Religious Calendrical Rituals: Jewish Celebration Of Pentecost (Holy Spirit In Jerusalem)

“Religious calendrical rituals occur on specific days or groups of days at a set time in the calendar each year and they often commemorate important days or actions in the history of the religious tradition” (Clark, 2019) Pentecost is a Jewish festival that is celebrated 50 days after Passover, which rejoices God giving the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. On the day of the Jewish celebration of Pentecost, God the Holy Spirit came down upon those gathered in Jerusalem, and when the Holy Spirit descended, he gave them the remarkable ability to speak in tongues (Acts 2:4).

Arnold Van Gennep was a French ethnographer and folklorist, whom is best known for his studies regarding the Les rites de passage, or more commonly known as The Rites of Passage. “Rite of passage, is a ceremonial event, existing in all historically known societies, that marks the passage from one social or religious status to another” (Bobby C. Alexander Edward Norbeck, 2019), the theory is often divided into three phases: preliminary, liminality, and post-liminality. Subsequently to studying and analysing the Pentecost using Arnold Van Gennep’s theory, the way in which participants are affected by the ritual can be identified, as well as the influence the ritual has on Christian religion.

Once analysing the Pentecost with Van Gennep’s theory, it can be identified that in modern society, the preliminary stage involves 5 stages of which adherents must go through, like disciples did traditionally in order to fully submit themselves to the Holy Spirit. Firstly, being submission to Christ. As a result of the disciples preparing for Pentecost by fully submitting themselves to the resurrected Christ, this is a necessary requirement in today’s society to prepare for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Accordingly comes the second stage of Spiritual Unity, Mary, like many people in contemporary society, was a sinner, but she was blessed of the Lord and saved by Jesus “The Holy Spirit was working in them to bring about great spiritual oneness and unity” (Mathew, 1998). This expresses how there should not be any divisions in God’s church, “Where there is division, we can expect confusion, not the presence or outpouring of the Holy Spirit” (Mathew, 1998). In addition, the third aspect of preparation for Pentecost is prayer. The disciples spent their waiting time in adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. They identified their sins and forsook them, which is a vital thing that must be done by current adherents to Christian faith in preparation for the Pentecost. The fourth phase of the preliminary stage is scripture study, once again this stage of preparation is an interpretation of how the disciples lived. In order for the Christian community of today to prepare for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, they must not only pray but too study the Scripture. Finally, the fifth phase of the preliminary stage, Spiritual Leadership. 'Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Biblehub, 2018) A Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit, therefore, results in revival and conversions. When many people are converted, they need spiritual leaders to teach, guide and discipline them. Subsequently to analysing the preliminary stage of preparation with Van Gennep’s theory, it is made apparent that in order to prepare for Pentecost, adherents must devote themselves in the way disciples did many years ago.

Van Gennep introduced the concept of ‘liminality’ in order to describe the value of the second

stage of a ritual. When it comes to Pentecost, the liminal phase is the transition from the preparation (preliminary stage), to the actual day of the feast. “The liminal state is characterized by ambiguity, openness, and indeterminacy. One's sense of identity dissolves to some extent, bringing about disorientation. Liminality is a period of transition, during which the normal limits to thought, self-understanding, and behaviour are relaxed, opening the way to something new” (New World Encyclopedia , 2016) Pentecost is not nearly as well recognised or as popular as Christmas and Easter, however it celebrates a turning point in Christian history, the birth of Christianity. “In the new covenant, Pentecost refers to the time when the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples of Jesus after He ascended to heaven” (Gutierrez-Cachila, 2017). This reveals how during Pentecost, God’s followers received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, hence, this is the significance of Pentecost in modern contemporary society. In addition to this, the gift of tongues is a symbol that God’s word is no longer limited to only one person or place, and one language or race, but is available to everyone, no matter where they are or what they look like. Traditionally, in society today, priests tend to wear red garments on Pentecost to symbolise the burning fire of God’s love and as mentioned previously, the tongues of fire that descend on the apostles. However, in some parts of the world such as Britain and Ireland, Pentecost is referred to as White Sunday. Therefore, typically speaking, they were white as a symbol of the dove of the Holy Spirit. In Italy, a Pentecostal tradition is to toss rose petals from the ceiling of churches in order to recollect the miracle of the fiery tongues, and in France it is tradition for trumpets to be played throughout mass to reminisce the sound of the Holy Spirit. These are just a few of the ways Pentecost is celebrated in different countries around the world, supporting the idea that no matter where you are, God’s word may reach you. Through analysing the Pentecost using Van Gennep’s theory, the purpose of the liminal phase is revealed to be important to Christian faith as it is not only a time of celebration but a time of connection with Christ.

The final stage in Van Gennep’s ritual analysis is the post-liminary phase, which is the re-entry into society. The purpose of Pentecost for adherents is to enter back into their everyday lives after completing the ritual with a ‘new’ identity or status as a result of them connecting with the Holy Spirit. “Men and women of all times would have opportunity to call on God. And His Spirit of love, peace and a sound mind, whilst provide a clear-minded thinking to help create the life that God intended” (McNeely, 2014). Following the event of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit had come upon Christian men and women and was empowering and emboldening them to be witnesses to Jesus. Believers began to “vibrant faith in Jesus, healings and other miracles… people were set free from evil spirits, Satan’s kingdom was pushed back, and believers engaged in rich fellowship and earnest prayer” (Strickler, 2016). After Pentecost, the disciples had a vastly dramatic change in their mind-set. Rather than self-centred, they became Christ-centred. Among many other things, in today’s society it can be seen how Pentecost celebrates that people of the Christian faith are never alone in their exploration for a sense of meaning or belonging. God’s spirit is among his adherents and he leads and guides his followers through life’s path. Thus, once people of today’s society commit themselves to the Christian religion, it can be identified throughout the post-liminal stage of Van Gennep’s theory that they continue to learn and grow, by God’s grace. Overall, Pentecost gives adherents an opportunity to draw closer connections with God, whilst having deeper understanding and spiritual relationship with him.

Ultimately, after studying and analysing the Pentecost using Arnold Van Gennep’s theory, a deeper understanding was able to be interpreted on the way in which participants are affected by the ritual, as well as the influence the ritual has on religion. Pentecost recognises the

moment in time that the church is born, a time when the church goes from having only a couple of believers to breaking forth into culture. Thus, it is such a crucial moment in history and therefore is important to the Christian faith today. Overall, through the analysis of Pentecost it can be revealed just how imperative Pentecost is within Christian faith. Displaying just how without it, the faith of the apostles would have wilted. This ritual celebrates how the church founded by Christ is able to surpass conceivable barriers to proclaim the Gospel all over the world.