

## The Charismatics

Ours is an age of change. Never before in the history of mankind have there been so many scientific, political, social and technological developments – the atom bomb, space travel and computer science. But all the latest gadgets, the increased wealth and material benefits have not met man's spiritual needs. Despite the awesome influence of secularism the heart still yearns for the spiritual,

Since World War II, it has become increasingly evident that moral deterioration instead of improvement seems to mark our times. The rapid increase in crime, divorce, youth delinquencies, exploitation of sex and drug abuse has spread like cancer through our society. It has become plain for many that man cannot solve his own problems. Where are the answers? Where can mankind find hope and security? The churches have often failed to present a clear message. Liberalism undermined many seminaries and pulpits. Restless hearts seek peace. The spirit longs for God. The empty heart wants an experience with the divine.

In this spiritual vacuum the doctrine of the Holy Spirit witnessed an amazing revival. And Pentecostalism and the contemporary charismatic movement are here to stay. Worldwide their growth has been dramatic. Indigenous Pentecostal and charismatic churches in Africa and South America have shown phenomenal growth. A 1979 Gallup poll showed that in the USA, 19% - or 29 million – adults considered themselves "Pentecostals or charismatic Christians." Peter Wagner, Professor of church growth at Fuller Theological Seminary, estimates their worldwide membership at 178 million. He claims: "The majority of new churches established in the 1980s that have grown to at least a thousand within two years are almost exclusively Pentecostal or charismatic.

Yet not one aspect of Biblical truth is so misunderstood as the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Endless confusion reigns. Differences of interpretation have brought heartache and divisions within churches and even families. The contemporary charismatic movement is far from unified; it shows a vast and even a bewildering variety of belief and practice. Within it are found Roman Catholics, Wesleyans, Unitarian Universalists and Reformed

The various shades of charismatics tend to unduly concentrate on certain gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues (glossolalia), prophesying, healing and even wealth by some; while the less spectacular gifts, such as administration, helping, serving and giving are played down (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:28). The fruit of the Spirit seems to receive even less attention.

Is all the supernatural drama a display of God's power and a boost for evangelism and missions? Satan is able to counterfeit both the gifts of healing and the tongue speaking. Both of these phenomena are found in indigenous religions in Latin America and Africa. Tongue speaking occurs among Mormons as well as the Muslims. Faith healing is also known in Tibetan Buddhism. The history of Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement has given rise to emotionalism, and excesses of various sorts which have not benefited the spread of the Gospel.

## **Their Roots**

Why glossolalia and other supernatural gifts now? Were Christians of previous generations without spiritual power? Between the first and the nineteenth centuries, glossolalia seldom occurred. The church father Chrysostom (c.344/354-407) already declared that there was no tongue speaking in his time. This should give glossolalia propagandists food for thought.

Historians trace the origin of Pentecostalism to the social and cultural crises of the late 19th century. Pentecostalism emerged as the religion of the poor, who practiced simple virtues and proclaimed "the old-fashioned gospel." It developed outside the mainstream of Protestantism. Yet by 1960 it had a worldwide membership of eight million. At that time it began to be called the "third force" in Christendom. Rev. Dennis Bennett, rector of St. Mark's Episcopal Church, van Nuys, California, received a Pentecostal experience in 1959. After this event a remarkable change took place in the history of Pentecostalism. As John Sherill says in his book *They Speak With Other Tongues*, "The walls came tumbling down." Thousands from mainline churches transcended denominational boundaries and became part of the neo-Pentecostal or charismatic movement. The Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship provided a bridge linking the older and the new form of Pentecostalism. As the emphasis on the supernatural gifts became gradually more accepted to people in mainline denominations, it consequently made an impact upon the more affluent and educated. Interestingly, this was also the time when Norman Vincent Peale's "positive thinking" and Robert Schuller's "possibility thinking" attracted a wide following. Though neither one is charismatic, their upbeat message took the US by storm.

Charismatic leaders have predicted that we are now on the thresh-hold of the greatest religious revival the world has ever known. Charismatics are joining hands and hearts with like-minded in other denominations. They often feel that they have more in common with charismatics in other denominations than with non-charismatics in their own churches. This ecumenical spirit was evident at the second "Holy Spirit Conference to the Reformed Faith," where Rev. David Mainse, an ordained Pentecostal minister, founder and host of the daily television broadcast "100 Huntley Street," was the morning speaker. At that conference a number of delegates spoke in tongues and several testified "to experiencing healing of physical ailments."

Also See: *The Roman Catholic Charismatics*

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