

The main  
characteristics of  
pentecostalism  
theology religion  
essay



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Since its inception in the first century, Christianity has been evolving as a social institution, changing its organizational shape, redefining its mission, and creating new expressions of worship. Since then there has been a vast change in denominations, where some decline and revival has been witnessed through the years.

The year 1906 brought new recoveries into a different type of worship in United States of America (USA). In USA, Los Angeles newspapers reported as gathering of people of different races and cultures describing them to involve the poor and rich, blacks and whites, men and women, young and old in a temple in Azusa Street displaying a new form of worship, praying, singing in unknown languages, dancing and clapping. Audiences gathered to witness what was happening. This was the biggest revival of the time in USA.

[2]Testimonies, diaries, articles were written by those involved and those who witnessed this great event. This was the beginning of what is called Pentecostalism today, the major driving engine of Christianity to its origins, the first century.[3]Although, most scholars have debated whether Pentecostalism had multiple almost simultaneous origins in different countries the same time it originated in North America, there is no doubt that that it is the strongest Christianity today in the third world.[4]This essay aims to examine its origins and its main three chosen characteristics which are spiritual gifts, personal encounter with God and the power over demons and Satan.

## **Definitions**

Allan Anderson's explanation on Pentecostalism is that it is perceived as a movement of believers who affirm to the work of the Holy Spirit and the

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exercising of the spiritual gifts as evidenced through speaking in tongues with foundation grounded on the emphasis of the acknowledgement of salvation attained through Jesus Christ.[5]David Martin and Peter Mullen state that “ speaking in tongues consists in the utterance of unintelligible sounds, often in rapid sequences, by persons who seem to be in conditions of varying degrees of dissociation.”[6]Pentecostal is linked with the doctrine of ‘ subsequence’ and ‘ initial evidence’ which originated from USA in the beginning of the twentieth century, referring to the experience of the baptism by the Holy Spirit.[7]Therefore, those devoted to this theology are called Pentecostals.

However, a change happened during the 1960s, when some Christians within main-line denominations started to accept the Pentecostalism phenomena as part of the worship experience.[8]This new form of Pentecostalism became known as the Charismatic Movement. Charismatic describes any form or experience of Christianity that emphasises the “ charismata” which means spiritual gifts (such as tongues, prophecy and discernment) listed in for example 1Corinthians 12, as well as a dynamic experience of being baptised or filled with the Holy Spirit.[9]A highly significant proportion of Christians and churches that have emphasis on this dynamic renewing experience and the operation of gifts of the Holy Spirit are called charismatics. The charismatic movements widely penetrated the traditional historical churches from the 1960s, Protestant and Catholic, Church of England (C of E), Methodist, Baptist or URC churches, or the Roman Catholic Church in what has been termed the charismatic renewal.[10]Therefore Renewal describes

the expression of this new form of spiritual life within these previously existing historic mainline churches or denominations.

The difference between charismatics and Pentecostals is the aspect of the initial evidence like signs and wonders as well as the encountering of power which charismatics deny hence agreeing in the tongues. Whereas, Pentecostal denotes the identity maker of tongues as the evidence of the Holy Spirit baptism whilst the Charismatics denote the Holy Spirit gifts, the teachings of prosperity and spiritual warfare.[11]

Consequently, the word “ Pentecostal” shifted from just refereeing to a particular group of denominations to any denomination whose worship experience includes some sort of “ Pentecostal” phenomenon such as speaking in tongues. Since the rise of the Charismatic movement, traditional Pentecostals are usually referred to as “ Classical Pentecostals”. The term Classical Pentecostal refers to a person or organization which believes that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a second work of grace subsequent to conversion, and that the initial physical evidence of this experience is speaking in other tongue that is the languages unknown to the speaker.[12]

## **Origins**

During the centuries from the Early Church’s time about 1500 plus years to the 20th century there were Christians traditions which influenced the formation of Pentecostalism such as the Reformation tradition, specifically the Anabaptist and Arminians, the Holiness and Evangelical Movements.

[13]The historical survey of the development of Classical Pentecostalism will

cover the years from 1738; John Wesley's Aldersgate experience' time when he emphasised the Holy Spirit in His teachings.[14]

The advancement of Pentecostalism can be dated back to a January the 1st 1901, a charismatic revival at Bethel Bible School in Topeka, Kansas USA. As Charles Parham, a former Methodist minister's students had questions about the evidence of baptisms with the Holy Spirit after his Spirit baptism teaching, following the Book of Acts. There was an experience of this baptism following a fervent prayer with students resulting in the experience of speaking in tongues.[15]The enthusiasm of the students following Charles Parham teachings brought an amazing Pentecostal experience as of the Apostles in the Book of Acts. Cox stated that Pentecostalism rose among a group of people who were waiting for it.[16]Charles Parham's' teachings opened the doors to what was later called Pentecostalism. Robert Gromacki called Charles Parham "" Father of the Pentecostal movement." [17]

From Parham's bible school, the movement became the worldwide movement following the Azusa Street revival mentioned above. This was through a black African American preacher called William Joseph Seymour who was also a student at Parham School who longed for the Spirit baptism and witnessed the first experience of speaking in tongues. His meeting with Parham had a big impact in William Seymour's belief about the Holy Spirit baptism.[18]He contributed to the spread of Pentecostalism; he did not just believe but took the message further.

Cecil M. Robeck gives the brief background of the journey William Seymour took to promote what is today called " Pentecostalism." In his account he

mentioned that William Seymour was invited to Los Angeles to be in charge of one ministry. After preaching about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, he was denied the position to pastor that congregation. He ended up living with black friends Edward and Mattie Lee who sympathised with him where he conducted prayer meetings in their house. This was the beginning of the great movement as they started to pray together and later invited other people to join them. The number increased and they moved to a bigger house. It was in the house of Richard at Ruth Asberry on the 9th of April 1906 as they were studying the bible that they experienced the power of the Holy Spirit. In this meeting, an eight-year-old black boy began to speak in tongues and soon crowds were attracted to the house. After this experience the house could not accommodate the growing large numbers of people who were coming to join in prayers and worship. They had to move to Azusa Street, where the greatest revival took place. Then Azusa Street became the house for the world Pentecostal movement.[19]Therefore the Azusa story is exceptional when the roots of Pentecostalism are discussed. Cecil M. Robeck labelled the “ Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles ... the birth place of Pentecostal movement.”[20]Harvey Cox acknowledging the root of Pentecostalism’s origin to be understood with reference William Joseph Seymour.[21]

From Azusa Street, Pentecostalism spread to the other parts of the world by members who experienced the Pentecostal revival and formed Pentecostal Churches.[22]Congregations spread around USA extending to Africa through missionaries that went preach this Pentecostal experience to other parts of the world “ By early 1907 ... entered Mexico, Canada, Western Europe, the

Middle East, West Africa and several countries in Asia”, spreading to Northern Russia, Southern Africa and Eastern and Central Europe. The Apostolic Faith Mission was the first Movement that Mr Seymour established consisting of different denominations with one agenda of Faith.[23] In 1914 was the first “ official statement” of the Classical Pentecostal doctrine of the baptism in the Holy Spirit by the Assemblies of God in the United States.

They are hundreds of Pentecostal denominations and fast growing over the last forty years, David Martin, sociologist who has done a lot of work on the estimates of Pentecostalism has reported it to be the largest global shift in the religious marketplace. He quoted a total number of Pentecostals and charismatics worldwide to at least a least a quarter of a billion by 2002.

[24] This has expanded to the West reaching other countries such as India, China and Chile.[25]

They are here main groups of Pentecostalism identified with their unique beliefs though some aspects might be similar. One of the group is identify by their belief in the work of the Holy Spirit, speaking, in tongues, baptism with the Holy Spirit, the works of grace, salvation and sanctification as continuous in their lives; the other group beliefs ‘ entire sanctification’ over and above some aspects of the above group, called then Wesleyan Holiness; last but not least excludes themselves in the belief of the Trinity aspect of God, called oneness Pentecostals.[26]

## **Main characteristics**

### **Spiritual gifts**

The birth of the Pentecostal movement in the early twentieth century was evidenced by followers of Christ exhibiting the gifts of the Holy Spirit often referred to as the supernatural gifts. It got its roots from the Early Church with ecstatic phenomena gifts of the Holy Spirit.[27]

The experiencing of the Holy Spirit baptism resulting in speaking in tongues in Topeka, Kansas sprang up the twentieth century Pentecostal Movement in 1901. Dayton asserts that the eighteenth century American revivalism, Holiness Movement played a part in its origins.[28] Charles Parham believed there was more on the entire sanctifications, the teachings of the Wesleyans, in his views. Therefore he bestowed sanctification and charismatic power as both part of the second blessing. His views were more extreme than many in the Holiness Movement. The teachings on investigations for signs of sanctification led to questions if this was related to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. As the students were determined for the outward evidence signs of the baptism, speaking in tongues was the first sign of the spiritual gifts

To have a good understanding of what is meant by “ spiritual gifts”, I would consider two definitions which defines spiritual gifts as “...divinely given capacities to perform useful functions for God”[29] Similarly Deffinbaugh defines spiritual gifts as the God-given capacity of every Christian to carry out his function in the body of Christ.[30] The se definitions adequately purvey the Pentecostalism understanding of Spiritual gifts.



These spiritual gifts are believed to have originated at Pentecost as explained in the Book of Acts. Over the period of three years after the Azusa Street revival which sparked the Pentecostal Movement, Seymour saw the restoration not just of speaking in tongues but all gifts of the Holy Spirit.

[31]These are spiritual gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12: 7-11. These gifts can be; speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues, prophesying and healing power.[32]According to Luke;

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability (Acts 2: 1-4 NRSV).

This was a physical evidence of being baptised by the Holy Spirit as they converted and believed in Jesus Christ.

Kenneth Boa describes the gift of tongues as the supernatural ability of a believer to speak in an unlearned language by the speaker enabled by the Lord.[33]This can be interpreted by someone who receives the gift of interpretation of tongues. This is interpretation into the language of the body in which the message is delivered not a strict translation, but an interpretation of the essential content of the tongues message.[34]Critiques of tongues - Thomas Aquinas believed to have been of the Apostles only in the early church to enable them to reach all nations as commissioned but presently it as to be done through language study.[35]There are also those

with the gift of healing gifted to heal the sick. The variety of the gifts can be divided into different sickness, for example some specific gifts are to heal cancer or emotions, mental illness and many more sicknesses.[36]

## **Personal encounter with God**

Access to God matters most to Pentecostals, life controlled by the Holy Spirit. They stress effectiveness the experience of God. What matters most is the felt power of the Spirit in the world, in the church, and in one's own life. Their faith is experiential, living faith in the living God who can miraculously, substantially intervene in the world.[37]For Pentecostals, from history they understood the as direct and immediate and self-authenticating.[38]This is explained in simple terms that Pentecostals understanding of the baptism of the spirit grants the authority by virtue of the individual experience of this powerful encounter with God. Therefore, their belief is that though the Holy Spirit they have a personal encounter the authentic and legitimate experience of God.

## **Power over demons and Satan**

Pentecostals stress the empowerment and the felt power of the Holy Spirit in the world. Their focus and faith is in God who miraculously substantially intervenes in the world. For example, Martin discusses how Pentecostalism unites its belief with the social inspiration and the experience of the Spirit. [39]That is the understanding of the power of the Holy Spirit over any social powers that could be powers of darkness. In short, it is a consideration of two different factors, external (demonic forces) and internal factors (Holy Spirit). These make Pentecostals feel part of the community, as they distinguishes the God and Satan, devil and divine, sickness and health. They believe they <https://assignbuster.com/the-main-characteristics-of-pentecostalism-theology-religion-essay/>

have power over demons, through the Holy Spirit, that they can obtain through prayer. That is power over sin, spiritual blindness, social oppression, and Sickness. They refer this as their spiritual weapons. One of the most factors which contributed to the Growth of Pentecostalism is their belief in deliverance from evil spirits. Anderson, for example, points out that “ the main attraction of Pentecostalism ... is still the emphasis on healing and deliverance from evil.”[40]

Their Theology extends to the apocalyptic belief of the coming of the Kingdom which includes the element of the final victory over Satan and death, which is a spiritual warfare.[41]The term “ spiritual warfare” is referred to evil spiritual forces such as demons including Satan as mythological realities. Thus, the baptism of the Spirit enables the believers to conquer the spiritual battle and overcome the enemy. As Apostle Paul states, “ we live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human standards; for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds...” (2 Corinthians 10: 3-4 NRSV). This is the belief that the Pentecostals have dependence on the Holy Spirit for power to enable them to fight the devil and any principalities of darkness. That is demonic attacks and possessions, physical and emotional sickness, evil spirits and so on.

These claims are biblically based as Pentecostal believes in the true Word of God. Martin and Mullen clarified that “ for Pentecostal the supreme authority is the Bible, the inspired, infallible and inerrant Word of God to which all else must be subject.”[42]Just to mention few examples of bible passages to support these claim of their belief; 1 John 3: 8 which states that “ the Son of <https://assignbuster.com/the-main-characteristics-of-pentecostalism-theology-religion-essay/>

God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil” (NRSV), “ He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Colossians 1: 13 NRSV) and “ Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness” (Matthew 10: 1 NRSV) and many more. Therefore Pentecostals take the word of God seriously and base their belief on what it says.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the essay has examined the origins of Pentecostalism. It has looked at its roots from early church, through the Holiness movements with the teachings of doctrine of sanctification. The teaching about the Holy Spirit and the actual experiencing of its baptism contributed to how Pentecostalism spread to other places. It has also touched on the explanation of charismatic its difference with Pentecostalism. Last but not least, three characteristics of Pentecostalism have been discussed though this is not the exhaustive least, however due to the limitation of the essay, only three were discussed. We have discovered with reaches that Pentecostalism is a growing movement. It has contributed to the inclining of Christianity as it was declining in many parts of the world. Their emphasis being the baptism by the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts that can be received to believers by God’s will.