

The Charismatic Movement

[A paper delivered at the Michigan District Teachers Conference, Adrian, Michigan, October 10, 1974]

By Siegbert W. Becker

Let me say at the very beginning that I am assuming that when your program committee asked me to read a paper on the charismatic movement, it was not their intention that this conference be informed about the history of Pentecostalism and NeoPentecostalism. That information is readily available to all of you in countless publications. I assume rather that all of you are concerned about the attitude that we ought to take over against this movement which is making such inroads also into Lutheran churches and which is exercising such a strong appeal for some of our people.

The Appeal of the Charismatic Movement

What is it that makes the charismatic movement so appealing to many Christians and also to Lutheran Christians? This might well be a question to ask by way of introduction to our subject.

When one listens to what charismatics have to say it soon becomes apparent that the people who are attracted to this movement are often, and perhaps we can say usually, disturbed by what they call the lack of power in the old-line established churches. They sense a lack of piety and sanctification in their own lives and in the lives of their fellow church members. Often they are looking for a way in which they can become sure that they are indeed children of the heavenly Father, that they are truly converted, regenerated Christians. In the charismatic movement they find what seems to them to be true Christian fellowship. Here, too, they find what seems to be true Christian missionary zeal and power for witness.

In the context of Lutheran church history it might be well to point out that the faults with which Lutheran charismatics are prone to charge their church are the same faults that the Pietists of the eighteenth century saw in the orthodox Lutheran churches of Germany. In fact, in a Lutheran context the charismatic movement, or neo-Pentecostalism, as it is so often called, might be called neo-Pietism. The Pietists laid a great deal of stress on feeling and experience. So do modern charismatics. The Pietists emphasized sanctification and what they called the Christian life. So do modern charismatics. The Pietists had a tendency to gravitate toward each other and to seek their Christian fellowship in groups and meetings outside of the regular worship activities of the local congregation. They held their own prayer meetings where they felt that they were truly in fellowship with other "real" Christians. The same attitudes are very apparent in the charismatic movement.

We should also not forget that Pietism often demonstrated a lack of concern for purity of doctrine. The real marks of the church were no longer in practice the pure preaching of the Gospel and the proper administration of the sacraments but rather fervent prayer, sincere piety, and missionary zeal. The end result of Pietism with its lack of emphasis on doctrine and doctrinal agreement was an indifference to doctrine that developed into the rationalism which robbed the church of both purity of doctrine and piety of life. In our evaluation of Neo-Pentecostalism we ought not to forget what Pietism, which seemed to breathe new life into the church, did to the church in the long run.

It might be pointed out also that pietism has a tendency to be anthropocentric rather than theocentric. The emphasis so often is shifted to what man is expected to do rather than on what God has done. The great heroes of faith in the Bible, however, are always presented as sinners who are far from perfect. Even in the Pentecost story, when the Spirit comes, the emphasis in the preaching of the apostles is on the wonderful works of God and not on what had happened to them.

In analyzing the strong appeal that the charismatic movement exercises also on Lutherans, we might ask ourselves whether we have not been troubled many times by the lack of missionary zeal and evangelistic fervor in ourselves and in our fellow church members. How often do we not feel that our churches are cold and indifferent, so that we sense the validity of the criticism which speaks of our congregations as "God's frozen people?" We sense a lack of truly sanctified piety in our own lives and in the lives of our Christian friends and relatives. To all of this the charismatic movement seems to supply the answer.

Because we know that we are not the kind of people we ought to be, we are often also tempted to doubt our own Christianity. Many Christians are inclined to ask themselves, “Am I really a truly converted Christian? Am I really a believer or am I only deceiving myself?” Neo-Pentecostalism seems to offer the kind of assurance for which they are seeking. The evident piety of Pentecostals and especially the gift of speaking with tongues are viewed as tangible and conclusive evidence that the Spirit of God is truly at work in their lives. Therein lies much of the appeal and the strength of Neo-Pentecostalism.

False Criteria for Judging

Before we proceed to an evaluation of the charismatic movement, we might first of all ask penitently whether we have perhaps by our carelessness and indifference, by our lack of missionary zeal, by our slow progress in sanctification given our fellow-Lutherans cause to question the power of the Gospel in our lives, At the same time, however, we must not forget that missionary zeal is not an infallible mark of the church nor is it necessarily evidence of the operation of God’s Holy Spirit. The missionary zeal of the Jehovah’s Witnesses ought to be proof of this. But proof positive for the truth of this proposition is found in the words of the Lord Jesus in which he criticized the scribes and Pharisees for their missionary zeal when he said that they were willing to travel around the world to make one convert but that in doing so they made the convert twofold more a child of hell than he was before. Missionary zeal that draws men away from the purity of the Gospel is surely not the work of the Spirit of God.

Neither is religious fervor and apparent piety necessarily a mark of true Christianity. St. Paul testifies to the zeal of his fellow-Jews but he characterizes it as a zeal that is not according to knowledge. He also speaks of the blameless life that he led prior to his conversion to Christianity whereas he complains of the wretchedness of his sanctification after his conversion. We might also keep in mind that the kings of Israel who are criticized most severely by the prophets are those who are most religious. After all Ahaz, who is described as one of the very worst kings of Judah, built altars in “every corner of Jerusalem.” (2 Ch 28:24), “sacrificed and burned incense...under every green tree,” (2 Ki 16:4), and offered his own children to Moloch. He apparently was a very pious man but his piety was an abomination to God.

It should be evident, therefore, that a proper verdict on the charismatic movement cannot and dare not be based on its evident missionary zeal or its apparent Piety. Our criteria for judging cannot be found here. Also in the question of NeoPentecostalism, we must always keep in mind the principle which is enunciated in the introduction to the Formula of Concord, where we have all confessed, “We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be judged.” It is therefore never a question of whether something appears to us to be pious and godly, devout and sincere. As St. Paul says, “Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the “ministers of righteousness.” (2 Co 11:14,15). It may therefore happen that when that which appears to be very spiritual and pious to us is tested by the rule and norm of the Holy Scriptures, we may find that we are dealing without something diabolical.

The True and Definitive Gift of the Spirit

We will also never come to a proper understanding and never reach a correct verdict on the charismatic movement unless we understand clearly what the work of the Holy Ghost really is. It will be difficult for us to form a sound estimate of Neo-Pentecostalism unless we truly understand that we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord, or come to him. So long as we look upon our conversion as a “decision for Christ” which we make by powers inborn in us or given to us prior to conversion we will have difficulty convincing ourselves that the Holy Spirit has done his blessed work in us without the kind of signs and wonders for which Neo-Pentecostals, like the Jews of old, are so often seeking.

On the other hand, if we truly understand that man is by nature spiritually blind, dead, and an enemy of God and that he can do nothing which contributes in any way to his own conversion, we will not feel an overpowering need for the additional evidence of the Spirits indwelling for which Pentecostals seem to yearn.

We need to bear in mind that by nature man always considers the message of the Gospel to be foolishness. St. Paul says, “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are

foolishness unto him; neither can he know them.” The things of the Spirit of God to which Paul has reference in these words are not the so-called Pentecostal gifts, but the context clearly shows that they are the things which God has revealed concerning the salvation of man, the things that were spoken by Paul and the other apostles in words which were taught them by the Holy Ghost, or, in other words, the Gospel message. Those things, this Gospel message, Paul says, must be spiritually discerned. We can never accept these things and believe this message until the Holy Spirit has enlightened our eyes through conversion. Where men can truly and honestly say that the Gospel message is no longer foolishness to them but that they have come to realize that in these promises of God conveyed to them in ordinary human speech lies their only hope of eternal salvation, the Holy Spirit has done for them something that is far more wonderful than giving them the ability to speak with tongues. We are not yet ready at this point to discuss the phenomenon of glossolalia, but until we have learned to appreciate this gift of the Spirit we will not be able to evaluate the gift of speaking with tongues in a proper context.

Paul’s Judgment on Spiritual Gifts in 1 Co 12-14

It is at this point that Paul begins in his evaluation of the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Co 12-14. The congregation at Corinth had written to Paul to ask about many questions that were causing difficulties in the congregation. One of these problems which evidently was upsetting the church in that city was the question of the spiritual gifts. At the very beginning Paul lays down the general rule that no one who speaks by the Spirit of God would call Jesus accursed and that no one could say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost. The honest confession that Jesus Christ is our Lord who has redeemed us with His holy precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death is the primary and infallible test of the Spirit’s presence in our hearts and of His work in our lives. Every other gift of the Spirit follows this gift in which all true children of God share.

The other gifts of the Spirit are, according to the apostle, *not* given to all Christians. St. Paul continues, “To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues. But all these worketh that one on the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will” (1 Co 12:8-11). The Spirit who distributes to God’s people of various times and places such diversities of gifts is always the same Spirit who has taught us in true faith to call Jesus our Lord and Savior.

And over and over again we must remind ourselves that this is the one thing that man by nature, dead in trespasses and sins, is unable to do. Missionary zeal can be developed and encouraged where the Spirit of God is wholly absent. Emotional outbursts of spiritual fervor are found also in heathen religions. But no man can say that Jesus is Lord, no one can recognize Jesus as his Redeemer without the Holy Ghost. This must always be kept clearly in mind if we are to evaluate Neo-Pentecostalism correctly. If we always remember what a miracle of grace has been performed for us and in us by the Holy Spirit when he converted us and brought us to Christ, we will not be unduly impressed by what appears to so many to be so much more significant and miraculous. On the other hand, if we still harbor syneigistic opinions in our personal theology, if we view faith as an easy accomplishment of our own and conversion as a decision which we made on the basis of what we considered the “sufficiency of the evidence,” we will have a hard time determining whether the Spirit has come to live in our hearts without the extraordinary signs always sought by an evil and adulterous generation.

The True Criteria for an Evaluation of Neo-Pentecostalism

Keeping all this clearly in mind we are now ready to form a judgment on the phenomena of Pentecostalism. We need, however, once more to remind ourselves what the criteria are by which we must judge. Remembering that the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule, norm, and standard by which all teachers and all teachings are to be judged, we will always, like the Bereans of old, search the Scriptures to determine whether these things are so. In regard to Neo-Pentecostalism we must ask, first, whether the passages of the Bible which are adduced to demonstrate the validity of the phenomena really say what Pentecostalism finds in them. And, secondly, we must compare the teaching and practice associated with these phenomena with the doctrines of the Bible to see whether they agree. While time

does not permit us to do this in great detail, we can at least indicate the lines along which we ought to proceed in judging the charismatic movement.

Glossolalia

Perhaps the most striking phenomenon associated with Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism is glossolalia, the gift of speaking in tongues. In practice, if not always in theory, it is for Pentecostals *the* gift of the Spirit *par excellence*. Almost without exception Pentecostals view glossolalia as the initial physical evidence of the coming of the Holy Spirit in fullness. It is doubtful whether any Pentecostal or Neo-Pentecostal would find fault with the official doctrinal statement of the Assemblies of God which says, "The baptism of believers in the Holy Ghost is witnessed by the initial physical sign of speaking with other tongues as the Spirit of God gives them utterance." (Quoted by Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970, p. 61).

The most exhaustive discussion of glossolalia in the Bible is found in 1 Co 12-14. Strangely enough, however, it would seem that this passage receives little emphasis in the charismatic movement. Besides First Corinthians the only book of the Bible that gives us any detailed information about this phenomenon in the early church is the book of Acts, and while Pentecostals insist that wherever the book of Acts speaks of the early Christians as being filled with the Holy Ghost we must assume that they spoke with tongues, there are actually only three passages in which glossolalia is expressly mentioned. Outside of these two books, in which tongues are discussed in some detail, there is one other brief mention of speaking in tongues in Mark 16.

It is the Acts passages, however, that are usually appealed to by Pentecostals. The very name "Pentecostal" demonstrates that they lay claim to having the same experiences that came to the apostles and the members of the Christian congregation in Jerusalem in Acts, Chapter 2.

There can be no doubt, however, that the tongues of Acts 2 were real languages. The Parthians and Medes and Elamites and all the other nations represented at the first Pentecost asked, "How hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" and said, "We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God (Acts 2:8.11). There is no mention of any interpretation of tongues such as is spoken of in the fourteenth chapter of First Corinthians. The hearers understood very clearly that the apostles were reciting, the wonderful works of God, It is safe to say that if we had only this passage in Acts, no one who takes the words of the Bible at face value would ever have come to the conclusion that the tongues are anything other than languages which were actually spoken in other parts of the world and which the apostles had never learned.

The other two passages in Acts are so brief and so lacking in detail that they add nothing that helps us understand what the tongues were. We can therefore only assume that they were of the same character as the tongues mentioned in the second chapter of Acts.

The first of the two remaining passages in Acts is found in the story of the conversion of Cornelius. In that story we read, in Acts 10:44-46, while Peter yet spoke these words the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision that believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Since nothing further is said we can only assume that this was the same kind of speaking with tongues that Luke had earlier described in greater detail in chapter two of Acts. In fact, in his report to the congregation at Jerusalem after his return from Caesarea, Peter said that when he began to speak to the household of Cornelius, "the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning." (Acts 11:15).

These words of Peter are significant from another point of view, Pentecostals insist the speaking with tongues was a very common phenomenon in the early apostolic church. They often insist that every time that the Bible speaks of men being filled with the Holy Ghost, we must assume that they spoke with tongues. It should be said that there is nothing in the Bible that would indicate that this is the case. In fact, if this is the case, it seems rather strange that Peter should say, "the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us *at the beginning*." This last phrase "at the beginning" would surely seem to indicate that the phenomenon of speaking with tongues had not occurred in the church since the first Christian Pentecost. In any case, Pentecostals cannot prove that it had been repeated, even though they usually cite the case of the Samaritans on whom the Holy

Ghost came (Ac. 8:17). But it should be pointed out that in the story of the conversion of the Samaritans not one word is said about glossolalia. We simply do not know how the Holy Spirit made his presence known at that time.

The third and last passage in Acts which speaks of tongues is found in chapter 19, where we read of about twelve men who were baptized by Paul who spoke with tongues when “the Holy Ghost came on them” after Paul laid his hands on them (Ac.19: 5.6). Nothing more is said and we can conclude only that we are again dealing with the same kind of tongues as had been more fully described in Acts 2, namely, intelligible actual spoken languages that these men had never learned.

The only passage in the Gospels that speaks of tongues is similar in its brevity. In Mark 16 the Lord Jesus gave his great commission to the apostles and gave them the promise,

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.

Here, too, there is no indication that the tongues were anything else than real languages especially in view of the context in which the disciples are commanded to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.

The situation, however, becomes somewhat more complicated when we come to First Corinthians. It is clear from chapters 12 and 14 of that letter that tongues speaking was a rather widespread practice in Corinth. Certain things that Paul says here might seem to indicate that this was a form of ecstatic speech differing from all other languages. Paul says, for example, “He that speaketh in a tongue, speaketh not unto men, but unto God; for no man understandeth him” (v.2). If these were real languages, then why would Paul say that no man understands the man who speaks in a tongue? Yet later Paul says that tongue speaking should be allowed in the church only if someone is present who can interpret or translate what was said by the man who spoke in tongues. It might be noted in this connection that the Greek word that is in this chapter translated as “tongue” could just as correctly be translated as “language” the word “interpret” also means “to translate.” There are competent Bible interpreters who insist that the tongue speaking in Corinth and in Acts are the same. Lenski writes,

We must ask whether a difference exists between the “tongues” spoken in Jerusalem and in Caesarea and those spoken in Corinth. The answer is that they are the same. As the promise is one, so the fulfillment is one regardless of the place where the fulfillment occurs.

He is convinced that the tongues in Corinth were real foreign languages. No one can really prove beyond question which view is correct, in regard to the Corinthian tongues, but no one who is guided by the plain words of the text can doubt that the tongues of Acts 2 were actual foreign languages.

The proliferation of “speaking in tongues” in our own time has prompted linguistic researchers to investigate the activity. These investigations tend to show that modern glossolalia does not consist in actual foreign languages. The scientific researchers do not seem to have found a single bona fide case of that kind. One researcher has concluded “that Pentecostal utterance is usually a repetitive string of syllables, similar from one utterance to the next, entirely unlike ordinary language” (Felicitas Goodman, referred to by David Beckmann, “Trance: From Africa to Pentecostalism,” *CTM*, St. Louis, CPH XLV, 1 (Jan. 1974), p.11). Another investigator contends that “tongues speaking is a learned experience, induced in a heightened emotional atmosphere in persons suffering from emotional stress” (Dr. John P. Kildahl, quoted in “Theologist.” Eerdman’s advertising folder, Sept. 1974) One occasionally reads of a claim that real languages were spoken but I have never read one account that would truly satisfy the Biblical requirement that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established. This would certainly seem to indicate that we are not dealing with the same phenomenon that is spoken of in the book of Acts. It surely ought to raise some questions regarding the genuineness of modern glossolalia, especially since it is the Pentecost miracle that charismatics claim is being repeated in them.

Even if it could be proved, however, that real languages are involved, this would still not prove that this is the work of the Holy Ghost. And if it is simply a form of ecstatic speech this surely cannot prove that the Holy Spirit is present. I know that the Holy Spirit fell on the Christians in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost because the Bible tells us that this happened. I know, also, that he came on the household of Cornelius because the Bible tells us that this happened. But apart from a special revelation of God no one can say for sure that modern glossolalia is a manifestation of the presence of the Spirit. On the other hand, we cannot a priori insist that it is a fraud and a deception. This is the kind of question that cannot be answered without supernatural knowledge.

Then how can we judge? A careful reading of 1 Co. 12-14 will very quickly demonstrate why Pentecostals generally shy away from these chapters and seek their support in Acts instead. At the end of the fourteenth chapter, after discussing the whole question of spiritual gifts, Paul writes, "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." It might be noted that Paul does not say, "If any man think himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him point to his experience of speaking with tongues." A recognition of Paul's commandments as the commandments of the Lord is the mark of the Spirit's presence and influence in a man's life. Paul's words clearly teach that if a man is truly guided by the Spirit of God, he will submit to the authority of the apostolic directives Paul has laid down for glossolalia, in particular, for that is the main thrust of this chapter.

Yet it is in this chapter and in connection with the gift of speaking with tongues that Paul says, "Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak." How spiritual Pentecostals really are may be inferred from the fact that Pentecostalism has perhaps done more than any other movement in the church to encourage the violation of this apostolic command against women speaking in the church. In this context it may be of some significance that some of the most famous Pentecostal preachers are women and that the first person said to have spoken in tongues in the modern Pentecostal movement was a woman. The prominence of women in the public ministry of the movement certainly does not meet Paul's test for the Spirit's presence and activity.

Moreover, Paul makes it as clear as possible that tongues speaking was not a universal gift even in Corinth. Toward the close of chapter twelve he writes,

God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of Miracles? Have all gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? (vv. 28-30).

Obviously the answer to all these questions must be "No." In fact, in the original Greek text Paul indicates beyond question that he expects a negative answer, and an exact translation of the Greek would require us to say, "All do not speak with tongues, do they?"

Pentecostals generally insist that *all* Christians ought to seek the baptism of the Spirit and that *all* those who have been baptized in the Holy Spirit will speak with tongues as the initial evidence of the baptism. Yet Paul clearly teaches that not all the Christians in Corinth spoke in tongues even though he also says, in the same context to the same people, "You have *all* been baptized in one Spirit into one body." It is clearly demonstrated therefore that one can be baptized with the Holy Spirit and filled with the Spirit without speaking in tongues.

Possible Explanations of Glossolalia

Even if we were to grant that speaking in tongues would be possible today, the phenomenon would not be the kind of evidence of the indwelling of the Spirit for which charismatics seek. The confessions of Marjoe, the former Pentecostal preacher turned movie star, show beyond doubt that glossolalia is at times a hypocritical hoax.

Glossolalia may also be the result of hypnotic self-deception. The human mind does strange things and when men concentrate their desires and their attention on one consuming goal it often seems that by sheer will the goal is attained. Doctors often speak of the "will to live" as the only thing keeping a hopelessly sick person

alive. It may well be that the will to speak in tongues is strong enough to bring the phenomenon to pass, especially when one considers the emotionally charged atmosphere in which the gift often comes for the first time.

Nor must we forget that glossolalia may also be a diabolic tool to lead men away from Word and sacrament and from the divine assurance that only Word and sacrament can give. David Beckmann has shown that glossolalia is a characteristic of African pagan religion. He writes, "Trance in African cults is strikingly similar to trance in American Christianity.... Possession-trance in Africa often includes the same two types of glossolalia found in Pentecostalism. One is rhythmic, alliterative pseudo language. The other is actual foreign language; in most cases the person possessed has had previous contact with the language, even though he may be unable to speak it in his normal frame of mind." (*CTM*, XLV, I, 11-13) And if we keep in mind Paul's statement that the Gentiles offer their worship to the devil when they worship their idols we may well ask whether the devil has not found in glossolalia a tool to encourage the enthusiasm, the *Schwaemerei*, that lurks in all of us by nature. We would do well to keep in mind the words of Martin Luther in the Smalcald Articles, "It is the devil himself whatsoever is extolled as Spirit without the Word and Sacrament." (S.Z. III, VIII, 10).

The Gifts of Healing

What is said here of glossolalia can also be said about the gifts of healing claimed by charismatics, even though time does not permit a thorough discussion of this charismatic gift. In this matter, too, we will never be able to speak a final definitive word as to the genuineness of the healing. It is easy to demonstrate that many so-called healing miracles are outright hoaxes and many others may be cases of self-deception and psychological cures. Many years ago a professor of medicine at Washington University in St. Louis told his students, "Eighty per cent of your patients will get well, no matter what you do to treat them short of feeding them poison; ten per cent will die, no matter what you do; and ten per cent will depend on your diagnostic skill and treatment." A young medical doctor who was a member of a congregation I once served said that ninety percent of the illnesses he treated existed only in the heads of his patients. This means that the field is wide open for faith healers. Many people would actually not be sick if they could be persuaded that there is nothing wrong with them. And this is the "faith" that charismatic faith healers inculcate in many cases.

Yet it is obvious that many times this faith is false. Some months ago a diabetic little boy out in California died because his parents under the influence of Pentecostalism threw out his insulin. At first they were convinced that he would not die and after his death they were convinced that he would be restored to life. Obviously the promises of Pentecostalism are sometimes a cruel hoax. In its October 11, 1974, issue *Christianity Today* reported (P. 55) that a well-known surgeon William A. Nolen, made a thorough investigation of twenty-six "cures" ascribed to Kathryn Kuhlmann. Nolen, who is not critical of religion, insists that his studies, which are to be published, have demonstrated that not one of the twenty-six cures is genuine. Two cases were worse shortly after they were healed, several never suffered from the disease that they claimed to have, and one patient "left a wheelchair she did not need."

This, however, again does not prove that no miracles of healing happen today. But again, even if they would happen, no man knows enough to determine whether they are truly miracles. And even if there were miraculous cures, it would be difficult to decide whether the miracle occurred through the intervention of divine power or whether it was a lying wonder brought about by the working of Satan.

It should, therefore, be clear to all of us that we will never be able to reach a sure and certain judgment on the charismatic movement by debating the question of the genuineness of glossolalia and the healing miracles claimed by charismatics.

A Sure Way to Judge

There is, however, a sure way to judge that will not leave us in doubt. In the Old Testament the prophet Isaiah had to deal with men who claimed all sorts of wonderful powers for themselves and who apparently also uttered strange noises as evidence of their supernatural powers. To those who felt the appeal of that kind of religion the prophet said,

When they shall say unto you, “Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep and nutter,”—should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them (Isa 8:19,20).

We may not have the supernatural knowledge required to speak a final verdict on glossolalia and healing miracles. But we can judge, and judge accurately, when we listen to what charismatics say in English. It will be difficult to deal with the charismatic movement as a unit because there is no doctrinal consensus among charismatics. Some Pentecostal groups, for example, deny and ridicule the doctrine of the Holy Trinity while others are strict Trinitarians. Yet both groups will claim the gift of speaking with tongues and recognize each other as Christians. There is such great diversity of doctrine among Pentecostals because doctrine is not overpoweringly important to them. This would seem to be one characteristic of charismatic Christians, which is almost universally true of them. At the Missouri Synod convention in Milwaukee I spoke to a well-known Lutheran charismatic who commented on the efforts toward fellowship with the American Lutheran Church and said that the whole movement was wrong because the Missouri Synod, at least, was trying to achieve unity on the basis of doctrine, which was impossible. The proper way to fellowship, he insisted, was on the basis of love.

The enthusiasts, or Schwärmer, of Luther’s day demonstrated the same attitude. When Luther quoted the Bible, their response was, “Bibel, Boobel, Babel,” and in that reply they manifested their concealed contempt for God’s Word. They insisted that since they had the Spirit, they did not need the dead letters set down in a book. But Isaiah said long ago, “If they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them.”

While modern charismatics profess great reverence for the Bible, yet that same concealed contempt for the words of and promises of God often becomes evident. Another Lutheran charismatic, a former Missouri Synod pastor, as written,

In my days of spiritual leanness (and he moans the days before what he calls his “personal” Pentecost) I used to plead with God to have mercy on me and not to forsake me, I lived under the yoke of condemnation because I never *felt* (our emphasis) able to measure up to all that my church, my calling, and my conscience demanded of me. To be perfectly frank I didn’t *feel* (our emphasis) loved of God, although intellectually I could say, “Yes, but God’s Word says you are even if you don’t feel it.” But when the Holy Ghost flooded my soul with love, I *felt* (our emphasis) it. *There was no need to keep quoting Bible passages* (our emphasis). (Rodney Lensch, *My Personal Pentecost*. Kirkwood: Impact Books, 1972, p.20.

The same concealed contempt for doctrine is demonstrated by the leading spokesman of Pentecostalism, David du Plessis, in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, V, 311) where he writes,

The missionaries of the Pentecostal movement have succeeded in establishing indigenous churches much faster than these missionaries who have had to transplant a particular doctrine or theology. (quoted by Bruner, p.74).

Contrast this attitude with the great missionary command of the Lord in which he said to his disciples that they should, teach the nations to observe all things that he had commanded. All of this makes it difficult to speak in general terms about the theology of charismatic Christians. Generally, it can be said that Pentecostals preach a simplistic Gospel that lays great emphasis on the blood of Christ and on the Bible as God’s Word. Whatever specific theological emphases appear are generally Reformed. Superficially Pentecostalism seems to be conservative, but its theology is not broadly based on the actual teachings of Scripture, and they are not even agreed on what they mean when they say that we are redeemed by the blood of Christ.

The spread of the Pentecostal movement in the last twenty-five years, moreover, has made it even more difficult to speak in general terms about the doctrines of charismatics. Catholic charismatics often claim to be better Catholics and Lutheran charismatics insist that they are better Lutherans because of their Pentecostal experience. In discussing the question of whether charismatics speak according to God’s Word, we shall

therefore make no general charges of false doctrine but only suggest certain areas where it is likely that aberrations from the teachings of Scripture will occur.

The Charismatic Movement Unionistic

When one is confronted by charismatics, the level of concern for Biblical doctrine is usually a test by which one can quickly discover whether they speak as the oracles of God speak. Charismatics seem without exception to be lax in the doctrine and practice of church fellowship, just because as we said, doctrine generally is unimportant to them. The Bible clearly teaches, "Mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine that ye have learned and avoid them." (Ro 16:17). Charismatics seem to be ready to worship with other Christians who have also been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Conventions of Lutheran charismatics feature speakers from both the Roman Church and Pentecostal Protestantism. In practice the Word of God is no longer the sole rule, norm, and standard by which all teachers and teachings are to be judged. The charismatic experience crowds the Word and the sacraments into the background. There is no more need of quoting Bible passages here either.

If the spirit who fills charismatics prompts them to pay so little attention to everything the Bible says about the importance of Biblical doctrine and to all the warnings of the Bible against false teachers, I am sure that this spirit is not the same Spirit who taught the holy writers the words of the Bible. The closer one examines the charismatic movement on the basis of the principle laid down by Isaiah, "If they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them," the more one is moved to say with Dr. Luther, "Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and sacrament is of the devil." (Tappert's translation, SA, III, VIII, 10).

Charismatic Denial of Grace

Just as charismatics express great reverence for the Bible and then demonstrate a lack of concern for maintaining the purity of Biblical doctrine by Unionistic practices, so they also have a great deal to say about grace and yet in actual practice make the gifts of God into rewards gained by works. It is generally agreed by charismatics that the baptism of or in the Holy Spirit comes only to those who fulfill the conditions. The conditions are not always the same but it is generally agreed that the baptism comes only to those who have an earnest desire for it, who pray for it with what we might call heroic faith, and who have cleansed their heart from all sin, (since the Holy Spirit will not come to dwell in a heart which still harbors sin), and finally there must be a complete yielding to the Holy Spirit, a willingness to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

The trumpet of Pentecostalism also here gives a very uncertain sound. Charismatics speak of the grace of God as the source of the charismatic gifts. The very word *charismata* from which the movement takes its name means "gifts of grace." Yet at the same time much is said about the price that has to be paid and the sacrifices that must be brought if the Spirit is to come. Even the fervent prayer that precedes the baptism of the Spirit is viewed as a struggle by which the gift is finally won. One Pentecostalist described a typical Pentecostal service in these words, "Oh, how they cried and groaned and groveled in the dust as they wrestled their way to victory." (Quoted by Bruner, P.107).

This motif of a price that must be paid, a sacrifice that must be brought, a struggle that must be waged is completely absent from the Biblical account of the coming of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostalists generally lay great stress on the "tarrying meeting" when the whole congregation comes together to pray and to "cry, to groan and to grovel in the dust" for hours on end until the Spirit finally comes to those who yearn earnestly for the "baptism in the Spirit" but who have not yet received it meeting" gets its name from the words of Jesus in the AV, "Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high."

The English word "tarry" does not mean what Pentecostalists understand it to mean. There are no overtones of eager expectation and fervent yearning in this word. It simply means, "to live in a place for a time, to stay, to delay, to linger."

This meaning is reinforced by the original Greek which literally says., "*Sit* in the city of Jerusalem until you are clothed with power from on high., And when the Spirit came on Pentecost, the disciples were doing exactly that, for we read that when the sound of the rushing mighty wind came, it filled all the house where they

were “sitting.” There is no indication of any kind that they were crying, or groaning, or grovelling in the dust, wrestling their way to victory. The Spirit comes to them, to all of them, not just to a selected few who had fulfilled all the conditions. He came as a free gift of God’s grace.

For the sake of completeness, lest we pass over what may seem to be more favorable to the Pentecostal view, it should be pointed out that in Acts 1 Jesus does tell His disciples to *wait* for the promise of the Father, But the word which is here translated *wait* has no connotation of eager expectation either. Literally it might very well be translated inelegantly as “hang around for the promise of the Father.” The Greek language has a number of words to denote waiting with eager expectation and eager yearning, but the word which is used here is not one of them.

One can examine every single passage in the book of Acts that speaks of the Spirit’s coming and not once does it appear that he comes as a result of many efforts and wrestling for the gift. He comes always as a free gift, in fulfillment of an unconditional promise of the Father. No matter how much charismatics may speak of grace in this connection, it is apparent that the word *grace* is only part of the theological capital that they brought with them when they came out of the established churches which Pentecostals consider to be their mission field. But in charismatic usage, the word *grace* has lost much of its meaning just because Pentecostalism is generally averse to precise theological definition.

Charismatic “Faith”

This lack of theological precision is found also when in this same connection charismatics speak of “faith.” St. Paul certainly rules out all human effort when he says to the Galatians, “Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” But charismatics often demonstrate very clearly that they have found a way to have it both ways and it might be very enlightening to press a Pentecostalist for a precise definition of what he understands by the “hearing of faith.” When Pentecostalists say that the Spirit is received by faith alone “if we fulfill all the conditions,” it would appear that what they are saying is that the Spirit is received by faith alone provided faith is *not* alone but is accompanied by works. Like the Galatians it would appear that Pentecostal Christians “having begun in the Spirit are now made perfect by the flesh.” (Gal. 3:3).

It would certainly appear that in the whole context of Pentecostalism faith cannot be a complete trust in specific words and promises of God. Instead it would seem to be just another name for this eager expectation and earnest wrestling for the sign that they need so badly because the bare words of the Gospel are not enough for them, so that Pentecostal faith is actually a lack of trust in the bare words and promises of God. It is rather at best a conviction that God will do what he has not promised to do. For that reason also one occasionally hears charismatics speak disparagingly of those who meet every temptation to doubt in regard to their salvation in Christ with a Bible passage. Still we would do well to recall that this was the Savior’s own way of meeting temptation. He did not say, “Listen devil, I want to give you this testimony that six weeks ago the Holy Spirit came upon me in the form of a dove, and I don’t need to quote any more Bible passages,” but he responded to every temptation with a Bible passage. In a time of deep distress he did not point to an experience but to the words of God.

The Charismatic Demand for Entire Sanctification

But earnest wrestling in fervent prayer is not the only condition that must be fulfilled before the Spirit comes. Even more destructive of the concept of grace in the Pentecostal movement is the requirement for perfect sanctification. It is generally agreed by Pentecostal writers that “perfect obedience” is a prerequisite without which the Spirit will not come no matter how earnestly he is prayed for. This perfect obedience consists in putting away all sin and in complete “yieldedness” to God, for the Spirit will not dwell in a heart that is not completely pure.

Here we must remember that the charismatic movement has close ties to the so-called Holiness churches, which are united in the conviction that a true Christian no longer sins. Bruner is of the opinion that what charismatics mean by the renunciation of all sin and complete purification of heart is the absence of conscious sin. In dealing with charismatics it might be well to examine this matter more closely. Because of the ties to the holiness movement I would be inclined to think that they often really mean complete eradication of

sin from the hearts and lives of those who have fulfilled the conditions for Spirit baptism. When holiness people proclaim perfect sanctification they do not mean only the absence of all conscious sin, They actually believe that they no longer sin.

Then, too, it might be asked how only conscious sin can be meant, if the claim is made that the Holy Spirit will not dwell in a heart that is still not pure. If He sees the sin of which *we* are not conscious, is the heart not still unfit to be his dwelling place? Many charismatics are prone to speak of the depraved and dissolute lives, which they led prior to their “Spirit baptism”, and they cite this change as proof of its validity. And even if they can point to no special immorality of which they used to be guilty, they at least contrast their present state with what they once were. The Lutheran charismatic quoted earlier who felt that in the days of his “spiritual leanness” he could not measure up to all that was expected of him is a mild example of this tendency even in those whose whole theological training would tend to make unsympathetic to the concept of “entire sanctification.”

The changed lives of charismatics cannot be denied in many cases. But changed lives are not an infallible proof of the Spirit’s presence. Alcoholic’s Anonymous can claim them also, even though they do not operate with the Gospel. And we ought not to forget what St. Paul says about the transformation of Satan into an angel of light and of his servants into ministers of righteousness. When it suits his purpose, the devil “a saint would be.”

Often the demand for complete holiness is coupled with a strange view of sin that smacks strongly of pietism with its distorted concept of wrongdoing. Charles Finney tells of a woman who yearned for the baptism of the Spirit but who did not receive it until she threw away a hair ornament of some kind.

In any case, any view of sin which operates with the concept of perfect sanctification this side of heaven is unbiblical in itself and can only result in a downgrading of the grace of God and will surely issue eventually in Pharisaic pride so that the laziest state of the charismatic is worse than the first. The apostle Paul repeatedly claims that he has a good conscience, that is, he is not conscious of guilt on the basis of his feelings, yet he also speaks of his wretched sinfulness which does not permit him to live the kind of life that he knows he ought to live. When we compare what Paul says with the teachings of Pentecostalism and remember that “if they speak not according to this word, there is no light in them,” we ought not to find it difficult to form a true Biblical judgment of the charismatic movement.

As we said, we cannot judge glossolalia and the healing miracles directly. Without special revelation no man knows enough to speak a final definitive word in regard to those phenomena. But I have never met a charismatic Christian who did not have false views of church fellowship, for example. It is rather evident also that in most cases they have wrong views in regard to the means of grace, that they disparage the importance of doctrine, and that they distort the Biblical teachings of grace and faith. It is on the basis of these things that they must be judged and in these areas we can speak a definitive word, and that definitive word can be summed up in the judgment spoken long ago by Isaiah, “To the law and to the testimony. If they speak not according to this word, there is no light in them.” It is by this standard that we must judge. What they say in English speaks so loudly that all their speaking in tongues cannot drown it out.

Bibliographical Note: An excellent bibliography on the charismatic movement will be found in Frederick Dale Bruner’s book, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, published by William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1970, now available in paperback from NPH.