

Editorial

WHAT is wrong with the Church to-day? Why is it so ineffective? Why is it so unsuccessful in appealing and reaching out to the populace? Why are its services so dull, its members so cold, and its messages so irrelevant? These are questions which exercise us constantly, and very rightly so. And the answer is close at hand, if only we will seek it in the right place. But it will *not* be found by taking crooners into cathedrals, or guitars into pulpits, or by diocesan bishops so demeaning themselves as to do "the twist" in purple cassocks in public. We need desperately to break free from the impersonal hand of institutionalism, from the puppetry of formalism, and from the smugness of respectability—not, however, by conforming to the world and its crazes (which is only to publicize our powerlessness) but by returning to genuine Christianity; and that means the Christianity of the New Testament. When we consider the gloriously triumphant power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of ordinary Christians as described in the Acts of the Apostles, the Church today almost seems to be a stranger to vibrant Christian dynamics. Where is the fulness of power, grace, and joy of the first Christians? For years now our church leaders and legislators have been preoccupied with the revision of canon law, a letter which kills; our diocesan conferences give a lead only in boredom, dominated as they are by financial estimates and committee reports; our parsons are masters of platitudes; and the faithful few of our parishioners who do come to church are annoyed if they find a stranger inadvertently sitting in what they regard as their place.

It is not God, but we who are to blame for this state of affairs. God is judging us for our complacency and little faith. If in humility and sorrow we seek His face, He will, in accordance with Christ's promise, pour upon us the transforming blessing of His Holy Spirit yet again. Indeed, there are already indications of a new movement of the Holy Spirit within the Church at the present time. Is this something for which we are ready? Are we willing, do we long, for a divine tide of blessing to flow over us? That tide is even now on its way.

This, at least, is your Editor's estimate of the developing situation which he had the opportunity of investigating during a visit to the United States earlier this year. What he witnessed, points only in one direction, namely, that the Breath of the Living God is stirring among the dry bones of the major, respectable, old-established denominations, and particularly within the Episcopalian Church. News that Episcopalians were speaking in tongues was certainly strange: it sounded so incongruous! But it was probably attributable to a flirtation under the hot Californian sun with the extravagances of pentecostalism—until in Washington he found a letter from the Editor

of *Trinity* magazine awaiting him, elicited by the reading of an article he had written. The personal experiences of his correspondent were described in the following terms :

I became an Anglo-Catholic after years of nominal Episcopalianism had failed to satisfy me. There was a hunger inside for more of God, and Anglo-Catholicism offered an opportunity to express the hunger through form and ritual and daily communions. Everything I could procure written by Anglo-Catholics I devoured eagerly. However, the day arrived when I had gone just about as far as I could go. . . . I adhered to a strict rule of life and said a multiplicity of prayers, and yet deep within me there was a feeling of dissatisfaction. At this point in my life the Lord graciously baptized me with the Holy Spirit, and my life became charged with new meaning. At first I accepted the language He had given me as merely the 'gift of tongues', and considered it a wonderful aid to my devotional life, but otherwise of minor spiritual significance. Gradually it became clear to me that my whole life had begun to be transformed at the time I first spoke in the language supernaturally given, and, through reading the Scriptures, I became aware that I had been filled with the Holy Ghost as I spoke with other tongues. . . . I would like to emphasize that this experience was not a conversion experience. I had been converted some years before while on my knees during my morning devotions. It is of interest that the experience I had when I personally accepted Jesus as Lord of my life was not recognized by either of the two priests I consulted or myself as having been a conversion experience. After I became filled with the Holy Spirit I realized what had transpired, and the significance of it. . . . I naturally rejoiced in my experience of being indwelt by the Spirit and attempted to fit the experience into my theology and my devotional practices. To my astonishment, it did not fit. To my horror, my theology began to change, and it was most terrifying. The Holy Bible, which I had previously considered to be a history of the Jewish people plus an interesting follow-up that my Church had written, suddenly became to me the living, breathing Word of the eternal Godhead. The Body of Christ, which I had formerly believed to consist of the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Orthodox Church, became to me all those who had accepted Jesus as Lord. Furthermore, they not only no longer appeared to me to be in grave spiritual danger, they seemed to be in a much safer state than fully half of the baptized, confirmed communicants of the church which I attended. . . . The Book of Common Prayer, which I formerly lamented as being just terribly 'protestant', now strikes me as being remarkably sound and filled with the rustlings of the Holy Spirit. . . . I have gained an entirely new conception of Christianity which is most wonderful, and I enjoy a new and exciting relationship with our blessed Lord that I previously sought through meditation and other devotional practices, but never quite found. . . . Thanks be to God that He has not changed, and that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is still a reality for believers to-day, and that by this self-same Spirit we are led into all Truth.

This experience, your Editor found, has been enjoyed by large numbers of other church-people. It is transforming lives. It is revitalizing congregations. It is not confined to one church or to one district. Nor is it induced from without, but has every appearance of being a spontaneous movement of the Holy Spirit. Your Editor met individuals and groups whose lives had been affected by it. He attended their prayer meetings and worshipped with them, and visited the homes of some. He heard some praying in an unknown tongue. It was all restrained and calm, and immediately someone else would interpret what had been said. Nearly all the prayers, however, were in English. Much more impressive than the glossolalia were the love, the joy, the devotion, which flowed out from their lips and their lives—and their consciousness of spiritual power : power to witness to their faith freely and daily in the world, and power to pray for the miraculous healing of the sick and to see the victorious answer to these prayers. Is not all this reminiscent of the situation with which we are confronted in the book of the Acts ?

It is a movement, moreover, within the heart of the Church, not away from the Church, embracing clergy as well as laity. Last year a diocesan bishop told his annual diocesan convention that he was convinced that another Pentecost was coming and had already started. "For the past hundred years," he wrote in a well-known Episcopalian magazine, "we have been largely occupied in turning the Christian religion into a loosely knit group of private chapels, which have been used as a place to extend a morality, a social behaviour, and a piously cultural way of life, tinged with local ceremonial additions—and all this with a growing neglect of the things of the Spirit."

"Why," asks a clergyman writing in a diocesan monthly :

Why did I have to live all of those years before someone told me that Jesus is related to life, that He is not dead, or impotent, but alive and able to help His creatures? The Sunday schools and churches never told me. The seminary [=theological college] I went to never told me. In fact, the least Christian environment I have ever known was that seminary. I say this in love, because, you see, they didn't know Him either. . . . In Acts I could see how a small group of frightened people were transformed instantly into the most powerful force that the world has ever known, by their experience on the Day of Pentecost. They became the Body of Christ, speaking His words, doing His works, reconciling the world to Him, bringing thousands to salvation through one sermon, performing miracles, making known the wonderful power and might and love of my Lord Jesus Christ. That's the kind of power I wanted in my ministry. I thank God that He led me to seek and receive, in accordance with His Word, a pentecostal experience of my own, and that He has baptized me with His Holy Ghost, so that in this wonderful ministry to which He has called me I no longer need to do my own preaching, nor make my own decisions, nor operate by my own power.

Of a small city "mission" church, fifty years old and, till recently, spiritually moribund, we read : "A small Episcopal mission without

love, without power, without the peace of God, is being converted by the power of God into a thriving church with the gifts and fruits of the Spirit being manifested in the lives of the parishioners. The Sunday morning service is, if anything, 'more Episcopal' than it ever has been. Yet here we perceive laymen praying for the sick, visiting the afflicted, preaching the Gospel, and doing the works of Jesus. Here is the power which transformed the Apostles from a discouraged, powerless band of fishermen into the men 'who turned the world upside down'."

In another parish, a parson speaks of the change which has taken place in his church :

The first notable fruit is that persons who once tolerated one another in parish life now have a deep association and understanding in the Lord Jesus Christ. Previously they had a hard time talking about sports, politics, and even the weather ; now they can talk hours without end concerning what the Lord is doing in their lives and in the world. . . . Because of this new aliveness, there comes the desire to share it with everyone. You tell this good news that Jesus saves—that His Spirit is abroad—to all who are in need. What an evangelical heart the Holy Spirit gives you ! You invite people to attend church with you ; you read the Bible to shut-ins ; you have tracts in your pocket to pass on to those who have questions ; you pray for a greater revelation of the Lord for those you love. The command to go out into the highways and hedges and compel others to come in is a reality. You now look forward to the next meeting of the Christian community, whether it be on Sunday in the Breaking of Bread, or on a weekday evening to join in special prayers of healing and praise. . . . In retrospect, you wonder how you ever existed previously without the gifts of the Spirit. Life now holds a new dimension ; there is a new spirit of discernment, of understanding, of insight, of destiny.

"The Church's purpose is the salvation of souls through personal faith in Jesus Christ," affirms another Episcopal clergyman who rejoices in this same experience.

But if we have ceased to believe in the salvation of souls (and truly we talk very little about it), it seems rather irrelevant, at least in terms of New Testament Christianity, to talk of 'building a Christian social order' or 'the Church's impact upon society', or even 'redemptive penetration of the social order'. All of these have their place. Indeed, one of the most indubitable facts of history is that the early Church did make a tremendous impact upon the society of its day. But the 'social impact' of the early Church arose precisely out of the fact that the Church was first, and above all, salvationist in its approach to the individual seeker. . . . *What is needed is assurance of a completed and finished salvation through personal acceptance and realization by faith of the 'finished work of Jesus'.*

A clergyman of the Anglican Church in Canada, who for twenty-five years was a Professor of Systematic Theology, tells how God gave him

the infilling of the Holy Spirit more than forty years ago when he was rector of an important city church in Canada, and how he witnessed souls saved from week to week, as well as many remarkable healings and infillings. He remarks that it is very profitable for Episcopalians, as well as others, to read over frequently the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Creeds, and calls for a return to a full-orbed doctrine of the Trinity. "Whatever is true of the Triune God," he says, "is true also of the Holy Spirit. A strange neglect of the person, power, and work of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in the life of the individual has left a barrenness which He alone can rectify."

Christians should pray earnestly and expectantly that the Acts of the Holy Spirit may be powerfully manifested once again in the Church of our day through the lives of those who profess the name of Christ. The Christianity of the New Testament, with its fulness of power and joy and grace, and its imperturbable peace in the face of adversity, is a reality, not a fantasy, and it is meant to be a reality for us now no less than it was a reality for those early believers in the first age of the Church. Only to the extent that it becomes a reality will the Church recapture its true effectiveness, its relevance, and its dynamism.

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We are pleased to include in this issue the text of the challenging address given by the Rev. Douglas Webster, Theologian-Missioner of the Church Missionary Society, at this year's annual meeting of members of the Society, marking the 163rd Anniversary of the C.M.S. The address is also available in pamphlet form from the C.M.S. (price 3d. a copy, postage extra).

P.E.H.
