Charismatic religious experiences

**Charismatic** - derives from the ancient Greek word *charism* meaning gift.
- occurring usually in hyper-stimulating religious gatherings:
  - enthusiasm, exclamations
  - singing, body movement.

*Charisma* is also used in social science in relation to charismatic leadership - a term devised by sociologist Max Weber [1922] to designate leadership that was based on the person her/himself rather than the formal role occupied within a tradition or through some rational legal authority.

Charismatic religious experience is associated with dynamic and volatile religious phenomena and with profound and sudden transformations of a spiritual milieu. Charismatic religious experiences are religious experiences that are particularly frequent among groups that are part of the charismatic movement, a Protestant Christian movement that emerged in the 1960s, dramatically expanded in the 1970s. This movement is part of the tradition of American revivalism that dates back to the Great Awakening on the Eastern seaboard in the 18th century that included Methodism’s foundation in the late 18th century.

The charismatic movement is also known as neo-Pentecostalism and shares pentecostalism’s embrace of enthusiasm and emphasis on collective religious experiences that are often associated with exclamations. There has been a rapid expansion of this form of Protestant Christianity in the Third World where it is dominant, and is making ‘conversions’ from Roman Catholicism. Partly as a response to this, the *cursillo* movement within Roman Catholicism developed in the late 1970s which shared the same focus on particular *charisms* such as speaking in tongues, and was regarded as renewal movement within that church. Both Protestant and Catholic forms attribute the power of the experiences to the activity of the Holy Spirit, which is the third element in the Christian idea of the Triune, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity agreed upon in 325 BCE at Nicea.

Cultural phenomenologist and anthropologist, Thomas Csordas in *The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing* describes processes of ritual healing in a Roman Catholic charismatic organisation in New England includes these activities:

- anointing by the spirit
- laying on of hands
- speaking in tongues

- emotionally charged preaching
- sustained rhythmic music

- designated groups of ‘expert’ prayers ‘praying over’ selected or self selected individuals within a larger group.

- experience of forgiveness - associated with emotional release.
- the severing of bonds - relational, and sometimes ancestral bonds.