

“Pentecost: The End of Organized Religion”

Acts 2: 1-21

Pentecost, 2009 B

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There are two parts to our Pentecost celebration today. The first part seeks to name the good news in the gift of the Spirit by characterizing Christian spirituality. The second part names the vector, the direction upon which that spirit sends a Pentecost church, a church like us.

There are a lot of spiritualities out there, and they are not created equal. We live in an age where anything “spiritual” must be good. But this age is poorly equipped to evaluate spiritualities. They must, however, be engaged, so that we can come to tell the difference between God the Holy Spirit – the gift of Pentecost – and those that are opposed to Christ.¹

Classical mysticism, for example, can be both some version of Neo-Platonism or a Christian variety. Secular mysticism is typically exclusive, internal, and pursued in the service of self, a search for the divine (small “d”) in the solitude of the individual soul. It is a quest *for* God rather than a quest for obedience *to* God. It fails to be biblical because of its focus on the self and the internal. Alternatively, a secular mysticism sees the divine everywhere, except in the God of Scriptures.

The gift of the Holy Spirit, Christian Spirituality, is to be caught by God in an external revelation and in acts of love toward one’s neighbor. “The gospel snatches us away from ourselves and places us outside ourselves.”²

That is what happened on that first Pentecost. Locked in fear behind closed doors with nothing to contemplate other than themselves, the apostles are greeted with a mighty wind, fire, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Dragged, thrown, ejected from that room out into the streets, into public view, they reel. Intoxicated they seem to some, drunken foreigners they seem to others, they spill into the streets. They lose control of all that is theirs. They lose control of self.³

¹ This typology is indebted to a review of Donald Bloesch, *Spirituality Old & New* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007) by Matt Moser, “Spirituality Old and New: Recovering Authentic Spiritual Life,” *dialog: A Journal of Theology*, Volume 47, Number 1 (Spring, 2008), 80-82.

² Martin Luther quoted in Moser, 80.

³ “. . . [O]ne possible theme for the day could be “Out of Control.” Carl Volz, “Pentecost – the Day of the Lord,” *Word and World* 10/2 (1990), 175.

They are directed away from their own navels and toward Christ.⁴ Here is the definition of the Holy Spirit I want you to take away from here this morning. Holy Christian Spirituality is anything -- anything, mind you -- that directs you to Christ and neighbor. Christian spirituality is an “unshakable confidence, a belief in the grace of God so assured that a [person] would die a thousand deaths for its sake.”⁵ Anything that brings about this “unshakable confidence” in Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the work of God at Pentecost.

Christian spirituality places itself under Christ’s authority; “it worships, serves, and obeys God; it reaches out and serves the neighbor.”⁶ Christian spirituality is *embodied*.

⁴“However, although god went beyond all expectations, out of control, Pentecost is still ‘controlled’ by christology.” Volz, 175.

⁵ Luther, “Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans,” *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 23-24.

⁶ Moser, 81.