

## Article

# The Spirituality of Jesus for the Unchurched and the Unaffiliated: A Pentecostal-Charismatic Perspective

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**Abstract:** This article calls for an examination of the spirituality of Jesus in light of the unique historical and theological distinctives of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement. Although the topic of spirituality is wide and deep, this study will approach it as personally transformative Christian experiences and practices that enrich one's life and the lives of others. By drawing from the research of statisticians and social scientists, I will discuss notable ways in which the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement has the potential to make the spirituality of Jesus accessible to the unchurched and the unaffiliated (nones) in the United States. The results of my research reveal that, although such persons do not regularly attend church, they are, in part, open to religious experiences and desire a deeper spirituality. A such, this paper shows that the experience-based, supernaturally empowered, every-member-is-a-minister nature of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement may indeed appeal to and meet the needs of certain unchurched and the unaffiliated persons. Furthermore, this paper will conclude by presenting suggestions for reform that may enhance this movement's ability to reach the unchurched and unaffiliated in days to come. In the final analysis, this paper provides a historical foundation and theoretical framework from which Pentecostal-Charismatic influences upon such groups can be further assessed.

**Keywords:** Charismatic movement; historical Jesus; Holy Spirit; nones; pneumatology; spirituality; transformative; unaffiliated; unchurched



**Citation:** Adams, Scott Lewis. 2022.

The Spirituality of Jesus for the Unchurched and the Unaffiliated: A Pentecostal-Charismatic Perspective. *Religions* 13: 1122. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13111122>

Academic Editor: Paul Anderson

Received: 19 September 2022

Accepted: 14 November 2022

Published: 18 November 2022

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## 1. Introduction

Numerous studies have been performed that center on the impact of the Pentecostal-Charismatic (hereafter P-C) movement within the wider Christian tradition. However, this article aims at discussing important ways in which this movement has the potential to make the spirituality of Jesus accessible to the unchurched and unaffiliated (nones). While spirituality can be defined in numerous ways,<sup>1</sup> this article defines this term as personally transformative experiences and practices that are founded upon the historical Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit. By drawing from the research of statisticians and social scientists, the following analysis will address how the P-C movement has fostered the spirituality of Jesus in a manner that has created a potential bridge-way for those who claim no formal church affiliation but maintain some affinity to Christianity in general and spirituality in particular. This study will not restrict P-C spirituality to one form or expression, since this movement is settled within a wide range of church communities. Instead, it will seek to extract foundational distinctives of the movement that may be strategically applied to unchurched and unaffiliated persons. I will begin by providing an overview of the historical and theological foundations of the P-C movement and then discuss the spirituality of Jesus in biblical perspective. I will also provide a sociological profile of the unchurched and unaffiliated and then outline three ways in which P-C movement has the potential to make the spirituality of Jesus accessible to them. Finally, I will conclude by presenting suggestions for reform that may enhance this movement's ability to reach the unchurched and unaffiliated in days to come.

## 2. The Historical and Theological Foundation of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity

While a comprehensive survey of the P-C movement is beyond the intent and scope of this article, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of its history, doctrine, and unique contribution to the spirituality of Jesus. As such, it is inadequate to speak of the Charismatic movement without acknowledging the Pentecostal foundation upon which it stands.<sup>2</sup> Most historians trace the origins of Pentecostalism to a revival that began on 1 January 1901, at Charles F. Parham's Bible school in Topeka, Kansas. After a careful study of the book of Acts, one of his students, Agnes Ozman, began speaking in unknown languages/tongues. In 1906 William J. Seymour preached the Pentecostal message at the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles, California, which sent spiritual shockwaves throughout the world. This revival was replete with accounts of speaking in different tongues, racially diverse worship services, divine healings, and individuals falling to the ground under the influence of the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup> The fire of Pentecostal revival gained strength and inevitably spread from the streets into churches that welcomed spiritual revival. While Pentecostalism has taken on many forms and denominational expressions (e.g., the Assemblies of God, the Church of God, the Foursquare Church, etc.), it is best known for its emphasis on a baptism in the Holy Spirit (subsequent to conversion) accompanied by the initial physical evidence of speaking in tongues, along with the belief in and the practice of the so-called supernatural gifts of the Spirit (see 1 Cor 12, 14).

Over time, supernatural experiences in the Holy Spirit also occurred outside the walls of traditional Pentecostalism and beyond the borders of the United States. On the American scene, the origin of the Charismatic movement is usually traced to Dennis Bennet, a rector of St. Mark's Episcopal Church, who received the baptism in the Holy Spirit at his home in Van Nuys, California, in November 1959.<sup>4</sup> While his experience drew notable controversy, by 1963 Christianity Today estimated that 2000 Episcopalians in Southern California were experiencing the Charismatic phenomenon of speaking in tongues (Hyatt 1996, p. 195). It is widely known that the origin of the Charismatic renewal among Roman Catholics began with the formation of a prayer group among the faculty at Duquesne University in 1967 (Kärkkäinen 2002, p. 89). By 1970, the fire of Charismatic renewal spread to a conference at Notre Dame where 30,000 Catholic Charismatics practiced the gifts of the Spirit, prayed, and worshipped. Hyatt (1996, pp. 198–99) remarks further concerning the ecumenical expression of the Charismatic movement the Charismatic movement, "The highwater mark of the renewal occurred in 1977 when 52,000 Pentecostal/Charismatics met in Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City. Truly ecumenical, it was indeed a work of the Holy Spirit. Half of the registrants were Roman Catholics, while the other half consisted mostly of Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, denominational Pentecostals, Baptists, Methodists, and Messianic Jews". Like other Charismatic meetings, this event was marked by speaking and singing in tongues, dancing, and other physical manifestations. Over time, Charismatics have not only successfully infiltrated Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and liberal Protestant communities; they have also established their own, independent communities that are based more exclusively upon their theological and/or ecclesiological convictions. Nevertheless, the ecumenical nature of the Charismatic movement is clearly seen throughout the 20th century in particular.

In some regards, Charismatics are not altogether different from their Pentecostal forerunners. While far from being a monolithic movement,<sup>5</sup> the Charismatic renewal eventuated the full recovery of the supernatural gifts of the Spirit to individuals personally and to the church trans-denominationally. In their view, the imminent and ubiquitous presence of God invited dynamic and transformative encounters with God and the granting of spiritual gifts.<sup>6</sup> As such, the so-called Neo-Pentecostals placed emphasis on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit that may result in speaking in tongues or some other sort of supernatural manifestation, whether pneumatically inspired prophecy, physical healing, etc. However, it must be noted that Charismatics appear to be more flexible with respect to the nature, timing, and corollaries of Spirit-baptism. In their view, while speaking in tongues is a gift to be pursued, it is not a definitive sign of the fullness of the Spirit. In this regard, it is plausible

to suggest that the movement promoted experience-based spirituality with less rigidity.<sup>7</sup> The same may be said of the so-called Third Wave (as coined by C. Peter Wagner) movement that began around 1980. While affirming the present-day operation of the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Third Wave (or Neo-Charismatic) movement also stressed the importance of signs and wonders, spiritual warfare, and supernatural encounters with God.

In time, revivals like the so-called Toronto Blessing (started in January 1994) became known for the unusual bodily manifestations (being “drunk in the Spirit” and uncontrollable laughter) that took place in their gatherings. Other controversial revivals include the Brownsville Revival (Pensacola, Florida, June 1995) and the Lakeland Revival (Lakeland, Florida, October 2008). Perhaps most notable is the advent and success of Hillsong, a P-C church based in Australia. Since its inception in 1983, Hillsong has gained worldwide influence through church planting, song writing, and its promotion of worship through dancing, the lifting of one’s hands, and exuberant singing. Along with the broader P-C movement, this ministry has emphasized the present-day power and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, along with dynamic, supernatural encounters with God.

### 3. The Spirituality of Jesus in Biblical Perspective

Although P-C spirituality is both personal and experiential, its theological foundation is derived from the canonical documents of the New Testament, which report dynamic, first-century encounters with the historical Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The Gospels present Jesus as “Immanuel” (Matt 1:23, “God with us”) and the Word-made-flesh (John 1:1, 14), the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29; 3:16). He is presented as forgiving sins (Matt 9:2), healing the sick (Matt 9:35), casting out demons (Matt 8:28–24; Mark 1:23–28), and raising the dead (John 11:43–44). He is said to have turned water into wine (John 2:1–11) and multiplied loaves and fishes (Mark 6:30–44; John 6:1–13). He called children to himself (Lk 18:16), ate with tax collectors and sinners (Lk 5:29–30), and ministered to women (Lk 7:36–50; John 4:7–26). After rising from death, Jesus commissioned his disciples (Matt 28:18–20; Acts 1:1–8) and then ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9–10).

Luke places the inauguration of Jesus’s ministry squarely in the context of the anointing of the Spirit, which is presented as the means by which the good news is preached, captives are freed, the blind receive sight, and the oppressed received liberty through his ministry (Lk 3:22; 4:14; 4:18–21) (See [Stronstad \(1984, pp. 39–46; 2010, pp. 28–47\)](#)). Additionally, while the Gospel of Luke provides an account of what Jesus began to do and teach, the book of Acts provides an account of what Jesus continued to do and teach through the apostles and the early church by the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:1).<sup>8</sup> In Acts, Luke repeatedly emphasizes the coming of the Spirit and the supernatural corollaries thereof (2:4; 8:17–18; 10:44–46; 19:6).<sup>9</sup> The repetitious emphasis on the power of the Spirit and the signs that followed elucidate the purpose of Acts, which involves (1) charting out the growth of the early church from its humble beginnings and (2) emphasizing the immediate power of the Holy Spirit that made such growth possible. The same Spirit who provides personal transformation likewise empowers cross-cultural evangelistic witness for Jesus in his physical absence (Acts 1:8). Building upon the scriptural narrative, Pentecostals have sought to live, pray, and preach with eschatological urgency as they look for the inbreaking of God’s kingdom into the present world.

Moreover, while similar to Pentecostalism in some respects, the Charismatic movement has typically placed more emphasis on the renewal of the church than on its missionary empowerment.<sup>10</sup> [Menzies \(2020, p. 108\)](#) says, “The term ‘Pentecostal’ points us to Pentecost and the missionary call and power that is given to the church (Acts 2:1–2). The term ‘charismatic,’ by way of contrast, points to the spiritual gifts that serve to edify the church, particularly as it gathers together for corporate worship (1 Cor 12–14)”. [Kärkkäinen \(2002, p. 95\)](#) remarks further that “Charismatic Christians usually focus more on community than do their Pentecostal counterparts. They have a greater sense of community life and the relationship between *koinonia* and the work of the Spirit”. Nevertheless, building upon the historical and theological foundation of Pentecostalism, Charismatics insist that divine

encounters and supernatural empowerments are available for contemporary worshippers within the church and for those outside the church, but not outside of a personal relationship with Jesus. As Steven Land points out (p. 21), “The God who was present among Israel and in Jesus Christ is now present as the Holy Spirit”. In this relational model, individuals are invited to participate in the spirituality of Jesus, that is, personally transformative experiences and practices including but not limited to (1) the baptism in the Holy Spirit, (2) the exercise of spiritual gifts, (3) prayer for the sick, and (4) the casting out of demons. Although these experiences and practices are said to be empowered by the Holy Spirit, they are, more precisely, ongoing extensions of the ministry of Jesus. With this profile in mind, the analysis below will center upon identifying and understanding the unchurched and the unaffiliated (nones) for the purpose of discerning how P-C experiences and practices make the spirituality of Jesus accessible to them.

#### 4. Identifying and Understanding the Unchurched and Nones

The term “unchurched” has become a popular term for American Christians and has been defined in several ways. The Barna Group ([Barna and Kinnaman 2014](#), p. 6) defines an unchurched person as “someone who has not attended a Christian church service, other than a special event such a wedding or funeral, at any time during the past six months”. In simplest terms, they present a “churched” person as someone who is connected to a church and an “unchurched” person as someone who is disconnected. The Barna Group elucidates the magnitude of this segment of American society by stating, “The number of unchurched adults in the United States has increased by more than 30 percent in the past decade. As of 2014, the estimated number of unchurched adults stood at 114 million. Add to that the roughly 42 million children and teenagers who are unchurched, and you have 156 million US residents who are not engaged with a Christian church” (p. 33). Furthermore, they also show that American adults fall into four broad segments that elucidate their relationship to a church (p. 7). These include: The “actively churched” (those who attend once a month or more), the “minimally churched” (those who attend several times a year), the “de-churched” (those who have attended church in the past but are on a hiatus), and the “purely unchurched” (those who have never attended church). According to research published in 2014, 49% of American adults are actively churched, 8% are minimally churched, 33% are de-churched, and 10% are purely unchurched (p. 5).<sup>11</sup> A more recent study published in 2017 reveals a slightly different picture, namely that 55% of Americans are somewhat churched or very churched, 34% are de-churched, and 11% are purely unchurched ([Lifeway Research 2017](#)).

The reality of these numbers has some pastors and church leaders scrambling for methods to reverse the trend. However, before becoming too dismayed, it is important for them to take a deeper look at the nature and identity of the so-called churchless. Research reveals that being unchurched does not automatically equate to being unchristian, unspiritual, or unbelieving. [Barna and Kinnaman \(2014, p. 41\)](#) share the following insights concerning how the unchurched identify themselves.

- 21 percent are born-again Christians.
- 21 percent are Pentecostal or Charismatic Christians.
- 23 percent say they are “absolutely committed” to Christianity.
- 26 percent say they are currently on a quest for spiritual truth.
- 34 percent describe themselves as “deeply spiritual”.
- 41 percent “strongly agree” that their religious faith is very important in their life today.
- 51 percent say they are actively seeking something better spiritually than they have experienced to date.
- 62 percent consider themselves to be Christian.
- 65 percent defines themselves as “spiritual people”.

Accordingly, 2 in 3 unchurched Americans identify as being spiritual people, approximately 50% say their faith and convictions are important, 99% are aware of Christianity, and 69% hold a favorable view of it. What is more revealing is that a notable percentage of the churchless believe they can maintain many of their beliefs and spiritual practices apart

from attending a church. A staggering 51% of unchurched persons say they are actively seeking something better spiritually than they have experienced to date. In other words, while the unchurched are not walking through the doors of a church, they are looking for open doors to more meaningful spiritual practices. Furthermore, another study published in 2017 shows that 20% of the unchurched stopped attending regularly because they lost trust in a Christian or a church, 23% simply lost interest in church, and 20% stopped because of the busyness of life.<sup>12</sup> However, it is important to note that lost trust and/or interest in church does not mean lost trust in God, nor does it mean that they gave up on pursuing some sort of spiritual growth (Lifeway Research 2017). Once again, the evidence seems to suggest that being unchurched does not necessarily equate to being unchristian, unspiritual, or unbelieving.

However, what about the so-called “unaffiliated” (nones)? This group includes atheists, agnostics, or those who hold to “nothing in particular” (no formal affiliation with any religious organization). Of course, atheists are those who do not believe in the existence of God (or a supernatural higher power), and agnostics are those who neither advocate for nor rule out the existence of God.<sup>13</sup> For the purposes of this article, the most relevant segment of nones includes those who hold to “nothing in particular”. While some nones are purely unchurched, a small minority attend church once a month (Burge 2021, p. 121). These individuals come from various walks of life and do not have a strong conviction or preference concerning any one religion.<sup>14</sup> According to a recently published study, “About three-in-ten U.S. adults (29%) are religious ‘nones’” (Pew Research Center 2021). Accordingly, another study published in 2022 provides key characteristics that help one better ascertain the identity of the disaffiliated and those who have left Christianity. These include the following:

#### Age.

U.S. adults who have moved away from Christianity are younger, on average, than those who have remained Christian after a Christian upbringing. More than a quarter of former Christians (27%) are under 30, compared with 14% of all adults who were raised Christian and remain Christian.

#### Gender

Americans who have moved away from Christianity are more likely to be men, while women are more likely to retain their Christian identity. A slight majority of U.S. adults who were raised Christian and are now unaffiliated (54%) are male. Among people who have remained Christian, 57% are women.

#### Education

People who have become unaffiliated after a Christian upbringing are a little more likely to have graduated college than those who remain Christian, with 35% and 31%, respectively, holding college degrees. This reflects a broader pattern: In the U.S., people with higher levels of educational attainment tend to be less religious by some traditional measures, such as how often they pray or attend religious services.

#### Politics

Seven-in-ten adults who were raised Christian but are now unaffiliated are Democrats or Democratic-leaning independents, compared with 43% of those who remained Christian and 51% of U.S. adults overall.

#### Geography

People who have left Christianity are underrepresented in the South, where 33% of former Christians live, compared with 42% of people who have remained Christian and 38% of U.S. adults overall. Those who have disaffiliated after being raised Christian are more likely than others to live in the West (28% live there, compared with 20% of those who remain Christian and 23% of all U.S. adults). Surveys often find that U.S. adults tend to be more religious, on a number of measures, in



the South, and less so in the West and Northeast. This may indicate that people adapt to the religious contexts in which they live and/or sort themselves into like-minded communities. (Pew Research Center 2022)

While some might assume the nones are unspiritual and/or irreligious, this is not necessarily the case.<sup>15</sup> Richardson (2019, p. 40) remarks further concerning this group,

Nones are not necessarily irreligious, by which I mean disconnected from any established or organized form of religion, or unspiritual. Spirituality is often defined in fluid and loose terms as referring to a feeling of connectedness to something larger than oneself, and that connectedness can happen through experiences with friends, pets, food, mind-expanding drugs, nature, God, or in many other ways that combine mind, body, and spirit. Still, over two-thirds believe in God, 81 percent believe in a force or higher being that can be reached through prayer, most think churches benefit society by strengthening community bonds and aiding the poor, more than a third describe themselves as spiritual, and 20 percent pray daily. Even nones are more spiritual, religious, and receptive than we might expect.

Based on the data provided above, it suffices to say that, while the number of individuals attending church is on the decline, there remains an openness among many Americans to explore and experience certain forms of spirituality.<sup>16</sup> While many Americans are not regularly practicing their religion within ecclesiastical gatherings, the evidence suggests that they remain open to spiritually transformative practices that enrich their lives. Notwithstanding their openness to certain forms of spirituality, it is vitally important to ascertain why such individuals have become disaffiliated. The research indicates that nones come from a wide variety of backgrounds and have come to hold to “nothing in particular” for numerous reasons. Burge (p. 35) notes that academics have not been able to identify a single “causal mechanism for the ‘nones’ astronomically growing numbers”. Some of the major theories for their growth include the influence of secularization, social desirability bias (people tend to lie in surveys), the influence of information on the internet, socialization, loss of trust, and changes in family structure (pp. 36–65). Notwithstanding, Burge (pp. 49–50) remarks concerning the clearest plausible reason,

Maybe I am slightly biased because I am a trained political scientist, but I have always felt that the best and clearest explanation for the rapid rate of religious disaffiliation can be traced back to the recent political history of the United States. In recent years, everyone who studies religion and politics has been constantly confronted with the same statistic: 81 percent of white evangelicals voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election. While many political observers were quick to note that the GOP and white evangelicals have consistently had a strong relationship, many pundits viewed the 81 percent figure as some sort of statistical aberration when in reality it was just business as usual.

Given the close association between the Republican party and the religious right, it is not hard to see why those with different political and religious leanings have distanced themselves from conservative Christian churches. Whatever the precise reason(s) for the rise of nones, the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement must take the data seriously and carefully consider how to regain an audience with the unaffiliated without losing their unique, biblical distinctives. The final section of this article offers some suggestions that may provide a way forward. The section that follows directly below will present positive ways in which the P-C movement has the potential to make the spirituality of Jesus accessible to the unchurch and unaffiliated.

## 5. Accessible Pentecostal-Charismatic Spirituality

Drawing upon the research and conclusions above, the following analysis will argue that the P-C movement has the potential to make the spirituality of Jesus accessible in three distinct ways. The first way is by its emphasis on experiential spirituality. Although

Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians are not alone in promoting dynamic encounters with God, they do stress a unique, experience-based approach to spirituality that is founded upon belief in Jesus and empowerment by the Holy Spirit. As indicated above, 51% of unchurched persons say they are actively seeking something better spiritually than they have experienced to date. On one hand, some within this group come from the P-C movement, and therefore will not be persuaded that this genre of Christianity has anything special to offer. On the other hand, the P-C movement promotes accessible spirituality that has the potential to deepen and strengthen over time. In this approach, the solution is not the abandonment P-C spirituality, but rather the implementation of it with a heightened expectation for spiritual growth. Accordingly, those who left the P-C church and have no intention of returning to a formal gathering can still pursue meaningful spiritual experiences that enrich their lives. Those who adhere to the basic tenets of Christianity but have never participated in P-C spirituality may in fact find it appealing once they have been introduced to it.

Peter Neumann speaks of the need for Pentecostals to “preserve a sense of divine immediacy—that they are, in some sense, directly encountering God” (Neumann 2012, p. 160). For Pentecostals such encounters normally begin with the baptism in the Spirit which is logically subsequent to conversion and is accompanied by speaking in tongues. While encouraging dynamic encounters with God, Charismatics maintain that a person may be (but is not always) baptized in the Spirit upon being baptized in water. One may speak or pray in tongues or operate in other spiritual gifts at the moment of one’s baptism or at some later point in their spiritual journey.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, Anne Mather notes concerning the common experience of Spirit-baptism, “It is often accompanied by physical manifestations such as great heat, the sensation of a current of power passing through the body, a feeling of intense joy, sometimes the healing of a physical ailment, and frequently speaking in tongues. Invariably, there is a vivid awareness of the immediate presence of God, and many find that their baptism in the Spirit marks a turning point in their Christian lives, initiating a greater concern with spiritual matters and deeper Christian commitments (Mather 1984)”.

Packer (1980, p. 3) says concerning the effects of the practice upon the worshipper, “Subjectively, it is a matter of letting one’s vocal cords run free as one lifts one’s heart to God, and, as with learning to swim, confidence in entrusting oneself to the medium . . . has much to do with one’s measure of success and enjoyment”.

Cartledge (2002, p. 103) remarks further, “You can speak in tongues anywhere. It does not locate you. Indeed, it becomes a kind of universal language which is not tied to privilege, power and status. It demonstrates the power of God in the weakness of humanity. It enables a person to identify with a particular group and yet to retain individuality”.

To speak or pray in an unknown tongue is to take a step forward into a perhaps unfamiliar experience without being required to step foot in a formal church setting. On the other hand, Charismatics insist that this practice also has value within a church gathering where corporate edification can take place (1 Cor 14:5, 13). Accordingly, the Barna Group reports that worship through song and praying aloud are viewed as the central practices across all Christian age groups and that 36% of Millennials believe that speaking/praying in tongues is an important expression that should be a weekly part of their worship experience (“State of the Church”). This echoes the sentiment of Pentecostals and Charismatics in the 20th- and 21st-century churches who encouraged spontaneous, pneumatic speech within a church gathering. As such, P-C spirituality serves as a reminder that spiritual gifts are available for all, individually, but are also for the church, corporately.

Moreover, the Charismatic paradigm of Spirit-baptism in particular encourages a heightened sense of expectancy concerning one’s experience with God without stressing the necessity of any one particular manifestation. This subjective approach to spirituality may be attractive to unchurched and unaffiliated individuals who desire an encounter with God without the pressure of having to conform their experience to one particular outcome.

The second way the P-C movement has the potential to make the spirituality of Jesus accessible is by its emphasis on supernatural spirituality. This is especially relevant for

the so-called Generation Z, which represents 25% of the US population and is comprised of those born between 1997 to 2012. According to recent research, 78% of this generation believe in God, but only 41% attend weekly religious services of any sort (White 2017, pp. 37, 47). Further, this generation represents a younger segment of American society that is not only unchurched but is also unaffiliated and largely unaware of the basic tenets of historic Christian thought. White (2017, p. 131) notes, “Perhaps the most defining mark of members of Generation Z, in terms of the spiritual lives, is their spiritual illiteracy . . . [T]hey do not know what the Bible says. They do not know the basics of Christian belief or theology. They do not know what the cross is about. They do not know what it means to worship . . . As a result, there is a profound spiritual emptiness”. However, despite the alleged theological ignorance and spiritual emptiness, research reveals that many within Generation Z remain open to the supernatural world and to spiritual experiences associated with it.<sup>18</sup>

Such openness to the supernatural world may provide an opportunity for the spirituality of Jesus to be introduced through P-C practices that transcend one’s everyday experiences. Peter Neumann says that “encounter with the Spirit provides revelation of something other than what is immanently found in everyday human life, and by doing so it provides transformative power, so central to Pentecostal spirituality (Neumann 2012, p. 116)”. This sort of spirituality seeks access to divine power from another world that eventuates transformation and restoration in this world. From dynamic encounters with God to the power of God that enables one to cast out demons (Matt 8:28–24; Mark 1:23–28; etc.), P-C spirituality encourages a range of supernatural, transformative experiences. Further, 1 Corinthians 12:4–10 (ESV) provides an outline of Spirit-empowered manifestations that are given for the good of the church.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

While these gifts may be practiced within a formal church setting, they are not restricted to it. They are given for the common good of the church, but they are also given as extensions of the ministry of Jesus, as they are practiced wherever a need presents itself. The universal accessibility of the Spirit logically extends the spiritual benefits of P-C spirituality through willing participants into every segment of society where belief in Jesus is practiced. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the potential application and impact of every spiritual gift, it is worth mentioning that 20% of churchless persons identified good physical health as the single most important goal in life (Barna and Kinnaman 2014, p. 121). While there are numerous factors that contribute to physical health, the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement<sup>19</sup> places unique emphasis on the supernatural gift of healing, the efficacy of petitionary prayer, and the laying of hands as a symbolic act of blessing. As such, by exercising their spiritual gifts and praying for sick individuals in their communities, unchurched persons may find solidarity with their fellow human beings and experience a deeper sense of spiritual fulfillment.

The third way the P-C movement has the potential to make the spirituality of Jesus accessible is by emphasizing the giftedness of all believers. In other words, Pentecostal-Charismatic spirituality views every member as a minister who serves as an extension of the ministry of Jesus in the world. While the New Testament offers several groupings and genres of spiritual giftings within the church (Rom 12:6–8; Eph 4:11; 1 Peter 4:9–11; 1 Cor 7:7–8; etc.), the P-C movement places emphasis on the so-called supernatural gifts (or sign gifts) of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:4–10 (see above). In contradistinction to the viewpoint that such gifts had long ago ceased, either in the first century AD or shortly thereafter, Pentecostals



and Charismatics insist that such gifts are not only available today but are available for every Christian who is willing to practice them. In their view, each member of the church (the so-called “Body of Christ”) must function in his or her gifting in order for the church to operate in her full potential (1 Cor 12:4–26). J. I. Packer outlines twelve features of the Charismatic movement that call for “unambiguous approval”. Most relevant to the present discussion are included the following: “Its concern that all Christians be actively involved in ministry; finding and using their gifts, whatever these prove to be, for others’ welfare” and “Its stress on the need for church structures to be flexible enough to allow all gifts within a congregation to be fully used (Packer 1980, p. 7)”. In some ecclesiastical contexts, the gifting of one Charismatic leader (or several) has often overshadowed the gifting of others. Without precluding the need for governmental leadership in the church, the P-C movement insists that all people in relationship with Jesus are gifted with distinct pneumatic abilities that deepen one’s spirituality and advance the ministry of Jesus in the world.

Furthermore, as noted above, some unchurched persons stopped attending a church because they lost interest in church. The Barna Group (Barna and Kinnaman 2014, p. 53) reports more specifically, “Nearly half of churchless people attribute their lack of church attendance to an absence of value . . . When we asked unchurched people to recall the most recent church service they attended, less than one in ten could identify anything from the experience that they considered insightful, valuable, helpful, or memorable”. Unfortunately, this sentiment is likely true of some who previously attended a Pentecostal or Charismatic church. However, this sentiment often stems from a consumeristic notion that asks “What have you done for me lately?” Nevertheless, the Charismatic emphasis on the giftedness of every believer moves the discussion away from the question “What has the church done for me?” to “What can I do for my church and my community?” The latter question elucidates the purest expression of the spirituality of Jesus which moves an individual from personal edification to communal participation through pneumatically empowered acts of service. In the final analysis, the P-C emphasis of the giftedness of every member summons the unchurched and the otherwise uninterested to participate in church once again and to reclaim their rightful place as gifted expressions of the spirituality of Jesus. Although the P-C movement makes spirituality of Jesus accessible to unchurched and unaffiliated persons, it also calls them to experience the divine life of the Son (Jesus) through the mediation of the Spirit with other believers within the ecclesiastical community.

## 6. Conclusions: The Way Forward

In this article I have outlined how the experienced-based, supernaturally empowered, and every-member-is-a-minister nature of the P-C movement has the potential to make the spirituality of Jesus accessible and attractive to the unchurched and the unaffiliated in the United States. While a significant percentage of Americans do not attend a church on a regular basis, the research reveals that many persons consider themselves to be spiritual and are actively seeking something better spiritually than they have experienced to date. This article has taken a step toward elucidating various ways in which the P-C movement may accommodate such persons in their spiritual growth.

By way of conclusion, this movement has an incredible opportunity to bear witness (Acts 1:8) to Jesus in a culture that is becoming increasingly unchurched and unaffiliated. In particular, the Pentecostal impulse to go into all the world with missional urgency is a tremendous strength that, if continued, will serve the movement well in its attempts to reach non-Christians and reclaim the unchurched. However, such witnessing must not be in word only, it must also necessarily involve action. Unfortunately, in some cases the emphasis of the power of the Spirit has eclipsed the necessity of the so-called fruit of the Spirit and the character of Jesus being replicated in the lives of his followers (Gal 5:22–23, “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”). One must not forget that the same Spirit who provides the power to verbally proclaim the message of Jesus also produces the character of Jesus in those who believe.

On a practical note, it is plausible to suggest that P-C movement can make the spirituality of Jesus more attractive to unchurched and unaffiliated persons by upholding its ethical and biblical convictions while at the same time treating them with dignity. This course of action does not guarantee that such persons will accept the P-C Christian message and adopt its core theological and ethical convictions. However, it does ensure consistency with the spirituality of Jesus who not only ate with sinners and tax collectors, but also called them to repentance (Lk 5:29–32). Along with those from every Christian tradition, this movement would do well to uphold the dignity and value of all people who are created in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27). This involves showing kindness, patience, and charity toward everyone, irrespective of their political affiliations. It also involves renouncing pride, hatred, bigotry, abusive behaviors, and racism (to name a handful). As these (and other) sins are avoided and repented of, the P-C movement and other Christian churches and movements may indeed gain a new hearing with those who have left, and especially with those who have observed the contradictions within it that keep them at a distance. On the other hand, many who reject the movement's emphasis on the value of human life and the nature of marriage are unlikely to return no matter how "kind" the movement becomes in other respects. In this case, they are not merely rejecting the P-C movement, they are rejecting the biblical foundation of this movement.

Furthermore, it is this writer's opinion that Christians should be involved in politics and to strive to vote in a manner that reflects their ethical and biblical values. However, one must remember that the Christian's hope is ultimately found in Jesus Christ, not in a political party (whether Republican or Democrat). It becomes problematic when a church or a Christian movement's identity is more tied to a political figure than to Jesus. In the final analysis, P-C believers have the opportunity to make the spirituality of Jesus more accessible (and believable) to unchurched and unaffiliated persons as they bear witness to Jesus with their lips and their lifestyle.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For example, McGrath (1999, p. 2) says that "Christian spirituality concerns the quest for a fulfilled and authentic Christian existence, involving the bringing together of the fundamental ideas of Christianity and the whole experience of living on the basis of and within the scope of the Christian faith". Del Colle (1993, p. 94) notes that "Pentecostal-charismatic spirituality is a spirituality communion in which God, self, the neighbor and all of creation are known amid prayer and the praise of God through the giftedness of the Spirit's presence, power and manifestations in witness to the divine agency in the risen Christ". One could argue simply that Christian spirituality is biblically-informed; Christ-centered; Spirit-empowered; experience-oriented; and, by necessity, transformative in nature.
- <sup>2</sup> While it is beyond the scope of this article, it is also correct to say that it is inadequate to speak of Pentecostalism without acknowledging the Wesleyan and Holiness movements upon which it stands. Land (2010, p. 59) notes, "Had there been no eighteenth-century Wesleyan and nineteenth-century Holiness movements there would have been no twentieth-century Pentecostalism; and Pentecostalism is at any rate inexplicable without this theological heritage". For a full treatment of this topic, see Synan (1997, p. 39).
- <sup>3</sup> Robert Owens in Synan (2001, p. 54) says concerning the Azusa Street revival, "People of all types—educated, uneducated, rich, poor, African-Americans, Asians, Hispanics, whites, men, women, native born, recent immigrants, and foreign visitors—prayed, sang, and came to the altar together".
- <sup>4</sup> See Synan (1997, pp. 227–30) for a full overview of this account.
- <sup>5</sup> Charismatics have much in common with many of their brothers and sisters within the wider ecclesiastical community. Don Fanning remarks, "In general, the Neo-Pentecostals are orthodox (biblical authority alone), evangelical (gospel by grace), reformist (desire to renew ecclesiastical structures), and ecumenical (seek unity of experience across denominational lines—including liberal Protestants, Catholics, and Protestants)" (Fanning 2009, p. 8). Packer (1980, p. 2) says further, "They [Charismatics] appear as theological primitives, recalling their churches not only to apostolic Christian experience but also to the 'old path' of supernatural belief. They are 'sound' . . . on the Trinity, the incarnation, the objective significance of the atonement and the divine authority of the Bible, and they see Christianity conventionally in terms of three traditional Rs—Ruin, Redemption, and Regeneration".

- <sup>6</sup> Land (2010, p. 44) says that, when “Pentecostals spoke of restoration, it was not primarily a restoration of this or that outward characteristic of the early church, but primarily the apostolic power and expectancy”.
- <sup>7</sup> Kärkkäinen (2002, pp. 94–95) says, “While Spirit baptism is the core experience of most Charismatics, not all Charismatic theologians understand the baptism in the same way. Most Charismatic theologians view the baptism in an ‘organic’ way by identifying it with water baptism, though it is not actualized through spiritual gifts until much later. For Charismatics, this view avoids the problem of the ‘initial evidence’ doctrine, the idea of two baptisms, and the dividing of Christians into two classes: those baptized by the Spirit and those who are not”.
- <sup>8</sup> Hermeneutically, Pentecostals have sought to establish their theology of experience with God from Luke-Acts. In particular, they have viewed these documents as history with a theological purpose, which is, in part, to elucidate the missiological empowerment by the Spirit. See William and Robert Menzies for an overview (Menzies and Menzies 2000, pp. 37–62).
- <sup>9</sup> “But its primary purpose is empowerment, enabling believers to engage in kingdom service more effectively—power is intricately linked to an aim, a commission” (Neumann 2012, p. 120).
- <sup>10</sup> Land (2010, p. 57) notes, “Pentecostals. It was a break that signaled God’s intervention in and sufficiency for the missionary task of announcing the gospel of the kingdom to all nations before the end. This meant that the nexus of socio-political cause and effect, of demonic and even religious opposition and hindrances—none of this could stop the fulfillment of God’s plan”.
- <sup>11</sup> The conclusions of this research are derived from data drawn from a series of eighteen nationwide surveys conducted between 2008 and 2014. This involved interviews with 20,524 Americans adults, including 6276 unchurched adults.
- <sup>12</sup> “Unchurched Report,” Billy Graham Center Institute and Lifeway Research (2017). See also Richardson (2019, p. 46).
- <sup>13</sup> Burge (2021, pp. 99–100) says it well: “As such, agnostics are a step removed from the certainty that is espoused by atheists, who clearly believe that there is no Higher Power. Often agnostics will use the language and construction of reason or scientific inquiry to indicate that because there can be no irrefutable evidence for God’s existence, it would be improper for anyone with this worldview to say that God does or does not exist. Instead, agnostics are open to the possibility that either conclusion may be proven empirically true.
- <sup>14</sup> See Pew Research Center (2012), “‘Nones’ on the Rise,” for an overview of theories concerning the root causes of the rise of the unaffiliated.
- <sup>15</sup> See Pew Research Center (2012), “‘Nones’ on the Rise,” for a fuller overview of the nature and identity of the “nones”. Also see Burge (2021, pp. 69–94), for an overview and analysis of the demographics of the disaffiliated.
- <sup>16</sup> Burge (2021, p. 122) remarks concerning “the nothing in particulars,” “The group also seems by and large to be struggling in American society. Nearly six in ten of them are making less than \$50,000 per year. They seem isolated as well. These are the people who may be the most receptive to faith and the most likely to gain real social and economic benefits from being part of a religious community”.
- <sup>17</sup> This is the view of Christenson (1962, p. 22).
- <sup>18</sup> Of course, openness to the supernatural does not necessarily lead to the acceptance of a Charismatic worldview. Due to various reasons, some unchurched persons may have an aversion to Charismatic spirituality.
- <sup>19</sup> This is not to say that non-Charismatics do not pray for the sick. Prayer for the sick is offered by Christians from every walk of life and denominational persuasion. However, the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements have placed unique emphasis upon the immediate inbreaking of God’s kingdom into this world through the means of prayer and the laying of hands.

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