

THE PROBLEM WITH PENTECOSTALISM

By Denver Cheddie

I am Pentecostal in theology. Make absolutely no mistake about that. I also know many Pentecostal pastors who are genuine and sincere men of God, hard workers who make tremendous sacrifices for the kingdom of God. The problem really lies with the excesses of a minority of celebrity pastors, evangelists, musicians and others, and to a deeper extent with the mentality of the majority of those who constitute Pentecostal congregations. There are many who will take issue with what is written in this article, however I offer no apology. Anyone who has a problem with that could just double click their way to another website and close their eyes to the truth. I write this article not to criticize but to provoke. My sincere desire is to see reform in the Pentecostal church. But reform from what?

Desire for the Extraordinary

The many problems associated with fringe charismatic groups stem from one root – ***a lust for the sensational***. Biblical truth is not enough for the typical Pentecostal. There must be more. As a result they are always looking for something new. They care little about doctrine, proper exegesis or biblical integrity – these are just not spiritual enough. They want anointing, power, visions, revelations – or any semblance of such – genuine or fake. I think Eve was the first Pentecostal.

Just recently in Trinidad (2000), a particular minister was being heralded from the most renowned pulpits in the country. He had allegedly inherited a multi-billion dollar fortune, and had promised to give financially to churches. As a result some pastors were giving assurances that "there would be no more poor people in Trinidad", and "When the Hindus see how much money there is in Christ, they would not be able to remain Hindu". When I first heard of him, the very first thought that entered my sceptical mind was "What is this guy really up to?" Time would authenticate my suspicions. Pastor "Kitty" subsequently lured some of the more affluent members of other churches, and formed his own congregation of "elites". Nothing ever materialized of his alleged fortune. He eventually spent some time in jail and is awaiting trial for fraud.

Why do these things happen to Pentecostals over and over again? Aren't they supposed to be the discerning ones? The truth is that they are so naïve and backward, that any charlatan could utter bombastic claims, and they would accept it without checking the facts and scrutinizing the whole story.

Don't Question Me

Pentecostals believe that it is rebellious to question the teachings and practices of authority figures. Pentecostals are taught not to question. To rationalize is to make rational lies. It is contrary to "faith". Once I lent a copy of Hank Hanegraaff's *Christianity in Crisis* to a believer, and I would recommend that book to any serious Christian. She later said that the Holy Ghost told her not to read that book. They would vehemently defend their pet preachers - whether they're right or wrong - but scantily vie for the Word

of God. How I admire the zeal of the typical Pentecostal but how I wish that same zeal could be redirected to contending for the faith instead of defending the often indefensible.

As a result pastors who think they are prophets can proliferate a plethora of false prophecies, and never be branded as false prophets. "Don't touch God's anointed." Quite frankly, as long as they have stupid people following them to the death and paying their salary, they could get away with anything. I think it is imperative for some pastors to keep their people in ignorance, so they will always maintain a following. They want to be a big fish in a small pond, but not a small fish in a big pond. They would rather be sung heroes among their own, than faceless and nameless servants of Christ content to await their full reward in heaven.

More Anointing Please!

Have you ever wondered why Pentecostal preachers can't just say what they have to say without the fanfare and commotion? The answer is that preaching must be done in an anointed manner, ***or at least perceived to be so***. Someone could expound the Word of God eloquently and perspicuously, he would receive economical applause. If he wants to improve the response of the crowd, all he has to do is put a little whimper in his voice and throw in a catchy punch line every here and there. A little rattle and roll on strategic words and phrases would generate an even more rapturous ovation. And if he jumps a little, runs around the stage (as

opposed to altar), or climbs on a chair while preaching, he would just bring the house down.

Pentecostals don't know the difference between anointing and crowd control. They can't differentiate between the presence of God and goose bumps. Hence they would always be prey to any preacher who can pull out of his hat all the slick gimmicks and frantic antics necessary to promulgate himself as a genuine man of God. From my experience, people pay more regard to personalities and celebrities than to the content of their message. The mere presence of a big shot preacher or singer is sufficient to bring the best out of a crowd. And they call it anointing.

Because Pentecostals are always seeking the sensational, the most absurd "moves of God" are wrought in their churches. Meetings where people roll on the carpet, laugh uncontrollably, and even squeal like pigs are now being branded as genuine revivals. What once prompted Jesus to cast out a devil (Mark 9:20,26), is now being foisted as a genuine manifestation of God's Spirit. There are some preachers who, in their honest moments have their misgivings, but just want so badly to believe these things are of God. They can't afford not to. To do otherwise is to surrender the sensationalism they so avidly crave.

Anyone can fake a few miracles as long as they have the right disclaimers to bail them out at the right time. So many preachers claim the power to heal, yet so few **genuine** miracles take place. They will passionately pray for someone, then ask one-ended questions like "How do you feel now?" What

do you expect them to say? "Worse"? Of course they will SAY they feel better. Then tears of joy will begin to roll down the cheeks of the credulous.

No one has a greater propensity for exaggeration than a Pentecostal preacher. "We had a great time in God's presence. Thousands of people were healed." Even though only hundreds were present. So where is the evidence of all this healing? People are urged not to go back by doctors to confirm their healing since this would indicate doubt, and they would lose their healing. And what if they do "lose their healing"? "Well we already have this covered. Just say they allowed unbelief to enter." That's their escape hatch.

Conclusion

It is true that a lot of what I wrote is not true of all Pentecostals, they do apply to a few celebrity preachers and to those who aspire to be like them. The even greater problem, however, is the gullibility of their followers. It is ironic that in a movement where the power of God is so emphasized, that laymen are so emasculated of the power to think for themselves, and to rationally search truth for themselves. My desire is to see such reform in the Pentecostal church.

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