

# History of the Charismatic Movement

By Pastor David C. Forsyth

## The First Wave 1906-1960

April 18, 1906 is generally credited as the beginning date for the modern Pentecostal Movement. On that date at the Apostolic Faith Mission located on Azusa Street in Los Angeles, there occurred an outbreak of “speaking in tongues.” The pastor of the little church was William Seymour (1870-1922), who in close association with his mentor Charles Parham (1873-1929) had developed the doctrine that speaking in tongues was the evidence of the “baptism in the Spirit.” The Azusa Street revival lasted until 1909 and was visited by thousands, although shortly after its beginnings Parham and Seymour suffered an irreparable breach over Seymour’s refusal to prohibit seances and occult trances from the revival services. It is generally conceded that virtually every Pentecostal Movement worldwide can trace its origins directly to the Azusa Street revival.<sup>1</sup>

The theological roots of Pentecostalism lie in the Holiness Movement pioneered by John Wesley (1703-1791). Wesley promoted the idea of “Christian Perfectionism” which he defined as freedom from self-will and a desire for nothing but the holy and perfect will of God. Charles Finney (1792-1875) later equated the idea of Wesley’s second work of grace with the concept of the baptism of the Spirit.

As the Pentecostal Movement developed through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the emphasis on divine healing was added to the mandate for speaking in tongues. This unbiblical emphasis on healing, coupled with the many charlatans which associated themselves with healing services, prompted B.B. Warfield to write his 1917 book Counterfeit Miracles. Healing ministries received national prominence when, beginning in 1948 Oral Roberts began healing crusades, which he later began to televise.

## The Second Wave 1960- 1982

Whereas the Pentecostal Movement was for the most part a separate movement outside the mainline denominations, the Second Wave or Charismatic Movement was very much a mainstreaming of Pentecostal theology. Beginning in 1951, Demos Shakarian, a Southern California millionaire businessman, launched the Full Gospel Businessmen’s Fellowship Int’l, whose stated purpose was to spread the Pentecostal message of tongues and healing via nonsectarian luncheons and conferences.<sup>2</sup>

On April 3, 1960 the Charismatic Movement went public when Father Dennis Bennett, an Episcopal priest announced to his Van Nuys, CA,

---

<sup>1</sup> Christian History, “*The Rise of Pentecostalism*,” Issue 58, (Vol. XVII, No. 2) pg. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Michael G. Moriarty, *The New Charismatics*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1992, pg. 66.

congregation that he had personally spoken in tongues and that he believed that this was the pattern for the church. Later in 1966 the Charismatic Movement penetrated the Roman Catholic Church where it was readily received by a laity and clergy opened, via Vatican II, to new ideas on church renewal.

The Charismatic Movement differs from old line Pentecostalism in several significant ways including a rejection of the necessity of speaking in tongues as a sign of the baptism of the Spirit. However tongues speaking does remain a very important element in most Charismatic circles. Today the Charismatic Movement has penetrated every mainline denomination, and has affected virtually every church in the world, and although the Charismatic Movement is far from a monolith it does teach and exhibit certain distinctives such as:<sup>3</sup>

- ❑ **Experiencing Jesus** in a personal encounter puts one into the position of receiving the baptism of the Spirit, which allows the individual to have Jesus not just as Savior but as Lord.
- ❑ **Power** gained through the baptism of the Spirit brings victorious Christian living.
- ❑ **Worship** is at a higher dimension because of the baptism of the Spirit.
- ❑ **Prayer** is more fervent and successful (including praying in unknown tongues) because of the baptism of the Spirit.
- ❑ **Sign Gifts** as listed in I Cor. 12:8-10 are meant for the church today.
- ❑ **New revelation** is given today as God speaks directly and regularly to His people just like in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.
- ❑ **The Bible** is exalted and believed as a source of divine revelation, although “God reveals deeper truths to those who have the anointing.”
- ❑ **Demonic activity** is greatly emphasized, as well as the Christian’s need to engage in deliverance ministries.
- ❑ **Evangelism** is emphasized and practiced based upon the baptism of the Spirit granting greater power and effectiveness to ones witness.

### **The Third Wave 1982- Present**

The Third Wave or Signs and Wonders Movement originated in 1982 with John Wimber (1934-1997) when he left his association with the Calvary Chapels to pastor a church in Anaheim, CA, called “The Vineyard.” Also in 1982 Wimber began teaching a class at Fuller Seminary called “Signs, Wonders, and Church Growth” which as part of the class time included healing the sick and casting out demons. It was in the context of Fuller Seminary that Wimber connected with C. Peter Wagner, an “expert” on church growth from the Fuller World School of Missions, who in 1983 coined the names 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> waves.

Wimber was of the view that present evangelism is not truly effective because it is not accompanied by the “in-breaking of the kingdom” in signs and wonders, as was true of Jesus’ ministry. Wimber coined the term

---

<sup>3</sup> This helpful analysis was provided by Moriarty in *The New Charismatics*, pages 71-73.

“Power Encounters” for these supernatural manifestations of God in the life of Christ. Under Wimber’s leadership the Anaheim Vineyard Church grew rapidly and spawned thousands of other Vineyard churches, which are affiliated in the Association of Vineyard Churches. This association produces their own statement of faith, has their own leadership and in many ways acts as a denomination. For example, in 1995, the leadership of the Vineyard Association disfellow-shipped the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship for their unbiblical practices connected with the “Toronto Blessing.”<sup>4</sup>

Although the Vineyard Association is neither Pentecostal nor Charismatic in a classical sense, they do hold to a number of doctrinal positions that concern us.

- ❑ **Sign Gifts** – They believe that the gifts of prophecy, tongues, healings, and miracles are all continuing today.
- ❑ **Spiritual Warfare Movement** – They believe that Christians can be demon possessed.
- ❑ **Highly Ecumenical** – experience rather than doctrine draws people to the movement.
- ❑ **Power Evangelism** – They believe that for evangelism to be truly effective (especially in 3<sup>rd</sup> world settings) it must be accompanied by signs and wonders.

### **Where Do We Go From Here?**

When subjective experience rather than careful examination of the Scriptures becomes the driving force behind your theology, then you are open to all sorts of abuses. While we admire the desire for close fellowship with God, and the desire to see His work grow and expand in this world, we believe that the Pentecostal Movement and its stepchildren are trading the birthright of the Holy Scriptures for a bowl of pottage named experience. We hope and pray that leaders will arise in these movements who will bring the people back to the Word of God.

We trust that this short study has been profitable for you and contributes to your obedient walk of faith. *Psalm 119:105*

*This article is copyright 2000 by David C. Forsyth. This article may be quoted, in part or in whole, without permission.*

You may contact the author through: <http://www.christianfallacies.com/contact.php>

For further study we recommend the following:

1. Christian History Magazine - “The Rise of Pentecostalism,” Issue 58, (Vol. XVII, No. 2).
2. The New Charismatics – Michael Moriarty
3. Strange Fire? – Eric Wright
4. Perfectionism – B.B. Warfield
5. Counterfeit Miracles – B.B. Warfield

---

<sup>4</sup> Eric E. Wright, *Strange Fire?*, Evangelical Press, 1996, pg. 12.