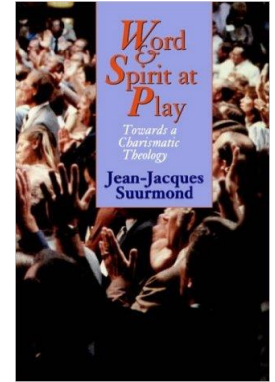


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## Word and Spirit at Play:

Towards a charismatic theology - tr John Bowden, SCM 1994

Notes Alison Morgan Feb 2005



### I : The origin & characteristics of present-day Pentecostalism

#### 1. A Fusion of 2 traditions – Africa and the holiness movement

The spirituality of c. ¼ of all Christians goes back to the spontaneous revival of 1906 in Los Angeles, where the pastor was a son of ex slaves called Bill Seymour, a careful preacher who taught reconciliation between black and white. The revival lasted 3 years and spread to 50 countries; Seymour wrote a paper which declared: 'we are not fighting against people or churches, but we are seeking to replace dead forms and dogmas with a living, practical Christianity.'

In Seymour 2 traditions came together: African spirituality and the Wesleyan Evangelical Holiness Movement. African spirituality – the religious tradition handed down by story, myth, song, and the holistic world view, with its belief that there is no division between the earthly and spiritual reality. The NT world was recognisable to these ex slaves, with its interaction between spiritual and natural, stories of healings, miracles, exorcisms and the power of the HS. The basic biblical story of the exodus addressed them personally, and confirmed their view of sin as something that undermines the community. Moses became a dominant figure. Wesleyan Holiness Movement – a movement for emancipation of slaves and women, with a theology based on Wesley's teaching of a second experience of crisis after conversion. The emotional aspect of the Wesleyan revivals appealed to the black community, and the Holiness Movement churches were the first to allow women and blacks to preach.

Seymour had been to Charles Parham's Bible school, where Agnes Ozman had been the first student to speak in tongues. He taught the new idea that baptism in the Spirit would be exclusively proved by speaking in tongues; a concept which has become part of the identity of the Pentecostal movement. Seymour took tongues as the sign that God was breaking through barriers between races, sexes, nationalities, and was reconciling all people with one another, and his church remained multiracial. Parham (white) was horrified. He and Seymour split, as subsequently did the Pentecostal movement into white-middle-class and black. The white branch gradually became a white, evangelical, middle class church, conservative and respectable, teaching Western dogmas and morality, sliding into fundamentalism. The black branch retained its African holistic spirituality, based on an oral theology expressed in movement and dance rather than dogma, emphasizing the experience of the Spirit and thus allowing people to become Christians without having to abandon their own cultural identity and traditions. It spread all over the world.

Most non-white Pentecostals continue to work for the elimination of evil from social structures and institutes. They often played an active part in the civil rights struggle in the US – Martin Luther King. Brazilian de Melo said, 'while we are converting a million people, the devil is de-converting ten million through hunger, misery, militarism, dictatorships', 12.

Pentecostalism today has 3 main currents:

1. Pentecostal movement
2. charismatic renewal (has broken through into established churches since 60s)
3. indigenous non-white churches

Factors contributing to charismatic renewal:

- By the 60s the fruits of the Enlightenment became the common property of ordinary W people; produced both accelerated secularization and, in reaction, a new quest for spirituality.
- societies were going thru a process of democratization, which increased the autonomy of the individual; an autonomy which is honoured in charismatic emphasis on individual gifts.
- the limits of the one-sided rational W approach to reality were becoming obvious, esp in psychology, physics, philosophy of science and control of the environment, and this led to a re-evaluation of the holistic faith of Pentecostalism
- the rise of mass media which appeals not just to rational thought but uses imagery and the senses to appeal also to the feelings

However, in the charismatic renewal, as in the white Pentecostal movement, holistic spirituality has remained at a personal level – it hasn't reached for reconciliation between people of different races and backgrounds. The barriers swept away have been those between churches. Impact has been in renewed study of the doctrine of the HS, rather than political or social involvement (most members have been middle class, and have a lesser motivation for social change; but, more significantly perhaps, the breakthrough of charismatic renewal came through David du Plessis, a white S African with a blind spot over apartheid).

The indigenous non-white churches in the 3<sup>rd</sup> world are looking for a Christian identity of their own; hence integration of religious and cultural elements from their own tradition. W theologians condemn this, but fail to realise how syncretistic their own thought is (as result of Greek, Roman, German influences).

1991: about 392m people involved in Pentecostalism, with annual increase of 19m. They are found in 8000 ethno-linguistic cultures and 7000 languages (5% of the total languages). They live more in city than country, and there are more women than men. 50% of them live in shanty towns in poverty; 19m of these hunt through rubbish heaps for food each day.

The essential contribution of Pentecostalism is the 3<sup>rd</sup> world spirituality mediated through the black Seymour. It's a gift from the 3<sup>rd</sup> world to the West, with its poverty of feelings and its fear of the body. Its spirituality is expressed most clearly in celebration.

## **2. Charismatic celebration**

5 characteristics:

1. an oral liturgy, allowing for spontaneous contributions and improvisations, and personal involvement and interaction between participants
2. a narrative theology and testimonies – central place occupied not by W concepts and dogmatic teachings but by the conviction of 'what God can do for you'. 'Scripture is not treated as a legal code but expounded with the aid of a charismatic exegesis which resembles that of the prophets, the NT writers and rabbinic midrash' 22
3. on the basis of the gifts of the Spirit, a max participation in prayer, evaluation, and the making of resolutions
4. space made for intuitive communication, eg in form of dreams, visions; liberation of the power of the imagination, which can lead to liberation in the political and social sphere – enabling people to imagine a different order from that of today
5. body and spirit are experienced as one whole; includes prayer for healing, opens the eyes to elements of life which produce illness (work pressure, discrimination, pollution) – an old Jewish notion holds that our pain can only be truly healed when experienced as the pain of the world and connected with the whole creation in need.

It is striking that all these characteristics have an element of play in them. Oral liturgy – a personal contribution; narrative theology – a good story; gifts – a team spirit; intuitive – surprising upsets; unity of body and spirit – as when caught up in a game. + John Taylor recognised how like a game charismatic celebration is – The Go-Between God p198.

## **II : Sabbath Play – biblical notes**

### **1. The Uselessness of God**

Anyone who tries to prove God's existence by demonstrating the need for God makes the same mistake as those who claim that in our modern secularised society God no longer has any function and has thus become superfluous. Both begin from the usefulness of God – but God is not useful, he is an end in himself. Not surprising that in a hi tech culture like ours, which is obsessed by purpose + achievement, God has either been reduced to a useful idol or experienced as absent.

N American charismatic renewal is often permeated with the dogmas of consumer society, and a 'positive confession' movement has formed – which insists that everything which is 'claimed' in the name of Jesus will be received, and God is reduced to a magical answer to prayer.

Often only when the q 'how does the world work' is replaced by the q 'why does the world exist?', can God be known. Creation exists only because God takes pleasure in it – Gen 1; Ps 104 – 'from moment to moment the world is called into being 'for nothing' in a pure game of love through God's Word and spirit. And we, created in the image of God, are created for play also.

- The play of the Sabbath – in a working week characterised by necessity and achieving, the Sabbath creates a free space, in which God enjoys his creation, and we abandon our work knowing it is not through that but through grace that we are saved. Gen 2 – the garden is a garden of delights, of play. We have oppressed it – like the Pharisees, a legalistic stress on order has robbed the celebration of its essentially playful character, and banished it to the sports field. The average church service is not characterised by play.
- Human play. The more human beings learn to live playfully, the more human they become and the more they begin to resemble God, who has directed creation towards the Sabbath game. In the new Jerusalem the music never stops, mature wine flows, the lion lies down

with the lamb and humankind plays the game of bride and bridegroom with God. Huizinga – what is essentially human is not just thought, or the capacity to make things, but in the capacity to play (*Homo ludens*). We are infected by a neurotic civilisation, deluded by purposefulness and utility, characterised more by animal instincts than by freedom. The answer – is in experiencing the dynamics of Word and Spirit.

- Word and Spirit. OT – the Wisdom tradition. Wisdom is personified. Some church fathers identified her not with Word but with Spirit (eg Irenaeus) – she is actually a combination of Word and Spirit. ‘Spirit and Word belong together like breath and voice’. Neither can do anything without the other, just as a word without breath (spirit) remains unexpressed, and breath without a word is inaudible and empty. Some prophets used synonyms for ‘spirit’ – *dabar*, a dynamic word. The Spirit of God brings about the prophetic word of God – Ex 11.5-13. The Word comes with a dynamic mission – Is 55.11. From the exile on, prophets used not Wisdom but Spirit. Word and Spirit are (Irenaeus) the two creative hands of God; they work together in playful Wisdom. Dutch philosopher Buytendijk remarked that the birds sing far more than Darwin allows them to, 41.

## 2. Jesus, the Wisdom of God

In the NT, Lady Wisdom becomes Jesus. This relativizes for the fact that Jesus was a male.

In theological discussion, Word and Spirit were soon separated, under influence of the Greek concept of the Word. Result was a one-sided Word Christology, influenced by the gospel of John. In Hebrew thought, Wisdom is not identified with God, as happens with the Word in John, but is regarded as divine. Both Wisdom and Word play an active part in creation. John gave preference to Word over Wisdom, perhaps because *logos* is masculine, *sophia* feminine, and better suited to denote Jesus. Perhaps also because Hebrew *dabar* (word) is close to Wisdom, denoting as it does not a static but an active word. The Hebrew word is permeated with the dynamic power of the Spirit, and for most church fathers the Word also had connotations of the Spirit and thus of Wisdom. For John, both Word and Spirit were present in Jesus – cp Jn 3.34 Jesus utters the words of God and gives the spirit beyond measure. For John, there is a tandem relationship between Word and Spirit; the word that Jesus proclaimed was a creative Spirit-Word which changed people. The Word that God sent in Jesus is not simply a verbal word but an active word, because Jesus is anointed by God, with the HS and with power.

Jesus emerges in the gospels as God’s troubadour – Lk 7 ‘we played the flute for you and you did not dance, we sang laments to you and you did not weep’. People rejected the wine-drinking Jesus. Jesus presents children as a model: and the indubitable characteristic of a child is play.

Jesus’ teaching was playful too – parables are like games, they make a gap in our closed order and create room for God’s rule, 49.

## 3. The church as a liberated community

After Jesus’ death, his life & mission, the liberating game of the kingdom, was continued by the community.

- Last come first
- No one is left out of the game

## III Sabbath Play – a closer look at church history

The greater part of the church is hampered by the misunderstanding that there is no alternative to order than disorder. Hence the conservatism and institutionalism that is everywhere. But a game is not dominated by order or chaos; it consists in the creative integration of order (word, rules) on the one hand and the spontaneous contribution and dynamic of all participants on the other.

### 1. Church history

Because the church rapidly put all the emphasis on order, Word and Spirit were set against one another. But without Spirit, the Word becomes a law. It becomes static and legitimates the established order; it becomes the word of the elite who have learnt to write, preach, discuss. But the Spirit is poured down on every living creature; so throughout history uneducated people began to prophesy. [Free Univ of Amsterdam has a professor of Charismatic Renewal]. But from C3 onwards, the church has put a disproportionately heavy emphasis on the Word, order, at the expense of the Spirit which brings life.

- The hierarchical church. Filioque controversy – the Holy Spirit is said to proceed from the Father and the Son, not the Son and the HS to proceed from the Father – thus giving rise to the schism in 1054 between the Orthodox and the Western church. John of the Cross experienced the Spirit as a ‘living flame of love’, and he and Teresa of Avila were marginalised. In the Roman Catholic Church the Spirit is seen as the soul of the church – ie it becomes a kind of divine stamp of approval of everything the church says/does. But it is not the Church which possesses the spirit, but rather the Spirit which possesses the church...
- The churches of the Reformation – a reaction on this order, this doctrine of work. But their slogan of ‘Word and Spirit’ did little to change the emphasis on order and structure. Berkhof: The Catholics imprisoned the Spirit in the church and the Protestants imprisoned it in the

Word. Luther did not see that the structure of the community of Christ is a charismatic one; the rediscovery of the priesthood of all believers turned out in practice to mean prayer and Bible reading at home.

- Eastern orthodoxy – and the Orthodox imprisoned the Spirit in celebration, which hindered them from recognising the liberating play of Word and Spirit in the world.
- Charismatic counter-movements – eg Montanists
- Before the Reformation – Joachim and the Age of the Spirit.
- After the Reformation – the Anabaptists prayed in tongues. Quakers. Moravians. Methodists. C19th and Irving in London.
- Now. No one expected 25 years ago that the SH would again be playing a dominant role in Christianity – or that it would be a deeper event than the Reformation, because the Reformers left intact the fundamental structure of the Church, one-sidedly focussed on order (the Word).

## ***2. Play and humour – a closer definition***

Animals play, but their play is always the same; human play involves interaction with the world, and helps shape the person who plays. It's a fundamental part of being human; humans have an identity which changes in interaction with the world.

The role of humour – those who can laugh at themselves are the freest and most human. The false self aims for self preservation; it opts for routine, predictability, nestling in the apparently safe haven of possessions, reputation, status, achievements. It cannot accept that its existence is not necessary, and therefore makes itself indispensable. It is occupied with itself, and tends towards an oppressive, formal piety. The true self is concerned for others, has God, Word and Spirit, in the centre; be still and know that I am God. The lightness of the Spirit redeems us from the heaviness that condemns us to live by a false, 'important' self; so that we are free to live in a playful interaction with the world, with courage, surrender and joy.

Merton: the monk is the true prophet because he is the only one who is free to do nothing and not feel guilty about it.

Jesus showed humour – cp Matt 22, coin with image of emperor on. No pious Jew would carry one (but his accusers do!), because it carried the inscription that the emperor is both king and God. Wind out of their sails!

## ***3. Celebration as Sabbath play – Huizinga's definition***

Word 'liturgy' in ancient Greece denoted the service of a well-to-do citizen who paid for the religious ceremonies associated with the games so that they could take place. Scripture is a liturgical book, full of songs, prayers, poems, visions, laments, drama.

Huizinga: 'play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself, accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy, and the consciousness that it is 'different' from 'ordinary life'. Play is:

- Voluntary – not orientated on order, requiring involvement (contr many church services)
- Within fixed limits of time and space (Sabbath space, church building)
- Freely accepted rules
- Having its aim in itself – liberation from purpose-driven activity
- Tension and joy
- Dance
- Different from normal life – maintains the awareness that the kingdom is 'other'

Vic Havel, Czech president, 1992: said that as a dissident he had learned that speaking the truth had a significance in itself, without knowing whether it would triumph.

## **IV: Baptism with Word and Spirit**

Catholics ask if you've received the sacraments. Protestants inform you about correct doctrines. Pentecostals ask if you received the HS when you believed. Baptism in the Spirit is mostly seen as different from and following on rebirth, confirmed with tongues.

### ***1. Baptism in Word and Spirit before the Resurrection***

Luke 3.15-16 he will baptise with the HS and with fire – fire best understood from OT. Moses and Sinai.

The storm is an image of the liberating God – Exodus God leads them in cloud, wind, fire, thunder. They had constantly broken the Covenant; John perhaps was thinking of the liberating presence of God's word and spirit. Jesus was the new Moses, leading a new Exodus.

### ***2. Anxiety and idolatry – the spoiling of life***

Anxiety before God is expressed in a mythical way in the story of the Fall. It is bound up with death.

Fear of God makes play impossible. (The doctrine of substitutionary atonement leaves the dread in place, and so must be rejected as unsatisfactory). Jesus died for us in that in his innocence, defencelessness and readiness he gave concrete, visible form to both the greatness of God's love and our capacity to do evil; and in that through his 'exodus' he removed the main cause of sin, which is anxiety about death.

Our fear of death leads us to seek to escape into the rigid order of structures and systems. We try to transfer it to objects outside ourselves in which we ground ourselves. These become idols.

For many people, medical care seems to have taken the place of religion. Instead of accepting life after death, we demand that doctors prolong life as much as possible.

Sin (hamartia, missing the mark) is the consequence of being without God. It makes necessary an exodus from the land of slavery to the freedom of Paradise where the tree of life blossoms.

### **3. Baptism with Word and Spirit after the Resurrection**

The reason the NT mentions the Word less explicitly than the Spirit as a cause of the Resurrection (Rm 8.11, 1 Tim 3.16, 1 Peter 3.18) is that the two are bound up in OT. IN the time of the NT the interpretation of the Torah had become 'spiritless' (2 Cor 3.6). Since the Resurrection, God's Spirit has also come to be called the 'Spirit of Christ', Rom 8.9, the Spirit of Jesus, Acts 16.7, or the Spirit of the Son, Gal 4.6. And God's Word is now also called the Word of Christ, Rom 10.17, Col 3.16. God's Spirit and God's Word are now stamped with Christ's life, cross, resurrection. We experience Christ as God's Word and Spirit, and God's Word and Spirit as Christ. Christ became a life-giving Spirit, 1 Cor 15.45.

Kierkegaard – if people are to live authentically, they must face their dread; true spirituality always involves a form of dying, the death of the false self.

Paul calls the Corinthians living letters of Christ, written with the Spirit of the living God, 2 Cor 3. And we are made ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit.

The charismatic renewal sees that the baptism with Word and Spirit can manifest itself both in moments of crisis and in gradual growth; both are a baptism, working itself out in numerous new experiences.

Baptism in HS:

- Matt 3.11
- Mark 1.8
- Luke 3.16
- John 1.33
- Acts 1.33 and 11.16
- 1 Cor 12.13

Holiness and wholeness are related; because through Christ's word and spirit we have a part in the Source of the existence from which we were alienated.

### **4. The Pentecostal experience in the light of traditional spirituality**

#### Elements of spiritual experience

1. The social and cultural context of the time also determines the spiritual experience. From the beginning the Pentecostal spirituality was a democratic and holistic spirituality which is experienced as healing.
2. The basic inspiration – which transcends the spirit of the time: the revelation of God in Jesus Christ
3. The self
4. The initiation – the training by which people adopt the basic inspiration: discipleship; evaluation of ancestral traditions etc
5. Mysticism (a mystic is a person who has awoken from the illusion that s/he is their own creator). Pentecostals express their mysticism not in prayer or poetry but in celebration and tongues, in which they express their love of God in Christ – 'glossolalia is the democratic counterpart of a talent for poetry' 156. Tongues is a playful way of communicating; it is an implicit criticism of any language which tries to capture God. The behaviour of the mystic often breaks codes/taboo.

## **V : The Gifts of Grace**

Pentecostalism regards only the gifts which in the NT are called charisms as gifts of the Spirit. This has led to an underestimation of the dynamic of the Word and the Spirit in the political and social spheres. But a charism is a concrete expression of Christ's baptism with Word and Spirit.

### **1. Life by Grace (Faith) alone**

The word charism means expression of grace, so 'gift of grace' is the best translation. It occurs only in Paul:

- 1 Cor 12
- Rom 12
- Encouragement, Rom 1.11-12
- Answer to prayer, 2 Cor 1.11

- Celibacy (marriage), 1 Cor 7.7

We are called to become a gift, a concrete expression of God's grace in Christ. Each person can be a gift of grace in his or her unique situation and identity. The form is not essential for defining what a gift of grace is; that's just the variable outside of a charism.

## **2. The encounter with God and human beings**

Even the charismatic renewal must constantly be renewed, p183.

The Hebrew word for love (yada) also means know. The liberation of anxiety opens us up to the other as the other is in herself/himself.

## **3. The Church as the body of Christ**

The attraction of Pentecostalism is not an aggressive drive for mission, but the playful character of their celebration. Pentecostalism embraces the holistic spirituality of the 3<sup>rd</sup> world.

The NT avoids using the existing Jewish terms for the ministry; the justifying power of God's grace in Christ excludes a separate 'caste' of priests/Levites, for whom particular tasks in the community are exclusively reserved. What is described in 1 Thess 5 as the task of the group is expected of the whole community. This doesn't mean there is no basis for the traditional view of a group of separate ministers – cp Eph 4, apostles, prophets, teachers.

Visser d'Hooft in 1951 said that the charismatic model is the only possible ecumenical model; but the doctrine of the Spirit still didn't appear on the agenda of the WCC till 1968. It's been confirmed by the practice of charismatic renewal.

The expression 'baptise by the Spirit' was probably coined by John from the practice to which he owed the name 'the Baptist'.

Baptism with word and Spirit is bound up with water baptism but does not coincide with it.

In Greek the words grace and gift of grace (charis, charisma) are related to the word for joy (chara).

Theology: in their fellowship the early Christians experienced God's word and spirit and Christ's word and spirit. In the framework of the dominant Logos philosophy, Christ was rapidly identified (like Wisdom) with the Word. The Spirit was left over, and gained a separate 'divine' status. The play of Word and Spirit was forgotten. The doctrine of the Trinity has to be understood *dynamically*.

## **Brief summary**

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