Introduction

Rising out of the Holiness Movement, Pentecostalism began in the early years of the twentieth century in the Los Angeles area. It was soon organized into denominations, such as the Foursquare Church and the Assemblies of God.

The Charismatic Movement arose in the 1960s when people with Pentecostal beliefs migrated into mainline denominations. The decline of denominations in the US in the second half of the twentieth century allowed Pentecostal theology to invade churches that were historically opposed to those beliefs.

Pentecostalism is denominationally based while Charismatics exist in many types of churches. Beginning in the 1970s, Charismatics began to establish churches that multiplied into pseudo-denominations, with freedom allowed within these associations. Examples include The Vineyard and Calvary Chapel.

The History of Pentecostalism

The beginning of Pentecostalism dates from 1900 among people with a desire for revivalism and the return of Christ. It grew out of the Holiness Movement when Charles Parham left the Methodist church in pursuit of freedom to preach as he desired and began teaching the importance of speaking in tongues and Spirit baptism. His influence upon African-American preacher William Seymour led to the Asusa Street Revival in downtown Los Angeles, considered to be the beginning of Pentecostalism in 1906.

The Los Angeles Times reported, “Meetings are held in a tumble-down shack on Azusa Street, and the devotees of the weird doctrine practice the most fanatical rites, preach the wildest theories and work themselves into a state of mad excitement in their peculiar zeal. African Americans and a sprinkling of whites compose the congregation, and night is made hideous in the neighborhood by the howlings of the worshippers, who spend hours swaying forth and back in a nerve racking attitude of prayer and supplication. They claim to have the "gift of tongues" and be able to understand the babel.”[4]

Pentecostal denominations sprung up because Holiness churches were not receptive to their teaching on the Spirit and miracles. Their emotion based ministry found a ready audience also with foreigners, who brought Pentecostalism rapidly to other countries.
Pentecostalism would soon split into a non-Trinitarian branch, which became known as Oneness Pentecostalism; the largest existing group with this defective view is the United Pentecostal Church.

**Aberrant Theology of Pentecostalism**

1. Experiential theology is advanced above biblical theology.

The issue of how our personal experience with God produces our understanding of spiritual truth is central to the aberrant theology of Pentecostal and Charismatic teaching. The Word of God, not our experiences, must guide us into truth (John 14:26; 2 Peter 1:4).

It is this emphasis on personal experience that negates the doctrine of God’s grace in salvation, leading to the teaching that a believer is able to lose their salvation. It also leads to an emotional element being depended upon with the gospel in order to assist conversion.

2. The baptism of the Holy Spirit as a post-salvation crisis resulting in sanctification.

This idea of a “second blessing” of the Holy Spirit, necessary for holiness, is contradicted by Ephesians 1:3 which confirms that every true believer has all of the Holy Spirit. Holiness is not dependent upon how much of the Holy Spirit a believer possesses but rather how much of the believer the Holy Spirit controls.

3. Tongues Speaking as the experience that necessarily validates the baptism of the Spirit.

Even if one believes that the biblical spiritual gift of tongues speaking (the ability to speak in a language one has never learned) still exists, 1 Corinthians 12:30 plainly states that not all believers will speak in tongues.

4. Physical healing as being provided for in the atonement of Christ through faith.

Pentecostalism holds a false view of the phrase “by His wounds you were healed” (1 Peter 2:24) by believing this speaks of physical healing. The immediate context of this healing is clearly spiritual.

5. Healings and miracles allegedly consistent with the apostolic era are expected.

This is further misunderstanding of the nature of miracles in the work of God on earth.

6. An unhealthy exaltation of Pentecostal leaders.

From its inception, Pentecostalism has been driven by leadership personalities which have lead to a wide variety of erroneous and bizarre teachings.
Survey of Pentecostal Denominations

1. Assemblies of God

Founded in 1914 in Hot Springs, Arkansas, the Assemblies of God denomination is rooted in the advent of Pentecostalism in the prior decade. It presently is one of the largest denominations with around three million members in the USA and over sixty-seven million adherents worldwide. It embodies the essence of traditional Pentecostalism as the leading denomination within Pentecostalism.

Some of the most well-known Assembly of God ministers have been television evangelists such as Jimmy Swaggart, Jim Bakker (founder of PTL club), David Yonggi Cho (largest church in the world in Korea), Paul Crouch (TBN), Benny Hinn (briefly), Brian Houston (Hillsong), Gene Scott (co-founder of Oral Roberts University).

2. The Church of God in Christ

The Church of God in Christ has been the largest and most influential African-American Pentecostal group with over six million members in the USA. Since its turn to Pentecostalism in 1907, there have been numerous separations that led to other Pentecostal denominations, such as the Church of Christ (Holiness).

3. Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee)

The Church of God traces itself back to 1886 but it adopted the Pentecostal teaching of Spirit baptism after the influence of the Asusa Street meetings in 1907. It had already held to the error of entire sanctification through their history in the Holiness Movement and they also believe in the practice of foot washing as a Christian Sacrament. It has over one million members in the United States alone.

4. Foursquare Church

Founded by flamboyant female Pentecostal evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson in 1923, the Foursquare Church has eight million members worldwide. Along with standard Pentecostal teaching, the Foursquare Church also teach that perfection from sin is possible for a consecrated believer. The leading Foursquare leader in recent decades has been Jack Hayford with the Church on the Way in Van Nuys, California.

The History of the Charismatic Movement

The beginning of the Charismatic Movement is typically dated to Easter of 1960 when rector Dennis Barrett spoke of his Pentecostal experience to his congregation of St. Marks Episcopal Church in Van Nuys, California. This marked the spread of Pentecostalism into non-Pentecostal denominations, which has been rigidly opposed to their theology. In keeping with the decidedly negative view that Christians outside of Pentecostal denominations had of their doctrine, Bennett was forced to resign his position.
Nevertheless, the Charismatic Movement found an initial response within main-line denominations and Catholicism. It was a Lutheran pastor, Harald Bredesen, who labeled his belief “charismatic” after the Greek word for “gift of grace.” It would take a few more years before the Charismatic Movement would become influential within Evangelical Churches. In addition to the inter-denominational nature of the Charismatics, the biggest difference compared with Pentecostalism was the widespread acceptance that it enjoyed among the larger Christian community.

Aberrant Theology of the Charismatic Movement

1. Tongues Speaking

While many Charismatics would not insist on speaking in tongues as evidence of the filling of the Spirit, they nevertheless confuse the purpose and nature of biblical tongues speaking. The Charismatic view of tongue speaking considers this either an ecstatic utterance of a message in an unknown language or as a heavenly prayer language. There is often a distinction made between tongues speaking in 1 Corinthians and in Acts.

While there is no reason to view a change in tongues speaking in the New Testament, Acts 2 clearly shows that the miracle of tongues was understood by those listeners in their home language. The Charismatic view advances an emotional experience at the expense of confusing the biblical understanding of the gift of tongues.

2. Healing and miracles

Like Pentecostalism, Charismatics believe that healing is found in the atonement of Christ. Healing ministries have become a mark of Charismatics, leading to an unwarranted expectation of healing by followers and the disruption of faith that follows. Similarly to tongues speaking, there is wide difference between what we read in the Bible and what is being done by Charismatics.

3. Prophecy

Perhaps the most disturbing aberration of the Charismatic theology is the abundance of supposed prophetic messages. It is very common for revelation that is ascribed to God to be communicated among Charismatics. People who erroneously speak on behalf of God are practicing a serious evil deed.

4. Arminian Theology

Very commonly, Charismatics believe that the grace of God can be resisted in salvation and that a Christian is able to lose their salvation through sinful behavior. It is only in recent years that any Charismatic leader has taught otherwise and those are very small in number. Their view of the work of man in salvation explains much of the overemphasis on emotionalism and manipulation of people within Charismatic circles.
Survey of Charismatic Entities

1. Charismatic Denominational Churches

As noted, what differentiated Charismatics from Pentecostals in the early years was that Charismatics attended non-Pentecostal Churches, thus influencing doctrine. This resulted in a large number of Lutheran, Episcopal, Methodist, Baptist and even Catholic churches becoming Charismatic in their teaching during the 1960s and 70s. These churches retain a denominational tie with their historic roots but are functional closer to Pentecostal churches in their practice. The fruit of the Charismatic influence is a diminishing of doctrinal concerns that lead to the denominational formation in the first place.

2. Word Faith Movement/Prosperity Teaching

The Word Faith Movement is based on a belief that the validity of a person’s faith can be seen in his abundance of material and physical blessing. The power of faith can be accessed through our positive confession that then opens God’s work of healing and financial blessing. Faith is not placed in Christ but rather in our ability to have faith.

The Father of the Word Faith Movement was Kenneth Hagin and current television personalities like Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, Joyce Meyer, Fred Price, Joel Osteen and many more fill the airwaves this this heresy. Hillsong Churches, under the leadership of Brian and Bobbie Houston are the fastest growing manifestation of this aberrant theology. While this seems to be the antithesis of the life of Christ and His followers, it is remarkable how few within the Charismatic Movement will openly denounce these false teachers.

3. Third Wave Movement/Vineyard Churches

Over 1,500 churches exist that associate with Vineyard Churches or the Vineyard Movement. The pivotal figure in the Vineyard Movement was John Wimber, whose church became the flagship church of the Vineyard in 1977. Wimber’s emphasis on Kingdom Theology, or “doin’ the stuff that Jesus did” spawned the “third wave movement” with Fuller Seminary’s C. Peter Wagner, emphasizing the role of “signs and wonders” in ministry. “Third wave” in is comparison to Pentecostalism (“first wave”) and the Charismatic inroads into mainline denominations (“second wave”). Wayne Grudem has been a leading theologian of this.

The Pentecostal teaching of Spirit baptism after salvation is no longer held to but the words of prophecy are frequent. From the Vineyard Movement has come the Kansas City Prophets (Mike Bickle, Paul Cain, Bob Jones) with the resulting false prophecy bringing a split with the Vineyard in the early 1990s. Mike Bickle continues his errors today in Kansas City’s International House of Prayer. In 1994 the Toronto Vineyard came under scrutiny due to a practice known as “Holy Laughter” or “the Toronto Blessing.” These excesses led the Vineyard to split with this sub-movement as well.
A few seminary professors such as Wayne Grudem, Gorden Fee and Jack Deere have bolstered the Third Wave Movement. Grudem’s defense of the prophetic teaching of Vineyard Churches has been to argue that New Testament prophecy was not the same as Old Testament prophecy and could be erroneous. This teaching provided cover for their prophets who invariably would be error prone, yet without biblical basis.

4. Calvary Chapel

Calvary Chapel numbers over 1,000 Charismatic churches. In addition, some ministries have been connected with the Calvary Chapel Fellowship of Churches, such as Greg Laurie and the Harvest Crusade, and also Maranatha Music.

Their approach has been more focused on the teaching of the Bible than most of their fellow Charismatics and thus they have avoided many of the problems of their fellow Charismatics. Indeed, they have been helpful in opposing some of the excesses of the Movement.

However, their advocacy of additional revelation from God outside of the Bible has not served the cause of Christ and has left them with little basis for opposing extra-biblical revelation that they themselves support.

5. Open But Cautious

Many large church pastors fall into a neutral zone of not promoting Charismatic teaching per se but who not willing to oppose it either. This is driven more by a desire to be inclusive of more people than a search for truth. Their openness to the Charismatic Movement leads to an increasing Charismatic theological influence.

6. Reformed Charismatics

Recently, a few Charismatics have arisen with a Calvinistic persuasion. Men such as John Piper (Desiring God), Wayne Grudum, Matt Chandler (Acts 29 network of churches), Josh Harris and C.J. Mahaney (Sovereign Grace Ministries) have taught the sovereignty of God in salvation while holding forth the belief that sign gifts continue today and additional prophetic revelation is possible.

These men are on the opposite end of the spectrum from the Word Faith part of the Charismatic Movement. They are closer to the Calvary Chapel teachers except with regard to Calvary Chapel’s belief in man’s free will in salvation.

However, reformed Charismatics retain the very doctrine that makes them Charismatics and therefore undermine the authority of the Scripture when allowing the opportunity for prophecy. Significant concern exists with Reformed Charismatics in light of the willingness of cessationists to join with them in ministry, thus validating their teaching and fostering a following of their ministry that allows for false prophecy.
Conclusion

The end result of Pentecostalism and its offspring has been undeniably negative.

1. Elevating experience over biblical truth thus centering God’s authority on man’s internal feelings and experiences rather than the Word of God.

2. Propagating, supporting and defending false prophets who pretend to speak for God when they do not.

3. Confusing the majority of Christians regarding the nature of miracles, tongues speaking, healing, with their redefinitions serving to depreciate the real Divine acts of the Bible by equivocating them with modern sideshow performances in order to explain the complete absence of biblical sign gifts.

4. Defaming God’s name by giving people false hope in something that God never promised in this lifetime.

5. Avoiding any critique of their teaching by shaming those who dare to offer a biblical assessment.