

The same ambivalence is expressed by outsiders. They see people pray, sing, and read together; they see their happiness, joy and new convictions; but they wonder how real or healthy it is. And since this is all so close, it seems very difficult to find the distance to understand without falling into a fanatic rejection and ridicule on the one hand or an uncritical enthusiasm on the other.

This essay is an attempt to clarify certain issues and to be of some help in an honest evaluation. I will use, besides my own observations and discussions with students, the study by Kilian McDonnell, O.S.B., 'The Ecumenical Significance of the Pentecostal Movement.'¹ I will approach the subject from three perspectives.

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Although Pentecostalism was originally found among people with a low economic status and closely related with the non-liturgical churches (such as the Assembly of God Church), since 1955 a new wave of Pentecostalism has entered the more prosperous communities, inspired many intellectuals, and established itself in such liturgical churches as the Lutheran and Episcopalian.

McDonnell, who studies the rising Pentecostalism with a group of anthropologists, is probably the most informed and knowledgeable theologian in this area. Considering it as 'the fastest growing movement within the Christian tradition'² he asks himself, 'How can the Pentecostals with so few means form such apostolic Christians while our liturgies rich in theological

¹ Kilian McDonnell, O.S.B. 'The Ecumenical Significance of the Pentecostal Movement' (*Worship*, December 1966).

² *ibid.*, p. 609.

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Pentecostalism on Campus

Since the Pentecostal movement has become a vivid reality on some university campuses, many active participants, as well as distant observers, have asked, 'Is this healthy or dangerous, something to be encouraged or something to be avoided?'

Various students who experienced the gift of tongues, who felt the Real Presence of the Holy Spirit and for whom a new world of feelings has opened itself, expressed their change: 'It is a tremendous experience. It is new, unique, full of joy and peace. I am different, that is for sure. Only one who has surrendered can really understand what I am talking about. Many problems I have long been struggling with just seemed to vanish, became like an empty shell falling off. Heavy burdens became feather-light things; hostile attitudes converted to deep sympathy. People whom I once feared are now my friends. Those whom I hated I can love, those who were masters are partners. I know with a deep certainty that God has spoken to me in a new way.'

But sometimes the same students will tell you the other side of their feelings: 'I wonder if it is all real, if it is really me. It is like another world which is not mine; one so overwhelming that it seems unreal. Once in a while, after a prayer meeting when I am by myself, I feel lonely and depressed. Will it last? Perhaps it is just for a short time and then my problems will come back. I wonder if it is really good for me.'

content and tradition fail to communicate the urgency of evangelization to the faithful?' Do our liturgies develop a sense of community? Do they form a congregation which acts, prays, listens, sings and sorrows together, a true community of the redeemed? Have the Roman Catholics become comfortable with the too-of-extended beauties of the Roman Liturgy (sobriety, grandeur, clarity, objectivity, lapidary formulations, fixity of form, supranational appeal – the list reads as though drawn up by an enemy) and failed to notice that, in every liturgical instance and in every cultural context, sobriety and objectivity may not be virtues to emphasize, that grandeur amidst poverty may be an indictment, that supranational appeal may, in fact, be a species of Roman liturgical colonialism?

Pentecostals are in many lands the fastest-growing Christian denomination. Why? 'Undoubtedly the answer involves many factors, but this much we know. Our liturgies have failed.'⁵ And McDonnell even wonders whether 'St Paul would not feel more at home in the free fervour of a Pentecostal meeting than in the organized dullness of our liturgical celebrations.'⁶ There is no doubt about one thing. The rapidly growing interest in the Pentecostal prayer meeting at university-campus reveals an intensive need, a long-hidden frustration which manifests itself in the sudden breakthrough of a form of behaviour which is rather unusual in a student-community.

It is difficult to imagine how a Catholic university looked in the twenties and thirties. About the University of Notre Dame, where John F. O'Hara was the prefect of religion, Joe Hoffman writes: 'O'Hara gave Notre Dame its enormous standing within the Catholic populace of the United States as a place where the solid practice of Catholicism could be found. His goals were

⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 622–623.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 615.

clear-cut and defined: Mass, Communion, frequent confession, devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary. His methods were novenas in preparation for Christmas, Easter, Mother's Day, and exams. There were processions, hours of adoration, the rosary, first Friday devotions, and all of them were popular. Freshmen arriving on campus were immediately indoctrinated into the system. By means of the Religious Bulletin, which was read as much beyond the campus as by the students, O'Hara hammered at students' foibles, suggested means for advancing in the spiritual life, gave timely notice of approaching religious events, commented on the spiritual significance of the news of the day, presented points of character development, gave short instructions on ideals, corrected student abuses, and answered difficulties. It was spiritual reading in tabloid form. O'Hara kept statistics on religious practice, published religious surveys and was keenly aware of the tempo and mentality of the student body. He was extremely successful.⁷

Today the picture is completely different. A university is no longer a place with easygoing students who consider their four years as a relatively relaxed time with abundant opportunity for prayer, sports, social life and extracurricular activities; rather, it is a very ambitious and competitive institution. Today, students often look upon their four years as a race in which only the fittest survive. In the educational revolution of the post-Sputnik era, academic excellence became the key word.

But competition demands a price. Most students take the challenge and are able to utilize the new pressures in a useful and often creative way. But many do not, and instead they often develop an excessive amount of anxiety and tension and experience a painful loneliness which they hide beneath the surface of seemingly well-adjusted behaviour. The university

⁷ Joseph Hoffman, C.S.C., unpublished article.

community now counts hundreds of very lonely men who consider their neighbours more as rivals than as friends. For many, their roommate is a stranger and their classmate a threat. 'Everyone for himself, and God for us all.' That seems most safe. Knowledge becomes a weapon by which you stay in school, avoid the Army, win a fellowship, and make a career. And the Church does not seem to help very much. Going through a time of reevaluation and extreme self-criticism, she offers more questions than answers. Instead of a safe home, she is more a source of deep discomfort for a man who looks for a solid support in a tumbling world.

In this context the Pentecostal movement very well can be understood as a revival, a rekindling of the devotional Church, or the revenge of a repressed sentiment. Everyone who enters a Pentecostal meeting is suddenly confronted with all that seems to be at odds with a 'typical' university student. In the midst of the congregation, students witness how their loneliness and insecurity have been overcome by the gift of the Holy Spirit. One who never had a friend and always felt afraid now feels free to share his deepest thoughts and desires with his fellow man. Long struggles with most embarrassing problems are wiped away by the infusion of God's Spirit. Sadness is changed to joy, restlessness to peace, despair to inner content, and separation to togetherness.

On a campus where people stay relatively distant from each other, the most intimate ideas are shared and the barriers to communication are broken. Where men hardly touch each other, they embrace and hold each other in a free physical contact. They lay hands on each other's shoulders and heads, pray aloud for each other's needs, and let themselves be led by deep spiritual impulses to which they surrender in ecstatic joy and happiness. The new feelings are so great and overpowering that they cannot be caught in human concepts or words, but break

through in ecstatic sounds varying in tone and intensity and expressing a prayer of total surrender and praise, saying with Jeremiah, 'Ah, Lord, I don't know how to speak'. Hands, eyes and mouth express unknown happiness, openness and joy. Young men move up and down in the pleasant rhythm of biblical songs, or are quiet in a long and contemplative silence. So intense is the exchange that many feel a new, warm intensity pervading their whole persons. Their hands radiate new power and a soft and tender breeze touches their skins. Joy and happiness may break through in tears and sweat and the intensity of the prayer may lead to a happy and satisfying experience of physical exhaustion caused by total surrender.

The Spirit has come. He who asks will receive and feel that God is not a strange God. He will taste again His sweetness, hear His internal call, and be able to love Him with his whole person, body and soul, without any reservation.

A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

How can we evaluate this new movement? We can understand it as a revival of the devotional Church and as a reaction of a repressed religious sentiment in a cool and competitive world. But is it healthy or sick? Does it cure or make wounds? It is very difficult to give an outright answer, but perhaps some considerations may be of help.

Does it heal or hurt? There is no doubt that many people who surrendered to this experience get a tremendous and often very sudden relief from their mental and spiritual pains. Problems they have been struggling with for years are wiped away in a moment and lose their unbearable weight. The questions are: Are they cured or covered? Is the real human conflict resolved or 'snowed under' by the overwhelming power of a new experience?

We know that electroshock, an artificially induced emotional experience, can cover a depression for many years but does not cure it. It may make us forget our problems for some years, but, in fact, it delays the process of cure by not using the human qualities to heal. One might wonder if the miraculous effect of the Pentecostal experience is not in a certain way like a shock treatment. If a young man or woman suddenly feels redeemed from deep mental suffering, they might, in fact, paralyze their internal human ability to overcome their problem, and when the pains recur later on they might be more discouraged than before.

If we use sleeping pills, we certainly will fall asleep but, at the same time, we can kill our own capacities to find physical rest and become quite dependent on these external forces. And, if the Pentecostal experience in many cases gives this sudden freedom, sudden friendship, sudden happiness and joy, we might prevent the gradual development of our internal capacities to develop meaningful, lasting friendships, to enjoy happiness, and to tolerate frustrations. Many people who have had deep, internal religious experiences (during retreats, cursillos, novitiates, etc.) all can witness to the fact that they relieved many pains for a while, but that the real test came later when there were no feelings to depend on, no experiences to count on. The task lies in the desert where God is not feelable and naked faith is all we have.

The Pentecostal experience might take away (even permanently) certain real problems, but it is very doubtful that it will cure deep mental suffering. It might only cover it up and delay the attempt for a real cure.

Can it be dangerous? For many people, perhaps even for most, it hardly seems to be dangerous. It might be even beneficial to a certain extent, especially for those who through retreats, cursillos and other religious practices have become exposed to the

inner feelings that are in line with the Pentecostal experience. But for some it is dangerous - very dangerous.

First of all, for those who are not prepared, every inducement of a strong emotion can break and do serious harm. The Christian tradition has been deeply convinced of the importance of preparation. Christ did not come to this world before a long preparation of His people. We do not celebrate Christmas without Advent, nor Easter without Lent. And St Paul distinguishes between Christians who still need spiritual milk and those who are ready for solid food. The whole mystical tradition stresses the need for purification in order to enter into intimacy with God and the danger of unprepared exposure to divine powers.

Several students showed remarkable signs of anxiety and confusion. They were so overwhelmed by these new feelings that they lost their hold on reality. They found they could no longer study nor concentrate on their daily work; they felt a pushing urge to share with others. In some cases, physical and mental exhaustion were visible, and people felt on the edge of a physical or mental breakdown. This is dangerous and may lead to psychotic reaction, which needs hospitalization and special psychiatric help in order to be cured. These are exceptional cases, but still no less a source of concern.

Secondly, there are those who strongly desire to have the gifts of the Spirit but do not feel able to come to the real experience. They wonder why others are so happy, and they are not; why others can speak in tongues and they cannot; why others feel free to embrace each other, and they do not. More than ever before, they feel like outsiders or even outcasts. And they wonder, 'What is wrong with me that I do not receive the gifts?' Feelings of guilt and depression can result from this, and many may feel more lonely than before. For those who ask but do not receive, the Pentecostal movement can create real dangers.

There is a heavy responsibility on the leaders of the movement. Emotion, and certainly religious emotions, need careful direction, careful guidance, and careful care.

Does it create community? Who could deny this? The free and easy way in which the participants relate to each other, talk, sing and pray together should convince everybody that here a real, new community is formed. Still there are some questions here. By suddenly breaking through the barriers of shyness and distance, many have given away their privacy. Many have shown their deepest self to their fellow man and laid themselves open for the other. They have stripped themselves of their reservations and inhibitions and have shared their most intimate feelings, ideas and thoughts with others. In a way they have merged their personality with their friends and given up their otherness.

But, is this real community? One who has given away so much of himself creates an unquenchable need to be constantly together with the other to whom he has given himself, in order to feel a whole person. Many students who actively participated in the prayer meetings felt terribly lonely during the vacation and felt a deep urge and desire to be with their friends again. Instead of creating the freedom to leave the group and to go out and work, many want to remain in the safe protection of the togetherness where they can really feel at home.

The lack of distance and the stress on intimacy make the creative community hardly possible. A good liturgy should always be characterized by a subtle balance between closeness and distance. It should offer different modes and levels of participation and many ways of religious experience. Perhaps it seldom did before and is only thought of as a distant, cool reality. But in the Pentecostal movement on campus, closeness has become so central that there is little room left for those who want to retain some distance and keep an intimacy for themselves.

In this context the danger is real that the Pentecostal movement creates a situation in which there is a growing desire to reinforce the feelings of oneness and togetherness, which makes the community highly self-centred and hinders the development of the autonomous Christian who does not depend on the other to feel his own commitments. A real community is for stretching out. The Pentecostal community tends to be bent over inwards, and, without so wanting or aspiring, to become an in-group, developing the idea of a spiritual elite (as the *curisillo* did) with a subtle handling of the terms 'we' and 'they'.

Are the prayer meetings all spontaneous? The informal, somewhat casual character of the Pentecostal meetings suggests that the real leadership is given to the Holy Spirit. But on closer observation, the meetings are found to be much more organized. There is a certain programme that reappears in most Pentecostal meetings: First, witnesses, songs, readings, which prepare for the baptism of the Spirit. Then there is some time allotted for free conversation in which people share their experiences. Finally, after offering more prayers, songs and readings, the laying on of the hands takes place, leading to a climax in the speaking in tongues and the praising of the Lord in ecstatic forms of happiness and joy. This all could not take place without strong and very influential leaders.

But here a new question arises. Who accepts responsibility or authority? The 'leaders' refer immediately to the Spirit as the great leader. To the question 'Can't the experience be very dangerous for some people?' they would reply, 'The Holy Spirit cannot do dangerous things. He is a healing force.' In this way the 'leaders' refuse explicit leadership, responsibility and authority, confiding in the immediate intervention of God. But in so doing they tend to neglect a definite responsibility, not only in terms of preparation and the actual event but also in terms of the long-range consequences that these experiences will have on the

ongoing development of the spiritual life of the people involved.

A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

An active participant of the Pentecostal movement will probably pay very little attention to a psychological approach to his experience. He might even feel psychology to be a hindrance to the free movements of the Spirit.

But this immediately raises the question of the theological significance of the Pentecostal movement. Most remarkable is the conviction of the immediate intervention of the Holy Spirit in human life. During the meetings the 'leaders' often explain how he who is willing to surrender and ask for God's coming will experience the eruption of the Spirit in this human world and allow Him to take over the initiative. 'Pentecostalism was, and to a degree remains, more a movement than a church,' McDonnell has said.⁶ We cannot speak about a Pentecostal doctrine, and perhaps it is for this reason that Pentecostalism so easily becomes a part of different religious institutions to which it adapts itself quite easily. For entering the Catholic Church, Pentecostalism could establish contact at the sacramental level by showing 'the relation of the sacramental life to personal holiness and practical piety'.⁷

It is, therefore, understandable that Pentecostalism brings people back to their religious practices. Often students who did not 'practise their religion' return to confession, Communion, and their lost devotion to Our Lady and the rosary. In no way does Pentecostalism seem to threaten the Catholic orthodoxy.

⁶ Kilian McDonnell, O.S.B., *op. cit.*, p. 623.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 621.

The opposite seems true. In the eyes of many, it seems to point to a reinforcing of the basic Roman Catholic doctrines and beliefs.

But it is exactly here where many theologians raise questions. For, while not denying any Catholic doctrine or practice, the Pentecostals within the Catholic Church act in a way which does not take into account the major development of the recent renewal in Catholic theology. A deeper understanding of the incarnation leads to a rethinking of the humanity of God. More and more it has become clear that God reveals Himself to man through man and his world and that a deeper understanding of human behaviour leads us to a deeper understanding of God.

The new insights of psychology, sociology, anthropology and so forth are no longer feared as possible threats to the supernatural God, but more as an invitation to theological reflection on the new insights and understandings. Vatican II strongly supported this humanization of the Church, and the new theology was a great encouragement to mobilize all the human potentialities in the different levels of human life as being the most authentic way to understand the voice of God to His people. The new theology was 'discovered' by a deeper understanding of the createdness of the world, by discerning that there is a task of Christian secularization. It was exactly this that the first Christians did: demythologize Caesar and the State. The more we make the world what it ought to be, a created reality with tremendous potentialities for growth, the more this world calls for Him, who is Uncreated. And in this sense secularization is possible only by faith.

In the perspective of this trend in theology, which also encourages more social action and 'worldly' involvement, the Pentecostal trend seems a step back. It calls for God's immediate intercession outside the human potentials. In a way it seems that God does not use man, unless as a passive instrument

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which is the victim of the struggle between demonic and divine forces. The devil is an alien power invading man, and so is the Spirit. The question then becomes, 'Who is possessing me?' But possession, good or evil, remains a passive state; it does not give full credit to the basic Christian idea that we are created to create, and to realize our deepest human potentialities in the service of our fellow men, in the love of whom we discover the Spirit of God.

Having discussed the Pentecostal movement as a revival of the devotional Church, as a religious reaction to a world with a heavy stress on achievement, and as raising many psychological and theological questions, the critical tone might have overshadowed a deeper concern about a valid religious experience. We might have overlooked that in one way the Pentecostal movement is an invitation to a deeper search. It made God a living God, a real experience, an actual event. Whereas the whole field of theological education is desperately looking for ways to bring theology from 'brain level to guts level', the Pentecostals certainly do it. And it is no surprise that many envy those who experience the presence of God as an undeniable reality. Is it not just this that all the forms of renewal (liturgical, social, clerical, etc.) are trying to do - make religious life something vibrant, a living source of constant inspiration?

The new wave of Pentecostalism on campus obviously answers a burning need in many students. It worries many who are concerned about the effects on the mental health of some of the participants, it places a heavy responsibility on the leaders of the movement, and it disturbs many theologians; but it also offers a chance to come to a new realization of the crucial importance of valid religious experience as an authentic part of the Christian life. It would be a pity if we missed this chance by a hasty judgment and an intolerant condemnation.

Intimacy and Community

