

# Calling heresies, ‘truth’

## And calling aberrations acceptable: a short history of Charismatic excesses.

### Introduction

I have written elsewhere on the origins of Pentecostalism at some length,<sup>1</sup> but this summary of some historic church movements aims to show the problems arising when error is not confronted at its source and condemned.

From the beginning of the sub-apostolic age two sorts of problems began to affect the church: the first was the proliferation of doctrinal errors the second was the appearance of aberrational practices. Some heretical influences involved a number of doctrinal errors coupled with a variety of dangerous practices; an example of this was Gnosticism. Being a syncretism of Christianity and pagan / occult religious ideas this led to a severe corruption of Christian ethics, teaching and church practice. Whilst the historic form of this died out after a few centuries, modern variants are now common in compromised western churches where New Age notions have been accepted by church leaders.

Aberrations of practice are the outcome of errors of teaching and we must strike to the root of a problem in order to protect the church. Thus the safest way to secure the flock is to identify errors as quickly as possible and expose them, explaining the truth of the matter.

Now some errors of doctrine lead to a great number of erroneous practices. Church movements which developed many aberrations arose in the sub-apostolic age chiefly with the arrival of sects which emphasised mysticism, emotionalism and a focus on supernatural gifts. Over time such groups gained a number of names: ‘inspirationists’, ‘enthusiasts’, ‘spiritualists’, ‘mystics’ and many more. On occasions this rise in emotionalism was associated with millenarianism, i.e. an expectation of the end of the age; on other occasions it was a by-product of revival fervour. It is also noteworthy that periods of heresies relying upon emotionalism were reactions to previous periods where rationalism had been prevalent. History shows a pendulum effect between an over-emphasis upon reason followed by an over-emphasis upon emotions.

What was crucial for the survival of the church was to identify these outbreaks as heretical and warn the flock. Thus we can learn good lessons by examining some of these rogue movements and evaluating their repercussions.

## Pre-Reformation

### **Montanism**, mid 2<sup>nd</sup> century – mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century

Montanism is a problem for historians (like some other sects, such as the Albigenses) in that it was persecuted and its history rewritten by its persecutors. Whilst there is no doubt that it later took a very serious wrong direction, it originally sprang up as a reform movement as a reaction to the stale formalism and worldliness of many churches at that time. It was a desire to promote true spirituality in the face of lifeless, legal, orthodoxy. There must have been some very good aspects to local expressions of it since the church

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<sup>1</sup> See, ‘Origins of Pentecostalism’ or ‘The Rescue Package: Charismatic Background’.

father Tertullian (c. 145-c. 220) joined the movement for many years. He was one of the greatest early theologians and one who contributed most clarity to the doctrine of the Trinity while he was involved in Montanism. He was also a great Christian apologist, evangelist, opponent of Gnosticism, and Christian educator. This cannot be ignored. Neither can the fact that the heresy hunter Epiphanius could find no fault with Montanism either. The condemnation of historian Eusebius, who called the prophecies 'bastard utterances', rests upon an anonymous source.

Nevertheless there is no doubt that over time it began to treat ecstatic utterances as authoritative and promoted the value of prophecies and tongues. Most historians blame Montanus for introducing this idea of reliance upon authoritative words arising out of ecstatic speech, but there is some doubt about this. Many Presbyterian historians discredit Montanus because he taught credobaptism and insisted upon a pure church; Baptist historians would support him in this. After the death of Montanus in 170 AD, two women took over the leadership (Priscilla and Maximilla) and the movement became extreme in its emotional mysticism.

To what extent Montanus himself is the cause of errors and aberrations will never be established; what is certain is that in the fulness of the movement, the following problems are evidenced.

- The value of new revelation arising from subjective feelings and ecstatic utterances or following a trance like state.
- The authority of prophecy from special prophets.
- The leadership of women.
- Supernatural gifts of the Spirit including tongues.
- Desire for miracles.
- Tendency towards asceticism. Fasting was protracted and intensified while marriages were disrupted.
- Imminent expectation of the Lord's return, including failed false prophecies of the end of the world.
- Frenzied behaviour following trances.

These features have been foundational to all inspirationist, mystical sects that followed in history and these are also prevalent in the modern Charismatic Movement.

The solution, as always, to these problems is to have a total dependence upon the Bible and deny teaching from subjective sources, such as the feelings of supposed prophets. All doctrines and practices must be supported by Scripture. This is the application of the 'Regulative Principle', a feature of Reformed theology. This demands that only what is expressly commanded, or reasonably inferred, in Scripture is acceptable in worship; in fact this principle should undergird all of church and personal life. The alternative 'Normative Principle' allows anything in worship as long as it is not expressly forbidden by Scripture. Originally a Lutheran teaching, this is the foundation of Arminian churches and obviously allows virtually anything in church life. Only a high view of Scripture allows us to be safe.

To give modern examples, are the following acceptable in church: flag waving, banners, choirs, rock bands or dancing? Testing these against the apostolic teaching found in the NT we can say of a certainty that they are not acceptable.

Thus the claims of a supposedly inspired prophet cannot overturn what has been revealed to us objectively in the Bible; neither can the utterances of people in an ecstatic trance.

Montanist characteristics are classical features of all inspirationist sects that followed in history. Most of the subsequent enthusiast sects emphasised supernatural gifts, tongues,

odd experiences, and new revelation based upon mystical, emotional experiences. In these aspects Montanism set the trend for what followed.

### **Medieval times**

From the time of the Montanists, and throughout the Middle Ages, there were various outbursts of enthusiasm and gatherings of inspirationist sects. These usually manifested themselves as mystics in this time, of which there were very many. These mystics expressed themselves in various forms and included men and women. Though there are some similarities between them, such as the encouragement of passivity, avoidance of reason and dying to the self, in an inward journey downwards or rising on a 'spiritual' ladder upwards, the different mystics expressed various symptoms, including tongues, prophecy, visions, falling down, laughing, crying, and so on.

A detailed examination of this would require an entire book and we will avoid such a discussion for another time. Suffice to say that all the excesses of modern Charismaticism can be observed in these various mystics and the chief problem is the focus upon inner subjective experiences rather than the absolute truth of the Bible.

## **Post-Reformation**

### **The Zwickau Prophets or Storchites, 1520s**

The term 'Zwickau Prophets' was coined by Martin Luther to describe Nicholas Storch, Thomas Drechsel and Marcus Stubner who came from Zwickau. These men were radical reformers heavily influenced by Anabaptist ideas from the more extreme Taborites (a militant Hussite sect) and also the less extreme Waldensians. They rejected many formal signs of the church (such as a professional ministry) because of their strong insistence upon the direct influence of the Spirit upon believers, particularly through visions and dreams. Like most inspirationists they emphasised the imminent return of Christ preceded by times of turmoil where their visionary leadership was required.

Despite influencing a number of prominent people the movement gradually died out after the leaders were driven out of Wittenberg in 1522.

Typical of all inspirationists, they insisted upon the priority of a subjective experience of the Holy Spirit and the words of prophets; but unlike many subsequent movements, they also had a deep knowledge of Scripture, which impressed Melancthon but not Luther. As in all inspirationist movements, this subjective 'prophecy' had no validity, being just someone's subjective impressions, unless it was corroborated by Scripture. The emphasis upon the imminent end of the world was also a means to frighten people into submitting to the sect, another feature of many inspirationists.

### **The Camisards, 1688 onwards (also called 'Cevenols' or the 'French Prophets')**

With the persecution of the Huguenots in France, after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, large numbers were killed, many were enslaved and many more were exiled. Thousands in southern France continued to meet in woods and the open air. Most of the pastors were killed or exiled and prophets emerged who were mostly illiterate young women with little knowledge of the Bible. These prophesied as 'spiritual' power came upon them, after trembling, crying, visions, tongues or falling down. By 1700 numbers had swollen into many thousands.

The messages began to encourage violence and an abbot was killed who had imprisoned Protestants. The result was war and after two years the Protestants were defeated. In 1713 a young preacher called for reformation and established the authority of Scripture, and in

1715 a synod condemned the prophets and violence, establishing reforms. The prophets condemned this claiming that woes would follow, but the cause dwindled away. A few hundred French Prophets emigrated to Britain where they influenced the Radical Quakers, Shakers and others, but they diminished after the failed prophecy of a bodily resurrection of a member.

We can see here similar features to those found in Montanism: women leaders, ignorance of the Bible, subjective utterances based upon mystical feelings and Charismatic experiences (visions, tongues, falling over etc.). Worse than Montanism it led to violence and a complete breakdown in the church. Note, however, that a restoration of Biblical preaching brought about restoration.

### **The New Light Prophets 1724-1744**

This was a movement occurring in New England, largely under the leadership of former Congregationalist pastor James Davenport (1716-1757). During the Great Awakening he gathered big crowds like Whitefield but, unlike Whitefield, Davenport also led the crowds in singing praise for hours on end. In 1742 Davenport began to hear voices and became a leader in the New Light Prophets. These believed that a new Reformation had begun which included the restoration of spiritual gifts; soon people began to fall over, shake and see visions. Davenport began to go to further extremes when he claimed to be able to see who was truly elect. The Bible began to fall into disuse in favour of prophetic utterances. Music was used to enhance the emotionalism of meetings and preaching became dramatic and theatrical instead of expository; passivity was encouraged over against self-control. In 1743 there was a great bonfire of Puritan books; at another bonfire Davenport took off his clothes and burned them. After an observer condemned Davenport as being devilish, he came to his senses and began to condemn the whole movement, which then gradually subsided.

Davenport is one of few examples of men who have escaped the clutches of inspirationist sects. But note that while under satanic influence he was able to lead great worship times, preach powerfully, gather a large following, support a large revival, write hymns, start a Bible School and oversee prophets. All this was later admitted to be 'misguided zeal' provoked by 'the false spirit'.

I have been much led astray by following impulses or impressions ... without a text of scripture; and my neglecting also duly to observe the analogy of scripture [the general, unified, doctrinal content of the Bible] ... this ... corrupted my experiences.<sup>2</sup>

Again the fundamental issue is the deliberate ignorance of Scripture in favour of 'inspired' prophetic utterances. Once this begins all sorts of evils follow; usually these include various forms of emotionalism, reliance upon prophecies, passivity, fleshly worship and indecent behaviour, as in this case.

### **The Jansenists / Convulsionnaires 1726-1790**

The Jansenists were an ecstatic French sect formed to oppose a Catholic revival movement (Ultramontanism). After the death of one of their deacons in 1727 miracles, which had erupted previously, intensified around prayer meetings at his grave causing people to arrive from all over France. People who touched the tomb received ecstatic experiences and were healed of blindness, paralysis and cancers; many had convulsions (hence 'Convulsionnaires'). There were fallings down, shrieking, barking, whistling, tongues,

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<sup>2</sup> James Davenport's Retractions from John Gillies, *Historical Collections of Accounts of Revival*, Banner of Truth, (1981), p357-358.

clairvoyance, and prophecies; sometimes whole streets were full of convulsing people. Often these were invulnerable to tortures; they were subjected to blows by hammers, knives, swords and hatchets with no effect, sometimes thousands of blows at a time. Some even managed to levitate with people holding them down to the ground. Others became as stiff as boards and could be used to hit nails into wood.

One woman was bent backwards over the sharp point of a peg. A fifty-pound stone was dropped from a great height on to her over and over again. Just the falling stone would have usually crushed a person, but she left without a mark on her! Another had a row of men stand on a board upon her body, while others had their bosoms pinched with tongs. These events were seen by thousands of witnesses.

Despite their extreme nature, the experiences can be explained by medical science as the results of shock, convulsions, nervous disorders and fits communicated through imitation, consequent to a subjection of the will to passivity, causing impressionability. Similar scenes have arisen from non-religious causes (e.g. the Medieval St Vitus' Dance). In the end the movement indulged in childishness and the grossest immorality in their secret meetings, even trans-gender, and moderate Jansenists condemned the Convulsionaires. The French Revolution finally 'shook the structure of this pernicious mysticism' and the King of France had the tomb of the leader walled up to prevent people reaching it.

Again the foundation of this Charismatic explosion of gross behaviour was inspiration from an unbiblical source. Scriptural doctrine and ethical guidance were ignored and people simply behaved in a disobedient manner. The more extreme the Charismatic behaviour the more gross the end results tend to be. Far from these miracles and supernatural gifts being evidence of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Scripture shows us that the fruit of the Spirit is 'love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control' (Gal 5:22-23).

### **The Shakers, 1770+**

North America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was absolutely filled with 'Christian' sects and cults of all sorts and descriptions. Absolutely every kind of aberration was to be found somewhere, from the resurgence of magic occultism in the east, to the multitude of neo-Gnostic diabolical cults. 'Christian' sects and communes were everywhere from those that developed into new religions, such as JW's, Christian Scientists and Mormons, to the many Holiness Movement sects, New Thought and radical Methodist groups. It was out of this melting pot that Pentecostalism emerged at the end of the century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The most radical of the Christian sects and the most influential to later groups was the Shakers.

We can only give a brief evaluation of this movement, which began in England amongst the radical Quakers and flowered in the US as a separate religion. The originator was Ann Lee who became a Shaking Quaker at the age of 22. Sadly she lost all her children in infancy and her distress was turned into religious fanaticism and enthusiasm. In 1770 she had a religious revelation, receiving a new Gospel which was based on a hatred of sex. Eventually, she saw herself as a second version of Christ and became known as Ann the Word or Mother Ann. This, and other doctrinal heresies, accompanied her teaching on the restoration of end time spiritual gifts including tongues and healing, the most serious deviation being the rejection of the inspiration of the Bible.

In 1774 she immigrated from England to New York State, near Albany, with 8 followers,

and in 1787 her growing disciples, many from Baptist churches, were organised into the 'United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing', a millennialist, perfectionist sect. As well as basic Quaker beliefs of simplicity, frugal living, equality, honesty and charity, they believed that the source of evil was sex, pride and greed. Salvation was by good conduct. God was a duality of the masculine and feminine and Christ's resurrection was denied. Celibacy was enforced along with communal property and strict regulation of ethics, including diet. Their worship was a wild and exuberant spontaneity which included the shaking off of sin and vigorous dancing (hence the name 'Shaker'). Visions, tongues, healings, revelations for guidance, prophecies, signs and other gifts attracted attention, many being convinced by Lee's end-time restorationist message. One source states that they danced together naked, whilst speaking in tongues, in order to mortify the flesh and learn how to control sexual temptation. They were the original Pentecostals in the States.

The dancing later became more ritualistic, and tongue speaking was reduced after Lee's death. Numbers dwindled, but the movement later prospered in the wake of various religious revivals in America, especially in the West, particularly the Cane Ridge Revival. Lucy Wright became leader in 1796, re-introducing previous excesses like: added dancing, hand motions and worship marches.<sup>3</sup> Mother Lucy's reforms prospered the Shakers so that by her death in 1821 numbers had grown. In 1825 there were 6000 members, but by 1837 they had become steeped in occult spiritualism.

As religious fervour faded, their numbers declined and only one active Shaker community remains today but the effect of their teaching and church life impacted many other groups and paved the way for the future pentecostal experience. The occult ministry of Rebecca Jackson manifested all the revelation gifts practised by modern Charismatics and modelled by William Branham, including: the word of knowledge, word of wisdom and prophecy. Both claimed to be instructed by spirit beings, not Jesus!

Like some modern Charismatics the Shakers openly practised spiritualism. Messages were regularly received from the dead Mother Ann, and other deceased Shakers, who conversed with the recipients who were called (by themselves) 'mediums'. Furthermore, they willingly accepted the entrance of indigenous tribal spirits into their bodies (i.e. demonic counterfeits). In a willingness to embrace different peoples, they took on spirits of Eskimos, Negroes, Chinese, Red Indians etc. in order to receive 'light' from their religious cultures. In fact, a key source declared that the Shakers were the forerunners of modern spiritualism.<sup>4</sup> In the late 1800's, Shaker prophets declared that soon similar manifestations would break forth all over the world. Within 30 years the 'revival' at Azusa Street took place.

What is worrying is that all the manifestations of modern day Pentecostal/Charismatic extremism were found among them 200 years ago, viz.:<sup>5</sup>

- Tongue speaking and interpretation.
- Shaking, extended arms.
- Prophecy.
- Exuberant worship with singing and dancing.
- Rolling, the jerks, barking, twitching.

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<sup>3</sup> *Christian History*, 45, p28. This is the origin for the fad of marching in worship seen in various Charismatic/Restorationist groups in the 1980's brought to the fore by Dave and Dale Garrett.

<sup>4</sup> E. D. Andrews, *The People Called Shakers*, Dover Pub. (1963), p175.

<sup>5</sup> Taken from E. D. Andrews, *The People Called Shakers*, in passim, and Rebecca Jackson, *Gifts of Power, the Writings of Rebecca Jackson, Black Visionary, Shaker Eldress*, Univ. of Massachusetts Press, (1981). See also Robert Lichow, *The Two Roots of Today's Revival*, Truth Matters Pub. (1997) p27ff.

- Behaviour which could not be suppressed.
- Staggering, bouncing (pogoing), hopping.
- ‘Treeing the devil’ (i.e. adopting the form of a dog and on all fours, growl and snap the teeth at the foot of a tree; something also done by early Pentecostals).
- Visions, signs, ‘operations’.
- Shouting, screaming, groaning, laughing, singing like birds.
- Being slain in the Spirit.
- Exorcism of members.
- ‘Spiritual’ communication with the dead.
- Spiritual warfare strategies.
- Wild preaching.
- Healings.
- The laying on of hands to impart gifts.

[This section is largely excerpted from my work, *‘The Origins of Pentecostalism’*.]

The Shakers are the closest group in history to modern Charismaticism; indeed they manifested prototypes of virtually all the practices of modern Charismatics. However, their doctrine was not only erroneous but was blasphemous in the extreme and they degenerated into spiritualists and occultists. By taking on occult and pagan practices they ended up as occultists and pagans. This is where Charismatic practices takes you.

#### **Methodist US frontier camp meetings, early 1800s**

Camp meetings were American rural gatherings of believers, similar to Charismatic Bible Weeks. Meetings would last from four to nine days, originally centred on breaking bread, and grew out of Methodist annual or quarterly church sessions. Eventually meetings had up to 20,000 people swirling, swaying, moaning and falling down.

By 1845 there were 1.5 million Methodists in the States as a result of the tireless work of circuit rider preachers. At one point a third of the population travelled up to fifty miles to attend a camp meeting. The circuit riders were often poorly educated and emphasised subjectivism, e.g. *‘Feel for the power; feel for the power brother’*, so the camp meetings were places where emotionalism ran rampant. John Granade was a revivalist example, he said: *‘I would sing a song or pray or exhort a few minutes and the fire would break out among the people and the slain of the Lord everywhere were many’*. Thus Methodism became noted for uneducated but *‘boiling-hot religion’*. This closely matches the experience of the Toronto Blessing, particularly statements by Rodney Howard-Browne and also some of the exuberance of the 1904 Welsh Revival.

Influenced by recent Shaker experiences, supposed evangelicals accepted emotionalism as an act of God and Shakers were formally welcomed at some meetings. For example: Lorenzo Dow was preaching when a woman started to scream. A Presbyterian or a Congregationalist minister would have considered her deranged and removed her, but instead Dow shouted, *‘God is here. He is here with that woman’*.<sup>6</sup> Excitable physical manifestations were now being seen as evidence of the Spirit of God in mainstream Christian denominations.

Camp meetings thus became full of this sort of wild behaviour, commonly seen in the Toronto Blessing of the 90s. However, they went further and became scandalous. Fornication and drunkenness became commonplace and it was said that more people were

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<sup>6</sup> *Christian History*, 45, p45.

begot than born again. In an emotional state of excitement women often exposed themselves; this also was manifest in early Pentecostal meetings where blankets were a requirement to cover women on the floor.

By the 1830s camp meetings had lost their enthusiasm and dwindled away. However, again these meetings anticipated modern Charismaticism in such ways as:

- People being slain in the Spirit for hours at a time.
- Compulsive laughter.
- Shrieking, groaning, crying.
- Children preaching.
- Twitching.
- Violent shaking so that women's hair cracked like a whip.
- Jerking back and forth, almost to the ground, while rooted on the spot.
- Hopping with head, limbs and trunk shaking.
- Rolling.
- Barking.
- Dancing.

Of chief concern here is that such antics were felt to be evidence of a new Pentecostal experience; but the original Pentecost led to preaching and exposition of Scripture, rational application of truth, genuine conversions and baptisms.

### **Edward Irving, 1827+**

Pentecostals may not like to be associated with heretical movements like the Shakers but they are happy to consider Edward Irving as a forerunner (such as Vinson Synan).

Irving was originally a Presbyterian minister in Scotland who suggested that all the Charismatic gifts of 1 Corinthians 12 could be experienced by those with faith. Irving was a powerful preacher who became popular and moved to London where tongues and prophecies were experienced in his Regent's Square church. This led to the development of a new sect, the Catholic Apostolic Church, where Irving (now a mere deacon) eventually became dominated by men who called themselves apostles and prophets. In time this church scandalised Victorian London as a result of wild behaviour and heresy. Irving died a broken and disenchanted man.

The sect had become famous for tongues, prophecies and healings before it was infamous for heresy and indecency. Some of the gifts manifested appeared to have great power where people knew the thoughts of others from a distance. However, all the gifts and revelations contradicted Scripture and led people down a false path; they all had a tendency to put aside the understanding, deny questioning and make people passive and malleable. As in Pentecostalism and Charismaticism, people who were 'healed' often died soon afterwards. A key member and prophet, Robert Baxter, left the movement and wrote a scathing critique of its delusions in 1833. The problems he describes are like a catalogue of Charismatic errors and his narrative is well worth reading.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Welsh Revival, 1903-4**

The church world had been praying for, and expecting, a great revival that would usher in a new Pentecostal experience, and then the end, since 1898. When news began to spread that

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Baxter, *Narrative of Facts* (1833). Also serialised in *Peace & Truth Magazine*, Sovereign Grace Union (1990).



a very emotional revival had broken out in Wales, the world was ready to jump on the bandwagon. This was the 16<sup>th</sup> revival to break out in Wales since 1785.

For the Welsh people involved, the revival was an awakening that led to many conversions and the planting of new chapels. However, the publication of stories about the emotional outbursts and other phenomena led to foreigners seeing the revivals as an outpouring leading to new spiritual experiences and power in existing Christians. The awakening did not get exported, but Pentecostalism did. Thus the revival emphasised to American Holiness groups the teaching of the baptism in the Spirit, prolonged singing, praying in unison, healings, a de-emphasis upon preaching and the 'hwyl' (sung religious fervour) which could spontaneously break out even in the middle of a sermon and anticipated Charismatic singing in the Spirit.

Like later Charismatics, key leader Evan Roberts would encourage emotionalism, such as by praying, '*bend me Lord*', and not preaching until conviction of sin would fall upon the congregation. Supposed signs of the Spirit's work, such as crying or distress, was encouraged, sometimes by locking the doors until it emerged.<sup>8</sup> Thus the revival often degenerated into a mystical and emotional introspection. Where preachers avoided this and taught Biblical doctrine (as RB Jones did) the mystical extravagances were avoided but, sadly, all too often the focus was upon mysticism, emotionalism and later it degenerated into demonic activity.

However, the exuberant behaviour was later modelled in Pentecostal services as a result of concentrating upon the same things: emotionalism, subjectivism, passivity and mysticism without teaching, doctrinal content and discipline. Leaders in the revival would consider the meeting a failure if there were no visible effects of the Spirit leading to it being like a 'boiling cauldron' of excitement. In Wales the flesh took over and ruined the initial work; but the effects abroad were only beginning. Evan Roberts had a major breakdown and withdrew from further ministry. It is also significant that, like later Pentecostalism, the revival boasted many prominent women leaders and speakers.

The impact upon Pentecostal leaders and churches was huge. In the UK the three main Pentecostal bodies (Elim, AOG, and the Apostolic Church) credit the Welsh Revival for its early leaders and patterns of worship and organisation. In 1905 Frank Bartleman heard about the Welsh Revival, from F. B. Meyer's description, and distributed accounts of it, doing much to propagate news of the awakening in America and creating a new expectancy for power from on high.

Contribution to charismatic history:

- Raised the 'spiritual temperature' world wide and created expectancy for global revival.
- Demonstrated exuberance in meetings, crying, etc.
- Spontaneous singing interrupting the speaker.
- Prostration.
- Subjective emphasis regarding personal ministry.
- Fleshly emotionalism.
- Visible emphasis regarding spiritual ministry.
- Healings.
- Deliverance.
- De-emphasis on preaching.

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<sup>8</sup> Brynmor Jones, *Voices From the Welsh Revival 1904-1905*, quoted in Graham Hind, *Pentecostal Experience in the Welsh Revival of 1904*, *CRN Journal*, Summer 1998, p10.

- Emphasis upon baptism in the Spirit.
- Focus upon demonology later on.

## Modern expressions

There are a variety of church movements which embrace the chief features of these historic enthusiasts: neo-Gnosticism in institutional churches, New Age influences in churches, and heretical cults; but the predominant expression today is in the Charismatic and Pentecostal Movements which include literally millions of supposed Christians. These are some of the common features:

- Women leaders.
- Ignorance of, or rejection of, the Bible.
- Subjective utterances based upon mystical feelings.
- Prophecies (including failed predictive prophecies).
- Visions.
- Tongues (gibberish rather than known languages).
- Falling down.
- Emotionalism.
- Passivity.
- Dancing, jumping, etc.
- Indecent behaviour.
- Poor ethics.

## Conclusion

This is by no means an exhaustive list of inspirationist movements; there is no time in this paper for many more that have appeared, such as Methodist extremists (e.g. the Jumpers), Radical Quakers, Ranters, Holiness Movement extremists, radical communes and many more. Each age has its own share of enthusiasts, which God sends to test his church to see how fast people hold to his revealed word.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit to glorify Christ in the church is always closely associated with the Bible; the Spirit inspired the Bible and applied God's sovereign providence to ensure that it was safeguarded throughout history. Jesus said that it was the truth which sets people free and all that the Spirit does in the church is founded upon the truth of Scripture. It is the purpose of the enemy to deceive Christians to divorce the Spirit from the truth and thus lead people astray. Once people have accepted this point, the devil then gets people to trust in subjective utterances on the pretence that this is the Spirit speaking. Imaginative, emotional men, who have freedom in expressing inner thoughts, quickly find that they can become prophets when such subjectivism reigns. The prevalence of enthusiasts and inspirationists arises when truth is downgraded, the Bible downplayed and people begin to trust in subjective feelings. The irony is that inspirationists are those who trust in uninspired feelings and disobey inspired truth in Scripture.

The purpose of this historic excursion is to make a simple point. Throughout 2,000 years of church history Charismatic type movements appeared almost continually. Each time a new enthusiast / inspirationist sect appeared it received short shrift from sound preachers. As it showed its real colours, true preachers exposed the dangers and warned the flock, showing why it was unscriptural and how it posed a hazard to spiritual health. The more

severe the danger the more severe the criticism. This is because it is the task of church leaders to point out wolves amongst the flock. If we fail to do this we disobey the commands of Jesus who is the Great Shepherd of the sheep. Woe betides under-shepherds who let the sheep be damaged by wolves because they never warned them.

However, from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century onwards two things began to happen. The first was that church leaders totally failed to point out errors of doctrine and practice. Serious aberrations were not condemned. The second feature was that Christianity in general was so dumbed-down that it failed to see that truth was its central objective feature and universal tolerance replaced it. Following the truth in Christ means that anything which is non-truth must be rejected and condemned. Instead, many churchgoers have accepted the deceived ethics of the world and rejected the truth, which is particular, and concentrated on tolerance, which is universal.

This combination of the flock tolerating every wind of doctrine (heresies appear like the wind) and the leaders failing to expose wolves meant that vast swathes of the church fell for every heresy and aberration going. Wolves were not only left in place but frequently became esteemed leaders, selling millions of books, CDs and films. Many today live in unimaginable luxury with fleets of limousines, aircraft and several mansions. It staggers me that any Christian at all can fail to spot that such men are frauds, serving Mammon and not Christ.

Today we do not have a church flock that is surrounded by a few wolves, but a compromised, failed church which is filled with wolves with a few lone voices truly contending for the faith outside the institutional sheepfold. In the early church Montanism was a minority sect troubling the church like a gnat on a horse; today neo-Montanism is the prevailing orthodoxy and men like me are considered as troublemakers of Israel, like a gnat to be swished away.

We should note that in the early years of the growing Pentecostal Movement many major, sound, evangelical, church leaders and commentators condemned it outright. Popular Congregational pastor G Campbell Morgan, of Westminster Chapel, called Azusa Street meetings, '*the Last vomit of Satan*'.<sup>9</sup> Higher Life teacher and correspondent of the Welsh Revival, Jessie Penn-Lewis, claimed that Pentecostalism caused division and problems everywhere it spread. Eminent Brethren writer GH Lang wrote a book evaluating and condemning the early rise of the movement.<sup>10</sup> Church members were warned of the dangers of being exposed to Pentecostal ideas and many were removed from membership for holding Pentecostal sympathies. Theologians and preachers in Reformed circles continually warned of the dangers of embracing mystical and emotional teachings as found in Pentecostalism.

Even Charles Parham, founder of Pentecostalism, was shocked by events at Azusa Street, appalled by the '*awful fits and spasms*' of the '*holy rollers and hypnotists*.' He considered the meetings to be manifestations of the flesh, spiritualistic controls, and the practice of hypnotism<sup>11</sup>. He also condemned the unethical behaviour as unseemly, morally compromising and free-lovism.

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<sup>9</sup> Michael L. Brown, *Holy Laughter to Holy Fire*, p197-198. R.M. Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism*, Oxford University Press, (1979), p142.

<sup>10</sup> *The Modern Tongues Movement*.

<sup>11</sup> Sarah Parham, *The Life of Charles F. Parham*, Tri-State Printing, (1930), p163.

Holiness leaders also condemned the movement. Alma White called Pentecostal tongues ‘*satanic gibberish*’ and their meetings, ‘*the climax of demon worship*’.<sup>12</sup> WB Godbey condemned Azusa Street leaders as ‘*Satan’s preachers, jugglers, necromancers, enchanters, magicians, and all sorts of mendicants*’. Evangelist and writer R A Torrey (who taught the baptism in the Spirit) stated that the movement was, ‘*emphatically not of God, and founded by a Sodomite*’.<sup>13</sup> Famous American preacher and writer Harry Ironside said in 1912 that the Holiness and Pentecostal movements were, ‘*disgusting ... delusions and insanities. ... pandemonium’s where exhibitions worthy of a madhouse or a collection of howling dervishes, [caused a] heavy toll of lunacy and infidelity.*’ He added that he ‘*could count scores of persons who had gone into utter infidelity because of it. ... Many more ... lapsed into insanity.*’<sup>14</sup>

Sadly today we find that modern church leaders almost everywhere have failed to be as faithful in contending for the faith as earlier church leaders; indeed, the vast majority are introducing Charismatic and Pentecostal teaching, songs and practices into their churches so that they become ‘Charismatic–Lite’.

Inspirationist mystical notions have been with the church since the beginning; however, instead of condemning such movements when they arise, as in the past, modern leaders have embraced them so that they fall into the pit with the apostates they embrace. Charismaticism is nothing new; it is a heresy as old as the ages; what is new is that in these end times it has gained acceptance by most ‘evangelical’ churches.

What began as inspirationist sects ended up as institutional monoliths, going the way of all Charismatic, enthusiast heresies. As R A Knox observed,

The pattern is always repeating itself, not in outline merely but in detail. Almost always the enthusiastic movement is denounced as an innovation, yet claims to be preserving, or to be restoring, the primitive discipline of the Church. ... Almost always schism begets schism; once the instinct of discipline is lost, the movement breeds rival prophets and rival coteries ... Always the first fervours evaporate; prophecy dies out, and the charismatic is merged in the institutional.<sup>15</sup>

In this way all the Charismatic groups, sects and cults that began in the 1960s or 70s have coalesced into inflexible, hierarchical, authoritarian institutions and denominations of their own to rival the very religious institutions they formed to condemn. As they became institutionalised many became respectable (if you can’t beat them join them) and now evangelical churches of all stripes try to tack on aspects of Charismatic (inspirationist) behaviour to keep their flocks, who want excitement instead of truth. It usually begins with adopting Charismatic choruses, then their style of music-driven, emotional worship and before long another church has apostatised completely, having false prophecies, heretical teaching, aberrational practices and indecent behaviour.

The only way to deal with the continually appearing enthusiast movements is to condemn them as heretical and indecent and to preserve the truth of God as the basis of church life.

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<sup>12</sup> Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, p145. Synan is a Pentecostal historian.

<sup>13</sup> Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, p147.

<sup>14</sup> Michael L. Brown, *Holy Laughter to Holy Fire*, p197-198. Vinson Synan, ed. *Aspects of Pentecostal-Charismatic Origins*, Logos International, (1975), p105-106.

<sup>15</sup> RA Knox, ‘*Enthusiasm*’, Oxford Press, (1950), p1.

**Bibliography**

For a detailed account of inspirationist movements in history consult, '*Enthusiasm*' by RA Knox, Oxford Press, 1950 (over 600 pages). Available new as a paperback but commonly found as a hardback in second-hand bookshops. It also contains over 100 pages profiling John Wesley, revealing some disturbing (but not surprising to discerning readers) facts. Knox writes as a Roman Catholic, but his historical observations are no less significant for that. I have not used Knox in these pages but have relied upon my own researches.

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