

Holy Spirit's Reach Studied

A Los Angeles-based university was awarded a \$6.9 million grant this week to establish a Pentecostal and charismatic research center in the birthplace city of American Pentecostalism.

✖ **Feb. 24, 2009** – This week the University of Southern California (USC) in Los Angeles received a \$6.9 million grant to study Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity – one of the world's fastest growing religious movements.

Awarded by the John Templeton Foundation, a natural and social sciences philanthropy, the grant is the largest amount ever given towards Pentecostal-charismatic research and will be used to establish the Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Initiative (PCRI) at USC.

"The growth of global Pentecostalism is one of the most remarkable religious transformations of the last century," said Kimon Sargeant, vice president of human sciences at the John Templeton Foundation.

"The goal of this project is to further a better understanding of its significance in the social sciences in areas ranging from social capital to economic development and more."

With as many as 600 million Christians worldwide claiming to be Spirit-filled, observers say Pentecostalism's profound effect on cultures has forced the academic community to take note.

"We are excited that with the continued growth of the charismatic-Pentecostal movement around the world, scholars and universities are continuing to try to understand this phenomenon," said the Rev. Billy Wilson, executive director of the International Center for Spiritual Renewal and chairman of

the **Commission on Holy Spirit Empowerment in the 21st Century**, which is examining the future of the Pentecostal-charismatic movement in partnership with Oral Roberts University.

“Our prayer is that this research will not only help people understand the charismatic-Pentecostal movement, but will also help more believers around the world be engaged in the Spirit-filled life,” Wilson said.

USC officials said the initiative would foster social science research in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the former Soviet Union, while continuing to study Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity in Los Angeles.

“Our goal is to inspire research partnerships around the globe and fund projects that will shape the discussion for years to come,” said Donald Miller, executive director of USC’s Center for Religion and Civic Culture and author of *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement*.

“We are interested in understanding why Pentecostalism is growing so rapidly, what impact it is having on society and how it is different in various cultural settings.”

With the largest charismatic populations in the “global South,” including nations such as Brazil, Guatemala, Kenya and the Philippines, scholars say the movement is making Christian converts ubiquitous, which in turn affects not just cultures but governments too.

The Pentecostal-charismatic movement “has far-reaching implications for international politics and interactions among religious groups,” said Brie Loskota, program officer at PCRI. “Studying Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity is critical to understanding the ways in which religion shapes our world.”

John Green, senior fellow at the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, agrees that the research initiative will allow for a more in-depth study of global Spirit-filled movements.

“It will expand the boundaries of knowledge about these key religious developments that are central to the spread of Christianity in the 21st century,” Green said. **–Paul Steven Ghiringhelli**