

Pentecostalism

Introduction

According to research published in December 2006, Pentecostals are the fastest-growing group of Christians in the UK. The research was based on an analysis of the English Church Census, carried out by the charity Christian Research and was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

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.

Pentecostal churches stress the importance of conversions that amount to a *Baptism in the Spirit*. This fills the believer with the Holy Spirit, which gives the believer the strength to live a truly Christian life.

The direct experience of God is revealed by *gifts of the Spirit* such as speaking in tongues, prophecy and healing.

Pentecostalism is based on a key event in the life of the early Christians, the baptism of the twelve disciples by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Most Pentecostals think that their movement is returning Christianity to a pure and simple form of Christianity that has much in common with the very earliest stage in the life of the Christian church.

Denominations and a movement

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 as many Pentecostal denominations don't include the word 'Pentecostal' in their name.

In the West Pentecostalism is strong in the Black 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.

Bible-based

Although Pentecostalism is often said to be rooted in experience rather than theology, Pentecostals base their theology on the text of the Bible which they believe to be the word of God and totally without error.

The day of Pentecost

Pentecostalism gets its name from the day of Pentecost, when, according to the Bible, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus' disciples, leading them to speak in many languages as evidence that they had been *baptised in the Spirit*. Pentecostals believe that this was not a one-off event, but something that can and does happen every day.

Growing strongly

There are just under 1 million Pentecostals in the UK, and over 20 million in the USA. (March 2006)

During the last three decades of the twentieth century Pentecostalism grew very strongly and there are now over 250 million Pentecostals around the world, who make up more than 10% of all Christians. (Some writers suggest the number is more like 500 million.)

Pentecostalism is particularly strong in the developing world where it poses a serious challenge to other, more established, denominations.