

# Worship at Pentecost

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The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost can be seen to have fulfilled several currents of Old Testament prophecy and symbolism. As the spirit inspired the heroes of Israel and led them to victory over Israel's enemies, we can see the Spirit working in Christ's victory over the prince of this world and the Christian's victory over evil. Or, again, just as the spirit of God hovered over the primal chaos rendering it obedient to the ordering word of God, so the Spirit is at work now bringing the new heavens and the new earth into being, the redeemed world out of darkness to the light of the final day. Or the spirit is a fire of purification, or the refreshing waters the nomad depends on in the wastelands. But there is another aspect which it may be worthwhile bringing out in this age of liturgical revival, the connection of the spirit with prophecy, with one stage of prophecy in particular. It is this which is made explicit by the quotation of Joel 2. 28-32 in St Peter's speech in Acts 2. There need be no doubt that St Peter himself referred to this prophecy on the very occasion, but we are perhaps to see in the fullness of the quotation evidence that it was used by the first generation of Christians, on whose memories St Luke drew, to justify and interpret these phenomena wherever and whenever they appeared in the primitive church. The question is whether it is only these transient phenomena that are referred to and regarded as important—as appears on the surface—or whether by examining the context both of the prophecy of Joel and of its New Testament fulfilment something deeper and more permanent is to be found. I want to show that one function of the spirit is to create a community worshipping God with the same power—if not with the same sensational extras—as certain communities in ancient Israel. St Peter is quoting Joel: Joel is referring to the bands of prophets whom it has been conventional for some time to call 'ecstatic'; *faute de mieux* we shall have to keep the word 'ecstatic', though I hope to show that this may include the notion of a not unreasonable fervour as well as of apparent craziness. But more recent scholars maintain that these bands of professional prophets were linked with the liturgy of the high places and the Jerusalem Temple, and even that certain of the later 'writing' or 'reform' prophets

came from their ranks. Without going so far as to claim Amos or Isaiah, as some have done, for these so-called 'cultic' prophets, it does seem relevant to maintain a continuity of inspiration between the professional prophets of the early monarchy and the great individual figures who followed; and—more relevant still for this article—not to lose sight of the connection of Old and New Testament prophecy with liturgical worship. There seem to be two questions that need to be answered: (a) If Joel was referring to the ecstatic stage of prophecy, in what did this consist? (b) How was this realized again in the primitive church and prolonged into the church of later times?

(a) JOEL 2. 28-29 AND THE PROPHETIC COMMUNITY

And it shall come to pass afterwards,  
 that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;  
 your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
 your old men shall dream dreams,  
 and your young men shall see visions.  
 Even upon the menservants and maidservants  
 in those days I will pour out my spirit.

The first point to notice is that the spirit is promised to the whole people; age, sex, and social condition will make no difference; young and old, men and women, master and servant will be equally possessed by the spirit. 'On all flesh' has a universal ring but in view of the following phrases and the context generally it seems it must be taken to mean 'on all Israel'. The second point is to determine the sense and background of the notion of prophecy. Here it seems necessary to look further back in the Old Testament. Although post-exilic prophets had dreams (Daniel) and visions (Zechariah), prophets that is of the era in which it is most likely that Joel was written, it is more illuminating to notice the conjunction of spirit—prophecy—dreams—visions in two chapters of the book of Numbers (11-12). Here we find two stories that illustrate the selflessness and humility of Moses, both deriving from the 'elohist' source of the Pentateuch, almost certainly the work of devout men in the northern kingdom towards the end of its existence. Why this is interesting will appear. In the first story, Moses asks God for help in caring for the people and is instructed to bring seventy elders to the sanctuary; there God shares to them the spirit which already and pre-eminently rests on Moses, and they prophesy. Joshua, jealous for the prerogatives of Moses, protests, but Moses answers, 'Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all Yahweh's people were prophets, would

that Yahweh would put his spirit upon them!' In the second story, God rebukes Miriam, Moses' sister, for claiming an equal authority with him, 'Hear my words; if there is a prophet among you, I, Yahweh, make myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream'. With Moses, of course, it is different, God speaks with him face to face. The parallels with the passage in Joel are obvious and it is not unreasonable to suppose that Joel knew these stories. In the second story the character of prophecy is not unlike that which we know from the writer-prophets of later times; the prophet is given a revelation of Yahweh by some indirect means, the words of Yahweh come to him in a vision or a dream. But in the first story, prophesying seems to have a wider, a less determinate sense: the elders uttered something which manifested that they were possessed by the spirit, but the expression is too vague to mean that they uttered a definite revelation from God.

It is here that it is important to remember the date and source of the tradition from which these two stories are taken. The *elohist* tradition received its final independent form either as an oral or perhaps as a written narrative in the northern kingdom, Israel, roughly between 850 and 750 B.C., and almost certainly among the disciples of Elijah and Elisha or in devout Yahwist circles influenced by them. These stories therefore and their conception of prophecy must be seen against the background of the times of Elijah and Elisha and the immediately preceding centuries. If we look at the texts in the books of Samuel and Kings which concern prophets and prophesying, we notice at once an atmosphere and behaviour rather different from those which we associate with, say, Isaiah or Jeremiah. First, there are groups of prophets, such as the 'company' which Saul met at Gibeah (1 Sam. 10. 10) or 'the sons of the prophets' with whom Elisha was associated from time to time (2 Kings 2. 15 at Jericho; 4. 38 at Gilgal). Secondly, they are met with especially at sanctuaries, the 'high places' which, whatever later writers thought, were legitimate places to worship Yahweh until the end of the seventh century B.C.; the company Saul met was coming down from the high place at Gibeah, communities of prophets are found at Gilgal, and at Bethel, one of the most ancient sanctuaries of Palestine, even though it fell later into schism. Thirdly, they were musicians, singers and dancers—perhaps not all of them, but this was a characteristic activity—and from time to time they worked themselves up into a frenzy by these means, so much so that onlookers might also be carried away. This ecstatic shouting and chanting was called prophesying. Fourthly, in general they were not easily distinguishable

from the prophets of Baal; in the religious troubles of the northern kingdom, when under the influence of trade relations and Ahab's marriage to a Tyrian princess there was a resurgence of the worship of Baal and the local fertility cults of Canaan, the prophets distinguished themselves less by their activities (though the author of 1 Kings 18 notes the limping movement of the dance and the dervish-like self-woundings of the prophets of Baal) than by their allegiance.

One must beware of reading too much into the scattered instances the scriptures preserve. Prophecy of this kind may well have been assimilated from Canaanite religion into the worship of Yahweh during the first centuries of Israel's occupation of Palestine and may have shared certain characteristics of the same activity in the religion of Baal, but in view of the sober morality of the Ten Commandments and the tradition descending from Moses and of the association of such austere figures as Samuel and Elijah with these prophets, it does not seem justified to regard them simply as dervishes whose function was to induce a collective ecstasy. Rather, it seems more probable that they were attached to or frequented the sanctuaries as choirs whose fervent 'rejoicing before Yahweh' at festivals and sacrifices might pass into a collective ecstasy and who might also either collectively or singly be inspired to utter oracles in Yahweh's name; see, for an example, the group of prophets (mistaken though they were) in 1 Kings 22. In their rejoicing we may legitimately imagine them to have used brief phrases such as *Hallelu-Yah*—Praise Yahweh!—or hymns to his might such as psalm 28:

Yahweh sits enthroned over the flood;

Yahweh sits enthroned as king for ever.

May Yahweh give strength to his people!

May Yahweh bless his people with peace!

It is this fervour of worship passing sometimes into ecstasy and ecstatic utterances which Moses wishes and Joel prophesies that all the people will be given; all Israel will become a company of prophets praising Yahweh in his sanctuary and receiving from him the special illuminations which we more usually associate with prophecy. The later history of this type of prophecy is unhappy; by reason of schism, syncretism and the corruption of individuals it fell into disrepute. But the memory of this aspect seems to have lingered a long time, for well after the exile we find the author of the book of Chronicles, drawing perhaps on older sources, describing the guilds of musicians who performed the liturgy of the temple as prophesying (1 Chron. 25. 1-8);

and later we find one of the choirmen giving an oracle, actually in the course of a liturgical ceremony (2 Chron. 20. 13-17). Their two functions developed separately, the fervent worship they had offered Yahweh passed on to the guilds of temple singers and their function of giving oracles, of acting as his spokesman, passed over to the more isolated individual reforming prophets whose oracles have been collected and preserved. But in their day they were truly inspired to worship him and thus strengthen Israel's faith in him.

If this is the correct background for the prophesying foretold by Joel or the correct associations at the back of his mind, one can see from the context in general how suitable it is. For in the book as it is now arranged the outpouring of the spirit is one of the forerunners of the day of judgment; first there is to be the creation of a community of prophets, or rather the whole people is to be inspired and become one great company of prophets, then there is to follow the cosmic catastrophe, a time of horror through which the fervent community grouped round the sanctuary in Jerusalem and calling on the name of Yahweh will pass, and then will come the day of Yahweh's final reckoning with the nations, a great scene of judgment which will take place under the walls of Jerusalem and within sight of the sanctuary. This schema, re-inforced by the apocalyptic element in our Lord's preaching, was always present to the mind of the primitive church.

#### (b) PROPHECY AND THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH

The same pattern of charismatic, or extraordinary, gifts of the spirit, linked to or issuing from the central current of worship, can be seen also in the life of the new Israel, the nascent church. Let us take first the event of Pentecost, and similar occasions recounted in the book of Acts, especially the conversion of the household of Cornelius (10. 44-48), and the conversion of the Ephesian disciples of John the Baptist (19. 1-7). At Pentecost, the twelve apostles were gathered together in one place; although it is not explicitly stated that they were at prayer, it can be assumed from the general descriptions given in 1. 14 and in 2. 42 that when all the apostles, the twelve patriarchs of the new people, were present together, it was primarily for the eucharistic meal and worship. On them the spirit descended, manifesting himself visibly in tongues of fire and audibly in their utterances, granting them the miraculous use of languages they did not know, in which they told 'the mighty works of God'. Similarly we are told of the household of Cornelius that they spoke in tongues and extolled God, and of the

Ephesian disciples that they spoke with tongues and prophesied. A double aspect is again evident in the ecstatic utterance of those inspired; the more obvious one at Pentecost is the outward missionary movement, the apostles spoke in the languages of Jews from all parts of the diaspora, converting them by narrating the mighty works of God, drawing them into the new and fervent community which would survive the day of judgment—'Save yourselves from this crooked generation'; but the parallel with the utterances of Cornelius' household and the prophesying of the Ephesian disciples suggests that what they uttered had an upward movement too, was in fact a surge of praise to God for his mighty works. If we want to form some idea of the words and ways in which they thought and praised him, we can perhaps turn to the ancient hymns preserved in the Apocalypse, addressed to God and to the ascended Christ:—

Worthy art thou, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honour and power,  
for thou didst create all things,  
and by thy will they existed and were created. (4. 11)

Worthy art thou . . .

for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God  
from every tribe and tongue and people and nation,  
and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God,  
and they shall reign on earth. (5. 9-10)

We give thee thanks, Lord God almighty, who art and who wast  
that thou has taken thy great power and begun to reign.

(11. 17)

In the primitive church it was considered quite normal and desirable that the Spirit should manifest himself in these extraordinary ways. Many instances can be found in the New Testament and we can perhaps systematize them roughly in concentric circles round the liturgy, an outer circle as it were of prophetic speech and action in the strict sense, an inner circle of extraordinary gifts which occurred in connection with the assembly for worship, and the centre itself, the primitive liturgy of the community inspired by the Spirit, the point of fervour where it might be difficult to distinguish the ordinary from the extraordinary inspiration. As examples of the first, prophetic revelation outside the actual assembly, we can take the visions of St Peter and St Paul (Acts 10. 9-16; 16. 9; 18. 9-10; 22. 17-18) and the symbolic action of the prophet Agabus (Acts 21. 10-11). A more interesting example is to be found in Acts 13. 1-3; there we hear of a group of

prophets at Antioch, including St Paul himself, through whom the Spirit instigates the first missionary journey of Barnabas and Paul. The command is actually given during a liturgical assembly, 'while they were worshipping the Lord and fasting'. The word which is used for worshipping is in fact the Greek work we transliterate to make our word 'liturgy'.

Of the inner circle, the extraordinary gifts which manifested themselves during the liturgy, we hear most in connection with the church of Corinth. This body took too great an interest in the bizarre, especially in the gift of tongues, and tended to over-rate it, upsetting the balance of Christian life and worship. St Paul goes to considerable lengths to work out and explain to them a hierarchy of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12-14). From it we can form a picture of the kind of activities that might be expected and desired, so long, St Paul insists, as they are desired in the right order. The principal contrast is between the gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy; the first consists in speaking in an unintelligible language, not nonsense but one unknown to the rest of the assembly and needing interpretation. Prophecy has a much wider meaning and application, ranging from preaching (edification, encouragement and consolation, 1 Cor. 14. 3) to revelations important enough to rank them second only to the apostles in the structure of the church (see Acts. 13. 1-3, already quoted, and 1 Cor. 12. 28: Rom. 12. 6; Eph. 4. 11). Both gifts are for the building up of the community, the first for the conversion of unbelievers who understand only these other tongues, the second for the believers present at the assembly. But this upbuilding is not to be conceived as a preaching activity only directed *at* them, it is equally and perhaps first a movement of prayer towards God, for St Paul speaks of praying, singing and giving thanks in both forms of utterance. If you speak with tongues, you pray, sing, give thanks with your spirit but with a blank mind; if you prophesy you pray, sing, give thanks both in spirit, in the upward surge of your soul affectively to God, and in mind in that your utterance is conscious and intelligible. It seems that there is the same continuity between the ordinary fervour inspired by the Holy Spirit and the extraordinary manifestations into which it passes under the inspiration of the same Spirit from time to time. St Paul even draws a parallel between the fervour with which they may have worshipped idols in the past and the fervour with which they now worship the true God and gives us a specimen of the utterances to which they might be moved, 'Jesus is Lord!'—to which we might add another from the Apocalypse, '*Maran-atha—Come, Lord!*'

True enough, beginning with St Paul, the church has had and still has to judge the manifestations of the spirit. She has had to condemn the excesses, sometimes wild and obvious, sometimes subtle and destructive, of those who have leant too heavily on the charismatic or been deceived either by paranormal phenomena whose psychological origins we are beginning to understand better or by the wickedness and snares of the devil. On the other hand, she has occasionally approved the visions and revelations, the extraordinary gifts of certain saints, indicating that they may be believed to be the work of the Spirit himself. But at the centre we are surely still to see the fervour of the community adhering to God in the Spirit and expressing that fervour in the liturgy. We may not break out into ecstatic cries of *Hallelu-Yah* or *Maran-Atha*, but we are to join in the mass, we can say or sing clearly, *Laudamus te, benedicimus te, adoramus te*. We are still Yahwists though we know more of Yahweh than the prophets congregated at Gilgal. And we still have a day of judgment to survive.

## Et Mundi Domina

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For a Catholic the main lines of the Christian faith are as certain as, if less demonstrable than, the law of gravity. This attitude of mind is not only part of the concept of faith, which in itself excludes doubt, but a psychological characteristic of 'being a Catholic', considered as a state. However lightly any Catholic may sit to his religious obligations, their existence, and the existence of a determinate authority with the right to loose and bind, is generally acknowledged, even if only with a snarl; and when it is denied there is something in the quality of the denial that tends to stress the fact denied. The idea of the Church has a precedence in individual lives as fundamental as the symbolic rock on which it is founded. It is not just a case of knowing all the answers. Some Catholics would be hard put to it to say exactly why there is and must be an authoritative Church, and perhaps this is one of the