

COFE Association Lecture
Thursday 18th May 2006

Is The Salvation Army Pentecostal? **Philip Cairns**

Here is a description of an early Salvation Army meeting recorded in General Bramwell Booth's autobiography *Echoes and Memories*:

At night Corbridge led the hallelujah meeting till 10 o'clock. Then we commenced an All-Night of Prayer. Two hundred and fifty people were present till 1am; two hundred or so after. A tremendous time. From the very first, Jehovah was passing by, searching, softening and subduing every heart. The power of the Holy Ghost fell on Robinson and prostrated him. He nearly fainted twice. The brother of the Blandys entered into full liberty and then he shouted, wept, clapped his hands, danced, amid a scene of the most glorious and heavenly enthusiasm. Others meanwhile were lying prostrate on the floor, some of them groaning for perfect deliverance ..."¹

This happened in 1878 - 22 years before the official start of the Pentecostal movement. Was The Salvation Army Pentecostal, or did it at least begin that way?

Here is another classic, this time from Samuel Logan Brengle:

'But we cannot have what Peter obtained on the day of Pentecost' wrote someone to me recently. However, Peter himself, in that great sermon which he preached that day, declared that we can, for he says: 'Ye shall receive the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you' - Jews, to whom I am talking - 'and to your children,' and not to you only, but 'to all that are afar off' - nineteen hundred years from now - 'even as many as the Lord our God shall call,' or convert (Acts 2:38, 39).²

In recent days, some people have challenged The Salvation Army by referring back to its early days and suggesting that it has moved away from its Pentecostal roots. Are they right? Was Brengle really a Salvationist Pentecostal?

Let me suggest that Pentecostalism isn't determined by the way people act under the influence of the Holy Spirit. At the heart of Pentecostalism is a theology and interpretation of Scripture that then manifests itself in various forms of behaviour.

When we look at these theological and interpretive issues, we discover differences between The Salvation Army and the Pentecostal Movement.

Let me make it clear right at the start of this talk that this is not a Pentecostal bashing exercise. Quite the opposite – although we in The Salvation Army do not embrace some of their theological positions or many of their practices, we do admire their passion for the Lord and the

spreading of the gospel. They have in fact been a 'wake up call' for the whole church (including the Army) challenging us regarding our own dependence on God and effectiveness in our ministry. We must both honour and respect our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Pentecostalism

The modern Pentecostal Movement has a specific point in time when it commenced.

"It all began at 7pm on 31st December 1900. 40 students at a bible college in Topeka Kansas, had come to the conclusion that the biblical evidence of baptism in the Spirit was speaking in tongues, and they were now praying for the experience. When the principal of the college ... was persuaded to lay hands on one of the students, a 'glory fell upon her, a halo seemed to surround her head and face' and she began to speak in tongues".³

This began a movement which has changed the face of the church through the 20th century and into the 21st century. Although its development has tended to ebb and flow, over the past 30 years there seems to have been a consistent growth in this movement.

Peter C. Wagner has described the major stages of this renewal as three 'waves'.⁴

The first wave - The rise of Pentecostalism is that described by John Larsson (above). It really emerged from the 19th century holiness movement in North America and for much of the first half of the 20th century was on the fringe of the church and seen as a deviation from mainstream Christianity – "too much experience, and too little in theology".

The second wave was the charismatic renewal of the 1960's and 1970's - described by some as neo-Pentecostalism.⁵ This time it was based in a mainstream church - the Episcopal (Anglican) Church at Van Nuys, a suburb of Los Angeles. Far from being on the fringe, this 'charismatic' renewal took place in a well-established church with a long tradition of conservative worship and orthodox theology.

The third wave - the renewal movement in the 1980's and 1990's was associated with people like John Wimber, Peter C. Wagner, Jack Deere and others. Again they were ministering and teaching in mainstream denominations. It spawned the Church Growth movement and had a focus at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena.

In each of these waves, the principle characteristics were: speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*), an interest in healing, ecstatic worship, interest in prophecy (particularly in the third wave) and spiritual warfare (also the third wave). Also common to all of the waves is the experience described as 'baptism of the Spirit' and it is this description of the action of the Holy Spirit that provides the common link throughout the history of the movement.

"The distinctive teaching of Pentecostalism is the emphasis on the second crisis experience subsequent to conversion which is called the baptism of the Spirit. This experience is seen as giving power for witness and releasing gifts of the Spirit within the personality and increasing the fruit of the spirit. Speaking in tongues is considered by most Pentecostals to be the necessary sign that the blessing has been received."⁶

The fourth wave?

In 1999 the writer R.T. Kendal in a book called *The Anointing* speculates about a fourth wave of Pentecostal renewal. He sees a coming together of the conservative evangelical and charismatic groups that will have an influence which will cross denominational boundaries.

Although this ‘wave’ has not yet fully formed, there are things happening that seem to be indicating that Kendall might be right. The characteristics of the ‘fourth wave’ he has observed are:

- A particular pattern of worship – 20-40 minutes of chorus singing; then prayer (often in small groups; or everyone speaking out loud); then a 35-45 minute sermon, followed by ‘ministry’ (often laying on of hands).
- Some slaying in the spirit
- Some speaking in tongues (although not overt or public)
- Fervent ‘supernatural’ believing prayer
- An expectation of signs and wonders

Is this ‘fourth wave’ already happening? In our own Territory, we seem to be seeing some of these characteristics. Some corps and even some larger events (such as Unlimited) express a strong dependence on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit with an emphasis that is more along the lines of the Pentecostal tradition than the Holiness tradition from which The Salvation Army comes. But this is not limited to Australia. Major Ian Barr of the UK territory says this:

... it is difficult to gauge the accuracy of Kendal's thesis, but there is no shortage of evidence even in the Army. The UK Territory's annual *Roots* convention, started in the early 1990's by a group of officers and soldiers with charismatic leanings, has grown to accommodate a diverse range of Salvationists. It bears all the hallmarks of the fourth wave - a coming together of charismatic and evangelical conservative Christians for worship and study with a strongly prophetic and missiological agenda.⁷

Whether it is a ‘fourth wave’ or simply an awakening of the Spirit, we should rejoice in the new enthusiasm for the mission and a new passion for the things of God that is being displayed in our present generation.

The big question is however – can we embrace this awakening without embracing Pentecostal theology? There is a difference in our theologies. How do we respond to the Holy Spirit without getting caught up in the trappings of another denomination?

Holy Spirit dependent *without* being Pentecostal (Acts 2)

The Salvation Army is not a Pentecostal movement (in spite of the influences). Our interpretation of Act 2 leads us to a different understanding of ‘baptism of the Spirit’, and thus sets us aside from our Pentecostal friends.

Let me take a moment to look at Acts 2 and then highlight two theological differences between The Salvation Army and Pentecostalism.

Acts 2 and 3 (selected verses)

¹When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

¹⁴Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say..."

⁴⁰With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." ⁴¹Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. ⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

³¹One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer--at three in the afternoon. ²Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. ³When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. ⁴Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" ⁵So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

⁶Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." ⁷Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. ⁸He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. ⁹When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

¹²When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed ..."

The first difference – Understanding Acts 2.

What is Acts 2 all about? Is it about the Holy Spirit (and the signs and wonders associated with him), or is it about what the Holy Spirit did? Pentecostals celebrate the first – *the coming of the Holy Spirit*, and their worship re-enact the signs and wonders of Pentecost (talking in tongues, exuberant behaviour etc.)

The Salvation Army (along with mainstream non-Pentecostal churches) celebrates *what the Holy Spirit did ...* and that is the *creation of the church*. Described theologically as ‘Christ’s last act of creation on earth’, it was on the day of Pentecost that the church was born. Because of this belief The Salvation Army celebrates the purposes of the church that the Holy Spirit created.

What are these purposes? Acts chapters 2 and 3 tell us ...

The first activity the church under the direction of the Holy Spirit was to preach the gospel ... verse 14 onwards records the first sermon of the church by Peter. It was a mission sermon (*kerygma*). It had a challenge with an appeal and 3000 people were saved

The second activity of the church was to gather the new believers together for teaching, friendship and the building of a community. They did ‘fellowship’

Then in chapter 3 we see a third purpose: a suffering man was given physical help. In this case he was healed. We saw this happen often with Jesus himself, but here we see that it is also to be part of the church ... involvement with society at the most basic level.

Proclaiming the gospel (saving souls); sharing and teaching in fellowship (growing saints) and caring for the sick (serving suffering humanity).

It is interesting to note in Chapter 3 that immediately after the healing of the lame man, Peter goes back to the first thing the church did. He again uses this opportunity to preach. The mission of the church to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ is always part of the narrative of Acts.

Some may argue that this is a primitive ecclesiology and that history has advanced the idea of ‘church’ well beyond these three basic functions. Is the church of Australia today as dynamic as the Acts church? I am suggesting that the church of today (including The Salvation Army) could do well to re-visit its New Testament roots, certainly in regard to understanding its reliance on the Holy Spirit.

The second difference - understanding ‘baptism of the Spirit’.

The Salvation Army used the term ‘baptism of the Spirit’ for many years, as did the Wesleyans and many of the Holiness movements of the 19th century. The intention of this phrase ‘baptism of the Spirit’ was to describe the cleansing that comes to the person who is being fully sanctified – made holy.

In early Salvation Army teaching the baptism of the Spirit was associated with ‘second blessing’ theology – that Christians were saved, and then in a subsequent experience (baptism of the Spirit) were cleansed of their sin and fully sanctified. Although The Salvation Army has now moved away from the ‘second blessing’ teaching, it still declares that when a person is saved, they are *cleansed of their sin* through the baptism of the Spirit. We can be saved and sanctified – and it is all the work of the Holy Spirit. It won’t happen without him. For The Salvation Army, and for the whole holiness movement, the focus the baptism of the Spirit was on ‘power’ (*exousia*) for ‘moral authority’ and evidenced through the life of love and purity.

When the Pentecostals came onto the scene, they too began to use this term ‘baptism of the Spirit’. But theirs’ was a different meaning. For them, the focus was on the ‘power’ (*dynamis*) for the purpose of supernatural giftedness and evidenced in the signs and wonders.

For Pentecostals the baptism is a ‘doing’ thing. For Salvationists, it is a ‘being’ experience. Salvation Story is helpful here.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a way some have used to describe the holiness experience. Baptism is a symbol of dying to ourselves and emerging as new persons in Christ. It was used in the Early Church as the receiving of the Holy Spirit at regeneration which was the requirement for membership in the body of Christ: 'We were all baptised by one Spirit into one body' (I Corinthians 12:13). The 'baptism of the Holy Spirit' may therefore be considered as distinct from being 'filled with the Holy Spirit'. Baptism happens once at the beginning of Christian experience, while infilling happens repeatedly throughout the Christian life.⁸

The impact of the Pentecostals was such that because of confusion over the meaning of ‘baptism of the Spirit’, The Salvation Army (and the holiness movement generally) moved away from this terminology in the early 20th Century.⁹

The problem of experience

It is at this point that we come face to face with the one of the most problematic aspects of the Holy Spirit - experience, and the problem of *experiential theology*.

Let me divert briefly.

- Biblical Theology is the development of theology based purely on what the bible says (eg. Creation). This theology forms the foundations of the doctrines of the church.
- Systematic Theology collates and organises the Biblical concepts and moulds them into rational ideas, especially the theology that is not clearly spelt out in scripture (for example the Trinity).
- Experiential Theology is theology that expresses itself in the human’s response to God. It adds the ‘flavour’ and colour, but is affected by interpretation, bias, pre-conceived ideas, and individual experience (for example, slaying in the Spirit and the ‘second blessing’).

Whenever we discuss the Holy Spirit, we become affected by ‘experiential theology’. It is how people experience God and because we are all different, the experience will be different for each one of us. This is why there are so many diverse opinions regarding the work of the Holy Spirit. If we are going to avoid error, then we must always return to scripture.

It is the question of ‘experience’ that presents the most contentious issues related to Pentecostalism. The ‘doctrines’ of the General Council of the Assemblies of God (USA) states

“We believe ... the initial physical evidence of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit is ‘speaking in tongues’ as experienced on the Day of Pentecost and referenced through Acts and the Epistles”.¹⁰ To speaking in tongues we also add ‘slaying in the Spirit’, ‘prophecy’ and ‘healing’. It is these things that cause most of the arguments.

Each of these expressions falls into the category of ‘experiential theology’ and must be tested against ‘biblical theology’.

Speaking in tongues – from the Greek word *glossolalia* meaning ‘unknown tongue’ The interpretation of this word in scripture is hotly debated. Dr Roger Green, head of NT studies Asbury College, argues that this term always means a language that is known, but unknown to the speaker. Acts 2 for example indicates that all those from foreign countries could understand what the disciples were saying even though the disciples had not learned their language. Other scholars on the other hand, argue for a spiritual language that is only known to God. Whatever position is taken, it is still qualified by Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians that discourages this language being used in public (1 Cor. 14:19 and 28) and is one of the lesser gifts. (1 Cor 12:28-31). There is no suggestion in scripture that this is a gift given as one of the evidences of the baptism of the Holy Spirit,

Slaying in the Spirit – there is no equivalent experience described in scripture

Prophecy – in scripture it is primarily the proclamation of the word of God. Very little is involved in telling the future or forecasting events. Almost none of it is prophecy over individuals.

Healing – is evidenced in scripture and although there are some accounts of the apostles’ healing people following the resurrection of Jesus, they are few, and usually in the context of a larger evangelical purpose. What is never present in scripture is the idea that the ‘faith’ usurps the sovereignty of God. Healing cannot be demanded and is not equated with salvation. Fullness of life (John 10:10) is not a physical reference, but a spiritual one.

The Salvation Army celebrates the purpose of the church, which was created in Acts 2. The re-enactment of Pentecost through the signs and wonders is therefore not our tradition and in our opinion cannot be fully substantiated by scripture.

This does not diminish the experiences that some people have. Many have been blessed through the ecstatic experience of signs and wonders. But it is largely ‘experiential theology’ and therefore not the basis of doctrine or biblical interpretation.

Experience and Scripture

This does not mean that experience is not indicated in scripture, in fact, quite the opposite. In the 1930’s, the theologian Rudolph Otto explained the two particular types of experience that can be identified in Scripture and was evident in the life of the Church.

The first of these experiences he describes as the 'Numinous' - an *intense* experience and near physical encounter with God that is characterised by fear, fascination and mystery in the almost tangible presence of the divine.

Biblical examples of intense experience are found in the story of the transfiguration of Jesus in which Peter speaks for James and John in Mark 9:6 and says 'Rabbi it is good for us to be here'. They were really so frightened that he didn't know what to say. The Old Testament story of Moses at the burning bush is another example of this intense type of experience. These occurrences are very rare, yet nonetheless real to the participants, and throughout the centuries a relatively small number of Christians have given testimony to such near-physical encounters with God.

The second type of experience Otto describes as 'ecstatic' – a joyful experience, a sense of release from one's normal inhibitions, often evidenced by speaking in tongues, and other ecstatic manifestations. Acts 2:2-4 is such an example.

It is this second type of experience that has become more commonly expressed in the modern church and has been fundamental to the various manifestations of Pentecostalism and charismatic renewal in the twentieth century. There is no question that 'experience' is part of the biblical tradition and therefore to be expected as part of the church tradition.

Experiencing the Holy Spirit without being Pentecostal

However, a person or a church doesn't have to be Pentecostal to acknowledge or experience God through his Holy Spirit. They are Biblical experiences, not 'Pentecostal' experiences.

The Swiss theologian Emil Brunner makes the point:

“ ... we ought to face the New Testament witness with sufficient candour to admit that in this 'pneuma' (Holy Spirit) which the Ecclesia was conscious of possessing, there lie forces of an extra-rational kind mostly lacking among us Christians today”¹¹

Experiencing the Holy Spirit should be a part of who we are as the 'ecclesia', the church. But I suspect that Brunner's suggestion that the modern church is 'lacking' in its acceptance of the supernatural is partially right. The *rationalism* of Modernity has created many Christian cynics who are skeptical to anything supernatural. Maybe scientific rationalism has had a 'dampening' effect on the church, and The Salvation Army.

I believe that God has used the Pentecostal movement to challenge The Salvation Army to a new awareness of our need to be Holy Spirit dependent. Even though The Salvation Army has constantly acknowledged the importance of the Holy Spirit, it has not always acted that way. We are not Pentecostal, but the Pentecostals can teach us to be more expectant of the supernatural workings of the Holy Spirit.

I personally believe that God has brought into existence The Salvation Army and given us our emphasis for a specific reason... the world needs a church of holy people who are mostly on their knees before God in humility and brokenness. God has called us to a broken world. How better to reach a broken world than through the awareness of our own brokenness, and the reliance of his perfect grace and love. Our baptism of the Spirit is 'power' (*exousia*) for the life of love and purity.

There is no question that early Salvation Army teaching advocated an experiential type of Baptism of the Spirit. Certainly, early leaders encouraged Salvationists to fervently pray for the blessing.

The emphasis however, was not the ‘signs and wonders’ or the experiential nature of the ‘blessing’. The result was always for the experience of holiness – that state of ‘perfect love’, ‘full salvation’, entire sanctification. It was always for ‘what it meant’, not for ‘what was to be experienced’.

The historical records show little evidence of people speaking in tongues; there were accounts of people falling down and lying on the floor in an trance – but this appears to have been spontaneous, and not encouraged by a mediator ‘slaying’ in the Spirit. There are certainly accounts of laughing, joyous behaviour, but the focus was always on the life change that followed – the life of holiness that was a foundational doctrine of our early Salvation Army.

Conclusion

General Clarence Wiseman wrote:

The New Testament does not teach that Christians need a new baptism in the Spirit, for they already possess the Holy Spirit, otherwise they would not be Christians. What is required is an awakening to the necessity for an utter and complete surrender to the Spirit.' (Wiseman p.3)

The Salvation Army is not Pentecostal. But it is ‘charismatic’ because it is absolutely dependent on the Holy Spirit and the gifts he gives to enable us to be his servants in the world.

Our challenge is to pray more expectantly for the beautiful Spirit of Jesus to transform the whole world and to use The Salvation Army as one of his tools in this mission.

Endnotes:

¹ Bramwell Booth *Echoes and Memories* (London, Hodder and Stoughton 1977) p.67-68

² Samuel Logan Brengle *Helps to Holiness* (Atlanta, The Salvation Army Supplies and Purchasing Dept. 1979 -first published 1896) pp.10-11

³ John Larsson *Spiritual Breakthrough* (St Albans, The Campfield Press 1983) pp.60-61

⁴ This overview is summarised from Ian Barr *Holiness and the Charismatic Renewal Movement*, a lecture given at the ICO July 2002, p.1

⁵ J.I.Packer *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Baker Books 1984) p.170

⁶ John Larsson p.62

⁷ Ian Barr pp.5-6

⁸ The Salvation Army *Salvation Story* (Cornwall, NPG Books 1998) p.97

⁹ Ibid p.2

¹⁰ *16 Foundational Truths of the Assemblies of God* noted in their website:
http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Statement_of_Fundamental_Truths/sft_short.cfm

¹¹ Emil Brunner *Dogmatics Vol.III* p.48 quoted in J. Rodman Williams *The Era of the Spirit* (Plainfield, Logos International, 1971) p. 79