

## Article

# Is the Spiritual Man Pentecostal? Watchman Nee's Perspective on the Charismatic Experiences

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**Abstract:** Watchman Nee (Ni Tuosheng, 1903–1972), one of the most prominent theologians in Republican China (1911–1949), developed a “spiritual theology” that is concentrated on the work of the Holy Spirit. This theological perspective shares parallels with Pentecostal-Charismatic theology. This paper examines Nee’s attitude toward Pentecostalism and the charismatic experience. First, based on his teaching of the three-stage work of the Holy Spirit, Nee argued that the inner guidance of the Holy Spirit was more important than any external manifestation and that the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” in the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement was not a personal experience that Christians should pursue. Second, in terms of subjective experience, Nee’s trichotomous view of human nature as consisting of spirit, soul, and body suggested that many charismatic experiences originate in the soul and need to be overcome. Third, concerning the spiritual world, Nee regarded as the work of evil spirits those charismatic experiences that occur in irrational and unconscious situations. Nee’s negative stance towards Pentecostalism and the charismatic experience serves as a means of distinguishing his spiritual theology from Pentecostalist-Charismatic movements. Both Nee’s theology and his church practices reveal a strong elitist element, in stark contrast to Pentecostalism.

**Keywords:** Watchman Nee; charismatic experiences; Chinese Protestant theology; Republican era



**Citation:** Zhao, Pan. 2023. Is the Spiritual Man Pentecostal? Watchman Nee’s Perspective on the Charismatic Experiences. *Religions* 14: 833. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14070833>

Academic Editor: Pan-chiu Lai

Received: 22 May 2023

Revised: 11 June 2023

Accepted: 20 June 2023

Published: 25 June 2023



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## 1. Introduction

In the 1920s, Watchman Nee (Ni Tuosheng 倪柝声, 1903–1972), a young Christian writer and minister, emerged as a prominent figure in the Chinese independent church and the founder of the “Little Flock” or “Christian Assembly”<sup>1</sup> movement during the Republican era of China (1911–1949). Nee, esteemed as one of China’s most celebrated theologians, developed a distinctive theological system known as spiritual theology, along with a unique ecclesiology, thereby shaping the Chinese indigenous theological and ecclesiastical traditions. Nee’s movement, which shares some parallels with Pentecostalism, exerted a widespread influence beyond China and became a global Protestant movement. His writings inspired the Jesus People Movement, a product of American Pentecostalism, that emerged in the 1960s in the United States (Williamson 2021, pp. 14, 20, 53). In China, Nee’s movement, alongside the True Jesus Church and the Jesus Family, both of which were Pentecostal<sup>2</sup>, became one of the three independent church movements with thousands of adherents.

During the first half of the twentieth century, Pentecostalism experienced significant growth throughout China, spawning a number of indigenous Pentecostal churches as well as churches with Pentecostal influence but not identifying themselves as Pentecostal.<sup>3</sup> The relationship between the fundamentalists<sup>4</sup> and Pentecostals is multifaceted. On the one hand, both groups upheld the authority of the Bible and traditional doctrines, and they were interconnected through various shared beliefs and practices. For instance, Wang Mingdao (王明道, 1900–1991) was baptized by a Pentecostal pastor in his early years. John Sung’s (宋尚节, 1901–1944) miraculous healing practices bore a striking resemblance to those prevalent within the Pentecostal movement. On the other hand, the emphasis of Pentecostal theology on intense religious experiences, which often led to chaos

due to the rapid development of the movement, provoked concerns among many fundamentalist pastors.

Specifically, Nee's spiritual theology is often compared to, and at times conflated with, Pentecostalism. This phenomenon can be traced back to several reasons. The primary cause lies in Nee's own ambiguous stance towards the Pentecostal movement. While Nee did not identify as a Pentecostal and even denounced the True Jesus Church as "heresy" by stating that "they emphasized the Holy Spirit, but what they received is evil spirits" (Nee 1997b, p. 5), he refrained from publicly criticizing other Pentecostal churches or charismatics, unlike Wang Mingdao (Wang 1934). Furthermore, Nee seemed to hold an open attitude toward spiritual gifts, divine healings, and speaking in tongues (Meng 2018, p. 34). As Angus Kinnear, the author of Nee's biography, writes, "He certainly believed in the Holy Spirit's lesser gifts to the Church: healing, and speaking with and interpretation of other tongues" (Kinnear 1973, p. 135). One record of direct contact between Nee and Pentecostals was made in 1935, when Nee became acquainted with Pentecostals and attended the Pentecostal meetings held by Miss Elizabeth Fischbacher (1897–1967) from the China Inland Mission at Yantai, Shandong Province. Nee was excited about experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit during the meeting and wrote, "I have met the Lord" (Kinnear 1973, p. 133). Subsequently, he brought about a revival in his own church, although he did not accept Pentecostal theology.

Nee's ambiguous position with respect to Pentecostalism has also led to debates within the academic field. Liu Yi situates Nee's theology and tradition within the global Pentecostal and charismatic movement (Liu 2018), a perspective I respectfully contest. Scholars have also recognized similarities between Nee's teachings and Pentecostalism. Grace Y. May points out that Nee "borrowed much of his vocabulary and emphases from the holiness movement, which overlapped with modern Pentecostalism" (May 2000, p. 327). Wu Dongsheng also claims that "Nee's idea of revelation can be seen as much closer to contemporary charismatic thought in its insistence on the possibility and even the necessity of 'hearing God' today" (Wu 2006, p. 157). Leung Kalun observes that Nee's views on spiritual warfare are reminiscent of Pentecostal theology (Leung 1999b). Additionally, another issue that has drawn scholarly attention is the relationship between the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement and the Local Church. The latter, which started in Taiwan in the 1950s under Nee's influence, "has some distinct practices such as prayerful reading, shouting out loud, and prophesying, which may or may not be considered charismatic" (Yang et al. 2017, p. 7). Hu Jiayu compares the theology of the Local Church with that of the Assemblies of God, and argues that the Local Church should not be viewed as a Pentecostal church (Hu 2017)<sup>5</sup>.

Therefore, I believe it is essential to revisit Nee's works and delve into his perspectives on the Pentecostalism within his theological frameworks. By clarifying this issue, we can not only gain a deeper understanding of Nee's spiritual theology but also shed light on the nuanced and intricate distinctions within the so-called conservative churches, in contrast to the liberals. This study aims to argue that Nee's negative stance towards Pentecostalism and the charismatic experience serves as a means of distinguishing his spiritual theology from Pentecostalist-Charismatic movements. To achieve this objective, the paper will be structured around Nee's views regarding the charismatic experience. Firstly, Nee acknowledges that some charismatic experiences may come from the Holy Spirit's exterior work, which is considered inferior to His inner work. Secondly, he suggests that charismatic experiences or sensory feelings may arise from the soul or the "outer man". Finally, Nee maintains that in the most severe cases, any charismatic experiences that occur when individuals are unconscious must be directly attributed to evil spirits.

Drawing on Chow's view that Nee's emphasis on God-ordained free will and its union with God, much like the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of synergism (Chow 2013, p. 53), I propose that the distinctions between Nee and Pentecostalism reflect a significant theological dispute on free will and divine sovereignty, while also revealing a tension between elitism and egalitarianism. This perspective not only identifies the essential distinction between Nee's theology and Pentecostalism, thereby refuting the notion of equating or

confusing the two, as in Liu's work (Liu 2018), but also offers alternative viewpoints that challenge the longstanding criticism of Nee's theology as anti-intellectualism.

This study primarily relies on texts pertaining to Nee and the Pentecostal movement. Three monographs directly relevant to this topic include *Spiritual Man*<sup>6</sup> (Nee 1977, 2006), *The Latent Power of the Soul* (Nee 1991), and *The Breaking of the Outer Man and the Release of the Spirit* (Nee 2010). Furthermore, Nee's articles on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, which are derived from sermon records spanning different periods, have been compiled in the book *How to Understand the Holy Spirit* (Nee 2004). It is important to note that Nee's perspectives on "being filled with the Holy Spirit" underwent significant modifications from the 1920s to the 1930s. In this study, the primary focus will be on his views expressed in his 1935 sermons. Additionally, Nee's critiques of the Pentecostal movement can be found scattered throughout various articles, which have been collected in the "Questions and Answers" section of the *Collected Works of Watchman Nee*.

## 2. Charismatic Experiences from the Holy Spirit

To investigate Nee's perspectives and distinctions on the experiences related to the Holy Spirit, the paper will begin by examining his pneumatology, which primarily focuses on the works of the Holy Spirit. In his article "The Work of the Holy Spirit", Nee identified three stages of the Holy Spirit's work in a believer's life that underpinned his pneumatology. The first is regeneration, which occurs when a believer receives the Holy Spirit's life. However, this only marks the initial stage of the spiritual journey since "the Holy Spirit has not been the master yet" in one's life. The second stage is sanctification, which refers to the indwelling and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The final stage is the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, which refers to the reception of unique abilities or gifts from God to serve in his kingdom (Nee 2004, pp. 7–8). In contrast to a sudden and externally mediated outpouring of spiritual gifts, sanctification is an on-going, internal process that is made possible solely by the Holy Spirit's presence within the believer. In light of this, Nee made specific distinctions between "baptism", "filling", and "outpouring" of the Holy Spirit to articulate his position on these concepts that are central to the Pentecostal theology. Whereas Archie Hui examines Nee's pneumatology from the perspective of New Testament studies (Hui 2003, pp. 3–29), my focus is on assessing the divergence between Nee's teachings and those of Pentecostalism in three aspects: (1) the baptism of the Holy Spirit and being filled with the Holy Spirit; (2) the indwelling and outpouring of the Holy Spirit in relation to the descent of the Holy Spirit; and (3) being filled with the Spirit and the outpouring of the Spirit. The last two aspects represent a difference not only between the second and third stages of the Holy Spirit's work, but also between Nee's teachings and those of Pentecostals in terms of their theological emphasis.

### 2.1. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit and Being Filled with the Holy Spirit

My analysis begins with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the core concept of Pentecostalism. In Acts 1:5, Jesus said, "for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now". The disciples were subsequently filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues in the next chapter of Acts. Later on, the Holy Spirit also descended on the Gentiles in Cornelius's house (10:44–48) and the believers in Ephesus when Paul laid his hand on them (19:1–10). Pentecostals believe that these events are the biblical root of the baptism of the Holy Spirit marked by speaking in tongues, whereby the Holy Spirit empowers believers to overcome sins. This is also referred to as "the outpouring of the Holy Spirit" (Li 1929, p. 29). For one of the Pentecostal churches during Nee's time, the Chinese Assemblies of God, water baptism is just "the baptism of repentance", originating from John the Baptist, to wash away moral sins. If a believer is not baptized by the Holy Spirit marked by speaking in tongues, he or she is only a second-class Christian (Dong 1928, p. 65), who would not be sanctified without the Holy Spirit's indwelling (Wang 1928, p. 31).

In contrast to Pentecostalism, Nee asserted that “the baptism of the Holy Spirit” is a once-for-all event that has already occurred on the day of Pentecost. Nee compared it to Jesus’s crucifixion. Jesus, who was crucified once and for all and thus has redeemed all the people who believe in him, need not be crucified numerous times. Similarly, the whole church was already baptized with the Holy Spirit once and for all. “Baptism is also a fact that anyone who embraces it through faith will have the experience of Spirit-baptism” (Nee 2004, p. 27). All the churches in history that have already shared this historical event through faith need not seek any special “Spirit-baptism”. Moreover, Spirit-baptism need not happen in anyone’s personal life. “The first time is to obtain the power of Pentecost, which is called the baptism of the Spirit. After that, every time when we need the power to work, we will be filled with the Holy Spirit. Spirit-baptism is one-time (the first time), while being filled with Spirit occurs repeatedly” (Nee 2004, p. 28). We will discuss the mark of Spirit’s baptism—speaking in tongues in Section 4.2. Therefore, Nee set himself apart from Pentecostalism by differentiating “the baptism of the Holy Spirit” from “being filled with the Holy Spirit”.

## 2.2. *The Indwelling and Outpouring of the Holy Spirit*

In the Bible, the narratives of the descent of the Holy Spirit in John and Acts seemed contradictory. In John 20:19–22, Jesus breathed on the disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit”, on the evening of Resurrection Sunday. In Acts 2, however, the disciples were “all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance” on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:2–4). To solve this seemingly contradictory problem, a Chinese believer from the Assemblies of God separated regeneration from the Holy Spirit’s outpouring. He argued that the event that occurred on the evening of resurrection Sunday “referred to regeneration. The breath of Jesus was the spirit of resurrection, commanding disciples to wait for the new life” (Wei 1929, p. 7). The day of Pentecost, meanwhile, was the moment of the Holy Spirit’s advent with whom the disciples were baptized.

However, Nee was convinced that the Holy Spirit had already been given to the disciples on the day of resurrection, which was the second stage of the Holy Spirit’s work—indwelling rather than regeneration. As Nee noted, on “the day of resurrection, the Lord has given the Holy Spirit” (Nee 2004, p. 18), fulfilling the promise of the helper (John 14:16). Luke’s record of the Holy Spirit’s descent on the day of Pentecost fulfills the promise of Luke 24:49, which says, “I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high”. “The promise of my Father” here refers to the promise of Joel 2:28–32.

When Jesus was still on earth, he sent the Helper to his disciple; when he was lifted up, he sent the Holy Spirit of Pentecost. The Helper is Jesus’ breath on the disciple, while the Holy Spirit of Pentecost is the outpouring on the Church. The Breath is internal while the outpouring is external; the Helper indwells in the disciples’ hearts to be the master of life while the Holy Spirit of Pentecost poured out on the disciples to be the power of work (Nee 2004, p. 19).

In short, Nee differentiated Jesus’s breath on the Resurrection Sunday from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The former involves the indwelling of the Holy Spirit for sanctification, while the latter entails the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that endowed believers with the power to work; the former holds greater significance than the latter.

## 2.3. *Being Filled with the Holy Spirit and the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit*

Nee further differentiated the Holy Spirit’s interior and exterior works by examining the concepts of the Spirit’s filling and outpouring. In November of 1935 at a camp meeting in Quanzhou, Fujian Province, Nee delivered a sermon focused on the differences between the “indwelling”, “filling”, and “outpouring” of the Holy Spirit.

Nee pointed out that the main difference between being filled with the Spirit and the outpouring of the Spirit is that the former relates to the internal work of the Spirit “for a

group of special people”, while the latter is linked with the external work, or empowerment, “for all the believers”. The two types of work are distinct and disconnected. For instance, in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit was poured upon three thousand people, but not all of them were filled with it, since, in the next chapter of Acts, some people still complained about the daily food distributions. As Nee explained, “As regards the Spirit’s outpouring, the ascended Lord pours forth the Holy Spirit upon us because of our faith. Yet it has little relationship to life. But with respect to the filling of the Holy Spirit, it is the risen Lord who infills us because of our obedience. It requires a holy life in us” (Nee 2004, p. 81).

Therefore, on the one hand, being filled with the Holy Spirit in our inner life is more important than the outpouring. “If we are not filled with the Holy Spirit but only experience his outpouring, it will be harmful rather than beneficial since this experience will cause pride”, Nee reasoned (Nee 2004, p. 43). He was convinced that being filled with the Holy Spirit is related to the work of the cross to sanctify people: “If you want to be filled with the Holy Spirit, you must empty yourself: you must be hungry and unsatisfied” (Nee 2004, p. 81). He also stated that “The deeper you are dug into by the cross, the fuller you shall be filled with the Holy Spirit”. In other words, being filled with the Holy Spirit is to experience faith in terms of self-denial and brokenness, rather than any special feelings. As Nee continued, “Each time we submit ourselves under the will of God in such matters and allow the cross to cut us, we give opportunity to the Holy Spirit to fill us once more” (Nee 2004, p. 81). Simply striving towards the Spirit’s external work is insufficient, since “many people think that their problems will be solved if they experience their own Pentecost. You have gotten your Pentecost, but have your sanctification problems been solved? Does it lead you to overcome your temper? . . . Their Pentecost only has gifts without fruits” (Nee 2004, p. 2).

On the other hand, however, the Spirit’s outpouring gives believers the courage to witness faith in the ministry. Nee further asserted that to obtain the outpouring of the Holy Spirit Christians must cultivate active consciousness. “The spirit that poured out on us (like 1 Corinthians 12:13 says ‘all were made to drink of one Spirit’, this spirit, just like water, is not a person in Trinity) was impersonal and subject to us (14:32) . . . the spirit that fell on you was a kind of an element for God” (Nee 2004, p. 66). “How much are you willing to let the Holy Spirit come? He will come as much as you let Him come. It depends on you” (Nee 2004, p. 59). The real outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a cooperative act between God and humans. However, being under the control of evil spirits often results in the loss of consciousness and the freedom to act recklessly, which may cause various forms of chaos within the church. “In some Pentecostal churches, believers were controlled by the spirit fallen on them, which caused disturbances”, Nee claimed (Nee 2004, p. 59).

Moreover, the external “outpouring of the Holy Spirit” must be incorporated with the cross’s internal dealings with (*dui fu* 对付) the old self.<sup>7</sup> According to his trichotomous view of humanity, that humans are made of spirit, soul, and body, Nee wrote that “In experiencing the Spirit’s outpouring, what one receives is first the power of the Holy Spirit, and then it is released together with the strength of the soul and the energy of the body” (Nee 2004, p. 77). Therefore, if a person’s soul has been dealt with by the cross, it will only release the power of the spirit. Otherwise, without the cross’s involvement, the power of the spirit will become tainted by the power of the soul and body. When the spirit’s power is contaminated by the power of the body, “he or she will hop around. So does the soul. If one’s soul has not been dealt with, its latent power will be released” (Nee 2004, p. 78), potentially leading to disorderly and uncontrolled emotional reactions. For Nee, before the Spirit’s outpouring, believers should first “experience the victorious life”, having “the power of resurrection life” (Nee 2004, p. 80). Otherwise, disorder might arise. Nee’s own testimony explained his viewpoint on the experience of being filled with the Spirit. Nee described how, when he had recently converted, he “felt the need to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to receive power from above” so that he “might be able to bring more people to the Lord” (Lee 1991, p. 46). However, only after he was led by God, that is, after his painful

separation from his non-Christian girlfriend<sup>8</sup>, did he feel that he was filled with the Holy Spirit and his ministry had been transformed (Lee 1991, pp. 45–52).

Based on the discussion above, Nee's pneumatology can be summarized and its distinction from Pentecostalism elucidated as follows. First, Nee disagreed with the Pentecostal understanding of "the baptism of the Holy Spirit", because, for Nee, this had already been accomplished once and for all. Second, Nee considered the internal work of the Holy Spirit for sanctification to be more significant than the external work of the Spirit for empowerment. Whereas Nee did not deny that the charismatic experience derived from the Holy Spirit, this experience was considered only as external work, lacking the Spirit's inner life.

There is some ambiguity in Nee's arguments. Despite the differences in his explanation of "being filled with the Holy Spirit" at different times<sup>9</sup>, the relationship between the "indwelling of the Holy Spirit" and "being filled with the Holy Spirit", which both refer to the Holy Spirit's internal work, was unclear in his work. On the one hand, according to Nee's argument about Resurrection Sunday, once people are reborn spiritually, they will have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. On the other hand, Nee viewed being filled with the Holy Spirit, which is linked with the believer's co-death with God on the cross, as the higher spiritual plane that believers should seek. This discrepancy means that the relationship between these two terms is problematic, as both of them refer to the internal work of the Holy Spirit in contrast to the Spirit's outpouring. As Archie Hui asserts, "We do not find that the difference lies in the outpoured Spirit being an external work of empowerment and the indwelling Spirit being an internal work of personal renewal" (Hui 2003, p. 28). Nee established a framework of the Holy Spirit's work, comprising three stages, and interpreted the relevant biblical passages accordingly. However, reading his framework into the biblical text could easily cause contradictions. Furthermore, Nee's view seems confusing. If the outpoured spirit is not the Holy Spirit, the question remains as to why it is called the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Another point of contention concerns the relationship between this spirit and the Holy Spirit. It seems that Nee failed to explain these issues clearly.

### 3. Charismatic Experiences from the Soul

In the previous section, I argued that Nee considered as secondary to inner spiritual life those charismatic experiences arising from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In this section, I will further contend that Nee's trichotomous anthropology leads him to insist that some charismatic experiences and sensory perceptions represent manifestations of the soul. According to Pentecostal theology, the baptism of the Holy Spirit must be marked by outward manifestations. A Chinese Assemblies of God author wrote, "Anyone who has received the Spirit-baptism must have the power of the Holy Spirit, which could be recognized . . . So when people receive the Holy Spirit—an overwhelming power—they will fall down on the floor, crying, praying, confessing, and asking for mercy. Some people will weep while laughing and praising God loudly" (Xuwo 1928, p. 26). Pentecostal churches maintain that sensory experience is essential for recognizing the advent of the Holy Spirit. However, Nee showed less interest in extraordinary experiences, feelings, and wonders; instead, he expressed criticism towards the charismatic experience.

#### 3.1. Experience from "The Latent Power of the Soul"

In his representative work *Spiritual Man*, Nee proposed that human beings are composed of three parts: the body, the spirit, and the soul. While the body is the human flesh and desires and the spirit is the supreme part that communicates with God, the soul is an intermediary between spirit and body, manifesting as the human mind, volition, and emotion. Nee believed that after the Fall, the spirit was suppressed by the soul and surrendered to evil spirits. Under the control of the soul, human beings are reckless and presumptuous, seduced by the lusts of the flesh into committing sins. Regeneration is merely a starting point in one's journey to faith, and believers could still be manipulated by the "soulish"

life, living by their own abilities and following their own desires. Therefore, Nee emphasized the imperative to overcome the soul-led life that is based in feelings, emotions, and special experiences.

Some seek the gifts of the Holy Spirit with genuine earnestness. Yet, often what they crave is but some joy, for the “I” is hidden behind their quest. They believe if they can feel the Holy Spirit descending upon them or some external force controlling their body or some warm fire burning from head to foot, then they have been baptized in the Spirit. However, true it may be that does sometimes allow people to so feel Him, it is very damaging for men to seek Him by means of emotion. For this not only can excite their soul life but also may evoke the enemy’s counterfeit (Nee 1977, p. 361).

Nee believed that the strong, emotive feelings that often occurred to the Pentecostals, who strive towards soulish, self-centered satisfaction, should be shattered so that believers rely solely on the leading of the Spirit rather than their feelings and emotions.

Furthermore, Nee suggested that people can only understand the will of God through intuition, conscience, and communion. The feeling of the Spirit is quiet and slight, rather than anything that is experienced by the strong emotional reactions embraced by Pentecostalism. “It is the inner and not the outer man which is activated by His power and thence becomes strong . . . for it helps us to exercise simple faith in our desire for the filling of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 3.14), rather than to anticipate some bodily sensations such as a shaking, a jerking, or a hurling to the ground” (Nee 1977, p. 244). God “does not speak thunderously from heaven nor does He cast the believer to the ground by an irresistible force. Rather does He work very quietly in one’s spirit to impress something upon our intuition” (Nee 1977, p. 298). Moreover, Nee also warned that sensation might obscure spiritual intuition. “Man’s sensory organs replace the operation of the spirit. The movements of the spirit are buried beneath the powerful sensations of the soul and body. And eventually, all spiritual life and work are completely terminated” (Nee 1977, p. 381). Being led by the Holy Spirit occurs in believers’ inner spirits rather than as a sensation. “This kind of revelation is not a vision, a heavenly voice, a dream, or an external force which shakes the man . . . Revelation happens in the intuition—quietly, neither hastily nor slowly, soundless and yet with a message” (Nee 1977, p. 302). Nee admired the life of a patient, self-denying, and calm spiritual man. “No sensation, no sight, no understanding, and silently trust God Himself to work until we emerge on the other side of resurrection to possess a more glorious life” (Nee 1977, p. 302).

In 1932, Nee published a series of articles in *Fu Xing Bao* (复兴报) and later compiled them into a book entitled *The Latent Power of the Soul*. Based on Mrs. Penn-Lewis’s *Soul and Spirit* and G. H. Pember’s *Earth’s Earliest Ages* (Roberts 2005, pp. 125–26), this collection examined various extraordinary experiences and charismatic experiences. In the preface, Nee quoted F. B. Meyer’s words about the danger of the charismatic movement. “Nowadays, the air is almost full of all kinds of stirs caused by counterfeiting”, to which Nee added that, “Today’s situation is dangerous” (Nee 1991, p. 5). In this book, Nee claimed that most wonders in different religious traditions, such as telepathy, hypnotism, prediction, are “to release the power which Adam has left to our soul”, and “to aim at overcoming the outward flesh so as to deliver the soul power from all kinds of bondage for freer expression” (Nee 1991, p. 18). Nee specifically pointed out that the experience of “baptism of the Holy Spirit” popular in Shandong, came from the latent power of the soul.

When I was in Shandong this time, I too told people to seek for it. Nevertheless, I do not approve of the shutting in of many people into a small room for several days’ fasting, praying, and chorus singing. Should people do such a thing, it will not take too long for them to have their brain dazed, their will turned passive, and their lips to be made to utter strange and incoherent sounds or tongues. And in this way shall their latent power be released . . . How can you consider this as Spirit-baptism? It is merely soul-baptism (Nee 1991, p. 47).

In short, Nee opposed the idea that believers must encounter the power of the Holy Spirit through the special experience of Pentecostalism. Instead, he posited that true reve-

lation is acquired through the intuition of the spirit rather than through any special charismatic experience.

### 3.2. Experience from “Outward Man”

In the 1940s, Nee simplified his theory in *Spiritual Man* into *Brokenness of the Man and the Release of the Spirit*. In this book, he used the concepts of the “inward man” and the “outward man” to replace the body, soul, and spirit. The “outward man” was the soulish and natural “personality that can be felt”, encompassing emotions, volition, ration, and feelings. The “inward man” referred to the spiritual life. Nee stated that the outward man must be broken to release the inward man. The charismatic experience is derived from the activities of the outward man. “Our emotions are different in nature from God in nature, and they cannot communicate . . . If we experience the presence of God through emotion, where emotion is, the presence of God disappeared . . . . The nature of the inward man is the same as that of God so that the presence of God could be revealed through the Spirit of God” (Nee 2010, p. 32).

Moreover, Nee posited that not only do some extraordinary experiences, but also many feelings and emotions, stem from the outward man. He agreed that neither the rational knowledge of theology nor subjective feelings and experience could pave a reliable path to salvation. In one of his books, Nee expounded upon the unreliability of feelings. “Some brothers and sisters think that the excitement and joyful feeling is power. They do not realize that emotional excitement will hinder the life of faith”. In other words, believers would be confused and frustrated when they felt spiritually dry and would experience inner boredom if they concentrated on feelings. Nee first asserted that feelings are not indications of a spiritual state. “The ups and downs of Christians’ feelings, the emotional situation, cannot be used to judge their spiritual life” (Nee 2009, p. 120). On the one hand, for Nee, subjective feelings are not reliable at all. Joyful feelings are not necessary as long as believers stick to their faith. “Feeling is unreliable, if what has been changed is your feeling rather than your heart, you should just ignore that feeling” (Nee 2009, p. 128). On the other hand, the feelings of spiritual dryness and depression might also be sent from God, who did not want believers to be satisfied with joy when they were reading the Bible or praying and so removed this feeling. “God would teach you a lesson and make you know that the experience that you thought was the most spiritual was not really spiritual but only came from your body” (Nee 2009, p. 123). The experiences of confusion and darkness, akin to the experience of being in a cave, are actually a faith journey, which takes believers from relying on feelings to entering into faith. Therefore, Nee wrote that the approach to coping with the low mood “is to declare by the power of your will: I want to read the Bible, I want to pray, and I want to make a testimony. Then you will have the ability to overcome the feeling of dryness” (Nee 2009, p. 127).

Overall, Nee believed that one’s spiritual state cannot be determined by sensory feelings or special experiences, and that such experiences are derived from the “outward man” or “soul” that needs to be broken. Authentic real spiritual maturity depends solely on the slight and quiet guidance of the Spirit. Although emphasizing the importance of breaking the soul or “the outer man” to restore the spirit, Nee also relies on the power of will, which is considered a function of the soul, to overcome fluctuations in feeling. Additionally, it is noteworthy that the role of the soul, particularly the will, plays a critical part in the relationship between charismatic experiences and evil spirits.

## 4. Charismatic Experiences from the Evil Spirits

According to Nee’s understanding of the spiritual world, charismatic experiences can originate from not only the Holy Spirit and the soul but also from the evil spirit. Nee explores this aspect in detail in the second part (chapters five to ten)<sup>10</sup> of his book, *Spiritual Man*, which he wrote in Shanghai, where he started his new ministry. As Leung describes, “When he moved to Shanghai and devoted himself to church affairs, obviously Nee took notice of the charismatic movement which impacted the national and foreign church. At

this time, on the one hand, he had to respond to various new trends in churches; on the other, he had to reposition his own church, determining its boundaries and distinguishing itself from other denominational traditions" (Leung 1999b, p. 186). This situation is reminiscent of the one Mrs. Penn-Lewis faced in the early twentieth century when she modified her views to emphasize the significance of the mind and of volition as a way to counter the Pentecostal movement (Leung 1999a, p. 158). Nee, under the influence of her writings, also emphasized the soul's function and provided important insights on the topic of the "evil spirits", thereby opposing the ecstatic charismatic experiences.

#### 4.1. Principles in the Spiritual World

In Nee's view, there is an invisible spiritual world in which not only the Holy Spirit but also many evil spirits exist. For him, as Chow describes, "When a person becomes a Christian, he or she now has two competing powers working within: the power of God working through the spirit and the power of Satan working through the soul" (Chow 2013, p. 50). "After the person has experienced the pouring of the Holy Spirit's power into his spirit, he faces a new world never before encountered. And just here is there cause for alarm" (Nee 1977, p. 381). Thus, when Nee endeavored to reveal a spiritual world, he opened Pandora's box, which means that this spiritual world is filled with evil spirits that are always ready to deceive and attack believers. "The desire of directly knowing God will come forth something dark" (Wacker 2001, p. 11). Nee believed that, in the spiritual world, evil spirits would seduce, deceive, and control people, working with the soul and the body to hinder the development of their faith. In order to differentiate between the works of the Holy Spirit and those of the evil spirits, Nee established three spiritual principles for God, evil spirits, and humans.

Principle 1: God gives people free will that cannot be violated even by God. Nee observed that "Just as there is a law to everything in the natural realm, so is there also a law to everything in the spiritual realm: certain actions produce certain results. God who establishes these laws is Himself law-abiding" (Nee 1977, p. 617). One of the most significant rules is free will. God will not force or manipulate people into doing something they do not want to do. "The purpose of God's creation and redemption is to give man a perfectly free volition. Through the salvation accomplished by the Lord Jesus on the cross, we Christians now can choose freely to do the will of God" (Nee 1977, p. 634). The premise of all God's commandments is the inviolable free will.

Principle 2: Humans have the responsibility to actively cooperate with God with their minds and wills, based on Principle 1. Nee pointed out that many believers mistakenly thought that obedience to God and 'co-death with Christ' meant being passive, mechanical, or even controlled by God without any self-consciousness. However, "co-death with Christ" and "denying oneself" refers to "death to the life, power, exercise, and activity of self; in no way does it refer to the death of one's personality" (Nee 1977, p. 604). Therefore, one should be responsible for their judgments and choices. "What we must remember always is that God never substitutes His will for man's. Man himself must be responsible for what he does. God does not decide for him" (Nee 1977, p. 591). Nee also pointed out that "God desires man to understand His Word with the intellect, from whence the emotion, will and spirit are reached. A lively head is therefore an obstacle to the work of malevolent spirits" (Nee 1977, p. 511).

Principle 3: When believers give up upon their free will, they are attacked and controlled by the evil spirits of Satan. God cooperates with humans, but Satan manipulates them. "God calls man to choose actively, consciously, and willingly to do His will so that his spirit, soul, and body may be free; Satan coerces him to be his passive slave and captive; God appoints man to be autonomous, free to be his own master; Satan forces man to be his puppet, a marionette altogether manipulated by him" (Nee 1977, p. 592). Evil spirits cannot attack or manipulate people arbitrarily; instead, they target those who "have ground given to evil spirits". This would occur in many situations, such as acting according to the desires of the flesh after having converted, thinking impurely, and misunderstanding

of the truth of God—all of which are caused by “a blank and passive mind”. When believers give up upon their free will and their minds are empty without any rationality or judgments, they are controlled by evil spirits. “All revelations and notions received by an empty head emanate from enemy sources” (Nee 1977, p. 512). Passive volition, which refers to “a cessation of the active exercise of the will in control over spirit, soul, and body” (Nee 1977, p. 588), can also give ground to evil spirits.

Nee also lists various signs of evil spirits’ infiltration into people’s minds, such as flash thoughts, dreams, visions, sleeplessness, loss of memory, distraction, vacillation, talkativeness, and obstinacy. Ironically, the more devout believers are, the more vulnerable they are to evil spirits since they would regard everything as the will of God and cease to exercise their free will. However, God does not intervene in this process because of the law of free will. “Should a person fulfill the conditions for the working of the evil spirits God cannot forbid the latter to work, for He is a law-abiding One” (Nee 1977, p. 599).

Therefore, Nee suggested several methods to deliverance from evil spirits, including restoring believers’ minds, recovering the lost ground, renewing the mind, recognizing normalcy, and overturning passivity (Nee 1977, pp. 542–53). Believers should also actively use their will. “The refusing must therefore be reasserted, and the believers refuse persistently until each point of ground is detected and refused, and the faculties are gradually released to act freely under the will of the man” (Nee 1977, p. 630). Finally, by taking initiative in mind and will, believers can get out of the work of the evil spirits and reach a level of self-control by freely obeying God under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

#### 4.2. *Experience from Evil Spirits*

From the arguments outlined above, we can conclude that Nee’s attitude toward the Pentecostal movement and charismatic experience was unambiguous. For him, most special sensational experiences came from evil spirits, who often seduced believers to indulge in feelings rather than following the Holy Spirit.

As noted above, speaking in tongues is regarded in the Pentecostal movement as the mark of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Researchers have pointed out that Nee did not oppose divine healing or speaking in tongues (Wu 2006, p. 52), and he once said: “Some ask me if I oppose speaking with tongues. Certainly not, though I do question tongues which are obtained through faulty means” (Kinneer 1973, p. 135). However, Nee believed that most speaking in tongues that occurred in contemporary churches were from evil spirits rather than God. Nee pointed out that “recently some people claimed that they have spoken in tongues. However, what they spoke was just growls or shouts rather than any languages that other nations used; that is not speaking in tongues recorded in the Bible” (Nee 1997b, p. 122). Moreover, he argued that “fruits of the Holy Spirit will testify whether we have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit or not. We should be careful that seeking speaking in tongues reluctantly will cause counterfeiting of evil spirits” (Nee 1997a, p. 117). He also criticized the phenomenon that some believers kept repeating “Hallelujah” until their minds were blank and passive; they mistakenly believed that they had spoken in tongues and received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which was actually from Satan (Nee 2006, p. 381).<sup>11</sup>

Nee also asserted that “sometimes Satan will even induce him to experience supernatural sensations of shaking, electrifying, freezing, overflowing, floating in the air, fire burning from head to foot, and consuming all his uncleanness, etc.” (Nee 1977, p. 475). The experiences that Pentecostalism embraced, such as “visions, dreams, voices, fires and even inexpressible wonderful sensations” (Nee 1977, p. 476), were, according to Nee, actually the work of evil spirits. Many charismatic experiences were claimed to come from evil spirits, since they occurred or were created deliberately in unconscious and passive minds. Nee concluded, “Whatever induces feeling to the body proceeds nine out of ten times from the evil spirit” (Nee 1977, p. 476).

Nee’s objection to building faith on a foundation of sensational/subjective experience had the benefit of correcting the failings of Pentecostalism. The Pentecostal movement has

long been criticized for its believers' addiction to supernatural ecstasy and fanatic feelings in meetings at the expense of rational judgments, with attendees falling into fanaticism and unconsciousness. In Nee's time, many Chinese Pentecostal meetings were described as being "scenes of 'pandemonium' that frequently became 'a ritual of chaos and a liturgy of disorder', filled with dancing, jumping, . . . cacophonous praying, and wild wailing" (Bays 2017, p. 35). Nee emphasized the Holy Spirit's cooperation with humans and refused to recognize the legitimacy of special experiences that come forth from an unconscious mind and a passive will. He further affirmed the value of human rationality and unviolated free will as factors that are crucial to obedience of the Holy Spirit and the quest for sanctification. According to Nee, believers should use their minds and exercise their will to judge, discern, determine, and practice biblical teachings. "Nee's version of spirituality to a large degree is able to avoid producing radical cults because of its reasonableness" (Meng 2018, p. 75). Nevertheless, the concept of "free will" in Nee's teachings should not be conflated with the philosophical or theological definition of the term, which pertains to the capacity for human volition as a basis for moral responsibility. Instead, Nee employed the term to denote consciousness and initiative, as opposed to unconsciousness and passivity, in a psychological sense.

However, Nee's arguments have some shortcomings. The first and most obvious is that his argument on the status of free will and the assistance of the soul to the spirit in the second half of *Spiritual Man* obviously contradicts his statement that the soul should be broken so that the spirit can come forth in the first half part of the book, as discussed in Section 3.2. Leung points out that this contradiction was due to Nee's use, or even plagiarism, of Mrs. Penn-Lewis' works, which were written at different times (Leung 1999b, pp. 226–30). Nee's own explanation is that "the soulish life" must be broken, which was the main theme of the first half of *Spiritual Man*. Meanwhile, the function of the soul should be kept to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, in reality, it seems far more difficult for believers to determine when to break the soul and when to use it.

The second problem concerns Nee's overemphasis on the work of evil spirits and the legitimacy of the foundational principles he established, including unviolated free will, God's self-limitation, and the conditions of being possessed. While it may make sense to view as the work of evil spirits some charismatic experiences, such as mysterious visions, sounds, and uncontrollable body movements, Nee goes as far as to argue that many ordinary phenomena, such as insomnia, forgetfulness, being talkative, and "not looking straight while talking" (Nee 1977, p. 594) are also the work of evil spirits, which can be considered a somewhat extreme view. Moreover, Nee seems to suggest that evil spirits are ever present and might possess people easily. In contrast to the Holy Spirit's "weak voice"—a self-restriction that prohibits himself from bending people to God's will—evil spirits are presented as more powerful, pervasive, and scheming. Nee's conviction that God cannot interfere when believers are passively possessed by demons seems far-fetched in relation to the doctrine of God's omnipotence. Overemphasizing the work of the spiritual world can lead believers to become either paranoid or judgmental of other people, shifting their focus from the Holy Spirit to evil spirits and distorting theology into "ghost studies". Lam wrote that "the spiritual journey he described was shrouded in a mysterious color. It was unavoidable for any theological thought that took the analysis of human nature as its starting point" (Lam 1985, p. 284). Leung also pointed out that Nee "objected to the charismatic movement by the charismatic thought", because "Whenever individuals inadvertently come into contact with ominous objects or utter inappropriate words, they become susceptible to the control of malevolent forces. This leads to a reenchantment of the world, illustrating that there is no substantial difference between Nee's line of thought and the Pentecostal movement" (Leung 1999b, p. 229). All of these factors allow us to understand why Nee's theology and his church movement were sometimes mistakenly thought to be part of the charismatic movement since they shared a similar understanding of the spiritual world.

## 5. Conclusions

Drawing a clear line between his church and the Pentecostal movement, Nee established the unique identity of his own theological system, making the “Christian Assembly” movement an important part of the independent church movement during the Chinese Republican period. We can draw the following conclusions regarding Nee’s attitude toward charismatic theology and the Pentecostal movement.

First, based on the three-stage work of the Holy Spirit he proposed, Nee pointed out that the inner guidance of the Holy Spirit is more important than the external work, and that the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” is not a personal experience that people should seek out individually. Nee’s teachings, which balanced the pursuit of the Spirit’s outward work with the Spirit’s indwelling, have a positive effect in correcting the tendency of Pentecostal theology to overemphasize exterior spiritual gifts. Simon Chan astutely observed that Pentecostal theology lacks the incorporation of pneumatology within the Trinitarian structure, resulting in a neglect of the hiddenness of the Holy Spirit. He noted, “The Pentecostal religious affections can only be rightly exercised within a trinitarian context” (Chan 2000, p. 33). Nee’s theology, concentrated on Christ, brings about a balance between the role of the Holy Spirit and the Son within the Trinity. Second, according to Nee’s trichotomous anthropology of spirit, soul, and body, many charismatic experiences are just from the latent power of the soul, which must be broken in order to release the spirit. Third, Nee viewed as the works of evil spirits the charismatic experiences that occur in irrational and unconscious situations. He emphasized the significance of the function of the soul, namely the mind and will, in cooperating with the Holy Spirit to overcome them. In other words, regardless of whether the soul should be broken or kept, charismatic experiences are not worth seeking. From these three aspects, it is clear that Nee was not a Pentecostal, and therefore it would be erroneous to classify Nee’s theology and the Local Church movement that emerged in his lifetime as a part of Pentecostalism or the charismatic movement.

Nee’s primary objection to the Pentecostal movement and charismatic experiences can be traced back to his ecclesiological perspective. As previously mentioned, Nee endorsed charismatic experiences in 1935, a move which “rippled rapidly through the Little Flock congregations in various parts of China”, inciting widespread chaos and disarray. “The panic-stricken congregation filed an urgent report to Nee, who wired back his directive to stop the Pentecostal meetings” (Lian 2010, pp. 172–73). This upheaval compelled Nee to underscore the necessity of drawing distinct demarcations with the charismatic movement. Indeed, Nee placed significant emphasis on maintaining order and upholding spiritual authority within the church. This was particularly evident in his proposed “Jerusalem” model, introduced in 1948 when he returned to Shanghai and resumed his role as the foremost leader of the Christian Assembly. Moreover, Nee’s critique of the Pentecostal movement primarily targeted the charismatic experiences rather than the theological doctrines themselves, suggesting his apprehensions arose from concerns of church order and discipline. The differences between Nee and Pentecostalism epitomize the fundamental tension between an institutionalized church and the extraordinary charismatic authorities that characterize Pentecostalism.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, Nee’s spiritual theology encourages elitism with the concept of “the spiritual man” — an individual who has attained a higher state of spirituality than ordinary people, thereby becoming a spiritual elite. This contrasts starkly with Pentecostalism, characterized by egalitarianism (Yong 2005, p. 53), positing that anyone may receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. One significant theological difference that separated Pentecostalism from Nee’s theology is the view regarding the Holy Spirit. In Pentecostalism, “the Holy Spirit became too much of a person, unpredictable and petulant, very much like a child” (Wacker 2001, p. 90), but the power of this divine entity is also seen as overwhelming and pervasive. In Nee’s work, however, the Holy Spirit seems to be “shy”, quiet, and incapable of working without cooperation with human beings in the spirit. This view places a significant responsibility on the individual.

Furthermore, regarding the issue of evil spirits, humans must also discern and resist pervasive evil spirits by themselves. While Leung acknowledges the similarity between Nee's view and charismatic thought (Leung 1999b, p. 229), he overlooks a critical distinction: Pentecostals strive to expel evil spirits through prayer, invoking the power of the Holy Spirit. Conversely, Nee's method for confronting evil spirits hinges on the restoration of an individual's mind and will. According to Nee, without an individual's own decision, even God cannot offer assistance. Nee's deep concern about evil spirits comes from the belief that manipulation by a transcendent power invalidates believers' free will. From this perspective, individuals bear no spiritual or moral responsibility, a concept intolerable to Chinese intellectuals deeply influenced by Confucian traditions.<sup>13</sup>

Nee's emphasis on God-ordained free will and its union with God could also be interpreted in the light of "Heaven and humanity in unity" (*Tian ren he yi*) within the Chinese cultural context (Chow 2013, p. 53). In Chinese religious and cultural tradition, Confucianism advocates self-cultivation by gentlemen, a thought characterized as elitism. This perspective aligns with Nee's teaching that believers should strive to be a spiritual man, aiming not only to release the spirit but also utilize the function of the soul. On the other hand, popular religions focus on transcendent powers, such as direct deliverance by gods or shaman possession—a characteristic mirrored in Chinese Pentecostalism.

Moreover, the significant distinctions between Nee and Pentecostalism enhance our understanding of Nee's position in Chinese Christianity. Nee's theology often attracts criticism of anti-intellectualism due to its perceived negative attitude toward reason and knowledge (Zeng 2012, p. 279). However, this criticism stems from the fact that some scholars have only focused on the first half of *Spiritual Man*, while overlooking the theological insights presented in the second half, which emphasizes the role of mind and will. Lian Xi's classification of Nee's movement as "popular Christianity" (Lian 2010)—parallel to Pentecostal movements—presents problems<sup>14</sup> when considering the inherent elitism and institutionalized features of Nee's theology and movement.

Nee's theology, far from being a simple translation and editing of Western theology, possesses distinct contextual characteristics. By differentiating himself from the Pentecostal movement, he also established a unique theological and church system that gave his movement a significant position within the independent church movement in Republican China. Nee's sophisticated pneumatology will offer valuable insights into the evolving charismatic movement. This is presumably why Nee's writings on the Holy Spirit's work continue to resonate with Pentecostals.

**Funding:** This research was funded by The National Social Science Fund of China, and the grant number is 21CZJ021.

**Data Availability Statement:** Not applicable.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> While Nee's church is variously known as the "Little Flock", "Christian Assembly", or "the Local Church", this paper will refer to it as the "Christian Assembly". This terminology is chosen to differentiate Nee's movement from the one initiated in Taiwan in the 1950s, commonly known as "the Local Church".
- <sup>2</sup> Although the True Jesus Church is usually viewed as a Chinese indigenous Pentecostal church, Iap challenged this view in his recent study (Iap 2019, pp. 40–54).
- <sup>3</sup> The initial movement that emerged in the early twentieth century is commonly known as classical Pentecostalism, while the movement that developed within non-Pentecostal churches after the 1960s is referred to as the Charismatic Movement. However, as we know, the term "Pentecostalism" "refers to a wide variety of moments scattered throughout the world that can be described as having family resemblance" (Anderson 2010, p. 15). In the context of Chinese churches, as scholars have found, "most of the others who maintain Pentecostal practices such as speaking in tongues (glossolalia), healing, prophesying, and so on refuse the label of *wuxunjie pai* 五旬节派 (Pentecostalist). The alternative they often use is *ling'en pai* 灵恩派 (Charismatics)" (Yang et al. 2017, p. 6). I concur with the notion that "'Pentecostalism' may be considered to include churches and movements which, despite significant differences, share a family resemblance in that all emphasize the miraculous working of the Spirit

through the practice of spiritual gifts, especially healing and speaking in tongues" (Yang et al. 2017, p. 4). Thus, in addition to "Pentecostalism", I also use the term "charismatic" to describe the practice of spiritual gifts prevalent in the Chinese churches. See (Inouye 2016, pp. 885–919). In the title of this paper, I employ the term "the charismatic experience" rather than "Pentecostalism" because most of Nee's discourse pertaining to the Pentecostal movement focuses on religious experiences rather than theological issues or church institutions.

In the context of the Chinese Protestant church, the term "fundamentalist" denotes the churches or individuals who, distinct from the liberals, uphold traditional Christian doctrines and manifest notable evangelical characteristics (Yao 2008).

However, the "Shouters (Hu han pai 呼喊派), a group associated with Witness Lee in mainland China, has been labeled an "evil cult" by the Chinese government due to its extreme charismatic feature.

Notably, a comparison has been made between the original Chinese versions and their English translations, and where they align, direct quotations from the English version are utilized in this paper. However, the English version of *Spiritual Man* omits critiques on charismatic experiences. For the other two books, the Chinese editions serve as the primary source.

Nee's thoughts on discussion on being filled with the Holy Spirit, the cross's internal dealings with the old self, and union with God is influenced by Keswick theology, especially by Jessie Penn-Lewis. Leung Ka-lung surveys in detail how Nee inherited Mrs. Penn-Lewis' thoughts (Leung 1999b, pp. 226–30).

The lady, Zhang Pinhui, finally married Nee after ten years when she had already become a believer.

In the 1920s, Nee argued that "being full of the Holy Spirit" was different from "being filled with the Holy Spirit" since the former pointed to sanctification and the latter referred to empowerment. While in 1930s, he viewed "being filled" as the Holy Spirit's second stage, the internal work.

*Spiritual Man* can be separated into two parts. The first part (chapters one to four), which examines the basic trichotomy theory of body, soul, and spirit, was written when Nee was sick in Fuzhou, Fujian Province.

By comparing the Chinese and English version of *The Spiritual Man*, I found that in the English version, the paragraphs of Nee's discussion about "today's Pentecostal church" and "speaking in tongues" were deleted, see (Nee 1977, pp. 517–19; Nee 2006, pp. 381–82). Cliff mentions that Nee's works "have been widely read and studied by Pentecostals all over the world"; however, "some Pentecostals had been offended" by Nee's criticism of Pentecostalism in *Spiritual Man* (Cliff 1983, p. 298). That might be the reason why this part was deleted in the English version, reflecting the complexity of relationship between Nee and Pentecostals.

In accordance with Max Weber's theory, charisma refers to an extraordinary quality of a person in authority. This charisma becomes routinized when "the organization of authority becomes permanent, the staff supporting the charismatic ruler becomes routinized" (Weber 1946, p. 297). While Nee initially emerged as a charismatic leader, the development and expansion of his church eventually led to a routinization of his charisma. Parallel developments can be observed in other Pentecostal movements, such as The True Jesus Church, which have also established comprehensive and rigorous organizational structures (Inouye 2018). At this stage, the emergence of new charismatic experiences could pose a threat to the established institutional structure.

This feature is also discernible in Wang Mingdao's theology, which places a strong emphasis on individual moral obligations.

Wang Zhixi provides a compelling refutation of Lian's concept of "popular Christianity". This is achieved by identifying the social stratification among the leaders of various movements, inclusive of both Nee's and the Pentecostal movements (Wang 2015, pp. 285–86).

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