

CHAPTER 3

The Indian Pentecostal experience

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE: SOME GENERAL FEATURES

Pentecostals make the congregation and its various activities the centre of their entire life. In the early period of Indian Pentecostalism, the members of Bethesda, the Apostolic Faith Mission and the Assemblies of God were themselves fully involved in campaigns, evangelistic outreaches, prayer meetings, thanksgiving and memorial services, mid-week services and home fellowships. No part of the members' life remained untouched by their attachment to their church.

All three of these churches in this period had 'cell groups' especially committed to evangelism. These acted as catalysts in each of the local branches and constantly influenced other members of the congregation.

The entire congregation was encouraged to be involved in these activities. On average a member attended church services at least three times a week and twice on Sundays. Sunday afternoons and evenings were spent in evangelistic work. All three churches encouraged their members to engage in 'house-to-house visitation' of church members, a programme of personal evangelism, and to distribute Christian tracts. 'Open-air meetings' featured frequently in the outreach programmes. These meetings generally followed the same pattern. There was loud singing in Tamil, Telugu, Hindi or English often to the accompaniment of guitars, tambourines and piano accordions. A few would give biblical addresses. These were often very simple and cliché-ridden

exhortations, punctuated by 'testimonies' or songs. 'Testimonies' are accounts of how people had become Christians and deal mainly with the reasons for, and circumstances of, their conversion. The main reasons given for conversion were healing, liberation from some kind of debilitating habit, especially alcoholism, and freedom from 'evil possession'. These testimonies are often very moving accounts expressing the person's personal experience of conversion.

The following activities received prominence in all three churches:

- * All-night prayer meetings: a number of the older members of these churches told of how such meetings were even held on beaches and in deserted places where they could be alone with God.
- * Fasting often accompanied these prayer meetings and was associated especially with overcoming evil. For the working of healings and exorcisms and for effective preaching, it was deemed necessary to fast and pray. In interviews the words of Christ that 'these things come out only through much fasting and prayer' were often quoted.
- * Lay-witness in streets, workplaces and public assemblies. It was considered a sign of one's spirituality to evangelise and bring others to Christian faith.
- * Church services were held in homes, makeshift backyard structures, barracks, rented halls or cinemas, and private garages. The preaching was often done by elders or deacons. There were usually seven deacons after the example of the church in Jerusalem but there are instances in which twelve were appointed.
- * Very significant, in the first two decades of Indian Pentecostalism, was the formation of zealous 'youth clubs'. All had strong contingents of devout young people. It was not uncommon to find the same young person teaching Sunday school, leading the youth meetings, convening home-fellowship meetings and taking part in evangelistic outreach programmes.
- * The Sunday school was an important medium of mission outreach. All the churches mentioned in the previous chapter had examples of what initially were 'wayside Sunday schools' which developed into 'home fellowships'. These in turn formed the beginnings of new branch congregations. Many non-Christians were so influenced by these 'wayside' Sunday schools that they later converted.

- * After a while, the home fellowships usually moved into tents, backyard structures or private garages. Many of these, as time went on, erected larger tents, used schools in the vicinity, or rented larger premises. Eventually these branches built their own churches. Many congregations met for up to 15 years before they acquired a building of their own. It was in the 1960s that Pentecostal church buildings mushroomed.

Over and above these characteristics which are shared by all three of these churches, Bethesda also developed its own peculiar approach and character which was rewarded with remarkable growth in comparison with the Assemblies of God and the Apostolic Faith Mission: thus through the 1960s and 1970s Bethesda's membership remained over 10 times larger than that of the other two churches combined.¹

PROCLAMATION - BETHESDA STYLE

Dialogical and illustrated sermons

Pastor J F Rowlands had a great facility for innovation. He could isolate in everyday events themes and slogans that caught his congregation's imagination. For example, the titles of his sermons during the war included 'Hitler and the Jews - Gog Agog', 'Twin-engined believers', the 'Grand March Past', 'Harbour Lights', 'Sabotage' and 'God's Suspension Bridge'.²

He used these themes and slogans in a community-centred, highly attractive way to popularise his preaching and consistently drew huge crowds. Within the first nine years of Bethesda's existence in Durban he preached almost 3 000 sermons. These included 'musical sermons' (song items and music interspersed

1 *Membership of three older Indian Pentecostal churches*

	1950	1960	1970	1980
Bethesda	5 733	13 080	21 775	31 000
Apostolic Faith Mission	552	675	1 320	2 250
Assemblies of God	-	550	787	1 800

Sources: Population census May 1979; G C Oosthuizen *Pentecostal Penetration*, 160-162, 164. Information from the leaders of these churches.

2 *Moving Waters (MW)* March 1949, 7; August 1941; October 1940 and March 1942.

in the sermon),³ 'drama sermons' which included sketches and plays during the sermon, and 'illustrated addresses' in which large models, slides and pictures were used.⁴

J F Rowlands did not refrain from the sensational and the spectacular to hold his audience captive. For example, in October 1949, towards the end of an illustrated sermon on future judgement entitled 'Unforgiven Sins', a stern voice was heard calling from a cupboard on the rostrum. When J F Rowlands opened it, it revealed a skeleton which, by means of a hidden voice, spoke for six minutes of the 'forgotten and unforgiven sins' not only 'in the cupboard' but in 'the Book of Judgement'. The huge congregation was reported to have been 'awe struck, a pin dropped would have made an audible noise'.⁵

In 1957, on the occasion of Bethesda's 26th anniversary, A H Cooper, then the oldest surviving pioneer of the Pentecostal movement in South Africa, described the impact of the 'Bethesdascopes' (slide shows accompanying the sermon) thus: '[W]hen graphic descriptions were given by Pastor J F Rowlands as each picture was put on the screen, we seemed to be no longer in Durban, but actually with him on his great trip around the world. The impressions left on my mind are unforgettable'.⁶

Dr E P Reim, a great admirer of Bethesda, who was pioneering the Presbyterian mission to Indians at the time, was also greatly impressed by the 'Bethesdascopes'. In 1956, he declared, 'In the medieval church, visual teaching methods were used ... each depicting some Bible story. So Pastor Rowlands used the projector and colour slides in making the scriptures live in the minds of the congregation'.⁷ A year later he wrote: 'Christians of all denominations in our country should enrich their spiritual lives by a pilgrimage to a Bethesda campaign'.⁸

As we noted in chapter 1, during the first few decades of this century most Indians lacked the opportunities for education.⁹ Furthermore, it was mainly the

3 'Hymn formation' and 'Back to my father and home' were popular musical sermons in the late 1940s.

4 'Risen with Christ' *MW* November 1949; *Sunday Tribune* 17 October 1954.

5 *MW* November 1949, 124.

6 *MW* November 1957.

7 *MW* November 1956, 170.

8 *MW* November 1957, 151.

9 Only in 1973 did it become compulsory for Indian children to attend school until the age of 16.

poor, and thus the less educated, who had joined the Pentecostal churches. It is therefore understandable why this attractive visual approach to teaching had had a special impact on the minds of the majority of Bethesda's members.¹⁰ This appeal was accentuated by sermons whose themes would have had special appeal for the Indian, such as 'Calvary's Indian Eyes', 'New lamps for old' and 'Fire-walking with Jesus'.

In the first twenty-one years of Bethesda's existence, Pastor Rowlands conducted over two hundred 'Gospel Campaigns'.¹¹ At the end of every sermon solemn appeals were made for people in the congregation to commit themselves to Christ. At the end of the 'Unforgiven Sins' sermon one hundred made this public commitment.¹² At the larger campaign meetings even greater numbers responded. Dr E P Reim once remarked that, 'The high emotional pitch reached in these Gospel campaigns may be intellectually disturbing, but it is often necessary in order to bring a decision'.¹³

Cultural continuity

There is an inherent but not obvious tension in the cultural attitudes of South African Indians.¹⁴ South African Indians have a kind of 'love-hate' relationship with their past. While they rapidly discard their traditional habits and customs for a Western life-style, reasons for which were given in chapter 1, they all the same still hold their cultural past in high esteem. This is true even in cases in which there is no real knowledge of this past and in which all contact with India has long since disappeared. For many, this link is merely sentimental as they have little or no knowledge of the Indian languages or of the literature. Yet the affirmation of these 'roots' helps to maintain a sense of general wellbeing.

10 MW 1957, 154-4; 158-9; *The Natal Mercury* 7 October, 1957.

11 MW November 1957, 164.

12 MW November 1949, 125.

13 MW November 1956, 170.

14 This tension was referred to in chapter 1. See also: Pillay, V 1972. A comparative study of the values, attitudes and folklore across three generations of Hindu-Tamil speaking females in Durban, MA dissertation: University of Durban-Westville (refer specially to her conclusions); Oosthuizen, G C *Pentecostal penetrations*, op cit, 33f; Jithoo, S *Structure and development cycle of the Hindu joint family*, op cit; Coopan, S 1960 *The Indian community of South Africa: past, present and future*, Johannesburg: Institute of Race Relations, 9f.

Bethesda's strength in comparison with the other Pentecostal churches was its ability, often unconsciously, to articulate in its approach this tension between the old, traditional Indian life and culture which was rapidly passing away, and the new, Western, secularised life-style and habits this community now confronted. J F Rowlands himself stressed the continuity with India and its culture though he was in every possible respect a typical Englishman. He offered an attractive model of speech, dress and life-style characteristic of a well-bred Englishman. In fact many of Bethesda's Indian pastors borrowed some of his idiosyncrasies.

Yet, on the other hand, he always emphasised Indian cultural identity. He believed that it was essential for Indians to keep their traditional life-style and lamented that 'some Indian Christians change their mode of dress and adopt a Western style'. 'The Indian sarrie,' he maintained, 'is the most graceful ... all Indian ladies should retain this most exquisite gem of the Nation's identity.'¹⁵

For this reason he forbade marriages in his churches between Indians and non-Indians. In May 1941 he published this stance as a statement of 'church principle'. The country itself legally forbade marriages between black and white only after 1948. In 1941 he pointed out that 'familiarity and intimacy is to be deplored between boys and girls of different nationalities'.¹⁶ In one of his early writings he stated that 'perhaps the greatest of all great peaks of National Identity to be jealously guarded is the Purity of the Indian Race. If this is lost all is lost ... an Indian boy must marry an Indian girl. This is the foundation stone of the edifice'.¹⁷ Another example of his perception of this cultural tension was the fact that he instilled in his members a love for India, their motherland. By 1930 nearly all of Bethesda's Indian members had been born in South Africa. The majority were already second generation South Africans. Only a very few remembered arriving here as little children in the last few shiploads of immigrants.

To them, J F Rowlands presented the glamorous wonders of their motherland in his sermons and 'Bethesdascopes'. He himself had a deep love for India which he visited a number of times and where he established several Bethesda fellowships.¹⁸ On returning from his third trip in 1951, the 'All-India

15 *MW* January 1967, 19; December 1942, 143; *MWa*, 210f.

16 *MW* May 1941.

17 *MW* December 1942, 143.

18 *MW* December 1952, 3.

Campaign' was held which attracted wide interest in the whole Indian community. Over five hundred members were added to the church in that year.¹⁹

J F Rowland's visits to England, to the Church of God in the USA and to India brought the isolated Indian community in Bethesda into contact with the world at large. This helped to create a sense of pride in their church especially when Bethesda received complimentary reviews in overseas magazines and when its leader was widely acclaimed for his accomplishments.²⁰ Furthermore, Bethesda members faithfully sent financial aid to Christian workers in India on a monthly basis either through J F Rowlands or the 'Bethesda Missionary Endeavour', an organisation of Bethesda's members which was set up especially to raise this aid for India.

Moreover, J F Rowlands was concerned about the elderly Indians who still spoke Tamil, Telugu and Hindi as well as about those who were now speaking English in their homes but who nonetheless wished to preserve the Indian languages. The latter more westernised and better educated group found itself in a dilemma - people no longer required Indian languages for daily discourse especially in Natal which is predominantly English speaking but they suffered a sense of loss because the Indian languages were now not being spoken by themselves or, especially, by their children. At all Bethesda services and at least some of the early Apostolic Faith Mission congregations songs, prayers and testimonies were in Tamil, Telugu or Hindi. The service as a whole, however, including the sermon, was conducted in English.

Bethesda always had Indian orchestras which played at services and especially at the campaigns. Before the sixties vernacular choirs were a great attraction at Bethesda's services. Both Tamil and Telugu choirs performed to packed audiences.²¹ F Victor and L R Frank interpreted J F Rowlands' sermons at the larger services into Tamil and Telugu respectively.²²

With the gradual loss of the traditional languages, insistence on the use of the vernacular became a mere token demand. J F Rowlands' attempts to foster the traditional life-style achieved no lasting results. The westernisation process, by

19 *The Leader*, September 1951; *MWa*, 34.

20 Bethesda received coverage in the *Bristol Weekly*, *Western Daily*, and the *Church of God Evangel*. J F Rowlands was honoured with a number of citations and awards, e.g. 'The man of Vision' award which the Church of God, Cleveland, Tenn made in 1976.

21 *MW* March 1942; February 1943, 19; June 1955, 63.

22 *MW* March 1943, 34; February 1943.

virtue of the socio-economic and political pressures on the community as a whole, went on largely unchecked. Nevertheless, Bethesda did help its members, who were caught in a cultural cleft stick, to cope during a difficult socio-cultural transition.

J F Rowlands, the pastor

Bethesda ministered to the needs of its members in a way that made them feel 'at home' in their church. They 'owned' their church in a way uncommon in the established churches. They had what may be described as a 'club mentality', proudly wearing Bethesda badges and binding themselves to their leader in total loyalty. Pastor Rowlands had the autocratic power of the traditional Indian 'guru'; Bethesda churches were his large 'ashram'. His members unquestioningly supported him.

He in turn entered into the lives of his congregation. Given to caring and pastoral devotion, he identified himself with and was accepted by the Indians to an extent no other white person had been in the history of South Africa. His 'Pastor's Own' meetings, held only for the unmarried young men of the church, his open letter to youths, and his sensitivity to individual needs endeared him to his members.²³

His acceptance was aided by certain spectacular happenings such as his courageous act in risking his life to save one of the members from drowning while on a Pastor's Own camp²⁴ and his active concern for people in great difficulties. P H Khan, a Muslim awaiting execution, added the following postscript to his final letter to J F Rowlands: 'Millions of thanks for your long telegram just to hand. I am dying with a firm faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.' In 1954 two brothers, Sunnilall and Salik Sunker, wrote from prison in Pretoria, 'When we arrived here from Pietermaritzburg, we were thinking of our dark fate but Pastor J F Rowlands had been writing to us about the Lord Jesus Christ Today we are facing the worst punishment in the world, but our

23 He sent out several hundred birthday cards and gifts to his members each year. Numerous examples of these acts of kindness exist: e.g. a 99-year-old man told of how on the birth of his first son, Pastor Rowlands together with his brother and mother arrived at their very poor home with flowers. He said, 'If he could take the trouble to visit my poor home surely I could attend his church.'

24 *MW* 8 August 1944, 31.

hearts are filled with peace and joy. We are happier than millions in the outside world, knowing that we are safely sheltered by the precious Blood of the Lamb of God.²⁵

Salik's sentence was commuted to one of life imprisonment. Sunnilall penned his last letter to J F Rowlands in which he stated, 'The time has come for me to leave you and go to meet God. I have no more time on earth so I am rushing this letter up to you I am very thankful to you for leading me to the Light of Salvation ... please extend my greeting to all Bethesdaland.'²⁶

These cases received wide publicity in Bethesda's congregations. Love and respect for him led young people and the Indian pastors throughout his churches to address him as 'Dad'. At important occasions in the church he was garlanded with flowers, an honour Indians reserved only for the most respected.

In this way a strong sense of familyhood was fostered in 'Bethesdaland'. Early in 1940, in a letter addressed to 'My dear Bethesda family', J F Rowlands defined 'The Spirit of Bethesda' thus:

Bethesda's unity is the revealed secret of her progress. Travellers, missionaries and visitors to the temple from various parts of the world invariably remark upon the warmth of Christian love radiating through the services. It has long been acknowledged that Bethesda is like a large family of which God is the Heavenly Father.

Bethesda's close community came to the notice of E Stanley Jones and in a letter to J F Rowlands he stated:

I pray that out of the racial differences you may be able to create a new brotherhood and fellowship in Christ. I pray that Bethesda may be used to change individual lives and to change the social order which is producing so much of confusion and wrong attitudes.²⁷

Many testimonies of members of Bethesda in this period can be cited which confirm the view that the congregation themselves were deeply aware of this familyhood. The following is representative:

25 MW July 1954, 71.

26 MW August 1954, 87.

27 Letter in MW October 1940.

I came from a strictly orthodox non-Christian family which is antagonistic to the Christian Faith. When I attended Bethesda I was struck and astonished by the great reality people were finding in religion. This was something quite new to me. I continued visiting Bethesda and discovered that there was one preached about, who was so different to the many deities I had hitherto ignorantly worshipped.²⁸

These testimonies usually go on to express gratitude to the Bethesda family in which they had learned about Christ.

J F Rowlands exploited every opportunity to promote this sense of familyhood. For example, the Bethesda badges, which members in good standing in the church could wear,²⁹ not only obligated the wearers to mind the way they lived and behaved, especially in public, but also gave them a sense of belonging; the ownership of the badge meant that one was in good standing with the church. Hence in an early edition of the Church's bulletin it was stated that 'Bethesda members go about proudly flashing their Bethesda badges because they are proud of the church'.³⁰

The obverse side of this 'fatherly attitude' of J F Rowlands was the paternalism it generated. The policy of the church was almost entirely autocratic. This dependence on J F Rowlands also extended to financial matters. From the beginnings of Bethesda, the finances of the church were under his control.³¹ Branch churches were also dependent on him for financial assistance. Since he was a keen numismatist and had acquired a very valuable collection of coins he remained financially independent of the church.³² Yet he reinvested his money in the churches and when he died he willed all he had to Bethesda.

This tight financial control contributed to the fact that the Indian members abrogated their claims to decision-making or leadership to Pastor Rowlands. Members even found it difficult to criticise him 'because of all that he had done for the church'. It appears that the deep respect for their pastor had grad-

28 OI M Thavarajan.

29 Bethesda Temple Church Council (BTCC) minutes 27 January 1936.

30 MW October 1940.

31 BTCC minutes September, 1942.

32 Rowlands served also as president of the Natal Numismatist Society for a number of years: *The Daily News* 30 October 1959; *Cape Argus* 7 November 1958; *The Star* 3 November 1959.

ually come to mean total dependence. Also, nothing of importance could take place, even in a branch church, without Pastor Rowlands' sanction. The appointment of Indians to positions of pastor, evangelist or missionary was his sole prerogative.

Lay responsibility and group participation

Lay participation was one of the chief factors that influenced the growth and development of Pentecostalism. In the period under discussion in the development of Indian Pentecostalism there was a total absence of the clergy-laity distinction. Further, the selection-process by which full-time workers were appointed was a 'selection by participation' and not a matter of being ordained into another 'caste'. A brief description of a few representative examples of Indian leaders in Bethesda will serve to illustrate this. This is followed up by a brief description of certain 'auxiliary-ministerial' organisations to show how Pentecostal churches utilised lay leadership in their programme of growth.

MINISTERIAL 'SELECTION BY PARTICIPATION': A FEW EXAMPLES

The oldest and longest-serving minister in Bethesda in 1983 was Pastor Frank Victor, formerly Govindsamy. He, V R Enoch, Paul Lutchmiah Simeon, James Kistnaswami, Cyril R Geoffrey and Joseph Vallen were among the earliest Indian leaders of this church.

Frank Victor

Frank Victor's conversion was most dramatic. He was a practising Hindu who took umbrage at Hindus converting to Christianity. When he heard that his cousin was to be baptised by J F Rowlands on the afternoon of 12 May 1932, he went in the morning to threaten J F Rowlands: 'I went to give Pastor Rowlands a black eye I was defending my gods who were being insulted by these conversions to Christianity.'³³ After he had hurled abuse at Pastor Rowlands he was invited by him to pray. First he prayed to his deities and later when Rowlands prayed for him, 'Mr Govindsamy began to weep, at first softly then openly and unashamedly'.³⁴ The next few moments saw him 'led to Christ'

³³ OI F Victor (referred to also by J F Rowlands and J Vallen).

³⁴ MW November 1961, 93; January 1975, 10.

as Pastor Rowlands spoke to him from Acts 8:37. Victor recalled that a sense of conviction of sin came over him and after his confession of error and weeping the prayer offered gave him a sense of renewed hope: 'immediately my spiritual eyes were opened and the glorious light of the Gospel shone into my heart and wonderful peace came into my soul' was how he described the experience of that day.³⁵

He requested baptism that same afternoon and both cousins formally joined the church. He became the first Indian to be ordained to full-time service in a Pentecostal church in South Africa. Because of its melodramatic effect on the hearer, this event was repeated several times. The essentials, however, as presented above were confirmed by Victor himself.

His parents disowned him and treated him as a pariah after he converted. Victor continued in his old job as a waiter for a further two years and gave himself up zealously to the activities of the church. Victor maintained that since his conversion in 1932 he had always greatly desired to 'serve God with all [his] strength'.³⁶ He began working in a factory so that he could find more time to work in the church - attending evangelistic outreaches, Bible studies and prayer meetings. The minutes of the Bethesda Temple church Council and the pages of *Moving Waters* have repeatedly commended Victor's support and effective pioneering work.³⁷ In 1935 he became a full-time worker with the status of 'evangelist' but with no fixed stipend. He also fulfilled the important task of translating J F Rowland's sermons into Tamil.

Victor had lived with J F Rowlands in a small flat while Rowlands' mother and brother were away in Bristol in 1932. He had acted as personal assistant to the young J F and had led the prayer sessions in the minor hall and in the prayer tent during the campaigns. Given to fasting and long periods of prayer he soon received the title of 'Bethesda's Prayer Warrior'.³⁸

Only later did he become a pastor and with the establishment of Chatsworth in 1963, he was promoted to pastor Bethesda's branches there. He served Ebenezer Temple in Unit 2 first, and in 1975 he headed Shekinah Temple. This is the largest of Bethesda Temple's churches, the site also of the Bethesda Bible college. On the occasion of the opening of the first church building in

35 OI F Victor; *MWa*, 120.

36 *MW* January 1941.

37 BTCC minutes 13 August 1940; November, 1938; 10 September 1940; 9 January 1943; 9 June 1943; 1 June 1956; 1 January 1956.

38 *MW* November 1949, 128.

Chatsworth, J F Rowlands said in recognition of Pastor Victor that 'the calibre of Pastor Victor is not easily found, this man has played a tremendous role in his own quiet but joyful manner in this church. He is a jewel seldom found.'³⁹

Frank Victor influenced many of the projects which J F Rowlands, with extraordinary gifts as organiser and leader, brought to fruition. He, for example, urged the founding of a Bible college and the strengthening of ties with the churches in India. Victor chose to follow the example of J F Rowlands and Alec Rowlands and remained unmarried so that he 'could be given totally to God's work'.⁴⁰

V R Enoch

Virasu R Enoch, a Telugu-speaking man, like Frank Victor was from staunch Hindu stock. While he also received very little formal schooling, his father had taught him to read the Hindu Scriptures. The family was very poor and had resided at the magazine barracks. At the age of 18 he 'grudgingly' attended one of J F Rowlands' meetings. Intending to stay only ten minutes he eventually sat through the entire sermon. He recalls, 'I hated Christianity believing it to be a white man's religion [but] the wonderful singing of our Pastor and the sermon touched me'.⁴¹ J F Rowlands' singing (and accompanying himself on the ukelele) was something of a novelty and enhanced the services.

The sermon on that occasion, from Daniel, concerned the refusal of the three Hebrew boys to bow down to the image of Nebuchadnezzar. In Enoch's mind, his own worship was being called into question and he claims to have heard on three occasions a voice saying, 'I am Jesus your Saviour, follow me and you shall have eternal life'.⁴² This type of experience had a profound impact on the Indian mind. In fact one finds many testimonies of conversions occasioned by similar experiences. While it is not within the scope of our enquiry to subject these to psychological scrutiny they do serve both to illustrate the intensity of the religious experience involved and to identify the tendency among Pentecostals to emphasise this type of supernatural or mystical experience.

39 MW July 1967, 51.

40 OI F Victor.

41 OI V R Enoch; MW September 1973, 137-138.

42 OI V R Enoch.

What matters here is that such an experience radically changed the course of the individual's life. This often occurred at the cost of physical harm and ostracism by his family and community, a high price for the Indian in his close-knit family to pay. V R Enoch's experience therefore is typical: 'My father said, "you will disgrace my name, my caste and my relatives". But I could not agree because I knew Christ was real.' His conversion on 12 December 1931 was kept a secret for the next nine months. Then he endured persecution at the hands of a 'violently tempered' father. Yet in keeping with the familiar pattern that one often discovers when talking to early converts to Pentecostalism, the end result was invariably the conversion of the persecutors. Enoch's whole family were eventually converted and he pointed out, 'My father who smoked cheroots and drank for nearly 50 years gave up all these habits after he was saved.'

Like all Bethesda full-time workers he began as a lay worker and Sunday school teacher; then he became an 'ambassador' (a lay worker with pastoral responsibilities for home visitation and evangelism); then deacon and church council member; then, on July 1943, full-time evangelist (in his case 12 years later) when he was allocated the Overport-Sydenham areas on the outskirts of Durban, and then, pastor. He was the pastor of Sharon Temple in Overport until it closed down in 1965 when this area was taken over by the Department of Community Development under the Group Areas Act. Enoch was then made the pastor of the Bethesda congregation in the large Indian areas of Kharwastan and Shallcross to the southwest of Durban.

Cyril R Geoffrey and Paul L Simeon: missionaries

Cyril Ramasamy Geoffrey was the first missionary to be appointed by Bethesda and he and Paul Lutchmiah Simeon became faithful workers of the church. They travelled by bicycle far up the Natal Coast and to Port Shepstone in the south, visiting Christian homes and evangelising.⁴³ Both were born of Hindu parents and both had had very little schooling.

Geoffrey was converted on 16 December 1936 at the age of 20. His whole family was converted soon afterwards. He recalls that while 'fasting and praying in a bush at Umbogintwini the Lord spoke to me and told me I must carry the Gospel to the unsaved'.⁴⁴ In Bethesda, he too started as a Sunday school teacher then 'ambassador', deacon, evangelist and in 1943 the church's first

43 MW August 1943, 87.

44 OI C R Geoffrey.

itinerant missionary. 'His consistent Christian living since conversion at Bethesda and his flaming zeal for souls' won him this promotion.⁴⁵ He resigned his secular job and 'stepped out in faith', which meant renouncing a fixed remuneration and basic comforts, living in Christian homes along the way and then moving on. A Christian man with whom he had frequently lodged at Park Rynie recalled how the Christians in that area had looked forward to these 'pastoral visits' and he especially mentioned the comfort Geoffrey had brought during the sudden death of his wife. As soon as he had heard of the death, Geoffrey had cycled to Park Rynie to spend a few days with him.⁴⁶ In 1949 Geoffrey was made evangelist on the North Coast and then he became pastor at the Galilee Temple in Merebank and at the Horeb Temple in Clairwood. In 1983 he was pastor of the Bethesda congregation in Lenasia, Johannesburg. He later left to establish his own church in Lenasia.

Paul L Simeon came to Bethesda seeking 'healing'. This led to his conversion and baptism on 12 April 1936. He claimed that his conversion had given 'inner satisfaction' and 'peace in his troubled home'.⁴⁷

Like all these early Indian pioneers he too had had little schooling and no theological training except the biblical studies J F Rowlands offered. The teaching was simple and sufficient for the provision of guidelines to Christian living. While these studies had very little doctrinal content they nonetheless emphasised ethics and Christian devotion. Simeon was 'catechised through participation'⁴⁸ by first becoming an 'ambassador' in the areas of Clairwood and Seaview, where the poorer Indians had settled. In 1943 he served as a full-time missionary on the Natal North Coast and made regular trips as far up as Stanger. Later he became pastor in the Verulam-Tongaat areas and helped to establish the following Bethesda branches: Elim Temple (Inanda), Angelus Temple (Mt Edgecombe), Jerusalem Temple (Cornubia Estate), Lystra Temple (Tongaat), Olivet Temple (Hillhead Estate) and Hermon Temple (Verulam).

Joseph Vallen and James Kistnaswami: evangelists

Joseph Vallen and James Kistnaswami were two early evangelists who, although they eventually left Bethesda, had been two of the stalwarts of the

⁴⁵ *MW* August 1943, 87.

⁴⁶ *OI* A Kodi.

⁴⁷ *OI* Paul L Simeon.

⁴⁸ *MW* January 1941.

church in the early days. Joseph Vallen was converted to Christianity at Bethesda's first Back-to-the-Bible campaign in 1933, and James Kistnaswami at the Bethesda Temple on 29 March 1936.

Both were from the start actively involved in the activities of the church and were active members of the 'Ambassadors Movement'. J Vallen was invited to work in Rossburgh and was made pastor of the new Horeb Temple, Bethesda's first branch church, which was opened at the beginning of 1941.

He gave up his job to enter the ministry, first as an evangelist, and then later as pastor. During this time he earned only a fraction of his previous salary which had to support an ageing mother, brother and sisters. His mother, a staunch Hindu, was bitterly opposed to his entering the ministry. He claims that one night she had a dream in which she was chided by a person she understood to be Christ. The next day to his total surprise she asked him to go ahead with his plans to join the ministry. They experienced many financial difficulties and had to sell the only fixed assets they had.

However, Vallen believed this to be only a small sacrifice for the Gospel's sake. In a discussion with him he repeatedly referred to the example of J F Rowlands whose family had lost everything when their mill had burned down. Vallen, who also chose celibacy like J F and Alec Rowlands, complained that the 'problem with Pentecostal ministers today is that this element of sacrifice is gone'.⁴⁹

He pastored the congregation at the Horeb Temple from its inception and pioneered Bethesda's work in Merebank and Rossburgh. He served here until he left this church to join the Pentecostal Holiness church.

James Kistnaswami became an evangelist on 27 June 1943 and was assigned the Inanda area where the new Elim Temple had just been completed.⁵⁰ The report in the church bulletin on his ordination confirms the selection pattern described above: 'He has always taken a very active part in Christian evangelism and has been most successful as Sunday school superintendent at Horeb Temple since its inception. Our brother's musical talents are well known'.⁵¹ Kistnaswami led the singing in Telugu during worship services and at the early campaigns, and also prepared Telugu choirs for the big services of the church. His successful pastoral work in the Inanda area is amply attested to in

49 OI J Vallen.

50 MW October 1943, 111; July 1943, 81.

51 MW June 1943, 65.

Moving Waters. Later, he too left this church and joined the Reformed Church in Africa.

Auxiliary ministerial movements: a few examples

These churches measured 'revival' by the level of involvement of the congregation in ministerial duties, praying for the sick, house-to-house visitations and personal evangelism.

A keen observer of Bethesda's progress who was a member of one of the established churches but who had also attended many of the campaign meetings made the following significant assessment in 1959:

One Bethesda member, a convert from Hinduism, within a week of his baptism, was in a group visiting homes in his neighbourhood, seeking souls for Christ and praying for the sick. Within a short time he had become an 'ambassador' whose duties are similar to those of a Presbyterian elder, and he had also taken part in organising a wayside Sunday school for Hindu children. His significance is typical of Bethesda, where it has become a tradition for members to be Spirit-filled soul winners, and these Christian laymen are Bethesda's main evangelical ministry.⁵²

The Pentecostal churches created organisations in which all members could participate in the life of the church. We briefly mention the main ones that Bethesda created as they are representative of the type found in most of these churches.

The Ambassadors Movement

As early as 1940, members of this movement were considered to be the 'key men' of Bethesda's myriad activities. To be an active member was regarded as a sign of a person's spirituality. Later each branch of Bethesda prided itself on having its own group of ambassadors who went out visiting Christian homes, and who prayed for the sick on Saturday and Sunday afternoons and on two or

⁵² E P Reim in an article in *The Christian Recorder* which was reprinted in *MW* November 1956, 169.

three evenings in the week. They were described as 'a cordon of love around their beloved pastor who sought at all times to relieve him of the heavy burdens and responsibilities which rested upon his shoulders by systematic visitations throughout the entire assembly'. Careful records were kept of all these visits so that the number of times each home had been visited could be estimated at a glance. Ambassadors were described as 'all-weather Christians who may be seen going about their work in sunshine, wind and rain'.⁵³ In each home they would hold a short service that included Bible reading, a short exhortation and prayer. Annual conventions which were attended by all the ambassadors from all the branch congregations were held. Here they would reaffirm their commitment to their task.⁵⁴

The 'Sisters' movement

'The Sisters Bright Hour' founded by E H Rowlands, J F Rowlands' mother, was the female counterpart of the 'Ambassadors Movement'. It adopted a very similar programme and *modus operandi* except that its work was conducted during the day and solely among women. The organisation also incorporated into its duties the task of providing assistance to the poor in the church and the raising of funds for certain church needs.⁵⁵

Christian Caterers' Fellowship

Since many of the Indians in the early days of Bethesda were waiters and stewards in numerous hotels in Durban, the 'Christian Caterers' Fellowship' was formed to take care of the spiritual needs of these members. Thus those who had to work odd shifts and who could not attend the church services had their own weekly services. At their inaugural meeting on 3 March 1955 Teddy Gabriel, a chef at one of Durban's premier hotels, was elected leader. He was still the leader in 1984. This fellowship also formed amongst themselves an Indian music group which has undertaken evangelistic missions throughout the Indian settlements of Natal.⁵⁶

53 R Abel's secretarial report in *MW* October 1940.

54 *MW* June 1962, 44; February 1952, 64.

55 *MW* March 1953, 34; July 1959, 81; January 1960, 4.

56 *MW* March 1955, 33; September 1957, 129.

Tract distribution societies

Open-air meetings and tract distributions were important features of the Ambassadors, the Christian Caterers; the deacons of each branch church, and the youth clubs of the various areas. Preaching on the street corners and open-air services in the yards of Bethesda members also featured prominently in their outreach programmes to non-Christians.

The Bethesda Tract Distribution Society was founded on 24 May 1943 to fulfil what was to remain an important evangelistic function of this church.⁵⁷ On the day of its inauguration 3 400 tracts were distributed in Clairwood. At the July handicap, the annual horse-racing derby, on 3 July 1943 a further 3 300 were distributed. As the work expanded the function of this society was taken over by the other groups mentioned above.⁵⁸

Youth guilds

The Pastor's Own and the Nazareth Guild Organisations were aimed at reaching unmarried men and women. In 1940 the following aims of the Pastor's Own were defined:

The Pastor's Own is a spiritual organisation sponsored by the Government of Bethesda, to assist young unmarried men of all nationalities to live clean, pure and God-fearing lives, exercising self control and total abstinence from sinful sexual indulgences. A deep spirit of concern is fostered for the rescue of fellow young men who may be ensnared by the many temptations of the flesh, and by encouraging a sense of national pride in matrimonial relationships, definite disapproval is shown towards mixed marriages.⁵⁹

Monthly meetings were held and the annual retreat became the highlight of the organisation. These weekend camps created a brotherhood and helped instil a sense of Christian holiness in the lives of the church's young men.⁶⁰ The object of the camp was 'to withdraw from the humdrum of everyday life and to enjoy a season of quiet fellowship with God'.⁶¹

57 MW March 1943, 33.

58 MW August 1943, 93.

59 MW July 1940.

60 Many of the church's pastors and the faithful told of their renewal.

61 MW September 1940.

As the name suggests, these meetings were promoted and conducted by J F Rowlands. They continued to be a rallying point for young men, well into the 1960s. The church bulletin in 1950 reported that, 'Hundreds of young men have been saved from the snares of the devil through its [i.e. Pastor's Own] ministry and very many have been refreshed in both body and soul at the ten spiritual camps which have been held throughout the years.'⁶² But by the late 1960s the interest in these outings dwindled and the organisations ceased to function.

The Nazareth Guild attempted to accomplish similar objectives among the young women of the church where 'Each individual was encouraged to live a life of holiness and purity'.⁶³ In the late sixties this guild suffered a fate similar to the Pastor's Own.

Pentecostal congregational life: effects on groups and individuals

It is clear from the foregoing that the Pentecostal experience usually meant group acceptance accompanied by a strong feeling of belonging. Unlike the established churches, within their own churches Pentecostals are not merely 'members'. Each is vitally involved in the life, activities and growth of the group or congregation, often in the absence of a full-time pastor.

Within the Pentecostal community members had ample opportunity to develop their leadership potential. In fact, lay members were encouraged to lead organisations within the church. This meant that men who had held menial jobs and who had been too 'low' in society to be noticed became in their Pentecostal community leaders, deacons, elders and pastors. When a study was made of all the Indian pastors of Bethesda appointed before 1970, it was found that, besides two, all had been converted from Hinduism and were the first Christians in their family. (The other two were from Roman Catholic background.) All were poor and all, save one, had had very little schooling. The two who had acquired some ministerial training became pastors only in the sixties. This meant that for the first 35 years of the church's existence all their ministers had been 'catechised by participation', the process we described above. All but two of these pastors had menial jobs before they joined the ministry. These included working in factories, catering and working for Durban Corporation. Two of the pastors had been alcoholics and had held no steady job. Again the

62 MW July 1950, 67.

63 MW October 1940.

two exceptions, one a teacher, joined the church only in the sixties. The histories of the pastors of the Apostolic Faith Mission and Assemblies of God are very similar.

Thus Pentecostalism ministered effectively to the poorest and to the economically deprived. Just as William Booth and his fellow-workers 'descended into the morass where alone they could catch the coal-heavers and the navies',⁶⁴ these Pentecostal pastors sought out those who lived in railway, corporation and mill barracks, tin shanties, temporary housing settlements and in 'sub-economic' housing-schemes. These pastors and evangelists, like the Salvation Army in Britain, also preached in 'dirty, draughty and comfortless places' where 'decent people' did not go.

In this regard Pentecostalism among South Africa's Indians also shares the same characteristics as, for example, Pentecostalism in Britain where, as B Wilson points out, it 'is predominantly the religion of the working class and poor people ... those termed "disinherited" ... the lower social classes'.⁶⁵ What Wilson found to be true in the Elim Foursquare Gospel Church in Britain is also apparent among Indian Pentecostals: that is, they are prepared, usually, to recognise themselves as the low and the least, to rejoice in the many biblical promises made to this class,⁶⁶ and to become completely involved in church and congregational activities.

This is very similar to what happened when Methodism was first introduced in eighteenth-century England where congregational allegiance also became a 'total way of life' that was embraced in a new way by the converts. There too the whole life of the members centred on the church and its activities.

Furthermore, the convert's life was now transformed by a new austerity which usually accompanied the 'striving after holiness'. The Pentecostal shuns, for instance, tobacco, alcohol, gambling, dancing and other 'worldly amusements'. He or she is now called to careful living and to circumspection in speech, manners and appearance. These they regard as signs of holiness. The socio-economic benefits of this austerity are obvious. The money usually squandered

64 Sandall T *The history of the Salvation Army*, in Stark, W 1967 *The Sociology of Religion* Vol II, London: Keegan Paul, 170.

65 Wilson, B 1961 *Sects and society: a sociological study of the Elim Tabernacle, Christian Science and Christadelphians*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 142.

66 *Ibid*, 235.

on 'worldly pleasures and amusements' is now utilised in the upliftment of the family. For example the cases of Pastors S E and R C A:

Pastor S E lived in the Corporation barracks, held a menial job and had little or no education. He converted in 1932, became an evangelist soon after, and in 1940 became a pastor. All his children in spite of their initial poverty were able to receive a good education. One of the sons is now a director of education and another a medical doctor.

Pastor R C A was out of a job and quite a prodigal. However, after his conversion he immediately stopped drinking and his family, hitherto destitute because of his drinking, managed to gain some social prestige. R C A soon became a preacher and led many of his neighbours to Christianity.

With the benefits of this new life-style many Pentecostals themselves became in time part of the economic middle class. This is evident in Bethesda where it was observed that among the numerous members interviewed that 'socio-economic' improvement accompanied conversion.

In the case of Indian Pentecostalism in contrast to Pentecostalism in Britain, there is another important factor: Indian Pentecostals in the main were converts from Hinduism: the type of Hinduism which was ritualistic and centred chiefly on the temple and its priest and not the philosophical Hinduism which exalts contemplation. Thus the conversion experience included the rejection of temple religion and its way of life and introduction into a new religious society. Healing and exorcism played a very significant role in conversion. Many of the interviewees began to attend a church or even to listen to the Pentecostal evangelist only after they had been healed or had witnessed such healing in their family or had been 'delivered from demon possession'. Many of these converts said that they had previously consulted Hindu priests but had not been healed. Then they enlisted the aid of the Pentecostal pastor and eventually joined his church. Thus in our study those embracing Pentecostalism were not rejecting one type of Christianity for another but were rather rejecting one type of religion for another type which ministered directly to their existential concerns, chiefly healing and deliverance from evil.

A Dubb pointed out that Pentecostalism fulfilled the same role among some of Nicholas Bhendu's Xhosa members who found that within the Pentecostal

church they received prayers for healing and protection and who complained that their former churches 'had neither been concerned about, nor offered, any remedies for their physical, mental and material problems'.⁶⁷

Another factor is that many of those attracted to Pentecostalism had been devoted religious people. We would not go so far as to generalise, as R M Anderson does in his study of North American Pentecostalism, that 'where cultural tradition defines religion as primarily of the "heart" ecstasy is implicit and struggles to become explicit The poorer, more dislocated and despised, the more marginal and highly mobile such people are in the social order, the more extreme will be their ecstatic response,'⁶⁸ or that the 'most important difference between the working poor who became Pentecostals and the much greater number who did not ... [was that] they were believers in the religion ... of "the heart" before they came into contact with Pentecostals'.⁶⁹ Michael Harrison also generalises in this way when he points out that 'Pentecostalism attracts those already drawn to religious devotion and already committed to a church establishment'.⁷⁰

In our case, all that can be said with surety is that several converts to Pentecostalism had been devoted Hindus and some had even been Hindu priests. To say more is unwarranted because Pentecostalism had also attracted many with little or no religious commitment: gangsters and drunkards on the one hand, and many nominal Hindus on the other.

Moreover, G C Oosthuizen has revealed some interesting sociological parallels between traditional Indian society and Indian Pentecostal communities.⁷¹ He sees the Pentecostal society in many cases as continuing the traditional *kutum* or joint family system that was breaking down. The pastor's role in these churches replaced the role of the father in the *kutum*. The charismatic leader, for instance, like the father over the family, had authority over the life of the congregation. He points out that 'the pastor remains the sum and substance of his church or congregation and in this full identification he is seen as the model to

67 Dubb, A 1976 *Community of the saved: an African Revivalist church in the Eastern Cape*, Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 35-36.

68 Anderson, R M 1979 *Vision of the disinherited: the making of American Pentecostalism*, NY: Oxford University Press.

69 *Ibid*, 228.

70 Harrison, M I 'Sources of recruitment of Catholic Pentecostalism', *Journal for Scientific Study of Religion* 13(1), 48-64.

71 MW, 234-240.

which the devout at least can attain, but which ideally everyone of his followers ought to reach. The pastor does not assume absolute responsibility because it would affect the *esprit de corps* which is of vital importance to the church.⁷²

Using Oosthuizen's view and D Aechliman's study of independent movements in the Western Cape, J S Cumpsty maintains that the charismatic leader is the 'linchpin' by which individuals relate to 'the ultimately real' thus achieving 'indirect cosmic belonging' by relating to 'that which is already so related'.⁷³ In the same vein Steven Tipton in his study of some Pentecostal churches in North America maintains that the pastor possessed 'divine moral authority' which was validated by Pentecostal doctrine.⁷⁴

While there is apparently some evidence for these claims regarding the 'headship' of the pastor, what is equally true is that the 'Pentecostal experience' not only introduces the person to a family, but also emphasises the person's own worth. The 'experience' essentially helps him to come to terms with himself. The individual is equal to anyone else who has had the same experience. Others, 'no matter how rich or educated they may be' may 'lack the Spirit' which *he* possesses. Hence he finds support in such texts as 1 Cor 1:27, 'God chooses the foolish things to confound the wise' or 1 Cor 3:19, 'The wisdom of this world is foolishness before God'.⁷⁵ This experience of the Spirit is the major factor that influences the total involvement in the church. When one 'receives the Spirit' one obtains 'power' and can therefore achieve what anybody else can. There is here a 'democratisation by the Spirit' which removes the distinction between clergy and laity. Thus both community solidarity and group allegiance are stressed, and yet the importance and autonomy of the individual is maintained.

Another reason for not exaggerating the 'headship' of the pastor in a fragmenting joint family system is that the scholars cited above have ignored the fact that very often the people who had converted to Pentecostalism had converted with their joint families quite intact. In fact we have repeatedly observed how entire families have followed their parents into a Pentecostal church. While the pastor may have been a 'father figure' to many disinherited Indian Pentecos-

72 *Ibid.* 236.

73 Cumpsty, J S 1983 'A proposed framework for identifying and locating religious experience', *Religion in Southern Africa* 4(2), 36.

74 Tipton, S M 1982 *Getting saved from the sixties: moral meaning in conversion and cultural change*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 236.

75 These ideas and stock phrases appeared frequently in interviews and in the testimonies.

tals, many of them gave to him the respect that they had previously always given to their Hindu priest or guru.

Associated also with Spirit Baptism or glossolalia is the experience of receiving power for service. Samuel Chadwick in his study of Pentecostal doctrine points out that 'Pentecost is always associated with power The Spirit dwells in men and accomplishes extraordinary things through quite ordinary people.'⁷⁶ He adds that 'there is probably no instinct of the heart so strong as the craving for the sovereignty of power The gift of the Spirit is a gift of personality. It turns ordinary persons into extraordinary personalities. That is the miracle of Pentecost.'⁷⁷

V Hine concluded from Hollinshead's study of the role of education and social prestige in Pentecostal commitment that relative deprivation of status or power may be associated with participation in the Pentecostal Movement.⁷⁸ While clearly pointing out that this correlation in no way constitutes a causal relation between the two, Hine believes that to accept that such a correlation exists is 'consistent with the way in which Pentecostals characteristically describe the benefits of Baptism with tongues: again the concept of power is used. Power to witness for the Lord ... and to heal.'⁷⁹

The direct implication of this experience of receiving power is, says W Stark, a 'supremely activistic, supremely dynamic type' of person.⁸⁰ Hence the attitude of Pentecostals is positive and confident since within the confines of their church they shed their anxieties and inhibitions. As B Wilson said of British Pentecostals, 'conversion is not the point of arrival, but a point of departure, and as a rule they have a long way to go'.⁸¹ Hence a strong holiness motif inheres in the Pentecostal position. Pentecostals launch out into a spate of activity. They attend several weekly meetings and cottage services; they evangelise, distribute tracts, hold open-air meetings and other such activities.

76 Chadwick, S 1972 *The way to Pentecost*, 49, London: Hodder and Stoughton.

77 *Ibid*, 62.

78 Hine, V H 1974 'The deprivation and disorganization theories of social movements' in Zaretsky and Leone (eds) *Religious movements in contemporary America*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 660.

79 *Ibid*, 658.

80 Stark, W *The sociology of religion*, op cit, 170.

81 Wilson, B *Sects and society* ..., op cit, 344-345.

Furthermore, Pentecostal churches have not only offered those who were socio-economically depressed an alternative society which accepted them but have also ministered to individuals who suffered from social and cultural isolation, and alienation. Stark warns that the economic aspect must not be undervalued 'but that besides low social status and bad living conditions, the misery and degradation which is the ever active cause of sectarian sentiments ... had become progressively personal and psychological. It is now less the hungry but the lonely who long for the consolations which are offered by the special religiosity of the deprived and depressed.'⁸²

As we have seen already, Indians not only suffered socio-economic deprivation but were also becoming alienated from their traditional culture and world view. This was occasioned both by the break with their motherland and their move to the city during the first few decades of this century. Urbanisation fragmented their family life and social coherence and they had to make the difficult transition to coexistence with whites and blacks. Their traditional languages were being rapidly replaced by English and many adopted the social customs and habits of the whites. To these people Pentecostal communities offered a 'haven of rest' where, for a while at least, a sense of continuity with their past was kept. As was the case in Britain, by combating 'loneliness, anxiety and fear the church helped to release tension, offer catharsis ... and persuade the individual to integrate himself in a community'.⁸³

SUMMARY

In this summary, some of the social implications of Pentecostalism among Indians will be discussed vis-à-vis several studies of the Pentecostal phenomenon made elsewhere:

(a) Pentecostalism fostered *group solidarity* and consciously accentuated *communal belonging*. R M Anderson⁸⁴ and M Calley⁸⁵ provide ample proof that Pentecostal churches fulfilled this function in North America and England as well. As J S Cumpsty stated, for many Pentecostal-type religious movements 'group solidarity is often more important than beliefs'. Hence he points out that the group can easily become the symbol of 'the felt sense of the ultimately

82 Stark, W *The sociology of religions*, 28-29.

83 Wilson, B *Sects and society* ..., 347.

84 Anderson, R M *Version of the disinherited*, op cit, 233.

85 Calley, M J C 1965 *God's people*, London: Oxford University Press, 134.

'real' in which the rest of the experience is considered 'evil, transitory and markedly inferior'.⁸⁶

We observed how Bethesda, for example, fostered what we called a 'club mentality' which gave its members a sense of 'pride in belonging'. That membership of 'the saved' provided a sense of communal wellbeing has been illustrated in W J Samarin's study of glossolalia as well. He found that 'the powerless, voiceless position of the Pentecostals and the anxieties arising from that position provided a social basis for speaking in tongues'. He proceeds to compare the social significance of glossolalia to the significance of Latin for the Roman Catholic laity. He claims that it is a means for 'communicating attitudes and emotion, but not thought; an expression of communal solidarity'.⁸⁷

There is no need to restrict this role of Pentecostalism only to glossolalia. While 'speaking in tongues' was fairly common, J F Rowlands for instance played down its importance. (This receives greater attention in chapter 7.) Nevertheless, seeking after holiness and the infilling of the Spirit which manifested itself in religious fervour and commitment to prayer, fasting, worship and evangelism also served as non-verbal communicative action in which indeed 'attitudes and emotions, but not thought' were communicated as 'an expression of communal solidarity'.

(b) Pentecostal churches also emphasised the need for *all their members to participate* in their activities and their growth. These churches offered ample latitude for their members to assume leadership roles and their sub-organisations created opportunities for everyone to be actively involved. In activity, members felt that they belonged. In this way each member was made to feel important and needed. L P Gerlach in studies of Pentecostalism made the same observation, namely that 'participation in the shaping of the future by involvement in the goals of their church afforded individuals a feeling of personal worth and power and the reshaping of the individual image'.⁸⁸

Pentecostalism has attracted most of its members from the poor classes who, as we observed, bore the brunt of the socio-economic and cultural woes inflicted on Indians in South Africa. It is obvious that Pentecostal Christianity

86 Cumpsty, J S 'A proposed framework ...', op cit, 29.

87 Samarin, W J 1972 *Tongues of men and angels: the religious language of Pentecostalism*, NY: Macmillan, 42, 88-98.

88 Gerlach, L P 'Pentecostalism: revolution or counter-revolution?' in Zaretsky and Leone, op cit, 682.

which stressed individual worth would have proved attractive. R Willem also isolates this particular social implication of Pentecostalism in the Pentecostal communities in Brazil and Chile, in which 'Pentecostalism helped the believer cope, not only with their low social position, but with personal problems as well. [It gave] a sense of power to the believers in contrast to their low social status.'⁸⁹

(c) An important characteristic of the nature of Pentecostal commitment is the *dialectic that obtains between communalism and individualism*, that is, between group solidarity and individual worth. While the believer is introduced into a caring community whose goals he totally shares, the Pentecostal experience of the Spirit also affirms his or her own importance. Thus as we pointed out already community solidarity and group allegiance are maintained in dynamic relation with individual worth.

Because this tension has not been appreciated, sociologists and anthropologists have reduced the function of this type of religion to its role only in relation to whole communities, that is, to show how such religious phenomena fulfil the requirements of *sociation*. (Cf our critique of this reductionism in the Introduction.) Peter Worsley's criticisms of this approach are apt. He argues that in concentrating on tracing the effects of religion on the behaviour of collectivities (and vice versa) and the ways in which religious institutions condition the behaviour of individuals, such sociological and anthropological exercises 'not only tend to eschew, notably, the philosophical problem of the meaning of religion to the actor .. as "thinking", "believing" or "feeling"'. He wisely adds, 'collectivities do not think, or undergo religious experiences; men do'.⁹⁰

Some have attempted to describe this relation between the individual and his community in Jung's psychological terms. They see individuals achieving, through their Pentecostal experience, mental and emotional stability by bringing their 'higher centers of consciousness in touch with the collective unconscious ... the underground reservoir of common human experience'.⁹¹

In the early days of the development of the churches discussed thus far the tension between communalism and individualism appears to have been success-

89 Willem, R 'Religious pluralism and class structure: Brazil and Chile', cited in Zaretsky and Leone, *ibid.*

90 Worsley, P 1976 'Religion as a category' in Robertson, R (ed) *Sociology of religion*, Middlesex: Penguin, 232.

91 In Lapsley, J & Simpson, J H 'Speaking in Tongues', *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* LVII (Feb 1965), 7.

fully maintained. This was achieved chiefly through strong charismatic leadership, attractive and fulfilling worship and church-life, on the one hand, and through the provision of ample opportunity for lay leadership, on the other. The latter was facilitated by the absence of formal restraints such as constitutions, creeds, and rigid ecclesiastical structures.

As these churches became institutionalised (refer to chapter 5) this dialectic was less obvious and separatism inevitably followed, a problem dealt with in the next chapter. The negative side of the 'democratisation of the Spirit' was indeed extreme individualism which emerges when communal solidarity breaks down. J B Oman, in his study of Pentecostals, described this extreme individualism as 'a self aggrandizing, narcissistic component'.⁹²

(d) In the midst of the socio-cultural upheaval which is described in chapter 1, Pentecostal congregations became in effect *surrogate communities* in which a sense of communal wellbeing was maintained for many of their Indian members whose traditional culture was experiencing rapid change because of urbanisation and demographic shifts.

R M Anderson found that Pentecostalism fulfilled the same function for many of its members who were migrant workers in North America. The Pentecostal church, he says, was 'a haven ... to which ... to repair from the buffetings of their daily experience'.⁹³ Malcom Calley found that Pentecostal churches among West Indians in England also compensated for the instability of social disorganisation which had resulted from poverty and slavery in the West Indies. Therefore, he adds, that 'being "born again" is more than a meaningless, conventional expression; the saint is born again into a new society with a new set of values [hence] social inadequacy becomes unimportant'.⁹⁴ Virginia Hine, while maintaining that 'social disorganization may be considered a "facilitating factor" only, and that it "cannot be viewed as necessary"', maintains that 'the intimacy and emotional support provided by the Pentecostal type of group-interaction is a highly successful solution for the individual experiencing social dislocation or family disruption'.⁹⁵

It was this ability of Pentecostalism to create surrogate communities that has encouraged scholars to use Durkheim's concept of anomie to explain the emer-

92 *Ibid.*

93 Anderson, R M *Vision of the disinherited*, op cit, 237.

94 Calley, M *God's people*, op cit, 135.

95 Hine, V 'The deprivation and disorganisation theories ...', op cit, 650.

gence of Pentecostalism.⁹⁶ However, as we have pointed out earlier, any attempt to see a causal relation between social disorganisation and Pentecostalism is fallacious. It is more correct to conclude that Pentecostalism provided a surrogate society for several of its members in which they achieved some social stability. To say more is to ignore the fact that the majority of the Indians, who experienced the same social ills, did not become Pentecostals and that many who were not socially disorganised also joined Pentecostal churches of which the Christian Centre among whites, which is referred to in chapter 4, is a good example.

(e) The *experience of Spirit-baptism which is accompanied by the gifts of the Spirit*, usually glossolalia, becomes for many of the Pentecostals the *token of spirituality* and therefore the means by which the individual is considered to be holy and truly devoted: those who are in close communion with God and are 'full of the Spirit'. Therefore, as C Williams correctly maintains, glossolalia should not be treated merely as a 'verbal manifestation' but as a 'total experience within a religious culture'.⁹⁷

Whatever else glossolalia means, it confirmed for Pentecostals the closeness, indeed the possession, of the divine. This type of commitment proved most fulfilling. This is understandable if Melvil Herskovits is right that 'of all the means, by which the individual achieves oneness with the supernatural, none is more striking, more convincing to those who believe, and apparently more satisfying, than possessions'.⁹⁸

(f) In these churches, *a democratisation of the Spirit occurred*: all are one in Spirit. This oneness had tangible social consequences. In Pentecostal churches, above social status, wealth or education, 'God-given gifts' are the measure of one's worth.⁹⁹ Nichols maintains that this affirmation of spiritual equality led

96 Problete, R & O'Dea, T "Anomie" and the "quest for community": the formation of sects among Puerto Ricans of New York' *American Catholic Sociological Review* 1(21) Spring 1960, 25-26.

97 Williams, C G 1981 *Tongues of the Spirit: a study of Pentecostal glossolalia and related phenomena* Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 37.

98 In Gerlach and Hine 1970 *People, power and change: movements of social transformation* NY: Bobbs-Merrill, 204.

99 Refer to accounts by Pentecostal leaders of the need for the Baptism of the Spirit e g Bhengu, N 1949 *Revival fire in South Africa* (autobiography), Philadelphia np; Gee, D 1949 *The Pentecostal Movement* London: Victory Press.

many to 'sever their affiliation with the so-called middle-class denominations like the Methodists and Baptists and to join Pentecostal churches'.¹⁰⁰

In the same way, Indian Pentecostal churches rejected all reference to caste differences. Hence, at the time of conversion or at baptism, caste names were often changed for a biblical or Western one which removed the social stigma that the traditional lower-caste name carried.

For this reason the 'democratisation of the Spirit' may have been, within the Indian community, 'an oblique expression of social protest'.¹⁰¹ E Williams in his study of South American Pentecostal movements confirms the opinion of Walter Goldshmidt in his study of Californian Pentecostal sects that 'the social reality is replaced by a putative social order in which the sect represents an élite called by God and confirmed by the "gifts of the Holy Ghost"'.¹⁰² Willems concluded that 'the structure and creed of Pentecostal sects may be interpreted as a symbolic inversion of the conventional order'.¹⁰³

It is important to note, however, that this social protest has been 'oblique' and 'symbolic' only. Indian Pentecostals have tended to be a-political in spite of their legitimate political grievances. This indifference to political involvement has been characteristic of South African Indians at large. However, the point here is that Pentecostals have confined the freedom of the Spirit and the equality of all Spirit-filled believers to their churches only and they did not perceive its implications for the larger context. Therefore, Pentecostals in the main have been politically conformists.

(g) Pentecostalism has indirectly influenced the *socio-economic development of its members*. Many Pentecostals who had been very poor improved their positions and increased their finances by maintaining the austerity and carefulness of lifestyle that Pentecostalism engendered.

100 Nichol, J T 1966 *Pentecostalism* NY: Harper & Row, 57.

101 Anderson, R M *Vision of the disinherited*, op cit, 230. Anderson used this expression to describe a similar reaction in North American millenarian movements.

102 Cited by Willems, E in Robertson, R (ed) *The sociological interpretation of religion*, op cit, 209-210.

103 *Ibid.*

This has been a feature of Pentecostalism at large.¹⁰⁴ C L d'Epinay, for example, found that within the Chilean churches Pentecostalism 'canalized the strivings of a large proportion of the working class by proffering the certainty of salvation, security within the congregation, and a certain type of human dignity'.¹⁰⁵ As Gerlach observed in Haitian Pentecostal churches, so we observed among Indian Pentecostals, that by abstaining from drinking, smoking, gambling, attendance at cinemas and such like, Pentecostals were able to conserve what little income they had.¹⁰⁶ Steven Tipton confirms these findings in his study of charismatic religious movements among the North American youth of the sixties. He found that among lower-middle-class youths who had rejected conventional work, Pentecostalism was able to 'justify blue-cotton work, motivate ... reliable performances ... justify following orders on the job in order to obey God, regardless of the work's intrinsic meaning or prestige'.¹⁰⁷

This work ethic obtained the result that John Wesley himself had predicted: 'Religion,' he stated, 'must necessarily produce industry and frugality, and these cannot but produce riches. We must exhort all Christians to gain what they can and save what they can; that is in effect to grow rich.'¹⁰⁸

With time many Indian Pentecostals gradually progressed up the socio-economic ladder. Many of these churches in keeping with this 'progress' became more institutionalised. D L Edwards in his study of religion and change states that Pentecostal churches which give to believers 'a sense of inner confidence; the Puritan moral progress and the ability to co-operate in a cause - are tending to bring consequences which the early apostles did not expect. The sects' members rise to a superior social class; the sect itself is gradually transferred into a respectable, organised and educated denomination'.¹⁰⁹

104 Refer, for example, to Calley, M *God's People*, op cit, 134; Nichols, J T *Pentecostalism*, op cit, 237; Anderson, R M *Vision of the disinherited*, op cit, 231; Hine, V 'The deprivation and disorganization theories', op cit, 655; Gerlach, L 'Pentecostalism: resolution or counter-resolution?' op cit, 694.

105 d'Epinay, C L 1969 *Haven of the masses: a study of the Pentecostal Movements in Chile*, London: Lutterworth Press.

106 Gerlach, L 'Pentecostalism: revolution or counter-revolution?' op cit, 694.

107 Tipton, S *Getting saved from the sixties*, op cit, 241.

108 Cited in Weber, M 1930 *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, London: Allen & Unwin.

109 Edward, D L 1969 *Religion and change* London: Harper & Row, 367.

(h) W A McLoughlin in his study of religious awakenings in North America concluded that revivals are 'Critical disjunctions in ... self-understanding ... [which] begin in periods of cultural distortion and grave personal stress, when [we] lose faith in the legitimacy of our norms, the viability of our institutions and the authority of our leaders in church and state.'¹¹⁰

Pentecostalism in very much the same way addressed itself to Indians who had to make a similar difficult transition from a traditional and sometimes parochial world view to a contemporary and Western one. In this regard C Geertz makes the following observation: 'Whatever else religion may be, it is in part an attempt (of an implicit and directly felt rather than an explicit and consciously thought-about sort) to conserve the fund of general meanings in terms of which each individual interprets his experience and organises his conduct.'¹¹¹

Indians who were questioning the viability of their Indian and Hindu social and religious institutions were at the same time far from adapting themselves to the new Western alternatives they confronted. Pentecostalism articulated the tension and provided a 'half-way house'. Elements from both 'worlds' were incorporated.

Thus Pentecostalism provided both *continuity and discontinuity*.

D'Epinay described the Chilean Pentecostal movement as an 'attractive substitute society because it relates back to the known and renews it. [Therefore] it is radically different from Chilean society and also very similar to it.'¹¹²

This antithetical relation with the past also exists in contact with 'the world'. Tipton in his study of conversion among North American Pentecostals observes that by providing love and acceptance for believers, acceptability of the Christian ethic of work and love for the larger society, Pentecostalism 'facilitated members to "engage" in society more easily as Christians than as hippies while the "sect sustains their alienation from utilitarian culture"'.¹¹³ R M Anderson maintained that the 'Pentecostal rejection and condemnation of

110 McLoughlin, W G 1978 *Revivals, awakenings and reforms* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 7.

111 Geertz, C 1973 *The interpretation of cultures* London: Hutchinson & Co, 127.

112 d'Epinay, C L *Haven of the masses*, op cit, 38.

113 Tipton, S *Getting saved from the sixties*, op cit, 238.

the world in rhetoric and symbol, in effect, liberated the Pentecostal to adapt to that world'. This view seems to confirm Marion Dearman's opinion that Pentecostals essentially accept the dominant social values.¹¹⁴ In the Indian community, Pentecostalism served a useful social function in helping its members to cope with an alien culture by attempting to preserve at least some of their traditional culture at the same time. Undoubtedly in the face of a dominant, technological culture, in this case the culture of the 'ruler', much of the traditional culture was indiscriminately discarded. Cumpsty is correct in pointing out that such communities may show a predilection 'to embrace the tradition of the culture which is causing the disturbance ...'.¹¹⁵ Hence after a while within the surrogate communities, mere token gestures were made to preserve Indian traditions. But the attempt at such preservation, especially in the case of Bethesda, slowed down the rate of cultural erosion for a period.

Thus Indian Pentecostal congregations like the West Indian ones in England acted as a 'buffer between the immigrant group and society. They cushioned the impact of new ways of life ... by providing continuity.'¹¹⁶ As they did in migrant communities in North America, these churches provided 'a buffer against the chaotic impact of the urban-industrial milieu upon migrants'.¹¹⁷

In Durkheim's terminology we may say that Pentecostalism was 'a moment of effervescence' within the South African Indian community which has been for a section of it 'a moment when people were brought into more intimate relations with one another, when meetings and assemblies were now more frequent, relationships more solid and the exchange of ideas more active'.¹¹⁸ In this way Pentecostalism contributed to the changed cultural landscape of its adherents.

114 Anderson, R M *Vision of the disinherited*, op cit, 237.

115 Cumpsty, J S 1980 'A model of religious change in socio-cultural disturbance' *Religion in Southern Africa* No 2 July, 67.

116 Calley, M *God's people*, op cit, 145.

117 Anderson, R M *Vision of the disinherited*, op cit, 237.

118 In Martin Marty's foreword to McLoughlin, W G *Renewal, awakenings and reform*, op cit, 2.