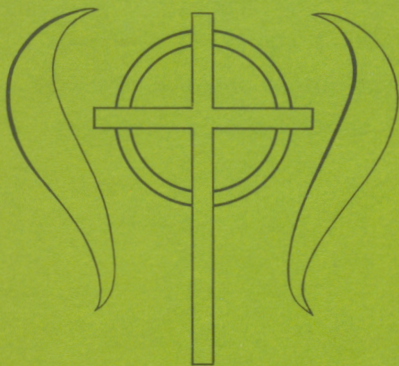


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Pentecost in the Catholic Church

Edward D. O'Connor, C.S.C.



PENTECOST IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

*A trilogy on the
Catholic Pentecostal Movement*

by

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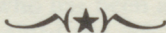
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I

A CATHOLIC PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT

"I understand that some people in Pittsburgh have received the gift of tongues." With that innocuous introduction, a young graduate student at the University of Notre Dame began a story that was to get more surprising at each step. He proceeded to tell how this gift of tongues had been brought from Pittsburgh to South Bend; he himself had witnessed it in action. As I listened, intrigued, I began to suspect, from his somewhat embarrassed allusions — and finally to realize for sure — that my friend himself was one of those who had received the gift.

Even for a priest who has seen some surprising things in the course of his ministry, it is not easy to take in stride the announcement that a close friend whom you have known for several years, who has been a student in your classes, has received the gift of tongues! And there was still more to come: About six other students were also present at this conversation, and most of them had also received the gift. I was almost the only one in the group who had not received it!

That was March 14 of 1967. Since that time, things have advanced rapidly, and people are beginning to speak of the Catholic Pentecostal movement. The name has been

given to it because of resemblances to the Pentecostal movement, now reputed to be the fastest-growing movement in the Protestant world. However, there has not yet been any opportunity to carefully compare Catholic Pentecostalism with its Protestant homonym so as to determine exactly the relation between them; hence it would be quite unjust to prejudge the one solely on the ground of its being called by the same name as the other. The remarks that follow refer solely (except when otherwise indicated) to Catholic manifestations of the movement.

It gets its name "Pentecostal" because many people in the movement seem to have experienced the presence and power of the Holy Spirit as the Apostles did on the first Pentecost, and in particular the gift of tongues. However, the manifestations of the Spirit vary considerably from one person to another. A more appropriate biblical reference would probably be John 14:16-17, in which Christ, the night before He died, promised His disciples: "I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate to dwell with you forever, the Spirit of Truth whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, because he dwells with you and will be in you." The Pentecostal movement is characterized above all by the confident belief that Christ does indeed keep this promise.

The key to the movement is the prayer

meeting, at which a group of people gather together to pray and invoke the Holy Spirit. There is no fixed form for these meetings and they are not planned in advance; their essence is freedom, and each participant is encouraged to say to the group whatever he feels prompted to. Nevertheless, there is a vague sort of pattern that has, *de facto*, begun to take shape. At a typical meeting, some people may testify to what the Lord has done for them, others will read a text of Scripture and others offer a spontaneous prayer. Many simply comment on a text that has been read or the remarks that have been made by someone else. This very free exchange of reflections never becomes an argument or even a discussion, but is more like a freely moving group meditation. From time to time, all will join enthusiastically in a hymn — lively modern ones are somewhat favored, although the range is quite wide. Guitars are used when available.

Frequently there are intervals of a minute or two in which each one prays and meditates in silence. Sometimes one person will pray aloud for the group. When all pray together they use the Our Father with special predilection. At times all engage in spontaneous prayer aloud together, and those who can pray in tongues do so.

When telling of the work of the Spirit in their lives, they speak in a simple, unemotional, matter-of-fact tone that inspires respect for its sincerity and conviction. Even

casual and skeptical visitors frequently express admiration for the faith with which these people speak of God and address themselves to Him. It is this lively faith above all that characterizes these meetings. One visitor (the superior general of a Belgian religious community) remarked, "I saw nothing new in that meeting; it was just the Gospel. But where most Christians treat the Gospel as a story about something that happened two thousand years ago, these people read it as a message addressed to themselves. It is simple faith; but we are so complicated today, we can't understand simple things."

Because of their simple, lively faith, the Pentecostals are sometimes accused of fundamentalism. In fact, however, many of them are well acquainted with modern critical biblical scholarship. Moreover, there are many "intellectuals" among them—university or college professors, Ph. D.'s and advanced graduate students, and college students in great numbers. On the other hand, however, it would be a mistake to imagine that this is essentially a university movement, or that it is confined to an intellectual elite. Although its beginnings were largely in university environments, it has spread into all other sectors of American life: at any given prayer meeting, one is liable to meet business men and farmers, professional men and laborers, husbands and wives, high school students and retired grandparents. Likewise in their religious and social thought, they vary im-

mensely. There are liberals and conservatives, as well as every conceivable blend of the two. They keep their differences from one another, but find that they can join together in prayer harmoniously.

It is often noted with amazement that people of such different cultural backgrounds and intellectual viewpoints — people who, in some cases, could scarcely tolerate one another before — have been brought together by this movement into a deep spiritual union such as they had not known previously even with their friends.

The faith that inspires the prayer meetings does not make them lugubrious. They are filled with joy and gaiety; people laugh readily at one another and at themselves. Although many of those who come are frequently strangers, there quickly develops a sense of fellowship and communion among them.

Even people who dislike ordinary meetings and social gatherings find that they can attend these meetings without weariness. It is the spirit of peace and joy and communion, and — more profoundly — the almost palpable sense of the presence of God pervading these meetings, that explain this amazing fact. One skeptical visitor, announcing himself as a psychologist, declared, “I don’t believe in this Holy Spirit business at all, and I sure don’t understand what is going on here; but whatever it is, it’s good.” More often, people recall the promise of Christ: “Where two or

three of you are gathered together in my name, there am I in your midst" (Matt. 18:20).

Although spontaneous and unorganized, the meetings are not in any respect wild or chaotic. They go along quietly, each person waiting for others to finish before he speaks. There is never any shouting or gesticulating of the "Holy Roller" type. Protestant observers note that these meetings tend to be much less emotional and demonstrative than theirs. The frequent exclamations of "Amen" and "Hallelujah" so characteristic of Protestant reunions are seldom heard at these. Similarly, not nearly so much emphasis is placed on the gift of tongues as among the Protestant Pentecostals. On the other hand, the hymns that have become most popular at these meetings tend to be much livelier than the slow, sentimental ones dear to the Protestants.

Towards the end of each meeting, there is usually an informal ceremony in which anyone who wishes is prayed over. Several others gather around him, and after praying silently for a few moments and ordering all evil spirits to depart in the name of the Lord Jesus, they pray that the Holy Spirit may fill this person with His gifts. Usually they lay their hands on his head as a symbol of blessing, and those who can, pray in tongues.

Occasionally, the one who is prayed over begins at once to speak in tongues himself. Sometimes, with or without any external

manifestation, he is suddenly engulfed with a keen realization of the love of God, or a deep peace in the awareness of His presence. More often, however, these effects do not occur at once. They may take place a day or two later, or at another prayer meeting. Frequently, there is only a delicate joy and peace that grows gradually, that does not even become conscious until after it has been present for a considerable time.

The gift of tongues is the effect which tends to attract most attention. This is perhaps unfortunate, because in the minds of people who do not understand this gift, it tends to attach a note of weirdness to the movement. In reality, the gift of tongues is a quiet, gentle gift of prayer. To understand it, one should not focus exclusively on the story of Pentecost, where the Apostles spoke in tongues that were understood by the many foreigners who were present in Jerusalem. That was a very unusual case. The ordinary working of this charism can better be understood from I Corinthians, chapter fourteen. It is a mode of prayer, not a means of communication. The one who speaks in tongues addresses God, not his fellowmen. What he says is ordinarily not understood either by those around him or even by himself. If someone happens to be present who knows the language used, he will be able to understand it, of course; but that is quite accidental. Some people not only speak in tongues but even sing — often in a strange chant un-

like any familiar to our Western culture.

The one who speaks in tongues is aware that he is praying to God or praising Him, but not of the exact meaning of what he says. He speaks according to the prompting or guidance of a force within him that does not come from himself; yet he is conscious that he himself does the speaking, and he remains free to begin and quit when he sees fit. There is nothing ecstatic about the experience. The subject is perfectly calm and in full command of his senses; he is aware of what he is doing and of what goes on around him. Frequently he is engaged in a normal, rational conversation immediately before and after the speaking in tongues.

It is often asked what is the sense of value of praying in strange tongues? A full discussion of this question would take more space than is available here. It is enough to note that those who have received the gift find that it has helped their entire prayer life; but they also insist that this somewhat flamboyant gift is secondary in importance compared with the other effects the Holy Spirit has on their lives.

The most evident and frequent of these has been an appreciation of Sacred Scripture. Almost all of those who have had the Pentecostal experience have found arising in themselves a love of Scripture such as one rarely finds in anyone. They read it eagerly, not as scholars engrossed in a fascinating study, but as souls hungry for the Word of God, devour-

ing and savoring every word of it. In times of need and moments of decision, they turn to it in search of light and strength, often coming upon texts strikingly appropriate to their needs. They remember passages that have struck them, and cite them with a familiarity amazing to priests who, after years of study and meditation, have not acquired as deep a penetration of Scripture as some of these young people have received in a few months.

One college student, after receiving the "baptism of the Holy Spirit," as it is sometimes called (Acts 1:5), experienced such a keen desire to read the Bible that he spent two hours a day at it for the following week, and has continued to read an hour a day for the two months that have since elapsed. A woman who — after a period of great anguish — had been filled by the Holy Spirit with great peace of soul tells how she sat down to read the Bible the next morning as soon as her husband and children had left for work and for school. It had long been her habit to read one chapter every day, but this day she continued right on reading until it was time to prepare supper. She stopped only long enough to do the most indispensable household chores, and even thanked God that the telephone did not ring all that day to cause an interruption.

An even more profound effect of the Holy Spirit's action is that God becomes much more real and meaningful for these people.

They experience a truly personal love of Him; He ceases to be just a principle by which to regulate their lives.

Many of these people have been very energetic in the service of their fellow man before encountering the Holy Spirit, but now they realize that for them God had been, as it were, dissolved into their neighbor. They did not know Him except in their fellow creatures. Now they have discovered Him in Himself, and have realized that He can and must be known and loved in Himself, and more than all others.

Consequently, their prayer life is deepened and enlivened. They no longer find prayer simply a burden; they are drawn to it and feel the need of it. They spend a long time at it, often just remaining in silent adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, needing no books or other help. One college girl declares, "I used to feel good after I prayed, the way you do when you have done what you should. But now I feel good *while* I pray."

The mood of their prayer has also been affected. They are inclined spontaneously to praise God, something which many of them had never done before. It is a familiar fact that the average Christian, even if he is fairly devout, usually spends most of his prayer asking for things he needs. In exceptional moments, perhaps, he thanks God for favors received. But simply to praise God because of His glory, and to do so by a spontaneous

and joyous inclination, is ordinarily the mark of someone well advanced in the life of prayer. In the Pentecostal movement, the exclamation, "Praise God," is so common it is almost a trademark.

The prayer of these Pentecostals turns with predilection to God as Father. Whereas Catholic piety is usually addressed almost exclusively to Christ, these people — without abandoning prayer to Christ—find themselves instinctively turning *with Christ* to the Father, whom they love to address by this name. This accords with Christ's own instructions, "If you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it to you. Hitherto you have not asked anything in my name. Ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:23,24). Likewise, St. Paul taught that one of the effects of the Holy Spirit would be to teach us to pray in the spirit of sons (Romans 8:14-17).

However, this new dimension of interiority has not had the effect of making people indifferent to their neighbor, but just the contrary. Most of the leaders in the movement are actively engaged in some form of social or apostolic action, such as CCD teaching, conducting cursillos and their offshoots, the "Antioch weekends," counseling freshmen, tutoring underprivileged children, promoting YCS, and so forth. They were engaged in these activities before, and the Pentecostal movement has made them even more compassionate, generous and persevering.

Two students, one a boy and the other a girl, have declared in almost identical terms that their love for others used to be merely a kind of humanitarian impulse, but that now they have discovered how to love men as brothers in Christ.

On the other hand, several members of the movement were not outgoing or socially conscious at all. They tended to be introverted, out of timidity or hostility or bitterness, shut up within their own universe. But the Holy Spirit has released them from their solitary confinement and introduced them to the joy of communion with others which they had seldom if ever known before. One sophomore declares that he used to smile only about twice a semester, and his classmates confirm that this is hardly an exaggeration. Another had been for months in a state of great interior anguish, oppressed by the thought of the role the Cross played in mankind's redemption. Both of these students have now become cheerful and friendly. Several who had been too shy to speak in public are now willing to stand up before any crowd and testify to their faith.

There are people who had been troubled for months or even years with grave temptations or tenacious psychological problems, and found themselves suddenly set free by the "baptism of the Spirit." In some instances, the problems seem to have been solved completely; in others, the problems returned. But even in the cases of partial or temporary heal-

ing, the respite given seems to have aroused new hope and courage for the struggle still to be waged.

Still others who have been blessed by the Spirit had been living a normally healthy and happy Christian life before; now they speak of having found new depths of meaning and happiness in their lives. "The Holy Spirit did not bring about any spectacular change in our life," declares one young wife. "He simply transformed everything."

But whatever other particular effects may have occurred, peace and joy seem to have been received by all, almost without exception, of those who have been touched by the Spirit. These two terms rise almost unfailingly to the lips of anyone who gives testimony to what the Lord has done for him. The peace is deeper than any they have ever known; the joy wells up from within like a fountain that is ever fresh, and yet it is without the exuberance or elation that makes human joys liable to excess and then deflation.

The durability of this peaceful joy and joyous peace has at times been tested severely by the derision and contradiction to which those in the movement have been subjected. They are by no means indifferent to these attacks, but have generally borne them buoyantly and cheerfully, replying calmly and patiently to those who contradict them, and continuing their activity undisturbed.

In the Protestant world, the Pentecostal movement has often led people to separate

from their parent churches and found new ones. The Catholic Pentecostal movement has manifested no such tendencies: On the contrary, it has greatly deepened the attachment of its members to the Church. They have a livelier appreciation and heightened reverence for the Church's institutions. They welcome the presence of priests at their meetings as an assurance against doing anything that would be incompatible with the teaching or practice of the Church. They do not regard their prayer meetings as a substitute for the liturgy; in fact, many of the leaders of the movement have also been enthusiastic promoters of the liturgy. The invocation of the Holy Spirit, and the gesture of laying hands on the head of the one being prayed for, are not looked upon as replacements for the sacraments and do not lessen esteem for the sacraments. Many have become daily communicants since their new experience (although some were already), and others have begun to frequent the sacraments much more than before.

Similarly, the traditional devotions of the Church have taken on more meaning. Some people have been brought back to a frequent use of the sacrament of Penance through the experience of the baptism in the Spirit. Others have discovered a place for devotion to Mary in their lives, whereas previously they had been indifferent or even antipathetic towards her. One of the most striking effects of the Holy Spirit's action has been to stir up devo-

tion to the Real Presence in the Eucharist. Coming at a time when many theologians, for academic reasons, are belittling this devotion, while the Holy Father, in his little-heeded encyclical *Mysterium fidei*, has reaffirmed its value, this is an impressive sign of the authentically Catholic instincts of the movement.

Thus, whether it is judged by the persons involved in it, the effects it has on their lives or the ideas that inspire it, the Pentecostal movement inspires nothing but confidence. At first sight it gives the impression of something new and odd; but when examined carefully, it is nothing but the Gospel taken seriously. It has no new doctrine but simply a lively belief in the traditional Christian doctrines. It dares to believe in earnest that Christ is keeping the promises He made. It has no new practices: prayer meetings, invocation of the Holy Spirit and even the gesture of laying on hands are time-honored in the Church.

Of course, when the human mind and will begin to collaborate with the Holy Spirit, as indeed they must, the danger of mistakes arises. There is no doubt that mistakes have in fact been committed by some of the participants in the movement. Even more disconcerting is the fact that the name, *Pentecostal movement*, has been adopted in some parts of the country by groups that have little in common with the movement as described in the preceding pages. There are some. for

example, that dabble in astrology or false spiritualism, while others conduct unauthorized experiments in the liturgy or imprudent ecumenical ventures. Deviations of this sort are to be expected in any activity, regardless of how good its root inspiration may be, especially since the Spirit of Evil stirs up counterfeits by which to discredit the work of God. They make it necessary to use judgment and discrimination in regard to the manifestations of the Pentecostal movement, but they do not define the sense of the movement itself.

The latter is rather, in its deepest root, a renewal of what is most authentic in the Christian life. It is a "revival movement" in the theological sense of the word, but without the connotations the term has acquired in modern religious history. It is a renewal, not by means of gimmicks and innovations, but by a simple rediscovery of the life-giving waters that have ever been ready to flow from Christ's ancient institutions. This is exactly the sort of work which the Church long ago learned to expect of the Holy Spirit, as it expresses in the antiphon, "Send forth Your Holy Spirit and all will be regenerated, and You will renew the face of the earth."

II

PENTECOST AND CATHOLICISM

The Pentecostal movement began in Topeka, Kansas, on the first day of the year 1901. In a Bible school directed by the Methodist minister Charles Parham, people laid hands on one another and prayed that the Holy Spirit might be given with the sign of speaking in tongues. This did in fact occur, first to a young woman student, then to others in a gradually increasing stream. Since then, the movement has been carried all around the world by its unquenchably enthusiastic adherents, who have not been stopped by ridicule, exclusion from their families and churches, or persecution. Today the Pentecostal communities number something approaching fifteen million (exact statistics are not available), and appear to form the fastest growing branch of Christianity in the world.

Historians were already speaking of Pentecostalism as a "third force" in the Christian world, alongside of Catholicism and Protestantism, when a new development occurred which threw this classification into disarray. After World War II, Pentecost began to take root within the established Christian denominations, instead of leading people out of them into the so-called Pentecostal churches. It is already very strong among the Episcopalians and Lutherans, and has made its

presence felt among the Presbyterians and Baptists, as well as among many other denominations.

Roman Catholics also have been undergoing the Pentecostal experience for over a decade, although at first it was as isolated individuals and without publicity. But in February 1967, at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, there began what has become a unified Pentecostal movement within the Catholic Church. It spread to the University of Notre Dame and to the Newman Center at the University of Michigan. From these two sources, in turn, but also from other independent beginnings in Los Angeles, Boston, Rochester, and elsewhere, it has spread across the country. The chief concentration is in the Midwest, but it is to be found from Massachusetts to Oregon, from Florida to California, and in many places in between. It has crossed the border into Canada, and is beginning to take root in several countries of Europe, Africa, Latin America, Australia and New Zealand.

Essence of Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism is not a movement in the sense of an organized campaign or a method of action. It is not inspired by a new revelation or religious insight. Its essence, and the source of all its energy, is the experience of the action of the Holy Spirit. This occurs at two levels, which might be called the charismatic and the contemplative. Charismatic, in that the charisms witnessed in the early

Church and discussed by St. Paul have reappeared. The most widespread of these is glossolalia, but the charisms of prophecy, inspired preaching, healing, working of miracles, discernment of spirits, etc. have also been observed.

These charisms have attracted attention to the movement and merited its second name, that of "charismatic revival." In truth, however, they are not nearly so important as the other level of the Spirit's activity, which consists in bringing people to a personal encounter with God, a deep and moving experience of his presence and love that fills them with a new peace and joy and arouses in them a lively and affective love for God and neighbor and a hunger for giving praise to God. It is hard to list these effects without seeming either banal or academic, because they are nothing other than what Christianity has always preached and promised; but anyone who has seen the Spirit transform human lives from tepid to ardent, and from sin to the obedience of Jesus Christ, can hardly remain unmoved at the might with which the hand of God is once again active in our own days.

Catholic Involvement

Among Catholics, as was pointed out above, the Pentecostal movement has taken on a somewhat different tone from what it has in the classical Pentecostal churches. In the first place, it has not ordinarily inspired people to leave the Church, but on the con-

trary has tended to give them a deeper appreciation of her, as well as of the sacraments and the great Catholic traditions. It is already possible to point to a number of priestly and religious vocations that have been saved thanks to the movement. In the second place, the emotionalism and demonstrativeness that have been so typical of the worship services in Pentecostal denominations have been replaced by a quieter spirit of deep conviction and deep feeling, which loves silence as well as language as a medium for praising God. Likewise the anti-intellectualism that characterized classical Pentecostalism has not reappeared in the Catholic community.

Nevertheless, the Catholic movement is certainly in continuity with that which began at Topeka and has spread throughout the Christian world. This is evident from the charismatic activity, the experience of the "baptism of the Spirit" and numerous tiny tokens of kinship that are obvious to anyone familiar with the movement. Furthermore, most Catholics have received the Pentecostal experience through the intermediary of a non-Catholic Pentecostal. David Wilkerson's book, *The Cross and the Switchblade*, was the seed from which the movement at Duquesne was engendered. In Boston, Rochester, St. Louis, Cincinnati and many other places, it was through a non-denominational Pentecostal association known as the *Full Gospel Business Men* that Catholics first encountered this new activity of the Spirit. In Cincinnati,

Washington, D.C., Pittsburgh and elsewhere, it was through the prayers—of neighbors and prayer groups of other denominations, or of no denomination at all—that Catholics have received the “baptism of the Spirit.” There is no denying the fact that the Pentecostal movement originated outside the Roman Catholic Church and subsequently entered into it.

Precisely this fact gives many Catholics misgivings about the movement. The remainder of this article will be addressed to these misgivings. I will not try to demonstrate the genuineness of the activity attributed to the Holy Spirit, although the evidence I have observed at first hand is sufficient to convince me of it. I will deal only with the problem: if this movement is truly inspired by the Holy Spirit, and is capable of contributing to a renewal of Catholic spirituality, why did it originate outside the Church and come to her from without?

For those who hold that any concrete, historical Church can be only one of many possible particular realizations of the body of Christ, there is, of course, no problem. But I write from the point of view of a theology which holds that Christ gathered his followers into a definite, “visible” community which still subsists in the world today, catholic in its embrace and Roman in its pastoral center. This real human community, with all its faults and limitations as well as its virtues and holiness, its oddities as well as its achieve-

ments, and in the actual complex structure of its sacraments, laws and doctrine, its hierarchy and traditions, is (according to the faith here postulated) a unique and privileged temple in which the Holy Spirit still dwells on earth, as the *shekinah* of a new (though not yet completely *The New*) Jerusalem. Thanks to the presence of the Spirit, and the ever actual guidance of Christ, its Lord, this community is the adequate earthly source of grace and instruction, "*mater et magistra*," for all who seek to be led by the Spirit of God. Other Christian Churches may be animated by a sincere and salvific faith and be in possession of authentic Christian institutions; nevertheless they are regarded as separated from the Church of Christ in one or more important respects.

In the theological perspectives just delineated, is it conceivable that the Holy Spirit should be more operative in certain other Churches (viz., the Pentecostal) than in that Church which alone is held to be fully authentic, and that the latter could receive from the former a new influx of the gifts of the Spirit? This question is posed both by Catholics who doubt the validity of the Pentecostal movement, and by Pentecostals who challenge the authenticity of the Roman Catholic Church.

Misconceptions

Before replying, we must remove some latent misconceptions. First, there is a difference between the abiding presence of the

Spirit in the Church, and the transitory actions and movements that come from him. The Spirit was given to remain with the Church forever, but the essence of the Spirit is the freedom to breathe "where he wills." Hence, all through the history of salvation it is to be expected that new impulses will be imparted by him according to the needs of the moment and the intentions of providence. The Pentecostal movement, if it is genuine, is a wonderful new action of the Spirit adapted to the needs of our time, but it does not imply that the Spirit has been absent or quiescent before this movement began.

Secondly, it should be borne in mind that the proper effect of this movement is not the establishment of new Churches. The Pentecostals themselves generally affirm that "Pentecost is not a Church but an experience," and they have a deep-seated aversion for denominational lines. The so-called Pentecostal churches are only an accidental by-product of the movement, called into being when people who were obliged to separate from their original Churches banded together in communities of prayer for mutual support, and out of a powerful instinct for Christian community.

Furthermore, as it impinges upon Catholicism, Pentecost has the effect not of doing away with any authentic doctrines or practices, or of erecting new ones, but rather of awakening in people a deeper appreciation

for the sacraments, dogmas and traditional practices of piety. In other words, it does not tend to alter the essential structures of the Church, but to reveal the power and life that still surge through the limbs of this gnarled old tree.

Thus, the Pentecostal movement does not discredit the institutional Church, but revivifies and revalidates it. Vatican Council II summoned us to such a renewal, and Pope John himself asked for it in the famous prayer: "Renew thy wonders in this our day, as by a new Pentecost. . . ."

Concluding Thoughts

With these points in mind, we can now turn back to the question: Why did this renovating action of the Spirit begin outside the Church? I would suggest three possible reasons. The first is that this may be God's way of demonstrating to members of the Church that He alone is sovereign Lord, and that all institutions and hierarchs on earth, even in the Church, are nothing but instruments and ministers. Everyone professes to know that God is free to use whatever instruments He pleases, that He is not confined to the sacraments or other institutions of the ecclesiastical structure that He himself has created. Nevertheless we Catholics tend to get uneasy when He exercises this freedom, because our faith in the power and sacredness of these structures so readily changes into the implicit supposition that the Church is the manager of the grace of God. For this very reason we

need to have it demonstrated for us that God's action transcends the action of the Church as well as all human calculation. If He chooses to employ our separated brethren to bless us, we should be ready to receive this blessing with thanksgiving, knowing that all grace comes from God, regardless of the vehicle employed. Let us not forget that Christ, after instructing and forming his apostles in a very human way, and charging them with official responsibility for his Church, then, by a bolt of grace from heaven, turned Saul, who had received none of this formation, into the most effective apostle of them all.

In the second place, those who lack the support of the institutional Church and the grace of the sacraments have a special need of manifest signs from God. They may be compared to the Roman centurion Cornelius who received the fullness of the Spirit and the sign of tongues before he had even been baptized (Acts 10). If the Good Shepherd leaves the ninety-nine in the desert to seek out the sheep that have strayed, is it any wonder that his Spirit does likewise?

Finally, it may also be that those who lack the doctrinal and sacramental riches of the institutional Church often make up for it by the liveliness of their faith and the hunger of their hearts, whereas those who repose comfortably in the bosom of the Church have grown tepid. There was another Roman centurion who had such great faith that

Christ could find none like it in all Israel (Mt. 8, 10). There seems to be a kind of law running through salvation history, according to which communities that have received the favors of God tend to become complacent and arrogant, with the result that God withdraws his grace from them and offers it "to the Gentiles." Faith does not allow us to admit that the Church as a whole can ever be rejected by God. Nevertheless, we dare not assume that there is no meaning for us in the warning that Christ addressed to his contemporaries: "Many will come from the east and west, and will feast with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the children of the kingdom will be put forth into the darkness outside" (Mt. 8, 11f.). The Pentecostal movement appears to be a new and greater fulfillment of God's promise to pour out his Spirit upon all flesh; perhaps it is at the same time a realization of the parable: "The wedding feast is indeed ready, but those invited were not worthy . . . Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor, and the crippled, and the blind, and the lame. . . . Make them come in, so that my house shall be filled" (Mt. 22, 8; Lk. 14, 21ff.).

III

BAPTISM IN THE SPIRIT: EMOTIONAL THERAPY?

The central feature of the Pentecostal movement is an experience of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit which is sometimes called a "baptism in the Spirit." The name, taken from such passages as Luke 3:16 and Acts 11:15 ("John baptized in water, but you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit"), is not meant to suggest that this experience has the character of a sacrament. Neither does it imply that the Holy Spirit is not imparted by sacramental Baptism. But while it is a matter of faith that all who are in the state of grace are indeed "temples of the Holy Spirit" (I Cor. 6:19), it is also evident that not everyone in the state of grace seems to experience a conscious presence and manifest action of the Holy Spirit. These are nevertheless implied by many passages of the New Testament (John 14:17; Acts 10:44; I John 4:13, etc.). Hence it appears we must distinguish between a basic reception of the Holy Spirit which occurs in Baptism and is strengthened at Confirmation, and a further and fuller working of the Spirit that still needs to be awaited and desired by all the baptized.

The "baptism in the Spirit" which occurs in the Pentecostal movement is of this second

order. It is manifested differently in different people, but usually brings a deep peace and joy such as "this world" cannot give. It arouses a great increase of love for both God and neighbor. Often, but by no means always, it is signalized by speaking in tongues.

Critics of the movement are often inclined to suppose that baptism in the Spirit is an emotional experience, and they base their appraisals of it on this basis. One used the terms, "emotional explosion," "violent shake-up," "ecstasy." A psychologist, commenting on the movement at the University of Notre Dame, suggested that it is in part a reaction of pent-up feelings against the loneliness and tension brought about by the tough competitive spirit at the University today.*

Many people who know Notre Dame well would want to question the accuracy of the latter characterization; but that is not the business of the present article. What I want to show here is simply that baptism in the Spirit cannot be reduced to an emotional experience. Anyone who supposes that it can is simply starting from imagination or from an *a priori* view, not analyzing the real facts.

First, let me point out the limits of this article. Only the Pentecostal experience among Catholics is under consideration. Among non-Catholic Pentecostal denominations, the emotional factor is often far more pronounced. This does not by any means

* Henry Nouwen, *Intimacy*, Fides Press, 1969, pp. 77-90.

imply that their experiences are illusory or self-induced; it does, however, require that the two cases be treated separately. I think that the strongly emotional character of the Pentecostal denominations is perfectly understandable, given the fact that often they have almost no liturgy or sacramental life. Most of them also lack a developed theology capable of putting the Pentecostal experience in a larger perspective. The one reality they have — but what a tremendous reality — is this experience itself. No wonder that they seek it avidly and do everything possible to prolong and renew it. On the other hand, may it not be that the unemotional character of Catholic services is in part the sign of tepidity or rigidity or smugness? In any event, the strongly emotional character of the Pentecostal prayer meetings has not carried over into their Catholic counterparts.

Although the Pentecostal movement got its start in the Catholic Church among university people, it has not by any means remained confined to them. On the contrary, as was pointed out above, it has spread into all age groups and social classes of American Catholicism. Even in place where it began at a university, such as Pittsburgh and South Bend, it has tended to grow more rapidly outside the university than within it. This shows the irrelevance of any explanation such as the one given above, based on the conditions of college students.

Furthermore, extensive contact with peo-

ple in the movement makes it clear that no explanation based on psychological grounds suffices to account for their participation. In any given group, one can find extroverts and introverts, the loud and the quiet, the intellectual and the emotional, the active and the contemplative, and just about all the varieties of natural temperament that one would expect to find in a random sampling of American people. There are people with problems, and there are people with admirably balanced and integrated personalities. What draws them together is not any psychic need or bent, but the experience of having been touched powerfully by the Spirit of God.

In the case of Pentecostals of other denominations, several studies have been made by psychologists with a view to determining whether they are characterized by any discernible psychic traits. These studies have been surveyed by Virginia Hines, who reports* that, contrary to the expectations of the investigators, the psychological profiles of the Pentecostals were quite comparable to those of the control groups. Whatever differences appeared indicated that the former were better integrated and adjusted than the latter. No comparable study has yet been made of Catholic Pentecostals; but until one is, it is to be assumed that the findings of these other studies apply to them also.

That such is indeed the case is richly con-

* Virginia Hines, "Pentecostal glossolalia: toward a functional interpretation," in *Journal for the scientific study of religion*, VIII/2 (Fall, 1969), pp. 211-226.

firmed by personal experience. This can be illustrated by the nine persons with whom the movement at Notre Dame began. Anyone who knew them could hardly fail to be impressed by their overall wholesomeness. Although of quite different temperaments, they tended as a group to be friendly, open, cheerful, well-liked by their peers, and influential among them. Four of them were young married couples, very happy in their love for one another; the Pentecostal experience had the effect of intensifying their love.

On the intellectual plane, the group was far above average. The two married men were both successful graduate students. Their wives both had college degrees, one of them an M.A. The five undergraduates all ranked above average in their college, and three of them were on the Dean's List. To several of them, academic success came rather easily. If tough competition makes people dream up spirits, this should have happened to the rest of the student body rather than to this group!

The same psychologist who was cited above also suggested that the students in question were experiencing a kind of devotional "rebound" back to the sort of piety that preceded the liturgical revival. But in fact the majority of them had been and still are enthusiastic, active promoters of the liturgy.

It seems clear, therefore, that the intriguing psychological explanation cited above has little relation to the facts. As I see it, the underlying error lies in the false assumption

that the Pentecostal experience is essentially emotional. Strong emotions have in some cases accompanied the experience, but they have not been the ordinary rule and they have never been more than concomitant to it.

To be specific: The experience is not produced by emotion, it does not consist in emotion, and its chief and characteristic effects are not emotional. Anyone who has watched revival or faith-healing meetings may have been disturbed by the extent to which they create an atmosphere and use techniques calculated to arouse emotions. One cannot but fear that an emotionally unstable person might be led to imagine he was healed, whether he was in fact or not. But there has been nothing of this sort in the prayer meetings I have observed. No effort whatsoever has been made to create an impressive atmosphere or stir the emotions. The meetings proceed in a very relaxed spirit, with almost as much humor sometimes as piety. (This has not been so true of a few large meetings held for the general public. The presence of many curious onlookers who did not enter into the spirit of the movement sometimes created an unaccustomed stiffness and tension; but these were also the meetings which were spiritually the least fruitful!) Ordinarily a joyous mood prevails in the gathering, with the participants laughing readily at one another and at themselves. The hymns that are sung (often to the accompaniment of a guitar) are mostly light, modern ones

with a gay rhythm that makes them fun as well as a prayer. When anyone speaks at these meetings, he invariably does so calmly and simply. (All that is said is said impromptu; the meetings are never planned in advance.)

The first time I attended, I was a little surprised to see that many of those present continued to smoke or chew gum or eat snacks just as casually as at a card party. I call attention to this because I can think of nothing better calculated to dissipate any atmosphere of the supernatural than the sight of a round-faced St. Mary's sophomore curled up on the sofa across the room, chomping away at a handful of popcorn.

Since then, the pattern has evolved in many places of stopping for a coffee break after the first hour or two of the meeting. During this break, people stand around conversing about topics often quite unrelated to the prayer meeting, laughing and joking a great deal. If any emotional tension had built up during the first part of the meeting, this would be enough to dissipate it.

When there is anyone who wishes to be prayed over in order to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit, this often takes place right after the coffee break, without any further solemnity or emotional preparation. Those who do the praying ordinarily lay their hands on the head of the one they pray for, in imitation of a common biblical gesture; but this is not regarded as a sacred ceremony, but simply as a natural expression of the in-

tention of invoking God's blessing on this person.

Sometimes this invocation of the Holy Spirit occurs outside of a prayer meeting altogether, when someone has asked for it privately. In this case, once those involved have made sure that the person is serious in his purpose and sufficiently instructed, they simply gather around him where he sits and pray over him with no further ado. I have witnessed these private invocations several times, and have always been struck by the matter-of-fact abruptness with which they are entered upon.

I mention such details to show that no attempt is made in these gatherings to arouse, intensify, or sustain emotion, whether religious or otherwise. On the contrary, if emotion were being sought for, almost every psychological rule about how to achieve it would here be violated. The plain fact is that emotion is not being used in this movement as a means to bring about the Pentecostal experience.

Secondly, this experience does not consist in emotion. Most of the time, the one who is prayed over experiences no immediate effects whatsoever. Sometimes the gift of tongues may come to him a few days later, or perhaps the second or third time he is prayed over. Sometimes, after the lapse perhaps of several days, he begins to realize that a delicate new peace and joy have been growing gradually in his soul without his being

at first aware of it. Occasionally, the subject finds himself a little dazed and bewildered after he is prayed over, but must still wait some time for the effects to take on a definite character. In none of the cases just described can one speak of an "emotional experience."

Once in a while, the laying on of hands produces an immediate and dramatic effect. It may be that the person begins speaking in tongues there on the spot. This naturally astounds (and usually embarrasses) him, but does not otherwise stir the emotions.

There have, however, been some cases in which the immediate effect was strongly emotional. One person broke into deep sobbing; another was so overcome by some interior, unspoken emotion that he simply remained sitting still and immobile for half an hour or so. One person, who had obviously been deeply affected, exclaimed in heart-rending tones, "He loves me!"

Such cases tend to catch attention because they are so striking; presumably they are largely responsible for the impression that the Pentecostal experience is essentially emotional. They are, however, the exception rather than the rule.

Moreover, even in these cases there is plenty of evidence that the emotion is only the by-product and incidental sign of a much deeper change or encounter that has taken place within. On the one hand, the emotion appears abruptly, and its vehemence is utterly disproportionate to the dispositions which

preceded it. On the other hand, when the feelings have subsided, there remains a deep and durable effect in the person's moral fiber. In some it is a new strength of character, or generosity, or humility that is acquired; in others a moral weakness is overcome or a grievous psychological problem resolved. Perhaps the last-mentioned result could sometimes be explained simply by the therapeutic effects of an emotional catharsis; but genuine strengthening or healing of the will cannot be brought about in this way—it requires something deeper. This, however, introduces us to the third point, *namely, that the effects of the Pentecostal experience are not chiefly emotional.*

This applies in particular to the speaking in tongues, which is not at all the “ecstatic” experience many nonobservers have supposed it to be. The subject is perfectly conscious and in calm control of himself before, after and even while he speaks; he needs no intense concentration in order to prepare for it, and manifests no special emotional reaction afterwards.

The effect, however, which is most commonly noted by those who have received the baptism in the Spirit, and on which all of them seem to place the greatest stress, is that of a deep interior peace, joy and love. These same three terms arise spontaneously over and over in the personal testimonies. Joy and love are, of course, the names of emotions; but there is a deeper level of joy and love

which is not emotional, but belongs to the purely spiritual faculty of the will. Ordinarily, we seldom advert to the distinction, since the affections of the will are normally accompanied by and hidden under those of the emotions; but there are occasions when the distinction between the two levels is quite apparent.

Those who have undergone the Pentecostal experience insist that the joy and love they have received are far “deeper” than those which their previous experience had made them familiar. What is even more significant is the interior peace which these affections bring with them. It is a familiar principle of spiritual theology that emotional experiences tend to excite and “exalt” the soul, whereas the work of grace has a pacifying character. God touches the soul in its depths, and draws all together into a harmonious unity that is brimming with intense joy and yet quiet and relaxed. Human emotions cannot achieve this paradoxical effect. They either stimulate and excite the soul, and thus draw it out of its inner quiet and composure; or they have a soporific effect, inducing a sort of composure (or depression!) by lessening the soul’s intensity, braking its dynamism.

Moreover, emotions of themselves are not long lasting. Unless anchored in either an organic or a spiritual basis, they tend to pass quickly. The “morning after” is the acid test of the feelings of the night before. And of

all the emotions, joy and love are perhaps the most delicate. But the joy, love and peace that have come from the baptism in the Spirit endure a long time. It is not rare for them to increase and gather in strength steadily, even amid the doubts and bewilderment to which the person is often subjected, and the challenges, questioning, disbelief, and derision he may encounter.

I do not seek to give the impression that the Pentecostal experience is cold and unemotional. My point is simply that emotion is not the substance of the experience, nor its chief effect, but only a natural concomitant. It would be quite unnatural and inhuman for a man to undergo a profound experience without it registering in his emotions; and this has certainly not been the case here. In fact, some people who had previously been rather cold and unemotional have been "moved" by this experience as never before in their life. Pent-up feelings, the existence of which they did not suspect, have been released and allowed to flow freely.

The only question under consideration here is whether baptism in the Spirit can be reduced wholly or largely to the emotional order, as has been assumed by several commentators. The evidence I have gathered leads, I believe, to the conclusion that emotion plays almost no role in the preparation for this experience, and only a secondary and concomitant role in the experience itself as well as its sequels.

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