

# The Pentecostal Movement and Lutheran Theology

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A significant development in the recent history of religious life in the United States has been the rise and rapid spread of the Pentecostal movement. During the past two decades the growth of this “charismatic” movement has been apparent to even the casual observer. What once had been regarded as merely a fanatical fringe of the fundamentalist movement, as an interesting relic of the nation’s frontier past, has now blossomed into a “Third Force” alongside Roman Catholicism and the Protestant churches.

Not only have the Pentecostal groups themselves grown during the years following the Second World War, noteworthy is the rise of this movement within other established church bodies, especially within the last decade. Experiences and practices usually associated only with the Pentecostal denominations have appeared with increased frequency also in the Roman Catholic, Episcopal, and even in the Lutheran church. (When a conference of Lutheran pastors in the charismatic movement was held at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in May of 1971, it was estimated that there were over two hundred pastors in the Missouri Synod who claimed to have received the baptism in the Holy Spirit.)<sup>i</sup> Practically every major denomination now has its own Pentecostal element.

## Historical Background of the Pentecostal Movement

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Acts 2:1-4

Historically the Pentecostals trace their origin to that outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon the disciples recorded in Acts 2. Modern Pentecostalism, which originated near the beginning of the twentieth century, claims to be a resurgence of the original Pentecostal power after centuries of decline. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, is also credited with being the spiritual and intellectual father of the modern holiness and Pentecostal movements. The organization of the Pentecostal movement probably stems from Charles Fox Parham’s Bethel Bible School in Topeka, Kansas.

Parham began his ministerial career in Linwood, Kansas as a pastor in the Methodist Episcopal church. However, in 1895 he left that fellowship and adopted an anti-denominational view to which he adhered for the rest of his life. In 1898, he felt that he should begin a “divine healing home” in Topeka where he could gather together those who were sick and infirm and pray for their healing. Accordingly, the Bethel Healing Home was begun. Two years later, he established a school near Topeka which he named the Bethel Bible School.

By December of 1900, Parham had led his students at the school through a study of the major teachings of the holiness movement. When they arrived at the second chapter of the Book of Acts, they studied the events which occurred on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, especially the ability of the disciples to speak in other tongues. They came to the conclusion that the visible evidence for the reception of the baptism in the Holy Spirit was speaking with other tongues.<sup>ii</sup>

Convinced that this was a proper interpretation of the Scriptures, Parham and his students held a watchnight service on New Year’s Eve of 1900. During this service, a student, Agnes N. Ozman, requested Parham to lay hands on her head and pray for her to be baptized with the Holy Ghost with the visible evidence of speaking in tongues. It was after midnight on the first day of the twentieth century when Miss Ozman is reported to have begun speaking in the Chinese language while “a halo seemed to surround her head and face.” Following this experience, she was unable to speak in English for three days, and when she tried to

communicate by writing, she invariably wrote Chinese characters. After Miss Ozman experienced this speaking in tongues, the rest of the students sought and received a similar experience. Somewhat later, Parham himself received the experience and began to preach it at all his services.<sup>iii</sup>

Thus it was Charles Parham who first singled out “glossolalia” as the evidence of a person’s having received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. He also taught that it should be a part of normal Christian worship rather than a curious by-product of religious enthusiasm. It was Parham’s teaching that laid the doctrinal and experimental foundations of the modern Pentecostal movement.

Parham soon closed his school in Topeka in order to go on a whirlwind tour of revival meetings. This went on for four years. In the fall of 1905, he established his headquarters in Houston, Texas and opened another Bible school for the propagation of his views. It was at this school that W.J. S Seymour, the negro apostle of Azusa Street, received his training.

In 1906, Seymour was invited to conduct a service in the home of Richard and Ruth Asbury in Los Angeles, California. For several days prayer services were conducted in the Asbury home. On April 9, 1906 Seymour and seven others who attended the prayer meeting fell to the floor in a religious frenzy, speaking with other tongues. The news spread and in the services that followed the demonstration of tongues was so pronounced that large crowds gathered in the street to see what was going on. With such interest in evidence, Seymour had to find larger quarters in which to conduct his revival services. After a search of the city, an old abandoned Methodist church building at 312 Azusa Street was secured. No sooner had Seymour begun preaching at the Azusa Street location than a monumental revival began. Scores of people began to “fall under the power” and arise speaking in tongues. This Azusa Street revival is commonly regarded as the beginning of the modern Pentecostal movement. Although many people had spoken in tongues in the United States in the years preceding 1906, this meeting brought the beliefs to the attention of the world. From these early revivals the movement has grown to an estimated twenty million Pentecostals today.<sup>iv</sup>

The early converts to Pentecostalism were urged to return to their own established churches and introduce in them their blessings of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. However, the efforts of those Pentecostals were not often appreciated. Therefore they began to form their own Pentecostal congregations which were usually grouped around some outstanding leader.

In recent years, the Pentecostal movement has sprung up within many of the non-pentecostal denominations. The most characteristic marks of this movement are the emphasis on the experience of baptism with the Holy Spirit and the ability to speak in tongues. The origin of this neo-Pentecostal movement is somewhat difficult to trace. According to one account, the movement began in an Episcopal church in Monterey Park, California. It seems that a young couple who had been loosely connected with the church suddenly became very active, giving as their reason the fact that they had been filled with the Holy Spirit and were able to speak with tongues. The rector of the church introduced this couple to other young members of the congregation with the hope that more young people would become interested in normal church work. Instead, the other young people became fired with the spirit of the first two, and the zeal for speaking in tongues spread. The rector went to Father Dennis Bennett of a neighboring Episcopal church for help. However, instead of helping correct the situation, before long Bennett also began to speak with tongues. He informed his own congregation of what had happened and because of the dissention that resulted Bennett resigned. Since that time this modern neo-Pentecostal movement has spread and as already has been mentioned may be found in other major denominations

### **Pentecostal Baptism with the Holy Spirit**

The distinctive doctrine of the Pentecostal movement is the baptism with the Holy Spirit. The Pentecostals believe that:

All believers are entitled to, and should ardently expect and earnestly seek the promise of the Father, the baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire, according to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the normal experience of all in the early Christian Church. With it comes the endowment of power for life

and service, the bestowment of the gifts and their uses in the work of the ministry. This wonderful experience is distinct from and subsequent to the experience of the new birth.<sup>v</sup>

The Pentecostals view the baptism in the Holy Spirit as the central doctrine of the Bible and as the climax of the Christian life. They teach that the baptism in the Spirit is more to be desired than the new birth, since the new birth concerns man only in so far as he is a sinner, while the baptism in the Spirit concerns the whole Christian life. While they teach that this “Spirit-baptism” is not absolutely necessary for salvation, they do teach that it is to be the desired and sought after experience. They believe that though the Spirit regenerates man and enables him to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ at the time of his conversion, the Holy Spirit does not come into the believer’s heart as a Person who fills his life, dispensing the full compliment of His gifts. That takes place only after the individual has experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This “Spirit-baptism” may come to individuals in various ways. A prominent neo-Pentecostal writes concerning this.

Sometimes the baptism with the Holy Spirit occurs spontaneously, sometimes through prayer and the laying on of hands. Sometimes it occurs after water baptism, sometimes before. Sometimes it occurs virtually simultaneously with conversion, sometimes after an interval of time. So there is considerable variety within the pattern. But one thing is constant in Scripture, and that is most important: It is never merely assumed that a person has been baptized with the Holy Spirit. When he has been baptized with the Holy Spirit the person knows it. It is a definite experience.<sup>vi</sup>

The value of this “Spirit-baptism” is expressed in this way. “The baptism with the Holy Spirit is a specific link in a chain of experience which unites the believer to Christ.”<sup>vii</sup> In other words, the claim is made that without the experience of baptism with the Holy Spirit Christians are missing an important link in their relationship with Christ. Though it is granted that one can be saved without this experience, it is implied that one has not entered into a full relationship with the Lord unless he has had this experience. Thus no Christian can live the full Christian life, nor render true Christian service until he has received “Spirit-baptism.” It is taught that the experience of “Spirit-baptism” means a deepened awareness of the love of God joined with the reception of new power for life and service. It is also believed that “Spirit-baptism” brings with it the full: indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the full bestowal of His gifts. Without the baptism with the Holy Spirit something is lacking.

### **Biblical Baptism with the Holy Spirit**

Already in the Old Testament, the Bible speaks of a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the New Testament Church. The prophet Joel said:

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit (Joel 2:28-29).

This prophecy was fulfilled on the great day of Pentecost, as Peter himself stated in the introduction of his sermon on that day.

The New Testament also speaks of a baptism with the Holy Spirit. In Matthew 3:1, John the Baptist said:

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I. . . he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire. (Cf. Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, John 1:33)

The Lord Jesus used the same expression in Acts 1:5. There He told His disciples:

For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

On Pentecost the promise of Jesus was fulfilled, God poured out His Spirit upon the disciples. A similar experience occurred when Philip preached the Gospel to the Samaritans, (Acts 8); and in the case of Cornelius and his household, (Acts 10). It was also experienced by the disciples at Ephesus when Paul baptized them in the name of Jesus, (Acts 19). In each case, believers in Jesus were endowed with special gifts.

In the past, Lutheran theologians have usually interpreted the above mentioned experiences of baptism with the Holy Spirit as experiences that occurred only in the apostolic church. Lutheran dogmaticians carefully distinguished between baptism with the Holy Spirit and Baptism in the name of Jesus. Only the Baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus was considered a sacrament. Baptism with the Holy Spirit was limited to the apostolic age.<sup>viii</sup>

In more recent years, other Lutheran theologians identified the baptism with the Holy Spirit with the conversion of the sinner, which takes place through God's Word and the Sacraments. Dr. Theodore Engelter, for example, writes:

All Christians are "baptized with the Holy Ghost," Luke 3:16. This term describes the work of the Holy Ghost in saving, in regenerating and justifying the sinner, sanctifying and preserving the Christian, and bestowing upon him the gifts and power he needs in his Christian calling. The term is used in an unscriptural sense by the extreme enthusiasts, who define "the baptism with the Holy Spirit" as the bestowal of sinless perfection. . . accompanied by miracle-working power, as the "second blessing" consequent upon the re-consecration of the soul to a higher and deeper life. . . Some even go so far as to designate it the chief and greatest blessing, while according to Scripture justification by faith is the chief and supreme thing in the life of a Christian, the greatest blessing, the source of all blessings.<sup>ix</sup>

While Lutheran theologians have at times differed in their understanding of the term "baptism with the Holy Spirit," they have never taken the doctrinal position which the Pentecostal movement has on this. The Pentecostals teach that every believer is to earnestly endeavor to experience "Spirit-baptism." They maintain that it is a very essential part of the Christian life, placing more importance on it than on the true central teaching of the Bible, justification by faith.

The apostle Peter proclaimed on Pentecost:

Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you and to your children and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. Acts 2:38-39

That promise was given to all Christians of all time, and there is no mention of any time interval between Baptism and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. When a person is baptized he receives the Holy Spirit. We, of course, recognize that the Holy Spirit continues to give His gifts and blessings to believers after conversion. But we are opposed to the idea that "ordinary" believers somehow lack the Holy Spirit or that the Holy Ghost only partially comes to them and therefore they must await a later "baptism with the Holy Spirit."

According to the Book of Acts, Christians in the apostolic age received the baptism of the Spirit solely as a gift, never as a reward granted on the basis of human effort. While Pentecostals emphasize that the Spirit must be earnestly sought after and prayed for, the passages in the Bible on this always refer to Him as the result of a promise from the Father bestowed on the believer.

The Pentecostals give the impression that this experience of "Spirit-baptism" is some sort of supplement to the Means of Grace. However, both the Bible and the Confessions teach that the Word and the Sacraments are the only Means of Grace and that the Holy Spirit accompanies their use with His blessings and gifts.

Thus the Pentecostal doctrine of "the baptism of the Spirit" as a second work of the Spirit in addition to and beyond conversion and sanctification, and the idea that we should seek this special "baptism of the Spirit"

is not in harmony with Lutheran theology. Certainly the Bible encourages Christians to pray for the gifts of the Spirit. Certainly we Christians are to strive to walk more fully by that Spirit in whom we already live. Certainly we should yield ourselves to the Spirit's influence. But to say that a Christian needs a baptism with the Holy Spirit subsequent to, or in addition to, his conversion by which the Spirit is to then totally enter the believer's life, is to distort God's Word and not in agreement with Lutheran doctrine.

### **Glossolalia**

As noted previously, the characteristic "mark" of having been baptized with the Holy Spirit is the ability to speak in tongues. In support of this belief the Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals cite passages from the Book of Acts in which glossolalia is spoken of.

To be sure, glossolalia was a fact of life in the early Christian Church. However, there are only three explicit post-Pentecost references to glossolalia in the New Testament. They are found in two books, Acts and First Corinthians. Thus glossolalia does not occupy the same place of prominence in the Holy Scriptures that it does in the minds of the Pentecostals. In the Book of Acts, speaking in tongues is mentioned in the Pentecost story (Acts 2); in the account of the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10); and in the account of the baptism of John's disciples at Ephesus (Acts 19). In First Corinthians 12-14, Paul deals with the problem of the abuse of tongues by the Corinthian Christians.

The Pentecostals hold the position that glossolalia was and is a sign that a believer has experienced a second baptism with the Holy Spirit. However, a study of the passages in the Book of Acts which are supposed to support such a teaching leads to a different conclusion. In First Corinthians 14:22, the apostle Paul says that "tongues are for a sign" but he adds "not to them that believe, but to them that believe not."

In other words, tongues offer an evidence or sign of something objective, not something subjective. God-filled individuals with the Spirit and gave them the gift of tongues not so much as a sign to the individual who did the speaking, but rather for those who heard the speaking. In all three instances in Acts, that makes sense.<sup>x</sup>

The miracle of speaking in tongues on Pentecost served the purpose of convincing the people of the truth of Peter's message. In the home of Cornelius the situation was reversed. Cornelius and his household spoke in tongues as a sign to Peter and his companions that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was intended for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. In Ephesus, where the disciples of John spoke in tongues after their baptism by Paul, the tongues were a sign confirming the testimony of Paul to them concerning the person and work of the Holy Ghost.<sup>xi</sup>

Thus speaking in tongues was a gift given by the Lord, not primarily as a unique language for worship, not primarily to aid in the spread of the Gospel to foreign lands, and definitely not as a sign that a believer had experienced a second baptism in the Holy Ghost. It was given primarily for the purpose of authenticating and substantiating some aspect of God's truth.<sup>xii</sup>

Because of the wide-spread and increasing popularity of speaking in tongues, it would be well for us to briefly note what the apostle Paul has to say on this subject in First Corinthians 14.

In his introduction to his epistle Paul said that he thanked God because of the grace of God that had been given to the Corinthians by Christ, so that they were enriched by Him in every kind of gift. In chapter 12 Paul listed some of the gifts that had been given to the church. In chapter 13 Paul spoke of the gift of charity, Christian love, which outranked all other gifts and also was the principle according to which all other gifts were to be evaluated and used in the congregation. The gifts of healing, administration, working miracles, speaking with tongues, were all gifts of the Holy Spirit, but if those gifts were used apart from the governing principle of love, they could and did give rise to problems in the congregation. Christian love, as described in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter, determined the manner in which all gifts were to be used. The purpose for which the gifts were to be employed was always the edification of the Church might be exalted more than another. Paul told them that they were not to become puffed up.

The Corinthian congregation was young, rich in gifts, full of enthusiasm, but immature, and it was natural therefore that the members would emphasize those gifts that made them appear more important in the eyes of their fellowmen. The gift that seems to have especially caught their fancy was the gift of speaking in tongues. However, the Corinthians abused this gift and Paul was compelled to admonish them. This he did in chapter 14.

### **1 Corinthians 14**

Verses 1-3: He who speaks with tongues speaks not for men, but only for God because no one understands what he is saying. Therefore prophesy is to be preferred because people can understand it and it edifies them.

Verse 4: He who prophesies edifies the church, but the speaker with tongues edifies only himself.

Verse 5: He who prophesies speaks edification, admonition, and consolation for -she church and is therefore greater than the speaker with tongues.

Verses 6-13: Unless “tongues” are interpreted they are meaningless.

Verses 14-17: It may be that there is a content of prayer or of praise in tongue speaking, but the speaker’s mind, his understanding is not involved and therefore the whole thing is meaningless to anyone but God and is fruitless as far as the congregation is concerned.

Verses 18-20: Paul says that he is able more than anyone in the congregation to speak in tongues, but in the congregation he would rather speak five words with understanding than ten thousand words in tongues. The Corinthians should grow up, become mature in their understanding. For speaking in tongues without an interpreter is childish.

Verses 21-22: Tongues are for a sign, but not to believers, rather unbelievers. They are a judgment of God.

Verses 23-25: The effect of this speaking with tones on uninitiated people who happen to hear it is that they will get the impression that the speakers are raving mad; whereas if they heard intelligible prophesying, they would come to the conclusion that God was present in the congregation.

Verses 26-33: Speakers with tongues ought to be silent in the congregation if no interpreter is present. Also good order should be preserved when speaking in tongues in the assembly.

Verses 34-35: Women are to keep silent in the church.

Verses 36-40: Paul does not prohibit speaking in tongues, but let all things be done decently and in order.

In regard to the modern speaking in tongues the Word of God still applies. We are told in the Bible that:

Charity never faileth; but whether there be prophesies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. 1 Cor. 13:8

From what follows it is clear that prophesies will fail, knowledge shall vanish away, “when that which is perfect is come,” that is, at our Savior’s return on judgment day. But regarding tongues we are simply told that they will cease. There is nothing to indicate that they will, however, continue until “that which is perfect is come.”<sup>xiii</sup>

If we would grant that some of the emotional outbursts of the Pentecostals might have as their source a genuine religious feeling wrought by the Holy Spirit through the Word of the Gospel, the instruction of Paul concerning tongues still applies. Unless interpreted in clear, understandable language, the gift should not be employed in the congregation. It should be exercised at home for personal edification and for the ears of God. The gift of tongues is described as a lesser gift of the Spirit, and if the speaker with tongues is sincere, then he should strive after the greater gifts.

### **Conclusion**

The Bible tells us:

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. 1 John 4:1

Now I beseech you brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them. Romans 16:17

We are to test the spirit of the Pentecostal movement. The only true basis for our test, for our judgment of this movement, is its confession of faith. We quote from the *Statement of Faith* contained in the *Constitution of the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America*:

(1) We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God; (2) that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father Son and Holy Ghost; (3) in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning sacrifice through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory; (4) that for the salvation of lost and sinful men regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential; (5) that the full gospel includes holiness of life, healing for the body and the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance; (6) in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit, by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to lead a godly life; (7) in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost, they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation; (8) in the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>xiv</sup>

While the Pentecostal movement does insist on such fundamental doctrines as the inspiration of Scripture, the deity of Christ, and the reality of miracles, in other doctrinal points it is found to be in disagreement with true Biblical doctrine. For example, the Pentecostals accept premillennialism as one of their doctrines. Most Pentecostals are Arminian in their theology. The efficacy of the sacraments is denied by them. They are unionistic. They claim that unity is achieved on the basis of love and not on the basis of agreement in doctrine. Each person is allowed to have his own opinions in doctrinal matters and all controversial questions are avoided. They place the central teaching of the Bible, justification by faith, in a subordinate position to their baptism with the Holy Spirit. Yet Scripture nowhere says that in order to be a Christian a person has to have a charismatic experience. Nowhere does the Bible make speaking in tongues a prerequisite for Christianity. Nowhere does the Bible teach that the events surrounding the first Pentecost have to be repeated whenever a person is brought to faith. Thus the Pentecostal movement is not in agreement with all of God's Word or with our Lutheran theology.

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- <sup>i</sup> “The Charismatic Movement in Lutheran Theology”, page 3.
- <sup>ii</sup> Synan, *The Holiness Pentecostal Movement*, p. 101.
- <sup>iii</sup> Ibid, pages 101, 102.
- <sup>iv</sup> Ibid, pages 103-114.
- <sup>v</sup> Mayer, *The Religious Bodies of America*, page 315.
- <sup>vi</sup> Christenson, *Speaking in Tongues*, page 38.
- <sup>vii</sup> Ibid, page 48.
- <sup>viii</sup> “The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology”, page 23.
- <sup>ix</sup> Ibid, page 23.
- <sup>x</sup> Gerlach, “Glosslalia,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, page 251.
- <sup>xi</sup> Ibid, page 251.
- <sup>xii</sup> Ibid, page 251.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Schuetze, “What Does the Bible Say About Speaking in Tongues,” *The Northwestern Lutheran*, page 6.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Mayer, op. cit. p. 310.