Article

The Atlas of Pentecostalism

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A database charting global Pentecostal faith

Pentecostalism is the fastest-growing Christian movement in the world. The Atlas of Pentecostalism is an online, multimedia repository that charts the development and evolution of this rapidly expanding faith tradition.

Origins: The Azusa Street Revival (1906-1909)

Pentecostalism is a branch of Protestant Christianity that emphasizes a direct and personal engagement with God through baptism. One of its most notable doctrinal elements is the belief in speaking in tongues as evidence of this direct connection. While Kansas preacher Charles Parham is first credited with establishing this doctrine, it was William J. Seymour who led the Azuza Street Revival and sparked Pentecostalism's development as a distinct faith tradition.

After hearing one of Parham's sermons in Houston, Texas, Seymour led the three-year Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, California, beginning 1906. During these meetings, participants reported profound spiritual experiences which included feeling the presence of God, the sudden ability to speak in tongues, and divine healing. News of these events spread quickly, catalyzing similar experiences, new adherents to the faith, and new congregations. By 1914, what is now known as Pentecostalism had spread to nearly all major American

cities.

Azuza Street Revival leaders including William J. Seymour, and his wife Jennie Evans Moore Seymour, who served as a co-pastor of the congregation. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Pentecostalism is now well-known for energetic and emotional worship services and emphasizing a first-person connection with God. However, these very characteristics initially caused sharp criticism from other Christian leaders as well as a fissure between Parham and Seymour. Prominent newspapers derided the revivals as “orgies” and “fanaticism” —the same sorts of criticisms that had historically been leveled at African and Indigenous spiritual traditions by white Christians. Indeed, much of this reporting had racist undertones. One headline reporting the revivals read, “Whites and Blacks Mix in a Religious Frenzy.” Parham, likewise, criticized Seymour for encouraging the emotional aspects of the practice. He was also repulsed by the fact that Seymour and other leaders associated with the Azuza Street Revival preached antiracism. Parham himself was a sympathizer of the Ku Klux Klan, and early Pentecostalism appealed to a mixed demographic beginning with the African American, Latino, and working-class white populations in Los Angeles.

What Distinguishes Pentecostalism


Langley Ave. All Nation
Pentecostal Church
ELDER LUCY SMITH

A Pentecostal church service in the 1940s. Source: Library of Congress (LC-USF34-038745-D).



Source: Daniel Morton via Unsplash.

Pentecostalism is identified as a charismatic religious movement that emphasizes the importance of experiencing God's presence on an individual level. Since the Azuza Street Revival, Pentecostalism has become a globally practiced faith tradition. In its earliest stages, Pentecostalism was most popular amongst the racially and culturally marginalized in North America, especially African Americans and white working-class Southern populations. In the latter half of the twentieth century, televangelism played a major role in expanding the faith internationally. Today, the largest number of Pentecostals are found in Africa and the Americas and are growing most rapidly in the Global South.

The Database

The *Atlas of Pentecostalism* is a multimedia repository produced through a collaboration between information designer Richard Vijgen, documentary filmmaker Bregtjie van der Haak, and Dr. Donald E. Miller of the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture. The repository includes interactive maps, photography, a documentary film, and interviews which seek to capture the wide array of Pentecostal practices, beliefs, and communities. The *Atlas* can be found in the form of a physical book, which represents records consistently updated between 2012 and 2018. In addition, multimedia representations of the project's findings are also displayed on its website. According to the database, over 600 million people throughout the world now identify as Pentecostals. With that said, there is significant diversity between Pentecostal populations.

Cartography

The maps of the *Atlas of Pentecostalism* chart the growth of the faith using different metrics. Designed by Richard Vijgen, the *Atlas* includes maps that represent Pentecostal growth, Christian broadcast networks, reported instances of divine intervention, Bible sales, and belief in the Devil.

Iconography and Documentary

The *Atlas* repository also features a body of photography including images of books, baptisms, architecture, worship spaces, pulpits, logos, attire, and signs associated with Pentecostalism. In addition, a documentary filmed by Maasja Ooms depicts Pentecostalism through the lens of one church.

Interviews

Many of the interviews in the *Atlas of Pentecostalism* were conducted by Dr. Donald Miller of USC's Center for Religion and Civic Culture as part of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Initiative. As part of this initiative, researchers traveled to over twenty countries to identify the defining characteristics, causes of growth, and impact of global Pentecostalism.

Bregtje van der Haak gives a presentation on the Atlas at the Pulitzer Center.

Read the *Atlas*

Explore the database