

E: Religious identity through religious experience



Is this what we typically expect of
Christian worship?

Worship in a Charismatic church might include:

- Worship bands
- Speaking in tongues
- Laying on of hands during the Eucharist
- Prayer meetings focused on the 'power of the Spirit'

Charismatic (*Greek: charismata meaning 'gifts of grace'*) is the word the Apostle Paul uses to refer to special qualities that Christians receive through the HS. There are several passages in the NT that list these spiritual gifts, but they don't present a standardised version. Instead, they focus on the many ways that Christians can express God's grace.

1 Corinthians 12-14 contains the most extensive discussion of the spiritual gifts. In these chapters, Paul is concerned that the Church becomes aware of the true purpose of spiritual gifts: to strengthen the body of Christ.

Paul uses the picture of the body when he writes about spiritual gifts. Christians are members of the body; Jesus is the head.

Just as parts of the human body have different functions, so Christians experience a variety of spiritual gifts. These are given by the Holy Spirit to strengthen the body of Christ in its worship, witness and service.

Paul discouraged 'chaotic' practice of the gifts (where multiple/simultaneous displays of tongues would cause a confusing babble of noise). Instead, he preferred that if you were speaking in tongues, this was kept for private worship unless the experience was interpreted in an orderly fashion – so everyone could understand what was being communicated.

Introduction to the Charismatic Movement

- **Charismatic** = Gifts of grace (Greek). Focuses on the Holy Spirit.
- **Biblical Evidence** = Romans 12:6-8. The story of the Pentecost in ACTS. 1 Peter 4
- **Pentecostalism** = Focuses on Acts. Early 20th Century movement.
- **Examples of Pentecostal Churches** = Audacious! In Manchester. Hillsong.
- **Key Quote** = 'Pentecostals have turned the narrative of the Luke—Acts as the main source for their Theology' - Cartledge

What is Pentecostalism?

Pentecostalism is a form of Christianity that emphasises the work of the Holy Spirit and the direct experience of the presence of God by the believer. Pentecostals believe that faith must be powerfully experiential, and not something found merely through ritual or thinking.

Pentecostalism is energetic and dynamic. Its members believe they are driven by the power of God moving within them.

Pentecostalism is not a church in itself, but a movement that includes many different churches. It is also a movement of renewal or revival within other denominations.

It's not always easy to see if a church is Pentecostal because many Pentecostal denominations don't include the word 'Pentecostal' in their name.

In the West, Pentecostalism is strong in African-American churches and the American and Australian 'mega-churches' such as Hillsong Church. One of the world's largest churches - the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea, where up to 250,000 people attend each Sunday - is a Pentecostal church.

Many scholars trace the beginnings of Pentecostalism to a temporary Bible school set up by Charles Fox Parham in Topeka, Kansas.

Parham believed that the HS was going to descend in a special way on the church. He asked his students to read the book of Acts and pray to receive the Spirit.

One of his students, Agnes Ozman, reported to speak in tongues on 1st January 1901 – many other students soon followed.

Biblical Evidence for the Charismatic Movement

Romans 12:6-8	1 Corinthians 12:8-11	1 Corinthians 12:28	Ephesians 4:11	1 Peter 4:11
Prophecy Serving Teaching Exhorting Giving Leadership Compassion	Word of wisdom Word of knowledge Faith Healing Miracles Prophecy Discernment of Spirits Tongues Interpretation of tongues	Apostles Prophets Teachers Deeds of power Healing Serving Leadership Tongues	Apostles Prophets Evangelists Pastors Teachers	Speaking for God Serving

The Development of the Charismatic Movement post 1960

- **The beginning of the Charismatic movement** = began in the mid 20th Century. First CofE congregation announced itself charismatic in 1963. Western.
- **1960s onwards** = Dennis Bennet wrote a book called '9 O'Clock in the Morning' which promoted Charismatic movement.
- **The Charismatic Movement in the Catholic Church** = Initially wary of the movement as they believed it contradicted old doctrine about worship. Vatican II they became more open. Accepted that some believers want 'renewal'
- **Lumen Gentium** = Catholic Document. Accepted that the Holy Spirit does give gifts to everyone – but warned about proper use
- **Other expressions of the Charismatic Movement** = Restorationism relates to God restoring his Kingdom in the last days. Anti-denominational Christian movement in Britain

Main Beliefs and Implications for Christian Practice in the Experience of Believers and Christian Communities

- 1. **Speaking in Tongues** = Glossolalia. Xenolalia. Relates to ACTS and the Pentecost. St Paul was wary of the use of glossolalia.
- 2. **Prophecy** = The idea that Charismatic individuals are God's messengers. Speak the language of Holy Spirit.
- 3. **Healing** = Charismatic healings can be physical and mental. Power of the Holy Spirit.
- 4. **Inspiration in Worship** = Joyful and exuberant worship. Singing / Rock bands (i.e. twelve 24) / jumping / whooping

Philosophical Challenges

- **The set criteria for Christians for accept a charismatic experience as true** = i) the messages must be a prophecy ii) The experience must provide spiritual fruits iii) the message must be supported by the leaders of the Church iv) the experience must affirm that Jesus is Lord
- **HOWEVER, The verification of charismatic experiences** = AJ Ayer. Says the experiences can't be verified so are meaningless. Glossolalia is meaningless.
- **Claims for healing** = Ayer criticises the claims for healing – says they aren't valid.
- **Natural explanations for charismatic experiences** = Natural explanations remove God from the equation. Could the healings simply be Psychological (Freud) or Sociological
- **Can we justify a charismatic experience?** = i) Not all charismatic Christians are lunatics ii) maybe the brain is involved *without* saying the experience only comes from the brain iii) The healings are part of a cumulative case for God's existence

The Charismatic Movement is appealing to some Christians because it offers a different experiences of God than a simply intellectual relationship. Charismatic believers claim to have direct 'experience' of God's presence; the fact that so many people become believers after observing and experiencing the gifts of the Spirit seems to confirm this belief.

However, churches have a set of criteria to judge the veracity of experiences. These vary between denominations but usually include the following:

- Do the messages of the experience conform to the teaching of the Bible?
- Does the experience produce spiritual fruits (like love, joy and peace)?
 - Is the message supportive of the direction set by church leaders?
- Do the experiences affirm that Jesus is Lord, to be esteemed as God and followed?

5. (a) Explain the main beliefs and practices of the Charismatic Movement. [AO1 20]

This was answered fairly well with most candidates being able to identify accurately what the Charismatic movement was. The candidates that performed well on this question made accurate links to the Bible and showed the influence of the passages on the beliefs and practices, there were candidates with some frequency who attempted to discuss the beliefs and practices of the movement without mention of the Holy Spirit. Weaker candidates limited their answers to the superficial characteristics of the Charismatic movement such as lively music and freedom of movement. Most candidates were able to refer to 'tongues' and supernatural healing being characteristic of the Charismatic movement. There was not a great deal of reference in answers to the gifts of the Holy Spirit in any great detail nor reference to the interdenominational aspect of the charismatic movement.

Features of stronger responses:

- accurate understanding of the Charismatic Movement;
- good, detailed discussion about key features.

Features of weaker responses:

- a general, descriptive summary of style of worship;
- seeing Charismatic as simply Pentecostal.

A02 = 'The Charismatic Movement has more weaknesses than strengths'. Discuss this view

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
It is a large movement – the fastest growing religion in the world	The Catholic Church is still the largest denomination and doesn't wholly embrace the movement
It goes beyond dry intellectualism and passive participation	It isn't fair to say non-charismatic churches are overly intellectual
It recognises that each Christian individual has 'a gift'	The gifts seen in the Charismatic movement aren't exactly the 'gifts' that were seen in the New Testament
It recognises the importance of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity	It is unfair on the individuals who don't experience the 'Holy Spirit'

- (b) 'The Charismatic Movement has more weaknesses than strengths.'**
Evaluate this view. [AO1 30]

This was generally answered well, but some candidates strayed into simply providing a narrative of strengths and weaknesses rather than a specific evaluation of the statement. Those that answered part (a) well were able to show the links between the Holy Spirit and the Charismatic Movement and its influence on the main beliefs and practises. Without this link candidates were not able to fully demonstrate a 'thorough, accurate and relevant knowledge'. However, weaker candidates seemed to perform better than part (b) and most candidates approached the question from the modern movement that was accessible to all denominations of Christianity versus whether the experiences were verifiable. Better answers were able to include some excellent synoptic links with religious experiences and religious language.

Features of stronger responses:

- good debate about the role of the Holy Spirit;
- accurate understanding of the impact of strengths and weaknesses within Christianity as a whole.

Features of weaker answer responses:

- a general summary of a strength or weakness;
- tended to just judge the authenticity of the charismatic experience.

AO2 = 'The Naturalistic Explanations for a Charismatic Experience Undermine its Value'. Discuss this view

DOES UNDERMINE VALUE	EXPERIENCE STILL HAS VALUE