

The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement

(Taken from Milton V. Backman, Jr., *Christian Churches of America*)

While Americans concentrated on the challenges created by the post-Civil War social, industrial, and intellectual revolutions, leaders of a Holiness-Pentecostal movement sought to preserve what they regarded as the central truths of classical Christianity. The rise of this new movement paralleled the reforms of labor leaders, prohibitionists, populists, and progressives. In the midst of demands for political and social changes, Holiness and Pentecostal leaders sounded their protests concerning the evils of their generation. Reacting against the growing popularity of contemporary theology, especially trends in biblical criticism and the rise of the social gospel, these orthodox Protestants claimed that the moral degeneracy of their time was the result of man's departure from traditional Christian principles. These preachers further declared that the mounting problems of urban America could be resolved by rekindling historic Christian truths.

One of the specific doctrines that one group of Holiness preachers sought to revitalize was the Methodist belief in sanctification. John Wesley had emphasized two distinct stages in a Christian's religious experience. The first was an individual's initial conversion, called his justification, and the second was a sanctification, a perfecting of a Christian or a person's becoming holy. According to this belief, when an individual was converted he was forgiven of his sins of commission but retained within himself a "residue of sin." The sin which persisted was the inbred sin resulting from Adam's fall and had to be removed by receiving a second rebirth. This second blessing purified the believer from his inward sin and enabled him to secure perfect love of God and of his fellowmen. Although Wesley recognized that believers continued to sin, the perfection which he advanced was one of motives and desires. Even though he taught that this holiness could be attained instantly "as a second work of grace," he held that it usually was preceded and followed by a "gradual growth in grace."

Methodist preachers not only transplanted to America the doctrine of entire sanctification, but also popularized in this land a pentecostal type of religious enthusiasm. Ministers of this denomination undoubtedly conducted more camp meetings in the early republic and initiated more revivals than did preachers of any other Protestant society. During some of these Methodist-directed spiritual quickenings, participants expressed their emotional aspirations with a variety of outward manifestations. While one group of participants was weeping, wailing, and praying vocally, others were fainting, jerking, or speaking in an unknown tongue.

The last general awakening which preceded the Civil War occurred in the North in 1858. Hundreds of prayer meetings were held in the rapidly growing northern cities with clergy and lay members participating in the services. During this revival thousands united with the major Protestant churches of America. Endowed with a motivating spiritual zeal, the new converts stimulated the crusades against slavery, intemperance, and Sabbath negligence. During this urban enlivenment several preachers also published works on Christian holiness, encouraging Christians of all faiths to live

in closer harmony with the example set by the Savior of mankind.

Although the Holiness movement was temporarily disrupted by the holocaust of the Civil War, following Appomattox another wave of revivals swept across the nation; amidst the flames of these quickenings, an emphasis on Wesley's doctrine of sanctification was renewed. Most clergy who spoke on this holiness theme were of the Methodist persuasion, but a few Presbyterian and Baptist preachers incorporated the doctrine into their sermons. From 1867 to 1894, "holiness associations" were formed to promote the doctrine of the second rebirth. After leaders of these interdenominational groups decided that the Methodist Church had failed to reestablish the doctrine of sanctification as emphasized by Wesley, they withdrew from this (and other Protestant denominations) and organized independent religious societies.

The major divisions within Methodism occurred after 1894, at a time when the Methodist society was the largest Protestant denomination in America, and during an era when the percentage of church membership was growing rapidly. Since influential leaders of the Holiness movement could not agree on the precise nature of the new religious communities, they failed to establish one major denomination.

Further divisions in this movement occurred during the first decade of the twentieth century. Between 1901 and 1906, a theological rupture within the Holiness communions gave birth to the Pentecostal movement. One of the doctrines precipitating this schism was the "evidence required to prove that one had been baptized by the Holy Spirit." While Holiness preachers emphasized the doctrine of sanctification, one faction within the communion specified that Christians secured full holiness only when the second baptism, the baptism of the Spirit, was accompanied by an outward, emotional reaction. Although Pentecostals generally agree that speaking in tongues is a major evidence that a convert has been baptized by the Holy Spirit, members of this religious community have not been unified on the propriety of other forms of manifestations.

One of the foremost leaders in the rise of the modern Pentecostal movement was Charles F. Parham (1873-1929). Born in Muscatine, Iowa, Parham testified that when he was nine years of age, he was called to the ministry. "Though unconverted," he recalled, "I realized as certainly as did Samuel that God had laid His hand on me." For many years, he added, he felt like Paul when that apostle of Christendom declared, "Woe is me, if I preach not the gospel."

After his conversion, Parham united with the Congregational Church, and two years later, when he was fifteen, became a lay preacher. His interest in the ministry was temporarily interrupted after entering Southwestern, a college in Kansas; but after being stricken with rheumatic fever and failing to respond to medical treatment, he decided that his illness was caused by a rebellion against his Heavenly Father. After dedicating his life to God and deciding to serve him in the capacity of a minister, Parham felt that he had been

miraculously healed. He further declared that this experience was one of the most significant spiritual events in his life and was an immediate predecessor to his becoming a well-known faith healer.

After graduating from college, Parham became a minister in the Methodist Church, but his nonsectarian views and desire to retain characteristics of John Wesley's Methodism led him away from that denomination and into Holiness circles.

A number of the basic teachings of Parham were eventually incorporated into most Pentecostal societies. While many preachers in America were teaching that conversion was a gradual process, Parham returned to Wesley's emphasis on salvation as a crisis experience. He further held that sanctification was an important second work of grace and completely destroyed the inbred sin. This second rebirth, he added, should be sought by all Christians so that their sinful desires would be eradicated. Two additional doctrines popularized by the Pentecostal leaders were healing through faith and premillennialism. Although some Christians were teaching a postmillennialism, that Christ would return following a man-made millennium, Parham taught that Christ would suddenly return, that the world would be transformed by divine intervention and that a thousand years of peace would continue, followed by the final judgment.

One of Parham's most controversial beliefs that eventually led to various schisms within the Pentecostal movement was his insistence that speaking in tongues was necessary as the only biblical evidence of the baptism by the Holy Spirit. This belief, though controversial, gave to the Pentecostal community a powerful thrust. While members of the communion were trying to decide the visible forms that the second rebirth should take, some claiming that it should be by shouting, leaping, jumping, or falling into trances, Parham argued that speaking in tongues was an unmistakable motor expression which guaranteed that a Christian had received his second rebirth.

Like the Holiness societies, the Pentecostal movement has experienced a number of permanent divisions. Influential leaders have gathered their own followers, and theological diversities have kept groups apart. Currently there are more than twenty religious societies in the United States that are classified as Holiness-Pentecostal or Baptist-Pentecostal bodies. The largest of these denominations is the Assemblies of God, whose leaders enumerated a membership of more than 1 million in 1972. Other major branches of this movement which reported a membership of from quarter to a half-million members are the Church of God in Christ, International; the Church of God in Christ; the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee); and the Church of the Nazarene, the latter group endorsing the Wesleyan view of holiness but opposing the practice of speaking in tongues.

Since the 1920s many Pentecostal bodies have witnessed a phenomenal growth not only in the United States but in other parts of the world. From 1926 to 1970, for example, the Assemblies of God increased in this nation from 47,950 converts to 626,660 members; the Church of God in Christ from 30,263 to 425,500; the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee) from 23,247 to 243,532; and the Pentecostal Holiness society from 8,096 to 66,750. In percentage, a

number of these groups are among the fastest growing denominations in the United States.

One of the best-known Pentecostal leaders of mid-twentieth-century America is Oral Roberts. After gaining notice as a revivalist and faith healer, Roberts established a school that was originally referred to as the first distinctly Pentecostal university, the Oral Roberts University, in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Shortly after this school was founded, Roberts shocked many people by joining the Methodist Church. After uniting with this popular faith in 1968, the evangelist vowed that he would never depart from the basic teachings of Pentecostalism.

Since there is such a wide latitude of belief among members of the Holiness and Pentecostal societies, it is difficult to summarize their distinguishing beliefs. Basically most members of these churches endorse the classical Protestant faith. In fact, many accept the fundamentalist view of the Bible (and many other beliefs which fundamentalists popularized) but they do not generally support the fundamentalist crusade, a movement that was primarily directed by leaders of the major Protestant faiths.

Although doctrinal diversities have kept the Holiness and Pentecostal communions from uniting into several denominations, a large majority of these Christians agree on a number of doctrines. In addition to endorsing the view of John Wesley concerning sanctification, nearly all these Christians assert that there is one God and that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three persons of one essence. Although most endorse a belief that harmonizes with the traditional Catholic and Protestant view of the Godhead, they generally reject the use of the term "Trinity," claiming that it is unscriptural. Most teach that the Bible in all its parts is divinely inspired and is the sole norm of faith, containing all truth necessary to faith and proper Christian conduct. In harmony with the classical Arminian spectrum of Protestantism, most members of these religious circles declare that because of the fall, man is born with a fallen nature and an inclination to evil, that Christ took upon himself the sins of all believers who persevere to the end, that heaven is a place where all believers, who benefit from Christ's action on Calvary, will reside, and that hell is a place of everlasting punishment for all unregenerates. Most believe in the priesthood of all believers and that the Lord's Supper is a memorial commemorating the death and sacrifice of the Savior.

One doctrine which currently serves as a wedge preventing the unification of some of these religious bodies is baptism. While Nazarenes believe that sprinkling, pouring, and immersion are proper modes of baptism and that young children may be baptized upon recommendations of their parents or guardians, most members of the Pentecostal movement teach that only believers should be baptized and that immersion is the only proper mode for this ordinance.

The orthodox flavor of Pentecostalism is further reflected by the recommendations of these Christians concerning observance of the Lord's Day and their emphasis on simplicity and modesty in dress. Most members refrain from dancing, attending movies, and gambling. Moreover, most members are opposed to the sale, distribution, and consumption of intoxicating liquors, and many do not use

tobacco. Some of the adherents of these two evangelistic faiths earnestly believe that they are conscientiously preparing for the imminent return of the Savior of mankind.”

The tremendous growth of the Holiness and Pentecostal movement and many other religious societies of modern America, including the Latter-day Saints, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the Seventh-day Adventists, is striking evidence that man’s quest for religious truth has continued and that many people in the modern world are earnestly striving to recapture the essence of New Testament Christianity.