

‘Pentecostal Monk’ Is Sought-After Evangelist in Sweden

Peter Halldorf, a third-generation Pentecostal preacher, worships in Coptic monasteries and leads a contemplative life
He is a third-generation Pentecostal pastor who says he “could not survive for a day without speaking in tongues.” But he is also likely to be the only Pentecostal minister in the world who focuses on the Desert Fathers of the early church in his preaching and worships regularly in Coptic monasteries in the Egyptian desert.

Meet Peter Halldorf, known in Sweden as the “Pentecostal monk.”

“My roots are sunk deeply into Pentecostalism,” Halldorf, 45, told Charisma. “Both my grandfathers were Pentecostal pastors, my father was a Pentecostal pastor, and I am and will always remain a Pentecostal pastor.”

He said the personal experience of the Holy Spirit was “inalienable” from his Christian walk. But Halldorf also feels “at home,” he added, praying the hours with Coptic monks. “The first office is at 3 a.m.,” he said. “The Psalms are sung just like in Catholic monasteries, but the Coptic melodies have a very different tone, and the atmosphere is noisier [than with the Catholics]. I feel totally free to pray along in tongues, and I could go on for hours.”

The Pentecostal monk reaps occasional criticism for his singular spirituality, but his supporters outnumber his critics 10-1. Very few preachers attract larger crowds in

Sweden. Halldorf is one of the most popular speakers in the Lutheran charismatic renewal, and internationally known Swedish pastor Ulf Ekman applauds Halldorf's theological approach.

Halldorf's fascination with the Desert Fathers grew out of his concern about superficiality and even worldliness that he felt Pentecostalism and other young church movements could easily fall prey to because they lacked historical roots.

"Without compromising our pursuit of the Holy Spirit and the charismas, we as Pentecostal and charismatic Christians should recognize the need to imbed the charismatic experience in the soil of sanctification, that is in the process of becoming more and more like Jesus," Halldorf said.

It was this focus on sanctification that led him, literally, into the Middle East deserts. Studying the desert theme in the Bible, Halldorf many years ago stumbled upon a booklet titled Sayings of the Desert Fathers.

"Reading it felt like sand between your teeth," he said.

Rough and anything but ear-tickling, "I felt it to be a thorn in my flesh—but also a [balm] for my soul."

Halldorf found out that the Desert Fathers were radical disciples who became hermits in the deserts of Egypt, Syria and Palestine to escape the same problem that concerned him—the worldliness of the church—even though in their case less than 200 years had gone by since the first Pentecost. Decades later, in the middle of the 300s, Copts—the first-nation, pre-Arabic Egyptians—formed the first monastic

fellowships.

The desert lifestyle was utterly ascetic. There was a strong emphasis on “mortifying” your body, soul and spirit, as it was termed, and new disciples learned discipline the hard way. But Halldorf claims it was the Desert Fathers who in spite of their “roughness” taught him how to avoid the legalism that had trapped and disabled much of the teaching on sanctification in the charismatic renewal in the 1970s and 1980s.

“The Desert Fathers had a tough surface,” Halldorf admitted, “but if you face the sinfulness of your own heart without making excuses and at the same time experience that God still loves you, you will, as a result, start treating yourself and others with [inner] gentleness.”

Halldorf noted that the Desert Fathers were not in the least impressed by their own spirituality, another characteristic he found attractive. They practiced healing and deliverance from demonic spirits on a daily basis, but as Halldorf puts it, “In the desert there were neither showbiz nor stars.”

And in the desert, Halldorf said he learned to be quiet. “To become like God you must hear Him speak,” Halldorf told Charisma. “If you only listen to yourself you will become your own image. Listening is the heart of prayer, and listening requires silence.”

Halldorf cites historian Frank Bartleman and Swedish “Mr. Pentecost” Lewi Pethrus as examples of early Pentecostal leaders who encouraged a quiet and contemplative expression of faith. Returning to its roots could serve the modern

Pentecostal movement well, Halldorf asserts, as end-time Pentecostalism will grow faster in coarse desert sand than in smooth flowerpot soil.

Tomas Dixon in Sweden