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## Nineteenth-Century Australian Charismata: Edward Irving's Legacy\*

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### Abstract

In recent decades, most interpreters have argued that as an organized movement, Australian Pentecostalism began in 1909 with Janet Lancaster's Good News Hall. This article argues that Australian Pentecostal beginnings should be recalibrated to 1853, with the arrival of representatives of the Catholic Apostolic Church in Melbourne. The evidence indicates that the Catholic Apostolic Church continually taught and practiced the charismatic gifts in Australia throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. The existence of an established denomination in Australia embracing and exhibiting the charismatic gifts for the period 1853 to 1900 challenges the dominant Lancaster interpretation. This evidence also argues for a direct historic link between Australian Pentecostalism and the charismata of Edward Irving and the nascent Catholic Apostolic Church in 1830s London.

### Keywords

Catholic Apostolic Church, Australian Pentecostalism, Edward Irving

For about twenty-five years there has been a general historiographical consensus that Australian Pentecostalism began in Melbourne in 1909 with Janet Lancaster and Good News Hall as a direct result of news filtering through from the infant Pentecostal movement overseas.<sup>1</sup> From this date it is relatively easy to

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<sup>1</sup> B. Chant, *Heart of Fire: The Story of Australian Pentecostalism* (Adelaide: House of Tabor, 1984), 36.

trace continuities among early Australian Pentecostal groups, their alliances and realignments, through to the present day. Obviously, “the Lancaster interpretation” places Australian Pentecostal phenomena later than the foundational events of modern Pentecostalism in Topeka, Kansas and Azusa Street, Los Angeles. This interpretation is based on the assumption that charismatic phenomena were largely absent in Australia before 1909, and it naturally leads to the question: Were there any significant examples of the charismata in Australia before Janet Lancaster’s ministry? When we look back into nineteenth-century Australia, evidences of charismata initially appear to be scanty indeed. This article will argue that through the agency of the Catholic Apostolic Church (CAC) nineteenth-century Australian charismata were more established than has been generally assumed.

In a 1994 exploration of the origins of Australian Pentecostalism, Barry Chant indicated an isolated nineteenth-century example.

In 1870, a farmer named Joseph Marshall, formerly of Yorkshire, who may have been converted in a Methodist revival, and who had taken up land a few miles west of Portland, Victoria, was conducting cottage meetings in the area. Several people were baptised in the Holy Spirit with the sign of glossolalia. These were probably the first Pentecostal meetings held in Australia and among the first conducted anywhere in the world.<sup>2</sup>

Chant’s endnote does acknowledge the existence of Edward Irving and CAC in the United Kingdom context, as a way of modifying the second assertion in this final sentence. There is, however, no acknowledgement of CAC’s contribution in the Australian setting. The remainder of this article will call for modification of Chant’s assertion that these Portland meetings were “probably the first Pentecostal meetings held in Australia.”

The story of Edward Irving and the rise of the Catholic Apostolic Church is both complex and fascinating. Very briefly, Irving was a Church of Scotland minister who accepted an appointment with a struggling London congregation in 1822. He rapidly became London’s most popular preacher and, some years later, its most controversial. While Irving’s premillennial interests fitted well with the temper of his Romantic times, his assertion that Christ fully assumed fallen human nature (while remaining sinless through the power of

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<sup>2</sup> B. Chant, “The Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Origins of the Australian Pentecostal Movement,” in M. Hutchinson, E. Campion, and S. Piggin, eds., *Reviving Australia: Essays on the History and Experience of Revival and Revivalism in Australian Christianity* (Sydney: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 1994), 103.

the Holy Spirit) and his 1831 adoption of the charismatic gifts into his congregation aroused opposition. He was eventually declared a heretic for his Christology and, although his congregation stood by him at this point, its leaders later moved against him. Nevertheless, the majority of his congregation followed him to form a new group that after his untimely death in 1834 would become known as the Catholic Apostolic Church.

Despite his own hopes, Irving never personally demonstrated the charismata, in the sense of glossolalia, prophecy, or noteworthy healings. He became relegated to a position beneath the emerging order of “apostles” within the group, dying at the age of forty-two. After Irving’s death, the Catholic Apostolic Church (CAC) rapidly developed a very formal liturgy that became one of its hallmarks, eclipsing its association with the charismata for most observers.<sup>3</sup> This paper will focus on the activities of the CAC in an attempt to discover whether the charismata were still in evidence in nineteenth-century Australia. It is worth noting at the outset, however, that the claims of glossolalia, prophecy, and other spiritual gifts had caused much controversy and ridicule for Irving and the fledgling CAC in London; developing Victorian sensibilities would tend to discourage drawing attention to such phenomena as the century progressed.

Mark Hutchinson has pointed out that the CAC in Australia rapidly developed a strong position in society, reflecting in many ways its upper- and middle-class demographic in the United Kingdom. “Because it was a church of elites, the later Pentecostal solution (through a democratization of the Spirit in the post disestablishment period) was not an option for the Catholic Apostolic Church. Indeed the second and third (or ecclesial) stages of the church rapidly locked up the charismatic manifestations of Irving’s day in liturgy, apostolic offices, and rituals of ‘sealing.’”<sup>4</sup> Earlier in the same article, these second and third stages are dated as, respectively, 1833 to 1850 and 1850 to 1896. Hutchinson is arguing that by the second half of the nineteenth century, the egalitarian charismatic expressions of Irving’s heyday had either become restricted to a clerical elite or, more likely, were simply diluted into symbol and ritual. Is this view supported by the available evidence?

The first official CAC representative to arrive in Australia was evangelist Alfred Wilkinson, who arrived on February 14, 1853 and began services in a tent

<sup>3</sup> James Worsfold wrote that “there was a gradual transformation from spontaneous enthusiasm to ecclesiastical authority and sacramental emphasis.” *A History of the Charismatic Movements in New Zealand* (Bradford, UK: Puritan Press, 1974), 51.

<sup>4</sup> M. Hutchinson, “Edward Irving’s Antipodean Shadow,” accessible at <http://webjournals.ac.edu.au/journals/aps/issue-10/edward-irvings-antipodean-shadow/>.

on Melbourne's Domain.<sup>5</sup> Were the charismata in evidence in these services? Although direct evidence is lacking, one way of addressing this is to look at the contemporary CAC worship in England. If it can be established that the charismata were still part of CAC worship in the United Kingdom at this time, then there is at least the possibility, if not the likelihood, that English CAC leaders arriving in Australia also continued this practice, even if they did not seek to draw attention to it.

Columba Flegg has clearly established that the CAC in the United Kingdom was still open to prophecy and glossolalia at this date. "The exercise of spiritual gifts was more freely permitted in prayer meetings than in public worship. In the former, anyone might prophesy at any time . . . During worship, the angels were responsible for exercising judgement so as to ensure not only that prophetic utterances were (as far as possible) confined to the allotted place but also that they were for edification and not confusion."<sup>6</sup> He makes this statement in the context of considering a work by Apostle Cardale, which is dated 1866, entitled *Directions on the subject of women prophesying in church*.<sup>7</sup> Such a publication would not have been necessary in 1866 if the inspired utterances were not continuing as part of CAC worship services; clearly, the charismata were continuing and, by implication, were doing so in sufficient quantity that a person at the highest leadership level chose to give direction on their operation. Other eyewitness accounts also attest to the continuity of prophecy and glossolalia in English CAC worship at least well into the 1860s.<sup>8</sup>

Flegg's comment also gives weight to the suggestion that the charismata were taking place in such a way as to largely avoid public gaze: although these gifts were exercised in public worship, they were subject to greater control in this setting than in private groups. As this was the practice in the United Kingdom, it would not be surprising for Australian CAC groups to do likewise and allow free operation of the charismatic gifts primarily in private meetings. Therefore, the CAC leadership that arrived in Australia in 1853 came from a mode of worship that was still embracing and experiencing the charismata,

<sup>5</sup> J. Martin, *A Brief Survey of the Lord's Work in Australia* (Melbourne: unpublished document, 1992), 4, 6-7.

<sup>6</sup> C. G., Flegg, *"Gathered under Apostles": A Study of the Catholic Apostolic Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 176. The term *angel* was the CAC equivalent of "pastor" or "minister."

<sup>7</sup> J. B. Cardale, *Directions on the Subject of Women Prophesying in Church* (privately issued, 1866), 2. Flegg notes that this work contains comments on prophesying in general, as well as specific information for women. Quoted in Flegg, *Gathered under Apostles*, 177.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. Andrews, C. F., *What I Owe to Christ* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1932), 37, quoted in Worsfold, *A History of the Charismatic Movements in New Zealand*, 57.

but in more discreet ways than formerly; it would have been unlikely for them not to have continued this tradition in their new home. In this context, combined with the initially relatively small numbers of CAC adherents, it is not surprising that direct evidence of the charismata is lacking in the 1850s.

More concrete evidence that the early Australian CAC leaders were both preaching and practicing the charismata comes from the opening of the first Catholic Apostolic Church in Wellington, New Zealand. On this occasion, the preacher indicated in a number of ways that the charismatic gifts were still operating in both Australia and New Zealand. In the context of the previous remarks, it is worth noting that the very first sentence of the printed sermon referred to the presence of those “who do not belong to the handful of believers who worship here.”<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, he continued to proclaim the “restoration of apostles and prophets” and that “the light of prophecy ought always to be in the Church, by means of men and women speaking in the power of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>10</sup> A few pages later in the same document the preacher reflected on the work of Australian CAC ministers in New Zealand during previous decades.

Well, brethren, some of you may have heard of it in the old country, and may recal [sic] the stir it made when you were children, about speaking in unknown tongues — as such I remember it myself. And some may have heard the good news of it in this City, preached in the Odd Fellows' Hall and in the Athanaeum — first in 1863 and 1864 by Mr. Wilson from the Mother Church in Melbourne, then in 1867 by Mr. Whitestone and again by him in 1873; lastly by Mr. Wilkinson the evangelist from New South Wales who delivered a testimony to this work of the Lord in 1876.<sup>11</sup>

Although in context the preacher is referring to the entire CAC message, it is noteworthy that glossolalia is specifically mentioned as part of the message, and this is consistent with the tone of the rest of the sermon that the prophetic gifts were restored alongside the office of apostle. So here we have specific mention of the activity of Australian CAC ministers in New Zealand and glossolalia is part of it. It is impossible to believe that these ministers were preaching something different in New Zealand from what they were preaching in Melbourne and New South Wales. The period mentioned, 1863 to 1876, begins only ten years after the first CAC representative arrived in Australia. This extract provides significant evidence that the Australian church, like its United

<sup>9</sup> Anon., *Three Sermons Preached in the C.A. Church, Wellington, Nov. 1880* (Wellington: Edwards & Green, 1881), 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, 4, 5.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

Kingdom parent, continued to teach and practice the charismata through the second half of the nineteenth century. Further circumstantial confirmation of this can be found in a Melbourne newspaper of April 1869, which announced that the CAC sermon topic for the week was “Spiritual Gifts.”<sup>12</sup>

Some thirty years later, at the very beginning of the twentieth century, an Australian CAC leader again made a spirited defense of the charismata. J. Moore Ritchie, an evangelist from Sydney then ministering in Wellington, responded to criticism of CAC theology by the Anglican bishop of Wellington, Rev. Dr. Frederick Wallis. Ritchie’s pamphlet gives evidence that he saw the charismata continuing in his own day. In his preface he indicated that he would present “Evidence of the restoration of Apostles and other Ministries, Sacraments, Gifts, and Ordinances, as at the beginning.”<sup>13</sup> The first part of Ritchie’s pamphlet quotes from Wallis’s argument against the CAC, which itself provides evidence for the continuity of prophecy amongst CAC groups.

What test can we apply? Only, I think, the words of their prophets. For if prophesying is one of the signs given, and if it was shown to be from God, then in the words of the prophets we may hope to find a test of the truth of their claims. You can read these words for yourselves in accounts given by others of the “Adherents of the Restored Apostolate,” or better still, in the volumes of the Angels’ Record, which can be obtained from members of that body. I shrink from giving pain to some whom my words may reach, by reading and criticising before you what they believe to be the direct utterances of the Holy Spirit of God. You can read them yourselves.<sup>14</sup>

The bishop’s unsympathetic evidence shows clearly that prophecy was still being uttered, and recorded, in the CAC churches of Australia and New Zealand.

Ritchie himself went on to argue that the charismatic gifts were “the inheritance of all the baptised” and that “the experience of over 70 years has demonstrated, to those who have given heed, that the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, speaks again through prophets as of old.”<sup>15</sup> Ritchie was writing in 1900, so the seventy-year period refers back to the founding charismatic experiences under Edward Irving in the early 1830s. Ritchie was also writing from first-hand experience of the CAC in both Australia and New Zealand. There is no “lapse” in view here: Ritchie’s testimony is that there was a continuing charismatic

<sup>12</sup> *The Argus*, Saturday 17 April 1869, 8.

<sup>13</sup> J. M. Ritchie, *God’s Work by Restored Apostles Also an Answer to Bishop Wallis to His Charge of Spiritual Error against This Work* (Wellington: Evening Post Press, 1900), preface.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

experience within the Catholic Apostolic Church for the period 1831-1900 and Australia was no exception.

Contemporary evidence has also survived about the charismatic gifts in the Australian CAC, in the form of the *Angels' Record* mentioned earlier. I have depended on the generosity of others to search these records for me, as they are located in Yorkshire. Due to the rarity of this material, I will quote some of these instances in full. The first group relates to the operation of divine healing.

A deacon evangelist reports: On the morning of the 7th inst about four o'clock, I was called up by a member of the flock, and requested to come in haste to a house [in] North Fitzroy, and baptize a sick child who had been given up by the doctor. When I got to the house the doctor had left, saying that the child was dead. It was cold and discoloured, but I believed that breath was still in the body. After receiving satisfactory answers from the parents as to their faith in the sacrament of baptism, I blessed the water and baptized the child, and felt moved to lay my hand upon its forehead, and in secret prayed to the Lord to raise it up. I felt my prayer answered, and after about three minutes I asked the nurse how the child was: she said: "Oh it is quite warm," and its proper colour was returning. The child is still doing well. The doctor was very much surprised, and said that in all his experience he never knew a case like it. Both parents admitted that their child had been miraculously restored to them by the Lord.<sup>16</sup>

A faithful woman residing at Granville, had been for years very delicate, her lungs being weak. In October last she had a very severe attack of the epidemic then prevailing, the so-called influenza. The doctor attending her was very anxious about her, she became very weak, and expressed a desire to receive the anointing. Accompanied by the pastor and deacon I went out and administered the holy anointing, and afterwards the holy communion. After we left she immediately rallied, and her strength was so increased that she was able to sit up whilst her bed was being made. On the doctor calling the next morning he told her husband who is not in the apostles' communion, that he was greatly surprised at the sudden change, as he had very little hope of her recovery the day before, she was so low; yet in less than twenty four hours she seemed to have gained strength in a most remarkable manner. She continued to improve; in a few weeks returned thanks for her recovery and says that since, she has felt better and stronger than before her illness.<sup>17</sup>

One of the pastors reports: On the morning of the second inst one of the deacons came to me stating that his infant, then only two days old, had the previous evening been attacked by internal bleeding, and that the doctor had counselled immediate baptism, as the child's life was in imminent danger, not one in sixty having been known to recover. The elder and I, with the deaconess, went to the house as quickly as possible, and found the child very low indeed. Holy baptism was administered, followed by the holy anointing and the holy communion, all in their very shortest forms. The child seemed to revive at once, the nurse declaring it to be distinctly better. Next morning

<sup>16</sup> Bradford Apostolic Church collection, 53D95/1/6, 1893, 118-19, Melbourne, Australia.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 124, Sydney, Australia.

the father reported to me that the bleeding had entirely stopped from the time of the services, and that the child was hourly recovering from its former prostration. The doctor expressed great surprise, and seemed much puzzled looking from the child to the mother repeatedly, as though to discover what had happened. On the 5th day he admitted that the infant had perfectly recovered, contrary to his expectations. The mother said that from the moment of the anointing she felt that her infant was safe, and as though the Lord had given it to her for the second time.<sup>18</sup>

These three extracts provide evidence of the charisma of healing operating within the Catholic Apostolic Church at the end of the nineteenth century: the first is from Melbourne in 1893; the second from Sydney in the same year; the third from Melbourne in 1896. It is fascinating to note the strongly sacramental context in which these events were set, as well as the bold faith of the deacon evangelist in the first account who was clearly expecting the child's virtual resurrection. It also should be noted that these three events were "successes"; presumably there would have been less motivation to record similar incidents that resulted in deaths.

There is also evidence for the continuation of glossolalia and, especially, prophecy in Australia. The following quote contains a prophecy that was given in the morning, supplemented by an interpreted message in tongues the same evening. The year was 1880. From the Church in Melbourne. Morning Prayer Jer: i.10.

Shall not the Rod blossom? shall it not bear fruit? Yea, as the Lord hath stretched forth His hand, so will He accomplish His work; & they of the captivity who have beheld the Rod, they also shall be warned concerning the judgments of the Lord, the seething pot, with its face towards the North! The evil that cometh, hidden from the eyes of men! They that receive the spiritual Ministry of the Lord in this day, they also shall see the judgments of the Lord, about to be poured forth. The Lord looketh unto such, He looketh unto you, O ye Sealed — ye who know the Rod, who have discerned the power thereof, He looketh unto you, that ye may deliver.

[Note] This word appears to have been continued in the Evening Service as follows. Evening Prayer — After Magnificat

[Tongue] The evil which the Prophet beheld coming forth from the North — the evil hidden, hidden from the eyes of man — it is the denial of the work of the Lord — the denial of the sending forth of the Almond Rod, & all that appertains to it. The secret evil — but men shall not know it, though it shall pass before their eyes, out of the North. The Lord speaketh that He founded Zion as a defenced City, & His work in her midst

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 1896, 432-33, Melbourne, Australia.



shall be accomplished. The revelation of the Almond Tree, the blossom, & the fruit thereof shall be seen — & Jerusalem's walls, they shall be brasen, brasen walls. Ah! The filling of all the ordinances, with the Holy Ghost! The evil cometh to pass. Be ye warned [all?] ye Sealed. It is the subtle working of the enemy which cometh up in secret, until he be revealed.<sup>19</sup>

Space prohibits quoting other examples from Melbourne in 1882 and 1889, and Sydney in 1888.<sup>20</sup> We will close this short survey of primary sources with the following from Queensland in 1888. East Talgai, Australia. Presentation for the Episcopate. After Hymn 38.

Ah the blessed unity in Jesus, your Living Head, the one High Priest, the Living Sacrifice ever presented before the mercy seat! Out of His hand ascends the cloud of sweet Incense, there He ever intercedes, presenting the prayers of all Saints, making intercession for all. O ye Angels of the Son of Man! the one act of intercession of Jesus the High Priest, fulfilled in Heaven, on Earth! Look ye to the Throne on high, look ye into the holiest of all, for there the cloud of sweet Incense ascends! Remember, the act that ye fulfil, is the act of the High Priest — one act, one act — not your own; therefore abide ye in the unity of your Living Head, & ye shall be preserved from the snare that cometh. Oh! there is a time coming, nigh at hand, when he who is the enemy of God & man, shall draw down from Heaven the third part of the Stars thereof — but ye who abide in that living unity of the High Priest, remembering that it is He that fulfilleth every act towards His Saints — ye shall be kept in that hour, ye shall stand fast, as ye abide in Him.<sup>21</sup>

While I have not had the opportunity to examine these records personally (and I anticipate they contain more examples than those quoted), it is obvious that in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the Catholic Apostolic Church in Australia (at least in Victoria, New South Wales, and Queensland) continued to operate in the charismatic gifts of tongues, interpretation, prophecy and healing. We now have seen evidence that the Catholic Apostolic Church in Australia practiced and taught the ready availability of charismatic gifts from the period 1863-1900. They expected the charismata to be available, acted accordingly, and recorded the results. While solid evidence for their first ten years in Australia, that is 1853-1863, is not readily available, circumstantial evidence makes it impossible to believe that this period should be excluded from their charismatic activity. Can we believe that CAC leaders could leave England, where the charismata were still actively being embraced

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 53D95/1/3, 1880, 169-70, Melbourne, Australia.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., respectively, 53D95/1/3, 379-80; 53D95/1/5, 182-83; 53D95/1/4, 505-6.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 53D95/1/4, 506-7.

and experienced, and completely ignore this aspect of their spirituality for ten years after arriving in Australia, only to rediscover it in 1863 and support it for the next four decades? Clearly not.

The evidence leads to the conclusion that the Catholic Apostolic Church supported and practiced the full range of charismatic gifts from its arrival in Australia in 1853 until at least 1900; for the purposes of this paper, it is not necessary to look beyond this date. It seems that these gifts operated in a more low-key manner than when they appeared in Irving's London ministry in the early 1830s, probably out of a desire to avoid controversy in the Australian setting. Yet operate they did. Therefore the standard interpretation of Australian Pentecostal beginnings is obviously lacking: Janet Lancaster's Good News Hall should not be viewed as the starting point of Australian Pentecostalism, preceded only by isolated groups like those in Portland.<sup>22</sup> The Catholic Apostolic Church was a well-organized denomination with a recognized Australian presence throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. The evidence indicates that for fifty years before Janet Lancaster (and, for that matter, before the birth of American Pentecostalism) they pioneered a spirituality and practice that was both Pentecostal and sacramental in Australia, underpinned by a coherent pneumatology bequeathed to them by Edward Irving. Experience had taught them the wisdom of not highlighting the charismata as the most important element of their message, but it was still integral to their restorationist thought. As a result, "the Lancaster hypothesis" needs to be challenged and the contribution of the Catholic Apostolic Church to Australian Pentecostal history and therefore, indirectly, that of Edward Irving, needs to be significantly upgraded.

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<sup>22</sup> Instead the possibility of CAC influence on these groups should be explored.

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