

'You'll never know your future until you know where your past is'

British Pentecostalism's development and future challenges

Neil Hudson (neil.hudson@regentstc-ac.uk)

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One hundred years ago, the thought that there would be a new grouping within Evangelicalism that would spread throughout the world with a rate of growth that in certain places would outstrip countries' birth rates would have been deemed a flight of fancy. Yet, this is exactly what happened. However, for all their shared roots, the relationship between Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism has often been distant and uneasy. Nevertheless, Pentecostals have increasingly been interested in examining their historical roots, recognizing the points of contact and the diversions that have been part of their history. This article reflects this development. Emerging from the same parental stock, the Pentecostal child has grown into an adult with its own emphases, aspirations and dangers. This article will examine some of these aspects of Pentecostalism.

Pentecostalism's heritage

Pentecostalism's formation and development looks to the nineteenth century Holiness Movement for its parentage. Perhaps every generation has looked at the church they have inherited, compared it with the biblical account of the early church and pronounced the diagnosis that something fundamental was awry. Certainly, by the late nineteenth century, Evangelicalism was ill at ease with itself and had spawned many agencies seeking to kickstart the church back into life.

In Britain, the Holiness Movement, particularly as mediated through the Keswick Convention, became a significant breeding ground for proto-Pentecostals. The theology surrounding this ecumenical event (its motto was 'All one in Christ Jesus') focused on the desire for a victorious Christian life that many of its delegates desired above all else. The answer to this overwhelming desire was to be found in an experience of a life lived in the 'fullness of the Spirit'. Rejecting the more extreme views of 'sinless perfection', the clear expectation was that the believer, once justified by faith, could have a distinct divine experience which would become the gateway into a 'life of overcoming'. This life would then be transformed into service, the work of the Spirit providing the disciple with power to witness.

For many Evangelicals, convinced of the fact that too often the church was leading a spiritually substandard life, this was deemed to be the obvious answer. Many early proto-Pen-

tecostals became frequent visitors to the convention in Keswick, returning to their mission halls and prayer meetings having claimed this experience of sanctification by faith. That this was the answer to the problems of the church was given credibility when the Welsh Revival broke out in 1904. Led by the trio of Holiness revivalists, Seth Joshua, Joseph Jenkins and Evan Roberts, the freewheeling dynamism of the Revival awakened many people's imaginations to the possibility of a much wider spiritual renewal.

The Welsh Revival was to be a significant precursor to Pentecostalism for a number of reasons. Some future Pentecostal leaders were converted in the Revival; others, such as Rev. A. A. Boddy, visited Wales and returned to their home churches having witnessed the radical freedom of the services, believing this to be a hallmark of the Spirit in action. A third reason related to the fact that the post-revival period was marked by small home-groups that delineated themselves as 'Children of the Revival'. It was amongst these groups that Pentecostalism would start. They had experienced the freedom of the Revival, were convinced that this was what churches had been missing for years and were not content to return to the formalism of non-conformist churches.

Pre-denominational Pentecostalism

The central British Pentecostal before World War One was Rev. A. A. Boddy, vicar of All Saints Church, Monkwearmouth, Sunderland. An inveterate traveller, he consequently had contacts all over the world. He was intrigued by any mention of churches being revived, and was therefore a natural visitor to Keswick as well as to Wales to witness the Revival first hand. However, when he paused from his travels, he was well-loved by the parishioners in the working class parish he represented. On hearing of the outbreak of tongues in Azusa Street, Los Angeles that had taken place in 1906, he contacted T. B. Barratt, the leader of a Methodist Church in Oslo, Norway that was reportedly manifesting charismatic gifts. Barratt was an Englishman who had moved to Norway during his teenage years. In September 1907, he visited Sunderland, and a small number of English believers began to claim to have received the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of an ability to speak in tongues. As had happened at Azusa Street, news of this event was initially, and most effectively, spread via the secular press. Gradually, others who had entered into a similar experience, or were anxious to, made contact with Boddy and the phase of the Pentecostal Movement in Britain was underway.

Many of these early Pentecostal leaders were members

of Mission Halls, independent prayer groups or Brethren churches where laity had been given greater freedom to participate in the work of the ministry. They were more often likely to be entrepreneurial businessmen, often self-employed. They were able to take the time and had the money to travel to the annual European Conventions that Boddy hosted, able to establish Pentecostal 'centres' (the use of the term 'church' was often deemed to be too restrictive to this new move of the Spirit), and they were willing to use the existing Holiness networks to share their new experiences of the Spirit. The period prior to World War One was one when Pentecostalism was determinedly ecumenical, non-hierarchical and based on relationships rather than any denominational structure. Although Boddy was the natural person to establish a new Pentecostal denomination, he refused to do so on the grounds that he believed the Spirit was being poured out for the whole church, not simply for the sake of the emergence of a new denomination. This somewhat idyllic infancy was shattered by the First World War. Boddy's patriotism, which resulted in him becoming a padre in the trenches in 1915, clashed with the radical pacifist stance taken by younger Pentecostals such as Smith Wigglesworth, Donald Gee, John and Howard Carter. Boddy's moment in the limelight had come to an end. The next development would see the organization of Pentecostal denominations.

The development of denominations

Three Classical Pentecostal denominations emerged between 1914 and 1924, each with its own distinctive emphases. The Apostolic Church founded in 1916 by the Welsh brothers Daniel Williams and William Jones had emerged from the Apostolic Faith Church, a group that was dominated by the increasingly eccentric William Hutchinson. Their emphasis related to the restoration of the offices of apostle and prophet to the church. The Elim Pentecostal Church began in 1915 in Monaghan, Ireland under the leadership of another Welshman, George Jeffreys. He was an outstanding revivalist and the Elim Church structure revolved around his evangelistic campaigns and the subsequent establishing of churches. Between 1915 and 1922, they were largely confined to working in Ireland. In 1922, they moved their headquarters and the substance of their work to England and London, in particular. The Assemblies of God eventually became a distinct group in 1924, after a failed attempt two years previously. The denomination was determined not to become a centralized group, wanting to preserve and safeguard the independence of local churches. However, the need for a new body was acknowledged if the Pentecostal distinctives were to be maintained and churches guarded from sliding into heresy by being disconnected from other assemblies. Although there was an early attempt to incorporate Elim's vigorous evangelistic work into their new group, it was deemed too bold a step, the preference being expressed for two vigorous Pentecostal works in Britain rather than one larger body.

Each denomination viewed the others with slight suspi-

cion. The Apostolic Church was felt to be fanatical by the Assemblies of God and Elim in its desire to be led via the prophetic gift and apostolic authority; Elim's dependence on Jeffreys' evangelistic gifts was viewed as being unhealthy whilst the Assemblies of God's insistence on independence was believed to have led to an uneasy denomination. Needless to say, the new denominations led by highly charismatic figures, operating in the same towns and growing with the same types of people sometimes produced the unfortunate picture of competing meetings occurring on the same street at the same time. The golden years for Pentecostalism were the late 1920s-1930s, when the revivalists packed their tents, town halls and auditoria with people hungry for a revitalized spirituality.

Post-War Pentecostalism

However, the outbreak of the World War Two saw the diminishing of Pentecostalism's vigour. Internal dissension led George Jeffreys to leave Elim and set up an alternative group that remained small and insular in its significance; the Assemblies of God and Apostolic Church had survived the period of suspicion, had seen churches develop and become established but would struggle to function in post-war Britain.

The desire for ongoing revivalism explained the ongoing attempt to recapture the past by enshrining the practices that had become ritualistic. The choruses that had been written, to be used spontaneously to produce a non-threatening environment and introduced alongside the hymns, were collected into bound songbooks. This ensured that the post-war generation found itself destined to sing spiritual songs set to pre-war popular melodies. Healing, the successful means by which many came to faith, was no longer solely located in the revivalists, but in the local pastors who would advertise evangelistic meetings with the promise of miracles, even though these were less forthcoming than they had expected. The doctrine of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, for many years conflated with the subsequent experience of sanctification, became a doctrine that was preached, believed and expected but often the emphasis on tongues as initial evidence gave way to the gift of the tongues being centre-stage rather than the fuller experience of life in the Spirit. Expectant that the Lord would return at any time, Pentecostals became sectarian, whilst being suspected by many Evangelicals of being 'holy rollers'.

The Sixties, shock and suspicion

The 1960s proved to be a decade of shock for Pentecostals. In general society it was, of course, the decade when the world talked more about sex, permissiveness and youth than ever before, listening to the soundtrack of rebellion, epitomized by the Rolling Stones and the Beatles. Within the small Pentecostal circles, it was a time when it became apparent that the Spirit's work was being accepted in mainstream churches, something that would never have been expected previously. Initially, the reports came from Anglican churches. John Collins, vicar at St. Mark's, Gillingham, Kent, was the first Anglican parish to become a focal point

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for the Charismatic Renewal. His two curates, David Watson and David MacInnes would become leading figures in the Charismatic Renewal in years to come. The other figure that would have an impact on British Pentecostalism was Michael Harper, curate at All Souls and the first leader of the Fountain Trust, a service agency for the Charismatic Renewal.

Initial Pentecostal reactions to the Charismatic Renewal were a mixture of astonishment and pleasure. This was followed by confusion and suspicion, since these new 'Pentecostals' did not feel the need to join with the historic Pentecostal churches, nor even to consult with them about their new found experiences. These feelings of uncertainty were only heightened after reports were circulated that Catholics had also experienced Pentecostal phenomena, yet had not renounced their church, but rather, in some cases, were testifying that their experiences had led them to a greater appreciation for their traditions. Although some more radical Pentecostal leaders were happy to join with these Charismatic gatherings, for the most part, Pentecostal churches continued in their revivalist traditions.

The changes happened when a harder-edged form of the Charismatic Renewal was propagated through the House Church Movement, particularly that epitomized in the ministry of Bryn Jones and Arthur Wallis. There were a number of Pentecostal churches attracted to teaching that related to the authority of the church and, by implication, the authority of the church leaders. The emphasis on covenant relationships within the church that took the place of denominational hierarchical relationships, and the relaxed, more flowing and contemporary worship styles were also attractive to many younger Pentecostals. After a number of Pentecostal churches moved across to these newer groups, the Pentecostal denominations realized that they had to address these new issues and did so, moving to a close approximation of their services and styles of worship and leadership. By the time changes had been introduced, the House Church Movement began to be seen to be less radical and threatening. However, their influence and that of the wider Charismatic Movement, had changed British Pentecostal churches fundamentally.

Influenced by the general acceptance of Pentecostal beliefs, through events like Spring Harvest and the new-church influenced Evangelical Alliance, Pentecostal churches became far less sectarian. Many dropped their denominational titles and the word Pentecostal from their church titles, moving to 'Christian Fellowship', echoing their Holiness roots where the word 'church' was rarely used in an attempt to demonstrate their ecclesiastical freedom. Pentecostals joined and led local church fraternals, were accepted as full members and able to accept other churches as friends in terms of mission. Pentecostals grappled with the emphases that moved through Charismatic churches – inner healing, spiritual warfare, positive confession, deliverance ministries, the Toronto Blessing, Pensacola revivalist preaching, youth congregations, alternative worship and cell church paradigms.

But if Pentecostals now felt they were at the table as full and equal members of the Evangelical fraternity, there was a price to pay. British Pentecostals became a group in search of an identity. At present, many Christians accept that charis-

matic gifts were not limited to the early church, but are a vital component of contemporary church life. It is also a time when globalisation has affected worship so that worship styles are increasingly mono-cultural and one can no longer be sure to which denomination the church one is attending is attached. Similarly, praying for revival is done in massed gatherings obliterating denominational differences. With so many distinctive theological or ecclesiological differences dissolved, Pentecostal denominational leaders are leading their churches into a very different future from that which their predecessors would have imagined possible.

So who are we now?

One of the byproducts of the Charismatic Renewal is that there are now far more theologically trained thinkers who have experienced renewal by the Spirit, in a Pentecostal understanding of that phrase. Whilst for the first couple of years, the Pentecostal explanation of subsequence was paramount, it was only a matter of time before Michael Harper, Tom Smail, David Pawson and more latterly Max Turner and John Wimber would present alternative explanations for the experiential engagement with the Spirit. Pentecostals could not dismiss them as people who did not believe/understand. They patently did. They just explained their experience in a different way. So, for example, the significance of tongues changed. For most of the last century, the gift of tongues was viewed by Pentecostals as the initial evidence of being baptized in the Spirit. Now, Pentecostals are having to come to terms with the implications of alliances they have made.

In the light of these challenges to classical Pentecostal theology, some Pentecostals have responded with a call to return to a form of 'radical Pentecostalism'. This is more than a mere rhetorical flourish. It is aimed at getting back to the roots of Primitive Pentecostalism – an emphasis on holiness linked to power, rooted in a subsequent experience of the Spirit. The temptation for Pentecostal denominations is to merely insist on their acceptance of their doctrinal formulation even whilst acknowledging that the doctrine itself may be inadequately formulated to carry the weight of experience that many of their constituency have had. So, Pentecostal theologians such as Frank Macchia, Simon Chan and Amos Yong are pushing at the boundaries to explore more fully the very experiences that the doctrinal formulations were created to protect.

Naturally, globalisation does not help this sense of a lack of self-identity. Many of the largest churches in the world are Pentecostal in practice and theology, though many are not part of wider Pentecostal denominations, and even if they are, they are linked together on a supra-denominational basis. Peter Wagner has written about the new networks of apostolic churches – based in every continent with leaders in relationship with each other not primarily on the bans of doctrine or history, but on the foundation of shared vision and ecclesiology.

For Pentecostals, the search for the perfect ecclesiological shape has always been their holy grail. From the days when the Assemblies of God were obsessively alarmed by fears of centralized bureaucracy, and George Jeffreys was prepared to shipwreck his own successful denomination in

order to reconstitute the organization, there has been a fallacious equation that anything that approximates to the New Testament expression of church life will result in the same spiritual power portrayed in the New Testament. The number of false assumptions exhibited here are clear. However, when this is allied to a pragmatism that wants to use in God's service whatever 'works', it can result in Pentecostals too often desperately experimenting with church structural change. At its best, it means that Pentecostal churches are dynamic, evangelistically minded groups wanting to express their relationships. At worst, Pentecostal churches can be insecure places always looking for the new model.

At the heart of Pentecostalism is an emphasis on a God who does intervene and do surprising things in people, a God who performs miracles both as a sign to his own people and a cause of wonder for non-believers, a God who is to be encountered. Therefore, worship for Pentecostals is not fundamentally a framework in which one is to be taught something but is where one experiences something/someone. So if the classical format of an Evangelical service is one where the didactic elements are to the fore with the Bible being central and centrally used, for contemporary Pentecostals the worship band and the display of worship songs is central. This is not to say that the Bible is not honoured, but the desire and purpose of Pentecostal services is that the God of the Bible be experienced, not just known about. Furthermore, whilst this encounter can occur during sermons, in practice, it is more likely to be experienced in sung worship or in the ministry time following the sermon where individuals receive prayer. For some, grappling with evangelizing amongst the sensory nature of a postmodern generation, this emphasis on experience resonates with the desires expressed in society. It is no surprise that there is a growing feeling that Pentecostalism might succeed in evangelizing a postmodern generation more effectively than it ever did in the rationalistic modernist era.

Though we are many, we are one

Throughout this paper, Pentecostalism has been referred to as though it were a monolithic group. It is far more accurate to speak about Pentecostalisms, even in Britain. The development during the past fifteen years of strong, innovative and resourceful African and Hispanic Pentecostal churches has provided a new landscape to be considered. These churches are exuberant in worship and preach a gospel which has a liberating, this-worldly emphasis where Jesus wants to bless every area of one's life so that one can enjoy life to the full. The challenge to British Classical Pentecostalism is to develop relationships with these newer churches, and where possible to learn from them. Increasingly, with the numerical strength of Pentecostalism lying with the southern hemisphere, Pentecostal theologies are being shaped by worldviews very different from the western enlightenment influenced ones.

Pentecostalism has come of age. From very inauspicious beginnings, it has grown to be a global movement of considerable significance. Part of the development of any new religious movement is the questioning that happens once the first and second generation of adherents have passed. British Pentecostals are in a position now where they want to celebrate their past and all that God did, even whilst also having the confidence to recognize the weaknesses that were apparent even then. There is also a re-envisioning happening of theology as the old formulations are re-examined, and reapplied to a changed world. Moreover, there is a confidence that is more than insecure triumphalistic blustering. It is a confidence based on the belief that that which has been shaped and developed through the last century should and can make a contribution to the ongoing life of the church in Britain in the new century.

The Fullness of the Spirit

Pentecostalism and the Spirit

Matthias Wenk (m.wenk@bewegungplus.ch)

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The Holy Spirit and Pentecostals/Charismatics

It seems as if not much needs to be said about the relationship of Pentecostals/Charismatics to the Spirit. For sure, they no longer have a monopoly on the Holy Spirit, but they definitely claim a sort of copyright on it and are precisely

known for their emphasis on the Spirit. Furthermore, quite often, Pentecostal/Charismatic spirituality is associated with 'the fullness of the Spirit' - over against those traditions that, from a Pentecostal perspective, seem to reflect only a restricted range of Spirit experiences.

Having said this, a major characteristic of Pentecostal pneumatology has been accentuated. It is more a pneumatic spirituality, an overwhelming experience of God's presence through the Spirit than a thoroughly reflected pneumatology. Pentecostals are not primarily known for a critical reflection of their theology of the Spirit, nor for developing a well thought through and well balanced definition of God's Spirit. They are more known for their enthusiastic worship.