

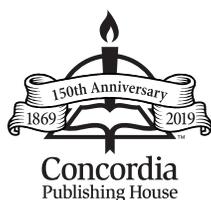
LED BY THE SPIRIT

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How Charismatic Is
New Testament Christianity?

Victor C. Pfitzner
with Introduction by John T. Pless

*Dedicated in grateful recognition to
Pastor Carl Julius Pfitzner, father, first mentor, benefactor;
and Professor Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, doctor-father, guide, friend*



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Published 2019 by Concordia Publishing House
3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, MO 63118-3968
1-800-325-3040 • cph.org

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Manufactured in the United States of America

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	vii
PREFACE	5
CH. I THE CHALLENGE OF THE CHARISMATICS	9
1. Defining the Challenge	
2. Theology and the Whole Truth	
CH. II THE QUEST FOR THE SPIRIT—THEN AND NOW.....	16
1. The Neglected Doctrine	
2. The Quest for the Spirit in the New Testament World	
3. The Problem of Religious Experience	
4. The Criteria of Truth—the Central Issues	
CH. III THE MYSTERY OF DIVINE CREATIVE POWER	29
(Old Testament)	
1. The Spirit of Creation and Revelation	
2. The Spirit and the New Creation	
CH. IV THE SPIRIT-FILLED MESSIAH (Gospels)	35
1. The Promise of the Baptizer	
2. The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus	
3. The Promise of the Spirit	
CH. V THE SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH (Acts)	45
1. The Acts of the Spirit	
2. The Promise of the Spirit and Mission [Acts 1]	
3. The Miracle of Pentecost [Acts 2]	
A Note on Acts 2:37–39 and Baptism	
4. The Samaria Episode [Acts 8]	
A Note on the Ethiopian Eunuch [Acts 8:26–40]	
5. The Conversion of Paul [Acts 9]	
6. The Conversion of Cornelius [Acts 10–11]	
7. Apollos and the Disciples at Ephesus [Acts 18–19]	
CH. VI FAITH AND LIFE—THE SPIRIT’S WORK (Paul).....	62
1. The Spirit and the Gospel of Baptism	
2. The Assurance of Faith	
3. ‘Be Filled with the Spirit’—The Call to Holiness	
4. The Spirit and the Spectacular	
5. The Charismatic Gifts and Ministry	

CH. VII THE SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH TODAY.....	89
1. The Fundamental Experience of Grace	
2. Evaluating Charismatic Experience	
3. The Charismatic Gifts Today	
4. Prophecy	
5. Speaking in Tongues	
6. Divine Healing	
A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	118
INDEX OF SCRIPTURE REFERENCES	125

INTRODUCTION

When *Led by the Spirit: How Charismatic Is New Testament Christianity?* was published in 1976, the Charismatic or Neo-Pentecostal Movement was having a broad impact in denominations in North America, Europe, and Australia. Pfitzner's careful exegetical study was written with this phenomenon in view. While the influence of this movement has waned in the Global North, Pentecostalism and its offshoots in the Charismatic Movement continue to be a major challenge in South America, Asia, and Africa. The need to provide a Lutheran response to Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism anchored in the Holy Scriptures and faithful to the testimony of the Lutheran Confessions prompted the republishing of Dr. Pfitzner's book for use in a course in the Lutheran Leadership Development Program. Others—especially missionaries—will find this work useful as well.

Henning Wrogemann observes that it is difficult to make statements that accurately portray the whole of Pentecostalism. “This complex phenomenon actually comprises a whole range of movements.”¹ Wrogemann does conclude that the Pentecostal Movement, which numbers more than five hundred million people worldwide, does display three defining characteristics: (1) the working of the Holy Spirit is tangibly experienced; (2) this experience leads to a distinct turning point in one's life; and (3) the presence of an intense missionary impulse.²

Although speaking in tongues was practiced in some nineteenth-century groups, modern Pentecostalism is usually identified as an outgrowth of the Wesleyan Holiness Movement in the early twentieth century. Historians point to Charles Fox Parham at Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas—where Agnes Ozman spoke in tongues on January 1, 1901—and the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles associated with William Joseph Seymour as the origin of the movement. These two events would provide impetus toward the founding of numerous Pentecostal denominations that would form the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America (PFNA) in 1948. Pentecostalism generally held to a double work of grace (justification and sanctification) followed by a “baptism in the Spirit” evidenced by speaking in tongues. The capacity of the believer to perform miraculous signs and wonders was seen as confirmation of the Spirit's power.³

Pentecostalism would also make inroads into mainstream Protestant churches as well as the Roman Catholic Church by means of what would become known as the Charismatic Movement. It was newsworthy in 1960 when Dennis Bennett (1917–91), an Episcopal priest at St. Mark's Church in Van Nuys, California, began speaking in tongues and writing about his experience of the Holy Spirit. Another Californian, Larry Christenson (1928–2017), a pastor of an American Lutheran

1 Henning Wrogemann, *Theologies of Mission*, trans. Karl E. Böhmer, vol. 2 of *Intercultural Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 235.

2 Wrogemann, *Theologies of Mission*, 237.

3 For a helpful historical overview of Pentecostalism, see Walter J. Hollenweger, “Pentecostalism,” and Jackie David Johns, “Pentecostal Churches,” in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, eds. Erwin Fahlbusch et al (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 4:144–51, 137–44.

Church congregation in San Pedro, California, was introduced to speaking in tongues while visiting an Assemblies of God Church. Christenson would emerge as the leader of the Charismatic Movement within the Lutheran churches, authoring the books *Speaking in Tongues* and *Charismatic Renewal among Lutherans*. Within Roman Catholic circles, Francis MacNutt and Killian O'Donnell became proponents of speaking in tongues and miraculous healings.

Pentecostalism would spread into South America, Asia, and Africa as a force to be reckoned with in these settings. Pentecostalism in the Global South is diverse, often incorporating aspects of indigenous religious practices. Yet it has a common motif marked by ecstatic spiritual experience and an emphasis on the miraculous intervention of the Spirit not only in healings but also in the bestowal of material gifts, that is, the so-called “prosperity gospel.” Popularized by “televangelists” in the United States, this belief holds that God will bless the faithful with wealth and health. This false theology would also be exported to the Southern Hemisphere, often associating itself with dynamic personalities who would gather devoted followers attracted by the promise that obedient faith would pay dividends in the deliverance from poverty and need.

The marks of Pentecostalism can also be seen in churches not formally identified with the movement. For example, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus has experienced the effects of Pentecostalism in its worship practices. Pentecostalism has become ecumenical in that it is not confined to the historic denominations associated with the movement such as the Assemblies of God, but it reaches into a wide spectrum of churches in the Global South.

A primary concern for Lutherans is the unity of God's Word and Spirit.⁴ Lutheran theology recognizes in Pentecostalism a schism between the Word and Spirit. Exegetically, Pfitzner has demonstrated that the Holy Spirit works through the preaching of Christ crucified to build and keep His Church. The Spirit is not to be found in spectacular displays of power but in the words of the Lord both preached and written by His inspiration in the Holy Scriptures. A Lutheran critique of Pentecostalism proceeds from this biblical perspective.

The Lutheran focus is on Christ's own words about the Holy Spirit. On the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus promises to send the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth (John 14:15–17). The Holy Spirit is the “Helper” who bears witness about Christ (John 15:26). He will convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment

4 Here see Jeffrey Silcock: “The Holy Spirit in his freedom has bound himself to the letters of the Bible so that any demonstration of the Spirit and power today (1 Cor. 2:4) will happen in no other way than ‘in and *through* the prophetic and apostolic Word that is sure, certain, and utterly reliable’ (Bayer)” (“Luther on the Holy Spirit and His Use of God's Word,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, ed. Robert Kolb et al [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014], 306). Also note Werner Klän: “Within the horizon of Lutheran theology on the means of grace, the (external) Word and God's Spirit are attached inseparably to the ‘lettered’ word, as the Holy Spirit binds himself this word” (“God's Word as the Place Where God Dwells,” in *From Wittenberg to the World: Essays on the Reformation and Its Legacy in Honor of Robert Kolb*, ed. Charles Arand et al [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018], 265). Klän's whole chapter is well worth reading in light of the fact that the Lutheran argument against Pentecostalism is, at least in part, concerning the question of where is God “located.”

(John 16:4–11). He will not call attention to Himself but will take what belongs to Christ and preach it (John 16:12–15). Luther writes in his exposition of John 16 (1537):

Here Christ makes the Holy Spirit a Preacher. He does so to prevent one from gaping toward heaven in search of Him, as the fluttering spirits and enthusiasts do, and from divorcing Him from the oral Word or the ministry. One should know and learn that He will be in and with the Word, that it will guide us into all truth, in order that we may believe it, use it as a weapon, be preserved by it against all the lies and deceptions of the devil, and prevail in all trials and temptations. . . . The Holy Spirit wants this truth which He is to impress into our hearts to be so firmly fixed that reason and all one's own thoughts and feelings are relegated to the background. He wants us to adhere solely to the Word and to regard it as the only truth. And through this Word alone He governs the Christian Church to the end. (*Luther's Works* 24:362)

In the words of Steven Paulson: “The Holy Spirit’s proper work is given a Christological fixation.”⁵

God’s Word and Spirit go together. We do not have one without the other: “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host” (Ps. 33:6 ESV). The Lord’s breath is His Spirit (*ruach*). The breath of His mouth “is emitted when the word is spoken.”⁶ So in the New Testament Word and Spirit (breath and wind) go together as we see from John 3:8; 20:19–23; Acts 2:1–2. It is this Holy Spirit who works in and through the words of the Gospel to bring unbelievers to faith, the dead to life (see Eph. 2:1–22), and to keep them united with their Lord in His Church. Without the working of the Spirit in the Gospel, no one can confess Jesus Christ is Lord (see 1 Cor. 12:3).⁷

It is this scriptural teaching that is presented in the Lutheran Confessions. Luther’s explanation of the Third Article in the Small Catechism is the clear confession of 1 Cor. 12:3 as he states: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.” Likewise in the Large Catechism, Luther asserts:

Neither you nor I could ever know anything about Christ, or believe in him and receive him as Lord, unless these were offered to us and bestowed on our hearts through the preaching of the gospel by the Holy Spirit. The work is finished and completed; Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by his sufferings, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained hidden so that no one knew of it, it would have all been in vain, all lost. In order that this treasure might not remain buried but be put to use and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to be published and proclaimed,

5 Steven Paulson, *Lutheran Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 197.

6 Hans Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988), 376.

7 For more on 1 Cor. 12:3, see the essay by Hermann Sasse, “Kyrios,” in *The Lonely Way*, Vol. 1: 1927–1939, ed. Matthew C. Harrison (St. Louis: Concordia, 2001), 61–67.

in which he has given the Holy Spirit to offer and apply to us this treasure, this redemption. Therefore being made holy is nothing else than bringing us to the Lord Christ to receive this blessing, to which we could not have come by ourselves.⁸

Article V of the Augsburg Confession tells us how this⁹ is done: “To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel.”¹⁰

Therefore the Lutheran Confessions reject every form of Enthusiasm, that is, the effort to find the Spirit apart from God’s Word:

In these matters, which concern the spoken, external Word, it must be firmly maintained that God gives no one his Spirit or grace apart from the external Word which goes before. We say this to protect ourselves from the enthusiasts, that is, the “spirits,” who boast that they have the Spirit apart from and before contact with the Word. On this basis they judge, interpret, and twist the Scriptures or oral Word according to their pleasure.¹¹

Oswald Bayer rightly says, “Those who search for the Holy Spirit inside themselves, in realms too deep for words to express, will find ghosts, not God.”¹²

In contrast to every form of spiritualist enthusiasm which we encounter in our world, we have the sure and certain promise of Jesus, who says, “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (John 6:63 ESV). His Spirit-ed-words do what they say even as they say what they do. They bring to faith, they build up the Church in truth, and they strengthen His people for a life of witness and service in the world. The Spirit’s manifold gifts are given not for the acquisition of power, personal gain, or emotional excitement but to bring Christ into focus full and clear as the Lord who lives and reigns eternally as our Savior.

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8 Large Catechism II 38–39 (Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000], 436).

9 For more on Enthusiasm, see Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator: Luther’s Concept of the Holy Spirit*, trans. John M. Jensen (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1953), 205–305; Carter Lindberg, *The Third Reformation? Charismatic Movements and the Lutheran Tradition* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1983); Amy Nelson Burnett, “Luther and the *Schwärmer*,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther’s Theology*, ed. Robert Kolb et al (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 511–24.

10 Augsburg Confession V 1–2 (Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 40).

11 Smalcald Articles III III 3 (Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 322).

12 Oswald Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, trans. Jeffrey G. Silcock and Mark C. Mattes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 55.

PREFACE

There are 'head books' and 'heart books': those which have as their primary purpose the imparting of knowledge and information, the stirring of the intellect; and those which, while giving information, set out rather to inspire and stir the emotions. There are 'head books' which analyse poetry in a scholarly and objective manner; but these are preceded by the 'heart books' of the poetry itself.

This book seeks to speak to both the head and the heart. It begins from the standpoint that every experience of the Spirit of God involves the whole person of the one who is led by the Spirit (Rom. 8:14). Our Christian understanding (with the head) of God's gracious Spirit is part and parcel of our very experience (with the heart) of the Gospel itself.

But we must always realize that the Spirit of God exists before and beyond our understanding or experience. He is a reality beyond full human comprehension; He cannot be limited or shaped by human experience. That is why this study sets out to explore the wonderful mystery of the Spirit on the basis of God's own Word and not on the basis of human experience.

If this book tends to speak more to the head than to the heart, this bias has been deliberately chosen. Charismatic writers, both Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal, claim to base their theology of the Spirit on the Scriptures. And those who oppose the charismatics make the same claim. How, then, can the differing conclusions be explained? Any reading of charismatic literature will soon make clear that it appeals strongly to the 'experience of the Spirit' as proof of the truth of its claims. In turn, Scripture itself is read and understood in the light of that experience. What we obviously need is a clear biblical hermeneutic (that is, how the Bible is meant to be read and understood), as well as a clear understanding of the nature of Christian experience and its relationship to the Scriptures.

While this study from time to time adopts a polemical tone, its purpose is positive, not negative. It does not seek to attack charismatics for the sake of polemics. The study of the power and person of the Holy Spirit is a study of the grace and mercy of God, of His love in Jesus Christ. To be led by the Spirit means to be led into the glorious liberty of the children of God, to a joyful understanding and living of the Gospel.

The chapters of this book are, to some extent, based on papers and talks presented to various groups in the Lutheran Church of Australia. They include sections of a paper delivered to the Fourth General Convention of that Church at Horsham, Victoria, in October 1972, as well as lectures offered to an in-service training-school for pastors of the South Australia District of the Church in May 1972. Both these past papers and the present study were requested in view of the challenge, and often confusion, caused by the charismatic or neo-Pentecostal movement within the major denominations, including the Lutheran Church.

It will be obvious to anyone who has read some of the many recent books dealing with the Spirit and His gifts, that the present writer is indebted to many fruitful minds. In particular, indebtedness to Frederick D. Bruner, Charles K. Barrett, James D. G. Dunn, Kurt Koch, Anthony A. Hoekema, Paul Barnett, and Peter Jensen is gratefully acknowledged. Footnotes, giving detailed textual arguments and literature references, have been deliberately omitted to keep the presentation as simple as possible.

Every effort has been made to keep the study clear and intelligible, but this does not mean that the reader can escape some deep and detailed study of the Scriptures. The discipline of thorough searching of God's revelation is one of the marks of spiritual maturity. Many may be tempted to skip the biblical study of Chapters III to VI; however, the summary of Chapter VII will, hopefully, direct the searcher for truth back to those basic studies.

My only justification for another book on the Spirit is the contention that we are never finished with the quest for the Spirit, or, better, for an understanding of His person and work. In addition, the writer confesses his allegiance to the Lutheran understanding of the Gospel, and thus believes that the Lutheran understanding of the Means of Grace (Word and Sacraments) as the 'home' of the Spirit, can help us understand and arrive at that fullness of the Spirit of which Saint Paul speaks in Ephesians 5:18. The ultimate aim of this book will be reached if it helps the reader to live as a child of God who is 'filled with all the fulness of God' (Eph. 3:19). That is the ultimate of ultimates.

Malvern,
South Australia.
August 1975

Victor C. Pfitzner.

Chapter I

THE CHALLENGE OF THE CHARISMATICS

1. DEFINING THE CHALLENGE

It is quite understandable that from time to time we should find a longing to return to the Early Church which enjoyed that first flush of zeal and fervency in the possession of the Spirit. But the return to the past often entails a rather naive and uncritical picture of that church.

Too often it is forgotten that there never was a perfect church. In its first days as the new people of God, the Early Church had its Ananias and Sapphira who lied to and tempted the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3,9). It experienced petty squabbles over material things (Acts 6). Paul's missionary congregations also revealed some sad and serious flaws. The Galatians, or many among them, denied the Spirit of freedom and the gift of faith by their return to the Law (Gal. 3:2). All the errors of the congregation at Corinth ('the church of Vanity Fair' as A. M. Hunter calls it) can be summed up as an abuse of the Spirit's gifts in a loveless and boasting pride, based on their false understanding of themselves as 'spiritual people'.

Nevertheless, who can deny that the Early Church was indeed led by the Spirit? One of the chief aims of Luke in the Acts of the Apostles was just this: to show how the Spirit was involved in every important decision and every new move of the church from the Day of Pentecost onwards. And who would not want the church of today to be so guided and led?

It is just here that the Pentecostal groups since the turn of the century, and, in particular, the charismatic movement since the early 1960s, have had an unsettling impact on the main-stream churches of Christendom. They have created a considerable degree of uneasiness, instilling doubts as to whether the main-stream churches have lost something which they ought to have: a surer sense and clearer evidence of the possession of the Holy Spirit, plus such external signs as speaking in tongues.

From small beginnings in the last century, the quest for this 'experience of the Spirit' has not only produced many new denominations, but has now more recently produced a major international and inter-denominational movement—in a sense, a second ecumenical movement—which unites Christians from various confessions and traditions in what they claim is the common possession and experience of the Spirit. This 'new Reformation', as it has been called, has major ecumenical significance, since it is seen by many as one way, perhaps finally the only way, in which the old doctrinal differences, which have previously separated the various churches, are to be overcome. The catch-cry of the new enthusiast ecumenicity is thus not only 'One in Christ', but also 'One in the possession of the Spirit'. For them, that is enough to unite all Christians.

The above slogan is fine if there can be agreement on what is meant by 'the, possession of the Spirit'. But, even within the charismatic movement, there is no such thing as agreed doctrine on the Spirit and His work. While we can speak of a 'movement' in general terms, there is no consensus, no commonly-held confession, on all the varied aspects of the charismatic stance. Indeed, some of the Pentecostal churches are even unitarian, denying the doctrine of the Trinity! And while charismatics of the various historic confessions do enjoy a sort of fellowship based on a common experience of the Spirit attested by tongue-speaking, such a bond can and will never let the churches escape the task of seeking a common expression of the church's teaching and doctrine.

Before we proceed any further, it will be good to define some of the terms already used, and others yet to be used in this study. Sometimes the terms: Pentecostal, neo-Pentecostal, and charismatic are used in such a way as to create some confusion. For the sake of clarity we will use the terms in the following way:

1. **Pentecostal** is used for that movement and for those churches which have grown out of the quest for the Spirit and His tangible gifts since the turn of the century. Pentecostals see and demand the so-called 'baptism of the Spirit' as a second, separate experience of grace after conversion itself. There is general agreement among them that this will not only come subsequent to conversion, but also will be attested by some external sign, especially speaking in tongues. With some, tongues is even demanded as a sign of this 'filling' with the Spirit, and a Christian is not considered to have reached spiritual maturity without this special filling.
2. **Neo-Pentecostal** is used for that movement embracing Christians within the traditional church-bodies who, especially since the early 1960s, have desired for themselves and for their churches a greater experience of the power of the Spirit and His special gifts for ministry. These Christians stay within their denominations and usually do not accept all the emphases and excesses of Pentecostal teaching. While they seek a greater experience of the Spirit for themselves and others, they still profess faithfulness to the central teachings of their churches.
3. The term **charismatic** is a more general one. It is derived from the Greek word used in the New Testament for grace (*charis*), and from the term used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 for 'gifts of the Spirit' (*charismata*). Thus the term charismatics is used to include both Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals, to cover anyone who believes that the gifts of the Spirit referred to in the New Testament are just as valid and available for the believer today as they were in the Early Church.

The distinction between the first two terms is not always clearly defined. But the Pentecostal has, for example, no appreciation of the sacramental life of the church (especially of baptismal regeneration), nor does he appreciate the traditional liturgical life of the church. More importantly for Lutherans, the Pentecostal understanding of justification and sanctification and their relatedness as the work of the

Spirit must be viewed as either rejecting, or at least placing in danger, the great doctrine of the Reformation, *sola gratia* (by grace alone). Where sanctification and the quest for holiness are seen apart from grace, apart from the gift of the Spirit in justification itself, where 'tarrying' or waiting for the Spirit denies every Christian's present possession of the Spirit by faith, the free gift of the Spirit and the free Gospel are denied. We thus finish with a new legalism in the name of the Spirit.

This rejection of Pentecostalism may be regarded by some as arbitrary. However, this study is not really concerned with arguing the case with Pentecostals; a fuller and more detailed argument would be necessary to explain the above rejection of Pentecostal teaching in its most-commonly-accepted form. And yet this study will provide enough incidental evidence to illustrate the complete incompatibility between the Pentecostal teaching and that found in the New Testament.

This study is, first and foremost, concerned with the challenge to the church presented by the neo-Pentecostal movement. More particularly, it is part of a dialogue with Lutherans who claim to have already had a special experience of the Spirit, or who desire it. It is addressed also to those who want an answer to the urgent question: Am I a complete Christian without this special experience?

This is an intensely practical question for many Christians today. Many Christians are concerned about apathy and coldness within their local congregation. They may come to various conclusions as to why this apparent spiritual stagnation has set in; a lack of joyous Gospel proclamation from the pulpit, traditionalism, formalism, nominalism, secularism, and many other 'isms' may be cited as causes. Often comparisons are then made with the zeal, ardour, enthusiasm, fervency of spirit (call it what you like), lively worship, and evangelistic fervour which are usually attributed to charismatic circles. These features are often highlighted and used to throw a bad light on the anaemic, spirit-less life, worship, and piety sometimes found in congregations of the major historical denominations. Many Lutherans who have come into contact with members of the Assemblies of God or with the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International (FGBMFI) have often drawn quick comparisons between Lutherans and charismatics which leave the former found wanting.

Whether such comparisons are always fair need not be argued here—though it can be said that Lutherans (and many other Christians) have a sad habit of too easily overlooking real spiritual life and growth when they bemoan all that seems to be wrong with the church! We are simply making the point that charismatics both inside and outside the main denominations raise a vital question which demands an answer: Have the churches been guilty of quenching the Spirit, of blocking His path, of neglecting or even rejecting His special gifts? Before we attack what we believe to be the error of others, we should be ready to confess our own spiritual apathy, if that confession must be made.

And it may be necessary for the pastors of the church to make their own confession of guilt, too. The sins of God's people, as the Old Testament in particular often reminds us, are very often to be traced back to the sins of their spiritual leaders (cf. Ezek. 34).

But it is just here that soberness and not muddle-headed enthusiasm must reign. The fact that Pentecostalism has largely lost its sectarian taint (at the New Delhi World Council of Churches Assembly in 1961 several South American Pentecostal churches were admitted as members of the WCC), or the fact that neo-Pentecostalism has its followers in virtually every major denomination in Christendom, does not justify an uncritical 'jumping on the band-waggon' of the new Spirit-movement. Among all the threats which face the church, those which arise from within are perhaps even more dangerous than those which come from outside. False teaching is heresy, even if it uses traditional Christian terminology, whenever it distorts the faith of the church as expressed in its creeds and confessions.

2. THEOLOGY AND THE WHOLE TRUTH

If there is something to be learned from the charismatics, or if we have to reject some of their teachings, we must be clear that both actions are based on sound theology.

Such a seemingly-obvious statement requires brief clarification. Too often the new is immediately rejected because it is just that. Because the church by its very nature is bound closely to a long tradition, it is easier to stick to traditional formulations, structures, organizations, and accepted practice than to adopt new ideas and ways. That which we have not tried, or which we have not fully understood, is often pushed aside with an easy label condemning it as a dangerous 'ism'. For example, a call for small-cell-group activity, whether for prayer, Bible study, or some form of mutual edification, can, by those who do not wish to understand or to become involved, be branded as 'Pentecostal'. But to be led by the Spirit means being open to the Word even if this means something new or untried. There is a great need in our congregations for open, earnest seeking of the truth together, and for a readiness to listen lovingly to one another in obedience to that Word.

On the other hand, searching for the truth under the Spirit always involves pinpointing dangerous errors. That is the Spirit in loving action. Unfolding the truth and unmasking error go hand in hand.

It is worth remembering that most of the New Testament writings arose from the Early Church's struggle against error. And the interesting thing about this struggle is that the people against whom the New Testament writers had to pen their lines did not always appear as raving heretics mouthing blasphemies and patent lies. On the contrary, the early converts were impressed by such heretics because they presented very plausible arguments, and seemed to be orthodox and pious in their contentions. The call back to the Law on the part of the Judaizers who were threatening the liberty of the