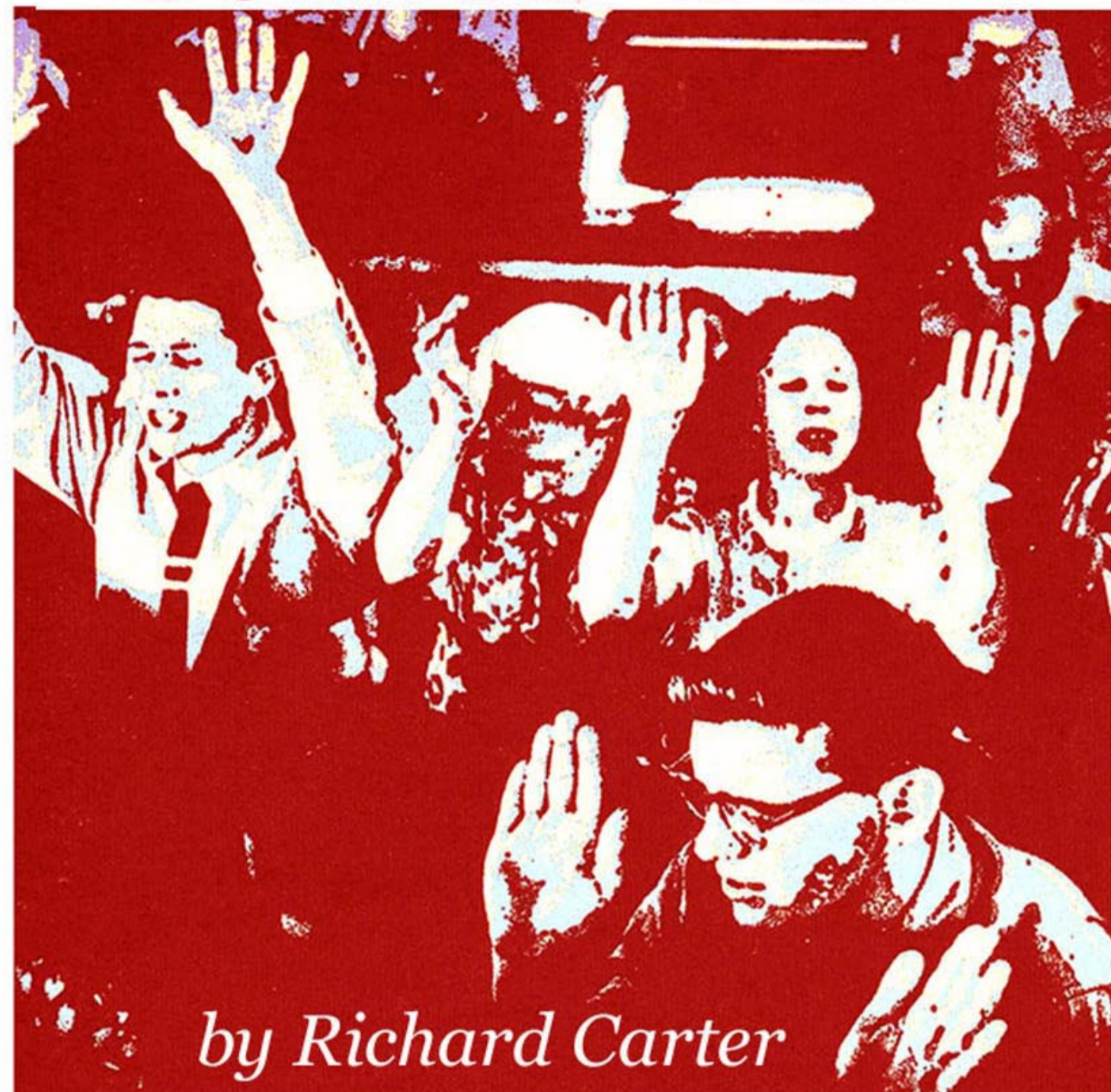


That old-time religion comes back



by Richard Carter

THE FASTEST-GROWING Protestant religion today is the Pentecostal movement, whose members used to be nicknamed "Holy Rollers" but which has become too important to remain a target of derision. In barely half a century, this dynamic young version of old-time fundamentalism has produced spectacularly successful leaders such as Oral Roberts and the late Aimee Semple McPherson, has won the devotion of at least 2,000,000 Americans of every racial and religious origin and through zealous foreign missionary work, has gained thousands of converts on every continent.

To achieve and sustain this remarkable progress, the religion has had to live down the antics of early evangelists who sought attention by swallowing alleged poison or permitting themselves to be bitten by supposedly poisonous snakes; and it has had to rid itself of adventurers who sometimes succeeded in transforming its wildly emotional services into unspeakable orgies.

Having accomplished these things, the movement has established its respectability and won acceptance in most American communities. Yet it is still a religion of violent contrasts.

It is a religion in which dramatic evangelists and faith healers such as Oral Roberts contrast with congregations composed almost exclusively of the obscure, the modest, the economically and socially unaccomplished. It is a religion in which solemn adherence to the literal letter of Holy Scripture contrasts with loud, uninhibited and even boisterous prayer.

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It is a religion in which murky store-front churches contrast with million-dollar edifices. It is a religion whose ministers, soft-spoken and gentle outside the pulpit, become shriekers and arm-wavers inside it, generating a commotion which makes the late Billy Sunday seem restrained and scholarly, and Billy Graham a model of spiritual calm.

More important, however, the Pentecostal movement has tremendous appeal, much of which lies in the fact that the Pentecostals stress the miracles of faith healing to a degree unequaled by other religions. To Pentecostals, miraculous recoveries from illness and disability are everyday occurrences proving the power of prayer.

An example is the case of Ludwig Blum of Fort Wayne, Indiana, who reported his experience in the August 4, 1957, issue of *The Pentecostal Evangel*, national publication of the largest international Pentecostal Fellowship, the Assemblies of God. Blum wrote:

“The tests and X rays showed that a small TB spot on my right lung had grown so rapidly in one month’s time that the entire upper half of the lung had become infected.

“When my pastor, Glenn Horst, came to visit me . . . I had been placed in isolation, and . . . the pastor . . . was not permitted to touch me, but he stood at the foot of my bed and prayed.

“Brother Horst came again the next day and this time he laid his hands upon me as he prayed for me. The presence of the Lord was very real and we both wept as Brother Horst prayed for me. Before he left I requested that on the Sunday evening broadcast the radio choir sing, ‘Pass Me Not, O Gentle Saviour. . . .’ That Sunday evening, as the choir sang, Christ came into my room and His healing virtue went through my body.

“The next day, as the doctors were running their tests and check-ups, they found that all the tests were negative! . . . They took some more X rays and called in the specialist to read them and he kept exclaiming, ‘This is a miracle! This is a miracle!’”

According to Blum and Pastor Horst, all subsequent tests proved that the tubercular lesion had been healed. Completely. Overnight. And

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he has been healthy since.

Pentecostal prayers are the most ardently devotional of any religion. But what sets the prayers apart is the phenomenon that often accompanies them—when the worshipper enjoys the experience known as Baptism in the Holy Spirit. At such times, Pentecostals believe that they are filled with the Holy Ghost, which speaks through them in unknown languages. This phenomenon is believed to parallel the events of the Day of Pentecost, or Whitsunday, when the apostles “began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:4).

Here is what a convert wrote of that experience:

“. . . waves of glory swept over me and when they came I praised God with a loud voice and in the spirit I clapped my hands and rejoiced. . . . After a long and glorious season of uncontrollable praise, there came . . . a blessed quietness and in that holy calm I gave honor to the new power, the Holy One, *in words that I formed not* and which I shall never forget—‘Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, wonderful the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost; praise Him, praise Him, praise Him, praise Him; glory, glory, glory to God!’

“After several minutes of this wonderful manifestation of God’s great power, the speaking ceased and there reigned a heavenly peace—such peace as I had never known.”

This rapture, this overpowering sense of having been possessed by God, is one of the most significant aspects of the faith. When combined with miraculous healing and unwavering certitude that all questions are answered by Scripture, it is believed to account for the appeal of the movement.

SIXTY YEARS AGO, Southern revivalists began experiencing the Baptism in the Holy Spirit and undertook to base a new, non-denominational faith on the phenomenon. During its first ten years, the movement gained a foothold, particularly in Kansas and California.

Revival meetings were held in tents or behind store-fronts. The characteristic moans and wails, the insistently rhythmical singing, the clapping of hands and stamping of feet, the rattle of tambourines and the caterwauling of off-key musical

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instruments were detested as nuisances. Unbelievers who looked in on the services and saw grown men and women writhing on the floor coined the term "Holy Rollers" and dismissed the Pentecostals as fanatics.

Other religious groups, both modernists and old-time fundamentalists, continue to regard the unbridled emotional worship of the Pentecostals as hysteria, extremism, fanaticism. But criticism is rarely voiced in public. "After all," one theologian points out, "no matter what you say about the Pentecostals, they are filling a need among people."

In the belief he can ameliorate her ills, Oral Roberts "lays hands" on devout follower.



Forty years ago, the largest Pentecostal group, the Assemblies of God, had fewer than 11,000 members; but as of July, 1957, the fellowship encompassed about 8,000 congregations with an enrolled membership approaching 500,000, and a Sunday school roster of 825,000. Its missionaries reported 575,000 foreign converts.

In many an American city, the Assembly of God store-front is only a memory and the congregation occupies the newest, prettiest stone church in town. The magnificent new Calvary Temple in Denver, an outstanding example, cost just under \$1,000,000 and seats 2,189 worshipers.

The Assemblies have 756 missionaries in 69 different foreign lands, and an annual budget for such activity in excess of \$3,000,000. As a result, the faith has become the


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Rev. Wm. Buckner

MONDAY, SEPT. 18—
Rev. Carl Paul, M.C.
10:00—Rev. R. Coleman
11:00—Rev. John Kirby
12:00—Rev. Edy Walker
7:30—Rev. William Swain

TUESDAY, SEPT. 19—
Rev. John Kirby, M.C.
10:00—Rev. O. C. Harris
11:00—Rev. Robert Perry
12:00—Rev. Samuel Couch
7:30—Rev. Tommy Hicks


WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 20—
Rev. Samuel Couch, M.C.
10:00—Rev. Gordon Under
11:00—Dr. Harold F. Courtney
12:00—Dr. Kaleo E. Glaser
7:30—Rev. David Hunt

THURSDAY, SEPT. 21—
Rev. R. W. Coleman, M.C.
10:00—Rev. Sammie Davis
11:00—Rev. Carl Paul
12:00—Rev. Demos Shakerian
7:30—Rev. A. C. Valdez Jr.

FRIDAY, SEPT. 22—
Rev. Raymond H. Harris, M.C.
10:00—Rev. Sammie Davis
11:00—Rev. Bob De Wasse
7:30—Rev. Anna York
7:30—Rev. Oral Roberts

SATURDAY, SEPT. 23—
Demos Shakerian, M.C.
11:00—Charles Howard Taylor
7:30—Rev. A. C. Valdez Jr.
And Living Participants of Azusa St.
7:30—Demos Shakerian
The Full Gospel Business Men's
Fellowship International

SUNDAY, SEPT. 24—
Dr. W. B. Teaford, M.C.
10:00—Rev. Tommy Hicks
Rev. A. G. Osterberg special chairman



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the Pentecostal Holiness fellowship. His showmanly healing services have been seen by millions, some of whom have undoubtedly been shocked and offended but few of whom have been indifferent.

Pentecostal ministers, devoutly positive that faith cures all ills, regard Roberts as a pillar of the movement. Seldom critical of even his most pronounced theatrics, these clergymen speak with unqualified pride of his influence throughout Protestantism.

“The other denominations are all beginning to emphasize healing,” says one typical Pentecostal pastor, slightly exaggerating Roberts’ effect on the older sects. “The reason,” he goes on, “is that the people see what real born-again faith can do, and they demand it from their own churches.”

So many persons have, in fact, been awed by Roberts’ fervor and by the healing miracles which seem to take place before his television cameras that they have been jamming halls to see him in person.

That such potential converts seldom live in the better neighborhoods, seldom hold the better jobs and are unlikely to be especially well-educated is happily verified by Pentecostal authorities. The general secretary of the General Council of the Assemblies of God, Rev. J. Roswell Flower, explains, as Pentecostals explain all things, with a quotation from the Bible:

“In his first epistle to the Corinthians, Chapter One, verse 27, Paul wrote: ‘. . . God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty. . . .’”

Pentecostal worship is direct, informal, spoken communication with the Lord, undertaken ad lib, whenever and however one feels impelled. Whether there is singing, preaching, instrumental music, the testimony of converts or group prayer, the individual worshiper is free to voice his praise as he wills.

The service is therefore punctuated with a rhythmical succession of exclamations: “Praise the Lord forever . . . Hallelujah . . . Amen . . . Hallelujah God . . . Praise the Lord . . . Praise Jesus . . . I love you, God . . . Thank you, thank you, thank you, Jesus.”

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With each outcry, the worshiper feels closer to the Presence, more in tune, and the feeling is heightened by the hammering accents of the music, the ebb and flow of the preacher's voice and the harmonious cries of the other communicants.

"Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah," chants the preacher, eyes closed, face alight, head shaking slowly from side to side, "thank you, thank you, thank you, God." Many of the worshipers begin writhing in their seats, arms raised overhead, hands waving from the wrists, chorusing in praise as they try to reach God with voice and hand.

After many such paeans and several hymns, the sermon starts, often on an earthy note. At one Eastern church a lady evangelist recently announced that her subject was "The Sin That Makes Our Lord Nauseated—The Sin That Makes Jesus Christ Want To Vomit." A detached observer might have criticized the evangelist's grammar, her pronunciation, some of the assertions which she offered in guise of fact. But such an observer would have been missing the forest for the trees: the evangelist was setting the congregation ablaze with love of God.

As in the great majority of Pentecostal messages, no heed was given to worldly matters, politics, economics, social responsibilities. Indeed, all that really mattered was the voice, rising and falling in pitch and volume, maintaining the hot rhythm, lashing the emotions.

After such a sermon there may be a fervent hymn and then comes the climax, the final prayer. Members of the congregation, often stumbling, move to the altar and kneel, some with their heads resting on the front pews or against the altar itself. The preacher starts the prayer in the usual ad lib style, praising, praising, thanking, thanking, and soon some of the worshipers are flinging their hands to heaven, screaming their love, "speaking in tongues."

The sense of release and accomplishment which Pentecostals derive from their devotions is enhanced, of course, by their conviction that they have found the only road to blessed life after death. To them, life on earth is merely a preparation for death, or for the second coming of Christ, which they regard as imminent.

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They forswear worldly pleasures. Most of the women wear no make-up. Dancing, smoking and alcohol are banned. The theater is avoided. Even television, at first, was viewed with suspicion, except for Oral Roberts' program. To "speak in tongues" and draw closer to God become fulfillments of eternal value against which worldly considerations pale to nothingness.

A veteran Assembly of God minister, Dr. Nelson J. Kenyon, of Butler, New Jersey, puts it this way, "We are not trying to save the world." He smiles peacefully. "We are trying to save people from the world."

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