

BOOK REVIEW
EDDIE L. HYATT: 2000 YEARS OF
CHARISMATIC CHRISTIANITY

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by Jackson Morro

What happened to the baptism with the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit after the initial outpouring on the Day of Pentecost? A traditional view maintains the original Charismatic gifts slowly dissipated after the original apostolic generation and the second century era of the Church fathers with just about all true manifestations of the Holy Spirit's power effectively quenched by the rise of the Roman Catholic church and the secular intervention of Emperor Constantine into Christianity in the 300's A.D.

Many modern evangelical "cessasionists" maintain this extinction of the Charismatic gifts was the plan of God, who only wanted signs and wonders working in the Church until the formation of the Bible. The Charismatic gifts, therefore, have rightfully ceased and are not valid anymore. Many modern Pentecostals on the other hand maintain that the Holy Spirit was effectively quenched for centuries after Constantine but God, in the 20th century, began restoring the baptism with the Holy Spirit and His gifts to the church as part of a "Latter Rain" end time outpouring.

While every Pentecostal and Charismatic agrees that our current times indeed are an era of special visitation, outpouring and restoration by the Holy Spirit. (See for example, the excellent article by James Robison on "The Holy Spirit Restoration" in *The New Spirit-Filled Life Bible*, publisher: Nelson, pp. 1859-1864.), the impression given from many Pentecostal pulpits is that both the Spirit baptism and the Charismatic gifts effectively ceased from the time of Emperor Constantine and the rise of the Roman Catholic Church in the 4th century A.D. until the 20th century Latter Rain Outpouring.

"Not so fast!" maintains Eddie L. Hyatt, who has done prodigious research in both primary and secondary sources of Church History. The result is the fascinating and revealing *2000 Years of Charismatic Christianity*. Hyatt convincingly demonstrates that both the baptism with the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's gifts have always been present in the Church of

Jesus Christ, although at times, institutional Christianity has vigorously fought to suppress the Pentecostal experience. Hyatt concludes, “The fact is that Pentecostals and Charismatics do have a legitimate history. It is a history found in the various revival and renewal movements that have emerged constantly in the life of the Church.” (p.4)

2000 Years begins with a book at the generation of the apostles, the era of the Church fathers, and the period of Constantine and the early great Church councils. Hyatt’s research confirms the common wisdom “that there was a gradual demise of the charismatic character of the Church and a corresponding rise of organizational structures” (p.9) during this period. He also shows that with the rise of institutionalism also came a sharp distinction between clergy and laity, a moral decline among the clergy, a virtual extinction of Christian love, and a preoccupation with doctrinal arguments in place of vibrant worship and effective pastoral ministry.

The “new perspective” Hyatt presents is that while Spirit baptism and the gifts of the Spirit virtually disappear from the institutional church (i.e. Roman Catholicism), they reappear with the establishment of early western monasticism. In fact, the monks who withdrew from society to escape the corruption of institutional Christianity often plumbed the depths of Pentecostal experience within the confines of their monasteries.

Hyatt, in reality, now forces any true student of Church History to acknowledge the charismatic nature of much of western monasticism in the early Middle Ages, modern day Pentecostals and Charismatic Catholics can legitimately find grounds for common fellowship. Hyatt mostly studies western monasticism, but my own suspicion is that one can find a similar charismatic experience also in the era of the Desert Fathers (Christian hermits) and in the Eastern Orthodox monasteries.

Hyatt then proceeds to the High Middle Ages (i.e., 1000 A.D. to 1500 A.D.) and examines the period when both superstition and ritual dominated the institutional Church. Traditionally, Pentecostals have virtually dismissed the possibility of any genuine movement of the Holy Spirit during this era of Papal corruption and popular religious superstition which often bordered on the occult. But again, Hyatt takes a discerning look at the evidence and rightly concludes that not all the “legends of the saints” were merely superstitious piety put forth by the Catholic church as self-aggrandizing propaganda. Separating the wheat from the chaff, Hyatt concludes there were some genuinely Charismatic Catholic “saints” such as Francis of Assisi and Vincent Ferrer. Interestingly, an article by Paul Thigpen in the September 1992 *Charisma* magazine, “Did The Power of The Spirit Ever Leave The Church?” (p. 20-29) corroborates Hyatt’s conclusions

and even points to others, such as Catherine of Siena, as genuine Charismatics. Again, Hyatt is forcing all students of Church History to take a fresh look at the Pentecostal dimension of the history.

Moving to the Reformation, Hyatt underscores the growing restlessness of those who, unlike the Catholic Charismatic saints, simply could not work within the structure of the Catholic Church. Catholicism itself had grown hardened toward any unfettered operation of the Holy Spirit. In 1000 A.D., the Catholic Church had officially condemned speaking in tongues by “common people” as *prima facie* evidence of demonic possession. This was unacceptable to those seeking a genuine experience of the Holy Spirit, and we may rightfully conclude, unacceptable to the Holy Spirit Himself! Consequently, groups like the Cathari and Waldenses who emphasized moral purity, scripture and the experience of the Holy Spirit, arose and challenged the authority of the institutional church, often paying dearly for their faith by persecution and martyrdom.

In 1517 A.D., however, the dam burst and Martin Luther became God’s instrument for bringing about the much needed Reformation and finds that, although there was a belief in such things as healing prayer, there was, nevertheless, an ambivalence toward the baptism with the Holy Spirit and Charismatic gifts among the mainstream Reformers. Those wholly committed to Pentecost, like the Anabaptists and French Prophets were considered “radical” and odd by mainstream Reformers.

Examining the modern period, Hyatt effectively demonstrates the truly Pentecostal character of the Wesleyan Methodist revival. There was a definite Charismatic character to most of the American revivals in the 18th and 19th centuries. Coming to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Hyatt begins examining the Azusa Street Revival and the development of 20th century Pentecostalism. He does a fine job treating these classical heroes in the parade of significant modern Pentecostal forefathers (and foremothers). There are, however, a few significant gaps.

Hyatt himself wrote in his introduction, “This study is neither exhaustive nor critical. Its purpose is to show that Pentecostals/Charismatics do have a legitimate history.” (p. x) He accomplishes this purpose. Nevertheless, one wonders why there is no mention of Aimee Semple McPherson, Angelus Temple and the Foursquare Pentecostal denomination. Certainly, these are major factors and more deserving of mention in a Pentecostal history than D. L. Moody.

Also, there is no mention of the ministries of Jim Bakker and Pat Robertson in the 1970’s and 1980’s. Although Jim and Tammy Bakker’s ill-fated PTL ministry is often viewed by the secular media as an American

cultural sideshow, a modern remake of the movie *Elmer Gantry*, the fact is Bakker's daily ministry was profoundly significant in bringing Pentecostalism to mainstream America. Also, I suspect the Bakker ministry will eventually be seen as the key galvanizing instrument for bringing Pentecostals and Charismatics together during the great revival of the 1970's and 1980's.

Furthermore, the PTL "phone banks" resulted in tens of thousands of "call-in salvations" being referred to local Pentecostal pastors. The PTL era was the era of explosive Pentecostal church growth in the United States. If 19% of all Americans claimed to be Pentecostal or Charismatic in 1980 (Hyatt cites Gallup poll on p. 3), it was clearly due to the PTL ministry which was at its apex in 1980. Bakker's short-lived ministry was far more significant than any of the later movements such as Third Wave, Toronto Blessing, and Pensacola Revivals.

Perhaps the richest part of *2000 Years* are the thought-provoking conclusions and challenges Hyatt sees as a cyclical pattern develop in Church History starting from the original outpouring on the Day of Pentecost. The cycle begins with a spontaneous outpouring of the Holy Spirit and His gifts upon believers. During the outpouring, there is a spiritual freedom and a sovereign direction of God's people by the Holy Spirit Himself. As time goes on, a "felt need" for structure and organization arises. Organization results in a gradual diminishing of manifestations of the Spirit's power. The rise of a "clergy class" results in a quenching of the move of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual and moral coldness follows. The original revival ends.

This, however, is followed by a new revival, a new outpouring which is always Pentecostal/Charismatic in nature. The new revival is forced to bypass the old structural organizations but eventually itself becomes another denominational structure and ultimately loses its spiritual fire, and the cycle goes on and on. This "cycle" confronts us with two critical issues.

First, is it possible to arrive at a balance between the spontaneous charismatic power of a revival and the perceived need for organization and order? Hyatt writes: "The question is really one of authority. Must the revival or renewal always subject itself to institutional authority, or is its existence, in fact, legitimized by the presence of the *charismata*? In other words, must the charismatic person or movement yield to institutional authority, or should the institution concede to the *charismata*?" (p. 199)

Hyatt has no firm answer. This is understandable because the Christian church itself has struggled with this issue without a satisfactory answer for over 2000 years. Is there an answer, a balance between

spontaneous Pentecostal outpouring and organizational structure, or is this simply a dialectic tension the church of Jesus Christ will have to live with in this dispensation of time? Even when revivals break away from the older structures, the revival itself eventually is organized into a new denomination that in the long run fossilizes its original experience.

Do we dare say that the exercise of human spiritual authority inevitably produces whitened sepulchers filled with dead men's bones? On the other hand, without the exercise of spiritual authority, will a continued spontaneous movement just as equally degenerate into the flesh and result in spiritual chaos and heresy? Is it inevitable that the Church, being human as well as divine, simply must go through a continual "bipolar" process of revival and organization until its consummation at the return of its Bridegroom Jesus Christ?

Regardless of how one seeks to resolve this first issue, Hyatt confronts us with a second, absolutely foundational issue. He asks: "It is often maintained by those in the traditional churches that it is their institutions which have preserved Christian truth through the centuries. Is it possible, however, that the historical resistance to spiritual renewal by many of these churches has often resulted in the development of a distorted form of Christianity within their ranks? Contrary to their perspective, is it possible that a purer form of Christian truth has often been preserved by many of the revival and renewal movements of Church History, which, in their respective eras, have been open to the renewing work of the Holy Spirit in their midst?" (p. 218)

I have no problem answering Hyatt's question with a resounding "yes." Pentecost was God's idea and God is a Pentecostal. Eddie Hyatt's *2000 Years of Charismatic Christianity* is a "must read" for all interested in Church History.