

## CHAPTER 3

# Challenges Raised by Pentecostal Communities



Celine was talented in all her activities. It was a great desire of her parents to make Celine an engineer. Their dreams about her were beyond limit. Her parents used to attend the daily Mass and offered their dreams about her in the daily Mass and prayed for its realization. They were proud of her and praised God as she studied according to their expectation and kept up excellence in all things. But one day when they assembled together as usual after the family prayer, they heard her saying, 'I don't want to study further'. They were shocked and in deep pain. Her parents were agonized when they realized that their daughter was under the influence of a Pentecostal group who spread the rumour that the end of the world is near. Such various Pentecostal groups who teach and act against catholic faith are growing up in Kerala. Knowledge about such movements will help us not to be led astray by false teachings.

### The Beginning and Growth of Pentecostal Movements

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a protestant revolution. This gave rise to many divisions and oppositions in the church and many Pentecostal communities like Calvinism, Baptist radicalism, Methodist Revivalism etc. cropped up. Later because of their emotionalism, they spread all over the world very fast. It spread in Europe as well as America. In the fertile soil of the new continent, this movement grew fast and got strengthened. T.B Barret, the leader of the Methodist church, gave leadership in the early years. Under the leadership of pastors and evangelizers, they began to grow in different groups in Brazil, South Africa, Europe, Russia etc.

### Life-style and Teachings

The special features of Pentecostal groups are gift of tongue and Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals claim that they are chosen specially by the Holy Spirit to lead Christians to the sanctity and simplicity of the early Church. Though they claim that their model is the apostolic

church, the argument is not correct. We see the identity of the true apostolic church in the "Acts of the Apostles". "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). It means the early Christians lived as a community, sharing in the communion of the apostles and the Bishops-their successors- and in devotion to their teaching and the service of breaking of bread (The Holy Mass) under their leadership. The basic life style of the early Christians is not seen in Pentecostal groups. Instead, we see a common character in them i.e. they are angry towards hierarchical structure and apostolic authority of the apostolic church. They are the ones who raise grave threats to the real Church.

### **Pentecostal Movement in Kerala**

Pentecostal movement started in Kerala in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We can include all the Pentecostal groups in two sections, ie, Assemblies of God and church of God. Many other independent groups are growing up daily. They work mainly not among non-Christians, on the contrary, they are very intent and work hard among the Catholics and other churches to 'convert' the faithful and make them members of their group. Their pastors instruct the people under them that the Catholics are idol worshippers, they are not saved, somehow or other they must join Pentecostal communities and thus save themselves. Several factors in Pentecostal groups helped them to grow fast in Kerala. They are:

1. Bible based preaching in their groups 2) Advice on baptism of faith 3) healing services 4) economic help 5) chances to visit foreign countries 6) activities among foreign Malayalis 7) opposition to the hierarchical structure of the church 8) personal likes and dislikes in their pastoral fields.

Recently - formed - groups like Emperor Emmanuel, Heavenly Banquet Church, Spirit in Jesus, Covenant Community etc can be included in Pentecostal groups in the broad sense of the term. Today there are many Pentecostal groups in Kerala.

### **Drawbacks and Challenges**

Pentecostal movement has deserted the Divine foundation of the church which was instituted by Jesus Christ on Peter-the rock. It is man-made and has no central system. The reason for it is that they have no apostolic foundation, which unites the faithful. Hence these groups form themselves and grow according to the views and interests of each leader. They are founded more on practical interests than ideals or principles.

#### **1. Denial of Sacraments**

The greatest defect of this movement is that they are not able to experience the fruits of the

great sacrifice on Calvary for the salvation of humanity through Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation. Instead, they use certain emotional means which help people to escape from the intense struggle of life for a short while. People are very much influenced by musical service and clapping, use of the mysterious perversion of gift of tongues, claims of visions and spontaneous prayer methods.

## **2. Rejection of Traditions**

They do not have an authentic set of principles of faith or tradition received and learned from Jesus and handed over to posterity through apostolic succession. They also lack a powerful leadership instituted by God. For the very reason many individual- based subgroups are formed in this movement. Hence, when compared to the traditional churches, membership is much less in these groups. Besides, these founders impose their teachings and practices on their followers. They are not ready to rethink or change, even when they are convinced that their teachings and interpretations are wrong. This leads to further divisions.

## **3. Wrong Teachings**

These groups, who have cut off their connection with the church instituted by Christ, reject the fundamental teachings of the church like communion of the faithful, the communion of saints, canons of the Bible etc. They accept only sixty-six books of the Bible. They reject and blindly oppose the tradition of the Catholic Church, Bl. Virgin Mary, saints and Ministers.

Though they claim that the 'Acts of the Apostles' is their life principle, they do not accept its pure spirit of the community, vision of the church, theology of the Holy Spirit and vision of salvation. They think that once they are saved, they will not commit sin any more. They also think that all get the charismas through the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. They give undue importance to the charismas. They misunderstand the experience of salvation and think that they gain salvation by their effort and say exactly the time, date, and place where they were saved. They have many such wrong ideas in their thoughts and life-style. They try to make the faithful misunderstand easily and lead them to their groups.

## **4. Religious Fundamentalism**

Some groups are fundamentalists. They prohibit cinema, use of jewelry, and use of liquor. They object to medical treatment. They believe that Christ will heal them through prayer alone. This fundamentalism may be beneficial in eradicating the evil practices which destroy individuals and society; still, they fail in explaining and interpreting the revealed word of God. They are also defective in the sense that they proclaim and spread personal messages rather than sincerity to the will of God and the magisterium of the Church.

## **5. Wrong Vision of the End of the world**

The recently - formed - communities like Emperor Emmanuel believe that the second coming of Christ is imminent. They make at least some people misunderstand in this case. This makes people develop a trend not to face the realities of life but to escape them. They ignore how St. Paul strictly criticized and corrected such thoughts in the Thessalonians' church.

The words of St. Paul are realized in them: "For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths" (2 Tim 4:3-4). We must be always alert to discern such groups and not to be led astray by their teachings.

### **I. Find out the Answers**

1. Modern Pentecostal movement is a wrong renewal movement. Elucidate
2. The Pentecostal groups claim that the early church is their model. Why do we say that the argument is not correct?
3. What are the main defects of Pentecostal groups?
4. What are the wrong teachings that Pentecostal groups give?
5. What are the main teachings and life-style of Pentecostal movements?

### **II. Let us Discuss**

1. Discuss the differences between the origin of Catholic Church and Pentecostal groups.
2. What are the means to dissuade people from following the wrong teachings of Pentecostal groups?

### **III. Activity**

I will pray and work for the return of Pentecostal groups from their wrong teachings and to enter the Catholic Church.

### **IV. Let us Enlighten our Hearts**

" But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed!" (Gal 1:8).