

BOOK PROSPECTUS

The Blessings of the Spirit: Pentecostals and Charismatics within American Life (tentative title)

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Background to the Volume:

Previous studies of pentecostal and charismatics have been largely confined to the theological and social roots of the movements (e.g., Anderson, 1979; Dayton 1987; Goff 1988; Cox 1995), qualitative studies of particular expressions of such movements (e.g., McGaw 1980; McGuire 1982; Nietz 1987), or studies of particular pentecostal denominations (e.g., Poloma 1989; Blumhofer 1993.)

Nature of the Proposed Volume:

The volume is designed to provide the first major empirical study of the size, the religious beliefs and practices, and the social and political characteristics of Pentecostal and charismatic Christians within American life today. It will do so largely through the analytical lens of social movement analysis, as the Pentecostal and charismatic movements can be viewed, in part, as constituting movements that seek certain kinds of religious and social change.

The study is based primarily on three national surveys conducted during the course of the 1992, 1996, and 2000 presidential elections, with each survey containing more than 4000 randomly selected respondents (for a total of over 12,000 respondents during the course of the decade). Each of the three studies contained a wide variety of religious measures that enables one to identify Pentecostal and charismatic respondents through a multiplicity of measures: (1) various doctrinal questions, (2) very precise measures of denominational membership that enable one to determine whether the respondent belongs to a Pentecostal denomination, (3) questions that tap identification as a Pentecostal or as a charismatic, and (4) questions tapping whether, and to what extent, one speaks in tongues. Together, these various measures enable the analysts to identify Pentecostal and charismatic Christians with a very high degree of accuracy. Moreover, given the number of respondents surveyed, a sufficient number of Pentecostal and charismatic

Christians are identified that enable within group comparisons to be made (e.g., between younger and older generations of Pentecostal and charismatic Christians and between more lowly and more highly educated Pentecostals and charismatic Christians).

At times, depending upon the issue at hand, these data will be supplemented by additional data that the authors have collected. These include random surveys of clergy of Pentecostal denominations (e.g. the Assemblies of God clergy in 1989 and 2001, and the Church of God in Christ or COGIC clergy in 2001) as well as surveys of religious activists conducted in 1991 that include a large number of Pentecostal and charismatic respondents (including, for example, random surveys of members of Focus on the Family, Concerned Women for America, Prison Fellowship, Bread for the World).

This book seeks, first of all, to define the contemporary religious beliefs and practices of “spirit-filled” Christians today. While it is clear what the doctrinal positions of Pentecostals were historically, it is far from clear whether the religious practices of Pentecostals today reflect their doctrinal positions. For example, when noting that many members of the denomination no longer possess the gift of tongues, a recent leader of the Assemblies of God lamented “We may be Pentecostal in doctrine, but not in experience.” Likewise, the integration of Pentecostals within American evangelicalism (e.g., through membership in the National Association of Evangelicals) may have affected both adherence to distinctive theological beliefs and normative expectations with regard to religious behavior among Pentecostals. Likewise, the emergence of another distinct, but related, Spirit-filled movement (the charismatic movement) in religious traditions once thought to be outside the ranks of “the saved”—namely, the Roman Catholic Church—may also have modified and altered the doctrinal beliefs and religious practices exhibited by those affiliated with historic Pentecostal denominational life.

Second, the book seeks to examine Pentecostals and charismatics socially both in terms of their social demographic characteristics, but also in terms of the social networks and social perspectives. In particular, given the relatively large numbers of both black and white Pentecostals and charismatics, patterns of social interaction, perceived proximities to other social groups, racial attitudes, and social priorities will be examined in terms of differences within the Spirit-filled movements as well as between those within and those outside the ranks of the Spirit-filled.

Finally, the book seeks to analyze the political nature of the Spirit-filled movements by emphasizing the ideas that serve to legitimate political action, the identities that tie collective concerns with individual interests, and the integration of members within social networks as a means by which their members are mobilized politically. In so doing, the focus of the book is on the “mass base” of these religious movements.

The volume is to be scholarly in nature, yet understandable for college students and educated laity. While the volume will be based upon analyses of the data patterns that result from the three national surveys noted above, such analyses will be based large on frequency distributions and cross-tabulations of the data. Multivariate analyses will be kept to a minimum, but will be employed when necessary to discern particular causal factors related membership within such “Spirit-filled” movements. As a result, the chapters of the volume will be written to be highly accessible—accessible to undergraduates and educated church laity, yet of theoretical and empirical significance to many scholars and clergy as well.

Organization of the Volume:

Chapter 1 is an introductory chapter. As such, it serves to address three different matters. First, it provides a brief introduction to the Spirit-filled movements in terms of their religious significance (e.g., in terms of its “reach” across major religious divisions and its effects on worship styles) and their social and political presence in American life today (e.g., in terms of televangelists and religious television). Second, it examines the diversity of these religious movements in terms of its leading figures and its social location—raising issues of the extent to which such religionists might be viewed in terms of some analytical whole. And, finally, the chapter provides an outline of the remainder of the book in terms of which each chapter seeks to address.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the history of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements. The discussion aims to illuminate the character of these Spirit-filled movements and to place their contemporary patterns within their proper historic context. The chapter begins by discussing a variety of ideas that existed prior to the emergence of the Pentecostal movement at the beginning of the twentieth century, how the Pentecostal movement brought together these particular ideas in an innovative fashion, and how, over time, that movement has “institutionalized.” The chapter then continues by discussing the charismatic movement, and how it emerged in the latter part of this century outside of Pentecostalism, representing a new development in the history of these Spirit-filled movements. Chapter 2 seeks not only to summarize the history of these movements, but to do so through the lens of social movement analysis by tying together such historical developments with propositions and generalizations tied to social movement theories.

Chapter 3 is more “foundational” and analytical in nature. The major question to be addressed is this: What is the relative size of these Spirit-filled movements today at the turn of the millennium? However, to answer this basic question, it is necessary, first of all, to address the issue of how members of these religious movements are to be identified and what consequences flow from the use of different analytical approaches. Different approaches are discussed, and the measurement strategy employed in the analysis of the book is presented. The chapter then concludes with an assessment of the relative size of the Spirit-filled movements, in terms of both the core and the periphery of these movements—as well as an assessment of the relative size of the “sympathizers” who exist outside the movement.

Chapter 4 examines these Spirit-filled movements in terms of their religious and social characteristics. First, the religious beliefs and practices of members of these movements will be compared with the religious beliefs and practices exhibited by members of other religious groups. The major question to be address is this: What are the particular ways today that members of the Spirit-filled movements differ religiously from members of other Christian groups? For example, how do Pentecostal and charismatic Christians differ from other Christians in terms of doctrine, social theology, and religious practice? Second, the chapter also examines the Spirit-filled movements in terms of their social composition and social character. Here questions related to such matters as the generational character, racial composition, educational attainment, and patterns of civic engagement will be examined. In addition, the social characteristics of the Spirit-filled will, in turn, be used to re-examine certain religious characteristics of its members in an effort to ascertain whether members of the Spirit-filled movement exhibit religious and attitudinal differences based, for example, on the members’ generational cohorts, educational attainment, or denominational affiliation?

Chapter 5 analyzes the level of political cohesion evident among those within the ranks of the Spirit-filled movements. The political power of any movement is tied to the extent to which its members think and act in a cohesive fashion. This chapter then examines the political attitudes and social theology of Pentecostal and charismatic Christians and the extent to which members of the Spirit-filled movements exhibit cohesion across different religious and social characteristics. For example, should Spirit-filled Catholics be viewed politically more as Catholics or more as members of the Spirit-filled movement who have to be located within the Catholic church?

Chapter 6 focuses on the relative level of politicization and mobilization evident among Pentecostal and charismatic Christians at the turn of the century. Even if the Spirit-filled movements are composed of many members who exhibit distinctive political attitudes and distinctive social theologies, such characteristics would be of little political consequence if members of the Spirit-filled movements are relatively uninterested in politics and avoid the voting booth on election day. Consequently, Chapter 6 addresses the extent to which the Spirit-filled have become politically involved in terms of their psychological interest and engagement in political matters and in terms of the effects that mobilization efforts have had in getting them to the polls on election day.

Chapter 7 then presents our concluding assessments. The chapter summarizes the major findings of the book and the implications such findings hold for the Spirit-filled movements themselves, American religious life, and American social and political life more generally.

Potential Market for the Proposed Volume:

This volume is likely to have appeal to both particular segments of the scholarly community and segments of the church community (both clergy and educated church laity). Among scholars, the volume should be of considerable interest to those within the subfields of sociology of religion, religious studies, and religion and politics.

Projected Length and Illustrations:

It is anticipated that the length of the volume will be around 250 double-spaced, typed pages. It will likely include somewhere between 25 and 40 tables. However, since the volume is intended to be fairly accessible, it is anticipated that the tables would be rather simple and short in nature.

Anticipated Completion of the Proposed Volume:

It is anticipated that the volume will be completed and ready to be reviewed no later than by March 15, 2003. The volume may well be completed earlier than then; ideally, I hope to have the volume completed by October 15, 2002.

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