

# WATCH OUT! A TIDAL WAVE IS COMING

by Tony Dale

*This move of the Holy Spirit will not destroy or replace previous ones. It will add to the momentum, piling up to create a wave that lifts and carries the entire church body!*

In the early 70's, Arthur Wallis, who became known as the father of the British house church movement, wrote a lengthy forward to a best-selling book about the Azusa Street revival called *Another Wave Rolls In*. In this forward, he explained how each successive wave of the Holy Spirit's work was like "another wave rolling in": slowly, but inexorably lifting the church to the place that it should be in the purposes of God.

In 1999, Felicity and I were sharing at a conference for medical people in the UK. While seeking the Lord one morning over what things to share at the conference, we felt the Lord speaking to us in a clear way that we would find ourselves in the privileged position of again being a part of a powerful move of the Holy Spirit, somewhat like the British house church movement of the 60's and 70's. Little did we realize that just a couple of years later, the whole concept of "house churches" would again grip the western Christian world.

House churches are no new phenomena. From the book of Acts, to the growth of the church in China over the past 50 years, house

churches have been at the center of church growth in each succeeding generation. Whether to escape the persecution of communism, the close scrutiny of a Moslem dictatorship, or just to try to recapture the simplicity of church life that seems to be so lacking in most western churches, house churches are again making a comeback. We need to ask why the Holy Spirit is allowing this resurgence of an old idea in a new generation.

Church history is replete with examples of revival movements that capture a portion, a “wave” of God’s truth. But in God’s economy, wave after wave of His reviving power enables the church to actually become more than just the sum of its parts. Two plus two mathematically may equal four, but it is still true that while “one can put a thousand to flight, two can put ten thousand to flight”(Deut. 32:30)! The synergistic effect of each previous move of the Holy Spirit can enable those that follow to take giant leaps forward in the life and quality of the church, rather than just add in the benefit of the one “new doctrine” that has been recovered. When a “charismatic movement” impacts a local Episcopal or Presbyterian church, it does not just mean that some believers are now speaking in tongues, but that a whole congregation is having its faith lifted to be able to take Scripture at face value.

It has frequently been noted that a rising tide lifts every ship in the harbor. When the charismatic movement hit Britain in the late 60’s and early 70’s, it was not just the churches that chose to accept the charismatic dimension that were helped. Across the whole of British evangelicalism there was a resurgence of faith and expectation that we could expect God to move in our day and in

ways that implied that the God of the Bible was still actively at work in His people. One did not have to accept the “baptism in the Holy Spirit” to also begin to believe that maybe God really does heal people today.

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When I went to a conference at St. Helen’s, Bishopsgate in London in 1968 for medical and allied students at London University, I was surrounded by a thousand eager Christians wanting to learn from 3 of the foremost evangelical leaders of the day, each one a household name within British evangelicalism. Yet, I found myself profoundly disappointed. Listening to them, we understood that although God can heal and intervene actively in the daily affairs of men, we should not be surprised when, in this day and age, He rarely does this in practice. Now, over a period of 30 years, the whole climate has changed. Although there has been no great healing movement in Britain, now virtually all evangelicals would agree that God not only could, but does actively intervene in supernatural ways in the affairs of those who reach out to Him. Stories from China to Mozambique, from the Roman Catholic cathedral to the Pentecostal mud hut (or the Pentecostal cathedral to the Catholic mud hut!) have lifted the tide for everyone to a place of genuine expectation of the active presence and power of God in the life of believing Christians.

Similar things are now beginning to transform our understanding, not only of Biblical doctrine, but also of church practice. Up until this time, in spite of repeated waves of the Holy Spirit's activity, even such momentous events as the Protestant reformation did little to affect church life, even while making significant in-roads into restoring Biblical theology. Currently this is all changing. Suddenly, the focus for many who take the Bible as their guide is centering on life rather than doctrine, on relationships rather than creeds. Does this mean that the doctrine is not important? No! It means that relationships and life are more important.

Jesus said to the Bible-believing folk of His day, the self-righteous Pharisees, "You search the Scriptures because you believe they give you eternal life, but the Scriptures point to Me!" (John 5:39) Similarly today, many are hearing Him say that it is more important to share Him and His life with others who also love Him with all of their hearts, even if you do disagree with them on such "vital" matters as infant baptism and the terminology surrounding the "baptism in the Holy Spirit." Events from the current crisis over pedophiles in the Catholic priesthood to the sexual profligacy of Charismatic televangelism of the 80's, from division within Baptist circles over issues of defining "inerrancy" to equally tragic division within groups such as Vineyard over what they accept as true workings of the Holy Spirit, say to us that it is our common life in Christ that is paramount, not our mutual understanding of theology. "That in all things He may have the preeminence"(Col. 1:18).

While each "wave" of the Holy Spirit's working has helped the church at large to re-capture such clearly Biblical truths as salvation

by faith, the priesthood of all believers, the reality of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, etc., the impression one gets from studying each of these movements is that while theology has changed, “ecclesiology” has not. Our beliefs may have grown and matured, but how we practice those beliefs has not led to much change in the actual structure (ecclesiology) of the churches.

Now that is all beginning to change. From March for Jesus to Mission America the cry is not what divides us, but what is it that unites us. In the 1960’s I was being thrown out of groups such as Inter-Varsity for daring to believe that a group of students meeting in a university cafeteria were a legitimate expression of “church.” In the 1990’s you have Inter-Varsity Press publishing such books as Inner Healing, where evangelicals and charismatics are happily collaborating in writing a book that looks at the power of God to heal today! Times have changed.

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Part of that change is in what the Holy Spirit is emphasizing to His people all over the world. Now we see that it is more important to love one another than to be “right”(see John 13:35 where Jesus teaches us that through this “the world will know that you are My disciples” and Mark 12:3 on the greatest commandment)! It is more important to “confess your faults to one another and pray for one another that you might be healed” (James 5:14) than to argue over whether or not God heals today. Today we know that it is more

important to “in honor prefer one another”(Rom 12:10) than to make sure we have all the issues of authority types in the church straightened out. After all, aren't we all commanded to “submit to one another in the fear of Christ” (Eph. 5:21)?

As the emphasis comes onto the “one anothers” of the New Testament, onto practice rather than theory, we all of a sudden see that this must lead to a changing of the structures. How can I live “bearing one another's burdens”(Gal. 6:2) when I don't even know your name, let alone your burdens? How can I “in honor prefer you” when in practice I've never even shaken your hand, let alone greeted you with a holy kiss (Rom 12:10)? If my relationship with God is demonstrated by my relationships with His children (see I John 4:20: “How can you say you love God whom you cannot see, if you do not love your brother whom you see all of the time?”) then the setting for those relationships becomes vital. All of a sudden the large alone just won't do the trick. How can I love like this with hundreds or thousands? I need to be in a small context, I need to have “church” in a way that emphasizes what the Holy Spirit is emphasizing.

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I love the large. What is better than to worship the Lord with thousands? But is this church in the normal, everyday usage of the word in the New Testament? It might represent the church in a city. But it could never take the place of “church in their house” (I

Cor. 16:19). Everywhere you look, you see the Holy Spirit bringing a similar emphasis. From the life of Jesus, as modeled with the twelve disciples, to the church planting patterns of Paul, we see the focus is on the small group. Yes, 3000 found the Lord on the day of Pentecost, but this was expressed by meeting house to house.

Every “wave” that has come in has been a blessing to the church at large. You don’t need to be a Lutheran to appreciate the value of recovering “salvation by faith in Jesus Christ alone.” You don’t need to be a Presbyterian to value the role of plurality in leadership. There are many who have never even heard of the Quakers (Friends) who have learned to value the place of waiting on the Holy Spirit in the leading of a meeting. Catholics who are finding Jesus as a reality in adult life are being baptized without becoming Baptist!

Episcopalians are learning to prophesy without feeling the need to be Pentecostals. You might never have heard of Watchman Nee and the Little Flock and still value the role of apostles in laying the foundation of the church. John Alexander Dowie or A. B. Simpson may never have even impinged on your consciousness, yet we all value the reality of the healing power of Christ that they help recapture for the church at large. However, none of these changed the structures on their own.

Theology experienced deepens individual lives. But when the whole body begins to experience the life of Christ together, when relationships with each other begin to deepen and a longing for the life and practice of the early church grips your heart, you inevitably begin to look at the structures.

A cursory look at church history shows that nearly all revivals begin as people experience the life of God together. Small groups naturally form. Spontaneous prayer times flourish. People gather to share meals and swap stories. Confession of sin and mutual accountability are accepted as the norm. Sharing possessions, cars, homes, finances seems natural and normal. Meeting with Christians who have other denominational labels is common. It is our life in Jesus that holds us together.

This is church! This is church in the home or the office or the school or the retirement home. This is the church in “Lydia’s house” (Acts 16:40). This is the tidal wave that is even now beginning to lift up the whole of the body of Christ worldwide!

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