**Holy Spirit: Tensions in Brethren Pneumatology**

**Aims and Objectives:**

1. Re-trace the origins & development of the Brethren movement from the early 19th C
2. Outline the development of their pneumatology across the 19th and 20th C
3. Identify some similarities in the origins of the early Pentecostal movement in 20thC
4. Offer hope for spiritual renewal and revival in our own churches of the 21st C
5. Stimulate some discussion on the work of the Holy Spirit for our movement today
6. **The value and importance of hindsight**HB Swete, renowned churchman and biblical scholar, Prof of Divinity (Cambridge)

**Quote:** *“No Christian doctrine, as it is now expressed, can be rightly understood without some knowledge of the history of Christian thought. The Christianity of the present day has not been evolved directly out of the New Testament, but it is the product of gradual assimilation of the original deposit by a long succession of Christian generations.”*

1. **Looking back briefly at significant “movements”**
	1. **16th C - Anabaptists** - Forgotten Reformation: “question everything”!  Pursuit of the true Christian church. Baptised again. Emphases included especially: Anti-sacramentalism | Anti-clericalism | High view of Scripture – Biblicism | Pneumatology | Eschatology | Ecclesiology | The Supper | Often emerged as a ‘lively pneumatology’ Spirit and Word (Hubmaier) as opposed to Word and Spirit (Luther) **Stephen** **McQuoid:** *“The spiritual children of the Anabaptists are Christians who meet in Pentecostal, Brethren, Baptist and Independent churches. Generally, they are evangelicals who believe in a form of church order that is neither Presbyterian, Lutheran or Anglican. They espouse a non-conformist spirituality where the church is separated from the state and where ritualism gives way to life and vitality.”*
	2. **17th C - Puritans and Pietists** - Richard Baxter & Richard Sibbes | Count Zinzendorf Attention to personal purity and holiness | Biblical catechists (Baxter) Entertaining the Spirit (Sibbes) | Pursuing ‘true & original Christianity’ (George Fox) Zinzendorf & the Moravians - Holy Ghost Fire | Missionary impulses…
	3. **18th C - Evangelicals** (later Evangelicalism) - Whitefield & John and Charles Wesley Context in England of extreme poverty | Church responses felt inadequate Seeking ‘special effusion of the Holy Spirit’ to succeed… The Geneva ideal of returning to ‘primitive apostolic Christianity’ Edward Irving (assist to Dr Thomas Chalmers, Scotch Church London, visits Scotland) ‘The central figure in the ferment of the period’ | Began well, finished badly Seeking ‘the full-orbit of Christian doctrine’ | experience over logical/scholastic theology Romanticism: Wanting to know the leading of the Spirit continuously/experientially
	Study of prophecy | Last Days | Age of the Spirit being poured out
	**Albury Conferences** (1826-1830) | Irving always present | Influences on Darby?
	4. **19th C - The Great Mission Century** (Kenneth Latourette) (“Fathers”: Carey and Groves!)
2. **The soil from which the Brethren emerge**
	1. **The common heritage of Anabaptism**
	2. **The shared passion of Puritanism & Pietism**
	3. **The mutual convictions of Evangelicals**
	(Word|Spirit|Longing|Experience|Last Days)
	4. **The joint impetus of mission-mindedness & mission endeavour** before Christ returns
3. **The Brethren: a radical\* movement of its day**
	1. **‘the marauders of Plymouth’** (Dr Alexander, Primate of Church of Ireland)
	2. **Omagh Presbyterian parish without a minister** (1807)
		1. Some zealous itinerant evangelists
		2. Take bread and wine like the first apostles
		3. Sole authority of the Bible not the church
		4. 1800 years of Christian tradition set aside for want of ‘getting back to the Book’ e.g., Groves to India - “to teach exactly what is said on its pages to the people”
4. **The early days: Christian Devotedness (1829)**
	1. **A.N. Groves: deep and full experiences of joy in their Christian lives**Mary’s testimony: “It was not until the Holy Ghost was pleased…to reveal the love of my heavenly Father in Christ…that I really had peace or confidence or strength.”
	2. **Living by New Testament principles**  (JG Bellet, John Parnell, JN Darby, Benjamin Newton, Samuel Tregelles, George Muller)
	3. **Albury’s last meeting (1830)**
	‘expectation that at the times of the end the pentecostal gifts would be restored’
	4. **The Irvingites of Greenock - speaking in tongues and miracles of healing**Mary Campbell | Margaret Macdonald | AJ Scott | Macdonald brothers
	5. **Haldane brothers in pursuit of the Spirit**(but not the “pentecostal gift of tongues”; “nothing visionary or enthusiastic”)
	6. **Nevertheless, some early Brethren allowed and practiced the gifts of the Spirit** J. Harrington Evans, St John St Chapel, London – Geo Muller & Robert Chapman attend; JV Wigram, H Bulteel and JB Stoney (per Shuff, *Searching for the True Church*)
5. **The leading of the Spirit among the Brethren**
	1. **Open worship ‘under the leading of the Spirit’**
	2. **Brothers encouraged to minister extemporarily (Spirit-led)**
	3. **Darby’s pneumatology…**
		1. The Brethren had been raised up by the Spirit ‘for such a time as this’
		2. Where they gathered the Spirit was present in the Word (the truth)
		3. All those controlled by the Spirit would agree on sound doctrine
		4. The Spirit was emphatically a communal experience for these early Brethren
6. **The tensions in Brethren pneumatology (JN Darby)**
	1. **Is the Holy Spirit for unity or for separation?**“The Spirit is seen to be present for the unity of the church, as well as the spring of its activity, and indeed all Christian energy.” | Yet Darby leads a separatist movement
	2. **What is the work of the Holy Spirit in individuals or the community?**The work of the Holy Spirit in the believer is about ‘being sealed’ - it is primarily about assurance of faith. It is about making the Truth plain in the Assembly.
	3. **To ask or not to ask for the Holy Spirit*?****“This personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit is not something for which the believer is to ask, but rather is that which automatically occurs at the moment of his conversion. Such a request for the Spirit is an expression of unbelief as to His personal presence in the Church and in the believer.”* (Dixon on Darby).
	4. **Does the Spirit come in one moment of faith or a subsequent moment(s*)?****‘that a person can be born again, and not have received the Holy Ghost, is perfectly certain according to the Scriptures.’* | There is an acknowledgment of the need for filling of the Holy Spirit and that it is a subsequent experience to be sought by faith. William Kelly and CH Mackintosh - Brethren writers take the same view.
	5. **Quote:**
	*“When in real enjoyment of God, we may for a moment lose sight of the existence of the flesh, because then the soul (which is finite) is filled with that which is infinite. As a ministry of the Spirit which depends upon the believer’s obedience to Ephesians 5.18 (“Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit”),* ***the filling of the Spirit is to be sought.*** *…* ***For my part, I feel enough that it fails me in many respects to acknowledge its reality, and feel the need of seeking it more and more, while deploring my want of faith.*** *The experience of filling is not limited to the apostles or to a special class of Christians: All believers are to be filled (controlled) by the Spirit.”*
	6. **YET there is no Brethren writer who overtly leads or acts upon these earliest convictions of the movement…**
7. **Later calls and expressions from the Brethren**
	1. **Floods Upon Dry Ground (1975!) Samuel Jardine**
	2. **Urges his readers to seek afresh the apostolic experience**“the holy exhilaration which will mark the Spirit’s mastery of the assembly”
	3. **Back to biblical narrative - ‘follow the pattern’**Jardine comments on the New Testament apostles’ filling and empowering in Acts 4: *The answer was as wonderful as it was immediate, a physical shaking of the place of assembly, a renewed infilling of the Holy Spirit for all present, and intensified courage in speaking the message and, not least, a lovely and affectionate community-spirit pervading every heart and manifesting collectively and outwardly the grace of God. To some who read these lines this will appear too idealistic and unreal for times such as these in which we live, and yet we claim to follow the pattern.*
8. **The view of some onlookers**
	1. **David Pawson**: **a reaction rooted in a deliberate decision to eliminate what he saw as the excesses of the Irvingites.**
	2. **Griffith Thomas: Irvingism and Brethrenism are two movements that call attention to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit***‘…their appreciation of the Holy Spirit’s presence, power and guidance is the grand and distinctive character of their theology.’*
	3. **Ian Randall:** *“The spirituality of the Brethren has often been affected by developments within the wider Christian community and has itself influenced such developments.”* (Outside the Camp, p.1)
9. **A closer look…**
	1. **Missionary endeavour challenges the movement (mid-19th C)**
		1. Groves and John Arulappa (Kerala) see revivalist & charismatic signs*“…the Holy Ghost was poured out openly and wonderfully. Some prophesied and rebuked the people. Some beat themselves on their breasts severely and trembled and fell down through the shaking of their bodies and souls. They wept bitterly and confessed their sins. I was obliged to pray without ceasing for consolation of everyone. I thought it strange to see them without their senses. They saw some signs in the air. They were much pleased to praise God… Some of those who were not baptised had no peace until we baptised them; so about twenty souls were baptised after they received the Holy Ghost. They were very anxious to enjoy the Lord’s Supper – every day if they could have it. About one hundred souls, including children, all have rice in one place as one household. …some of our people praised the Lord by unknown tongues with their interpretations. Some missionaries admit the truth of the gifts of the Holy Ghost.”* (Arulappan quoted in Dann, *Father of Faith Missions*)
		2. The move of the Spirit challenged Indian ‘Brethren ecclesiology’ Opposition to manifestations | Women in evangelistic ministry | Huge numbers gathering to Jesus’ name & expecting to share in Lord’s Supper
	2. **Some Brethren at home were still hungry for more (late 19th C/early 20th C)**
		1. Saw and heard of the Spirit at work across the UK and the world
		2. Revivals breaking out in UK
		(SW - South Wales 1905/ NE - Sunderland 1907)
		3. By 1919 Believers’ Magazine called out ‘subsequent experience’ as error  (fresh outpouring/deeper life/baptism of the HS)
		4. Not all were so convinced…
10. **Charismatic Brethren…**
	1. **Thomas Myerscough (1858-1932): ‘rumoured to be from the Brethren’** - a great Bible teacher. ‘came into the Pentecostal experience from a Brethren assembly’ (1909) (John Carter to David Garrard) Preston Evangelistic Fellowship > Preston Christian Assembly with TM as “Overseer” *incl. WFP Burton, James Salter, Smith Wigglesworth, George and Stephen Jeffries*  TM was tasked with leading the Pentecostal Missionary Union Bible school… one student J. Nelson Parr.
	2. **John Nelson Parr (1886-1976)**: **founder of the AoG** Joined Brethren Assembly in Manchester from Holiness Church… 1909 Parr’s mini-revival in Manchester, flared and died but then revived again under his teaching to be Manchester Pentecostal Church (1923).  Following year, Parr leads the way for Assemblies of God in GB and Ireland (1924). By 1929 (five years later) the AoG had 200 assemblies in fellowship!
	3. **HB Swete describes AoG ‘the product of gradual assimilation of the original deposit’** Ian Rennie recounts him draw attention to *‘…the most characteristic and persistent elements of Brethren spirituality—the intense gleaning of spiritual sustenance from the Bible, the rejection of the validity of church structures, separation from society at large, and their sense of the immediate activity of the Holy Spirit in the church.’* ***His emphasis on what he calls this ‘charismatic spirituality’ of the Brethren is an important and often overlooked feature****— though it was commented on by such a shrewd observer as Griffith Thomas years before the modern charismatic movement was born.’* (Ian Rennie)
	4. **Others sympathetic to a virile pneumatology within the Brethren**Watchman Nee, J Oswald Sanders, GH Lang
	5. **Others still came into a full experience of the Spirit from Brethren roots**Arthur Wallis; David Lillie; Campbell McAlpine; Denis Clark, Barney Coombes*. ‘I went right through the NT on this subject, and within 3 weeks we were both filled with the Spirit - for me it came alone on my knees, and without any contact with Pentecostals. The experience was revolutionary. It changed my prayer life, my preaching and my witnessing, though it was not till much later that I was to experience spiritual gifts.’* (Wallis)
	6. **Wallis’ tour/conference: “The Building of a Spirit-filled New Testament Church”** (1964)
	7. **“New Churches”** Roger Forster (Ichthus Fellowships); Bryn Jones (Church House, Bradford); Terry Virgo (New Frontiers) and Gerald Coates (House Church movement).
11. **The Pentecostals…**
	1. **Their “raison d’etre”** ‘to draw their doctrines, spiritual experiences, and fundamental practices from the well-spring of the New Testament Church… the Pentecostal Movements have many complicated roots, but it is the tap-root plunging deep into the New Testament Church that gives them their distinctive life.’ (Womack, in Pentecostal Perspectives, by K. Warrington.)
	2. **Their Biblicism ‘**The final authority in all matters of life and faith’ | Bible churches
	3. **Prophecy and eschatology**: imminent second coming of Christ Drawing on Brethren Bible teachers like Dwight Pentecost and FA Tatford.
	4. **Claims to** **Spontaneous expansion**: ‘divine dimensions of the origins of the movement’ crucial ‘It was among Grove’s Brethren churches in South India that the first Pentecostals were found’ (Allan Anderson)
	5. **Ecclesiology: priesthood of all believers** (contemporary Pentecostalism in Africa)  ‘When believers are allowed space to use their graces of the Spirit in ministry, the church becomes a living entity in which ministry belongs to all and not just to a clerical order.’ (Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu)
12. **Conclusions: a conversation and a criticism**
	1. **A criticism from T Austin Sparks** The Brethren: ‘*a movement of God*’ praising the features of their simple NT Christianity. Looked sometimes like the offering in the story of Abraham and Isaac: everything was prepared for the worship sacrifice, ‘*But where is the fire?’*
	2. **A conversation with Ian Myerscough, great grandson of Thomas Myerscough**‘the man rumoured to be from the Brethren’ Ian had few memories of the man but… His grandfather - Thomas’ son, left the AoG eventually and met with an Open Brethren assembly. It appears something was missing from the AoG!  Something had been missing from the Brethren in his father’s generation.  And what about ours? Where will we discern the Spirit today? Ian Myerscough WAS able to recall HIS grandfather’s comment on church life:  He said, ’When the Brethren receive the Spirit, then the Lord will come!’ Maranatha! Even so, come Lord Jesus.

**Discussion starters:**

1. From what you know of the Brethren movement in your part of the world are there matters that resonate or conflict with the pneumatology outline that has been presented today?

2. Are you currently satisfied with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as understood and practiced in your own fellowship? Explain your reasons.

3. What relationship, if any, do you see between the Brethren Movement and the Pentecostal Movement?

4. How might you help resolve some of the tensions we have inherited in our teaching on the Holy Spirit? Are they the same tensions as we saw in Darby’s pneumatology?

5. How do you feel about the criticism levelled against the Brethren Movement that although it is ‘a movement of God’, it ‘lacks the fire’ of the Holy Spirit?

6. Comments from the floor…