

. . . *we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God.*

The story of Pentecost as read today is better understood if you trace your way back to the very beginning of the Hebrew Bible – to its Genesis account of the Tower of Babel.

Unlike modern historians the Hebrew writers of three thousand years ago used their *imagination*s to trace the rise as well as the fall of our human race. Indeed, it's as if they thought mere facts would miss the point, whereas a storybook style would allow them to underscore both the ominous as well as the marvelous nature of this creature we call "human". And so we meet - early on - the mild Abel, a shepherd, untrammelled by fences, whose life is threatened by his brother Cain, who erects fences, walls, cities and forges tools of metal – including weapons.

By the time we reach chapter eleven of Genesis these descendants of Cain have grown numerous and ambitious and choose to go totalitarian, to take the high ground, to build a Tower with its top touching the sky. They also insist on speaking one language. Thus language becomes a tool of domination (as theologian Jennie Hurd has said). Language becomes almost military, insuring that everyone move in the same direction, even as printed language stays in line from page to page to page. Uniformity in speech and thought, ready to detect any discontent! Censorship.

Also in those ancient times building towers implied slave labor, a stratified society, people taught to scramble "to the top" or labor until they drop – it being the nature of a tower raised on high to accommodate only "the few" instead of the many – as I found out when I climbed the 450 foot high Pyramid of Cheops in Egypt many years ago to share the view with five other colleagues.

Those ancient Tower builders wanted to stop time; to rein in change; to render rigid a world that was too dynamic to hold still – even as their effort to freeze language fell apart into accents, reaction, protest, prophecies, a Sermon on the Mount. As the text says: *So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city* – their Tower of Babel, of chatter, of Newspeak.

Our Pentecost festival proclaims Christ's reversal of humanity's preference for a groundless "security". Far from it, our Gospels reveal the intent of our world's creator as – creative! It insists on a *widening* of space and time, a depth of being that allows more room for the Spirit, the Breath of Life to breathe, to sing - instead of Jimmy Cagney's "top of the world" insanity displayed amid a holocaust of blazing oil tanks.

Today recalls the return of the Pentecostal Spirit that opens the book of Genesis by calling forth the wonder of landscapes and mountains and unimaginable deep-sea creatures and galaxies and the face of a man and a woman. We celebrate the arrival of a breath so vital, so visionary, so full of grace. No need to enforce one language – as, for instance, mathematics - as the exclusively accurate one – as we did Latin for so long a time. The Love that underlies this world can speak in so many ways – so many poems, so many poets – even a phone book if you survey it as Christ would – all those names.

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