

Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism is an evangelical charismatic reformation movement which usually traces its roots to an outbreak of tongue-speaking members in Topeka, Kansas, in 1901 under the leadership of Charles Fox Parham, a former Methodist preacher. It was Parham, who formulated the basic Pentecostal doctrine of "initial evidence" after a student in his Bethel Bible School, Agnes Ozman, and experienced glossolalia in January, 1901.

Basically, Pentecostals believe that the experience of the 120 on the day of Pentecost, known as the "baptism in the Holy Spirit," should be normative for all Christians. Most Pentecostals believe, furthermore, that the first sign of "initial evidence" of this second baptism is speaking in a language unknown to the speaker. Although speaking in tongues had appeared in the nineteenth century in both England and America, it had never assumed the importance attributed to it now by the Pentecostals.

Though Pentecostals recognize such sporadic instances of tongue-speaking and other charismatic phenomena throughout the Christian era, they stress the special importance of the Azusa Street revival, which occurred in an abandoned African Methodist Episcopal church in downtown Los Angeles from 1906 to 1909.

In 1906, An abandoned Methodist church at 312 Azusa Street in the industrial section of Los Angeles became the originating center of modern Pentecostalism. William J. Seymour, a mild-mannered black Holiness preacher, founded the Apostolic Faith Gospel Mission on Azusa Street, where a new emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit rapidly became a local sensation and eventually a worldwide phenomenon.

Topeka and Los Angeles events took place in a turn-of-the-century religious environment that encouraged the appearance of such a Pentecostal movement. The major milieu out of which Pentecostalism sprang was the worldwide Holiness movement, which had developed out of nineteenth century American Methodism.

Leaders in this movement were Phoebe Palmer and John Inskip, who emphasized a "second blessing" crisis of sanctification through the "baptism in the Holy Spirit."

English evangelicals also stressed a separate Holy Spirit experience in the Keswick Conventions. From America and England "higher life" Holiness movements spread to many nations of the world, usually under the auspices of Methodist missionaries and traveling evangelists. Although these revivalists did not stress charismatic phenomena, they emphasized a conscious experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit and an expectancy of a restoration of the NT church as a sign of the end of the church age.

In order to distinguish these newer Pentecostals from the older Pentecostal denominations, the word "charismatic" began to be used widely around 1973 to designate the movement in the mainline churches leaving behind the smaller groups. Other teachings that became prominent in this period were the possibility of miraculous divine healing in answer to prayer and the expectation of the imminent premillennial second coming of Christ.

A great interest in the person and work of the Holy Spirit elicited the publication of many books and periodicals devoted to teaching seekers how to receive an "endowment of power" through an experience in the Holy Spirit subsequent to conversion. In the quest to be filled with the Holy Spirit, many testimonies were given concerning emotional experiences which accompanied the "second blessing," as it was called. In the tradition of the American frontier some received the experience with eruptions of joy or shouting, while others wept or spoke of surpassing peace and quietness.

By 1895, a further movement was begun in Iowa which stressed a third blessing called "the fire," which followed the conversion and sanctification experiences already taught by the Holiness movement. The leader of this movement was Benjamin Hardin Irwin from Lincoln, Nebraska, who named his new group the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church. Other "fire-baptized" groups formed during this period which included the Pillar of Fire Church of Denver, Colorado, and the Burning Bush of Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Not only did such Holiness teachers emphasize conscious religious experiences; they tended to encourage persons to seek for them as "crisis" experiences that could be received in an instant of time through prayer and faith. By 1900, the Holiness movement had begun to think of religious experiences more in terms of crises than in gradual categories, so they manufactured their own crisis.

Thus the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church taught instant conversion through the new birth, instant sanctification as a second blessing, instant baptism in the Holy Ghost and fire, instant divine healing through prayer, and the rapture of the Church after the Great Tribulation.

Those teachers of the Keswick persuasion tended to speak of the four cardinal doctrines of the movement. This way of thinking was formalized in A. B. Simpson's four basic doctrines of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, which stressed instant salvation, baptism in the Holy Spirit, divine healing, and the second coming of Christ. These four corrupted doctrines formed the Full-Gospel teachings.

Thus, when tongue-speaking occurred in Topeka in 1901, the only significant addition to the foregoing was to insist that tongue-speaking was the biblical evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit's baptism. All the other teachings and practices of Pentecostalism were adopted completely from the Holiness milieu in which it was born, including its style of worship, its hymnody, and its basic theology, and there were occasional charges of demon possession and mental instability.

It was inevitable that such a vigorous movement would suffer controversy and division in its formative stages. Though the movement has been noted for its many sub-movements, only two divisions have been considered major. These involved teachings concerning sanctification by good works and the erroneous doctrine of the Trinity. Other doctrinal errors were ignored.

William H. Durham of Chicago began teaching his "finished work" theory, which emphasized sanctification as a progressive work following conversion with baptism in the Holy Spirit following as the second blessing.

The Assemblies of God, which was formed in 1914, based its theology on Durham's teachings and soon became the largest Pentecostal denomination in the world. Most of the Pentecostal groups that began after 1914 were based on the model of the Assemblies of God. They included the Pentecostal Church of God, the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (founded in 1927 by Aimee Semple McPherson), and the Open Bible Standard Church.

A more serious schism grew out of the "oneness" or "Jesus only" controversy, which began in 1911 in Los Angeles. Led by Glen Cook and Frank Ewart, this movement rejected the teaching of the Trinity and taught that Jesus Christ was at the same time Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and that the only biblical mode of water baptism was administered in Jesus' name and then was valid only if accompanied with glossolalia.

This movement spread rapidly in the infant Assemblies of God after 1914 and resulted in a schism in 1916, which later produced the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World and the United Pentecostal Church. Through the years other schisms occurred over lesser doctrinal disputes, personality clashes, and leadership conflicts producing such movements as the Church of God of Prophecy and the Congregational Holiness Church.

Rapid growth brought forth several blessed divisions creating numerous groups around the world penetrating the homes of the middle class to lose their image of being disinherited churches of the lower classes. Added to their four basic doctrines was prosperity theology. The emergence of healing evangelists such as Oral Roberts and Jack Coe in the 1950s brought greater interest and acceptance to the movement.

The TV ministry of Oral Roberts also brought Pentecostalism into the homes of the average American. The founding of the Full Gospel Business Men in 1948 brought the Pentecostal message to a whole new class of middleclass professional and business men, helping further to change the image of the movement. Pentecostalism entered a new phase in 1960 with the appearance of "neo-Pentecostalism" in the traditional churches in the United States.

The first well-known person to openly experience glossolalia and remain within his church was Dennis Bennett, an Episcopal priest in Van Nuys, California. Although forced to leave his parish in Van Nuys because of controversy over his experience, Bennett was invited to pastor an inner city Episcopal parish in Seattle, Washington.

The church in Seattle experienced rapid growth after the introduction of Pentecostal worship, becoming a center of neo-Pentecostalism in the northwestern United States. This new wave of Pentecostalism soon spread to other denominations in the United States and also to many nations around the world. In 1966 Pentecostalism entered the Roman Catholic Church as the result of a weekend retreat at Duquesne University led by theology professors Ralph Keiffer and Bill Story. . The movement had spread to Catholic churches in over a hundred nations by 1980, and accepted without opposition among parishioners.



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