# CHARISMATIC CHRISTIANITY AS PRIMAL SPIRITUALITY? SOME OBSERVATIONS FROM SLOVENIA

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## Introduction

Since its emergence in the early decades of the 20th century, Charismatic Christianity[1] has rapidly spread across the globe. Scientific estimates suggest that there are as many as 700 million Charismatics worldwide,[2] positioning the movement as the most successful of the 20th century and the fastest-growing religion in human history.[3] Furthermore, its emergence is said to have accelerated the rise of Global Christianity.[4] While significant demographic shifts in the Global South certainly contribute to the understanding of this phenomenon,[5] the inquiry into why this specific form of Christianity has garnered such a substantial following remains inadequately addressed.

[1] Neither the scientific, nor the theological literature recognizes any agreed upon label for Charismatic Christianity. Given their origins, such Christian communities and churches are usually labelled as either Pentecostal, Pentecostal-Charismatic or merely Charismatic. Given my intention to pinpoint and evaluate a common quality of such Christians, I will be using *Charismatic* in order to flesh out their common characteristics.

[2] Todd Johnson and Gina Zurlo, "Status of Global Christianity 2024."

[3] David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); Peter Berger, *The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 24, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781614516477.

[4] Philip Jenkins, *The next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[5] Eric P. Kaufmann, *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth? Demography and Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Profile, 2010).

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Explanations from the social sciences regarding the emergence of Charismatic Christianity typically adopt a functionalist perspective, recognising the interconnectedness of significant social transformations and the global proliferation of Charismatic movements. These theories typically link the latter to the former through the perspective of material deprivation or the Weberian correlation between a specific form of Christianity and economic advancement.[6]

However, anthropologists have noted that such explanations do not adequately address the specific characteristics of Charismatic Christianity. One particularly interesting theory was developed by the theologian Harvey Cox, who proposed an analysis of Charismatic Christianity as a manifestation of primal spirituality.[7] This paper explores the advantages of Cox's approach, which, while favoured by theologians, has been relatively overlooked in social scientific discussions. This paper will present an analysis grounded in an empirical study carried out in three Christian Charismatic communities in Slovenia, highlighting both the advantages and disadvantages of Cox's approach through evidence gathered from Slovenia and other regions.[8] To begin, I will present a concise overview of Charismatic Christianity both globally and locally in Slovenia, emphasising its historical evolution and theological traits. Next, I will examine the prevalent social scientific analyses regarding the significant appeal of Charismatic Christianity. Finally, I will offer a detailed summary of the primal spirituality approach

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[6] Emílio Willems, *Followers of the New Faith: Culture Change and the Rise of Protestantism in Brazil and Chile* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967); Christian Lalive d'Epinay, *Haven of the Masses: A Study of the Pentecostal Movement in Chile*, World Studies of Churches in Mission (London: Lutterworth P, 1969); Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992); Paul Freston, "Pentecostalism in Latin America: Characteristics and Controversies," *Social Compass* 45, no. 3 (September 1998): 335–358, https://doi.org/10.1177/003776898045003002; Isabelle V. Barker, "Charismatic Economies: Pentecostalism, Economic Restructuring, and Social Reproduction," *New Political Science* 29, no. 4 (December 2007): 407–427, https://doi.org/10.1080/07393140701688305.

[7] Harvey Cox, *Fire from heaven: the rise of Pentecostal spirituality and the reshaping of religion in the twenty-first century* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1995).

[8] Research behind this paper was funded by the research programme "Problems of Autonomy and Identities at the Time of Globalisation" (P6–0194) and the training of Young Researchers. Both are funded by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARIS).

as articulated by Harvey Cox and assess the value of understanding Christian Charismatics as adherents of primal spirituality, drawing on research findings from both international sources and Slovenia.

## Global and local vistas of Charismatic Christianity

Before sketching the global and local outlines of Charismatic Christianity, it is worth considering its complexities. As the eminent theologians Cecil Robeck and Amos Yong recently pointed out, brush strokes are of no use when it comes to outlining the characteristics of those phenomena labelled as Charismatic Christianity: "The definition of what it means to be 'Pentecostal' has become nearly as elusive as a grain of sand in a desert windstorm."[9] Nonetheless, definitions remain inescapable. While a discussion of its particular characteristics will be presented below, Charismatic Christianity can be broadly understood by referring to the baptism in the Spirit and the manifestation of *charismata* or gifts of the Spirit. In this light, I will be following Allan Anderson's authoritative definition of Charismatic Christianity as "the churches with a 'family resemblance' that emphasize the working of the Holy Spirit, especially in the use of such 'gifts of the Spirit' as healings, prophecies and speaking in tongues."[10]

Beyond this, Charismatic Christianity is difficult to pin down from a theological point of view. Problems arise from the religious make up of Charismatics – they include Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican churches, rendering any conclusive doctrinal foundation exceedingly elusive. Consider, for instance, conversion, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. These rites are perceived fundamentally differently among Protestant and Catholic Charismatics. Nevertheless, Charismatic Christians possess certain shared ideas and, primarily, common experiences.

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[9] Cecil M. Robeck and Amos Yong, "Global Pentecostalism: An Introduction to Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, ed. Cecil M. Robeck and Amos Yong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1.

[10] Allan Anderson, "Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to World Christianity*, ed. Lamin Sanneh and Michael J. McClymond (Hobokon, New Jersey: Wiley, 2016), 653, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118556115.ch49.

The primary distinction that separates Charismatics from other Christians is their practice of Spirit baptism. Charismatics claim that, while water baptism is required to receive the Spirit, Spirit baptism is a unique and independent experience accessible to all baptised Christians.[11] This is explained in biblical terms by Mark, who records John the Baptist saying: "I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."[12] The experience of baptism in the Spirit is thought to empower the Christian in a manner similar to the formation of the first Apostolic church, as detailed in the *Acts of the Apostles*, the biblical wellspring of Classical Pentecostals and contemporary Charismatics alike: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."[13] Therefore, the baptism in Spirit should be understood as a gateway to empowerment via the workings of the Spirit.[14] According to the Acts, apostles experienced the outpouring of the Spirit on the 50th day after Easter as they gathered in prayer and anticipation of the Spirit:

> Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.[15]

This leads us to the second defining characteristic of Charismatic Christianity: *glossolalia* or speaking in tongues. Baptism in the Spirit can be understood as key to the unlocking of gifts of the Spirit also known as *charismata* or *charisms*, from which Charismatic Christianity derives its name. While these gifts are well-known across Christian communities, Charismatics believe that these gifts are not confined to the Apostolic age of the first church but can also be attained in

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11 William Caldwell, *Krst v Svetem Duhu* (Ljubljana: Kristusova binkoštna cerkev, 1976).
12 Mr 1:8.
13 Acts, 1:8.
14 William W. Menzies and Stanley M. Horton, *Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1993), 128.
15 *Ibid.*, 2–4.

contemporary times.[16] While the total number of gifts remains ambiguous, most common lists enumerate the nine gifts delineated in the initial Epistles to the Corinthians (12–14). Included among these is the gift of speaking in tongues, a specific form of prayer that remains incomprehensible to both the individual praying and any observers.[17] Speaking in tongues can be roughly defined as a "meaningless but phonologically structured human utterance believed by the speaker to be a real language, but bearing no systematic resemblance to any natural language, living or dead."[18] Charismatics typically believe that praying in tongues means praying directly to God as narrated by Paul: "For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit."[19] From this it follows that speaking in tongues is a gift that "edifies the one engaged in prayer," which is why it is commonly viewed as a "useful practice," which should be "cultivated in the believer's daily life," as by doing so a Christian "is built up in faith and in spiritual life."[20]

Beyond these general outlines, Charismatic Christianity exhibits significant variety in both scientific and theological definitions and actual communities and churches.[21] Building on Allan Anderson's work, Charismatic Christianity can be usefully categorized into three

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16 Keith Warrington, "Darovi Duha", in *Binkoštniki v 21. stoletju: Identiteta, vera, praksa*, ed. Corneliu Constantineanu and Christopher J. Scobie (Ljubljana: Podvig, 2016), 193–217.

17 Unless there is a person present, which has received the gift of interpreting and translating tongues into everyday speech.

18 William John Samarin, *Tongues of Men and Angels: The Religious Language of Pentecostalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 2.

19 1 Corinthians 14:2.

20 Menzies and Horton, *Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective*, 139.

21 See for example: Walter Hollenweger, "After Twenty Years' Research on Pentecostalism," *Theology* 87, no. 720 (November 1984): 403–12, https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X8408700602; Joel Robbins, "The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33, no. 1 (October 2004): 119–23, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.32.061002.093421; Michael Bergunder, "Constructing Pentecostalism: On Issues Of Methodology And Representation," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 27, no. 1 (April 2007): 52–71, https://doi.org/10.1179/jeb.2007.27.1.005; André Droogers, "Essentialist and Normative Approaches," in *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, ed. Allan Anderson, Michael Bergunder and André Droogers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 30–50; Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard van der Maas, eds., *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2007).

consecutive *waves*, whose representative communities and churches nowadays coexist: firstly, there are Classical Pentecostals, which emerged as an independent Protestant church during the first two decades of the 20th century; secondly, there is the *pentecostalisation* of other Christian churches, which took place during the first twenty years after the World War II, leading to the emergence of the Charismatic renewal; and thirdly, during the last decades of the 20th century, the pentecostalisation spread among large swaths of smaller Evangelical churches, giving rise to the Neocharismatics. This categorization is particularly useful as it highlights the varieties of institutional frameworks within Charismatic Christianity. Classical Pentecostals established their own Protestant churches, the Charismatic Renewal characterises the pentecostalisation of various Christian churches from within, and the Neocharismatics signify the institutional independence of the Charismatic impulse. In addition, there exists considerable scholarly debate regarding the distinction of an additional second wave, primarily composed of African Independent Churches, or a fourth wave of Charismatic Christianity, identified as the New Apostolic Reformation.[22] Given that these issues are still under discussion, I will follow the three waves categorisation.

The initial expression of Charismatic Christianity can be traced to the emergence of Pentecostalism at the beginning of the 20th century. Though there are a number of contemporary studies proving a multifaceted genealogy of Pentecostalism,[23] its origin is nevertheless commonly attributed to the Azusa Street revival, led by pastor William Seymour between 1906 and 1909.[24] Seymour effectively implemented the doctrine of initial evidence, which was developed in 1901 by former Methodist pastor Charles Fox Parham, who initiated a comparable revival in Topeka, Kansas, during which he articulated the concept of speaking in tongues as essential evidence of baptism in the Spirit. This

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[22] Peter Wagner, *Churchquake! How the New Apostolic Reformation Is Shaking up the Church as We Know It* (Ventura: Regal, 1999); Allan Anderson, "Varieties, Taxonomies, and Definitions," in *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, ed. Allan Anderson and Michael Bergunder (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 18.

[23] Bergunder, "Constructing Pentecostalism"; Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 36–39.

[24] Cecil M. Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville: Emanate Books, 2017).

theological cornerstone is integral to the Full Gospel doctrine, which serves as the theological foundation of Classical Pentecostalism. The Full Gospel emphasises Jesus Christ as central to Pentecostalism, encapsulating his significance through the concepts of salvation, sanctification, faith healing, and the Second Coming.[25]

As a Protestant church, Pentecostals inevitably fragmented into three major groups, which distinguished themselves along theological and social – particularly racial – lines. First, there are Wesleyan or Holiness Pentecostals, who trace their roots to the Holiness movement. Currently, these Pentecostals make up the largest Black Pentecostal communities such as the Church of God and the Church of God in Christ. Secondly, there are Baptist or Finished Work Pentecostals, represented today by, for example, the Foursquare Church and Assemblies of God, the largest worldwide Pentecostal network of churches. Thirdly, there are the Oneness Pentecostals, who, represent the most theologically distinct grouping within the Pentecostal family.[26]

The rise of Pentecostalism and the theological innovations they brought about did not go unnoticed among fellow Christians. Beginning in the early 1950s, the process of *pentecostalisation* or *charismatic renewal* began to reshape other Christian churches as well. This process started with fellow Protestant Christians, mainly Episcopals, and continued within the Orthodox, Anglican and most famously the Catholic Church.[27] Pentecostalisation involved adopting key Pentecostal features; primarily the emphasis on the Baptism of the Spirit and the resulting manifestations of spiritual gifts, and a particular style of Pentecostal worship began to be recognised as integral to many a Christian church. This process was so evident that observers referred to it as a new Pentecostal revival among Christians, resulting in terms such as Neopentecostals and Catholic Pentecostals or Pentecostal

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[25] Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1987), 20–22.

[26] Vinson Synan, "Pentecostalism: Varieties and Contributions," *Pneuma* 9, no. 1 (1987): 31–49, https://doi.org/10.1163/157007487X00047; Anderson, "Varieties, Taxonomies, and Definitions".

[27] Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 157.

Catholics.[28] The Catholic Church was among the last to experience pentecostalisation, which took place only after Vatican II. However, it was the Catholic Charismatic Renewal that attracted the most followers during the second wave of Charismatic Christianity.

While Catholics represent the largest segment of the Charismatic renewal, the third wave of Charismatic Christianity is predominantly comprised of Protestant evangelicals. Also dubbed independent or post-denominational, the Neocharismatics represent the institutional independence of Charismatic Christianity since the 1980s.[29] Neocharismatic churches and communities are characterized by greater theological flexibility, seen either in relegating the importance of such staples of Pentecostalism as the doctrine of initial evidence or in numerous theological novelties. Among these novelties are the dissemination of prosperity theology, power evangelism, and holy laughter, alongside an emphasis on worship music. The rise of prosperity theology[30] can be traced back to the Word of Life movement and its founder Kenneth Hagin and to his successor Kenneth Copeland. Though initially a US product, prosperity gospel is now part-and-parcel of the largest Pentecostal and Neocharismatic communities in the Global South – such as the Brazilian *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* or the Nigerian *Redeemed Christian Church of God*.[31] Power evangelism is a form of evangelism that makes use of mass faith healing and ecstatic worship events, associated with the Toronto Blessing phenomenon.[32]

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[28] Richard Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics: The Origins, Development, and Significance of Neo-Pentecostalism* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976); René Laurentin, *Catholic Pentecostalism* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977); Meredith B. McGuire, *Pentecostal Catholics: Power, Charisma, and Order in a Religious Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982).

[29] Peter Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit: Encountering the Power of Signs and Wonders Today* (Ann Arbor: Servant Publications, Vine Books, 1988).

[30] Also known as the health and wealth gospel or name-it-and-claim it theology.

[31] Amos Yong, "A Typology of Prosperity Theology: A Religious Economy of Global Renewal or a Renewal Economics?," in *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socioeconomics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, ed. Katherine Attanasi and Amos Yong (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 15–34; Virginia Garrard-Burnett, "Neopentecostalism and Prosperity Theology in Latin America: A Religion for Late Capitalist Society," *Iberoamericana – Nordic Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 42, no. 1–2 (February 2013): 21, https://doi.org/10.16993/ibero.32.

[32] Margaret M. Poloma, *Main Street Mystics: The Toronto Blessing and Reviving Pentecostalism* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2003); Michael Wilkinson and Peter Althouse, *Catch the Fire:*

Finally, the production of Charismatic worship music has been nearly monopolized by Hillsong, the Australian mega church. Hillsong music is now the unescapable repertoire of many a Charismatic church – be it Pentecostal, Charismatic renewal or Neocharismatic – leading to the *hillsongisation* of Christianity.[33] These three Neocharismatic novelties have long since been widely dispersed among Evangelical communities worldwide, making headway among other Charismatic communities as well.

The emergence of Neocharismatics and the proliferation of their novelties among Christians worldwide has made the already difficult task of approximating the number of Charismatics even harder. Scientific evaluations indicate that there are between 614 to 683 million Charismatic Christians globally, representing approximately a quarter of the total Christian population.[34] Should we regard Charismatics as an independent Christian denomination, they would rank as the second largest cohort of Christians, following Catholics. Among Charismatic Christians, the largest group consists of Neocharismatics, followed by members of different Charismatic renewals and lastly Classical Pentecostals. According to the *Atlas of Global Christianity*, there are 94 million Pentecostals, 206 million members of Charismatic renewals and 313 million Neocharismatics worldwide. Finally, it is imperative to highlight that Charismatic Christianity exhibits a significant geographical disparity with as much as 82% of all Charismatics residing in the Global South. Among the ten nations with the highest populations of Charismatics, the United States stands out as the sole representative from the Global North. In the regions of the Global South, Charismatics are nearly uniformly distributed across Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia.[35]

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*Soaking Prayer and Charismatic Renewal* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2014).

[33] Gerardo Martí, "The Global Phenomenon of Hillsong Church: An Initial Assessment," *Sociology of Religion* 78, no. 4 (January 2018): 377–386, https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srx059.

[34] See Johnson and Ross, "Atlas of Global Christianity 1910–2010," 103; Johnson and Zurlo, "Status of Global Christianity 2024".

[35] Jenkins, *The next Christendom*; Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross, *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910–2010* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 101–102.

On the other hand, statistics on European Charismatics present a stark contrast. Scientific assessments tend to vary to some degree: for example, the *Atlas of Global Christianity* estimates that there are 31.6 million Charismatics in Europe,[36] the research network GloPent, dedicated to researching global Pentecostalism, puts the figure at 37.5 million,[37] while William Kay and Anne Dyer, editors of *European Pentecostalism*, estimate the number at a mere 17 million.[38] Nonetheless, various estimations generally converge on the conclusion that Europe possesses the smallest proportion of Charismatics among all continents. Moreover, a notable aspect of the phenomenon in Europe is that a significant proportion of Charismatics are affiliated with the Charismatic renewal, predominantly within the Catholic Charismatic renewal.[39] However, perhaps it should come as no surprise that the most active segment of European Charismatic Christianity is in fact *migrant* Christianity. This phenomenon is dubbed *reverse mission*,[40] which encompasses the missionary striving of Global South migrants to convert Europe – in majority of cases by the way of African or Latin American Charismatic Christianity.[41]

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36 Johnson and Ross, "Atlas of Global Christianity 1910–2010," 103.

37 GloPent, "Europe," accessed July 26, 2024, https://www.glopent.net/global-pentecostalism/europe.

38 William K. Kay and Anne E. Dyer, eds., *European Pentecostalism* (Boston: Brill, 2011), 403.

39 Burgess and van der Maas, *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, 815.

40 Matthews Ojo, "Reverse Mission," in *Encyclopaedia of Mission and Missionaries*, ed. Jonathan Bonk (New York: Routledge, 2007), 380–382.

41 Richard Burgess, "Bringing Back the Gospel: Reverse Mission among Nigerian Pentecostals in Britain," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 4, no. 3 (2011): 429–49, https://doi.org/10.1163/187489211X593499; Harvey C. Kwiyani, *Sent Forth: African Missionary Work in the West* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2014), 110–34; Eric Morier-Genoud, "'Reverse Mission,': A Critical Approach for a Problematic Subject," in *Bringing Back the Social into the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Veronique Altglas and Matthew Wood (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 169–88; Richard Burgess, "Megachurches and 'Reverse Mission'," in *Handbook of Megachurches*, ed. Stephen Hunt (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 243–268.

## Charismatic Christianity in Slovenia

Turning our attention now to Slovenia, very little is known about any kind of Slovenian Charismatics. Only a few theological and biographical accounts about Pentecostalism and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal are available, and no social-scientific studies of Slovene Charismatics have been undertaken.[42] In light of this, my PhD study is dedicated to producing the very first sociological account of Charismatic Christians in Slovenia.

Between January 2023 and May 2024, I conducted a field study within three Charismatic communities. Relying on participant observations, semi-structured interviews with leaders and members, as well as a survey, I conducted my study in the following communities: the Pentecostal church Emanuel in Maribor; the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, which is not geographically limited; and the Neocharismatic community Christian centre. Overall, I conducted 41 interviews, 30 official participant observations, including three conducted in similar communities in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, and collected 189 survey responses across all three communities. However, the survey sample is not representative, as the breakdown of responses across communities is as follows: 121 Catholics responded, in comparison to 40 Pentecostals and 28 Neocharismatics. While considering these numbers, one should keep in mind the vast differences in sizes of studied communities. Nevertheless, I believe the data gathered can help provide sufficient scientific estimates, if not hard conclusions. I will draw upon some survey results later in this study.

Slovenia can be considered a paradigmatical example of European Charismatic Christianity. Although Pentecostals first appeared in what is now Slovenia in 1933, their growth has been somewhat modest, primarily limited to the more Protestant northeastern areas of a country

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[42] Anton Marinko, "Nekaj misli o prenovi," in *Jezus me je poklical za svojo pričo*, ed. Emiliano Tardif (Župnijski urad Ljubljana-Črnuče, 1986), 85–87; Mihael Kuzmič, *Prvih sedem let: Binkoštno gibanje v Sloveniji v letih 1933-1941* (Ljubljana, Osijek: Duhovno obzorje ; Evanđeoski teološki fakultet, Institut za protestantske studije, 2003); Simona Ficko, "Religijska Konverzija," *Religija i Tolerancija* 20, no. 38 (2022): 251–272, https://doi.org/10.18485/rit.2022.20.38.4.

that is otherwise predominantly Catholic.[43] As explained to me by Andrej Bojanec, a well-known Pentecostal pastor, their growth had been stifled by both the socialist regime of former Yugoslavia and inner preoccupation with Holiness codes of conduct up until the 1990s. According to Mihael Kuzmič, there were 4250 Classical Pentecostals in Yugoslavia at the time of its collapse.[44] Spurred by the liberalisation of the Slovenian religious field and a shedding of more conservative codes of conduct, they have enjoyed a relative uptick in popularity. Currently, there are thirteen Pentecostal churches, which constitute the association of Slovene Classical Pentecostals, which is itself member of the Pentecostal European Fellowship and the aforementioned Assemblies of God union. There are no official statistics on church membership, so the best estimates put the number of Pentecostals at around 4000.[45]

Catholic Charismatics, on the other hand, are more numerous. The Slovenian Catholic Charismatic Renewal traces its roots to the early 1970s, when Anton Marinko, a Catholic priest, first witnessed speaking in tongues while on a trip to Ohio. Impressed by the experiential dimensions of the Holy Spirit, he began organising regular prayer meetings in Ljubljana in 1972, which, in the next 10 years, gave rise to the official Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Slovenia.[46] However, it was not until the 1990s, that is, after Slovenia gained independence and liberalised its religious field, that the Catholic Charismatics experienced a lift of, reaching its peak in terms of sheer numbers in the beginning of the 21st century at around 40 thousand Catholics.[47] However, due to the combination of the precarious position within the Catholic Church

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[43] Mihael Kuzmič, *Prvih sedem let: Binkoštno gibanje v Sloveniji v letih 1933–1941* (Ljubljana, Osijek: Duhovno obzorje; Evanđeoski teološki fakultet, Institut za protestantske studije, 2003); Štefan Kuzmič, "Kratka zgodovina binkoštnega gibanja v Sloveniji," in *Plamen, Ki gori,* ed. Štefan Kuzmič and Sabina Maučec Scobie (Ljubljana: Podvig, 2023), 10–25.

[44] Kuzmič, *Prvih sedem let*, 12.

[45] The only available scientific estimation put the number at 973, which I believe to be overly conservative. See Burgess and van der Maas, *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, 648.

[46] Anton Marinko, *Očetova obljuba: Karizmatično binkoštno gibanje v luči Nove zaveze in sedanjega izkustva* (Leskovec: Župnijski urad Leskovec pri Krškem, 1978); Marinko, "Nekaj misli o prenovi".

[47] For similar estimations see also Burgess and van der Maas, *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, 658.

in Slovenia, as well as the inability to hand over the reins to younger generation, and the COVID-19 epidemic, their number drastically declined to about 8 to 10 thousand Catholic Charismatics, making about a half of all Charismatic Christians in Slovenia. Besides taking part in common Catholic rites, Catholic Charismatics weekly gather in small prayer or worship groups, which consist of up to 20 unofficial members. According to the official website, there are currently 90 prayer groups operating across Slovenia.[48]

Similar factors contributed to the rise of the Evangelical movement in Slovenia in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which in turn paved the way for the emergence of Neocharismatics. There are no official statistics when it comes to the Evangelical movement; however, there are some useful estimates. According to one such estimate, there are 43 Evangelical churches (including Classical Pentecostals) in Slovenia, as well as 13 non-church organizations.[49]

Although it is impossible to draw precise borders, Slovenia is home to a number of vibrant evangelical Neocharismatic churches, such as the Calvary Christian Church, which serves as a local representation of the well-known global Calvary Chapel movement, and the International Christian Community, which is led by former Michigan Assemblies of God missionary pastor Steve Telzerow. It is challenging to pinpoint the precise number of Neocharismatic churches in Slovenia because Neocharismatics often consist of Evangelical groups that underwent pentecostalization. Among these is the Christian Centre, a local affiliate of the International Network of Churches, a Neocharismatic church that originated in Australia and has its European headquarters in the UK. In Slovenia it was founded by Klemen Vidic, who became a Christian in the Pentecostal church in Ljubljana and was formally recognised as a religious community in 2003. Its largest communities are in Novo mesto and Ljubljana, though they also operate in Šentjur and Prevalje. In sum, I would estimate that there are about 700 Neocharismatics, with half of them belonging to the Christian centre.

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[48] Prenova v Duhu, "Molitvena Občestva," accessed August 9, 2024, https://prenova.rkc.si/.

[49] Podvig, "Imenik Evangelijskih Cerkva in organizacij (Podvig, 2020)"; Evangelij.si, "Evangelij.si," accessed July 21, 2024, https://evangelij.si/.

Overall, it is reasonable to assume that there are roughly 15,000 Slovenian Charismatics of all creeds, making them a small religious minority in a country of 2 million people. Despite the fact that the communities' sizes and member demographics differ significantly, they nevertheless have several fundamental traits in common. Due to the formal constraints of this paper, let me point out just one of them, which is particularly relevant in the light of the primal spirituality thesis under consideration: according to data gathered, the vast majority of Slovenian Charismatics are middle aged ex-Catholic converts. A typical religious narrative of my interviewees follows this pattern: first, they were socialised as Catholics, receiving all primary Catholic sacraments, and perceiving their faith as important, yet somewhat distant; second, they distanced themselves from the Church and their faith, only to experience a type of life crises, which, third, spurred a spiritual quest, eventually leading them to one of the Christian Charismatic communities.

Having briefly outlined my own research in Slovenia, let me now switch back to predominant studies of Charismatic Christianity before focusing on the primal spirituality thesis.

## Studying Charismatic Christianity

The patchy scholarly focus on Charismatics in Slovenia stands markedly at odds with the broader global scientific pursuits. Charismatic Christianity quickly became an interesting scholarly point of departure – first for theologians, quickly followed by numerous social scientific studies, predominantly undertaken in the Global South. Amongst most popular objects of investigation one can find the relationship between gender and the Charismatics;[50] the relationship between Charismatic Christianity and the neoliberal restructuring of societies of Latin

[50] Elizabeth Brusco, *The Reformation of Machismo: Evangelical Conversion and Gender in Colombia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995); Robbins, "The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity," 131–137; Bernice Martin, "The Pentecostal Gender Paradox: A Cautionary Tale for the Sociology of Religion," in *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology of Religion*, ed. Richard K. Fenn (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 52–66, https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470998571.ch3.

America and sub–Saharan Africa;[51] and lastly, the question of religious embodiment amongst Charismatics.[52] No matter how important these studies have been in deepening our understanding of Charismatic Christianity, they are overshadowed by the number of those studies that try to explain why exactly have Charismatics been so successful in their missionary zeal. Such studies typically investigate the underlying factors contributing to the Charismatic surge within the context of broader social dynamics, particularly focusing on the various consequences of social modernisation in the Global South.

Charismatic Christianity is often perceived as the religion of the poor,[53] as the disposed masses either navigate the precarious realities of contemporary lives by seeking refuge in Charismatic communities or see them as levers of social mobility. The first group of studies see theories of deprivation and existential security as best equipped to explain the popularity of Charismatics;[54] while the second, the most popular of the two, is marked by neoweberian theories of affinity between capitalist development and doctrinal content of Charismatic Christianity.[55]

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[51] David Maxwell, "'Delivered from the Spirit of Poverty?' Pentecostalism, Prosperity and Modernity in Zimbabwe," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28, no. 3 (August 1998): 350, https://doi.org/10.2307/1581574; Isabelle V. Barker, "Charismatic Economies: Pentecostalism, Economic Restructuring, and Social Reproduction," *New Political Science* 29, no. 4 (December 2007): 407–427, https://doi.org/10.1080/07393140701688305.

[52] Wolfgang Vondey, "Embodied Gospel: The Materiality of Pentecostal Theology," in *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Michael Wilkinson and Peter Althouse (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 102–19, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004344181_007; Michael Wilkinson, "Pentecostalism, the Body, and Embodiment," in *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Michael Wilkinson and Peter Althouse (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 15–35, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004344181_003; Naomi Richman, "Machine Gun Prayer: The Politics of Embodied Desire in Pentecostal Worship," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 35, no. 3 (September 2020): 469–83, https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2020.1828506.

[53] Cecília Loreto Mariz, *Coping with Poverty: Pentecostals and Christian Base Communities in Brazil* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 35; Paul Freston, "Pentecostalism in Latin America: Characteristics and Controversies", *Social Compass* 45, no. 3 (September 1998): 341–342, https://doi.org/10.1177/003776898045003002; Robbins, "The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity," 123–124.

[54] Christian Lalive d'Epinay, *Haven of the Masses: A Study of the Pentecostal Movement in Chile*, World Studies of Churches in Mission (London: Lutterworth Publishing, 1969); Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992).

[55] Emílio Willems, *Followers of the New Faith: Culture Change and the Rise of Protestantism in Brazil and Chile* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967); R. Andrew Chesnut, *Born*

While their implications diverge significantly, these two groups of approaches share a common functionalist tendency, wherein the social scientific explanation takes into consideration the specific beliefs of distinct Charismatic groups and seeks to understand how these beliefs align with their social conditions.[56]

While such studies have their fair share of critics,[57] discussing their merits in detail is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, what should be pointed out about sociological studies of Charismatic Christianity is the following: they rarely take Charismatic Christianity seriously in and of itself. They see it as a religion fitting into their scientific presuppositions of religion as a social phenomenon. I share these observations with authors such as sociologist Michael Wilkinson, who wrote that sociologists tend to reduce Charismatic Christianity – as any other religion – to a "sort of delusional behaviour, sectarian stance, material deprivation or market demand."[58]

Perhaps unsurprisingly, it is anthropologists who took up the torch of taking Charismatic Christianity seriously as a specific kind of religion.[59] In particular, they point to the clear lack of social scientific rituals studies, which is quite peculiar, since Charismatic rituals – a

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*Again in Brazil: The Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997); Peter Berger, "Max Weber Is Alive and Well, and Living in Guatemala: The Protestant Ethic Today," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 8, no. 4 (January 2010): 3–9, https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2010.528964; Benjamin Kirby, "Pentecostalism, Economics, Capitalism: Putting *the Protestant Ethic* to Work," *Religion* 49, no. 4 (October 2019): 571, https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2019.1573767.

56 Trad Nogueira-Godsey, "Weberian Sociology and the Study of Pentecostalism: Historical Patterns and Prospects for the Future," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 25, no. 2 (2012): 51–70; Trad Nogueira-Godsey, "First Impressions: American Sociology's Early Encounters with Pentecostalism," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 25, no. 1 (2012): 31–50.

57 Birgit Meyer, "Pentecostalism and Neo-Liberal Capitalism: Faith, Prosperity and Vision in African Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 20, no. 2 (2007): 5–28; Paul Gifford and Trad Nogueira-Godsey, "The Protestant Ethic and African Pentecostalism: A Case Study," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 24, no. 1 (September 2011): 5–22, https://doi.org/10.4314/jsr.v24i1.70018; Kirby, "Pentecostalism, Economics, Capitalism," 578–588.

58 Michael Wilkinson, "Sociological Narratives and the Sociology of Pentecostalism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, ed. Cecil M. Robeck, Jr and Amos Yong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 226, https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9780511910111.016.

59 Cecil David Bradfield, "Deprivation and the Emergence of Neo-Pentecostalism in American Christianity," *South African Journal of Sociology* 20 (1979): 36–47; Robbins, "The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity".

particular Charismatic enactment of religion – can be thought of as the religious innovation they have managed to cultivate in different social settings.[60] In this light, Joel Robbins claims that rituals are not merely one of the most obvious features of Charismatic Christianity, "it is in social scientific terms the most important one."[61] Indeed, there are also theologians who see Charismatic rituals as the core distinctive feature of Charismatic Christians. Even though particularly Protestant Charismatics usually guard against speaking of rituals as any sort of effective human action, rituals such as Sunday meetings or prayer and worship meetings nevertheless develop the necessary conditions for the cultivation of one specific Charismatic religious experience: the experience of God's presence, which is commonly described as entering God's presence or feeling the workings of the Spirit.[62]

This is why some speak of a *theology of encounter* when describing Charismatic Christianity as a religion, which in its core relies on a certain kind of experience. While such encounters may be described in terms of common features such as the baptism in the Spirit, they can also pertain to a type of experiences that are usually felt during intense concert-like worshipping sessions. The acknowledgement of Charismatic Christianity, both theologically and, in some instances, anthropologically, as a notably experiential religion leads me to engage in a discussion regarding its classification as a form of primal spirituality, as suggested by the theologian Harvey Cox.

## The primal nature of Charismatic Christianity

It should come as no surprise that theologians were the first to pay attention to the theological innovations introduced to the field of Christianity by the Charismatics. For example, the Pentecostal

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[60] Martin Lindhardt, ed., *Practicing the Faith: The Ritual Life of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians* (Berghahn Books, 2011), https://doi.org/10.1515/9780857450487.

[61] Joel Robbins, "The Obvious Aspects of Pentecostalism: Ritual and Pentecostal Globalization," in *Practicing the Faith*, ed. Martin Lindhardt (Berghahn Books, 2011), 65, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780857450487-002.

[62] Daniel E. Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit: A Ritual Approach to Pentecostal / Charismatic Spirituality* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1999); Keith Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology: A Theology of Encounter* (London: T & T Clark, 2008).

pastor-turned-researcher Walter Hollenweger, regarded as the founding father of Pentecostal studies, analysed five Christian roots of Pentecostalism: the Black root, the Catholic root, the Evangelical root, the critical root, and the ecumenical root.[63] Among them, it was the Black root, which, according to Hollenweger, was crucial in shaping Pentecostalism as a transcultural religious phenomenon. The Black root consists of the following elements: oral liturgy; narrativity of theology, and witness; maximum participation of believers; inclusion of dreams and vision into personal and public forms of worship; the correspondence between body and mind.[64] However, I should stress that Hollenweger went out of his way to say that the Black root – or any other root – does not correspond to any particular doctrine. Indeed, Hollenweger was convinced that that in terms of doctrine, "Pentecostalism is not a consistent whole."[65] It was the Pentecostal religious *experience* that surpassed the importance of any theological formulae. Thus, what Hollenweger had in mind, when discussing the reasons for the Charismatic worldwide ascension, is rather something that can be best described as a particular *tone* of Christianity.[66]

The notion that we should look past doctrine in order to understand the rise of Charismatic Christianity brings us nicely to the work of the influential American theologian and Harvard religion professor Harvey Cox. In the 1960s, Cox became well known for his deliberation on the interplay between the secular and sacred, and the decline of organized, institutional religion in a contemporary urban setting, which he presented in *The Secular City*.[67] Though Cox vehemently opposed the so-called death of God theologians of the 1960s, he nevertheless attempted to develop a theology of the post-religious age, whose onset was then predicted by the majority of sociologists. After carefully setting out a theological view of the secularisation of religion, he was

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63 Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997).

64 Hollenweger, "After Twenty Years' Research on Pentecostalism," 405–406.

65 *Ibid.*, 405.

66 Joshua R. Ziefle, "The Charismatic Renewal: History, Diversity, Complexity," in *Handbook of Global Contemporary Christianity*, ed. Stephen J Hunt (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 134.

67 Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400848850.

taken aback by the worldwide rise of Charismatic Christianity during the second half of the 20th century, which he dubbed the "unanticipated reappearance of primal spirituality in our time."[68] Puzzled by this phenomenon, he set out to thoroughly analyse Charismatic Christians in the 1990s, publishing his results in the now-famous landmark study *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first century* (1995).[69] Writing in the early 1990s, Cox embarked on a study of the reasons behind what he described as a "religious renaissance" or a "renewed religious vitality", whose one "particularly dramatic example" is Charismatic Christianity.[70]

Cox presented his argument regarding the factors contributing to the popularity of Charismatic Christians as follows. Charismatic Christianity is able to address "the spiritual emptiness of our time," by reaching beyond "creed and ceremony" to what he termed "the core of human religiousness."[71] This core is where one could find "primal spirituality," which Cox dubbed as the "largely unprocessed nucleus of the psyche in which the unending struggle for a sense of purpose and significance goes on."[72] It is this primal spirituality that Charismatics "restored," by which they enable to recover three dimensions of this "elemental spirituality," which Cox labelled as *primal speech*, *primal piety,* and *primal hope*.[73]

The first refers to the perhaps most well-known element of Charismatic Christianity – speaking in tongues. Cox claims that praying in the Spirit is a "language of the heart", which Charismatics learn to speak in contrast to the "ultraspecialized terminologies and contrived rhetoric" of common contemporary parlance. The second dimension encompasses the more ecstatic elements of Charismatic collective gatherings – such as trance, dance, singing and healings, which Cox dub "archetypal religious expressions."[74] Liking it to Chomsky's theory of

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68 Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, 71.
69 Cox, *Fire from Heaven*.
70 *Ibid.*, xvii.
71 *Ibid.*, 81.
72 *Ibid.*
73 *Ibid.*
74 *Ibid.*, 82.

universal syntax, Cox claims that these pious expressions represent a "universal spiritual syntax."[75] Furthermore, Cox believes that the emergence of primal piety is tied to the failure of "rationalistic assumptions of modernity" and the "strategies religions had used to oppose them."[76] Finally, there is primal hope, which is corollary to the Pentecostal and Neocharismatic millennial anticipation of the Second coming of Jesus Christ. According to Cox, this outlook that "a radically new world age is about to dawn" is a transcendental type of hope. Thus, primal hope encompasses the eschatological fervour of the movement – especially of the early Classical Pentecostals.

Cox believes that to view Charismatic Christianity as a primal spirituality allows for its contextualisation within the broader history of human religion. This is crucial for his analysis of the reasons behind the worldwide surge of Charismatics. From this point of view, says Cox, the "contemporary reemergence" of primal speech, primal piety, and primal hope "becomes a little less baffling."[77] Thus, it should come as no surprise to find a reference to the notion of *homo religiosus* in Cox's argument. As a theologian, he claims that reappearance of primal spirituality "transcends all merely social or psychological explanations."[78] Why is this so? According to Cox, primal spirituality in the form of Charismatic Christianity should remind us that "somewhere deep within us we all carry a *homo religious,*" making Charismatics a part-and-parcel of a human religious history.[79] Furthermore, this latest episode speaks to the "spiritual crisis of our era," consisting of "the ecstasy deficit."[80] In this light, Cox identifies the emphasize on experience – as opposed to doctrine *per se* – as one of the reasons behind Charismatic popularity, since they seem to address the "ecstasy-deficient generation."[81] According to Cox, primal spirituality as seen in elaborate and long-lasting worshipping

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75 *Ibid.*
76 *Ibid.*
77 *Ibid.*, 83.
78 *Ibid.*
79 *Ibid.*
80 *Ibid.*, 86.
81 *Ibid.*, 88.

sessions was there throughout history, but was "suffocated by centuries of western Christian moralism and rationality."[82]

It is the letter that dovetails nicely with the discussion of merits of Cox's approach of which two will be emphasised – his willingness to take Charismatic Christianity seriously in itself as well as the tying of the emergence of Charismatic Christianity to religious change – not decline. This, however, does not shield Cox from ahistorical assertions and falling trap to taking the claims of Charismatics too seriously as I explain below, where I will claim that what is lacking in Cox's approach is an appropriate theory of religion. Additionally, it is yet to be determined to what extent the dimensions of primal spirituality are implemented in practice or simply asserted by declarations of beliefs.

## Discussing the merits of the primal spirituality thesis

Engaging with Charismatics themselves, Cox claims that we ought to understand Charismatic Christianity as a certain kind of *experiential spirituality*. It is worth pointing out that his was not a default scholarly point of view at the time of his writing, when social scientific studies of Charismatics were only beginning to gather pace, making Cox's contribution extremely valuable. Only later did renowned scholars of religion begin to write in a similar vein. For example, David Martin, famous for his study of Pentecostals in Latin America, wrote in 2002 that Pentecostals should be understood as a type of spirituality "bearing resemblance to New Age spirituality."[83] Margaret Poloma also wrote that Charismatic Christianity should be understood as a "distinct type of 'spirituality' rather than 'religion,'[84] as did the anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann, who noticed that Charismatic Christianity – much like New Age spiritualities – offers an "intense spiritual experience."[85]

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[82] *Ibid*., 101.

[83] David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish*, Religion in the Modern World (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2003), 3.

[84] Poloma, *Main Street Mystics*, 22.

[85] Tanya M. Luhrmann, "Metakinesis: How God Becomes Intimate in Contemporary U.S. Christianity," *American Anthropologist* 106, no. 3 (September 2004): 518, https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2004.106.3.518.

Furthermore, Cox related the emergence of Charismatic Christianity onto the world scene to the struggle between two types of religiosities – fundamentalism and experientialism.[86] Setting fundamentalism aside, he found the common bases of experiential religious movements such as certain Charismatics, Buddhists, Hindus, and New Agers in their restoring of experience as the core of their religion. By doing so, he laid the groundwork for emerging sociological studies of the religion of the heart, while also contributing to existing studies of the spiritual turn.[87]

That said, it is worth taking a look at the empirical evidence either supporting or opposing Cox's claims about the nature of primal spirituality. In terms of primal speech, the speaking in tongues is less common that one might expect reading Cox's thesis. According to the *Spirit and Power* study conducted by the Pew Research Center, only up to 51% of Pentecostals and 68% of Charismatics in the US claim to have spoken in tongues; the same holds for 50% of Pentecostals and 26% of Charismatics in Brazil. The trend continues elsewhere – up to 76% of Pentecostals and 32% of Charismatics in Nigeria claim to never speak in tongues.[88] Though less pronounced, the same can be said about Charismatic Christians in Slovenia. Among Pentecostals, 25% of believers say they have not experience praying in tongues, even though 90% of them have experienced baptism in the Spirit. Similar figures can be seen amongst Catholic Charismatics – 26% of them never spoke in tongues, even if 93% of them were baptised in the Spirit. Interestingly, nearly the same can be said about Neocharismatics in my study – 22% of them have not received the gift of speaking in the Spirit, while 93% of them have been baptised in the Spirit.[89] Based on such data, the importance of primal speech dimension of Charismatic Christianity as

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[86] Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, 299–323.

[87] Dick Houtman and Stef Aupers, "The Spiritual Turn and the Decline of Tradition: The Spread of Post-Christian Spirituality in 14 Western Countries, 1981–2000," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46, no. 3 (September 2007): 305–20, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2007.00360.x; Galen Watts, *The Spiritual Turn: The Religion of the Heart and the Making of Romantic Liberal Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022).

[88] Pew Research Center, Spirit and Power, *A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals* (Washington, D.C.: The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2006), 17.

[89] These figures should be understood as heuristic orientations, less so as undeniable scientific facts as the size of the sample varies significantly.

primal spirituality might be overstated. This might be due to its doctrinal importance, which does not translate to actual practice. I will return to this point later.

Let us turn our attention to primal piety, which encompasses distinctive characteristics of Charismatic communal gatherings such as "trance, vision, healing, dreams and dance."[90] Referring again to the *Spirit and Power* study, we can firstly see the shades of this notion in Charismatics' church attendance – the vast majority of them attend religious services at least once per week, making them by far the most communally engaged Christians.[91] Furthermore, we can see that amongst the dimensions proposed by Cox, it is faith healing that is the most commonly witnessed and experienced practice of primal piety: up 62% of Pentecostals and 46% of Charismatics in the US have witnessed or experienced divine healing; the same can be said about 77% of Pentecostals and 31% of Charismatics in Brazil, and 79% of Pentecostals in Nigeria. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, experiencing divine healing is more common among Slovenian Charismatic Christians. For example, 95% of Pentecostals claim to have experienced a healing of an illness or injury; the same is true for 85% of Charismatic Catholics and 88% of Neocharismatics. These results seem to back up Cox's claim about primal piety.

However, I believe it is in *worshipping* sessions that one can observe the most pronounced case of primal piety. When asked how important worshipping is to them on a scale from very unimportant to very important, 87% of Slovenian Charismatics say that it is very important. While worshipping is usually linked to communal sessions, it is something that should not be relegated to the separate religious sphere, even if it is the most common space, where worshipping takes place. For example, 87% of Charismatics in Slovenia say they worship at home; and 82% of them worship God in their car. While worshipping at the church, 96% of Charismatics sing; 80% of them clap, and about half of them pray silently or out loud and speak in tongues silently or out loud. Such data – in combination with field observations – does justice

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90 Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, 82.

91 Pew Research Center, "Spirit and Power," 20.

to Cox's claims about primal piety to a much larger extent than in the case of primal speech.

Lastly, let us turn to primal hope. During my study amongst Slovenian Charismatics, the eschatological fervour very rarely came to light. Not one interviewee, either a representative or a member, spoke about the anticipation of Jesus' second coming. The same is true for my year-and-a-half-long fieldwork participant observations. The belief in the imminent rapture was a never a topic of preaching. International studies paint a somewhat more complicated picture. Belief in the rapture is very common amongst Pentecostals – but less so amongst Charismatics. On average, at least 90% of Pentecostals believe in the rapture in the US, Brazil, and Nigeria. The number of Charismatics sharing their beliefs is around 70 percent – in some cases, like in Brazil, considerably lower at 48 percent.[92] Excluding Pentecostals, the *Spirit and Power* study shows that the belief in the rapture is indeed higher among Charismatics than other Christians, but barely. Taking these figures into account, primal piety seems to be the least pronounced dimension of primal spirituality, holding mainly for Classical Pentecostals, which is in line with their traditional theology.

What can be said about Charismatic Christianity as primal spirituality in the light of empirical data? It is certainly true that Charismatics are primarily experiential Christians, which could be framed as a certain type of (primal) piety. However, the importance of speaking in tongues as a form of primal speech and especially the prominence of primal hope seems to be heavily influenced by doctrinal statements – and less so by actual practice.[93]

However, it is Cox's theoretical presuppositions, which are most problematic from a scientific point of view. There are two reasons for it. Firstly, even though he correctly acknowledges the lack of theological coherence among Charismatics, he nevertheless takes doctrinal statements of Classical Pentecostals as having precedence over actual practice when formulating his approach; secondly, his central claim vis-à-vis

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92 Pew Research Center, "Spirit and Power," 26.

93 See Menzies and Horton, *Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective,* 1993; Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide*, 1997.

history of religion is based on the presumption of a *homo religiosus*, which should be treated with great scepticism. Before elaborating, let me take a sidestep.

Writing in the early 2000s in *The Future of Faith* (2009), Cox set out a three-part history of Christianity, consisting of the "age of faith", "age of belief" and the "age of the Spirit."[94] The first one refers to the earliest Christianity, which was followed by the age of belief, which covers the formation and the consolidation of various Christian orthodoxies up to the beginning of the age of Spirit, associated with the emergence of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements during the 20th century. Cox asserts that the Charismatic reemergence of primal spirituality represents the future of Christianity, a future that is intrinsically linked to its past due to notable similarities with the age of faith. Indeed, he sees in Charismatic primal piety and primal speech, which many take as "deviations or unwarranted innovations," as "retrievals of elements that were once accepted feature of Christianity."[95] Cox writes that the Charismatic "animated worship" as well as the "concern for the downtrodden and left-out people of the world" provide a glimpse of the "transition of the Age of Belief" into the age of the Spirit. This was also his position back when writing *Fire from Heaven*. He described early Charismatics as "praying that God would renew and purify a Christianity they believed was crippled by empty rituals" as Christianity "lapsed into writing meticulous creeds and inventing lifeless rituals."[96] It is noteworthy that the belief that the future of Christianity must mirror its past is a prevalent perspective among Charismatics themselves. For example, one of the leading figures of the Catholic Charismatic renewal claimed during our interview that the Catholic Church can only survive as a *charismatic* Catholic Church. By this he meant that the Catholic Church needs to put the religious charismatic experience of encountering God at the very heart of its practice:

Personal experience can speak to people because there is no objection to it. This is what God has done for me, this is what I have experienced, this is

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94 Harvey Cox, *The Future of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009).
95 *Ibid.*, 14.
96 Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, 56, 58.

my faith, and this is why I believe. I can tell you this, you can accept it or not, but you can't say that it didn't happen to me […] God is concrete in my life.

Furthermore, he is convinced that the Church today should follow the example of the first Apostolic church, which spread by means of testimony: "How did the first church spread, if not like that?" he asked, adding: "the Church today must be a Church of witnesses." Cox must have taken similar statements and positioned them at the core of his theory of primal spirituality, rendering it normative rather than merely theoretical or empirical.

This notion dovetails with the final, and perhaps most fundamental, drawback of Cox's theory – his emphasis on the notion of *homo religiosus*. Cox asserts that the rise of Charismatic Christianity, or "the unforeseen eruption of spiritual lava," should remind us that "somewhere deep within us we all carry a *homo religious.*"[97] As such, Charismatics are seen as part-and-parcel of the "larger and longer history of human religiousness."[98] In this view, Charismatic Christianity is successful because it reaches back and taps into a core religiosity, which remained "latent beneath centuries of western Christian moralism and rationality."[99] Thus, Cox not only argues for a notion of inherent human religiosity to be found in the notion of *homo religiosus*, but also argues that at the heart of it lies experiential spirituality. The notion of *homo religiosus* is in itself dubious and should be regarded as a result of "speculation in faith than rational reasoning."[100] While the advances in cognitive science of religion do show that the evolutionary cognitive development of humans provide necessary cognitive tools for some kind of religiosity in terms of developing beliefs in supranatural agents, it hardly makes religiosity an innate human characteristic.[101] It is even more of a leap

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97 *Ibid*., 83.

98 *Ibid*.

99 *Ibid*., 101.

100 Slawomir Szajter, "The Concept of Homo Religiosus and Its Philosophical Interpretations," *Anglojęzyczny Suplement Przeglądu Religioznawczego*, no. 1 (2013): 17.

101 Paul Bloom, "Religion Is Natural," *Developmental Science* 10, no. 1 (January 2007): 147–151, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7687.2007.00577.x; Justin L. Barrett, "Exploring the Natural Foundations of Religion," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 4, no. 1 (January 2000): 29–34, https://doi.org/10.1016/S1364-6613(99)01419-9; Scott Atran and Joseph Henrich, "The Evolution of Religion: How Cognitive By-Products, Adaptive Learning Heuristics, Ritual

to claim that a certain kind of experiential religiosity lies at the core of *homo religiosus*, which Charismatics successfully tap into.

What should then be made of the primal spirituality thesis? Evaluating the merits of the primal spirituality thesis, one can say the following: the overwhelming benefit of Cox's approach lies in his readiness to consider Charismatic Christianity as a form of spirituality rather than a specific theological doctrine. This ability leads to Cox's main contribution to scholarly discourse: the reenforced recognition of fundamental religious change – not decline – as tied to the emergence of experience, rather than belief or doctrine based religious movements.

Although empirical evidence does not support the assertion regarding the significance of primal speech and primal hope, it is evident that Charismatics exhibit a distinct form of piety that frequently remains neglected by social scientific researchers of Charismatic movements. The notion of primality appears to be more of a normative assertion than an empirical observation. However, I contend that it is unnecessary to consider both claims together. One can – as Cox does – recognize in Charismatics a distinctive type of spirituality or piety without recourse to the somewhat speculative notion of innate human religiosity.

The question which remains unanswered, however, is why this type of religiosity has become so prominent over the last 100 years. While Cox does not claim to provide a definitive answer to this question, his work nevertheless offers a valuable starting point for further inquiry.

## Conclusions

Even after decades of studies, the characteristics of Charismatic Christianity and the reasons for its popularity remain unclear to the scholarly eye. In the introductory pages of the now-famous edited collection of essays *Pentecostals after a Century* (1999), Harvey Cox wrote that Charismatic Christianity represents a "quiet revolution" of the

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Displays, and Group Competition Generate Deep Commitments to Prosocial Religions," *Biological Theory* 5, no. 1 (March 2010): 18–30, https://doi.org/10.1162/BIOT_a_00018.

global religious landscape.[102] If we are to understand the reasons behind this "spiritual resurgence", I believe social scientists must pay greater attention to what Cox wrote about their experiential inclinations – all the while casting aside Cox's normative stances on the history of human religiosity. On the other hand, paying greater attention to the distinctive features of Charismatics as Cox did, pushes social scientists beyond their theoretical presuppositions about what constitutes contemporary religions. Examining the evolving characteristics of modern religions, it is essential to evaluate our analytical frameworks. Failure to address this may result in overlooking the fundamental aspects of movements like Charismatic Christianity, consequently hindering both empirical and theoretical engagement with the phenomenon.

Thus, while Cox's contribution may be imperfect, it should stand as a worthwhile signpost in our analytical endeavours.

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