

## **SERIES: THE CHURCH AND THE CHURCHES**

### **5 The charismatic or Pentecostal churches**

The Pentecostal churches are by far the fastest growing Christian group. Depending on how you count, between 200 and 600 million people worldwide now belong to this movement. It is currently expanding most strongly in South America, but also in Africa and Asia. For example, in Kenya 33% of the population and in Brazil 15% of the population belong to such churches. In Germany the Pentecostal movement has around 300,000 members, nine times as many as the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church or SELK. It is also growing faster than most other churches in Germany.

The Pentecostal churches place great value on the personal experience of the Holy Spirit. In these churches it is believed that the Holy Spirit comes directly to the individual. The Lutheran Church takes a different approach. "No, not directly, but indirectly... namely through word and baptism and communion." Through these means God gives the Holy Spirit, regardless of whether we feel it or not. Regardless of how many good Christian works we have done or not.

The modern Pentecostal movement has its roots in American churches at the beginning of the 20th century. Fundamental to their thinking is the distinction between conversion and justification as the beginning of the path of faith and the second characteristic of this church is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which one must receive in addition to baptism as proof of one's Christianity.

The very name "Pentecostal movement" or "Pentecostal churches" indicates that the work of the Holy Spirit plays an important role. The crucified Christ is not the center of the proclamation (1 Corinthians 2:2), but rather they focus on the feeling of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the focus is not even on the Holy Spirit but on the feelings of people.

Faith and love are not perceived as the decisive effects of the Spirit of God, as is the case in 1 Corinthians 13:13 "faith, love and hope," but rather speaking in tongues, prophecy and healings. They believe that they can refer to the example of the New Testament and see themselves as a special "New Testament church" that can perform the same miracles as Jesus and the apostles. Miracles therefore play a prominent role. And sometimes the survival of such a church depends on the fact that new miracles keep happening. It can even happen that people are taught to fake miracles so that others believe that miracles happen in this church. In these churches, water baptism is also distinguished from baptism in the Holy Spirit. It is believed that in addition to water baptism, there must also be a baptism of the Spirit. In this view, water baptism is only a symbol, while the more important baptism is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Often speaking in tongues is emphasized as proof that such a baptism of the Spirit has taken place. And because speaking in tongues is not present in other churches, it is simply said that the Holy Spirit is not there. This is a very harsh judgment that no one can make. Because only God can say where the Holy Spirit is. And God has confirmed his presence through word and sacrament

Speaking in tongues is a form of ecstasy in which believers begin to speak in unintelligible languages (this is what is meant by "tongues") during worship. In fact, such speaking in tongues is also mentioned in a few places in the New Testament. But this is clearly different from the speaking in tongues that takes place in modern churches. The New Testament states that such speaking in tongues should not remain incomprehensible, but should be translated. In fact, speaking in tongues is not very common in the Bible. It is important to remember that at that

time the New Testament had not yet been finished. Therefore, people had to rely more on prophetic words to guide the church into all truth. Now we have the Bible in its entirety and we no longer need that. In the letters of the New Testament, Paul mentions speaking in tongues mainly in 1 Corinthians. Paul says that speaking in tongues is not for the edification of the church, but for the edification of the individual. It must also be said that speaking in tongues disappeared very soon after the New Testament was written. It did not reappear, until it appeared again in South America in the 19th century. In that place, pagan religions practiced speaking in tongues and Christians simply took it into church. So this has nothing to do with the Bible, but only with people's wishful thinking. One must be fundamentally skeptical of other practices of the Pentecostal movement. These are, for example, phenomena such as people suddenly falling backwards, starting to laugh compulsively or making animal noises.

Many opinions within the charismatic movements simply ignore the Bible. For example, some believe that poverty and illness are fundamentally a sign of weak faith. Thus, people who suffer terrible fates are told that they themselves are to blame because they did not believe strongly enough.

In summary, one must say:

When emotional experiences are confused with the work of the Holy Spirit and when the invented prophecies of individual church members are against and above the word of God, this is a warning sign for us. And when the experience of the individual is the focus instead of the cross of Jesus, we are dealing with a different gospel.