. He paints the Pentecostal movement 'warts and all', while at the same time taking a standpoint which is different from some of the views expressed in this introduction.

These articles are followed by relevant book reviews. Mr. G. J. Polkinghorne writes on two standard works, Cutten's *Speaking with Tongues* (1927) and the more recent, but less cool, *Speaking with Tongues* by Morton T. Kelsey. Readers of Mr. Polkinghorne's review of this last book will be interested by the much less critical review of the same book which follows, from the pen of Mr. Hugh Thompson. Finally, Mr. Geoffrey Simmons contributes a *Viewpoint* which is representative of the reaction of those who accept some of the recent occurrences outside Pentecostal churches rather less critically than some other contributors to this issue. Those who know Mr. Simmons's personal self-sacrifice and sterling labours in his own district will accept this viewpoint seriously, whatever their own conclusions.

### **The questions put**

First, then, we shall attempt in this article to cover briefly the Scriptural and doctrinal background of the subject, remembering the main point at issue, as we have already defined it: *at what part of human experience may we expect that God will most strongly and intimately encounter the individual?* We have already dealt with the necessity for this appeal to the Scriptures: the method by which we make the appeal will be by putting four further questions.

1. Does the pentecostal response to that question rest upon a sound interpretation of the Scriptures, taken in their context and read as a whole?
2. Are the terms which pentecostalism uses, apparently Biblical though they are, in fact used with meanings which correspond to their Biblical meanings?
3. Does the conception of the Holy Spirit conveyed by that response correspond to the picture of His operations shown to us by Scripture as a whole? In short, does it accord with a Biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit?
4. What in fact are the sign gifts, and what is the margin of error in interpreting them as workings of the Holy Spirit? What ground, indeed, is there for believing that His use of them is a normal mode of His working?

### **Traditional arguments against pentecostalism inadequate**

Now it is deplorable that some arguments which have been traditionally advanced against pentecostal teachings have been completely inadequate for their purpose. Before we pass to the four questions which

have been put, we must therefore remark on these arguments, for they have become so inadequate that their continued propagation has become an act of pastoral irresponsibility. These traditional arguments have been as follows:—

1. That the gifts ceased in the apostolic age.
2. That they are of necessarily demonic origin (usually supported by anecdotes which are often explicable psychologically).

Both of these arguments are shown to be inadequate by later articles in this journal, and it is only necessary to add here:—

1. The former argument adopts a question begging attitude to a considerable body of historical evidence to the contrary, and its only Biblical support is found in a highly doubtful interpretation of 1 Cor. 13: 8. It is not necessary to discuss this interpretation, beyond remarking that simple common sense should instruct any responsible leader that to oppose any aggressive teaching by an appeal to an interpretation of Scripture which, at best, is only one of several competing alternatives, and which appears to the opponent to contradict his plain experience, is to invite serious controversy and to aggravate differences. Elders relying on this type of government, have only themselves to blame if division results.

2. The latter argument shares an error of the pentecostal teaching itself, with which we shall deal later in this article: the error of undue supernaturalism. But, taking it at its own level, it is plainly an argument to be avoided by any thoughtful Christian. Mat. 12: 24-31 should suffice for that.

### **The apparent replies**

Yet the inadequacy of traditional opposition adds nothing positive to the pentecostal hypothesis itself, and the rest of this article turns to test that hypothesis by the four questions already set out.

The results of the tests are deeply disturbing. To anticipate the detailed discussion which follows, the answers to the four questions emerge as follows:—

1. The pentecostal response seems to rest upon a distorted and selective exegesis of Scripture.
2. The two basic terms of pentecostalism, although Biblical in wording, are used in ways which do not correspond to their Biblical usage.
3. Behind the pentecostal response lies an implied doctrine of the Holy Spirit which is grossly inadequate in relation to the Biblical doctrine: inadequate, indeed, to the point of potential error.
4. There is reason to believe that the mechanisms of tongues and of many healings (although not all) are natural psychological or psycho-somatic mechanisms: there is thus no necessary guaran-

tee that their mere occurrence is a sign of the Spirit's working, and no reason to believe that His use of those mechanisms is to be preferred to a use of any other capacity of the human make-up.

It would seem, indeed, that the ultimate results of the teachings will be to divert the attention of the people of God from the enjoyment of the full liberty of their inheritance in the Holy Spirit, and to preoccupy them with a highly emotional and subjective by-way of experience.

It will be noticed that these replies relate only to the doctrinal formulation of pentecostalism. Not one of them denies that the Holy Spirit may and does at times of His choosing use the sign gifts, as He may use any other human capacity. They are rather concerned with the explanation which is given for such happenings, and with their relation to the normal life of the churches.

The conclusions are serious and far-reaching, and require fuller justification.

### **A distorted exegesis**

The most prominent and common of the sign gifts is that of tongues (see Mr. Patterson's article). Moreover, tongues present the problem of pentecostalism in its most acute form: healings, the other most prominent gift, are normally open to objective testing. In most pentecostalism, tongues inevitably emerge as the nub of the practical expression of the doctrine.

Now tongues occupy a comparatively insignificant section of the New Testament record. They have no place in the recorded teaching of Jesus, apart from the doubtfully authentic passage Mk. 16: 17, 18—a passage which creates as many problems for the adherent of the sign gifts as it solves. Apart from this, tongues are referred to explicitly in three passages of the Acts, and in one extended passage in the epistles. The three occurrences in Acts are at Pentecost (Ac. 2: 1-21) (where the narrative on the face of it suggests a miracle quite unlike the usual phenomenon), at the 'Gentile Pentecost' of ch. 10: 44-48, and at the 'untimely Pentecost' of ch. 19: 1-7. Beyond these three incidents, each from the initiatory experiences, the 'birth pangs', of the Church, not one of the abounding conversion stories records the occurrence of the phenomenon. Tongues must be read into the narrative. Nor is this argument from silence a weak one, for the author of Acts lays continual and repeated emphasis upon the miraculous elements of his story.

To this paucity of descriptive evidence, must be added an absence of doctrinal teaching on the subject, whether in Acts or elsewhere. Even in the one passage in the epistles in which reference is made to the subject, there is no real doctrinal content to the phenomenon in itself. Paul takes the situation as he finds it, but tongues do not have the doctrinal significance which they have for the modern pentecostal. This feature is the more striking in the light of the intensely important place which the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has in Paul's theology. The epistle to the Galatians is of

especial significance in this respect. In it, if tongues are indeed hinted at in the descriptive verse, 3: 5, then there must have been a virtually deliberate abstention from reference in the important chapter 5, in which Paul deals with the practical expression of the Spirit. In that chapter, the stress is entirely upon the *normal* manifestations of the Spirit's fruit within ordinary life.

The one passage dealing with tongues is of course in 1 Cor. chs. 12 to 14. From that passage we learn that, whatever was the practice in other churches, the practice of tongues (*glossolalia* as they are technically called) had become a regular feature of the activities of the Corinthian church. The practice did not guarantee a high plane of spiritual life, for, despite its high endowment of spiritual gift (1: 7), the Corinthian church is described by the apostle as 'yet carnal' (3: 3). The tone of Paul's comment on tongues throughout chapters 12 to 14 is unmistakable. While, as a wise pastor, he is anxious not to take from the yet carnal church (3: 1-3)\* a gift with which its members were as emotionally involved as any later practitioner, he clearly aims to depreciate the gift, to bring it under rigid self-discipline, and to point the converts to the higher and maturer states of Christian experience—particularly to faith, hope and love. Tongues are but one among many gifts, and one of the least of those.

In the light of the plain tendency of the chapters, it surely smacks of special pleading to encourage the practice of tongues by taking out of their context certain favourable phrases, where Paul meets his charges on their own ground: references such as that to edification in 14: 4, to his desire for the Corinthians in 14: 5, or his personal boast in 14: 18. It is also to the point to observe that a literalist interpretation of 14: 39, divorcing it from its historic setting, involves normal pentecostal practice in hopeless difficulties with verse 34. (That this argument is delightfully double-edged, readers of recent correspondence in this journal will need no reminding.)

If the Biblical background is so thin, how then has pentecostalism built its strong appeal to Scripture, and the authoritarian attitude which it often derives from that appeal? The following suggested analysis of its thinking may indicate how this has happened:—

- (a) Certain experiences are taken as a stereotype of a full experience of the Holy Spirit, on the basis of a highly selective choice of examples.
- (b) To this stereotype there are allocated certain expressions derived from Scripture, such as *the baptism* or *filling of the Holy Spirit*.
- (c) This stereotype forms its own conception of the Holy Spirit and His working, in the minds of those who hold it.
- (d) Scripture (and especially the expressions referred to) are then read and interpreted in the light of this conception.

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\*There is a significant progression in this passage. They were *sarkinoi* ('made of flesh'—immature) (v. 1). They are now *sarkikoi* ('thoroughly flesh-minded') (v. 3)—(J. A. T. Robinson *The Body* p. 24 n.).

This is a common progression, and by no means confined to pentecostalism. Readers of this journal may not be slow in finding examples nearer home.

### Terms misused

Exegesis of the two important expressions of pentecostalism just referred to (*the baptism of the Spirit* and *the filling of the Spirit*) next becomes pertinent to our enquiry. Pentecostal teaching uses both terms in a definitive sense, as denoting a special and marked experience. We should, if this use is correct, find the terms used in Scripture in a similarly definitive manner: that is, as a technical term describing such an experience.

In point of fact, neither is obviously so used, unless that usage is read into the terms. The term *baptise with (or in) the Spirit* is derived from an original usage attributed to John the Baptist and recorded at the beginning of each of the Gospels (Mt. 3: 11, Mk. 1: 8, Lk. 3: 16, Jn. 1: 33). The term is invariably used as part of a vivid figure of speech, contrasting the water baptism of John with the work of Christ. The significance of the term lies in this contrast. The two baptisms symbolise, on the one hand the essentially partial and incomplete work of John, dealing as it did in symbols of the divine, and on the other the complete work of Jesus, dealing with the final divine Reality of the Holy Spirit with men. Now in the occurrences in Acts, which are the basis of the pentecostal use of the term, this whole figure of speech is retained (Ac. 1: 5 and 11: 16). The point of the contrast must therefore also be retained: the reference is not so much to the specific individual experiences of the disciples (still less to the signs which accompanied the experiences on those two occasions), so much as to the whole event of the completion of the work of Jesus, in the coming of the Spirit to be with men as He had never been before.

It is possible that the term is used in one other place in Scripture—in 1 Cor. 12: 13 (although the writer of these notes believes that the reference there is to water baptism, merging that symbol of the new birth into the reality of the Spirit's work). If it is used there, it must be fatal to the pentecostal view, for the term is related conclusively to the new birth, and not to a subsequent special experience. It is interesting to compare this with the R.S.V. of Ac. 11: 17—'when we believed . . . .'

The N.T. usage of the other term, *filled with the Holy Ghost*, is also to be noted. It is used once by Paul (Eph. 5: 18) in no definitive sense, but again as part of a striking figure of speech which itself gives rise to the expression. Apart from this, the N.T. use of the term is descriptive, rather than definitive, and is related either to the equipping of a servant of God for a specific task or to meet a specific emergency, in a manner similar to its O.T. use, or as part of a general testimonial to personal character. It is used once only in the direct context of tongues (Ac. 2: 4), and is also used once in relation to the severely practical duties of serving tables (Ac. 6: 3).

Most significant, however, is the fact that the term is (apart from the

one Pauline use already quoted) confined to the writings of Luke, who, as we have remarked, uses it in a manner reminiscent of its O.T. usage. Now if this were a technical term, recognised as describing an important and definite stage of Christian experience, we should have expected it to appear as such in the N.T., and to be used as such by several of its writers. In fact it appears as the idiosyncratic usage of one writer only, and applied by him not to such a fulfilling experience, so much as to the divine help available in the face of the immediate needs and emergencies of life. Jesus, *full of the Holy Ghost*, was led into the wilderness of temptation (Lk. 4: 1).

### **An inadequate doctrine**

Concentration upon the sign gifts as a necessary sign of the Spirit's presence produces (or is produced by) an underlying conception of the Holy Spirit and His working. That conception is largely supernaturalistic. A study of the full Biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit illuminates the inadequacy of this conception, and throws into relief its dangers. It also reinforces our earlier conclusions as to the distorted nature of the exegesis upon which pentecostal teaching is based, by directing our attention (for the basic essentials of such a doctrine) to passages of Scripture which are rarely referred to in the writings of an aggressive pentecostalism. Conversely, the proof texts of such writings are seen to be of minor importance to the doctrine as a whole.

Some understanding of the scope and depth of the Biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit can be gained from the study of a book such as Griffith Thomas's *The Holy Spirit of Promise*. This article can do no more than to indicate the guide-lines of such a study.

Basically, and inadequately, we might describe the Holy Spirit in two phrases: 'God at work in the world' and 'God present with us'. Simply because this world is God's creation, the Holy Spirit is not so much 'supernatural' (though He is clearly that), as potentially the most 'natural' feature of our whole experience. He is not only 'transcendent', but emphatically 'immanent'.

So we find that in the opening sentences of the Bible the Spirit of God 'moved upon the face of the waters' in creation. The first men to be described as *filled with the Spirit of God* are so filled in order that they might do their daily jobs the better, and that their genius of craftsmanship and artistry might be heightened and made more sensitive and fitting for the furnishing of the Tabernacle (Ex. 31: 1-6 and 35: 30-35). (In passing this fact is significant in the light of that familiar attitude which dismisses the aesthetic as 'of the flesh'.) The Spirit is the revealer of God, and the agent of divine power and enabling for special tasks. Joshua is *full of the spirit of wisdom* that he might be the more effective political and military leader of the people (Deut. 34: 9), and Micah is *full of power by the spirit of the Lord* (Mic. 3: 8), to bring correction and rebuke to the people. While the Spirit descends upon men at times in ways mysterious and extraordinary, He is also present in the everyday life of mankind, striving with

men (Gen. 6: 3). He is the divine power and energy for specific and practical tasks among men in their ordinary living, social and political, as well as for the proclamation of the divine will.

These aspects are delightfully and concisely summed up in the words of the Nicene Creed: 'The Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Lifegiver . . .'.

The N.T. shows a new dimension of life in the Spirit inaugurated. The Holy Spirit is now among men and dwelling in men. He is a Companion for the believer's permanent guidance, enlightenment, strengthening and comfort. Yet the nature of His activities is not changed. It is intensified and deepened, and made permanent and more intimate, but He remains at the base of the springs of everyday life. The classic passages, and infinitely the most important for the Biblical doctrine, are John chs. 13-16 and Romans 8. The former gives us that expressive Greek word to denote His presence, the *Paraklētos*. The latter finds Him so closely infused into the life of the redeemed man, so intimately the director and shaper of mental outlook and of personal conduct, that, in the words of Griffith Thomas:—

'Summing up the whole question of the relation of the Divine to the human "spirit", we may remark that they are so intimate as to be indistinguishable, although their union is always regarded as equivalent to communion, never to identity'.

(*The Holy Spirit of Promise*, p. 30.)

Above all, the centre of the Spirit's witness is not His own activity, but the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 16: 13-15).

It is an understanding of this basic doctrine which illuminates the dangers which arise when the extraordinary phenomena of tongues and the sign gifts are unduly emphasised. Such an emphasis inevitably diverts the desires and the attention of the Christian to phenomena of transitory excitement, with the result that the full depths of the meaning of the indwelling Spirit and of His constant companionship in the whole of life are distorted and lost. Here is the dilemma of pentecostalism. If tongues are seen as inessential, they will soon be lost sight of: for they are essentially abnormal and unnatural. If they are to be made a part of regular church practice, on the other hand, it can only be at the expense of unduly emphasising their part, and indeed of insisting on their necessity: a step which can only be taken by distorting the doctrine of the Spirit and the Biblical exegesis on which it is based.

Here too is the erroneous potential of the teaching. It concentrates on the supernatural, and opens up again that very divide between the material and the spiritual, against which the whole truth of the Incarnation cries out. In it is the beginning of the error into which both the Docetic and the Manichee fell—those heretic teachers to whom the material became illusory or evil, and the spiritual alone of God and good. The whole of history insists that no teaching which opens that division in the minds of men can ultimately be for the health of the Church.

## The nature of the sign gifts

Finally, we turn to the last of the questions: a question to which modern psychology has yet to give a full answer, and which is taken up later in this issue. Manifestations of a nature similar to tongues are exploited by cults and fanaticisms well outside the bounds of Christian profession—indeed 1 Cor. 12: 2 may suggest that this fact was familiar to Paul and the Corinthians. A pertinent example appeared in a *Radio Times* description of a Jamaican cult (4 Apr. 1965)—

‘Remarkable sights, hypnotic sounds of rites within the secret world of this Jamaican cult: in a fine frenzy of “tromping” and furious drumming spirits take possession and Pocomaniacs begin to “speak in tongues” . . .’

These considerations suggest that we are dealing with a phenomenon which is no less a capacity of the human make-up than any other capacity of which use can be made by the Holy Spirit, or by more sinister forces whether natural or otherwise. As such, they are at best no more to be accepted as automatic signs of the Spirit, than the mere fact that a man may be a good speaker is to be accepted as an automatic sign of the Spirit’s presence in His preaching. But, in contrast to most other capacities, the sign gifts are abnormal in character, and their abnormality calls for a sober reassessment of indiscriminate encouragement to tongues and the like. If they are, as has been suggested, analogous to those utterances experienced ‘under stress of deep emotion or when the “censor” of the psyche is removed by hypnosis, narcotics or drugs’ (C. S. C. Williams in *Peake’s Commentary* 1962, 839a, referring to Cutten’s book reviewed below), then we have every reason to discourage that anxious seeking for these experiences which is the hallmark of aggressive pentecostalism. Such techniques may be beneficially used under proper medical care, but the intricacy of the human psychological structure is such as to cause us to be unconvinced by enthusiastic claims of their general therapeutic value (see Kelsey’s book reviewed below) or by descriptions of the sense of well-being released by them (by no means always a sign of a beneficent agent). The claim to therapeutic value, after all, implies a prior need for therapy, and therefore the existence of abnormality.

Such claims in themselves are a confession of uncertainty. If the Holy Spirit is using such signs, then their therapeutic efficiency is secondary, if not irrelevant. If, on the other hand, the practices are to be taken only on this level, then we may well doubt whether the encouragement of ‘do-it-yourself’ psychiatry is likely to be any more desirable than any of the other types of indiscriminate ‘do-it-yourself’ dosing, to which the advertisements in certain popular journals suggest that the Christian public may be unhappily prone.

## Summary and Conclusion

In conclusion, we return to the central question asked in the opening paragraphs of this article. The answer to that question must surely be that, contrary to the implied answer of pentecostal thought, the divine encounter

may take place at any and every point of human experience. Where it occurs most powerfully will differ for each individual, but the encounter at *some* level of intensity should take place, for us all, at *every* part of normal life. To the man who has learned, consistently and constantly, to find the Holy Spirit with him there, 'tongues' and 'signs' surely become an irrelevancy, tokens of immaturity. Yet such a man, as none other, is surely, in Luke's meaning of the term, *full of faith and of the Holy Ghost*. Any teaching which obscures the immense richness of the knowledge of the Holy Spirit's activity in every aspect of our existence, is obscuring the true wealth of our heritage, however powerful its emotional appeal.

F. ROY COAD.

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Beware of that daughter of pride, *enthusiasm*. Sometimes likewise it is the parent of pride. O, keep at the utmost distance from it! Give no place to an heated imagination. Do not ascribe to God what is not of God. Do not easily suppose dreams, voices, impressions, visions or revelations to be from God, without sufficient evidence. They may be purely natural: they may be diabolical. Therefore remember the caution of the apostle, "Beloved, believe not every spirit but try the spirits whether they be of God" (1 Jn. 4:1.). Try all things by the written Word and let all bow down before it.

John Wesley