

# On Being Pentecostal in an Anglican World

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It is interesting to see how people respond when they learn that I was a Pentecostal pastor for fifteen years before being ordained to the Anglican priesthood. Those who are Anglican tend to take it in stride, almost as if they are thinking, “Oh yes, another convert to Canterbury. We’ve seen this before.” But those who worship on the low Evangelical side of the liturgical fence often have more difficulty with the notion, or choose to see it as some kind of divine strategy at work. These responses speak volumes about the assumptions of those hearing the news for the first time and lead to a question that goes something like this: “What does it mean to be Pentecostal in an Anglican world?”

Before we explore that, let me share a bit about my journey. I grew up in a Pentecostal home and so came to profess faith in Jesus at an early age. When I was 13 years old, I was filled with the Holy Spirit and received the ability to pray in tongues. At 17, I felt God’s call to pastoral ministry and went to Bible college in British Columbia a couple of years after graduating from high school. After receiving my ministerial credentials in 1994 with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC), I served in three different churches until 2009. It was then that my family relocated to Toronto and I enrolled at Wycliffe College, pleased to engage in graduate studies in a tradition different from the one I grew up with.

Knowing that Wycliffe would be a great environment in which to learn, I chose to dive into the Anglican life with both feet during the week to try out this different expression of Christian life and worship, and attend a local PAOC church on Sundays. My wife and two kids came down every Wednesday for the mid-week Eucharist service and extended family dinner. It only took six months for us to decide to start attending an Anglican church on Sundays as well...

To put it simply, we found in the Anglican liturgy a fuller approach to worship than what we had grown up with and that I had conducted as a Pentecostal pastor in those previous years. The deliberate connection with the history of the church and the willingness to keep secondary matters secondary drew us in. We had been growing tired of the divisiveness that tended to crop up when people learned about doctrines and practices that were not typically characteristic of the Pentecostal expression, but were nevertheless legitimately Christian. Furthermore, we found it freeing to be out from under the perceived pressure to perform to prove the power of our Pentecostalism.

When Pentecostal friends and former colleagues learn that I am now an Anglican, those who find it difficult to accept do so largely out of the assumption that I’ve traded the vibrancy and “real” worship of Pentecostalism for a stoic, dead liturgy that is merely done by rote. The underlying conviction is that Pentecostals have more legitimately gotten in touch with the power of the Holy Spirit and are able to worship freely without needing the ancient structures of liturgy.

Now, it’s true that one can easily go through the motions mindlessly on a Sunday morning in an Anglican church, but it is also true that that can happen in a Pentecostal church as well. Furthermore,



the assumption that Pentecostals have a better grasp of the “full” Gospel message (which many are pleased to assert) may lead one to think that something is missing from Anglican worship and practice. But I don’t think this is actually true.

To whatever extent the work of the Holy Spirit has not been fully appreciated in the Anglican church has less to do with the content not being there and more to do with clergy and people not being willing to explore it.

In other words, I think it’s not about trying to add Pentecostalism into Anglican worship but actually looking for the work of the Spirit as described in the Scriptures, and then taking steps to act in keeping with what we’ve read.

I think it would be a mistake for an Anglican parish to try to look more Pentecostal in order to see more of the work of the Holy Spirit. This is what leads to that “pressure to perform” that I mentioned earlier; when we think we’ve got to restructure and rework in order to create the right environment that will “allow” the Holy Spirit to do the work we long to see, we end up inadvertently making it all about us, instead of all about the Spirit. If the Spirit doesn’t “show up,” *we* must have dropped the ball somehow.

Which brings us to those who think that there is some divine strategy involved in my transition to Anglicanism. What these people are basically saying is that it’s good that I’m an Anglican now, because the Anglican church needs people like me. They perceive this to be God using me to “infiltrate” the Anglican church, as if getting more Pentecostals among Anglicans is the key to spiritual renewal. The arrogance of this perspective is astounding. It’s as if the only church that isn’t “dropping the ball” is Pentecostal and, therefore, all other churches need to be Pentecostal, too. Umm, no...

What does it mean to be Pentecostal in an Anglican world? Here’s the thing: I’m not Pentecostal anymore; I’m an Anglican. Now, this does not mean that I’ve thrown away what I’ve learned about the work of the Spirit, nor the experiences I’ve had as a Pentecostal. This does not mean that I’ve traded one form of doctrinal prejudice for another. And it certainly does not mean that I wish to disparage my spiritual heritage.

Instead, it means that I will continue to watch for the Holy Spirit’s work in the people of my parish and encourage them to take hold of the truths they hear every week in the proclamation of the Word. It means I’m passionate about exploring what God is saying to us through the Scriptures and instructing the people for whom Christ died in the treasures found within them. It means this Anglican priest wants to see other Anglican hearts open to what the Spirit of God and Christ is up to in their lives.

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