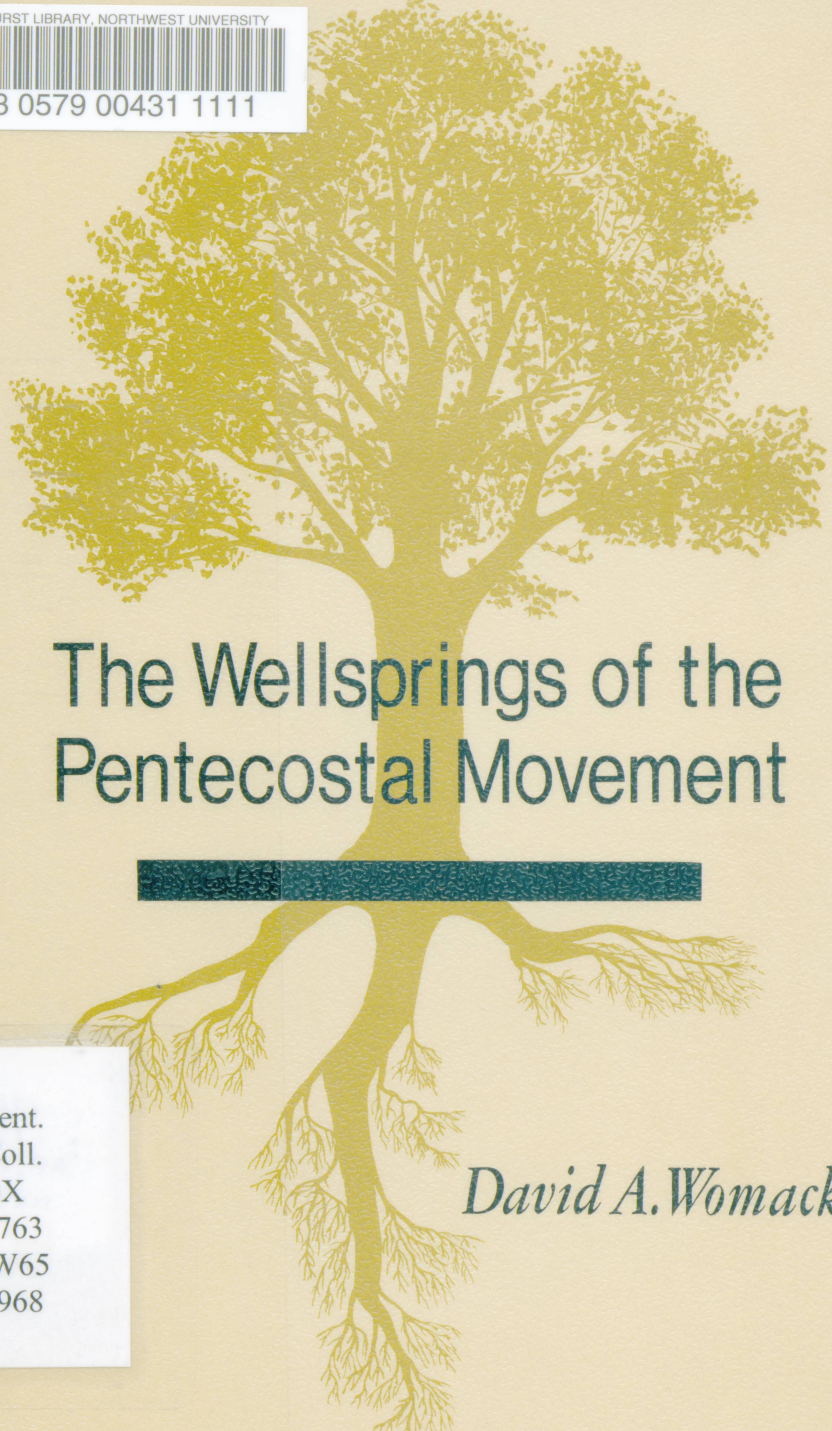


HURST LIBRARY, NORTHWEST UNIVERSITY



3 0579 00431 1111



# The Wellsprings of the Pentecostal Movement

Pent.  
Coll.  
BX  
8763  
.W65  
1968

*David A. Womack*

JAN 13 1993

Pent. Coll. 289.94 W872w  
Womack, David A.  
The wellsprings of the  
Pentecostal movement

NORTHWEST COLLEGE LIBRARY  
KIRKLAND, WASHINGTON 98033

**The Wellsprings  
of the  
Pentecostal Movement**

By David A. Worick

Written in Cooperation with the Committee on Pentecost  
Evangelical Council of the Assemblies of God

Word Publishing House  
Springfield, Missouri

1970



# THE WELLSPRINGS OF THE PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT

By David A. Womack

J124

Written in Cooperation with the Committee on Advance  
for the General Council of the Assemblies of God

Gospel Publishing House  
Springfield, Missouri

02-0628

© Copyright, 1968  
by the Gospel Publishing House  
Springfield, Missouri 65802

All rights in this book are reserved. No part of the text may be reproduced in any form without written permission of the publishers, except brief quotations used in connection with reviews in magazines or newspapers.

[ PRINTED  
IN U.S.A. ]

# Contents

Foreword	4
Preface	11

<b>CHAPTER TWO</b>	
<b>To</b>	
the many pioneers of Pentecost	
who were willing to break with	
time-honored traditions to return	
to the patterns of apostolic faith.	13

The Pattern of the Apostolic Church	14
The Church in the New Testament	17
The Spirit of the Apostles	21
Book IV, Chapter xxi, 14-17	22
Pattern of Early Church Growth	23
Building Power in the Early Church	24
The Apostolic Pattern	25

<b>CHAPTER THREE</b>	
<b>The Meaning of New Testament Patterns</b>	
The Nature of Apostolic Pattern	27
Jesus' Plan for the Church	28
The Apostles' Proclamation of the Gospel	32
How the Fathers Viewed the Church	39
The Marks of an Apostolic Church	50

<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b>	
<b>The Early Apostolic Patterns</b>	
A Witnessing Rite	51

“He has proclaimed the way of righteousness sprung up in the desert, and the streams of the Holy Spirit in a dry land, to give water to the elect people of God, whom He has acquired, that they might show forth His praise.”

—Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*,  
Book IV, Chapter xxxiii, 14.



# Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	9
<i>Preface</i>	11
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b>	
<i>The Secret of the Taproot</i>	13
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b>	
<i>The Patterns of Apostolic Christianity</i>	21
The Church Is Born	23
The Spread of the Early Church	24
Patterns of Early Church Growth	27
Stabilizing Forces in the Early Church	31
The Apostolic Patterns	32
<b>CHAPTER THREE</b>	
<i>The Meaning of New Testament Patterns</i>	37
The Nature of Apostolic Patterns	37
Jesus' Plan for the Church	39
The Apostles' Proclamation of the Gospel	43
How the Fathers Viewed the Church	49
The Marks of an Apostolic Church	50
<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b>	
<i>The Loss of Apostolic Patterns</i>	55
A Widening Rift	56

*The Wellsprings of the Pentecostal Movement*

Symptoms of Loss	57
A Repetition of History	63
When the Fire Went Out	63
What Happened in A.D. 200?	65
The Fall of the Early Church	69

## CHAPTER FIVE

<i>The Resurgence of Apostolic Life</i>	71
The Return of New Testament Patterns	73
The Contributions of Revivalism	75
Patterns of Revival	80
The Pentecostal Revival	82

## CHAPTER SIX

<i>The Future of the Pentecostal Movement</i>	87
Factors That May Determine Our Future	88
The Loss-of-Apostolicity Syndrome	91
Prescription for a Pentecostal Church	93
Conclusion	96

## Foreword

Beginnings are important. That may seem self-evident, but the Bible very specifically refers to some beginnings. The comparisons brought out in these references enabled people to know if their positions and practices were what they ought to be, or whether they had deviated from God-established norms.

For example, Peter referred to the beginning when reporting on the incident involving the household of Cornelius: "And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning" (Acts 11:15). Peter made a comparison with the beginning to demonstrate that what had taken place was indeed proper and God-given.

When the Pharisees debated with Christ concerning the propriety of divorce, they asked, "Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?"

In His response Jesus went back beyond the time of Moses and made a comparison with the beginning. He said, "From the beginning it was not so" (Matthew 19:8). In this case, the comparison indicated a deviation from God-given procedure.

The Assemblies of God is making a thorough study of its

own history in relation to the pattern for the Church given in the New Testament. The author of this book refers to the importance of this comparison with the first-century Church when he says:

“The only way that a church can assure itself of its own apostolicity is to test its correspondence with the Christianity of the first century. Does its theology match that of the New Testament, or have other ideas been added that cannot be found in apostolic teaching? Do the doctrines of the church stand out obviously in the New Testament, or must they hang on slender little phrases removed from their context in Scripture? Do the religious experiences of the church correspond to those of the early Christians, or is there only mental assent to the spiritual happenings of the first century? Can the basic positions of the church be preached by laymen, or does an understandable explanation require a highly trained clergy? Has the claimed return to apostolic theology reproduced the dedicated, evangelistic spirit of the Early Church? Has it produced a missions outreach with any possibility of carrying out the Great Commission of Christ?”

Other members of the *Committee on Advance* and I have found this book personally challenging. It is our hope that the book will be widely read. We further hope this will result in a continuing, deep dedication to New Testament patterns of doctrine, religious experience, and practice.

We are grateful for what God has done through the Assemblies of God in the past. But as we look toward the return of Christ and the great work which remains to be done, we are praying there will be a swelling of the ranks of those who “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).

Thomas F. Zimmerman  
*General Superintendent*  
*of the Assemblies of God*

## Preface

When the Pentecostal Movement appeared early in this century, it started among evangelical Christians who asked why the spiritual experiences described in the New Testament were apparently lacking in the churches of their own day. They began to pray for a rediscovery of the baptism in the Holy Spirit with its distinctive evidence of speaking with other tongues, and the Lord graciously answered their prayers.

By 1914, when the General Council of the Assemblies of God was formed, the Pentecostal Movement had already established churches in many parts of the United States and in a number of foreign countries. After their first 50 years, the Pentecostals are now a major force in Protestantism, and the Assemblies of God—which has continued to be the largest Pentecostal body—can conservatively claim three million members and adherents in more than 80 countries.

The Assemblies of God grew with such unbounded energy in its first half-century that little thought was given to the day when its pioneers would be gone and it would have to explain its faith and experiences to new generations. As love can least be explained by those who are caught up in it, so the many Pentecostal fathers spent little time in self-analysis. By 1967, however, those who knew the Movement best realized that the time had come to give a clearer defi-

nition of the purposes and distinctive characteristics of the Assemblies of God in order to retain the spirit and dedication of its beginnings.

At the August, 1967, meeting of the General Council of the Assemblies of God at Long Beach, California, General Superintendent Thomas F. Zimmerman announced plans for a *Council on Evangelism* to be held in August, 1968. He said, "The Assemblies of God announces its decision to reevaluate completely its role in the history of the Church, restudy its spirituality and methods of evangelism, and establish definite plans for the advancement of the Movement over the next five years."

The Executive Presbytery resolved "that aggressive steps be taken to make an in-depth evaluation of our strengths and weaknesses with the objective of fortifying ourselves in order to demonstrate a virile witness to our generation," and named a 15-man *Committee on Advance* to prepare the unprecedented self-analysis of the Assemblies of God.

Members of this *Committee on Advance* were: Lowell C. Ashbrook, West Monroe, Louisiana; G. Raymond Carlson, Minneapolis, Minnesota; Charles W. Denton, Springfield, Missouri; T. E. Gannon, Springfield; James E. Hamill, Memphis, Tennessee; Ralph W. Harris, Springfield; J. Philip Hogan, Springfield; Cyril Homer, Minneapolis, Minnesota; D. V. Hurst, Kirkland, Washington; Dr. Donald Johns, Springfield; Harry Myers, Chickasha, Oklahoma; Andrew Nelli, North Hollywood, California; Dr. Gene Scott, Oroville, California; and William O. Vickery, Santa Cruz, California. General Superintendent Thomas F. Zimmerman was asked to serve as chairman.

In collaboration with the *Committee on Advance*, I have written the following examination of the wellsprings of the Pentecostal Movement in the sincere hope that it may shed some additional light on the role of the Assemblies of God in the history of the Church.

David A. Womack

1968

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE SECRET OF THE TAPROOT

In a green and leafy forest there once stood a tender, young tree. It was unlike the other vegetation in those woodlands, yet few people paid much attention to it at first because it was so much smaller than the older trees nearby.

As time went on, however, the tree grew large enough that some of the little birds began to flit about and build their nests in its branches, and the animals of the forest would seek shelter in the cool shade beneath its rapidly spreading arms. Its thirsty roots reached down beneath the ground and drew in the abundant moisture of the forest soil, and its large taproot dug deeply into the earth where it managed to discover a subterranean stream that had been there for centuries just waiting to be found.

No one could see the searching roots that burrowed so far beneath the surface, but because of the life that the tree received from its underground source of strength it became very different from the other trees of the forest. Its leaves had a tendency to flutter at the slightest provocation of the woodland breezes, and when they did so they were a bit noisier than those of the other trees. When the storms blew and the rains poured down from the heavens, the limber young tree would sway to the commanding force of the tempest as

though it actually enjoyed the moving of the wind upon its branches.

But there came a season when conditions changed in the forest. A long period of dryness brought a drought to the woodlands, and tree after tree withered away and died. The moist soil beneath the soft cover of fallen leaves was gone, and in its place came blowing dust and driving sand. Yet the maturing tree remained, for the life-giving waters of the hidden wellspring had produced a tree that was verdant and alive in spite of changing conditions on the surface of the land. Even long periods of drought were unable to dry up this tree because its source of life did not depend upon the current state of the earth. Those who observed the tree were unable to see the network of deep roots and that one main taproot that drew so plentifully from the subterranean stream, so they could not understand the presence and continued growth of a green tree in the midst of what had become an arid wasteland.

When at last the rains began to fall again on the thirsty earth, the well-developed tree began to put forth its fruit. From the fruit there came seeds, and the moving of the winds carried them far and wide over the land until there soon were more trees with the distinctive fluttering of the leaves and bending of the branches and deep, very deep taproots that plunged far down into the hidden wellsprings of life-giving water.

The Pentecostal Movement has been much like that tree. Its distinctive characteristics are unlike those of other religious groups and denominations, and its main taproot goes deeply through the entire history of the Church to draw its doctrines, spiritual experiences, and fundamental practices from the wellsprings of the New Testament Church. Other roots drink from the waters of the Holiness Movement, American and European revivalism, episcopalian and congregational church government, Arminianism, the Reformation, and many other historical influences that have contributed to its structure and attitudes, but all are overpowered and trans-



formed by the one dominant factor of the basic return to the religion of the first century. The Pentecostal Movement has many complicated roots, but it is the taproot plunging deeply into the New Testament Church that gives it its distinctive life.

The only way that a church can assure itself of its own apostolicity is to test its correspondence with the Christianity of the first century. Does its theology match that of the New Testament, or have other ideas been added that cannot be found in apostolic teaching? Do the doctrines of the church stand out obviously in the New Testament, or must they hang on slender little phrases removed from their context in Scripture? Do the religious experiences of the church correspond to those of the early Christians, or is there only mental assent to the spiritual happenings of the first century? Can the basic positions of the Church be preached by laymen, or does an understandable explanation require a highly trained clergy? Has the claimed return to apostolic theology reproduced the dedicated, evangelistic spirit of the Early Church? Has it produced a missions outreach with any possibility of carrying out the Great Commission of Christ?

The Pentecostal Christians of this century believe that they have returned basically to the New Testament patterns of doctrine, religious experience, and practice. They consider that the doctrines and religious experiences of the apostles are constant standards that should not change, and that, although the Church's methods, organization, and general approach to the world may vary somewhat according to local cultures, the principles of apostolic practice should characterize the Church of every age. This basis of New Testament Christianity—which the Pentecostal believers call the *full gospel*—is the essential wellspring of this Movement.

The very word *wellspring* indicates a continuous source, a limitless supply of whatever is basic for the existence of a thing. The casual observer may look on the Pentecostal Movement as strange and overemotional, too much given to spiritual pursuits and not enough involved in the needs of

the present generation; but the Pentecostals, knowing of their own deep connection with the original power of the Church, reply that the one great need of the world is to find the Christ of the New Testament through a revival of Early Church religion, and they set about to spread the seed of the apostolic gospel over the whole earth at the expense of other worthwhile but less vital interests.

The differences between most Christian bodies stem from variations in their views of Bible interpretation. The Pentecostal revival did not come about only through a series of historical events, but through the development of a particular view of the Bible. For centuries the truth of New Testament religion was lost to the masses, for the Bible was buried in incomprehensible Latin and there were few copies in circulation; but, when the common people had rediscovered the Bible and the printing press made it available to them in large quantities, the Church began to return step by step toward the religion of the first century. The spontaneous reappearance of the doctrines, religious experiences, and fundamental practices of the Early Church was an inevitable development once the New Testament writings became widely available. It took nearly 500 years from Gutenberg's invention of the modern printing press to accomplish this maturation of ideas, for the process of human thought can be very slow and irregular—like molasses, it flows rapidly when heated, but almost solidifies when cold.

In the early days of this century, while earnest Christians were rediscovering the baptism in the Holy Spirit with its initial evidence of speaking with other tongues, there were those who attempted to eradicate the new tree that had sprung up in the forest. Persecution and rejection were common, but suffering for the cause only served to strengthen and unify the believers. Before long, the tree was too large and had put out too many seeds to be removed by so simple a method as cutting it down.

Today, the tree faces two other grave dangers—one from those who have limited knowledge of Church history, and the

other from those who have been overinfluenced by non-Pentecostal concepts. The first of these, well-meaning but unaware of the significance of the Early Church, want to tamper with the seed to bring about change through cross-pollination and manipulation of the genes. These seek to domesticate the tree to bring it under more control and have a little less fluttering of the leaves when the wind blows. Ignorant, however, of the very nature of the tree, these experimenting mutationists generally cause a dropping of the leaves altogether and an early preparation for a long winter.

The danger from those who have been influenced by forces outside the Pentecostal Movement is that they may know too much of what they expect from the tree. Having predetermined what the tree is to produce, they are unsatisfied with the untamed results of the tree in its natural state, and decide to graft sections onto the tree that will produce their own kinds of fruit. These reconstructionists all use a similar method of ingrafting: every time they graft on an alien stock they must cut away a portion of the original tree. When their reconstruction of the tree is done, the taproot may continue to draw from the ancient sources, but the flow of life will produce unfamiliar leaves and strange fruit. The distinctive characteristics of the taproot will be suppressed until the distant day when the bothersome caretakers leave it unsupervised long enough for it to send up a new shoot of apostolic Christianity.

The General Council of the Assemblies of God—by far the largest Pentecostal fellowship—is faced with both of these problems. A gradual domestication and control of what began as a spontaneous burst of life is like a blight upon us; and the increasing ingraftations of nonapostolic teachings, methods, and attitudes make it more and more difficult to discern the fruit of Pentecostal Christianity in our children. Complicating the whole issue is the unfortunate presence of those who are not at all concerned for the fruit, but only delight in blowing on the tree to watch the leaves flutter. In the face of such problems the real Pentecostal believer is

driven to ask, "Why cannot this Movement be allowed to spring forth and break into blossom and bear its fruit and spread its seeds over the earth by its own surging issue of apostolic life, rather than having to dissipate all of its energies on mere survival?"

No religious movement has ever long endured that did not have a deep sense of its own significance in the flow of history. If Pentecostal believers see themselves as an isolated movement, they will cease to exist meaningfully when the conditions that gave them their birth disappear; but if they have a self-view as an inevitable development in the mainstream of Church history, they can continue to be a significant expression of New Testament Christianity to this generation.

The appearance of the Assemblies of God and other Pentecostal groups in this century raises a number of questions:

(1) Does the twentieth-century Pentecostal Movement in fact represent a return to the basic teachings and religious experiences of the Early Church?

(2) Did Jesus Christ and His apostles intend for the Early Church to be the pattern for all ages, or was the Church supposed to develop its theology, traditions, and religious expression beyond what was described in the New Testament?

(3) If apostolic Christianity was intended to provide the patterns for the Church of all ages, why did the Early Church lose the distinctive characteristics that were manifested in the first century?

(4) Why, after so many centuries of diversification, religious traditions, and pagan influences, did the Early Church patterns of doctrine, experience, and practice emerge again?

(5) What were the underlying factors that brought about the return of Pentecostal religion early in this century?

(6) Why did the Pentecostal outpouring coincide with a conservative, Bible-based theology?

(7) If the Pentecostals represent a return to the Early Church patterns, what is the future of the Movement?

To answer these questions and gain an understanding of the historical and present significance of the Pentecostal Movement it is necessary to examine the wellsprings from which it continuously draws its distinctive life. Uncovering the roots of a tree can destroy it; but we can dig freely among the roots of history because the past cannot be changed, but only interpreted.

There are those who would say that history in its purest form does not draw conclusions, but simply lays the facts of past events before the reader. However, it is doubtful that any such history book has ever been written. Every historian interprets the events he describes, if only by the selection and priorities he gives his materials. In the following examination of the wellsprings of the Pentecostal Movement, we will attempt to give Assemblies of God people an understanding of their role in the mainstream of Church history and a sense of their destiny as Pentecostal believers.



## CHAPTER TWO

# THE PATTERNS OF APOSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY

To uncover the wellsprings of the Pentecostal Movement we must dig down through many centuries of history. As we trace through the roots of our church, we pause in admiration at the Hot Springs, Arkansas, of 1914 where the Assemblies of God was formed, at the little Azusa Street Mission of 1906 where the revival began to be noticed on a wide scale, and at the Bible school in Topeka, Kansas, where the students were filled with the Holy Spirit in 1901.<sup>1</sup> Burrowing down through succeeding layers of the past, we come to the sites of the great revivals of early America, the pulpits of the first Protestant preachers, the blood-stained scenes of the Reformation, Gutenberg's first printing press, the hand-copied Bibles of Wycliffe and his Lollards, and then the thick layers of the Dark Ages containing few signs of evangelistic activity.

Deep down in our excavation of the past we unearth some scraps of old Roman armor, we discover a crumbling Grecian urn, and, finally, among old sherds of Jewish pottery and some silver coins with the image of Tiberius Caesar, we find the walls of an ancient city—the Jerusalem of A.D. 30.

If by some miracle of time we could bring back the day

---

<sup>1</sup> Klaude Kendrick, *The Promise Fulfilled: A History of the Modern Pentecostal Movement* (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1961), pp. 52-66.

of May 19 of that year,<sup>2</sup> we would stand outside the walls of Jerusalem and watch the tunic- and robe-clad people coming and going through the Essene Gate. Ragged beggars sit by the roadside, and there are little stands where merchants peddle their wares to the travelers going to Bethany or down to Jericho. Suddenly, there is a commotion at the Essene Gate<sup>3</sup> as Jesus of Nazareth—a man whom all the city had seen put to death by crucifixion on April 8,<sup>4</sup> but who now has appeared alive again, much to the consternation of the authorities and the joy of His disciples—comes from the city accompanied by an enthusiastic band of followers. The people by the roadside step back in awe as the resurrected Christ leads His believers along the way toward Bethany and turns up the path that leads to the Mount of Olives.

We join the procession, not as intruders but as vitally interested believers of another day to come, and we see the Lord gather His followers about Him at a spot where they can see the walled city of Jerusalem to the west and the sunken depths of the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea to the east. The Master speaks and says, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:15-18).

Someone asks, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"

"It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which

---

<sup>2</sup> George Willis Botsford, and Lillie Shaw Botsford, *A Source Book of Ancient History* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1923), p. 522. The dates for the crucifixion and ascension of Christ are approximations based on the date given by Lactantius in *The Manner in Which Persecutors Died*, Ch. ii.

<sup>3</sup> Emil G. Kraeling, *Rand McNally Bible Atlas* (New York: Rand McNally & Company, 1956), p. 410.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Carrington, *The Early Christian Church*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), pp. 36-37.



the Father hath put in his own power," Jesus says. "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:6-8).

And then, while the believers watch in amazement, Jesus is taken up, and a cloud receives Him out of their sight. All at once the whole meaning of involvement with Jesus of Nazareth has changed. The believers are not to establish a kingdom on earth or overthrow the Romans; they are to be witnesses to the world of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They return to Jerusalem to spend the next ten days in "one accord in prayer and supplication," as Jesus had commanded them, saying, "But tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

### **THE CHURCH IS BORN**

It is as difficult to say when the Church was born as it is to say when a seed becomes a plant. When did the little nucleus of life that was to grow into the Church become the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ on earth? How much development was necessary for the small group of "about an hundred and twenty" believers to qualify them as the Church?

Some say the Church began when Jesus started to have a regular following. However, these first believers could not be considered truly Christians until after Jesus had died as a sacrifice for their sins. Others say the Church began when the disciples gathered together after Jesus' death and burial; but with Peter threatening to return to his former occupation and the others agreeing to join him, this group would no doubt have broken up if Jesus had not reappeared. All indications seem to be that the Lord's resurrection came as a complete surprise to the disciples, and that only in retrospect did they understand His previous teachings on the subject. The first real signs of the Church appeared in the embryonic group during the ten days of prayer; but it was on the Day of Pentecost that the Church was introduced to the world.

Jesus had made it clear that the disciples were not to begin their public ministry until they had received the infilling of the Holy Spirit. This experience, which was to occur at a definite time and in a specific place, was to fill the Christians with the presence of God. The Holy Spirit would give them power to become witnesses unto Christ, would teach them all things, bring the teachings of Christ to their remembrance, guide them into all truth, and reprove the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Through the baptism in the Holy Spirit, God Himself would become the living force of the Church, empowering and guiding the believers and convicting the unbelievers.

Yet, just as Christ dwells in the Church only as He dwells in its members, so the Holy Spirit is present in the Church only as He abides in its individuals. On the Day of Pentecost "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4).

The Day of Pentecost established a number of important precedents. The experiences of that day showed the early Christians that the infilling of the Holy Spirit with its evidences and blessings was to be for the whole Church, not only for its leaders. It also showed that anointed preaching was to be a major method of evangelism, that the Church was to reach large numbers of people with its message, that spiritual experiences may not always be understood by those outside the Church, and that three of the main religious experiences of the normal Christian life would be repentance, water baptism, and the baptism in the Holy Spirit—"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38).

## **THE SPREAD OF THE EARLY CHURCH**

With the coming of Christianity to the Roman Empire religion shifted from something that men do to appease the angry gods to something that happens to men to bring them

into relationship with the one true God.<sup>5</sup> Religion became an experience, not just a symbolic act; it became the whole of life, not just a part of social and superstitious obligation. The apostles proclaimed to all who would listen that men should repent of their sins, be baptized in water, and be filled with the Holy Spirit. These men were not well-trained orators, but were so inspired by their new faith that they personally moved many thousands of people to accept the teachings of their risen Lord.

Justin Martyr, a mid-second-century Christian writer, said, "For from Jerusalem there went out into the world, men, twelve in number, and these illiterate, of no ability in speaking: but by the power of God they proclaimed to every race of men that they were sent by Christ to teach to all the word of God; and we who formerly used to murder one another do not only now refrain from making war upon our enemies, but also, that we may not lie nor deceive our examiners, willingly die confessing Christ."<sup>6</sup> Justin himself died a martyr, as his name implies.

By the end of the second century, Tertullian could write, "For whom have the other nations believed—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and they who inhabit Mesopotamia, Armenia, Phrygia, Cappadocia, and those dwelling in Pontus and Asia, and Pamphylia, sojourners in Egypt, and inhabitants of the region of Africa, which is beyond Cyrene, Romans and sojourners, yes and in Jerusalem, Jews and other nations; as now the varied races of the Gaetulians, and manifold confines of the Moors, all the limits of Spain, and diverse nations of the Gauls, and the places of the Britons, inaccessible to the Romans, but subjugated to Christ, and the Sarmatians and Dacians, and Germans, and Scythians, and of many remote nations and provinces and many islands unknown to us and which we can hardly enumerate? In all these places the name of Christ, who has already come, now

---

<sup>5</sup> M. Rostovtzeff, *A History of the Ancient World*, Vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), p. 350.

<sup>6</sup> Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, Ch. xxxix.

reigns.”<sup>7</sup> The fact is that by the end of the second century the Christians had already reached most of the territory claimed by the Old Catholic Church and the Roman Catholic Church over most of the following 1,000 years.

Two interesting pieces of archeological evidence have recently been found. Not far from Jerusalem a Christian sepulchre has been discovered, which must necessarily be dated earlier than A.D. 70 when the city was destroyed. The stone coffers that contain the bones are marked with Christian crosses and the name of Jesus. The other discovery is a room where Christians probably worshiped at the city of Herculaneum, for in the room was found a stone slab with a cross incised on it. It must be dated before A.D. 79, because in that year the city was buried by an eruption of Mount Vesuvius.<sup>8</sup> It has surprised some scholars that at these early dates the cross had already become an artistic as well as verbal symbol of the Christian faith.

The complete story of how the Church spread in the first two centuries cannot be told, for the available data is too scanty. Even the information in the New Testament is fragmentary, for the early Christians were not anxious to let the Roman and local authorities know all the facts about their methods or their penetration with the gospel.<sup>9</sup> If they successfully concealed some of their activities from their contemporary persecutors, it will be almost impossible for us to piece together their whole history nearly 2,000 years later. Luke's account in *The Acts of the Apostles* is mostly a record of Paul's work in advancing the gospel into the West, and the book hardly mentions the rapid growth of the Christian faith into all the areas of the East where the Jews of the Dispersion lived.

We know that in the first century the churches were most numerous in Asia Minor. It was there that Paul did much

<sup>7</sup> Tertullian, *Adv. Judacos*, 7, as quoted in Ayer, Joseph Cullen, Jr., *A Source Book for Ancient Church History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924), pp. 52-53.

<sup>8</sup> Carrington, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1953), pp. 65-66.

of his work, and where John spent his last years.<sup>10</sup> Mark may have gone to Alexandria. Other traditions say that James the Greater went to Spain, Philip to Phrygia, Thomas to Parthia and perhaps to India, Andrew to Scythia, and Bartholomew to India. Whether or not these traditions are true, we do know that the original disciples personally preached the gospel over much of the civilized world.

### **PATTERNS OF EARLY CHURCH GROWTH**

There seem to be some basic patterns to the growth of the Early Church, some of which have been repeated in any period when the Church has grown.

(1) Converts were gained basically through Spirit-anointed preaching. Beginning at the Day of Pentecost, inspired sermons moved people to accept the message of Jesus Christ. It was a practical method, because for 120 inspired people to change the lives of millions they had to find some way to communicate the gospel with a forceful simplicity.

(2) Converts were required to make a public confession of their faith by being baptized in water. This quickly separated the serious believers from the sympathizers and gave the Church a working force of dedicated people. Very early the Church began to require a basic course in doctrine before baptism so it could be assured of keeping its doctrines pure.

(3) Christians met in small groups scattered within walking distance of their houses. Indeed, every Christian home was a potential meeting place because the worship of the Early Church required no special furniture, type of room, or distinctive trappings. Such rooms sometimes were identified by a Christian cross, and often a symbolic fish was drawn on the outside of the house as a signal to the believers. The letters of the Greek word for fish, *ἰχθύς*, were used as an anagram, each character being the initial letter for "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour."<sup>11</sup> There was probably no build-

<sup>10</sup> Charles M. Jacobs, *The Story of the Church* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1925), pp. 12-13.

<sup>11</sup> Lyman Coleman, *Ancient Christianity Exemplified* (Philadelphia: L. Johnson & Company, 1852), p. 100.

ing constructed especially for Christian worship before the third century.<sup>12</sup>

(4) A simple, but effective organization insured local continuation of Church functions such as worship services and care of the members. Peter was the spokesman of the Church for about ten years, after which James became the leader. By about A.D. 32 the Church had grown large enough to require the work of deacons to supplement the ministry of the apostles. There must have been a rapid growth of organization as soon as the Church moved from the fairly simple gatherings in the Temple and began to hold meetings "from house to house."

By the time of the writing of Paul's epistles, there was a practical organization. The pastors of the churches were called bishops or presbyters, and at first the two titles seem to have been identical. Inasmuch as each church was scattered in many homes rather than meeting in a single building, each bishop was assisted by several deacons, their number probably determined by the number of houses in which the services were held. At first these deacons and most of the bishops were laymen who were chosen because of their natural leadership abilities and their Christian witness. In fact, a separate laity and clergy cannot be distinguished in the first century. With no buildings to construct and maintain, the costs were minimal; and what expenses they had were supported by the tithes and offerings of the believers.

The strength of the system was that for every unit of believers, there was a local leader, each of whom was responsible to a bishop, who in turn followed the teachings of the apostles. The organization was simple and efficient, and it could expand naturally as the Church opened new houses for meetings and spread into new areas. It required no funds to operate the Church beyond the local level; and it made full use of natural leaders in their own communities.

(5) Another closely related factor to that of leadership

---

<sup>12</sup> Albert Henry Newman, *A Manual of Church History*, Vol. I (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1933), p. 142.

was the total participation of the whole Church in evangelism. Early Church evangelism, outside of that of the apostles and a few other gifted men like Philip and Stephen, seems to have been almost entirely by word of mouth. The apostle Paul could go to a Jewish synagogue and speak eloquently before the people, but that worked only once or twice or maybe for a few months. Once identified as Christians, the believers could not continue to proclaim the gospel through the Jewish synagogues. The Christian meetings apparently were not evangelistic, but secret gatherings for worship, the Lord's Supper, and religious instruction. The evangelism of the Church took place through the daily lives of the believers. People were won to Christ outside the meetings and were brought to the illegal gatherings only after they could be trusted not to report the Christians' activities to the authorities.<sup>13</sup>

Any consideration of Early Church evangelism would be incomplete without noting the tremendous charisma of spiritual power and unity of the Church in the face of great opposition. To be filled with the Holy Spirit meant to be indwelt and completely controlled by the very Spirit of God. This, plus the fact that the Christians expected Jesus Christ to return at any moment, made the Christians rally around the single cause of preaching the gospel. They were cast into prisons, driven from their cities, and deprived of their belongings, but "they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).

(6) The Early Church went first to the cities with the gospel, then let local believers evangelize the surrounding countryside.<sup>14</sup> Any new idea that could gain a following in Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome was bound to be spread to the entire Roman Empire, for these were the centers of commerce, communications, and culture. The

---

<sup>13</sup> Dana Carleton Munro, *A Source Book of Roman History* (New York: D. C. Heath and Company, 1904), quoting Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, Ch. 10: "Why have they no altars, no temples, no acknowledged images? Why do they never speak openly, never congregate freely . . . ?"

<sup>14</sup> Jacobs, *loc. cit.*

Church had only one bishop to a city, under whom were many meeting places and lay preachers; and the evangelization of a city and its environs was a unified effort of all the Christians in a given area. So complete was their penetration with the gospel that there were believers even in the very household of Caesar.

(7) The Early Church was more than a religious organization; it was a living organism, the perfect blending of the life of God with the lives of men. As each new convert was added to the Church, the whole body increased not only in size but in the necessary momentum to cover the whole civilized world with its doctrine. As parts of the living Church, the believers functioned as "new creatures in Christ Jesus" (2 Corinthians 5:17). They received freely the grace of God both initially in salvation and daily in worshipful contact with the Lord, glorified God in praise and adoration in thanksgiving for His love to them, and witnessed of the grace of God to men. This open communication with God, with one another, and with the world is of vital importance for any understanding of the successes of the Early Church.

(8) Accompanying all the ministries of the Early Church were the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. Divine healing was common, prophetic messages were so frequent that Paul had to limit such utterances to three in any given service (1 Corinthians 14:27), the demon-possessed were set free, and the whole atmosphere of Christian activities was characterized by the aura of the miraculous. One cannot read the New Testament without finding abundant evidence of this deep reliance on the supernatural.

About A.D. 150, Justin Martyr wrote, "For the prophetic gifts remain with us, even to the present time."<sup>15</sup> And Irenaeus, writing sometime after A.D. 183, said, "In like manner we do also hear many brethren in the Church, who possess prophetic gifts, and who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages, and bring to light for the general benefit the

---

<sup>15</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, Ch. lxxxii.



hidden things of men, and declare the mysteries of God.”<sup>16</sup> Later in the same passage Irenaeus said, “Those, then, are the perfect who have had the Spirit of God remaining in them, and have preserved their souls and bodies blameless, holding fast the faith of God.”<sup>17</sup> According to Irenaeus, the “perfect” or ideal Christian at the end of the second century demonstrated the same distinctive characteristics that marked the Apostolic Church.

### STABILIZING FORCES IN THE EARLY CHURCH

There were several stabilizing forces that tended to unify the Church and keep it pure in those years. First, the gospel—with its strikingly new ideas of monotheism, personal salvation, and resurrection from the dead—was a revolutionary concept in the Roman Empire. Christians were so busy explaining the fundamental doctrines of the Church that they had little time for conjecture or experimentation with theology. The great Christian controversies did not come until much later when a more ascetic approach to Christianity gave men the time for speculation. The problem of the Early Church was not how to interpret the Apostle Paul, but how even to get a complete set of his letters! There was a simplicity to Christian teaching in those years that gave great strength to the Church.

Another such force was the Old Testament Scriptures and the writings that were to make up the New Testament. The sermons of the first years are filled with scriptural references, and this continued to be the style of Christian preaching and writing throughout the period. It appears likely that the Scriptures were read and expounded upon in every service.<sup>18</sup>

Still another unifying force was the almost constant danger of persecution. In an age that saw all of the apostles but John die as martyrs for their Christian witness, anyone who

<sup>16</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Bk. V, Ch. vi, 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (London: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1964), p. 26.

accepted the gospel knew that he might die for his decision.<sup>19</sup> The penalty for being a Christian was not always death; it was more frequently imprisonment, confiscation of property, and exile.<sup>20</sup> Yet, there were times when the persecution became extremely violent, such as when Nero blamed the Christians for the burning of Rome. Tacitus wrote of that persecution: "In their very deaths they were made the subject of sport; for they were covered with the hides of wild beasts, and worried to death by dogs, or nailed to crosses, or set fire to, and when the day waned, burned to serve for the evening lights."<sup>21</sup> Such brutal opposition purged the Church of any halfhearted followers and strengthened the faith of the true believers.

Another stabilizing influence was the teaching methods of the Church. The preaching of the gospel formed an integral part of every service, and as early as A.D. 100 new converts were given a doctrinal course of instruction and required to make a public confession of faith before they were baptized in water.<sup>22</sup> This latter practice began very early, for the Ethiopian eunuch was baptized on his confession, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37).

### THE APOSTOLIC PATTERNS

The confessions of faith eventually developed into the Apostles' Creed and provided the pattern for most of the other creeds of the following centuries. The Apostles' Creed in its present form did not appear until at least the fifth century, and until that time its earlier forms were used mostly as baptismal confessions.<sup>23</sup> Though it is not a complete nor necessarily representative statement of apostolic doctrine (for it only indirectly implies the doctrine of the atonement), this creed does indicate the basic simplicity of the Church in its first few centuries.

<sup>19</sup> Juan Ferrando Roig, *Los Primeros Cristianos* (Barcelona: Juan Flors, Editor, 1955), p. 68.

<sup>20</sup> Jacobs, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>21</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, Bk. XV, Ch. xlv.

<sup>22</sup> Coleman, *op. cit.*, pp. 291-302.

<sup>23</sup> *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, Vol. I (Funk and Wagnalls Company, New York, 1908), p. 241.

The earliest known form of the Apostles' Creed is: "I believe in God the Father Almighty and in Christ Jesus, his only begotten Son, our Lord, born of the Holy Ghost and of Mary, the Virgin, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and buried; on the third day he rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, sitteth on the right hand of the Father from whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead; and in the Holy Ghost, the holy church, the remission of sins, the resurrection of the flesh."<sup>24</sup> Most of the phrases can be found in their rudimentary forms in the New Testament and the writings of the post-apostolic fathers.

Although the Church in its earliest years did not have such a memorized creed, every Christian could give a clear testimony of his faith. It may have been only after that condition was lost that written creeds became necessary. The basic doctrines of the Church were that God has revealed Himself to the world through His Son, Jesus Christ; that Jesus was crucified, buried, and the third day rose from the dead to atone for the sins of men and prove His victory over death; that He ascended to the Father and promised to return again for His followers; that the Holy Ghost was sent to fill believers with His presence, guide them in all truth, and make them dedicated witnesses; and that all men can be saved from sin by accepting Jesus Christ as their divine Saviour, repenting of sin, and living according to His teachings.

First-century Christianity was more a state of being than a doctrinal system. Doctrine grew out of the experience of the Church; for the death and resurrection of Christ were events witnessed by living people before they became abstract doctrines; the baptism in the Holy Spirit was experienced before it became a Church teaching. The Church did not present to the world a set of dogmas about Christ, but a firsthand witness of personal acquaintance with Christ. Throughout the history of the Church, whenever Christian identification has resulted from instruction without personal

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

experience the Church has departed from apostolic patterns.

The religious experiences of the Early Church rather quickly formed into patterns of the Christian life for all believers. Theirs was an essentially practical approach to the Christian life that could be understood by anyone—slaves or free men, rich or poor. The first Christians were united “in one accord in prayer and supplication” as a direct result of experiences with Christ.

It is really amazing how much of the apostolic doctrines and religious experiences were declared on the very first day of the Church, the Day of Pentecost. One would expect a gradual awakening to the great truths of Christianity, but instead the Church burst upon the world with most of its fundamental elements in evidence from its very beginning. Consider the basic Christian doctrines expressed in Peter’s first sermon—the keynote address of the Apostolic Church:

(1) Christian experience is a fulfillment of the Old Testament writings—“But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16).

(2) Christianity is to be a worldwide religion characterized by the outpouring of the Spirit of God—“I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh” (2:17).

(3) The Church is to be charismatic in nature—“... your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy” (2:17, 18).

(4) Salvation is to be a personal experience that results from calling on the name of the Lord and repenting of sins—“And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (2:21), and “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins . . .” (2:38).

(5) The death and resurrection of Christ are to be basic claims of the Christian Faith, for Jesus Christ was “crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up” (2:23, 24).

(6) When Jesus Christ returned to the right hand of the Father, He sent another Comforter as He had promised, and filled the believers with the Holy Spirit—"Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear" (2:33).

(7) Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah promised by the Old Testament Scriptures—"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (2:36).

(8) Remission of sins, water baptism, and the baptism in the Holy Spirit are to be definite, distinct personal experiences of all Christian believers—"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (2:38).

(9) The same outpouring of the Holy Spirit experienced on the Day of Pentecost is to be the pattern for all ages—"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" (2:39).

(10) Christian sermons are to be straightforward exhortations based on the Bible and centered in Christ.

By the time two years had passed, Peter could summarize the Church's position by saying, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him" (Acts 5:30-32). Thus, the fundamental doctrines of the Church were firmly established from the very beginning.

When the gospel began to spread to the outlying areas, Philip preached in Samaria, and "when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and

women...and they received the Holy Ghost" (Acts 8:12-17). Again at the house of Cornelius, when Peter first introduced the gospel to the Gentiles about A.D. 40, the people believed in Christ, were filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke in other tongues, and were baptized in water (Acts 10). And in Ephesus—about 25 years after the Day of Pentecost—Paul baptized the converts in water after he was assured of their repentance; and, when he "had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues and prophesied" (Acts 19:1-6).

By confessing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and repenting of sins, a first-century person was born into the family of God. He then declared publicly to the world that he was a Christian by being baptized in water. Thus separated from the world, he was baptized in the Holy Spirit to be continuously taught by God and to be filled with power to witness for Jesus Christ. Holiness then became his way of life, prayer his open communication with heaven, worship his constant expression to God, evangelism his burning passion, and heaven his earnest goal. He ministered unto the Lord in praise, to the saints of the Church in encouragement and comfort, and to the outside world in exhortation and witnessing. Christianity was his state of being and his way of life, and he committed himself wholly to its propagation.

## CHAPTER THREE

# THE MEANING OF NEW TESTAMENT PATTERNS

As we have dug among the historical ruins of the past, we have unearthed some of the major events and customs of the Early Church and have seen that there were certain recurring patterns of doctrine, religious experience, and fundamental practice. In the light of our discoveries so far, we are naturally led to ask: Did Jesus Christ and His apostles intend for the New Testament Church to provide the patterns for all ages to follow?

If this question is to be answered affirmatively, it takes on frightening proportions, for much of our twentieth-century religion has developed out of the traditions of Western culture rather than from a motivation to follow apostolic concepts. If today's churches are not obligated to resemble the Early Church, then we must ask what the lasting significance is of the New Testament. How far can a church stray from apostolic patterns and still be considered Christian?

## THE NATURE OF APOSTOLIC PATTERNS

Faced with their own dissimilarity from New Testament Christianity, some churches have tried to separate the teachings of the historical Jesus from the supposedly different or contradictory teachings of the apostles. Such a position is unrealistic because the entire story and teachings of Jesus

Christ have come down to us only as they were remembered and recorded by the apostles and their contemporaries. Peter said, "... we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him" (Acts 5:32). The Apostolic Church and the teachings of Christ cannot be separated, for John wrote, "that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us" (1 John 1:3).

The first reaction of those who desire to return to the apostolic patterns might be to attempt to copy the Early Church in every detail as though a reproduction of all its parts might somehow result in an exact replica of the original. However, such an attempt would be a tragic oversimplification of the nature of the Church, for the real value of apostolic Christianity was not so much in what it did as in what it was. Such an approach to apostolic patterns would be like reconstructing a tree out of bits of old wood. The Early Church was more than the sum of its parts, and it cannot be reproduced simply by copying the fragmentary knowledge that we have about it. Its structure can be copied, its methods emulated, and its doctrines repeated; but the result will still be just an imitation—something like the original, but lacking the spark of life.

The Early Church patterns are not mere examples to be followed, somewhat like a blueprint is the plan for the design of a building. They are rather like the genetic patterns of living tissue that always produce the same inherited characteristics whenever the seeds are planted and the soil properly prepared. It is interesting to note that the word *genes* comes from a Greek word meaning "to give birth to,"<sup>1</sup> so that the idea of genetic patterns fits the Church of Jesus Christ very well.

It was no coincidence that the Church was called the Body of Christ. It is a living entity, not a contrived structure. As God formed Adam from the dust of the earth and breathed

---

<sup>1</sup> Isaac Asimov, *The Genetic Code* (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., Signet Science Library Books, 1962), p. 17.



a soul into his body to make him a living man, in much the same way God created His Church.<sup>2</sup> From ordinary human beings Jesus formed a little band of men to be His Body in the world; and, when He had shaped it in His own likeness, He breathed the Holy Spirit into that Body and made it the living Church.

This concept of the genelike patterns of the Church is basic to an understanding of the Pentecostal Movement. Therefore, we must discover whether Jesus Christ and His apostles actually did intend for churches of all ages to follow the Early Church patterns.

### **JESUS' PLAN FOR THE CHURCH**

Once more we are faced with the fact that the Gospels themselves are the witness of the apostles. John wrote, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book" (John 20:30). Jesus also said much that was not recorded, for Luke wrote that He "showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

When Jesus used the term *the kingdom of God*, He referred to something far wider in scope than the Church, but He would have included the Church.<sup>3</sup> Only three times did Jesus name the Church, two of which are in the same verse.

In Matthew 16:13-19 Jesus gave the fundamental concept of His Church. He asked His disciples, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" After they told Him that some thought He was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets, Jesus asked, "But whom say ye that I am?"

This was a critical moment in the mission of Jesus to the world. He had gathered the twelve disciples, taught them, and done miracles before them; and now it was time to establish His true identity. He addressed the question "un-

<sup>2</sup> Deo J. Trese, *The Faith Explained* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Fides Publishers Association, 1959), p. 145.

<sup>3</sup> Myer Pearlman, *Knowing the Doctrines of the Bible* (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1937), p. 351.

to them," but impetuous Peter was first to reply. Matthew, who was present on that occasion, wrote, "And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus then said, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven."

Much has been written about this passage, and most of it has centered about Peter and his subsequent ministry. Whatever the meaning for Peter, we know that this revelation from the Father is the central truth of the gospel. This confession was the basis for the message of the apostles to the world, for John said that he had written his Gospel, "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31). The Ethiopian eunuch confessed, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37).

Jesus then went on to declare, "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Protestants in general have found difficulty in understanding this passage due to its Roman Catholic interpretations, but the Church fathers had no such difficulty because they had not yet heard the later Roman explanations. Even though some of them favored the idea of apostolic succession, they did not connect it with this verse. Chrysostom (c. 347-407) said, "Upon this rock, that is, on the faith of his confession."<sup>4</sup> And Augustine (c. 354-430) said, "It was not said to him, 'Thou art a rock (*petra*),' but 'Thou art Peter,' and the Rock was Christ."<sup>5</sup> So, although these two fathers differed in their interpretation, neither of them—nor any of the earlier fathers—said that Peter was the foundation of the Church. Just five verses after the one in question, Jesus said to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offense unto me"—strange words indeed to a man who would have just been named the foundation of the Church! Paul wrote, "For other

---

<sup>4</sup>See *The Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 15, Matthew (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1950), vol. ii, p. 134.

<sup>5</sup>Augustine, *Retract*, i, 21: See *The Pulpit Commentary*, *loc. cit.*

foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11).

This declaration of Jesus shows us, though, how inseparably interwoven is the apostolic witness with the central truths of the gospel. If Peter and the other apostles had not given their witness to the world, we would not even know the name of Jesus Christ today. Upon Peter's confession—"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"—Jesus identified the very name of Peter with the foundation of His Church; and not Peter's name only, but those of the other apostles who also agreed with the same confession. Paul wrote that Christian converts "are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20).

Jesus went on to say that the apostles would have "the keys of the kingdom of heaven." In the light of the former verse, we understand this to mean that the apostles would open the kingdom of heaven to the world by their confession of faith, personal identification with Christ, and their witness to the world. To Peter went the unique privilege of opening the gospel to the Jewish people with the keynote address of the Church and of further opening the Christian religion to the Gentiles with his visit to the house of Cornelius.

In the other passage in which Jesus used the word *church* we see something of church organization. In Matthew 18:15 through 20 Jesus said that "if thy brother shall trespass against thee" to go and try to settle it privately; then, if he does not cooperate, to take some witnesses along; and finally, if there still is no settlement, to take the matter "unto the church." Jesus finished the statement by saying, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Some say that Jesus never said anything about church organization, but that is not true. According to this passage, a church must be composed of more than one person—it can begin with two or three. When Christian fellowship exists

between two or more believers, there Christ is present in His Church. We see that a church is made up of a group large enough to judge the problems of its members, to be able to carry out disciplinary measures, and to take a firm position in regard to the truth entrusted to it.

By saying that He would be "in the midst," Jesus showed that the real strength of the Church is the supernatural identification of believers with Christ. In the last verse of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus said, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." The Church that teaches men to observe the teachings of Christ and meets in His name is assured of the continued presence of the Lord.

Jesus established three basic functions of the Church. To the apostles Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would guide them "into all truth" (John 16:13). The truth was not to be a gradual revelation over the centuries, but the apostles were to be led into all the truth. Secondly, the Church was to edify and feed the believers, for Jesus said to Peter, "Feed my sheep" (John 21:16). Finally, the Church was to proclaim the gospel. The commission of the Church was, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). This mission of the Church to receive guidance and truth from God through the Holy Spirit, to edify the believers with fellowship and spiritual food, and to evangelize the world formed the three-way communication of the Church with God, with fellow believers, and with the outside world.

Jesus' clearest statement on what he intended concerning His Church is found in His prayer of John 17, in which He gave His final report to the Father before He was arrested and taken before the Jewish and Roman authorities.

The year was A.D. 30. Jesus had been ministering openly for about three and a half years, and had finished this part of His mission. Now came the passion week with its sacrificial suffering as the Lamb of God, and then would come the victorious resurrection and the ascension. He reported

to the Father, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do...I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world...I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me...I have given them thy word... As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world."

Up to this point in His report to the Father, Jesus was referring to those whom the Father had already given Him—that is, the apostles. This becomes very clear later in the passage when He says, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." He made a distinction between those whom the Father had already given Him and those who would believe later through the word of His apostles. Jesus taught His disciples and sent them to the world; the rest of the human race would receive the gospel "through their word."

Did Jesus Christ intend that the Church established by the apostles provide the only true pattern for churches of all ages? The answer must be a very positive *yes!* The Lord made no provision for any gospel other than the one He delivered to those whom the Father had given Him during His earthly ministry. Twenty centuries of Christian believers might explain it in different words, refine it to a systematic theology, and argue over its interpretation...but the foundation of apostolic confession of Christian truth was to be forever established.

### **THE APOSTLES' PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL**

As we have already observed, the major points of doctrine of the Christian faith did not develop over the centuries, but burst forth in a surge of inspired revelation and spiritual insight in the very first sermon of the Church. Im-

mediately after the experience of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, the apostles began to proclaim the gospel that Jesus had taught them and which they were inspired to preach.

The first Christian congregation in Jerusalem "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship" (Acts 2: 42). No one who has given much thought to the way religious movements are formed can help but be amazed at the sudden unity of the apostles after the Day of Pentecost. They often argued among themselves during the earthly ministry of Jesus, but after they were baptized in the Holy Spirit they were unified around the central cause of the basic mission of the Church. Their conformity of doctrine, experience, and practice probably shows that Jesus gave much more personal instruction to His disciples than is sometimes realized.

It must be noted that the revelation of the gospel to the world did not come to men through the apostles' speaking with other tongues on the Day of Pentecost, but through the articulate preaching of the gospel in a language known to the speaker. The Church soon learned that outsiders were confused when a person who was baptized in the Holy Spirit broke out speaking in an unknown tongue. By A.D. 56, the Apostle Paul found it necessary to tell believers that in a public service they should only speak with other tongues when they were sure that there was an equally inspired person to interpret, and that there should not be more than three such messages and interpretations in one service. This was not to limit the spiritual experience, for Paul himself said, "I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue" (1 Corinthians 14:18, 19). The gospel was to be proclaimed by preaching . . . through the inspired use of each believer's own language or one he had learned.

What, then, was the purpose of speaking with other tongues? First of all, the phenomenon resulted from the ac-

tion of the Holy Spirit, not that of the believers. On the Day of Pentecost they "began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). Apparently this phenomenon was the first visible reaction of the believers upon being filled with the Holy Spirit. It was a very intimate and personal way of speaking with God from the inner depths of the soul—"For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God" (1 Corinthians 14:2), and "... if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth" (v. 14). Also, it is a source of spiritual strength—"He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself" (v. 4).

The very fact that Paul wrote, "If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues..." indicates that all the early Christians did indeed speak with other tongues. Paul said, "I would that ye all spake with tongues."

Over one hundred years later Justin Martyr wrote: "We may still see amongst us women and men possessing the gifts of the Spirit of God."<sup>6</sup> Apparently, this experience of the Early Church continued as long as the rest of the apostolic patterns remained, and disappeared only when the Christians ceased to be baptized in the Holy Spirit in the first-century manner.

The Church was not something that the apostles set up, but rather something that happened to them. The teachings and passion of Jesus Christ gave them a deep sense of fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures, and their personal witness of the resurrection was the basic truth around which they rallied; but the Church itself was like a plant that grew of its own inherent life. This was a new religion whose realm was the heart, whose structure was a worldwide brotherhood of redeemed men and women, and whose destiny was eternal life in the very presence of God. The characteristics of the Early Church sprang forth from the soil of human history like a young sapling full of the vital juices that would send its branches towering above every other tree in the forest.

<sup>6</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, Ch. lxxxvii.

Writing on this same subject late in the second century, Irenaeus (whom Polycarp—bishop of the church in Smyrna—sent out as a foreign missionary to Gaul) said, “. . . with one accord in all languages, they uttered praise to God, the Spirit bringing distant tribes to unity, and offering to the Father the first-fruits of all nations. Wherefore also the Lord promised to send the Comforter, who should join us to God. For as a compacted lump of dough cannot be formed of dry wheat without fluid matter, nor can a loaf possess unity, so, in like manner, neither could we, being many, be made one in Christ Jesus without the water from heaven. And as dry earth does not bring forth unless it receive moisture, in like manner we also, being originally a dry tree, could never have brought forth fruit unto life without the voluntary rain from above.”<sup>7</sup> And in the same passage he said, “The Lord, receiving this as a gift from His Father, does Himself also confer it upon those who are partakers of Himself, sending the Holy Spirit upon all the earth.”<sup>8</sup>

It was the opinion of Irenaeus, and perhaps of all the Christians of that period, that the characteristics of the Apostolic Church resulted from the infilling of the Holy Spirit, without which the *tree* of the Church would bear no fruit—that is it would not reproduce itself.

There is abundant evidence in the New Testament writings that the apostles agreed that there would be no other gospel than the one they proclaimed. They were prompted by the Holy Spirit to write the fundamentals of the gospel as well as to preach them publicly.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians, “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8). Paul obviously considered the apostolic doctrines as the final revelation of Christian truth. In fact, he warned the Ephesians not to be “tossed to and fro,

---

<sup>7</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Bk. III, Ch. xvii, 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*



and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Ephesians 4:14).

Jude exhorted the early Christians to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). He likened those who had departed from the original faith to "trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots" (v. 12). And he further said, "But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 17).

On this same subject John wrote, "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward" (2 John 8). And in another place he said, "that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us" (1 John 1:3).

Peter said that he wrote his second epistle in order "that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandments of us the apostles" (2 Peter 3:2).

The apostles foresaw that there would come deceivers and heretics, but they condemned any change in the original gospel as "wells without water" (2 Peter 2:17). They expected the Lord to return in their own day, and did not anticipate the long centuries of slow change that would drain the Church of its vitality and replace apostolic doctrine with human tradition.

We see, then, that the apostles very definitely believed that the Early Church characteristics would form the patterns for the Church in all subsequent ages. Both Jesus and His apostles were in agreement on this subject, and the entire New Testament reflects this viewpoint throughout its pages. The writings of the first century from the beginning of the Christian Era until the death of the last of the apostles make no mention of any acceptable change in the theology first set forth by the Lord and His immediate followers.

This is not to say that the apostles or Jesus Himself intended that the Church would be one great worldwide or-

ganization.<sup>9</sup> The Church of the first century was only loosely organized beyond the local level, for there was no intermediate structure between the bishop (or pastor) and the apostles. Jerusalem remained as a sort of headquarters with its bishop, James, as the leader; but when Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70, no other city replaced it. In the second century there was no organization beyond the local level, although the bishops of major cities such as Antioch, Ephesus, Smyrna, Rome, and Alexandria began to be more influential than those of smaller cities. There was no one leader or one headquarters of the whole Church until much later, well into the times of Constantine and probably later yet than that. The basis of their organization was the fraternal equality of the believers. Instead of a sacerdotal order there was a universal priesthood with Jesus Christ as the High Priest.<sup>10</sup> When the Church did finally organize with a hierarchy of deacons, presbyters, bishops, archbishops, and eventually of popes, it imitated the Roman state rather than any example of the apostles.<sup>11</sup>

Except for the very first years of apostolic leadership, there has never been a time when all the churches of every land have been under one church government. Tertullian said clearly that the Church had reached out to areas beyond the influence of the Empire;<sup>12</sup> yet the early Roman Catholic Church never was able to govern beyond the limits of Roman control. The idea of one church government in the world is an idealistic dream that never has seen fulfillment in reality and is not likely to do so until Christ Himself returns to earth.<sup>13</sup> The unity of the Church is in the centrality of its doctrines, experiences, and practices in Christ, not in any structure of centralized human leadership.

---

<sup>9</sup> William Newton Clarke, *An Outline of Christian Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898), pp. 381-382.

<sup>10</sup> George Park Fisher, *History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> George Willis Botsford, *A History of the Ancient World* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1911), p. 513.

<sup>12</sup> Tertullian, *loc. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> Clarke, *loc. cit.*

## HOW THE FATHERS VIEWED THE CHURCH

The position of Jesus and His apostles concerning the finality of New Testament theology also was shared by the early fathers. Irenaeus wrote, "It is within the power of all, therefore, in every Church, who may wish to see the truth, to contemplate clearly the tradition of the apostles manifested throughout the whole world."<sup>14</sup> In another passage Irenaeus prefaced a rather long, creedlike statement with the words, "The Church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith."<sup>15</sup> Irenaeus believed that wherever the Church would go with the gospel it would bear the apostolic teachings.

Clement of Rome, whom Paul may have mentioned in Philippians 4:3 and who probably died about A.D. 100, wrote to the Corinthians, "The apostles have preached the Gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ has done so from God."<sup>16</sup> And Ignatius, writing to the Magnesians, said, "Study, therefore, to be established in the doctrines of the Lord and the apostles, that all things, whatsoever ye do, may prosper both in the flesh and in the spirit."<sup>17</sup> Papias said, "And if anyone happened to arrive who had been a follower of the elders, I would make inquiries about the words of the elders, what Andrew or Peter had said, or Philip, or Thomas, or James, or John, or Matthew, or any other of the disciples of the Lord."<sup>18</sup>

In the second century there was written a highly imaginative book of Christian allegories called *The Pastor of Hermas*, which was to the Church of the second, third, and fourth centuries much what *Pilgrim's Progress* was for a later day. Many of the fathers believed that it was written by the Hermas mentioned in Romans 16:14, but it probably appeared later than that. Irenaeus quoted it as Scripture; Clem-

<sup>14</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Bk. III, Ch. ii, 1.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, Bk. I, Ch. x, 1.

<sup>16</sup> Clement, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Ch. xlii.

<sup>17</sup> Ignatius, *To the Magnesians*, Ch. xiii.

<sup>18</sup> Papias, as quoted in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Bk. III, Ch. xxxix, 4.

ent of Alexandria and Origen both thought it was divinely inspired; and even by the time of Eusebius there were those who thought it should have been included in the New Testament.<sup>19</sup>

In a beautiful passage of early Christian literature *The Pastor of Hermas* says, "And they who believed from the eighth mountain, where were the many fountains, and where all the creatures of God drank of the fountains, were the following: apostles, and teachers, who preached to the whole world, and who taught solemnly and purely the word of the Lord, and did not at all fall into evil desires, but walked always in righteousness and truth, according as they had received the Holy Spirit."<sup>20</sup>

*The Pastor of Hermas* agrees completely with the position that the wellsprings of the true Church, from which all true Christians receive their strength, is the teaching of the apostles and other teachers who before the time of the writing of this book "preached to the whole world . . . according as they had received the Holy Spirit."

### THE MARKS OF AN APOSTOLIC CHURCH

In our investigation of the Early Church, then, we have discovered that Jesus, the apostles, and the second-century fathers believed that the only true expression of Christianity is that received from Jesus Christ and taught to the world by His apostles. The characteristic doctrines, religious experiences, and basic practices of the Early Church were intended to be the patterns for the true Church of Jesus Christ in all ages. The New Testament made no provision for any other kind of Christianity than that taught in word and example by the apostles. The Church was not to develop gradually in a changing pattern of growth over the centuries, but it was to be the continuingly vital voice of "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

The sad fact is that throughout most ages the Church has

<sup>19</sup> Roberts, Alexander, and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. II (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1951), p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> *The Pastor of Hermas*, Bk. III, Similitude ix, Ch. xxv.

not followed the apostolic patterns. This should not come as a surprise to those who know that the children of Israel, who were once delivered out of Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, and received the revelation of the Law at Mount Sinai, later allowed themselves to come into condemnation and death by their disobedience of God's commandments and the deadly attacks of outside influences. There were long periods when the Law of God was unread and even lost; and there were other times of refreshing when the Law was read to the people and for a time they lived according to the demands of God, only to lapse into lethargy again when the Law was allowed to drop back into disuse.

If the patterns of the Early Church are the only true expression of real Christianity, then the Church should make every effort to return to these patterns. A church that attains the life of the Early Church in its own times should be expected to demonstrate the following characteristics:

(1) It will believe in the Old Testament as a background of God's preparation of the human race for the coming of Christ and will interpret the Old Testament in the light of the teachings of the apostles.

(2) It will believe in the New Testament as the only valid source of Christian doctrine, religious experience, and principles of practice.

(3) It will interpret the Scriptures in a literal sense wherever the context is not obviously figurative or poetic, for the Bible is essentially a practical book—the divinely inspired Word of God to men.

(4) It will believe every doctrine taught by the apostles and will utterly reject any religious teaching not included in the New Testament. Although the theologies of other ages may help to understand and interpret the apostolic witness, there will be no major doctrine that was not also major for the Christians of the first century.

(5) It will teach and actively seek to perpetuate among

its members and adherents the religious experiences of the first-century Church. This means that salvation will be considered as a definite experience in which a person is convicted of sin, repents of that sin to God, accepts Jesus Christ as the Son of God, is cleansed of sin through the atonement of Jesus Christ, and begins to live a life of holiness before God. Daily prayer and meditation on the truths of the gospel will be constantly encouraged for all believers. All new converts will be baptized in water after a reasonable time of proving the sincerity of their conversion and after a period of indoctrination in the basic teachings of the Church. Baptized Christians will regularly receive the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, duly administered by a minister of the gospel.

All Christian believers will actively seek to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit with its distinctive sign and spiritual experience of speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives them utterance.

(6) It will be characterized by the continuing manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit whereby the Holy Spirit ministers to the daily needs of the Church through miracles and supernatural powers.

(7) It will be intensely missionary in concept and in action. Continuously receiving blessings from God and sharing those blessings in love and fellowship with other believers of the faith, Christians who follow the New Testament patterns will make any sacrifice to spread the gospel to the whole world. If Christ is the Head of the Church, then missions must be the heart of the Church.

(8) It will grow spontaneously and produce fruit wherever the seeds of the gospel are properly planted. This will result in the total participation of the believers in the work of the Church, the rise of many lay preachers, and the tendency to develop in many churches scattered throughout the com-

munities where the believers live.<sup>21</sup> Lay evangelism is a natural expression of apostolic Christianity.

(9) It will not be limited by different cultures, languages, or races because its patterns will be so universally understandable to the whole human race that it will thrive in any cultural environment. Its conflict with existing religions and moral codes may cause it persecution, but it will always be at its most refined under the pressures of opposition.

(10) Growing out of its total participation and large force of lay preachers there will emerge ministers with divinely appointed gifts to lead the local churches and engage in all of the special ministries of the Church.

In our search for the wellsprings of the Pentecostal Movement we have uncovered a frightening truth. Jesus Christ and His apostles intended that the New Testament Church would provide the pattern for all other Church ages; yet, throughout most of its long history the Church has not followed those patterns. Novel as this idea may be for some of today's Christians, it was exactly this truth that brought about the Pentecostal Movement early in this century. When people began to realize that their churches were unlike the one they read about in the Bible, they began to seek and pray until they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Pentecostal Movement is a true expression of that Early Church life, come forth again after all these centuries. It may not be perfect (any more than the Early Church was perfect), but it drinks from the wellsprings of spirituality that began in Jesus Christ and sprang forth in a mighty torrent of life on the Day of Pentecost.

---

<sup>21</sup> See Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, Ch. lx: "Among us these things can be heard and learned from persons who do not even know the forms of the letters, who are uneducated and barbarous in speech, though wise and believing in mind; some indeed, even maimed and deprived of eyesight; so that you may understand that these things are not the effect of human wisdom, but are uttered by the power of God."





## CHAPTER FOUR

# THE LOSS OF APOSTOLIC PATTERNS

As we have examined the deep taproot of the Pentecostal Movement, we have discovered that it draws its distinctive life from the New Testament Church. We have also found that Jesus Christ, His apostles, and the earliest fathers all agreed that the doctrines, religious experiences, and principles of practice of the apostles were intended to provide the only patterns for the Church in all ages.

*The Pastor of Hermas* said that the apostolic teachings were the fountains of the Church. Irenaeus wrote, "He has proclaimed the way of righteousness sprung up in the desert, and the streams of the Holy Spirit in a dry land, to give water to the elect people of God, whom He has acquired, that they might show forth His praise."<sup>1</sup> Even Cyprian of Carthage, writing about the year A.D. 250, said, "The Church is one. There are many rays, but only one light; many branches of a tree, but only one strength; from one spring flow many streams."<sup>2</sup>

One would assume that a simple return to the New Testament patterns would be the wisest choice for any seriously Christian church; but yet there are disquieting undercur-

<sup>1</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Bk. IV, Ch. xxxiii, 14.

<sup>2</sup> Cyprian, *On Church Unity*, Ch. iv.

rents in the stream of the Early Church that give cause for further investigation. Enthusiastic as we may become for the first-century sources of the Pentecostal Movement, we still are faced with some bothersome questions. Why did the Early Church lose the apostolic characteristics? And... is there any way that we can keep this same deterioration from happening to the modern Pentecostal Movement?

To answer the first question we must analyze the causes for the loss of the Early Church characteristics. To the second question we can only reply that an understanding of the first loss of Pentecostal power may teach us some valuable lessons for our own future.

### **A WIDENING RIFT**

The most deteriorating factor in the Early Church was the passage of time, for people forget important causes very quickly as new generations emerge with different world conditions, social environments, and patterns of thought. Even in the A.D. 50's, when Paul was preaching in Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia Minor, most of the Christians had never seen Jesus Christ personally. By the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, most of the apostles were dead.

There follows one of the unfortunate gaps in our knowledge of history, for from the time of the destruction of Jerusalem until the middle of the last decade of the first century almost nothing is known of the history of the Church. With the death of John about A.D. 100, the last of the apostles was gone. New leaders arose, but they lacked the glowing quality of personal acquaintance with the earthly Jesus. A rift was thus formed between the apostolic witness and the doctrine of the Church that was to widen continuously over the following centuries.

During the first half of the second century, most of the churches did not even have complete collections of the New Testament, because the apostolic writings were scattered manuscripts written by hand on parchment or fragile papyrus. The gospel was passed on by word of mouth with many inaccuracies, additions, and false impressions. This lack of

exposure to the books of the Bible further enlarged the tragic rift between the Church and its sources.

Yet another dividing force was the moving of the center of the Church from Jewish to Greek territory. In Jerusalem the emphasis was on the relationship of the gospel to the Law of Moses; in Greek territory it was on the relationship of the gospel to the philosophy of Plato; and, much later, when the center moved farther westward to Rome, the emphasis was on the structure of Church government.

An example of the second-century interest in correlating Plato with Christianity appears in this passage from Justin's *Hortatory Address to the Greeks*: "If any one will attentively consider the gift that descends from God on the holy men,—which gift the sacred prophets call the Holy Ghost,—he shall find that this was announced under another name [i.e., *virtue*] by Plato in the dialogue with Meno."<sup>3</sup> This artificial attempt to fit the gospel into existing molds of pagan thought was like a deadly poison to the life of the Church. Christian writers like Justin Martyr were unable to know what the end result of such a dilution of the gospel message would eventually bring to the Church. The wider became the rift between apostolic teachings and the Church the less apparent became the New Testament characteristics.

## **SYMPTOMS OF LOSS**

One of the first signs of the loss of apostolic patterns was that the Church stopped proclaiming the gospel and began to defend the faith. As a result of this changing emphasis, direct evangelism was greatly reduced. The Roman Empire reached its widest geographic extent at about A.D. 180;<sup>4</sup> and, oddly enough, the Early Church probably reached its geographical peak very soon afterward.<sup>5</sup> The activity of the Church after about A.D. 200 seems to have been limited to the shrinking Roman Empire; and the many Christian

<sup>3</sup> Justin Martyr, *Hortatory Address to the Greeks*, Ch. xxxii.

<sup>4</sup> Jacobs, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>5</sup> See Tertullian, *Adv. Judaeos*, Ch. 7

communities in India, Britain, parts of Europe, and perhaps even into China were neglected and allowed to die.

As a more highly trained clergy arose, lay participation was reduced to a minimum, and the opening of new churches no longer came from the spontaneous witnessing of the believers. This happened very slowly over a long period of time, so there must have been many exceptions to the general trend before evangelistic fervor was lost.

One of the main factors in the loss of evangelism was the error of the Early Church in confining its leadership to the limitations of apostolic succession. As the apostles established churches over the Roman Empire and beyond, they "ordained them elders in every church" (Acts 14:23). They chose men to lead the local churches who showed some natural ability to guide the congregations in the new faith. When the last of the apostles was gone, however, there remained no one to name new leaders; therefore, Ignatius and others taught that Christian authority extended from the apostles to the men they had ordained, who in turn could name other leaders. This concept limited the number of Christian workers and gave almost dictatorial powers to the bishops, over whom there was no controlling authority. By the time a local worker could receive the needed authority from his bishop, much of his spontaneous enthusiasm was gone.

Yet another sign of the deterioration of apostolic patterns was the mistake of overadjusting to the times. Under the hypnotic trance of periods of success, Christianity made the error of becoming a philosophical rather than a redemptive religion. Its arguments satisfied the philosophical minds of the second and third centuries, but a slow dilution of purpose drained the Church of its life. The cry of the Greeks and Romans was for a workable philosophy; and Christianity allowed itself to yield to the temptation for contemporary relevancy and slipped into the ethnic niche that society had made for it. At this point, the Church was cast in the mold of social demands rather than formed in the image of apostolic patterns.

Another sign of its decay was that the Church began to diversify into factions. The Church lost the absolute qualities that it had demonstrated under the apostles and was forced to rely on human opinion—never a reliable guide because it can seldom transcend the current moods of society. Such names as Cerinthus, Marcion, Menander, and Montanus and such movements as the Nicolaitans, the Docetae, and the Gnostics remind us of some of the early divisive forces. With a wider breadth of opinions from which to choose, the Christian people did not so deeply commit themselves to any single cause.

A loss of the sense of purpose in the Church was one of the symptomatic signs of the loss of apostolic characteristics. Jesus had said much about the kingdom of heaven. In the middle of the second century Justin Martyr wrote, "And when you hear that we look for a kingdom, you suppose, without making any inquiry, that we speak of a human kingdom; whereas we speak of that which is with God, as appears also from the confession of their faith made by those who are charged with being Christians, though they know that death is the punishment awarded to him who so confesses. For if we looked for a human kingdom, we should also deny our Christ, that we might not be slain."<sup>6</sup> By the middle of the third century, this kingdom idea of the Church was almost gone. Abandoning the attitude of the Early Church toward the kingdom of heaven, the Christians were taking an active part in the society in which they lived.<sup>7</sup> When society began to be viewed as a damaged ship to be repaired instead of as a sinking ship to be abandoned, the Church no longer preached the same gospel that had brought it into being in the first century.

Still another sign of the loss of spontaneous life was that the Church began to speculate with theology rather than accept doctrine by apostolic declaration. The manipulation of theology became a game to be played to bring all doc-

<sup>6</sup> Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, Ch., xi.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur E. R. Boak, *A History of Rome to 565 A.D.* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 4th Ed., 1955), p. 412.

trinal elements into a uniform, self-consistent system. Some of the most common controversies of the period were about the mode and time of baptism, whether the Church could forgive sins, the relationship of Christ to the Father, and the authority of the clergy. As infant baptism by sprinkling gradually took the place of adult baptism by immersion, the idea of personal salvation came to be thought of as a state of grace rather than as a crisis experience of redemption from committed sin. The urgency for accepting Christ for deliverance from the guilt of sin was gone, and in its place came regular purgings of the conscience through confession to the priests.

Not all of these ideas developed at the same rate throughout the Roman Empire, but the trend was much the same everywhere. For example, in a period when many Christians were accepting the idea that the Church could represent Christ in forgiving sins, Tertullian wrote, "The Church, it is true, will forgive sins, but it must be the Church of the Spirit, by means of a spiritual man; not the Church which consists of a number of bishops, for the right belongs to the master, not to the servant; to God Himself, not to a priest."<sup>8</sup>

Another sign of the loss of apostolic patterns was the increase of formality that led to a liturgical form of worship. The development of the more formal approach, which eventually led to the Roman Catholic system, may be summarized by isolating several Early Church tendencies:

(1) *The tendency toward ritualism*: In a world of many heathen rites on the one hand and Jewish ceremonies on the other, it was inevitable that as soon as the Church began to cool in its fervor it would form its own rituals. The formation of a liturgy was a long process, but its progress was steady over the first few centuries until the worship services developed into the Roman Catholic mass.

(2) *The tendency toward noninvolvement*: The separation of clergy and laity brought about an audience-performer re-

<sup>8</sup> Tertullian, *On the Veiling of Virgins*, Ch. i.

relationship in the Church services. Over the three centuries before the Council of Nicea there was a gradual emergence of this form of worship that domesticated the power of the Church and greatly limited its working force.

(3) *The tendency toward legalism*: In the first two centuries the Christians' dress and social behavior did not vary from those of the peoples among whom they lived. *The Epistle to Diognetus*, written about A.D. 130, said concerning customs that did not involve basic morality, "For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. They... are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven."<sup>9</sup>

As long as the Church was made up of Spirit-filled believers, this kind of liberty characterized the Christian life, but as a larger and larger segment of the Church was made up of people who were born into Christian families but remained personally uncommitted, more legalistic rules were established. The life that started out as an exciting new freedom from sin and a purity of conscience finally became a way of bondage. Converts not only had to leave their sins, but they had to learn a whole new subculture within the main flow of their society.

After Christianity became the official state religion of the Roman Empire, this legalistic approach collapsed as far as

<sup>9</sup> *The Epistle to Diognetus*, Ch. v.

the main body of the Church was concerned. The legalistic-minded retired into ascetic monastic orders, while the common Christians so reversed their thinking on the subject of personal morality that they blended back into the syncretism of the times. Writing on his observation of the first effects of this union of Church and State, Jerome (A.D. 340-420) said, "After the Church came to the Christian emperors—power, at least, and greater riches, but less deeds of courage."<sup>10</sup>

(4) *The tendency toward doctrinal codification*: For the sake of practical religion, the doctrinal statements of the Church had to be simplified and labeled for public understanding, even though such definitions necessarily limited them. The apostolic doctrines at first were stated simply; but then they were made more and more complex as they were interpreted and explained. By the third century the Church had to attempt to simplify doctrine again by putting it into understandable categories for the purposes of instruction. The Apostles' Creed is the prime example of the Early Church attempts to simplify the statements of faith into neat and orderly categories. Like canned fruit, the doctrines of the creeds are isolated, labeled, and preserved for posterity; but their continued consumption without the more substantial food of the whole Word of God results in spiritual famine.

(5) *The tendency toward complexity of structure*: While doctrine was being simplified, the organization of the Church was becoming more complicated. By the beginning of the third century the Christian ministers were being called priests, and over the following centuries there developed a complex hierarchy of bishops, deacons, subdeacons, acolytes, exorcists, readers, and doorkeepers.<sup>11</sup> Eventually, there were added higher orders of archbishops, cardinals, and popes.

(6) *The tendency toward acculturation*: As the Church gradually became a strong religious force in the Roman

---

<sup>10</sup> Jerome, as quoted by Philip Schaff, *History to the Christian Church*, Vol. III (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), p. 1030.

<sup>11</sup> Lyman Coleman, *op. cit.*, p. 128.



Empire, it accommodated to the values of the Graeco-Roman society and slowly lost its distinctive qualities. The desire for social acceptance led to a lowering of apostolic standards until they were indistinguishable in the main body of the Church.

### **A REPETITION OF HISTORY**

The difference between the Apostolic Church and the Church at the Council of Nicea of A.D. 325 may be compared to the differences between the children of Israel who followed a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night and the later Jewish people under the kings. Both the Jews and the Christians succumbed to the temptation to adapt the freshness of spiritual experience to the rigors of human control.

There must be human organization, of course; but the important question is whether religious government is an extension of the Church to carry out its worldwide mission or whether it is a self-perpetuating end in itself that overshadows and binds the Church. When the Church was young and vigorous, it only needed to be loosely organized; but, when it began to lose its grasp on its central purpose, it had to form a pervading structure of clergymen to hold it together in one body.

The similarity between the Church and the Jewish people has received much attention by Christian writers. In fact, Jude wrote, "...the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not" (Jude 5). After their deliverance from bondage, the children of Israel had their years of obscurity and their years of great victory, and then they slowly degenerated in the times of the judges and turned to a monarchical form of human government under the kings. In many ways the story of the Church was a repetition of Jewish history.

### **WHEN THE FIRE WENT OUT**

We have seen what happened to the Church in general over the first few centuries, but we also need to know spe-

cifically why the Early Church no longer experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit, for these had been major experiences of the Apostolic Church.

In the light of the whole history of the Church up to the Council of Nicea, it seems clear that what happened to the baptism in the Holy Spirit was a gradual deemphasis over the years. During the first century *all* Christians were baptized in the Holy Spirit and spoke with other tongues; in the second century *most* of the Christians had this experience; by the third century *some* Christians were filled with the Spirit; and in the fourth century the baptism in the Holy Spirit was apparently *forgotten*.<sup>12</sup>

This gradual lapse of the Pentecostal experience may be seen in these passages from different periods of the Church: In A.D. 30 Luke said that "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). In A.D. 56, Paul wrote, "I would that ye all spake with tongues" (1 Corinthians 14:5). About A.D. 150, Justin Martyr wrote, "For the prophetic gifts remain with us, even to the present time."<sup>13</sup> After A.D. 183, Irenaeus wrote, "In like manner we do also hear many brethren in the Church, who possess prophetic gifts, and who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages."<sup>14</sup> Eusebius wrote concerning the end of the second century, "... instances of divine and miraculous power were remaining in some churches."<sup>15</sup> Thus we see that by A.D. 200 the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the accompanying supernatural acts of the Spirit were beginning to decline.

By the fourth century, Chrysostom wrote concerning the gifts of the Spirit described in 1 Corinthians 12 through 14, "The whole passage is exceedingly obscure, and the obscurity is occasioned by our ignorance of the facts and the

---

<sup>12</sup> Robert Chandler Dalton, *Tongues Like As of Fire* (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1945), p. 107.

<sup>13</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, Ch. lxxxii.

<sup>14</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Bk. V, Ch. vi, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Bk. V, Ch. vii.

cessation of happenings which were common in those days but unexampled in our own."<sup>16</sup>

Later fathers misunderstood the subject completely, most of them thinking that speaking with other tongues was intended for missionary purposes among foreign peoples. For example, Cyril said, "They spoke with languages which they had never learnt, and then was fulfilled the prophecy: 'there is neither speech, nor language but their voices are among them.'" Gregory Nazianzen said, "So they spoke with foreign tongues and not with their native tongues, and great was the wonder, the word being preached by them who had not learned." Jerome said, "In order that being about to preach to many nations, they might receive different kinds of tongues." And Augustine said, "The miracle of Pentecost is the antithesis of the confusion of tongues at Babel. There the one language had been divided into many, here the many languages were united in one man."<sup>17</sup>

After the Council of Nicea, the references to speaking with other tongues appear only in passages of Bible exposition rather than describing any contemporary occurrences.

### **WHAT HAPPENED IN A.D. 200?**

One of the mysteries of the historical evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is the apparent rapid decline of the experience about the turn of the third century. Irenaeus made clear that there were "many brethren" who spoke in other tongues late in the second century, but the third century fathers made no further mention of such an experience except where they referred to the experience of the apostles. There remains little doubt that the number of people who were baptized in the Holy Spirit diminished sharply about the year A.D. 200. The general causes for the decline of this experience were those that we have already described, but the abrupt cessation of mention of the baptism in the Holy Spirit may have been due to the interaction of two opposing

---

<sup>16</sup> Chrysostom (on 1 Corinthians 12-14), as quoted in George Barton Cutten, *Speaking with Tongues—Historically and Psychologically Considered* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1927), p. 37.

<sup>17</sup> As quoted by Cutten, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

heretical forces—the syncretism of the Gnostics and the fanaticism of the Montanists.

Christianity was not the only new religion in the Roman Empire; for, growing side by side with Christianity was Mithraism, which had a sacrificial meal of bread and wine as well as a baptismal rite.<sup>18</sup> Another popular religion was that of the Great Mother—a legendary goddess who supposedly loved the virgin-born shepherd Attis, whom the followers of that religion believed had died and rose again. Worshipers danced in wild orgies, and some killed a bull and bathed in its blood.<sup>19</sup> Many Romans traditionally worshiped the trinity of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva. It takes little imagination to see that there was a great amount of blending of ideas at that time. Such an amalgamation of religions is called syncretism.

When John wrote of “deceivers” in his second epistle, he probably referred to the Gnostics, who were members of a religious and philosophical movement that rose during the Hellenistic Era. The principal teachings of Gnosticism were that salvation was obtained through a special knowledge gained by separation from matter rather than by faith or even good works. The Gnostics believed that spirit was good and matter evil, and they borrowed from many religions for their many sacraments, ceremonies, washings, and rites.<sup>20</sup> Although the various schools of Gnosticism began before Christianity, in the second century there developed a great intellectual struggle as the Gnostics attempted to explain Christian doctrine from their own religio-philosophical viewpoint and to amalgamate the new religion into what they intended to become a worldwide faith.

For example, because they considered matter to be evil they denied that Jesus Christ had truly come in the flesh. Hence, John wrote, “For many deceivers are entered into

---

<sup>18</sup> G. H. Box, *Early Christianity and Its Rivals* (New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1929), pp. 115-117.

<sup>19</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1953), pp. 23-26.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist" (2 John 7).

The Gnostic influence caused the Christians to clarify their doctrines (especially their doctrine of the person of Christ) and probably to hasten the formation of the New Testament canon; but unfortunately it also caused some of the churches to take a negativistic, defensive position. While the main body of the Church was involved in deep controversy with such Gnostics as Valentinus of Rome, the prophetic elements that had been so evident in the first century began to wane. An opposing reactionary movement then formed to attempt to maintain the prophetic gifts. This latter movement was called Montanism.

Modern Pentecostals have tended to praise the Montanists for their charismatic nature, but it is doubtful that the movement was worthy of such approval. The abuses and excesses of Montanus and his followers cast a shadow of doubt over the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit that eventually caused the main body of the Church to treat these subjects with too much caution. The tragic truth appears to be that one of the contributing causes for the decline of the baptism in the Holy Spirit was a fanatical misuse of the Spirit's power.

Montanus was a "prophet" who taught in Phrygia beginning about A.D. 156.<sup>21</sup> Along with two women named Priscilla and Maximilla, he claimed to be especially enlightened by the Paraclete. His followers considered that as Jesus was the incarnation of the Father, so Montanus was the incarnation of the Holy Spirit.<sup>22</sup> As the fanatical movement spread to the West, it became somewhat more sober and even gained the venerable Tertullian in his last years.<sup>23</sup> In an attempt to maintain its weakening grasp on the prophetic gifts, a part of the Church resorted to an artificial and highly emotional approach to the work of the Holy Spirit. Though the

<sup>21</sup> Jacobs, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>22</sup> Fisher, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Cullen Ayer, Jr., *A Source Book for Ancient Church History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924), pp. 106-107.

movement had some corresponding characteristics to the Apostolic Age and the Pentecostal Revival, when viewed in its totality it cannot be properly understood as a return to apostolic standards.

Montanism never gained a large following, but the damage it caused the Church was lasting. The Montanists taught that the prophetic utterances given to them by the Holy Spirit were superior to the New Testament—a teaching that lived on in various forms in Roman Catholicism. Tertullian, after his conversion to Montanism, wrote, "If Christ abolished what Moses taught . . . why should not the Paraclete abolish what Paul indulged?"<sup>24</sup> They also taught that Christians should detach themselves from the world, isolate themselves from all worldly contact with society, and live an ascetic life in preparation for the coming of the Lord. This has often been a temptation in the Church, but it is in opposition to the teaching of Jesus that the Church is to go to all the world and preach the gospel rather than retire from society in monastic separation. The Montanists drew the first difference between mortal and venial sins, another doctrine which became a tenet of later Roman Catholicism.

In denouncing Montanism, Irenaeus wrote, "Others again (the Montanists), that they might set at nought the gift of the Spirit, which in the latter times has been, by the good pleasure of the Father, poured out upon the human race, do not admit that aspect of the evangelical dispensation presented by John's Gospel, in which the Lord promised that He would send the Paraclete; but set aside at once both the Gospel and the prophetic Spirit. Wretched men indeed! who wish to be pseudo-prophets, forsooth, but who set aside the gift of prophecy from the Church."<sup>25</sup>

The neglect of the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit, then, apparently came about through the two

<sup>24</sup> Albert Henry Newman, *A Manual of Church History*, Vol. I, Rev. Ed. (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1933), p. 205.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 205-206.

<sup>26</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Bk. III, Ch. xi, 9.

influences of Gnostic syncretism and Montanistic fanaticism. While some people were drawn away from the spiritual aspects of the Church in an attempt to blend their faith with all the religions of their communities under the guise of intellectualism, others were led into eccentric abuses of the spiritual gifts by ascetic isolation and self-centered emotionalism.

It is in the very nature of spiritual experience to be emotional; yet, it is in man's emotional nature that he is the most unstable. There were emotional excesses in the New Testament Church, particularly in Corinth; and there have been excesses throughout history whenever spiritual devotion has been emphasized. A certain amount of overzealous fervor and even a degree of fanaticism may be more healthy for the Church than a lack of emotional reactions, but whenever these excesses become a major emphasis they result in a loss of real spiritual values.

### **THE FALL OF THE EARLY CHURCH**

The disappearance of the apostolic patterns came during the reign of Constantine, who made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. It seemed at first to be a great victory to overcome the Roman system that had tried so hard to destroy the Church, but the official act of the emperor caused every Roman to become a Christian by the fact of his citizenship. Pagan people of all religions were forced to be called Christians in name, even though they held to their former religions with their graven images, their many household shrines, their priestly orders, their basilicas, their temples, and their sacrifices.

Over the following centuries there were many ecumenical councils to redefine the Church, its doctrines, and its mission; but the apostolic patterns were gone. As the religion of the state, Christianity necessarily centered in Rome, and the bishop of Rome naturally became the accepted leader of the Church throughout the Empire. Many years passed before Roman Catholicism emerged in its full development, but it can be generally said that the birth of the Roman

Catholic Church was the result of the marriage of the Church with the Roman Empire early in the fourth century. There followed a bleak and dreary period of 1,200 years before the first signs of apostolic patterns were seen again.

It appears to be in the very nature of human systems to begin with a burst of enthusiasm, build up to a peak of efficiency, and then decline over a long period. With the passage of time and generations, the original causes are forgotten; and because of the factor of human behavior the systems begin to fail. When this happens, authority must be centralized in one man or a closely knit body of men to hold the system together. As a result of this, incentive at the local level is discouraged and the main body decays from beneath, causing the whole structure eventually to collapse. The only way to maintain a movement over a long period is to keep the leadership as near the local level as possible, while still organizing sufficiently on the general level to care for the corporate needs of the whole body and to incite continuous growth.

Whether the Early Church could have perpetuated itself for more than three centuries if it had done differently is an unanswerable question. The fact remains that it did not do so. The Early Church developed in ignorance of the grotesque extremes to which future generations would carry its errors; but the Pentecostal Movement, with its knowledge of Church history, has no such excuse for repeating the same mistakes.



## CHAPTER FIVE

# THE RESURGENCE OF APOSTOLIC LIFE

When the flame of the Apostolic Church went out, there were no sad mourners to lament its passing: Like an unattended fire that wanes slowly, smokes for a while, and finally is reduced to forgotten ashes, so the characteristics of the New Testament Church gradually diminished and disappeared from historical mention.

After the collapse of the Roman Empire, the common people had no knowledge of the Scriptures except for the Latin verses used in the mass. The Bible existed only in a language they could not understand, and the hand-copied manuscripts of the Bible were guarded in secluded monasteries like museum pieces kept in honor of a forgotten age. Eventually, the reading of the Bible, except for the Psalms, was forbidden for the common man because it was thought that the holy books could only be understood by the exclusive members of the priesthood.

When the Roman Empire broke up into many feudal domains with their castles and knights, the great majority of the people became illiterate peasants—mere serfs who had to depend on their superior lords and the village priests

for all of their knowledge. We must be grateful for the monks who laboriously copied the Latin Scriptures during the Dark Ages, for without their contribution the Western world would not have had the benefit of the wide availability of the Bible that was to influence so deeply its cultural development. To understand the history of Europe during the Dark Ages one must remember that the Graeco-Roman civilization had collapsed and Europe had fallen into the hands of semi-primitive barbarians. Only a thin upper layer of society could even read and write, and most of the people were plunged into almost total ignorance of anything more than a few miles from their homes.

Some writers have attempted to prove that the charismatic experiences of the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the prophetic gifts continued among true believers throughout medieval times. However, such a theory lacks historical evidence. There may possibly have occurred isolated instances of the baptism in the Holy Spirit from time to time; but, if so, any records of such spiritual happenings during the Dark Ages unfortunately have remained undiscovered. The idea that there has existed a continuous line of apostolic Christianity from the first century to the present time is unfounded. There were certain mystic movements within the Roman Catholic Church that emphasized the union of the devotee with Christ through meditation and self-afflicted suffering, but the elements of these movements were based more on Aristotelian philosophy than on any understanding of apostolic patterns. There appears to be no historical evidence that anyone experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit in the apostolic sense over the thousand years between the fifth and the fifteenth centuries.

There is some indication that, as Bible knowledge increased, the experience of the baptism in the Holy Spirit did reappear in various groups between the fifteenth and late nineteenth centuries. Proof for such occurrences, however, should be treated with caution, for all ecstatic utterances and religious swoons have not had any favorable

scriptural precedent. A true revival of apostolic patterns must be based on more than religious frenzy or having people go into trances, for these factors hardly appear in the Apostolic Church. It must represent a return to the baptism in the Holy Spirit as described in the New Testament and a renewal of the ministries of the gifts of the Spirit that characterized first-century Christianity.

### **THE RETURN OF NEW TESTAMENT PATTERNS**

It is not possible to isolate all of the reasons for the resurgence of apostolic life that eventually brought about the rise of the Pentecostal Movement, for the causes are deeply involved in the whole historical development of the Western world. Certainly one of the strongest influences came from the Renaissance—the cultural and intellectual awakening that formed the transition from medieval to modern times. After more than a thousand years of the ignorance and superstition of the Dark Ages, men were ready to break their bonds and revolt against the forces that had bred such depravation. A new inquisitiveness opened the doors for education, industry, the arts, the discovery of the New World, and nationalism. With this awakening of Western man as though out of a long sleep there came a demand for better communications to spread and retain the new knowledge; and there was a strong move to update religion to meet the needs of a changing society.

Organized religion—bound in its centuries-old traditions and deluded by its own self-esteem as the final expression of the Christian faith—resisted the changes violently. The Roman Catholic Church grew up in the ancient world of absolute empires and it maintained an empirelike control over Europe for many centuries. It was unprepared for the new social order of autonomous nations whose princes would refuse to be ruled by an emperor-pope.

The demand for better education and communications to satisfy the needs of the rising masses brought about one of man's greatest inventions. In 1436 Johann Gutenberg made the first printing press with movable type—an invention that

brought a veritable revolution to the world, for with this marvelous innovation books could be made quickly without the long and arduous task of copying every letter by hand. And, interestingly enough, the very first book to be printed was the Bible!

The Reformation is remembered historically with the names of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli; but the real hero of the Reformation was the Bible. If these men had not supported the return to more apostolic Christianity, other men would inevitably have done so. The living Church was growing again, and one by one it would inexorably bring back the doctrines, religious experiences, and basic practices of the first century. Generally speaking, we may think of the return of apostolic doctrines as beginning with the declaration of Martin Luther that "the just shall live by faith." Once salvation by faith in Christ was renewed, the other doctrines of baptism by immersion, the receiving of both the bread and the wine in the Lord's Supper, holy living as a requirement for continued salvation, and eventually the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the ministries of the gifts of the Spirit were restored.

As Bible knowledge has increased there have been many Protestant churches come into being and remain at different stages of development along the way. If a chart were to be prepared with the Roman Catholic Church on the left side and the Pentecostal Movement on the right, there would spread out fanlike between the two the whole range of Protestant churches with the more liturgical movements such as the Lutheran and Episcopalian churches toward the left side; the denominations such as the Congregational, the Methodist, and the Presbyterian churches toward the middle; and the more evangelical Baptist, Christian, Brethren, and Nazarene churches toward the right. The returning apostolic patterns had to pass through all of these stages to grow to their full stature again. Most Protestant churches have burst upon the world in a revival movement, have grown rapidly with their new revelation of Christian truth, and then have

crystallized their position and failed to finish what they started out to do. Another movement then has had to arise to take the next daring step toward the apostolic patterns, much like the rise of a second generation was necessary for the children of Israel to enter the Promised Land.

The Pentecostal Movement has called for a complete return to the full gospel of the New Testament, declaring that true Christianity must be that which believes all the doctrines of the apostles, seeks all the religious experiences of the first-century Christian, and in the light of changing culture follows all the basic practices of the Early Church. If there is a further step toward apostolic Christianity, it would be difficult to imagine what that step might be.

Individual Pentecostal organizations may become static in their positions, becoming unyielding to the ministries of the Holy Spirit, and blend back into traditional Protestantism like a fallen tree is absorbed back into the soil; but the Pentecostal Movement—that form of Christianity which insists on a complete identity of the Church with the apostolic patterns of doctrine, religious experience, and basic practice—must by its very nature represent a complete return to the full gospel of the apostles. Any further development is an aberration, for nothing can be more like a thing than the thing itself. There must be a point at which orthodox Christianity cannot go farther than all the way back to the apostolic patterns.

If the fanlike chart of the Church from Roman Catholicism to the Pentecostal Movement could be extended back from the Roman Church to the Old Catholic Church, the Post-Apostolic Church, and the Apostolic Church, it would form a complete circle with the Apostolic Church and the Pentecostal Movement overlapping. The Church has come the full circle from apostolic faith through the trial of many different kinds of Christianity and back to the original faith again.

### **THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF REVIVALISM**

The availability of the Bible has been a major factor in the return to the apostolic patterns; but there is another his-

torical line that must be examined, without which the Pentecostal Movement probably would not have occurred. That line is the emergence of a particular view of the Christian religion called revivalism.

As early Protestant preachers realized how far the Christian religion had strayed from its original patterns, they began to preach with urgency that the Church must return to the Christ of the New Testament. This popularization of the Christian faith brought about the various religious awakenings of Europe and America. Inspired gospel preaching created the atmosphere in which the necessary changes could occur. Huss, Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli were all great preachers whose zealous presentations of the gospel stirred Europe; and in England the roots of revivalism go back to the preaching of the Lollards under John Wycliffe.

As the enthusiasm of the Reformation began to wane and the Lutheran Church in Germany became involved with rationalism, the Pietist Movement began to preach the need for divine inspiration to understand the Scriptures, the necessity of personal separation from the vain amusements of the world, and that "no person that was not himself a model of piety and Divine love was qualified to be a public teacher or guide to others in the way of salvation."<sup>1</sup> Clergymen raised the cry of heresy and charged the Pietists with "making void the efficacy of the Divine Word."<sup>2</sup> Pietism taught that correctness of doctrine is not enough for true religion but that there must also be personal experience, that the Christian life must be separate from the morality of the age, that the Bible must be read by all believers, that laymen must participate in the whole work of the church, and that true Christianity must be actively engaged in spreading the gospel to the world. The movement had an active missionary program that was among the first in modern foreign missions.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Illustrated Hand-Book to All Religions* (Philadelphia: John E. Potter and Company, 1877), pp. 283-284.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Jacobs, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

Meanwhile, the English equivalent of Pietism was coming about through the writings of William Law and the evangelical preaching of John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield. College student groups were formed whose purposes were to study the Bible, pray, cultivate the inner life, develop Christian character, and do acts of mercy. The Wesleys formed such a group at Oxford University, and the serious and regular way in which the members carried out their religious duties soon gained for them the name Methodists.<sup>4</sup>

The Methodist revival did not begin to spread until after the Wesleys put in an unsuccessful missionary term in the colony of Georgia in America. Upon their return to England, they experienced conversion, concerning which John Wesley said, "An assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."<sup>5</sup> The Wesleys then began to preach throughout England, and the Methodist revival spread rapidly. George Whitefield, a friend of the Wesleys, held evangelistic campaigns in both England and America.

There were a number of reasons why evangelical revivalism flourished in America more than elsewhere. One reason was the separation of American religion from state control. In Europe every country had its state church, supported by taxation and generally commanding the compulsory allegiance of all citizens. It was this very problem in Europe that drove many of the early settlers to America, where they established freedom of worship and allowed the revivals to progress without the degree of opposition that marked their counterparts in Europe.<sup>6</sup>

Another reason was the rise of the common man. In America there was no aristocracy, and the clergy was not so separate from the laymen as in Europe. The American ideas of human equality helped popularize religion to the point that widespread revivals could occur. The fact that White-

---

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 327-328.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

<sup>6</sup> Harold U. Faulkner, *American Political and Social History* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., Sixth Ed., 1952), p. 45.

field could gather as many as 20,000 people at a single meeting was an indication of how the revivals reached the common man.

Yet another factor that favored American revivalism was the increasing power of evangelistic preaching. From the very beginning of Protestantism, preaching held an important place; but in America there formed a doomsday type of preaching that characterized the great revivals. Luther had realized from a study of the Scriptures that the just can be saved without the intervention of priests, the Wesleys rediscovered personal conversion to Christ; and by the time that this message began to catch on among the common people there came a general awakening of the urgency of the Christian message.

There have been three great revivals in America that have generally affected people throughout the country—the awakenings of 1740, 1800, and 1857-58.

Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield were the principal preachers of the Great Awakening of 1740. The churches of New England had reached a place of decadence in which the children of members were not receiving the same religious experiences as their parents. This resulted in the Half-Way Covenant of 1662, which admitted children of church members to membership (although not to communion) without the previously required confession of "religious experience." For the next 80 years the preachers seized upon every opportunity to expound on the need for revival, and at last their prayers were answered. The awakening began from the preaching of Jonathan Edwards and spread throughout the colonies by the preaching of George Whitefield, who visited America six times between 1729 and 1770. People would stand by the hour even in the drizzling rain on the Common in Boston to hear Whitefield, and professors and students alike would stand listening to him in the college yard at Harvard. Thousands of people came to his meetings from great distances.<sup>7</sup> The emotional pitch of the re-

<sup>7</sup> Walter Blair, Theodore Hornberger, and Randall Stewart. *The Literature of the United States*, Revised Ed., Vol. I (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1953), p. 11.



vival was high, and many physical manifestations were seen. This brought much opposition to the meetings, but the preachers saw in these emotional outbreaks the results of the conviction of sin and effects of the experience of salvation in their hearers.

Unfortunately, the Great Awakening was followed by more than 50 years of spiritual deadness, yet the period of revival had established a new pattern of evangelical emphasis.

The Awakening of 1800 came in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War. This revival did not have the strong leadership that the first one had had, but it began simultaneously in several places and soon spread over the whole country. The most well-known name from this revival was that of Peter Cartwright, but his influence was limited geographically. There were two outstanding characteristics of this awakening—the beginning of the camp meetings and the physical manifestations that were evident in all parts of the country.

Camp meetings began out of necessity, for the crowds were so large that there were no buildings to accommodate them. The meetings were moved to the country, where several preachers would speak in different parts of the camp at the same time.

Typical of the stories from that revival is this report from Charlotte, North Carolina: "About the year 1800 commenced the most wonderful revival of religion that ever visited in this region of the country. It lasted in more or less power for six years. People would go for 50 or more miles, go in wagons and camp out. Persons were overpowered by the Spirit of God and would fall as if lifeless and remain so for hours. A number of persons would be similarly affected."<sup>8</sup>

This awakening did not end abruptly as the earlier one, for there were revivals scattered over different parts of the country for the next 50 years. The best-known evangelist of that period was Charles G. Finney.

---

<sup>8</sup> A printed, framed record in the general assembly room of First Presbyterian Church, Charlotte, North Carolina.

The next awakening was the Great Revival of 1857-58. Some of the effects of this awakening were the establishing of the prayer meeting as a form of evangelical worship, the birth of Sunday schools, and the beginnings of the methods of fundamentalism. The immediate context of the Great Revival was a financial panic in the fall of 1855. Many people were ruined in business, and a large number committed suicide.<sup>9</sup> Very hard times followed, allowing men to think of their spiritual condition. As the economic depression began on Wall Street, it is not surprising that the revival also began in the business district of New York. Jeremiah Lanphier began prayer meetings in a rented room, and soon there were prayer groups in 20 places in the city. Very rapidly the prayer groups spread until all the major cities of the country were conducting them. The number of converts has been variously estimated from 300,000 to a million in two years, and as many as 50,000 conversions were reported in a single day!<sup>10</sup>

Following the Great Revival the country plunged into the Civil War, and men stopped their strong spiritual warfare to fight against one another. For the last 100 years the United States has not seen another great awakening. There have been less spectacular revivals of importance, including the one that gave rise to the Pentecostal Movement, but there has been no general awakening of the nation.

### **PATTERNS OF REVIVAL**

There has been a pattern throughout history for the Christian people to return to the simplicity of apostolic teachings whenever they are exposed to the combination of Bible reading and evangelistic preaching. Churches begin in revival, for it is only in the crisis state of times of spiritual awakening that religious changes can occur. As long as the spirit of revival lasts, the churches are evangelistic, spiritual, and missionary. The people appreciate the warmth of a growing,

---

<sup>9</sup> Benjamin R. Lacy, Jr., *Revivals in the Midst of the Years* (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1943), p. 110.

<sup>10</sup> Frank G. Beardsley, *The History of Christianity in America* (New York: American Tract Society, 1938), p. 184.

Bible-based church, and they give much of their time, efforts, and enthusiasm to its work. Then, gradually, there develops an exalted idea of the clergy, the line of demarcation between clergy and laity grows sharper, and a more fully developed theology emerges with its own specialized vocabulary that can only be interpreted by highly trained ministers. The laymen become confused, dissatisfied, and finally disinterested. When the activity of revival is gone, the church eases into a quiet state of slumber.

During long periods of social tranquility, widespread revivals seldom occur; but when society is in a state of flux all men must scramble for new handholds of security. It is then that a general revival can take place. It must be understood that the Church thrives in an environment of human crisis and deteriorates in times of prolonged tranquility.

When a time of human need creates a potential atmosphere for revival, a few people become hungry for a deeper experience with God and express their spiritual hunger to others. A few followers are gained, and some of the clergymen begin to preach reform. The church is aroused and often is shocked that some of its members should break with time-honored traditions. Opposition forces the awakening groups to hold separate meetings, and soon the division widens and causes a complete organizational break. The revived then rally around their cause and preach fervently for a time. Their church is evangelistic, spiritual, and missionary. Laymen take an active part in all of its activities. Then, a separate clergy is formed who neglect preaching the gospel to defend the faith. The earlier patterns are repeated until another revival becomes necessary.

Yet, there has been more to European and American revivalism than a mere fluctuation between awakenings and slumber, for each awakening has brought the churches nearer to the apostolic patterns. The Pietists stressed justification by faith as Luther had done; the Methodists preached personal conversion as a definite spiritual experience; and later revivals emphasized evangelistic preaching, holy living, camp

meetings, prayer, and ecstatic experience. About the middle of the nineteenth century the missionary spirit of the Early Church was renewed, and most major churches of England and America began to send out foreign missionaries to spread the gospel over the earth.

One of the chief effects of the revivals has been the recognition of the value of religious experience. The real Church of Jesus Christ does not exist in the abstract doctrines of the creeds, but in the living examples of men in whom dwells the Person of Jesus Christ. Because of their stress on personal salvation and literal Bible interpretation the revival movements have tended toward a more orthodox theology and have brought the Church back toward the apostolic patterns.

### **THE PENTECOSTAL REVIVAL**

In view of the trends of the evangelical churches from the Reformation to the end of the nineteenth century, it is clear that there would occur a return to the full gospel of the apostles. It is difficult to understand why men did not immediately seek all the experiences that they read about in the New Testament, but the fact remains that the flow of human thought runs slowly and irregularly.

In 1859 there began the battle of the books, for in that year the Protestant churches were shocked by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and were even more surprised when the science world accepted the theory. As if it were not enough to face this struggle over the origin of man, the churches were confronted with new arguments about the nature of man. Sigmund Freud announced his revolutionary theories of psychology that questioned the very existence of sin and blamed human behavior on subconscious drives and the happenings of early childhood. The quick popularity of these scientific theories had a lasting effect on Protestantism; for most churches plunged into a deep depression that cast a shadow of doubt over the divine inspiration of the Bible and claimed that the mission of the Church was social bet-

terment. The "social gospel" was to replace the so-called antiquated and inaccurate gospel of the Bible.

But in opposition to this rapid degeneration there formed a strong reaction among evangelical believers that was known as the Holiness Movement. Its adherents taught that the Bible was true and that its apparent conflicts with science were due to problems of Bible interpretation on the part of religion and to underdeveloped theories on the part of science. Satisfied in their own minds that the Bible was the Word of God, the Holiness people largely abandoned the futile fight with science and began to preach fervently against the coldness and formality of the new liberalism in the churches. They taught that personal salvation was a requirement for entrance into heaven and that a daily life of sanctification was necessary to maintain a state of redemption. The movement preached such a strict moral code and insisted on so many proofs of self-denial that it never gained a wide following, but it successfully replied to extreme liberalism with a strong opposing position of evangelical faith.

The influence of the Holiness Movement as the forerunner of the Pentecostal Movement may be compared to the contribution of the austere John the Baptist to the ministry of Jesus, for he brought a revival of Jewish orthodoxy upon which Jesus could preach His full gospel and baptize "with the Holy Ghost and with fire" (Luke 3:16).

Although the scientific revolution in the latter half of the nineteenth century caused many people to stumble into liberalism, the new approach to human thought eventually turned to some good for the Church. As modern science worked at separating the facts and fables of the past, the Bible began to emerge as a true historical record as well as a guide for personal devotion. In digging into the ruins of past civilizations, archeologists discovered indisputable evidences for the Old Testament historical accounts; and there arose a new admiration for the Bible. The combination of a changing view of the world and the added support of a wider knowledge of history among the common people

brought about a revival of Bible reading as Christian people searched the Scriptures with new interest.

There was a change in the approach to the Bible, however, for the readers were seeing the Scriptures in the realistic light of historical knowledge. There was a real Jericho, whose walls really fell down; and the Early Church Christians seemed more like flesh-and-blood people than when the Bible had been interpreted more devotionally. This historical-cultural-literal approach to Bible interpretation was one of the major causes for the rise of the Pentecostal Movement; for, as people read their Bibles with renewed interest and better understanding, they found the description of a kind of Christianity very different from that of their own churches. Once the new approach to Bible interpretation was established, it was inevitable that some group would call for a return to the full gospel of the apostles.

Just before Christmas in 1900, Charles G. Parham assigned his Bible school students at Topeka, Kansas, to do a study on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and three days later they reached the conclusion that a characteristic of this apostolic experience was that the New Testament Christians spoke with other tongues.<sup>11</sup> The students and teachers of Bethel Bible College began to seek this experience in prayer, much as the first Christians had "all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication" 1,870 years earlier.

In an amazing parallel to the apostolic experience, the students began to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit and to speak with other tongues after about ten days of earnest prayer. On New Year's Day of 1901, the first group of students was filled with the Holy Spirit, and over the following three days most of the rest received the same spiritual experience. On the third day, a group of 12 visiting ministers from different denominations were also filled with the Spirit and spoke with other tongues.<sup>12</sup>

From this beginning, the Pentecostal Movement spread

---

<sup>11</sup> Kendrick, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 51-53.

quickly around the world. In a surprisingly short time there were similar outpourings of the Holy Spirit across North America, Europe, South America, and other lands. Along with the baptism in the Holy Spirit there came a full resurgence of apostolic patterns. Great emphasis was placed on the soon coming of Jesus Christ, and in a spirit much like that of the Apostolic Period missionaries rushed out to the ends of the earth to gather in the heathen. Traditional churches rejected the tongues-speaking people, but the opposition only served to strengthen the new Movement and clarify the issues.

During April 2 through 12, 1914, the General Council of the Assemblies of God was formed at a convention in the Grand Opera House at Hot Springs, Arkansas. There were five stated purposes of the convention: (1) doctrinal unity, (2) conservation of the results of evangelism, (3) a foreign missions program, (4) a legal church organization, and (5) a Bible school plan.<sup>13</sup> The nature of the Assemblies of God can best be seen in the very opening statement of the introduction to the official minutes of that convention: "*For a number of years, God has been leading men to seek for a full apostolic gospel standard of experience and doctrine.*"<sup>14</sup>

By the end of 1967, the Assemblies of God had more than 15,000 ministers and 8,500 churches in America, 918 foreign missionaries in 78 countries, and a total world following of over 3.2 million members and adherents. In 1967 alone more than a half million people were added to the Assemblies of God churches in what compares with the Great Revival of 1857-58 for being one of the most successful years of evangelism in history. Today, approximately one person out of every 1,000 people on the face of the earth regularly attends the Assemblies of God. It seems clear that along with the revival of apostolic patterns has come an unprecedented surge of church growth that may even have surpassed that

---

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

<sup>14</sup> *Combined Minutes of the General Council of the Assemblies of God*, April 2-12, November 15-29, 1914 (St. Louis: Gospel Publishing House, 1914), p. 2.

of the first century; for at the present time the Assemblies of God is increasing at the rate of 1,500 converts per day.

And so . . . the tree of the Apostolic Church blossoms again. The great branches reach out over all the earth, the distinctive leaves flutter to the moving of the wind, and the deep taproot plunges far down into the past to draw freely from the wellsprings of New Testament Christianity.



## CHAPTER SIX

# THE FUTURE OF THE PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT

We have now examined and identified the tree of the Pentecostal Movement; and in doing so we have seen that the distinctive fluttering of the leaves and the apparent independence of its flourishing greenery from the contemporary changes of climate are due to its deep taproot, which draws its unique life from the ancient fountains of the Apostolic Church. The Pentecostal Movement is not only similar to the Church of the New Testament; it is the same species, sprung from the same identical seed. It is not *like* the Apostolic Church; it *is* the Apostolic Church reborn in our times, for it has developed from the same genelike patterns first delivered by Jesus Christ and taught to the world by His apostles.

After its first half-century of growth, however, the Pentecostal Movement faces some of the same deteriorating forces that attacked the Early Church at its corresponding stage of development. Both the Apostolic Church and the Pentecostal Movement battled early attempts to uproot them through persecution and general opposition, and both demonstrated through continued growth that they could thrive best

under such pressures. The most devastating forces against them have been the dangers of ingraftation of foreign elements to produce strange fruit and those of inner mutations that have caused them to overspecialize their activities to cope with specific local conditions and hence to become outdated and headed for extinction when the temporary factors change. The interaction of these two deteriorating forces cause the tree of apostolic Christianity to lose its original resilience, become brittle and unyielding to the winds of the Spirit, to become overburdened with the variety of fruit it has been made to produce, and finally to die.

This raises the important question: Will the Pentecostal Movement be able to keep from repeating the same syndrome of deterioration that destroyed the Early Church? Only time will answer this question, but with the examples of the Early Church and the lessons of the various revivals of the past we may at least be able to recognize the problems and perhaps to find ways to avoid the repetition of past errors.

### **FACTORS THAT MAY DETERMINE OUR FUTURE**

There is the distinct possibility, of course, that the Lord may return for His Church before there can be any serious decline of the Movement. Many Pentecostal believers see in the latter-day outpouring of the Holy Spirit a sign of the soon coming of Christ, for there is a sense in which the Church has come the full circle from apostolic patterns to medieval religion and back to apostolic patterns again. The rapture of the Church is such an important part of the Pentecostal theology that no true Pentecostal believer really expects that the Movement will have to face the problem of a long history.

Another factor that could influence the Movement would be the development of world events. For example, another world war could greatly change the course of our organizational development, but should not be expected to alter our doctrines, religious experiences, or principles of practice. World events may cause temporary setbacks in some coun-

tries and present unprecedented opportunities in others, but the Movement has already outgrown the limitations of any single nation or culture. The apostolic patterns have returned to the world, and the Pentecostal Movement should be expected to continue for at least as long as the same patterns lasted the first time.

A third outside force that could influence our development is the current revival of syncretism manifested in the Ecumenical Movement. This is the same age-old problem that caused the children of Israel to follow the God of Moses across the Red Sea, but also to worship the golden calf of the Egyptians; that caused the Israelites to claim to believe in Jehovah, and at the same time to build altars to Baal; that caused Solomon to ask wisdom of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, only to marry the daughters of many heathen kings in the name of political expediency; that caused a number of early Christians to cling to the forms of Judaism in spite of the freedom of Christ; and that eventually caused the great merging of ancient philosophies and religions that resulted in the Roman Catholic Church.

This constant pressure on godly people to blend their faith with other religions to attain unified peace and harmony with men rather than meeting the demands of an absolute God has been one of the deadliest diseases of true religion since the world began. For anyone strongly dedicated to the claims of Jesus Christ and His Church there can be no religious agreement with other faiths, no matter how rational or expedient such a middle-of-the-road position may seem to be. If Christ and His apostles were right, then all other religions must be false, for Christianity is an exclusive religion. The syncretism of the Ecumenical Movement is a deteriorating force that endangers the Pentecostal Movement as the same force drained the Early Church of its power.

There is still another factor that may affect the future of the Movement. As world population becomes increasingly urban, the new cultural patterns of city life have brought

a development to most metropolitan areas that worries some Pentecostal people. In almost every major city there form two kinds of Pentecostal churches—both equally apostolic in doctrine and experience, but differing in their practical reactions to cultural factors. One stresses the ecstatic elements of the full-gospel message and thus tends to be quite informal in its worship and emotional in its whole approach to religion. The other stresses the concepts of apostolic doctrine and tends to be more conservative in its worship and usually more intellectual in its approach. Where there are several churches in a city there develops a wide range of styles and emphases between the two basic types that are as different as the personalities, education, and cultural backgrounds of their pastors.

It must be remembered that the cultures of urban life are exceedingly complex and that both kinds of Pentecostal churches are needed to reach a wide spectrum of the population. There are two kinds of Pentecostal churches because there are two kinds of people, not because there is any division in the Pentecostal Movement. The existence of two varieties of churches is a healthy sign of the great adaptability of the Pentecostal Movement to speak meaningfully to all levels of society. Apostolic Christianity is essentially supra-cultural, for it is one religion for all men. Because of this quality of universality, the practical manifestations of the Pentecostal Movement are somewhat variable, even though the apostolic patterns of doctrine and religious experience remain constant.

Either approach is only truly Pentecostal as it is filled with the Holy Spirit and identifies itself with apostolic patterns; and either one becomes nonapostolic when carried to an extreme position. In the Early Church there were the same two elements, the emotional groups leading eventually into monastic separation from the world, and the more intellectual groups fading into syncretism between the Christian faith and pagan philosophies.

The most dangerous problems facing the Pentecostal Move-

ment are not those of external forces or of normal variations due to cultural differences, but the slow decay from within. Having seen this process of deterioration in the Early Church, We can now identify some of the causes and perhaps avoid the repetition of ancient errors.

### **THE LOSS-OF-APOSTOLICITY SYNDROME**

If Jesus Christ and His apostles intended for the New Testament patterns to be the standard for the Church in all ages, then the Pentecostal Movement should make every possible effort to maintain its distinctive, apostolic characteristics. We cannot help but see, though, that some of the same symptoms of degeneration that appeared in the Early Church are beginning to be seen again in the twentieth century.

In order to survive the destructive effects of nonapostolic patterns, the Pentecostal Movement must do more than list the symptoms; it must isolate and identify the disease itself. Having seen the eventual extinction of the first Holy Spirit-filled Church, we can now recognize that *the primary disease is the separation of the Church from its apostolic sources.*

It may seem at first that to attribute the deterioration of the Church to a single cause is an oversimplification of the problem; but it is this very simplicity of the Christian faith that has been at the same time its greatest advantage and its greatest stumbling block. Men just cannot believe that to be truly Christian is as simple as it appears in the New Testament, so churches complicate their worship with such an array of religious paraphernalia that they finally collapse under the clutter of their own baggage. Once we isolate the primary disease as the separation from apostolic sources, we can understand that all other deteriorating forces are only symptoms of this single cause—that is, they are secondary effects that would not occur if the Church were not afflicted by the primary disease. The Church that is characterized by the apostolic patterns is a living organism that grows of its own innate vitality, and it quite naturally dies

if it is separated from the only source of its life for any prolonged period of time.

An increasing formality, a decreasing emphasis on the spontaneous moving of the Spirit, a growing emphasis on pulpit-centered rather than congregation-centered worship, the development of the audience-performer complex of church services, a gradual de-emphasis on personal experience in prayer, the limitation of religious activities within the walls of the church building, a shift in purpose from evangelism to serving the movement, the blending of non-apostolic elements into the churches, the erratic emotional excesses, the increasing crystallization of positions with the necessity of clerical explanations, and the loss of active lay participation—all these and many other such problems are symptoms of the single disease of separation of the Church from its apostolic sources.

In the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus gave the secret of the true and healthy Church. In reply to the question of how the Christian revelation would be given to the world, Jesus said, "If a man loves me, he will keep my words," thus indicating that the basis of the Church was to be love for Christ and obedience to His teachings—the same two factors of religious experience and original doctrine that have come down to us through the apostolic witness of the New Testament. Jesus went on to say that His Father and He would abide in the person who loved and obeyed Him, and that the Holy Spirit would come to teach him all things. The Christian doctrines, religious experiences, and basic practices taught to us by the apostles comprise the only source of Christian life, without which there can be no abiding presence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and no spreading of the Christian revelation to the world.

The Early Church began to deteriorate quite rapidly after the last of the apostles had died because the New Testament writings were not available to many of the churches. Even after the books of the Bible were compiled into a single collection, the many pages had to be copied by hand, and

such work had to be done in secret from the Roman authorities. Believers were fortunate if their church had a copy of the whole Bible, and few individuals could ever afford to buy a Bible for their own homes. By the time the Bible became more widely obtainable, the Church had already strayed too far from the apostolic patterns.

In some ways the Pentecostal Movement may be doing somewhat better than its first-century counterpart, for it enjoys many advantages that the Early Church did not have—one of which is the distinct advantage of a historical precedent. We have better communications and transportation today, so that the whole Movement can be continuously influenced by the whole Pentecostal Movement and keep itself unified in doctrine, experience, and practice. Also, the combined effects of wide distribution of the Bible, the great reliance on the Bible in Pentecostal preaching, and the Bible teaching of our Sunday schools keep the Pentecostal people in daily contact with the apostolic sources. We have a large number of well educated and devoted ministers and laymen who are deeply dedicated to the continuation of the apostolic patterns in the Pentecostal Movement. Also, we have a much more efficient and well-defined system of organization and leadership. The Pentecostal Movement seems to be doing considerably better than did the Early Church at its corresponding stage of development.

This is not to say that all is well. Anyone who has observed the Pentecostal Movement over the past years can see that the same separation from apostolic sources and the resulting symptoms of deterioration that tore down the Early Church are at work today. The dangers are always present, often in unrecognizable forms. Yet, now that we have identified the primary problem we may be able to cure the disease.

### **PRESCRIPTION FOR A PENTECOSTAL CHURCH**

There are those who say that the Pentecostal Movement will decline and become "just another denomination" like other movements that have developed out of revival. We have inherited that theory in America because of the pat-

terns of revivalism of our early national life; but it is not necessarily true. The Pentecostal Movement is different from the previous American revivals for several reasons: It represents a full return to the doctrines, experiences, and basic practices of the Apostolic Church; the other revival movements did not have the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the fullness of the gifts of the Spirit; and, the Pentecostal Movement has already surpassed the previous revivals in prolonged momentum, worldwide growth, and widespread influence among all Protestant churches. The only applicable precedent for the Pentecostal Movement is the experience of the Early Church. Now that we know what caused the deterioration of the first Spirit-filled Church, we should be able to retain our New Testament, Pentecostal characteristics.

We have seen that the disease of separation from apostolic sources is uncomplicated, so also the prescription for its prevention is within the easy grasp of every church. We cannot predict the future, but attention to the following suggestions ought to assure the continuation of the Pentecostal nature of our church:

(1) Hold fast to every apostolic doctrine and reject every religious teaching not found clearly in the New Testament. Give emphasis to the things the apostles repeatedly stressed, and do not give to the obscure ideas any more relative importance than what the Bible has already given them. Teach apostolic doctrine in the home, from the pulpit, and in the Sunday school so that this faith can be passed on from generation to generation.

(2) Constantly keep before the people the necessity of the apostolic experiences of personal salvation, water baptism, the baptism in the Holy Spirit, the Lord's Supper, and the ministries of the gifts of the Spirit. The life of the Apostolic Church is to be found in the abiding presence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in each individual Christian believer in the full, New Testament sense. Seek every apostolic experience and reject every religious novelty not found in the New Testament.



(3) Let the churches maintain a proper atmosphere in which the distinctive apostolic experiences can occur spontaneously. Remove all barriers that might keep people from receiving the fullness of God's provision for their lives.

(4) Encourage daily prayer and Bible reading for all believers, and keep Bible exposition central in the pulpit. The explanation of the Scriptures should take precedence over all other forms of preaching. Read passages of the Bible as a part of public worship, as the Early Church preachers did.

(5) Encourage the families of the church to hold regular prayer meetings in their homes, remembering that the strength of the Early Church system was in its smaller units of believers scattered throughout the communities. In the informal atmosphere of such meetings there will be greater lay participation, more incentive for community evangelism, and more opportunity for people to be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

(6) Keep a clear sense of missionary purpose before the people, remembering the awesome obligation of the Great Commission to preach the gospel to every creature. Observe the threefold mission of the Church of worship, fellowship, and evangelism by communicating constantly with God, with one another, and with the unsaved world.

(7) Be ready at any time for the coming of the Lord, working as though He might tarry a little longer and watching as though He might come at the next twinkling of an eye. In this attitude of momentary expectancy of the return of Jesus Christ is to be found the surest safeguard against the loss of our apostolic faith.

## CONCLUSION

Among the redwood trees of Northern California there stands a tall, young tree that began to grow about 50 years ago. The amazing thing about it is that its roots are entwined around the moss-covered trunk of another tree that fell over 1,000 years ago. On seeing this strange sight, the visitor to the forest cannot help but marvel over the apparent resurrection of ancient life. Whether or not the new tree will eventually fall to join its predecessor, the present fact is that it is now standing and still growing and showing every indication that it will remain in the forest for a long, long time.

How much like the Pentecostal Movement that tree is! We cannot predict for how many centuries this church will remain, but we do know that it stands very solidly now and that it demonstrates every sign that it will continue to grow for many years to come. Its deep taproot will steadily draw from the wellsprings of the Apostolic Church, and its distinctive leaves will flutter ever so vigorously to the commanding force of the wind.

Pent.Coll. 289.94 W872w  
Womack, David A.  
The wellsprings of the Pentecostal movem



30579000437373

### DATE DUE

TWO HOUR	
LIBRARY USE ONLY	

BRODART

Cat. No. 23-221

## ***"I have found it personally challenging. . . .***

It is our hope that this book will be widely read."—from the Foreword by General Superintendent Thomas F. Zimmerman.

Since the turn of the Century Pentecostals have become a major force in Protestantism. The Assemblies of God, largest of the Pentecostal groups, can conservatively claim over five million members and adherents in nearly 100 countries of the world.

David Womack likens the Pentecostal Movement to a tree and carefully examines its deep roots through which it draws from the wellsprings—the source of its life. Thus the book surveys the Apostolic Church patterns, the meaning of these patterns, and their eventual loss. The author also discusses the resurgence of apostolic life through the Pentecostal Movement.

He sees the tree today threatened by two grave dangers—one from those who have limited knowledge of Church history, and the other from those who have been overinfluenced by non-Pentecostal concepts. In his analysis he suggests what can happen in the future and gives a prescription for having a truly Pentecostal church.



Well known as a writer and missionary, David A. Womack has done considerable research on Church history. His master's degree thesis (at Northwest College of the Assemblies of God, Kirkland, Washington) was on the operation of the Holy Spirit in the second century. After pastoring churches in the Northwest District and serving as a missionary to Colombia, he became the editor for the Assemblies of God Division of Foreign Missions. He now serves as the Foreign Missions Home Secretary.

Cover Design by Lloyd Colbaugh