

# The Pentecostal Reality

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## Chapter 2: The Event of the Holy Spirit

There are millions of people today who lay claim to “Pentecostal experience.” They belong not only to churches called Pentecostal, but also are found in many of the traditional churches of Protestantism and in Roman Catholicism. A movement that began in the early twentieth century has now become worldwide, and thus a matter of high ecumenical significance. Herein I shall attempt to describe the focal point of Pentecostal witness, namely, the event of the Holy Spirit, and its relationship to the thought and life of the larger church.

Much may be said about the Pentecostal witness in such terms as fullness of prayer and praise, multiplication of charismatic activity, and bold witness to the Gospel, but behind all of these is testimony to an event. There was a time before; then occurred a certain event; afterward the world of the Spirit opened up. It is this special event, the event of the Holy Spirit, that now calls for careful consideration.

The expression most frequently used for this event or happening is “baptism with [or ‘in’] the Holy Spirit.” This refers to something that has occurred in one’s own life and experience, and is the door into the new fullness of life in the Spirit.

The word “baptism” is quite expressive because of its connotation of totality. To be baptized can signify an experience of being inundated by, submerged in, or pervaded with some reality. This is well illustrated in water baptism where modes of practice vary from a pouring or sprinkling to immersion, each in its own way conveying a

picture of totality. "Baptism with the Spirit" points to a whelming of the person -- an event wherein man in his conscious and subconscious existence is penetrated by the Spirit of God. No level of human existence is unaffected by this divine activity.

This "baptism with the Holy Spirit," however, is not a happening in which the person is so possessed by God that he loses his own identity. Nor is the Spirit's movement an invasion wherein the self becomes subjugated and coerced into a divine pattern of activity, so that the sole actor thereafter is God. Much less is it a pantheistic absorption into deity, or a sudden transportation out of this world into another realm. "Baptism" is not subjugation, or absorption, or translation, but the actualization of a dynamic whereby the whole person is energized to fulfill new possibilities. This fulfillment does have aspects previously unknown and unrealized (for example, the *charismata*, or "gifts of the Spirit"), since the divine Spirit is moving powerfully through the free human spirit. But at no point is there the setting aside of human activity. Indeed, quite the opposite, for it is only as the Spirit of God blows upon the human spirit that there is the release of man for fuller freedom and responsibility.

Again, this "baptism with the Holy Spirit" is not a kind of "instant sanctification." If the Spirit of God really possesses human existence, one might wonder if this does not imply that man is thereby made perfectly holy. If such were the implication, many questions would be in order: Do we see actual evidences of this holiness among those who claim such an experience?; Is there any biblical basis to support a view of immediate sanctification?; Does not the whole idea overlook the empirical fact of all men's

continuing sinfulness? Thus it is important to recognize that "baptism with the Spirit" as such has nothing to do with holiness of character, but with penetration of life. The effect is not a certain quality of existence but a way of life in which one is open to the Spirit's activity. Therefore rather than sudden holiness, the actual situation is that as the Spirit of God lays complete claim upon a person, he begins to see not his holiness but the depths of his sinful condition. The event of the Spirit does give power for more adequate dealing with human perversity; consequently, there should be progress in sanctification. But the "baptism with the Spirit" is not in itself the accomplishment of that end.

Another expression frequently used, in addition to "baptism with the Holy Spirit," is "filled with the Holy Spirit." This may refer likewise to the event of entrance into Pentecostal life and experience. The word "filled" -- or "full" -- has the advantage of expressing totality even more markedly than the word "baptism." When a person, for example, is said to be "filled with joy," everyone understands this as referring to the whole self. Such a one is rejoicing with all of his being -- body, mind, spirit. Even so, to be "filled with the Spirit" is to express the situation in which the whole of human existence is activated by the divine reality.

The word "filled" also expresses with particular force the background for the operation of spiritual gifts. Because one is "filled with the Spirit," charismatic manifestations may occur. They are obvious signs and indications of Spirit-filled existence. The supernatural becomes, so to speak, natural and normal in the context of a life open to the Spirit's activity.

Other terms used for the event of the Spirit include such words as “effusion,” “outpouring,” even the “falling” of the Holy Spirit. Or this event may be referred to as simply the “coming” of the Spirit. The impression given by this variety of terms, in addition to totality, is forcefulness. The Spirit comes from without and with mighty impact. The event of the Spirit is no gradual, passive thing, but a decisive endowment of power and energy. When the Spirit is “poured out” or “falls,” life can never be quite the same again.

Whatever the expression -- “baptism,” “filling,” “outpouring” or otherwise -- reference is thereby made to a dynamic movement of the Holy Spirit which results in a new sense of God’s presence and power, various charismata becoming manifest, and the emergence of a different style of life. These things are possible only through the event of the Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

What now are some of the aspects of the situation in which this event of the Holy Spirit happens? First, everything centers in Jesus Christ: He is the one who “baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” There is no Spirit baptism without the direct activity of Jesus Christ. It is Christ the Crucified, Risen, and Exalted Lord who pours forth the Holy Spirit. However much one may rightly stress the activity of the Holy Spirit, this is not a “pneumacentric” but a “Christocentric” event. It is not the Spirit who does the baptizing, but Christ Himself. Accordingly, this understanding of the event of the Spirit is quite different

from any so-called Spirit movement that tends to disregard the work of the historic Christ, or that seeks for spiritual reality in a direct, unmediated relationship with God. God the Father is the ultimate source, but it is through Jesus Christ the Lord that the Holy Spirit is given.

Second, “Pentecost,” while referring to a past event (narrated in Acts 2), is likewise a present experience. The event was, and is, two-sided: Christ the Lord on the one hand, and those who are “baptized” on the other. Hence, Pentecost represents more than a once-for-all incident in the life of the early church. The Spirit was not poured out upon the community of faith on that first day to remain therein until the end of time. Such a view fails to understand Pentecost as both past and present, and leaves little room or expectation for the reality to occur among people now. If the event is to take place today, there must be the recognition of its continuing possibility.

Third, this event occurs within the arena of faith. Faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is the essential precondition; only those who so believe may share in the Pentecostal reality. However, the event itself is not always coincidental with the inception of faith; it may occur then or at a later time. In fact many would testify to “baptism with the Spirit” as happening somewhere along the way of faith, not at the beginning. Others would attest that this experience occurred at the first moment of faith. But the usual witness is the former, namely, that there had been belief for some time before the Pentecostal event took place. In either case faith remains the context for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, the event of the Spirit cannot be simply

<sup>1</sup> Fr. Kilian McDonnell writes that “the issue in Pentecostalism is not tongues, but fullness of life in the Holy Spirit, openness to the power of the Spirit, and the exercise of all the gifts of the Spirit.” *Catholic Pentecostalism: Problems in Evaluation*, “ p. 9.

patterned or programmed. The original Pentecost came about suddenly, and there remains an element of surprise in its occurrence. God the Holy Spirit acts in sovereign unpredictability and His ways cannot be computerized. On the human side there is also a wide range of spiritual susceptibility, so that not everyone is ready at the same time for the operations of God to occur. There may be an unwillingness to surrender oneself to the Spirit, an unreadiness to let the barriers drop, a holding in reserve certain areas of the personality. But when something inside finally gives way, the Pentecostal event may happen. Prayer, earnest and continuing, is often the background for the occurrence of “baptism with the Spirit.” Commonly the matrix for the event of the Spirit is an attitude of openness and expectancy, of acknowledged spiritual hunger and thirst. None of this, however, is a way of achieving or earning the Spirit, for the Holy Spirit comes as an act of God’s grace. The element of spontaneity, unpredictability, surprise remains throughout; for it is with God’s gracious and free Spirit that man has to do.

Fifth, the event of the Spirit is basically a community happening. It often comes about when people are gathered for worship and fellowship; especially at a time of praise there may be the breakthrough of a new dimension of God’s activity and power. Those present may not be seeking this “baptism,” as such, nor others directly ministering to them; but the atmosphere may become so filled with the Spirit of God that miraculous things occur. Manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12-14) may become the occasion for the event of the Spirit. At such a gathering there is often the personal ministry of the community, either through a few persons or an individual, for those who admit their need. Sometimes this ministry is accompanied

by the laying on of hands for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Whether the moving of the Spirit happens when one is in the company of others or alone, there remains the sense of the community participating in the event.

A concluding word: In the event of the Holy Spirit there is both a giving and a receiving. The expression, “the gift of the Holy Spirit,” may be used to speak of the divine side of the event; the “receiving of the Holy Spirit,” to express the human side of accepting the gift. The event of the Spirit is altogether God’s gracious doing; man earns nothing, adds nothing, he merely receives. Consequently, there are no conditions or requirements to be met, no stairs to climb or hoops to jump through, but simply the reception of a freely offered gift. Still, without receiving, the gift remains afar. “Baptism with the Holy Spirit” is an occasion of both giving and receiving; and it has been so since the first Pentecost.

Now it is time to focus on the radicalism of the Pentecostal witness. By “radicalism” is first meant the root (*radix*) of a certain reality that has come to be experienced. The person of Pentecostal experience does not begin with a theology about the Holy Spirit, not even a biblical teaching as such, but with something that has happened in his life. He doubtless has heard about the Holy Spirit, possibly even theologized thereabout, and he may have had some or much biblical acquaintance -- and all of this will surely feed into his experience -- but the Pentecostal is essentially talking about something that is deeply existential.<sup>2</sup> Hence the

<sup>2</sup> Larry Christenson writes in his *Speaking in Tongues*, “There is a sound theology for the baptism with the Holy Spirit. But the baptism with the Holy Spirit is not a theology to be discussed and analyzed. It is an experience one enters into” (p. 40).

expressions used thus far -- “baptism,” “filling,” “gift,” “reception,” and others -- though biblical, are not primarily understood by exegeting certain texts. Rather, these terms are helpful ways of defining what has occurred. Others may wonder why the Pentecostal witness makes so much use of this kind of language (for example, the psychologist who may look for more human explanations than “Holy Spirit baptism” or the biblical scholar who may question if certain scriptural terminology is being used properly). Nonetheless, the person of Pentecostal experience finds in such language the biblical way of expressing what has taken place in his life. Until some better way comes along of saying what has happened, he will doubtless continue to talk about “baptism with the Holy Spirit,” and the like. What else conveys with such force a reality that has gripped his existence?

But “radicalism” also means something drastic, a position or view that is not held in the same way by others, and thus considered to be extreme. In this sense there is something radical about the Pentecostal position, if for no other reason than that most people talk little about such matters as “the event of the Spirit” and “baptism with the Spirit.” They will speak, for example, of the Spirit’s work in inspiring Scripture, in convicting of sin, in enabling faith in Jesus Christ, and in sanctification; but generally they do not recognize this event of the Spirit except as an incident that happened at Pentecost long ago. Many presume to know at least about baptism, but usually this is baptism in water with almost no thought about “baptism with the Spirit.” Who talks about “baptism in the Spirit,” they may inquire, except Pentecostals? Thus there seems to be something radical sounding, possibly sectarian, in the Pentecostal testimony.

From the perspective of much traditional

Christianity there is a strangeness about the whole area of the Holy Spirit. Talk about the Holy Spirit is not common, especially in Western Christendom. Neither Protestants nor Roman Catholics generally feel comfortable when they encounter the frequent use of Holy Spirit language in Pentecostal witness; the first reaction is often one of defensiveness and perhaps a repetition of traditional views. The strangeness, however, may not be the fault of the Pentecostal, but of a deficiency and neglect on the part of the church at large.<sup>3</sup>

Christendom has actually never dealt adequately with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Trinitarian and Christological issues were at the forefront in the days of the early ecumenical councils, but the pneumatological question was always incidental. The Reformation, with its focus on the issue of salvation, particularly justification, by no means satisfactorily treated pneumatology. On the left of Roman Catholicism and classical Protestantism, spiritualist and enthusiastic movements have at times arisen as an attempted

3 The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches at its meeting in August, 1971 (see *Faith and Order: Louvain 1971*), approved a document on “Spirit, Order and Organization” that includes the following pertinent statements: “The emergence and growth of Independent Churches in Africa, of Pentecostal Churches and of Pentecostalism within the established Churches could point to some deficiency of traditional Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Theology and practice of these Churches has to a large extent neglected the Holy Spirit, except for some standard affirmations about his continuing presence.... The doctrine of the Holy Spirit and even more the sensitivity to his active presence in the Church and the world were and still are underdeveloped in the western tradition of Christianity” (pp. 117, 131-132). Also an excerpt from the document adopted on “Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist” may be noted: “The development of Pentecostal movements reminds the historic Churches how much they have neglected life in the Spirit” (p. 41).

corrective, but these have tended to slip away from a Christological center. As a result Christendom has suffered from lack of an adequate pneumatology that does not sacrifice the great gains in Trinitarian, Christological, and soteriological understanding. There has been a tendency to subsume the person and work of the Holy Spirit under that of Christ with the result that the church has been able to find little place for the special operation of the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> The Holy Spirit has been recognized as fully God, third person in the Trinity, but His particular field of activity has not stood out with sufficient clarity.

Most of Western Christendom, furthermore, speaks seldom of the Holy Spirit's coming to the life of man. There is a mystical tradition, more in Catholicism than in Protestantism, but it tends to stress the elevation of man to God rather than the descent of God in the Spirit to man. Also there is generally strong resistance to any idea of ordinary human beings participating in the activity of God. Here the Eastern Church, with its sense of divine immanence and view of the Incarnation as making man partaker of the divine nature, may be more congenial than the Western tradition with the Pentecostal stress on the coming and activity of the Spirit.

The usual Protestant objection to the Pentecostal witness is that it does not represent an improvement or corrective in the area of the Holy Spirit but a distortion -- a shifting away from a soteriological ("salvation history") to a pneumatic orientation. This stress on the Holy Spirit and His activity is viewed as detracting from the centrality of Christ and His saving work. Such emphasis seems to

provide a different focus -- not salvation but "baptism with the Holy Spirit" -- thereby subverting both Bible and Christian faith.

Thus Protestant reading of the New Testament rarely makes room for a special event of the Holy Spirit. Moreover there is largely silence in the confessions of the churches, and among the theologians this subject is seldom treated. If an interpretation of such an expression as "baptism with the Holy Spirit" is attempted, it is usually identified with God's work of regeneration. It is often viewed as the inner side of baptism with water, namely, that even as water symbolizes outer cleansing, "baptism with the Spirit" refers to inward purification. Thus the event of the Spirit becomes the cleansing of the old, the birth of the new, the marvel of regeneration. Hence this activity of the Spirit is understood as making efficacious the redemptive work of Christ by applying it to the individual; it is the subjective side of salvation. Accordingly, "baptism with the Spirit" is viewed as the beginning of Christian initiation. It is assumed that the event of the Spirit is nothing other than the coming to birth of the new man in Christ. There is little recognition of "baptism with the Spirit" as referring to a further action of God which is the particular work of the Holy Spirit.

To reply: One may express agreement about the role of the Holy Spirit in the origination of Christian life and about the activity of the Holy Spirit in sanctification, but this is not the whole picture. First, as earlier noted, something has happened in the lives of many people for which the Protestant explanation is not satisfactory. They have known an experience of the Spirit's power and presence that cannot be identified with initiation of new life in Christ but only with a movement of the Holy Spirit

<sup>4</sup> See my book, *The Era of the Spirit*, p. 53, text and footnote, for brief delineation.

whereby a further dimension opens up. Neither can this experience be compared with sanctification, the life of growth in holiness, since it rather has the character of empowering event. Second, this Pentecostal understanding of a special event of the Spirit is actually more in line with the essential biblical witness than is traditional Protestant interpretation. The general Protestant viewpoint does justice neither to personal experience nor to all the data in Scripture.

Since this latter point is crucial for Protestants with a long emphasis on *sola Scriptura*, it is important to set forth some biblical justification. First of all, there was an event of the Spirit, according to Acts 2:1-4, which was neither related to the beginning of Christian faith nor to some aspect of sanctification. Those “baptized with the Holy Spirit,” or “filled with the Holy Spirit,” on the Day of Pentecost were already believers, and what happened to them was not a “making holy.” Rather here was a new dimension of the Spirit’s activity in relation to persons within the community of faith. The important thing was the new dimension -- not some result such as regeneration or sanctification -- the dimension of spiritual fullness. Out of this fullness came an overflow of praise in tongues (2:4-13), of witness to the gospel (2:14-36), the salvation of thousands (2:37-41), and the life of the first Christian community (2:42-47). The Pentecostal reality was therefore none of these latter things, wonderful as they were, but the “baptizing,” the “filling,” the empowering of those who believed in order that these results might abundantly follow. If that is what the event of Spirit baptism meant for Jesus’ disciples on the Day of Pentecost, why should we view it otherwise in our day?

Second, despite linguistic and situational differences,

several further accounts in Acts provide evidence of an event of the Spirit not identified with the initiation of faith and salvation. The narrative in Acts 8 tells of a group of people, Samaritans, who came to faith in Jesus Christ and were baptized in His name (8:4-13); however, it was not until some days later, following the laying on of hands by Peter and John, that the Holy Spirit fell upon these new believers (8:14-17). Acts 9, the first account of Paul’s conversion, depicts an original crisis moment when there was recognition of Jesus as Lord (9:1-8), but it was three days before Ananias laid hands on Saul of Tarsus, and he was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (9:9-19). According to Acts 19, Paul asked the question of some dozen Ephesians, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” (19:2), implying that faith or belief is not necessarily accompanied by the reception of the Holy Spirit. Shortly thereafter, upon their profession of faith in Christ and baptism in His name, and as a separate act, Paul laid hands upon the Ephesians for them to receive the Holy Spirit (19:3-6). Though none of these are “Pentecostal” occurrences in the sense of happening on the Day of Pentecost, the pattern is essentially the same: the gift of the Holy Spirit subsequent to the initiation of faith, thus something happening to believers. The purpose would seem identical to that of the original Pentecostal event: that the Samaritans, Paul, and the Ephesians might be empowered for the sake of the gospel. So in the record of Acts there is a continuation of the first Pentecost and, it might be added, further basis for what has happened in the lives of many today.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> No attempt is made above to go beyond the record in Acts. However, Acts is the only description in the New Testament of the origination of Christian communities and of the complexities and variations of the relationship between faith in Christ and the coming of the Spirit. The Epistles are written to established situations in which these things have already occurred. One may find, for example,

Finally, to the Protestant objection of another focus beyond Christ, and thus a subverting of Scripture and faith, the Pentecostal answer has become clear. There is no leaving Christ behind for a different centering in the Holy Spirit, for it is precisely through Christ that the event of the Spirit occurs. The real problem is not one of additional focus but that the typical Protestant has difficulty recognizing the “baptizing” work of Christ with the Holy Spirit, and thereby comes close to eliminating from Bible and experience a vital dimension of God’s activity.<sup>6</sup>

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in Ephesians 1:3-14 reference to a pattern of events not unlike Acts, but they have already happened. Hence, the primary use of Acts is necessary for perception into the dynamics of these interrelationships.

- 6 The water baptismal formula used generally by Protestants (and of course Christendom at large) is baptism “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (according to Matthew 28:19). Here there is recognition of a baptism also in connection with the Holy Spirit and a practice that goes beyond baptism in the name of Christ only (as in the Book of Acts). This is not unimportant, because the baptismal act points to more than a liturgical formula; it signifies introduction into (“into” may be preferable to “in” for the Greek word *eis*) a living relationship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus it could properly be held that everyone baptized in the Triune name has some experience of baptism “in” or “with” the Holy Spirit; consequently, what has been said thus far about “baptism with the Spirit” is not altogether foreign to the life of any regularly baptized person. For there is a sense in which the whole Pentecostal reality, or event of the Spirit, is anticipated in the third part of the baptismal formula. From this perspective “baptism with the Spirit” could be understood not as the wholly new but as the appropriation of what was given in baptism. This, however, by no means lessens the importance of an “event of the Spirit,” whereby the potential is actualized or the anticipated brought to fulfillment. (The same could be said about baptism in the name of Father and Son; however, this is not the place to go into other aspects of the baptismal reality). Whether one follows the line of “baptism with the Spirit” as

The traditional Roman Catholic orientation on the activity of the Holy Spirit makes for a different set of problems than those of the Protestant. One difficulty is that Catholic thought has tended to identify the original Pentecostal event with a permanent gift of the Holy Spirit to the church wherein the Holy Spirit becomes “the soul” of the church. Thus there is no need or possibility of such an event as Pentecost occurring among people thereafter. A second difficulty is that the Catholic tradition on the whole minimizes the importance of decisive moments in faith, for example, the experience of conversion. Catholicism is development -- rather than crisis-oriented; hence, the sense of a before and after, as in the “baptism with the Spirit,” is largely lacking. A third difficulty is the strong emphasis on sacramental grace, namely, that the Holy Spirit is objectively mediated through such sacraments as baptism and confirmation. This would seem to bind any unique gift of the Holy Spirit to the sacramental actions of the Church. Thus here there is a limitation which does not allow for the free and unpredictable move of the Holy Spirit.

Despite these difficulties the Roman Catholic tradition is compatible with the Pentecostal viewpoint in at least three ways. First, the Catholic Church has always held in high regard the supernatural, and therefore is by no means averse to the idea of a miraculous intervention by God in human life. Second, there has been a continued emphasis in the Catholic tradition on the life of spirituality and the possibility of higher or deeper levels of faith and experience. Third, throughout Catholic history there has

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representing a totally new dimension of Christian living, or an appropriation of what has already been given, the same result may follow. See chapter 5, “The Holy Trinity,” for further elaboration.

been sensitivity to a special implementing work of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands, a rite that in the fifth century came to be known as confirmation. However differently understood through the centuries, this rite has continued to bear witness to a special gift of the Holy Spirit within the life of faith.

This latter point is important for the Catholic orientation to the Pentecostal witness. For the Pentecostal there are two distinct moments: conversion and baptism with the Spirit. They may be separated from each other by years, although both belong to the full life of the Christian. The Catholic picture traditionally has been much the same, in that beyond regeneration is the further step of confirmation wherein the Holy Spirit is given for strengthening the believer in his dedication to Christ. Thus similar are the Catholic and Pentecostal perspectives, and quite different from the Protestant position that minimizes an event of the Spirit beyond the effecting of faith in Christ.

However, there are differences within this common area. One may refer first to the matter of personal experience. What the Catholic Church affirms to be given in these sacraments, the Pentecostal claims to have experienced. In baptism, according to Catholicism, regeneration is mediated, *ex opere operato*, by the Church: all receive new birth in water by virtue of the ritual act. The same is true of confirmation: through the laying on of hands by the bishop an “indelible character” is made regardless of personal response. The essential thing is the sacramental action. In contrast, for the Pentecostal, what is decisive is not the action of the church but the experience.<sup>7</sup> Another

difference concerns the matter of ministry. The Pentecostal does not view as essential either the ministry of an ordained clergyman or the laying on of hands. In personal ministry, laymen, equally with clergymen, may serve -- and sometimes this is done not by one person but by a group. Nevertheless, either type of ministry is dispensable, since God through Jesus Christ may pour out His Spirit without human mediation. Thus the laying on of hands, while often used by the Spirit, is by no means necessary. God moves as He wills in His freedom.

In conclusion: The Pentecostal witness represents a fresh way of thought and practice within the prevailing patterns of Western Christendom. It clearly poses the question of how to relate this witness to traditional Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. However, the prior question for the whole church, I would urge, is this: Is it possible that the Pentecostal is witnessing to something that is needed by all? It could be that the fresh experience of the Pentecostal reality by the church at large would signalize a new era of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>7</sup> For some Catholic Pentecostals there is a serious attempt to bring together a unity of sacramental action and inward experience by

speaking of “baptism with the Spirit” as “experiencing the effect of confirmation.” See *Confirmation and the “Baptism of the Holy Spirit”* by Stephen B. Clark, especially p. 15.

The Pentecostal Reality. Prophecy by the Book. Scripture: God's Written Word. The Pentecostal Reality. These articles of mine were published under the title of The Pentecostal Reality. They were written variously for magazine, seminar, ecumenical dialogue, task force, and pulpit presentation. I again invite your response. Preface. The Pentecostal Reality. The Event of the Spirit. Pentecostal Spirituality. The Holy Spirit and Evangelism. The Holy Trinity. 2. By "the Pentecostal reality" is meant the coming of God's Holy Spirit in power to the believing individual and community. Among countless numbers of people today in many churches an event or experience is happening which makes vivid the narrative of Acts 1 and 2 as contemporary event. What they may have considered before as more or less interesting history of the first days of the church and some of it rather strange (especially Acts 2:1-4) has suddenly become personally real. The Pentecostal Reality book. Read reviews from world's largest community for readers. The very first scholarly attempt at a Charismatic/Pentecostal theology. Written by the then President and Systematic Theology professor at Melodyland School Of Theology, the first Charismatic seminary in the world. Dr. Williams went on to be a professor at Regents University and finished his complete Charismatic/Pentecostal theology "Renewal Theology" in 1988. The characteristic of Pentecostalism that seems to have attracted most attention, is its rapid expansion. Latin American Pentecostalism is a particular case in point, and as such has been the subject of considerable study from the 1960s onwards. This may, at first sight, seem negative for the Pentecostal cause, but in reality division often leads to multiplication when dissidents establish a new preaching-point, or even a new church, thus enlarging the Pentecostal presence. up. Contextual factors. The Pentecostal church is considered a renewal movement in the Christian church. Here are 10 things to know about their beliefs. While the church has spawned a variety of other belief groups, Pentecostalism is considered a renewal movement in the Christian church. Here are 10 things to know about the Pentecostal church. Photo courtesy: Unsplash/Jon Tyson. 1. Pentecostalism started in the early 1900s.