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CONCLUSION

Pentecostalism in Australia is now almost one hundred years old.¹ It is an appropriate time to reflect on its origins and character. From the outset, the movement's distinctive doctrine and practice was the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues. In recent years, sociologists and psychologists have attempted to explain this phenomenon. While their insights have been valuable, and there have been helpful analyses of both the reasons why people speak in tongues and the benefits to be gained from doing so, the practice of tongues itself has defied human analysis. 'Deprivation theories', in particular, have proven inadequate, especially in regard to the Australian movement.

There are clearly many similarities between Australian Pentecostalism and its international siblings, but there are also certain areas of difference. Firstly, although in countries like the United States and Brazil, Pentecostals are numbered in the millions and the movement burgeoned initially among the poor and underprivileged, this was never the case in Australia. In this country, Pentecostals basically represented a middle-class constituency. There were twice as many Pentecostal believers engaged in small business or in professional or middle-management positions as in the community generally; there were only half as many in labouring jobs. During the Great Depression,

¹ This statement assumes a starting date of 1908, with the first formally organised congregation, the Apostolic Mission at Good News Hall. The first Pentecostal meetings were conducted in 1870. See Chapters Three and Six.

most Pentecostals were gainfully employed — and many gave themselves to charity and welfare work. In the cities, there was no obvious concentration of Pentecostals in poorer suburbs: a significant number inhabited prosperous areas. Many lived in country towns or on farms. Overall, the evidence suggests that Pentecostals in the 1920s and 1930s were middle class people who were socially secure.

Although Pentecostalism in many countries has been primarily an urban movement, in Australia, there were more congregations in country towns than in the cities. The earliest known Pentecostal meetings in 1870 were conducted in a farming community near Portland, Victoria and farmers continued to be well represented in subsequent years.

The role of women was another distinctive feature. The first Pentecostal church was pioneered and pastored by a woman (Sarah Jane Lancaster) and over half of the assemblies established prior to 1930 were brought into being by women, and often led by women as well. Although most Pentecostal movements overseas gave freedom to women to minister, there were few who encouraged them to exercise such oversight or pastoral leadership.² In most cases, women were allowed to preach, pray, prophesy and evangelise, but there were clear lines of demarcation limiting their authority. The roles of overseer, elder, bishop, general superintendent and the like were not open to them. The scene in Australia was different. In spite of reservations being expressed on occasion, women undertook all the roles open to men. After 1925, male leadership increasingly became the norm but theoretically any office was still open to women.

It is commonly thought that Pentecostalism came to this country as an American missionary outreach. In this respect, Australian Pentecostalism differs from movements like Mormonism and Seventh Day Adventism, which plainly reflect their American origins. The cosmopolitan nature of Australian Pentecostalism has been evident from the beginning. Its origins lay in the Wesleyan doctrine of ‘entire sanctification’ through the power of the Holy

² The Apostolic Church in England, for example, forbade women to participate in church oversight — a policy that was reflected in the Apostolic Church in Australia after 1930.

Spirit; in the ministry of divine healing and other gifts of the Spirit taught by John Dowie; and in the focus on holiness and ‘victorious living’ by Evangelicalism, especially the Keswick movement. Wesleyanism and the Keswick movement both stemmed from England. Dowie, although born and educated at tertiary level in Scotland, was brought up in South Australia.

From the outset, leadership was in the hands of Australians. Sarah Jane Lancaster, the founder and pastor of the initial congregation was Australian-born, as were most of her associates.³ The founders of the second and third congregations were also native Australians. Melbourne-based missionary Robert Horne began the Southern Evangelical Mission in 1911 and Melbourne-born Charles Greenwood established the Sunshine Gospel Mission in 1916. Successive congregations were also Australian-led — the church at Parkes was formerly established in 1919, a development from cottage meetings started there in 1914 by Will Jeffrey.⁴ In Sydney, it was Frederick and Philip Duncan who pioneered the work; in Adelaide, Annie Chamberlain, J.H.Rieschick, Gus Jansen and Joy Heath; in Brisbane, Florrie Mortomore and Harold Martin; in Perth, Edie Anstis and Ruby Wiles; in Cairns, Florrie Mortomore and C.Kajewski. And so on. Not until the coming of the Apostolic Church in 1930 was there a Pentecostal group in which ongoing leadership was in the hands of missionaries from overseas. Australian Pentecostalism has always been distinctly Australian.

At times, Pentecostalism has been erroneously seen as a pseudo-Christian sect. Theologically, however, it is in most respects an Evangelical movement. That Sarah Jane Lancaster’s views on the Trinity and the nature of punishment of the wicked made her an exception to this has already been noted. Even so, Lancaster stood more in the Evangelical tradition than out of it. Certainly, the movement as a whole was Evangelical. What set it apart was the emphasis on the baptism of the Holy Spirit accompanied by speaking with tongues. Even acceptance of the gifts of the Spirit was not exclusively Pentecostal. There were many in the mainline churches who believed in divine healing. It was

³ One exception was John A.D.Adams, a New Zealander.

⁴ Chant, 1985, p.126.

glossolalia that was the sticking point. For Pentecostals, on the other hand, this was a major strength. By insisting on the sign of tongues, they made it mandatory for people to have an experiential encounter with God. There was no place for a nominal faith. Whereas it might in other circumstances be possible to say all the right things and believe all the correct doctrines and still not have a personal faith, this was not so easy in a Pentecostal church. Only when you spoke in tongues was your profession beyond question. It was clear that you could not manufacture tongues by your own ability. It had to be an act of God.

The Pentecostal approach ensured that there was little nominalism among them. People either embraced the faith with enthusiasm, or withdrew altogether. It was hard to find a comfortable middle ground. An identifiable experience of their God gave people a sense of certainty that a rational understanding on its own did not always provide. ‘You can take many things from a man,’ said a member of Good News Hall in 1923, ‘but there is one thing you can never take, and that is his experience.’⁵

By enshrining such a numinous encounter in the centre of the faith, Pentecostals tapped into a major but often neglected aspect of religious life. While Protestant Christianity in particular was becoming increasingly formal in its approach, there were many who found in Pentecostalism an enriching experience of God which satisfied the oft-neglected emotional needs.

Unhappily, the same strong convictions that set Pentecostals apart from the rest also tended to set them apart from each other. Because of Lancaster’s unorthodox views, for example, she was ostracised by most other Pentecostals. Then, when the Apostolic Church started, they were vilified by their peers for their practices and their views.

Having experienced tongues, Pentecostals were inevitably open to other kinds of ‘manifestations’. Obviously, spiritual gifts such as prophesying and healing were encouraged. So, too, were phenomena such as tears, visions and physical trembling. With preachers like Van Eyk and Len Jones, worship and

⁵ GN 14:10 November 1923, p.13.

celebration were extravagant. So from the beginning attempts were made to discern what was acceptable and to bring in controls. Achieving a balance was always difficult. For those outside the movement, almost all Pentecostal behaviour was excessive; for those inside, it was important not to quench the Spirit, yet at the same time not to go to extremes. However, one experience was never questioned and that was being baptised in the Spirit. This was a cornerstone of the movement and potentially its great strength. As long as there was an insistence on constituents receiving the Spirit with the sign of tongues, the vibrancy of the movement would be sustained. If this was compromised, Pentecostalism would finish up becoming just another Protestant denomination.

Revival movements have rarely sustained their energies for more than a handful of years. Pentecostalism in Australia is now in the last decade of its first one hundred years. Whether it proves to be the exception to the norm has yet to be seen. As it stands on the threshold of its second century, it needs to review its origins and reassess its potential.

From a Pentecostal perspective, current statistics indicate an area of concern. After World War II, there was explosive growth in the movement. Census figures have only been available since 1976, but they show that from 1976-81 while the population grew by only 7.5%, Pentecostal growth rate was 87.9%. During the following five years, the rate was still a very healthy 48%. By 1991-1996, however, it had dropped to 16% (see Table 1.4) While growth rates of new movements inevitably reduce as numbers increase, the rapidity of the decline here is significant. If it continues to the same degree, the next five-year period could actually witness a reduction in numbers. While there are no doubt many reasons for this, which are outside the scope of this thesis, it may not be without significance that this same period has seen a softening of emphasis on the need for tongues as a sign of being baptised in the Spirit. Is there a correlation?

In the pre-War years, baptism in the Spirit was seen as a vital spiritual experience, but, as I have attempted to show in this thesis, it was always seen as being firmly based on biblical foundations. With the emergence of the Charismatic and 'Third Wave' movements, and the popularity in America,

England and Australia of phenomena such as the ‘Toronto Blessing’, there has been a growing focus on the value of an emotional experience for its own sake, rather than as a sign of spiritual empowering.⁶ Much has been made of behaviour such as being ‘slain in the Spirit’, often at the expense of tongues. ‘Blessing’ alone has been seen as sufficient justification, whether it can be defended biblically or not.⁷ This has always been a potential weakness in Pentecostalism — that a numinous experience might be over-valued in itself. Historically, there are indications that a preoccupation with experience generally rather than a clear focus on glossolalia as a sign of the impartation of the Holy Spirit tends to be corrosive. On the other hand, there is still a significant element of the movement which maintains its traditional stance.⁸ From both a historical and a theological perspective, it is my conviction that, in spite of the flattening of the expansion rate in the 1990s, the movement will continue to expand.

Ronald Knox has argued that, on the basis of history, no revival movement is likely to last longer than a hundred years.⁹ Like Wesley, in the film *The Princess Bride*, when warned by Buttercup that no one could penetrate and survive the terrible fire swamp, Pentecostals might well respond, ‘You’re only saying that because no one ever has.’

⁶ This could represent an interesting field of investigation for another thesis.

⁷ These movements, while being apparently Pentecostal, all stand back from a necessary connection between baptism in the Spirit and glossolalia. See Burgess et al (eds), 1988, p.810; Dixon, 1994. There has been extensive criticism of the ‘Toronto Blessing’ by some Pentecostals. See eg P.Powell, ‘Spiritual Drunks,’ *Contending Earnestly for the Faith* Blenheim, New Zealand, 1:4 May/July 1995, p.1; ‘Measuring False Prophets’ 1:4 May/July 1995, pp.2ff; ; B.Randles, *Weighed and Found Wanting: Putting the Toronto Blessing in Context* Cedar Rapids, IA, n.d. but c.1996.

⁸ The Assemblies of God Statement of Faith has not changed in this matter.

⁹ Knox, 1987, p.590.