

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Bornagainism as a Cardinal Teaching of Pentecostalism

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study, as its title indicates, is a particular theological grammar: that of being “born again”, a popular concept of Pentecostal Christianity today. Still, it is a subject which despite its immense theological importance has been largely neglected by mainstream theological scholarship. This is doubtless at least partially because the term “born-again Christianity” has connotations which cause the majority of academia unease: images of dramatic conversion experiences, of a bold religious fervor, of evangelists pleading for listeners to “accept Jesus into their hearts,” and, of course, of certain forms of conservative political activism which on many university campuses subsist only in the shadows. Yet it is not merely religious bias that has contributed to such paucity of interest in Christian new birth: at a more basic level, the phenomenon of being “born again” appears to have its locus in the private confines of the individual subject as a form of immediate presence, which would appear to at least partially shield it from scholarly scrutiny. The concept born-again denotes ‘new birth’ - something consciously experienced, frequently through a memorable conversion and followed by the conviction that one is now a different person, embraced by the presence of a God with whom the born-again Christian has a “personal relationship.” But what can systematic theology possibly say about such a seemingly private religious experience? This is the basic question that leads the researcher to study this topic.

Keywords: Pentecostalism, Bornagainism, Christianity.

INTRODUCTION

Since antiquity, the power of religion in shaping people’s public identity is growing. Global Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity, in all their diversity, are the fastest expanding religious movements in the world today. Pentecostals expanded

through the late 20th century to at least 380 million, by the most conservative estimate, put forth by John L. Allen Jr (2016). In Christian terms, the late 20th century will probably come to be known as the era of the “Pentecostal Explosion.” From less than six percent in the mid-1970s, Pentecostals finished the century representing almost 20 percent of world Christianity, according to a 2006 study by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life called *Spirit and Power* (Synan 2012). Some studies forecast growth of 2.25 percent in the Pentecostal population in comparison with the 1.23 percent increase in the world population in the past century (Gathuki 2015). Pentecostalism’s growing numbers strongly indicate that the movement will be a major force in shaping the religious landscape of the 21st century.

Pentecostalism has become globalized, having many ecumenical implications; and its adherents are often on the cutting edge of the encounter with people of other faiths (Miller et al., 2013). In direct and indirect ways, Pentecostal beliefs and practices are remaking the face of world Christianity. The sudden upsurge of a great deal of Pentecostal movements in Nigeria in particular and the world at large has attracted the attention of both the global world and scholars within the academic community. There is, therefore, a need for research on this Pentecostal phenomenon, to ascertain its origin, growth, nature, practice, causative factors, teachings and impact. As a result of the deficiency of information on the increasing Pentecostal trend, some scholars view their emergence and growth as another “infiltration of what is seen as pernicious American doctrine and as another manifestation of American religious and cultural imperialism” (Robert 1968, p. 2).

This paper does not focus on all the teachings of Pentecostalism. Its emphasis is on Bornagainism as an integral part of Pentecostalism. It is an incontrovertible fact that we cannot talk about Pentecostalism without Bornagainism. This is why this paper is aimed at giving the public an exceptional insight into Bornagainism.

WHAT IS PENTECOSTALISM?

Pentecostalism is a diverse and complex movement within Christianity with numerous strands and practices all across the world (Anderson 2013; Edet 2019). Thus, Pentecostalism cannot be clubbed as single and one and defies all attempts at defining it comprehensively. However, Pentecostalism is a modern movement within Christianity that can be traced back to the Holiness movement in the Methodist Church. A significant focus of Pentecostal Churches is the Holy Spirit baptism, also known as **Glossalalia** or **Ecstatic** utterance. Toward the end of the 19th century, there was a dramatic and phenomenal rise in religious fervor as various groups anticipated the end of history and the return of Christ in 1900. Much of this religious fervor was motivated by the revival meetings of those in the Pentecostal movement. The first widespread use of tongues was at a meeting led by Charles Parham, in 1900. Subsequently, in 1906, a series of revival meetings on Asusa Street in Los Angeles led to the widespread

experience of tongues-speaking. This meeting at Asusa Street was led by William Seymour, one of Charles Parham's students (Hunter & Hunter 2000, p. II). Though the Asusa Street experience had a brief life, its impact on the Pentecostal movement has been tremendous and has been a lasting or permanent one. It culminated in the founding of many new churches, both in America and globally, with emphasis on seeking the baptism of the Holy Spirit, with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues. Pentecostals adhere strictly to the reliability and authenticity of the Bible and the need for the transformation of the individual's life through the Born-again experience and faith in Jesus Christ. They believe in the divine inspiration and inerrancy of the Holy Writ (Bible). They believe that the Bible in the original manuscript in which it was written is infallible or without error.

Pentecostals emphasize the teaching of the "full gospel" or "foursquare gospel". The term "foursquare gospel" refers to the four fundamental beliefs of Pentecostalism. Jesus saves in consonant with John 3:16, baptizes with the Holy Spirit in accordance with Acts 2:4, heals bodily incongruent with James 5:15 and is coming again to receive those who are saved according to 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (Bridges 1998).

HOLLENWEGER'S CLASSIFICATION OF PENTECOSTALISM

Walter J. Hollenweger (1972) divided Pentecostalism into three types: classical Pentecostals, the Charismatic renewal movement, and Pentecostal or —Pentecostal-like independent churches. Although there is the danger of reductionism in this threefold classification of global Pentecostalism yet it serves as a starting point for any meaningful classification of the complex phenomenon and movement of Pentecostalism. No working definition answers all the objections or altogether avoids generalizations, but at least parameters acceptable to most scholars can be set. Using a narrower theological definition such as initial evidence, 'speaking in tongues,' or even 'baptism in the Spirit as Pentecostal theologians tend to do is fraught with difficulties when there are exceptions all over the world. This is even the case with those who can indirectly trace their origins to North America, such as most forms of European classical Pentecostalism. Similarly, a historical definition that depends on established links alone is difficult to maintain in the plethora of mutations of Pentecostalism worldwide.

His definition does not really exclusively on theological dogma, cultural characteristics, or historical precedents. Situating Pentecostalism within the broad framework of those movements and churches concerned primarily with the experience of the working of the Holy Spirit and the practice of spiritual gifts' which could then be unpacked further may be a satisfactory way to deal with the problem and lend a family likeness in keeping with the analogy (Hollenweger 1972). Within this broad family resemblance described in terms of an emphasis on the Spirit and spiritual gifts, the taxonomy of global Pentecostalism can be further divided into at least four overlapping

types, each with its own family characteristics influenced by historical, theological, and cultural factors. These include the following, each with its own subtypes.

Classical Pentecostals

Classical Pentecostals are those whose diachronic and synchronous links can be shown, originating in the early-twentieth-century revival and missionary movements. The first decade of the twentieth century was the time when these movements began to emerge, and although it took a few years before they were known by the term Pentecostal, their gradual ostracizing by their holiness and evangelical relatives resulted in new denominations being formed just before and after the Great War. Thus classical Pentecostalism can now be divided into four subtypes as follows (McDonnell 1995).

(A) Holiness Pentecostals

Holiness Pentecostals, with roots in the nineteenth-century holiness movement and a belief in the second work of grace called sanctification, followed by the third experience of Spirit baptism, which includes the largest African American denomination in the United States, the Church of God in Christ, the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), and the International Pentecostal Holiness Church (among others) (Synan 1997). Holiness Pentecostals as the name suggests insist on holiness as a necessary virtue and feature of Pentecostalism and expect their followers to be highly vigilant in their speech and conduct maintaining a high level of integrity and accountability in their personal and professional lives, in their social and communitarian gathering (Peachey 2013).

(B) Baptist or Finished Work

Pentecostals Baptist or Finished Work Pentecostals who differ in their approach to sanctification, seeing it as an outgrowth from conversion, and including the Foursquare Church, the Pentecostal Church of God, and the Assemblies of God; and, stemming from the latter (Anderson 2013).

(C) Oneness Pentecostals

Oneness Pentecostals, who reject the doctrine of the Trinity and posit a unitarianism that includes the deity of Christ, including the True Jesus Church in China, the United Pentecostal Church, and the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (Boyd 2012).

(D) Apostolic Pentecostals

Apostolic Pentecostals, both Oneness and Trinitarian, emphasize the authority of present-day 'apostles' and 'prophets', including some of the older Apostolic Church groups. All these four groups have a theology of a subsequent experience of Spirit baptism, usually accompanied by speaking in tongues (Nel 2018). Older Independent

and Spirit Churches, especially in China, India, and sub-Saharan Africa, sometimes have diachronic (but usually not synchronous) links with classical Pentecostalism. In this country and in India, several independent churches emerged in the 1920s and 1930s influenced by Pentecostal missionaries (Nel 2018).

Most of these independent churches prefer to be known as —churches of the Spirit. There is abundant historical evidence that many of these churches were influenced by indigenous Pentecostal revival movements in the early stages of their formation, and some were in direct contact with classical Pentecostals.

Charismatic Movements within Institutional Churches

Older church charismatic's, including catholic charismatic's, Anglican charismatic's, and protestant charismatic's. These movements remain in established older churches, are widespread and worldwide, and often approach the subject of Spirit baptism and spiritual gifts from a sacramental perspective (Burgess & Van der Maas 2010). Although the Charismatic movement is usually thought to have begun in the United States in 1960 in an Episcopalian church in California and in 1967 in Catholic circles in the American Midwest, there are several examples of earlier Charismatic movement in older churches in Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Scandinavia. The movements originating in the 1960s, however, have been more widespread and more heavily influenced by classical Pentecostalism in their initial stages (Burgess & Van der Maas 2010).

Today, in countries like France, Nigeria, Brazil, India, and the Philippines, they have established their own denominational organizations that constitute a significant percentage of the Christian population. Catholic Charismatics in particular make up a large percentage of the total numbers given in statistics and may be at least a tenth of all practicing Catholics.

Neo-Pentecostal and Neo-Charismatic Churches

Neo-Pentecostal and Neo-Charismatic Churches are often regarded as Charismatic independent churches, including megachurches, and influenced by both classical Pentecostalism and the Charismatic movement (Brissos-Lino 2018). Most of these churches emerged from the 1970s onward and are of various kinds:

- Word of Faith churches and similar churches in which the emphasis is on physical health and material prosperity by faith,
- Third Wave churches, which usually conflate Spirit baptism with conversion and see spiritual gifts as available to every believer, including such church movements as Vineyard and Calvary Chapel and mostly originating in the 1980s;
- New Apostolic churches, which have reintroduced an apostolic leadership to their governance not unlike that of the earlier Apostolic Pentecostals, promoting the idea of 'apostolic teams' that establish new churches globally (Brissos-Lino 2018); and

- Probably the largest and most widespread group consisting of many other different independent churches that vary considerably in their theology between Third Wave, Word of Faith, apostolic, and classical Pentecostal and are therefore difficult to categorize (Brissos-Lino 2018).
- Communities of believers led by Charismatic preachers often form international networks and loose associations, which have occasionally been organized into new denominations. These are often the fastest growing sections of Christianity and appeal especially to the younger, better-educated urban population. Some have suggested that this is a form of ‘Americanization, but there is also the danger of generalizing and failing to appreciate reconstructions and innovations made by Pentecostals in adapting to a very different social context.
- Pentecostalism has quickly become a non-Western, majority world church movement. It should also be noted that neo-Pentecostal is a fluid term that has been used in various ways over the past fifty years, at one stage referring to older church Charismatics, later to independent Charismatic churches, Third Wave churches, and more recently to a wide range of newer independent Pentecostal churches that embrace contemporary cultures, use contemporary methods of kids communication, media, and marketing, form international networks or ‘ministries’, and often have a prosperity emphasis.

BORNAGAINISM AS A CARDINAL TEACHING OF GLOBAL PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT

The Born-again experience is very significant teaching of Pentecostalism. The amazing development of born-againism is affecting all sectors of our society. In fact, with the latest figures presented in the religious polls, the current born-again phenomenon is viewed as the fastest-growing teaching in the world today. Bornagainism has permeated several denominations, both at the Pentecostal and protestant levels. In Pentecostalism, to be Born-again is to undergo a spiritual rebirth (Regeneration) of the human soul or spirit. This is solely the work of the Holy Spirit. This new birth is contrasted with the physical birth which everyone experiences. The word “Born-again” has its origin in the New Testament (Edet 2011). The term is originated from an incident in the New Testament in which the words of Jesus were not understood by a Jewish Pharisee, Nicodemus. *Jesus replied,*

*“Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are **born again**.” “How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!” Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit (John 3:3-5 NIV).*

The phrase “born again” applies to people who have accepted Jesus as their Savior or Redeemer. The born-again soul realizes that they are a sinner (Romans 3:23) and that

the penalty for that sin is death (Romans 6:23). To rectify the circumstances, God sent His only Son to die in their place, to take the punishment for sin (Romans 5:8). After Jesus' death, He arose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:3-6). Jesus is the only way to God (John 14:6) and He provides the blessing of salvation. Each person has the choice to receive or reject God's gift through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) and experience the new birth (John 3:1-8). Whoever follows Jesus as Christ, the Son of God, and has accepted His gift of life can be called Christian. That is where the journey of rebirth begins.

To be Born-again connotes repenting of one's sins and turning over a new leave. Being Born-again and repentance are just different terminologies for the same experience. The word Born-again is also synonymous with salvation or "being saved". Most Pentecostal churches equally regard the experience as "giving one's life to Christ". As one becomes born-again, he is expected to manifest this new life in his environment. It is this kind of life that will show people that one is truly Born-again. It is when one is Born-again that his life is totally transformed from the pattern of the world to the pattern of Christ. Being Born-again, therefore, is more than a reformation of habit, it is a transformation of character (Edet 2018, p. 6). Once a person becomes Born-again, he is expected to live a life entirely new and distinct from what others are doing. This is in conjunction with what the bible says in 1 Corinthians 5:17 thus: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (Edet 2018, p. 3).

Pentecostal churches propagate the teaching that being Born-again is not attending church services or being baptized in a church they consider as a "dead church." In this sense, one can be baptized without being born-again. Being born-again implies living a renewed life. It implies a spiritual rebirth. It is refraining from everything sinful. Pentecostals maintain that if one is not Born-again, then he is "Bornagainst." In the Pentecostal mindset, one who still lives in sin is regarded as living for the devil. 1 John 3:8-9 is used to buttress this point as follows: "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil". One who is Born-again is expected to abstain from everything sinful as enumerated in Galatians 5:19-21. He is expected to embrace the "fruit of the spirit" such as: love, joy, goodness, peace, longsuffering, faith, gentleness, meekness and temperance, as recorded in Galatians 5:22-23.

Majority of those who claim to be born-again Christians also withdraw from worldly pleasures and amusements like attending theatre, social clubs, mid-night parties and so on. This is incongruent with 1 John 2; 15 which says: "Love not the world neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the father is not in him." Again, Pentecostal churches also admonish their members to dress modestly and decently. Deeper Life Bible Church founded by William Kumuyi and the Apostolic

Faith' churches are few examples of Pentecostal Churches in full support of this teaching. An often-quoted scripture in support of this position is found in 1 Timothy 2:9 which says: "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with brooded hair or gold, or pearls, or costly array." In consonant with this scripture, therefore, one is expected to dress modestly.

Being born-again is a fundamental aspect of the Pentecostal faith and without it, one is regarded as not starting anything at all. The Born-again experience starts with a preacher making an **Altar call**. At this point, people come out to surrender their lives to Christ. After making some **confessional prayers**, which they are being led to do by the preacher in charge, they are handed over to a counselor who will make sure these people are planted in the church. Normally, the counselor gives them forms to fill, which will indicate their names, addresses and in recent times phone numbers.

It is believed that after being Born-again, a person is expected to attach himself or herself to a Bible-believing church. This was exactly what Reinhard Bonnke, a famous Pentecostal leader and founder of Christ for All Nations (CFAN) meant when he wrote:

Think of it like this: candles stand in the candlestick, light bulbs go into light sockets; and trees grown in soil. Without candlesticks, candles would fall over. Without being plugged in, light bulbs would never shine. And without soil, trees would simply die. For 'Christians, the church is a candlestick, a power source and somewhere to put down roots-so that you can stand, shine and grow (1991, p. 4).

For Pentecostal preachers, the call to be Born-again is a very significant call and they remind their hearers that delaying this decision is dangerous since man's life is like a vapour that appears for a little time and vanishes at a time he will not know "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth" - (James 4:14). Akwaowo, who founded a Pentecostal movement in Calabar by the name Truth and Life Church, in the early 1970s noted that:

A Born-again Christian is one who has the spirit of God, the fear of God and the life of Christ dwelling in him, so that in his actions, conversations, walk and conduct, Christ can be seen. This makes him different from any other person (1994, p. 9).

A Born-again Christian is therefore the window that lets in the light for those in the dark to see. But if the window is darkened or close, then the light cannot come out of it. A Born-again Christian is the "salt of the earth," that savours and makes the world good for others to live in (Matthew 5:13, Luke 14:34, Mark 9:50).

A Born-again Christian also has several responsibilities he must discharge to his nation. Prominent among them are:

1. He should fear and honour the rulers - Romans 13:1, Titus 3:1

2. He should be patriotic - Isaiah 66:10.
3. He should pay his taxes - Matthew 17:27, Matthew 22:21
4. He should pray for rulers - 1 Timothy 2:1-10 (Dewel 2000).

Being Born-again is important because there is nothing in the world. It is needless getting everything in the world if one is not saved. To confirm this, the world-famous evangelist, Billy Graham (1977) noted that: “All the material things in life are meaningless if a man hasn’t discovered what is underneath them.”(p. 21) This is the basic reason why a person must not allow these material things to take his attention away from God. The Born-again experience also comes along with profound peace. Once a person has accepted Christ as Lord and Saviour, from that time, he has real peace of mind. This peace reigns in the life of the person in the midst of any problem or trouble he goes through. To buttress this point, Graham (1977, p. 23) notes that: “the peace of God is not the absence of tension or turmoil, but peace in the midst of tension and turmoil”. The new birth or Born-again experience is received by the grace of God through faith in Christ as lord and Saviour. The believer is regenerated, justified and adopted into the family of God; and the Holy Spirit’s work of sanctification is initiated.

Being Born-again involves first of all an acknowledgment of our sin. When a person becomes Born-again, he is saying that he is a sinner and that his sin involves him in personal guilt before God. This kind of guilt does not mean incriminating self-contempt; it means seeing one’s self as God sees one and saying: “God be merciful to me a sinner” - Luke 18:13 (Freeman 1978, p. 12). From the moment a person is conceived, he has the tendency to sin; then he becomes a sinner by choice and ultimately a sinner by practice. That is why the Holy Writ says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. As a result of this sin, every person throughout the world, of whatever race, colour, language or culture, needs to be Born-again. Man is guilty of sin (singular), which is expressed in sins (plural). Man has broken God’s law and rebelled against him because he is a sinner by nature. It is this disease of sin that Christ dealt with on the cross. Mike Murdock (1990), who is in tremendous- demand in America today; and who affects thousands through his weekly television program “Wisdom keys”, while still preaching and teaching in hundreds of Pentecostal churches in America and globally noted thus about the Born-again experience.:

Guilt is the thief of faith. When you permit sin in your life, you become uncomfortable in the presence of God. It is difficult to expect a miracle from a God you resent. Confess your failure. He forgives. Your mistakes and sins have not shocked God. He anticipated your need for mercy. The master key to recovery is being Born-again. Don’t justify yourself. Quit blaming others for the decisions you have made. Repent immediately (1990, p. 8).

Oswald Smith (1932) who founded the people’s Church, Toronto, on his part noted that the experience of being Born-again has Christ as its originator. In other words, it is not

the church that saves, but Christ. He indicates his position in the following words:

You are saved, not by the church, but by a person; and that person is the Lord Jesus Christ, God's only begotten son. For there are thousands of Protestants, who are not saved, thousands who have professed to embrace Christianity who has never accepted the Christ of Christianity (p. 14).

Being Born-again according to the adherents of Pentecostalism comes with spiritual, physical, psychological, financial, material and eternal benefits. When a believer submits to God's will, by way of becoming Born-again, he now has a scriptural basis for the benefit of his salvation. A person becomes a part of the human family by first birth; but can only become a part of God's family by second birth, which Pentecostals identify as the Born-again experience. The Redeemed Christian Church of God is another good example of a Pentecostal church in Nigeria that emphasizes this experience.

CONCLUSION

As it has been noted earlier, the Born-again experience requires holiness and also requires that a Christian trusts God with every detail of his life. This itself is a major sign of maturity in the Christian faith. Every aspect of such a Christian's life should be under God's strict supervision and direction. This is why the teaching of divine direction and guidance is an integral aspect of the Christian's life. Pentecostals maintain that carnal Christians cannot experience an abundant and fruitful Christian life. The carnal man trusts in his efforts to live the Christian life. He is either uninformed or has forgotten about God's love, forgiveness and power. He has a Christian life that is unstable. Often, he wants to do what is right, but he is unable. In this way, such a Christian has failed to draw from the power of the Holy Spirit to live the Christian life.

A Born-again life is a spirit-filled life. It is a Christ-directed life by which Christ lives His life in and through the believer in the power of the Holy Spirit. One becomes a Christian through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, according to John 3:1-8. From that moment of spiritual birth, a Christian has the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. But even with this presence, it is obvious that not all Christians are directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The Born-again experience, therefore, entails a salvation experience and subsequent righteousness and holiness, emanating from the salvation experience. It entails also a life that is filled with the Holy Spirit and empowered by Him. It entails constant fellowship with like-minded people. It entails decency in dressing and lifestyle as well as several other godly virtues that qualify and accompany that nomenclature.

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