The Charismatic Movement in the United States

Peter Hocken

In this article, I will attempt to survey the development of the Charismatic movement in the mainline churches of the United States. Being a movement or stream, it is of its nature more fluid and complex than a denomination or cluster of denominations. Being more recent in origin than the Pentecostal movement, it has not yet attracted the attention of many doctoral candidates, so there are as yet no monographs on the development of the Charismatic movement in any of the mainline churches of North America. There are a few historical studies which deal with aspects of this subject, for example, at a detailed scholarly level, the writings of David E. Harrell, Jr., and, at a more popular level, some books by Vinson Synan. The general studies available are mostly of a more popular character, the most useful being the two studies by Richard Quebedeaux. My own article on the Charismatic movement in the Dictionary of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements remains one of the few attempts at an
overview. Some other works examining the Charismatic movement that are more biblical and theological in their orientation contain some data on its historical development.

**Statistical Evidence**

There have been a few attempts to gather statistics concerning the involvement of North Americans in charismatic-type Christianity. The results of a *Christianity Today*-Gallup poll were published in 1980. This poll claimed that 19% of the population were Pentecostal or Charismatic, and of these, 17%—that is 4% of the population—spoke in tongues. Of these Pentecostals and Charismatics, 27% were Roman Catholic, 21% Baptist, 8% Methodist, 6% Lutherans, and 4% Presbyterians. These percentages tend to reflect the numerical strength of these traditions in American society.

In spring 1992, a national survey of 4,001 Americans was conducted for the Bliss Institute by the Survey Research Center at the University of Akron. The survey, entitled “The National Survey of Evangelicals,” was intended to probe the diversity within American Evangelicalism. The survey used different tests to determine the extent of Pentecostal/Charismatic experience in the United States. Using the test of self-description, 4.7% of the United States population registered as Pentecostal, 6.6% as Charismatic, and 0.8% used both terms, giving a total percentage of 12.1. According to this survey “outside the historic Pentecostal denominations, the label ‘charismatic’ is much more likely to be adopted than the term ‘pentecostal.’ The only exception to this pattern is found within non-pentecostal black churches where approximately equivalent numbers expressed pentecostal as charismatic identities.” The percentage of the population who have on occasion spoken in tongues is lower: the survey found that 8.7% of the population.

---


9 The information concerning this survey and its findings is taken from a paper “The Spirit-Filled Movements in Contemporary America: A Survey Perspective” by Corwin E. Smidt, Lyman A. Kellstedt, John C. Green and James L. Guth for a conference on Mainstream Protestantism and Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements held at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, on March 10-12, 1994.
