

The Charismatic Movement (A Personal Testimony)

By Cornelius R. Stam

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THE CONDITION OF THE CHURCH

Years ago, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, I had a dinner with a Bible-teaching evangelist of some note.

During the course of our conversation I asked his opinion of the condition of the Church. He replied that he felt it was appalling. “In what way?” I asked. “Well,” he responded, “the Pentecostals are taking over, with tongues and healing campaigns sweeping the country.”

“What remedy would you prescribe?” I asked. “Oh,” he said, “now you’re trying to draw me into an argument.”

I wasn’t. I merely wanted to discuss the matter with him as a friend, but his defensive attitude did, I feel, betray his insecurity about his own theological position, for he believed that the Church today should obey the so-called “Great Commission,” and this commission clearly states:

“And these signs shall follow them that believe...they shall speak with new tongues...they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover” (Mark 16:17, 18).

How, then, could this brother consistently find fault with the Pentecostals? Little wonder that those Christian leaders who teach that the commission to the eleven is *our* “Great Commission” rarely want to touch “with a ten-foot pole” those who faithfully proclaim what Paul, by divine inspiration, calls “*my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery*” (Rom. 16:25). This brother referred to is now with the Lord. Had he remained with us until today he would see how Pentecostalism, or the Charismatic Movement, as it is now generally called, has made still further headway, with Fundamentalists and Evangelicals in general still impotent to challenge it consistently. The Charismatic Movement has now invaded almost all of the denominations and even the Roman Catholic Church, and TV healing extravaganzas are reaching the confused religious masses with their appeal to a “faith” that is anything but Scriptural.

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD CONVENTION

It was about the time when the above brother and I had dinner together, that I received a letter from a Pentecostalist leader, informing me that the *Assemblies of God*, the “nationally-recognized and God-honored”¹ segment of Pentecostalism was to hold its annual convention at *Milwaukee Auditorium* that summer. He asked me to promise him that I would attend this convention and consider the claims of “true, Bible Pentecostalism.” I did not promise him that I would attend, but I did promise myself that I would do so, God permitting.

When the time came I attended the opening service with Mrs. Stam and a friend. The theme of the convention was displayed on a large banner above the platform. It read: *EVANGELISM*.

1. His words.

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The “evangelist” for that night scarcely mentioned the Lord Jesus Christ. He said *nothing* about salvation through His shed blood, but after much acrobatics and screaming that his hearers “needed God,” “needed to have the devil knocked out of them,” “needed the Holy Ghost,” etc., he gave an invitation to come forward—not even then mentioning faith in Christ, or His death for our sins.

Around us sat a group of men, shouting “Hallelujah!” and “Praise the Lord!” as waves of noisy emotional expression swept over the audience.

At this point I took a slip of paper from my pocket and wrote: “*Is this evangelism? The preacher has not even told them that Christ died for their sins.*” I handed this note to one of the men seated nearest us and noted that he and his neighbor read it very carefully and that it was then handed down the row until it disappeared from sight.

We visited the meetings a second time with other friends. This time the evangelist *did* proclaim salvation through the finished work of Christ, though this may have had no connection with our note. This second evangelist, however, did not get the same response from his audience. He would leap into the air and cry, “this overwhelms me,” but it did not seem to overwhelm his audience. They evidently wanted a full-scale tongues and healing show.

Suddenly stopping, the evangelist finally asked all present to get down on their knees and pray. My friends and I chose not to join in the bedlam we knew, by experience, would follow. There had been some speaking in “tongues” both nights, but now a great flood tide of human emotion was released. Some prayed, some sang, some moaned, some chanted, some lifted their hands or pounded with their fists, and many spoke with “tongues.” All was confusion.

In front of us, and now facing us, was an average-looking man who gave clear evidence that it was not the Spirit of God that controlled him as he spoke in “tongues.” Clearly controlled by some power outside of himself, the man kept alternately uttering some sort of jibberish and repeating the words, “Save souls, save souls, save souls, save souls...” perhaps a dozen times in succession and so fast that one wondered how he could possibly articulate the words with such rapidity.

Now it is true that, not being able to understand what this man said in “tongues,” we could not prove that he was not intelligently doing so. But we *could* understand the English he spoke as, like a man out of his mind, he rattled on with his “Save souls.” This was proof enough that what he was doing, and the whole confused scene, was *not* of God but of Satan, for “*God is not the Author of confusion*” (I Cor. 14:33). He gives His people “*the spirit of...power, and of love, and of a sound mind*” (II Tim. 1:7), and expects them to practice sobriety and self-control. The Charismatic Movement is not characterized by these virtues.

Shortly after the meeting referred to, great crowds in Milwaukee were turning out to hear a prominent “healer.” One of his party wrote:

“May I remind you that on October 6 [1953] God’s special messenger to Milwaukee. Brother _____, told the people that God had revealed to him that this would be the greatest revival Milwaukee has ever seen; that there will be a great parade in the streets, the people joyously singing gospel hymns; that Milwaukee will be shaken for the Lord. Brother _____ has publicly announced, as definitely authentic, that the face of Jesus was seen on the television screen...”

Of course the prediction was as fallacious as the alleged face on the TV screen, for Milwaukee continued on its way after the campaign, just as it had before.

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This sort of thing is more widespread today than it was in 1953, but what troubles us more than the excesses we have described is the fact that most of our Fundamentalist and Evangelical brethren hold that the so-called “Great Commission,” which clearly includes tongues and healing, is for our obedience in the present “dispensation of the grace of God.”

WHEN THE PENTECOSTAL SIGNS WERE IN ORDER

Why was it necessary for the Pentecostal disciples to speak with other tongues?

Because they were to be *witnesses*, from Jerusalem to the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Witness of *what*?

Witnesses of the resurrection of the crucified *King*, and the miraculous gift of tongues was another supernatural sign that our Lord *was* the rightful King.²

It is frequently assumed that the eleven were sent “to testify the gospel of the grace of God,” but there is no Scriptural foundation whatever for this assumption, for neither this phrase nor the message is found in the Scriptures until we come to the Apostle Paul (See Acts 20:24 and cf. Eph. 3:1-3). Those who would understand the message of grace must get this clear in their minds.

In their last conversation with the risen Lord the eleven had asked Him whether He would *now* restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6) and while He had declined to tell them *when* this kingdom would be restored, He had commissioned them to go forth as His witnesses—obviously to proclaim Him as the risen King, for this was how they knew Him.

At Pentecost they began to carry out this “great commission” and *did* proclaim Him as King (Acts 2:29-36; 3:19-21). Indeed, had Israel accepted her Messiah the apostles could then have proceeded to bring the other nations to Messiah’s feet.³

The twelve knew nothing of God’s secret purpose and the exceeding grace which was to be manifested with the raising up of Paul. They did not know that the King and His kingdom would be rejected and that the prophetic program would be interrupted by the unfolding of the mystery kept secret since the world began.

Thank God we now know that it was His purpose to conclude Israel in unbelief along with the Gentiles *that He might show mercy to all*; to hold the Messianic kingdom in abeyance so that “the dispensation of the grace of God” might be brought in and poor, lost sinners in a world doomed to judgment might find salvation full and free, by grace through faith in the crucified, risen, exalted Son of God.

2. With Israel’s rejection of Christ, of course, tongues continued rather as “a sign...to them that believe not” (I Cor. 14:22); then were done away (I Cor. 13:8).

3. It is true that Israel’s rejection of Christ and the resulting judgements had already been predicted, but all this must be viewed in the light of such passages as Matt. 23:37; Luke 4:18,19; 19:41,42.

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THE TRUE MEANING OF PENTECOST

Modern Pentecostalism has perverted the true meaning of Pentecost. It has taught that the gift of tongues is bestowed today as a divine evidence of salvation and the possession of the Holy Spirit.

It is true that during the Pentecostal era the gift of tongues was *one* of the evidence of salvation, for our Lord had said: *“These signs shall follow them that believed.”* But our Pentecostalist friends must not overlook the fact that the disciples who first received the gift of tongues at Pentecost had been saved for some time prior to Pentecost.

Tongues, like the other signs of the so-called “great commission,” had a far deeper significance than the salvation of the individual who wrought them.

According to our Lord’s commission in Mark 16, those who believed were not only to speak with tongues, but also to *“cast out devils [demons] ...take up serpents ...drink any deadly thing [and] it shall not hurt them ...lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.”*

All this looked forward to the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom, for in the process of its establishment, God’s messengers were to attack the kingdom of Satan and defy sickness and death itself.

Let us see from the Scriptures, then, how the gift of tongues took its place right along with these other signs which pointed to the early establishment of the kingdom.

BABEL AND PENTECOST

There is a distinct relation between what happened at Babel in the days before Abram’s call and what took place here at Pentecost more than two thousand years later.

There, at Babel, God judged man’s rebellion with THE CONFUSION OF TONGUES; *here* He bestowed THE GIFT OF TONGUES. *There* His purpose was the *scattering* of the race (Gen. 11:7, 8); *here*, its *regathering*, beginning, of course, with Israel. (See Luke 24:47; John 11:51, 52; Rom. 15:8-10).

Since Israel rejected the glorified Christ, this gift has been withdrawn (I Cor. 13:8) and the Jews, like the rebels at Babel, have been scattered to the ends of the earth, while the Millennial kingdom and blessing are held in abeyance unto a future day.

In our day, therefore, God is not carrying on negotiations with, or through, any nation. The Jews joined the Gentiles in rebellion against God and His Christ, and have been scattered along with the Gentiles, *all* of them concluded in unbelief.

But let us never cease to thank God that *“where sin abounded, grace did much more abound”* (Rom. 5:20).

“For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, THAT HE MIGHT HAVE MERCY UPON ALL” (Rom. 11:32).

“AND THAT HE MIGHT RECONCILE BOTH UNTO GOD IN ONE BODY BY THE CROSS, HAVING SLAIN THE ENMITY THEREBY” (Eph. 2:16).

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The call, therefore, is now to *individuals* in a world given up to judgment, as in infinite love and mercy, God offers reconciliation, by grace through faith, to all who will accept His rejected Son as their Savior.

A DISPENSATIONAL MATTER

Who can deny that the ancient Pentecostal believers, working under their commission, *did* exercise these powers? (Acts 2:4, 43; 3:6, 7; 5:12, etc.). How can our Fundamentalist and Evangelical leaders answer the Pentecostalist as to this? Surely they will not be able to answer them *by the Scriptures*, intelligently and consistently, until they heed Paul's Spirit-inspired words in Rom. 11:13 and acknowledge that the so-called "Great Commission," was superseded by a *greater* commission (II Cor. 5:14—21), entrusted to Paul and to us. They will not be able to answer them until they acknowledge that the message and program of Pentecost have given place to that outlined in the Epistles of Paul.

Let these brethren take their stand squarely on Pauline ground and they will not be constantly embarrassed in combatting modern Pentecostalism.

Could anything be plainer than the fact that the same passage which speaks of tongues as an evidence of salvation also makes water baptism a requisite to salvation? (Mark 16:15-18). And could anything be plainer than the fact that the Apostle Paul said, when the gift of tongues was still in order, "*Forbid not to speak with tongues*" (I Cor. 14:39), but said in the same letter:

"I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all:

YET in the church I HAD RATHER SPEAK FIVE WORDS WITH MY UNDERSTANDING... THAN TEN THOUSAND WORDS IN AN UNKNOWN TONGUE" (I Cor. 14:18, 19).

Could anything be clearer than his words in I Cor. 13:8-13:

"...WHETHER THERE BE TONGUES, THEY SHALL CEASE...

"...WHEN THAT WHICH IS PERFECT [COMPLETE] IS COME, THEN THAT WHICH IS IN PART SHALL BE DONE AWAY...

"AND NOW ABIDETH FAITH, HOPE, CHARITY [LOVE], THESE THREE..."

And does not the Apostle make it crystal clear that it is no longer an evidence of unbelief to be ill – indeed, that illness is often a distinct blessing, conferred on God's choicest saints? Hear his own testimony:

"For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

"AND NOT ONLY THEY, BUT OURSELVES ALSO, WHICH HAVE THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THE SPIRIT, EVEN WE OURSELVES GROAN WITHIN OURSELVES, WAITING FOR THE ADOPTION TO WIT, THE REDEMPTION OF OUR BODY" (Rom. 8:22, 23).

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But to the Corinthians he wrote:

“For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.

“FOR WHICH CAUSE WE FAINT NOT; BUT THOUGH OUR OUTWARD MAN PERISH, YET THE INWARD MAN IS RENEWED DAY BY DAY.

“FOR OUR LIGHT AFFLICTION, WHICH IS BUT FOR A MOMENT, WORKETH FOR US A FAR MORE EXCEEDING AND ETERNAL WEIGHT OF GLORY” (II Cor. 4:15-17).

And not only do our afflictions gain blessings for the future; they can and should prove to be blessings to us *now*. It was with regard to the great revelations given to Paul that he said:

“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance [transcendence] of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

“For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

“AND HE SAID UNTO ME, MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR THEE; FOR MY STRENGTH IS MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS. MORST GLADLY THEREFORE WILL I RATHER GLORY IN MY INFIRMITIES, THAT THE POWER OF CHRIST MAY REST UPON ME.

“THEREFORE I TAKE PELASURE IN INFIRMITIES...FOR WHEN I AM WEAK, THEN AM I STRONG” (II Cor. 12:7-10).

These words were written by Paul as he emerged from the Pentecostal era with its miraculous signs. Read them again and note that he was not missing anything by the passing of the miracles of healing but rather entered a sphere of greater blessing where grace and faith are exalted to their highest place. Indeed, later, from infirmity and confinement in a Roman prison, he exclaimed: “*Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice*” (Phil. 4:4), and wrote of sitting “*in heavenly places in Christ,*” “*blessed...with all spiritual blessings*”! (Eph. 1:3).

This all stands in striking contrast to the shaken faith, the disillusionment and the heartbreaks that follow in the trial of modern Pentecostalism. Remember, at Pentecost, had the prophesied King and kingdom been accepted, all those healed would have entered, well and strong, into the millennial kingdom, never to become ill again, or to die. But with modern Pentecostalism here always comes that last time when nothing helps and in spite of all the prayers, all the firm faith and all the last hopes, death takes over. Indeed, after the names of all the great “healers” from Paul’s day to our own must be written the phrase that we find again and again in Genesis 5: “*and he died.*”

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WHEN DID THE CHANGE OCCUR?

What Sunday School child does not know about the great healing campaigns conducted by our Lord and the twelve, and even the seventy, while He was with them on earth (Matt. 4:23; 10:1; Luke 10:1-12)? And this was only the beginning, for in John 14:12 our Lord promised His disciples:

“He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; *and greater works than these shall he do*, because I go unto My Father.”

Thus there is no departure from this healing program at the cross or at Pentecost. On the contrary, we find a further development of it after Pentecost, when so many insist that the present dispensation and the Body of Christ had their beginning. With regard to the period directly after Pentecost we read that “*by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people*” (Acts 5:12):

“Insomuch that [the people] brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.

“There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks...and they were healed every one” (Acts 5:15, 16; cf. 2:43; Heb. 2:4).

The departure from this program did not begin until *the raising up of Paul*— and during his *early* ministry. It was “through infirmity of the flesh” that Paul was detained among the Galatians and preached Christ to them (Gal. 4:13), and we have seen how Paul wrote in his early epistles that the outward man perishes, that we who are in this body “do groan,” that the whole creation groans travails in pain together “until now,” and that not only they, but even we who have “the firstfruits of the Spirit...groan within ourselves, waiting for... the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:22, 23; II Cor. 4:16; 5:4).

We have seen how Paul himself was “given” and aggravating physical infirmity, lest he become “exalted above measure,” and how he therefore took pleasure in his infirmities (II Cor. 12:7-10)— a fact that the “healers” of our day seldom call to our attention.

For some time Paul still had “the signs of an apostle” (II Cor. 12:12), greater signs, in fact, than even Peter had wrought (Acts 19:11, 12). But in his later epistles, written after the close of Acts, we find *no trace of miraculous signs*. Paul himself has a “beloved Physician” attending him (Col. 4:14; II Tim. 4:11), prescribes medicine for Timothy (I Tim. 5:23) and leaves Trophimus “at Miletum sick” (II Tim. 4:20). All this indicates that “this present evil age” had fully set in—but with it, the full-orbed “dispensation of the grace of God,” in which sorrows are turned to joys as they bring us closer to Him whose grace is abundantly sufficient.

When our Fundamentalist and Evangelical leaders acknowledge the distinctive character of Paul’s commission and message, and his God-given apostolic authority over the Church of this dispensation, they will no longer be embarrassed by the Charismatic Movement. Indeed, they will come into a more blessed experience than either Pentecostalism or their own contradictory position could ever lead them.

If, on the other hand, they obstinately close their eyes to these truths and continue to lend support to the very doctrine they deny, they must be prepared to give an account to God for the ever-deepening confusion that must inevitably prevail in the Church.

May God help them to open their hearts to the truth and proclaim it boldly in this time of crisis.