

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 58: The Rise of Pentecostalism

The Rise of Pentecostalism: Did You Know?

Little-known or remarkable facts about early Pentecostalism.

editors

Recently *Life* magazine, in listing the top 100 events of the second millennium, put Pentecostalism at 68th. *The Dictionary of Christianity in America* says that Pentecostalism is perhaps "the single-most-significant development in twentieth-century Christianity."

Though many consider the 1906 Azusa Street Revival as the birth of modern Pentecostalism, speaking in tongues took place at two earlier Holiness gatherings, one in Topeka, Kansas, in 1901, and another in Cherokee County, North Carolina, in 1896.

It is hard to say which is the oldest Pentecostal denomination. The United Holy Church and the Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.) point to pre-Pentecostal roots as far back as 1886. The Pentecostal Holiness Church, with pre-Pentecostal roots as far back as 1879, was the first to adopt a clear Pentecostal statement of faith in 1908.

Early Pentecostals claimed the gift of tongues was not primarily the speaking of a heavenly language (*glossalalia*) but other human languages (*xenolalia*). The purpose? Early leader Charles Parham said, "I had felt for years that any missionary going to the foreign field should preach in the language of the natives, and that if God ever equipped his ministers in that way [by *xenolalia*], he could do it today." Though many anecdotes of *xenolalia* exist, none have been confirmed.

Many early Pentecostals were pacifists. At the outbreak of World War I, some Pentecostals called for a "great peace council" at which they could state their opposition to warfare. Every major Pentecostal denomination has at some point adopted a pacifist resolution.

Pentecostals have often been as stern as fundamentalists about social behavior. In addition to banning traditional vices like alcohol, tobacco, and the movies, they have targeted chewing gum, short-sleeved dresses, soft drinks, and neckties.

Though most early Pentecostals came out of the blue-collar working class, the movement thrived among the poor and marginalized of society. Early Pentecostals taught a "theology of the poor," interpreting their remarkable growth as God's special favor upon the poor.

Racial harmony marked the earliest stage of the movement; the Azusa Street Revival was led by a black, William Seymour, and blacks and whites worshipped and shared leadership in the church. As one Pentecostal historian of the day remarked, "The color line was washed away in the blood."

On the other hand, some white critics noted that since the movement "started with a black man" and began "like a simoon from the African desert ... , [it is] better adapted to tropical climates where there is plenty of water to immerse the victims of this hellish power."

Pentecostals found occasion to argue about most any subject, from prohibitions on pork to the correct doctrine of the Trinity. The result: today, worldwide, there are 11,000 Pentecostal or charismatic denominations.

There were many women preachers and pastors in the early years of the movement, and the most well-known Pentecostal of the twentieth century was evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson. Another early preacher of fame was Maria Woodworth-Etter, who once argued, "It is high time for women to let their lights shine; to bring out their talents that have been hidden away rusting, and use them for the glory of God."

For most Pentecostals, tongues and healings have been a means to a greater end. As one modern Pentecostal leader put it, "In spite of charges to the contrary, Pentecostals do not spend all their time talking about tongues. They have instead consistently sought to bring people to Christ."

The largest church in the world is a Pentecostal church in Korea: the Yoido Full Gospel Church pastored by David Yongji Cho. 240,000 attend weekly worship. Two Pentecostal churches in Buenos Aires attract together 150,000 each week.

Pentecostalism has become the fastest growing family of world Christianity. It is growing at a rate of 13 million a year, or 35,000 a day. With nearly a half billion adherents, it is, after Roman Catholicism, the largest Christian tradition.

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More resources:

One of the main works on Pentecostalism is also one of the easiest reads: Vinson Synan's [The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century](#). This revision of the 1971 ***The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*** will likely be as influential as the original.

Any student of Pentecostalism should own a copy of [The Dictionary of](#)

[Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements](#). It contains more than 800 entries (and 300 photographs) written and edited by the top scholars of Pentecostalism; it includes everything from biographical sketches to lengthy discussions of theological distinctives.

Links:

An overview of the Pentecostal movement, including a brief history and summary of beliefs, is available at the [New Religious Movements](#) area of the University of Virginia's Sociology department site.

For a more academic look, check out the [Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research](#). It covers

Pentecostal
history as well
as current
trends.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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The Rise of Pentecostalism: From the Editor - One Dangerous Religion

One Dangerous Religion

Mark Galli

Between the advertising industry and a handful of scholars, this issue has nearly come to ruin.

Let's begin with advertisers, who have destroyed the very words that should litter this issue. What can you do with *sensational* after it's been used to describe the results of facial cream, or *phenomenal*, when it's been describing the ride of a new car. When I use such words to describe early Pentecostalism, they sound trite.

But they remain two of the best words to describe it. It was sensational: it created a sensation and (with tongues, laying on of hands, and slayings in the Spirit) touched the senses of its adherents. It was also phenomenal: it shocked America and was filled with spiritual phenomena. So we've decided to use these and other Madison Avenue adjectives—though sparingly. But when we do use them, please note we mean them. Really.

On the other hand, as we prepared the issue, we were warned by some scholars not to highlight the sensational but to remember that Pentecostalism is a maturing movement that now includes well-behaved, middle-class people, like, uh, scholars. The behavior of some Pentecostals seems to be an embarrassment to others.

I can understand this. Pentecostals have done a few strange things in their day: seeing 90-foot Jesuses, falling into trances, and, lately, barking like dogs. But they've also done pretty remarkable things, like reaching out to the poor, reintroducing many spiritual gifts to the church, and reinvigorating the faith of entire continents (Africa and South America). Not bad for a century.

As a liturgically minded, theologically educated, decidedly non-charismatic Episcopalian (I used to lift my hands in prayer, but then only waist high), I'm impressed with Pentecostals. Mainline Christians like myself have managed to so tame the Holy Spirit, one can hardly tell the difference between "the divine presence" and a well-oiled liturgical service.

When Pentecostals are accused of acting foolishly, I reply: So? If God were really to descend in power, wouldn't some recipients of that power go crazy? (Moses said he'd die.) What do we expect when the Spirit of the Living God enters people: that they'll form a committee to write a new set of church by-laws?

A number of Pentecostals have suggested that being filled with the Spirit is like touching a live electrical wire: it's dangerous. Pentecostalism is dangerous, indeed, and as such produces some excesses. Then again, God is reported to be dangerous.

The only embarrassment to me is Pentecostalism's embarrassment of riches: it is too dynamic a movement to do justice to in one issue, let alone one book. So in this issue, we narrow our focus to early, white (mostly), American Pentecostalism. Though this variety is a minority in worldwide Pentecostalism, it is the type of Pentecostalism we suspect you, our readers, have some acquaintance

with.

It is also a variety that was sensational and phenomenal. Really.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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American Pentecost

The story behind the Azusa Street revival, the most phenomenal event of twentieth-century Christianity.

Ted Olsen

In the early morning of April 18, 1906, San Francisco residents were rudely awakened by the deadliest earthquake in North American history. A devastating fire, fed by ruptured gas lines, finished off what the earthquake, later estimated as 8.3 on the Richter scale, failed to destroy in its first deadly seconds. Some 700 people lay dead among the decimated 514 city blocks.

Angry men and women blamed God and the unstable earth sitting atop the unpredictable San Andreas Fault. A gospel tract, rushed to the printer and widely circulated in the area, called the tragedy a judgment and a warning from the God some were cursing.

That same morning, 400 miles south, the world took notice of another movement—one with aftershocks still spreading today. In a skeptical front-page story titled "Weird Babel of Tongues," a **Los Angeles Times** reporter attempted to describe what would soon be known as the Azusa Street Revival.

"Breathing strange utterances and mouthing a creed which it would seem no sane mortal could understand," the story began, "the newest religious sect has started in Los Angeles."

Skinny and sickly fanatic

The "newest religious sect" had, in fact, been around for a few years. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Midwestern Methodists and other Christians associated with the Holiness movement had become obsessed with divine healing and the possibility of speaking in tongues—doctrines and practices that dispensationalists argued had ended with the apostolic age. One of these Holiness Christians was an 18-year-old Kansas collegian named Charles Fox Parham.

Like other Methodists, Parham believed that sanctification was a second work of grace, separate from salvation. But he also adopted the more radical Holiness belief in a third experience—the "baptism with the Holy Ghost and fire." As early as 1891, Midwesterners heard young Parham claim that **glossolalia**—speaking in unknown or foreign tongues—should accompany this baptism in the Holy Spirit.

A handful of his listeners accepted him as a latter-day Elijah, ushering in Christ's return. Some wrote him off as another self-appointed prophet, while others branded the skinny and often sickly Parham as a fanatic.

To perpetuate his views, Parham opened a Bible school in 1900. It was housed in a three-story, turreted Topeka mansion dubbed "Stone's Folly" because it had bankrupted its builder. (Local residents had thought the building was haunted.) In developing his "Apostolic Faith" theology, Parham promoted a revolutionary but short-lived theory—which even Christian and Missionary Alliance leader A. B. Simpson would toy with. Simply put, Parham believed God would supernaturally give known, earthly languages to baptized believers so they could quickly evangelize the world. This end-time revival, accompanied by believers speaking in known languages they had never learned (**xenolalia**),

would bring to an end the church age and bring back a triumphant Christ.

Even Parham's missionaries—and those later sent out from Azusa Street—found difficulties when it came to putting this belief into practice. For example, A. G. Garr, the first white man to speak in tongues at Azusa, went to India expecting the Spirit to enable him to speak Hindi. When this did not happen, Garr and his wife went to Hong Kong and studied Chinese. Though Parham never gave up his belief that he and his followers had spoken in earthly foreign languages, his followers discovered that if foreigners understood them, it was an exception rather than the rule.

The meetings began at 10 a.m., and continued for at least 12 hours, often lasting until two or three the next morning.

Yet Charles Fox Parham based his life on the exceptions rather than the rules. The status quo, he believed, was rarely in touch with the Spirit. He left the Methodist church, calling it predictable and staid. He searched for the missing element he believed would lead Christians back to the true, nondenominational New Testament church. He decided the missing element was speaking in tongues.

At his Bible school, Parham assigned his students to search the Bible for demonstrable evidence that a believer had been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Their conclusion matched Parham's: the Holy Spirit is manifested through tongues.

Speaking in tongues was not a new occurrence, but popped up occasionally in both Christian and heretical groups throughout history. In 1896, W. F. Bryant and his followers had spoken in tongues (this group became the Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.)). But Charles Parham was the first to consider it the initial evidence of "the baptism of the Holy Spirit."

Convinced of their findings, Parham and his students conducted a Watch Night service on New Year's Eve to ring in 1901. One of the students, a 30-year-old evangelist named Agnes Ozman, asked (in Parham's words) "that hands be laid on her to receive the Holy Spirit as she hoped to go to foreign fields." As he prayed for her, "a glory fell upon her, a halo seemed to surround her head and face," and she is reported to have spoken in Chinese. Though many people believed Ozman's experience proved Parham's teachings, it is unclear if she actually spoke in Chinese or simply a "heavenly language." In any event, within the next few days, about half of the school's 34 members, including Parham, spoke in tongues.

Finding the Texas protégé

Meanwhile, the press was giving Parham's Apostolic Faith band and its critics front-page coverage. The publicity gained the "Parhamites" more notoriety than fame. Parham closed the school to spread the news of revival with his more devoted students (several students dubious of the recent events had left the school). Their message was met with less than overwhelming success. Though crowds did not show up to see the tongues-speech, reporters did.

Following several scathing articles and the death of one of Parham's sons, the pioneer struggled. He continued to preach here and there, witnessing healings and *glossolalia* but without great success. Not until a Galena, Kansas, revival in late 1903 did Parham begin to see the results for which he had prayed. Newspapers as far away as Cincinnati gave these meetings favorable publicity as Parham gained several thousand converts.

Crowds in Galena and other Midwestern towns soon learned that Parham was not your usual Sunday morning preacher. Often dressed in Palestinian costume, he warned his listeners that "God will hold them responsible if they do not join in this great crusade with our captain, Jesus, against sin and Satan." He viewed himself as the "projector" of the Apostolic Faith (also called Pentecostal or Latter Rain) movement, though he opposed officially organizing the group.

While Parham preached throughout the Midwest, Texas, the East Coast, and into Canada, claiming a following of 13,000 to 25,000, an even larger Pentecostal movement was happening in Wales, at New Quay on Cardigan Bay. American Holiness publisher S. B. Shaw stirred worldwide interest in that awakening with his 1905 book *The Great Revival in Wales*. For many believers, the Welsh Revival became a rallying cry for God to do it again. And it prompted many of them to conduct prayer meetings that went on for years.

From Kansas in 1905, Parham took a band of his protégés into Texas. There he preached, distributed his *The Apostolic Faith* newspaper, won converts, and set up a non-credit Bible school. One of the students attracted to the school was a former waiter and southern Holiness preacher, William J. Seymour. In the Jim Crow South, Seymour, a black, could take part in the Bible studies only by sitting in the hallway outside Parham's classroom.

After only a few weeks of listening to Parham, Seymour received an invitation to pastor a small Los Angeles church of Baptists expelled from their congregation for espousing Holiness doctrines. Seymour carried more than his luggage to California. He boarded the steam train in the Houston depot with enthusiasm and Parham's finely tuned statement of faith.

Twentieth-century Pentecost

The 35-year-old Seymour was an unlikely ambassador of the Pentecostal message: he was the son of slaves, not a gifted speaker, lacking in social skills, had almost no formal education, and was blind in one eye. But perhaps his greatest handicap was the fact that he had never spoken in tongues, even though he preached that such a sign should be a part of every believer's experience.

He chose Acts 2:4 as the text for his first sermon at the mission on Santa Fe Street in Los Angeles: "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

His message, that speaking in tongues was the "Bible evidence" of baptism in the Spirit, was well received by the congregation but not by the pastor, Julia Hutchins. It is unclear how long she let Seymour teach such things, but she soon had the door padlocked shut against him.

Seymour and most of the congregation found an open door for ministry in the Edward Lee home where he was boarding. The Lees and a small group had been praying for a another Great Awakening, a Welsh-type revival that would turn Los Angeles upside down. And they believed that Seymour might be the catalyst.

When the Lee home grew too small for the interracial crowd that gathered for Seymour's Bible studies and prayer meetings, Richard and Ruth Asberry opened their home at 214 (now 216) North Bonnie Brae Street, even though they then disagreed with some of his teaching.

On April 9, 1906, Edward Lee asked Seymour to pray for him that he would be given the gift of tongues. When Seymour prayed, Lee spoke in tongues, fulfilling a vision he said he had received in which the apostles taught him how to speak in tongues.

Seymour immediately left for the Asberry home Bible study and prayer meeting, where he again preached from Acts 2:4 and related Lee's experience. As he continued his study, someone else began speaking in tongues. Others followed. Jennie Moore, Seymour's future wife, sat down at the piano and improvised a tune while singing what she thought was Hebrew.

Crowds of both black and white faces descended on the Asberry home over the next several days. On

April 12, the first white man spoke in tongues. More importantly, Seymour, "the prophet of Pentecost to Los Angeles," finally received his personal Pentecost.

And that same day, the Asberry's front porch gave way from the weight of the crowds. That's when leaders negotiated a lease for the former Stevens African Methodist Episcopal Church at 312 Azusa Street.

The windows were knocked out. Debris littered the floor. Its last occupants had been livestock, since it had most recently been used as a stable. It was more like the rustic outdoor camps of the Holiness movement than the stained-glass churches of the distrusted denominations. And since it was not in a residential area, meetings could go all night.

Within a week, a makeshift pulpit, altar, and benches graced what the *Times* reporter called the "tumble-down shack" where "colored people and a sprinkling of whites" practice the "most fanatical rites, preach the wildest theories, and work themselves into a state of mad excitement in their peculiar zeal."

The article, published almost immediately after the group's move to the new church, took Seymour to task, too: "An old colored exhort [he was only 35], blind in one eye, is the majordomo of the company," the reporter wrote. "With his stony optic fixed on some luckless unbeliever, the old man yells his defiance and challenges an answer. Anathemas are heaped upon him who shall dare to gainsay the utterances of the preacher."

Although he knew the Pentecostal teaching would be controversial, Seymour was adamant about what he had learned and experienced. The Holy Spirit, he said, "will find pure channels to flow through, sanctified avenues for his power. ... You will never have an experience to measure with Acts 2:4 ... until you get your personal Pentecost or the baptism with the Holy Ghost and fire."

"Let the tongues come forth!"

By September the church reported that about 13,000 people had "received this gospel. It is spreading everywhere, until churches who do not believe backslide and lose the experience they have. Those who are older in this movement are stronger, and greater signs and wonders are following them."

Though there were periods of silence in the meetings, where even the most demonstrative believers sat still, most of the meetings were electric, loud, and unlike the services of "any company of fanatics, even in Los Angeles, the home of almost numberless creeds." The meetings began at 10 a.m., and continued for at least 12 hours, often lasting until two or three the following morning. "Elder" Seymour rarely preached, but when he did, he would often take out a tiny Bible and read only one or two words at a time. Then he would walk the room, challenging unbelievers face to face, shouting to those kneeling at altars to "let the tongues come forth!" or "Be empathetic!"

There were no hymnals, no liturgy, no order of services. Most of the time there were no musical instruments. But around the room, men jumped and shouted. Women danced and sang. People sang sometimes together, yet with completely different syllables, rhythms, and melodies. At other times the church joined together in English versions of "The Comforter Has Come," "Fill Me Now," "Joy Unspeakable," and "Love Lifted Me." At various places, some would be "slain under the power of God" or entranced.

"Proud, well-dressed preachers come in to 'investigate,' " informed *The Apostolic Faith* (a newspaper founded by Seymour, not to be confused with Parham's publication of the same name). "Soon their high looks are replaced with wonder, then conviction comes, and very often you will find them in a short time wallowing on the dirty floor, asking God to forgive them and make them as

little children."

Depending on the observer, the occurrences were either proof of God's presence or of the participants' fanaticism. But to all witnesses, it was something new.

" 'You-oo-oo gou-loo-loo come under the bloo-oo-oo boo-loo,' shouts an old colored 'mammy' in a frenzy of religious zeal," reported the skeptical *Times*. "Swinging her arms wildly about her, she continues with the strangest harangue ever uttered."

Despite the frequent critical news reports, the curious and genuine seekers continued to pour down Azusa Street.

"The secular papers have been stirred and published reports against the movement," boasted the first issue of *The Apostolic Faith*. "But it has only resulted in drawing hungry souls who understand that the Devil would not fight a thing unless God was in it."

In fact, when the *Times* printed a speaker's prophecy of "awful destruction" the day of the San Francisco earthquake, many residents' interest was piqued.

One striking feature of the early meetings: they were interracial. Although Los Angeles was not segregated by law, it was unusual in the growing city of 230,000 to see blacks, whites, Hispanics, Asians, and newly arrived European immigrants worshiping under the same roof. A 1906 Azusa staff photo shows blacks and whites, men and women—all in leadership. An unsigned article in the November 1906 issue of *The Apostolic Faith* said, "No instrument that God can use is rejected on account of color or dress or lack of education."

Another described one Communion service and foot washing that lasted until daybreak: "Over twenty different nationalities were present, and they were all in perfect accord and unity of the Spirit."

Though reports of the miraculous were sometimes exaggerated, the church didn't mask the revival's problems. Seymour wrote several letters to Parham asking advice in dealing with spiritualists and mediums from occult societies, who were trying to conduct séances in the services. And the church publicly admitted that not everyone at the meetings felt the presence of the Spirit:

"While some in the rear are opposing and arguing, others are at the altar falling down under the power of God and feasting in the good things of God. The two spirits are always manifest, but no opposition can kill, no power in earth or hell can stop God's work."

A future general superintendent of the [Assemblies of God](#), Ernest S. Williams, drawn to Azusa Street from Denver, was turned off by the more fanatical elements, but he also sensed vitality:

"On the brink of turning away," he said, "a great check came over my spirit. Then I began to seek earnestly."

Chicago pastor William Durham was also somewhat skeptical of the meetings, having heard conflicting reports, but he reported, "As soon as I entered the place, I saw that God was there."

Many of the thousands who poured into 312 Azusa Street between 1906 and 1909 heard the revival news through the widely circulated *The Apostolic Faith*. The paper not only kept readers abreast of what was happening in the "City of Angels" but also in churches and mission stations around the world.

Whether the seekers read the paper or came in person, they were certain to receive

messages emphasizing repentance, salvation, humility, worship, healing, deliverance from demonic possession, holy living, and the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Divisions and the end

Along with the success, hurts and heartaches soon came to Azusa Street. Seymour and the faithful learned to expect criticism from newspapers and leaders of other churches—including the founder of the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene, P. F. Bresee, who believed that Holiness people were already baptized in the Holy Spirit and that the Azusa tongues were not from God.

But some of the harshest criticism came from inside the little mission, with the mother church splitting because of personality clashes, fanaticism, doctrinal differences, and racial separation.

It was said that some whites left because the blacks had a lock on the leadership. Seymour, proving that he was no more perfect than his critics, reportedly asked the Hispanics to leave, and later wrote by-laws that prevented anyone except African-Americans from holding office in the mission. The often-quoted line that "the color line was washed away in the blood" was true in practice for only a short time.

Through the early months of the revival, Seymour gave credit for the movement's origins to Charles Parham and said that Azusa was an extension to the Midwest Apostolic Faith. Expecting a visit from Parham, Seymour wrote, "He was surely raised up of God to be an Apostle of this doctrine of Pentecost." But that "grand meeting" of October 1906 ended in a division that never fully healed.

Parham was shocked at what was being called spiritual manifestations. At what Seymour viewed as God-sent, Parham cringed with disgust, even labeling some adherents as spiritists.

"I sat on the platform in Azusa Street Mission, and saw the manifestations of the flesh, spiritualistic controls, [and] saw people practicing hypnotism at the altar over candidates seeking the baptism, though many were receiving the real baptism of the Holy Ghost. After preaching two or three times, I was informed by two of the elders, one who was a hypnotist ... that I was not wanted in that place."

But though the founder and most prominent leader of Pentecostalism renounced it, Azusa Street eclipsed him as the center of the new movement.

After some three years of daily, high intensity revival meetings, the Azusa Street Revival, still under Seymour's leadership, began winding down. When the crowds fell off, the mission soon looked like many other Pentecostal missions sprouting up in the Los Angeles area, with only sparse attendance.

Eventually, after Seymour's death in 1922 and his wife's in 1936, the mission closed and was razed. Only memories were left. But a new chapter in the history of the church had begun.

—Ted Olsen is assistant editor of *Christian History*.

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**More
resources:**

One of the
main works on

Pentecostalism is also one of the easiest reads: Vinson Synan's [The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century](#). This revision of the 1971 ***The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*** will likely be as influential as the original.

James R. Goff's [Fields White Unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism](#) examines Parham as "a symbol for the sociological origins of Pentecostalism." But don't let the abstract introduction fool you; from Parham's frontier roots to his fall into obscurity and rejection, his life is fascinating. And Goff tells it well.

You can also buy the story

of [Azusa Street](#)
by Frank
Bartleman, the
primary
chronicler of
Pentecostalism's
Los Angeles
origins. His
1908 history of
the mission is
still being
published.

Speaking of
republished
materials, [The
Original Azusa
Street Revival
Devotional](#) is
still available,
too.

Links:

[Azusa Street](#)
offers primary
source
material,
including the
first issue of
the mission's
***Apostolic
Faith***
newsletter and
the infamous
***Los Angeles
Times*** report
of the meetings.

Vinson Synan,
one of
Pentecostalism's
best scholars,
has written a
fantastic
[Pentecostal
history](#)
overview for
Oral Roberts
University.

The same site

houses a brief history of [Azusa Street and William J. Seymour](#).

The [Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center](#) also provides several historical documents on [digital media](#), including digitally preserved issues of early Pentecostal newsletters and digital oral histories.

Sanctification Scuffles

The finished work controversy was Pentecostalism's first split

James R. Goff

In 1911 as William Durham denounced the "second blessing" doctrine of sanctification, a young woman attacked him with her hat pin to register her "pointed opposition." She was not alone in her contempt for his "demonic" views. The conflict over sanctification had burst forth a year earlier and had become the first full-blown controversy of the Pentecostal movement.

The early Pentecostal movement arose from the Holiness movement, and like its parent, shared John Wesley's views on sanctification: that it was an instantaneous experience of "entire sanctification" or "Christian perfection" and that it was a separate experience from conversion. Early Pentecostals called it a "second blessing" and regarded it as a necessary preparation for a third experience, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (that is, the new Pentecostal experience).

In 1910, William H. Durham, pastor of the North Avenue Mission in Chicago, began making waves throughout Pentecostal circles when he denounced these views. "I began to write against the doctrine that it takes two works of grace to save and cleanse a man," he later wrote. "I denied and still deny that God does not deal with the nature of sin at conversion. I deny that a man who is converted or born again is outwardly washed and cleansed but that his heart is left unclean with enmity against God in it."

This wouldn't be salvation, he argued, because salvation "means that all the old man, or old nature, which was sinful and depraved and which was the very thing in us that was condemned, is crucified with Christ." He dubbed his position the "finished work at Calvary" because he believed the work of Christ on the cross was sufficient for both salvation and sanctification. Finished-work Pentecostals slowly also came to stress a gradual process of sanctification, not an instantaneous one, in which the sanctifying work of Christ was "appropriated" over one's life.

Locked out of Azusa

Durham returned to the Azusa Mission in 1911 (where he had received the gift of tongues in 1906). William Seymour was on a preaching tour, and Durham was invited to preach. His finished-work teaching generated conflict but sparked a fresh revival. Wrote one observer, "The fire began to fall at old Azusa as at the beginning." But when Seymour heard what was going on, he promptly returned and padlocked the church door to prevent the Chicago preacher from speaking further in his pulpit. Undaunted, Durham moved to a rival mission and continued proclaiming his message.

From his home in Kansas, Charles Parham (by then dropping rapidly out of the Pentecostal spotlight) declared, "If this man's doctrine is true, let my life go out to prove it, but if our teaching on a definite grace of sanctification is true, let his life pay the forfeit." When Durham passed away unexpectedly later that year, Parham claimed vindication and remarked to his followers "how signally God has answered."

Despite such ardent denunciation, Durham's interpretation emerged as the preferred theological position for roughly half of all Pentecostals by 1915. Most of the denominations formed as Holiness bodies prior to the Pentecostal outpouring remained staunch supporters of the second-blessing doctrine, while newer organizations, including the Assemblies of God, either left the matter open to individuals or adopted the

finished-work view. It is today the view of most American Pentecostals.

James R. Goff, Jr., is professor of history at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina.

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**More
resources:**

James R. Goff, Jr., is the author of [Fields White Unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism.](#)

It's one of the best books on how Pentecostalism came to be, seen through the life of Parham, a true Sphinx.

Though there are no major books solely about the William Durham or the finished-work controversy, both stories are told in depth in the [Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements](#), edited by Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee.

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They Had a Dream

Racial harmony broke down, but the hope did not.

David D. Daniels

The fact that Pentecostalism has two founders—one white (Charles Parham), one black (William Seymour)—did not go unnoticed. It perfectly signified the interracial cooperation of the movement's early days, both at Azusa Street and in the new denominations. Not only did blacks and whites worship together with other races and ethnic groups, but many racists were transformed and prejudices were challenged.

Sadly, Parham's bigoted tendencies were not among these. He caricatured Seymour's "disgusting" Azusa Street revivals as "Southern darkey camp meetings." The short-lived relationship between Seymour and Parham foreshadowed the inability of Pentecostalism to maintain the racial harmony for very long. What emerged from the failed experiment, however, was a distinct movement. Neither that movement, black Pentecostalism, nor the larger movement, Pentecostalism, can be understood without knowing the early relationships between black and white Pentecostals.

Christian History asked David Daniels of McCormick Seminary (Chicago) to help us understand that complex relationship.

Black Pentecostalism emerged out of three nineteenth-century renewal movements within the black church: the black Holiness movement, the black Restorationist movement, and the healing movement—and all three had from the beginning a desire to bring blacks and whites together.

The black Holiness movement arose during the decades before the Civil War but only developed institutions in 1869 when the first black Holiness denomination was formed: the Reformed Zion Union Apostolic Church. The early movement was mainly found among black Methodist congregations from North Carolina to New York, but soon the movement spread, invading black Baptist and independent religious circles across the country. By the late 1800s, many black Holiness leaders were forging cooperation with white leaders throughout the country.

William Christian, who founded the "Church of the Living God, Christian Workers for Fellowship" in 1888 near Wrightsville, Arkansas, led the black Restorationist movement. He sought to popularize the teachings of Alexander Campbell: he rejected denominationalism and aimed to teach only the simple message of Christ; he had no patience with unscriptural titles for churches, specifically the terms **Baptist** and **Methodist**. He also advocated the reform of popular conversion practices, such as the mourner's bench: "All the praying to repent and the mourners' bench business [is all] ignorance of the deepest dye. You don't have to have any fits and spasms, but just accept the Word and he will save you."

By 1900 the denomination included nearly 90 congregations in 11 states, and a cardinal principle of Christian's message was the rejection of racial prejudice.

There were two streams in the black healing movement. An older stream offered prayers for healing, teaching that the healing could occur over time or instantaneously. A newer stream was led by Elizabeth

Mix, the first African-American female to serve as full-time healing evangelist. Mix emphasized the role of faith in healing:

"'According to your faith' so be it unto you. Lay aside trusting in the 'arm of flesh' and lean wholly upon God and his promises." Unique in Mix's ministry was that she worked with all races.

In the early 1900s, these three movements joined the parallel movements found in white renewal groups to produce the Azusa Street Revival and a strong interracial impulse within Pentecostalism.

The power of Jim Crow

The early years of the Azusa Street Revival were a model of interracial cooperation, partly due to interracial ideals that had been preached in both black and white Holiness churches. Not only the participants, but the leadership at Azusa was a mix of black and white.

So impressive was this model that by 1910, prominent black and white Pentecostal leaders were campaigning to make the interracial vision of the Azusa Street Revival a keystone of Pentecostalism. Black Holiness congregations in Los Angeles, Portland, Memphis, Indianapolis, and New York City introduced Pentecostalism to these cities, conspicuously modeling the interracial worship brought from Los Angeles.

By 1910, prominent black and white leaders were campaigning to make the interracial vision of the Azusa Street Revival a keystone of Pentecostalism.

The most eminent African-American Holiness fellowship, The Church of God in Christ (COGIC), led by Charles Harrison Mason, brought in two white fellowships in an attempt to become more integrated.

The Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (PAW), established in 1907, also incorporated a large influx of whites who withdrew from the [Assemblies of God](#) in the Oneness dispute.

While COGIC and PAW continued to attract white members (throughout the twentieth century, in fact), many white leaders within Pentecostalism found it difficult to maintain the interracial impulse. Social Darwinism, Jim Crowism, and racism prevailed in this era, a mere half century after the Civil War. Racial segregation was a virtue. Many denominations staunchly committed to interracial church conventions found insurmountable problems when planning meetings: Jim Crow laws in the South prohibited multiracial conventions and hotel accommodations—although COGIC continued to hold interracial

conventions in Memphis up until the mid-1930s.

Because of the social and cultural obstacles to the interracial ideal (and also because some denominations would not allow black leadership), black congregations began withdrawing from multiracial denominations as early as 1908. Similarly, one white fellowship associated with COGIC formed the [Assemblies of God](#) as a predominately white fellowship in 1914. Ten years later, the majority of white congregations in the PAW withdrew to form a predominately white denomination eventually named the United Pentecostal Church.

Though many blacks and whites submitted to the segregationist outlook of the day, what is surprising is that, in spite of the huge challenges, some whites and blacks continued to strive to realize the interracial ideal. Most black Pentecostals believed the "cleavage of the races" was one of Pentecostalism's chief issues and believed it was "sinful and embarrassing." In 1918 the COGIC made interracial fellowship an essential teaching of their church manual, in a section titled, ***Equal in Power and Authority***. After noting segregationist tendencies (how some denominations "advised electing colored officials to preside over colored assemblies") and injustice (how blacks were denied "equal power with white bishops"), it

stated its position clearly: "The Church of God in Christ recognizes the fact that all believers are one in Christ Jesus and all its members have equal rights. Its overseers, both colored and white, have equal power and authority in the church."

Today, however, black Pentecostalism remains a distinct, though vibrant, branch of the larger movement, with dozens of denominations and millions of believers. Since the late 1960s, Pentecostal denominations have attempted to heal some of these divisions. More and more Pentecostals today hold tightly to the interracial dream which, as one church document put it, has more than ever "awakened greater hopefulness" in terms of solving race problems.

David D. Daniels is associate professor of church history at McCormick Seminary, Chicago.

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More resources:

[Saints in Exile : The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African-American Religion and Culture](#), by Cheryl Jeanne Sanders (part of Oxford University Press's Religion in America series) may be good. We don't know. We haven't read it yet.

Links:

[The North Star: An Online Journal of African-American Religion](#) is not just about African-American Pentecostalism, but will discuss it

frequently. A new project, they're still working on content. But this site looks promising.

The largest black North American Pentecostal body, the [Church of God in Christ](#) is online, and offers pages upon pages of its history, including a video of a young Charles H. Mason.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 58: The Rise of Pentecostalism

Dividing Over Oneness

The Oneness movement pushed Pentecostals to organize

Kenneth Gill

*Preach in Jesus' Name,
teach in Jesus' Name
Heal the sick in his Name;
And always proclaim,
it was Jesus' Name
In which the power came;
Baptize in His name,
enduring the shame,
For there is victory in Jesus' Name.*

So went one of the hymns of the Oneness Pentecostals, for whom **Jesus** was the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Their desire to recapture the mantle of the apostolic church started with questions over the proper formula to use in water baptism. But they were soon questioning even the doctrine of the Trinity.

In April 1913, a Pentecostal-Holiness meeting was held in Arroyo Seco, California. Between 1,500 and 2,000 Pentecostals, mainly pastors, attended the meetings each night, with hundreds more filling the camp on Sundays. It was here that Robert Edward McAlister, a respected Canadian minister, observed that though Jesus had told his disciples to "baptize [disciples] in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," the New Testament invariably records the apostles baptizing only "in the name of Jesus."

Pentecostal preacher Frank J. Ewart later said, "The gun was fired from that platform which was destined to resound throughout all Christendom."

In fact, by January 1915, the message had spread across the continent. Many of the Pentecostal faithful were rebaptized to follow the ways of the apostolic church. They believed older doctrines, long diseased by generations of unfaithfulness and the inability to heed God's Spirit, were being uncovered by this "new light" of the Holy Spirit.

For most of the new adherents, this was just a different formula for baptism, not a conscious rejection of the Trinity. Eventually, however, while Oneness Pentecostals worshiped God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the terms **Trinity** and **persons** were rejected as unbiblical.

Two in the Spirit

J. Roswell Flower, later secretary of the [Assemblies of God](#) (AG), was anxious not only about the apparent denial of orthodox doctrine but also with the potential this "new issue" had for creating division. He urged other leaders to call a meeting of the General Council to prevent it from spreading.

On October 1, 1915, 525 delegates met in St. Louis, ready for a confrontation. The Oneness adherents did not present an aggressive front, so no strong effort was made to censure them. Instead the council

proposed a compromise. It specifically denounced the practice of rebaptism as well as a few other Oneness doctrines. But it acknowledged both formulas for baptism as Christian.

The Oneness Pentecostals became increasingly vocal after the council, and within a year, the AG delegates were back in St. Louis. They were to decide once and for all whether the denomination was big enough to accept Oneness adherents.

Since its formation in 1914, the group had rebelled against formal organization. They wanted to reestablish the church of the New Testament, and the New Testament gave no examples of organization beyond local churches. Creeds, "tradition," and power structures had corrupted the church and stifled the Holy Spirit.

So rather than address the doctrinal issues of the Trinity, the Oneness contingent (made up largely of African-Americans) stressed that they did not want to establish a set of doctrinal statements for the AG. In fact, they voted against every proposition that was raised.

Their strategy failed. A "Statement of Fundamental Truths," almost half of which was a repudiation of Oneness beliefs, was accepted as the AG standard. More than a quarter of those attending, 156 members, were forced to leave the AG and form new organizations (the most important of these were the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World and—via several future mergers—the United Pentecostal Church.) But because of the AG's reaction to the "new issue," the group became solidified as a denomination early in its history.

Many small Oneness groups formed after 1916, though many have remained independent. Today scholars estimate there are between 1.5 and 5 million Oneness Pentecostals worldwide, and they make up only a fraction of one percent of the world's Pentecostals.

Kenneth Gill is acting director of the Billy Graham Center Library in Wheaton, Illinois.

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More resources:

There are several books on or about Oneness Pentecostalism, but most are geared solely to either proselytizing ([*In the Name of Jesus*](#) by David K. Bernard) or condemning (Zondervan's [*Jesus Only Churches*](#) by Calvin Beisner) the belief.

*United We
Stand : A
History of
Oneness
Organizations,*

by Arthur and Charles Clanton, falls into the former category (as do all books by World Aflame Press, a wing of the United Pentecostal Church, International), but may be the best bet for a history of the movement.

*The
Dictionary of
Pentecostal
and
Charismatic
Movements,*

edited by Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee, has several sections on Oneness Pentecostalism and its denominations.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 58: The Rise of Pentecostalism

Peaceniks

Early Pentecostals asked, *Why go to war when Jesus is on his way?*

James R. Goff

Peaceniks

When World War I broke out, most adherents to the fledgling Pentecostal movement stood firmly on the side of pacifism. The movement's leaders, like Frank Bartleman and Charles Parham (who married a Quaker) had made it a key tenet years before, even though they believed war was inevitable.

The position drew strength from at least two quarters. First, Pentecostals took literally the biblical injunctions to "Love your enemies" and "Thou shalt not kill."

But Pentecostals also believed their movement heralded the end of the world as they knew it. As ardent premillennialists, they envisioned a final earth-shaking revival even as the world hastened down the final path of destruction that would lead to the coming Millennium.

From this perspective, the outbreak of war in 1914 offered tangible proof that the end was near and fighting against militant forces in Europe was useless. The only important battle was the warfare for souls.

Most Pentecostal denominations, therefore, took stands against the war and urged members to seek conscientious objector or noncombatant status. Some, like the [Assemblies of God](#) and the Pentecostal Holiness Church, declared their opposition to warfare but left the decision ultimately in the hands of their members.

The Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.), though, passed a resolution specifically forbidding its members from participating in war. Its publication, the ***Church of God Evangel***, actually faced a Justice Department investigation for possible violation of the Espionage and Sedition Acts.

In a similar vein, Charles H. Mason, head of the predominately black Church of God in Christ, was jailed in Mississippi for his vocal opposition to the war effort. Even more ardent was the opposition of a fiery prophet on the West Coast. Thomas Gourley, the white Pentecostal leader of a small commune on Lopez Island in the Puget Sound, stood trial in early 1919 on charges that he violated the Sedition Act of 1918 when he openly urged audiences to refuse Liberty bonds and stamps.

Defendants like Gourley were acquitted or at least saw their cases dropped as the end of the war reduced anxiety over pacifism. But by then it didn't matter as much. Pentecostals were already assuming a cultural position more akin to that of evangelicals. They built successful organizations and, as they did, mirrored more closely the fabric of American life. By the outbreak of the Second World War, Pentecostal denominations not only offered support for the morality of the American effort but also participated fully in the supply of military chaplains. And by Vietnam, many Pentecostals were staunchly antipacifist.



James R. Goff, Jr., is professor of history at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina.

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**More
resources:**

James R. Goff, Jr., is the author of [Fields White Unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism](#), which talks about the pacifism of Parham and his colleagues.

Though there are few major books solely about pacifism in the Pentecostal movement, but the [Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements](#), edited by Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee, gives a lot of space to it.

If you can find it, George Fox College sociologist Jay Beaman wrote one of the main scholarly works on the subject:

Pentecostal

***Pacifism:
The Origin,
Development,
and
Rejection of
Pacific Belief
Among
Pentecostals.***
([Center for
Mennonite
Brethren
Studies](#), 1989).

Jay Beaman
and others
have a large
section about
Pentecostal
pacifism in
[Proclaim
Peace:
Christian
Pacifism from
Unexpected
Quarters](#).

Links:

[Peacemakers
for Jesus](#) does
not appear to
be Pentecostal
but gives an
introduction to
Christian
pacifism. You
may also want
to try one of
the many
excellent
[Mennonite](#)
sites out there.

Not all early
Pentecostals
were pacifists.
[Sergeant Alvin
York](#), a
member of the
Pentecostal
Church of
Christ in

Christian
Union, became
a hero in
World War I.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 58: The Rise of Pentecostalism

The Silent Pentecostals

Until recently, Latinos have been the most overlooked members of the Pentecostal family.

Gaston Espinosa

Pentecostals are attracting 30,000 to 40,000 Latinos annually away from Roman Catholicism.

The Azusa Street Revival was noticeably "free of all nationalist feeling," according to one observer. "If a Mexican or a German cannot speak English, he gets up and speaks in his own native tongue and feels quite at home, for the Spirit interprets through his face, and the people say 'Amen.' No instrument that God can use is rejected on account of color or dress or education."

It is no accident that this observer's first example of varied ethnicity was "a Mexican," for since the beginning of Pentecostalism, Latinos have played an important role in the movement.

Old-time religion

Abundio and Rosa López were among the first to be baptized with "Holy Ghost and fire," at Azusa. "Thanks be to God for the Spirit which brought us to the Azusa Street Mission, the Apostolic Faith, old-time religion," they exclaimed. "We cannot express our gratitude and thanksgiving which we feel moment by moment for what He has done for us, so we want to be used for the healing of both soul and body."

From the very beginning, Latinos flocked to the Azusa Street Mission in search of a transcendent God and a better life. For reasons that are not entirely clear, their unbridled enthusiasm and desire to testify prompted the leader of the mission to "ruthlessly crush" the Latino contingent in 1909.

This conflict gave birth to the Latino Pentecostal movement as scores left the mission and began preaching the Pentecostal message throughout barrios and migrant farm labor camps in the U.S., Mexico, and Puerto Rico. As early as 1912, Latinos organized their own completely autonomous and independent churches in California, Texas, and Hawaii.

Trinitarian and Oneness

The Oneness controversy split the fledgling Latino Pentecostal movement asunder in 1913. Many rejected the doctrine of the Trinity as unbiblical and accepted the Oneness message.

Francisco Llorente and Antonio Nava organized the first Latino Oneness denomination in the U.S. in 1916. Their tremendous evangelistic work, along with that of their proétyés, has developed into a movement numbering 900 congregations and 100,000 followers throughout the United States.

These Apostolic Assembly and La Luz del Mundo Pentecostals differ from their [Assemblies of God \(AG\)](#) counterparts in practice as well as doctrine. They do not ordain women and require women to wear a head covering during worship. They also frown upon women wearing cosmetics, jewelry, pants or cutting their hair.

Schism and charisma

While the Oneness controversy was ripping apart the Pentecostal movement, a young, tall, and idealistic Anglo Methodist named Henry C. Ball converted to Pentecostalism. Although he didn't speak a word of Spanish, Ball began preaching to Mexicans through a translator in Ricardo, Texas, (near Corpus Christi) in 1915. That same year he founded the Latin District Council of the Assemblies of God. Committed to establishing indigenous churches, his often headstrong and paternalistic attitudes towards Mexicans led to a major schism.

Affectionately known as the "Mighty Aztec," the physically imposing Francisco Olazábal (who worked with Ball) left the AG in 1923 because "the gringos have control."

The controversy with Ball behind him, Olazábal founded the Latin American Council of Christian Churches. Olazábal's powerful evangelistic-healing crusades swept through the barrios of Los Angeles, El Paso, Chicago, New York, and Puerto Rico like a spiritual tidal wave.

While Olazábal's evangelistic-healing crusades were sweeping the barrios, H. C. Ball and the Latin District Council was silently planting churches throughout the U.S. The energetic Ball and Alice Luce published ***La Luz Apostolica*** (Apostolic Light) and ***Himnos de Gloria*** (Hymns of Glory), set up Bible Schools in California and Texas, and aggressively recruited and trained their spiritual successors with Texas vigor. Today the movement Ball and Luce founded now numbers 290,000 Latinos and 1,700 churches.

Like a wax museum, the history of Latino Pentecostalism is full of dynamic characters like Chonita Morgan Howard who preached the Pentecostal message on horseback in northern Mexico and Arizona. Domingo Cruz, a fiery, illiterate one-legged was legendary for his persuasive preaching among the migrant farm labor camps of northern California. Still others like Robert Fierro, a.k.a. the "burned over Irishman," and A.C. Valdez thrilled thousands of Latinos and Anglos with their powerful evangelistic services throughout the country.

The Silent Pentecostals

The work that these silent Pentecostals (their story is rarely told) pioneered prior to World War II is spreading like wildfire throughout the U.S. and Latin America today. Although often only averaging 60 to 100 members, these Pentecostal ***templos*** and ***iglesias*** are attracting 30,000 to 40,000 Latinos annually from Roman Catholicism.

"Their minister," one scholar of Latino Pentecostalism stated, "is likely to be a factory worker himself, secure in the Pentecostal belief that 'a man of God with a Bible in his hand has had training enough.' Many Pentecostals attend church every night for a two-hour service. Loud Bible readings and spontaneous testimonials are part of every service, punctuated by shouts of '***Aleluyah***' and '***Gracias a Dios*** [Thanks be to God].' The hymns well up with rhythmic clapping, generally accompanied by a guitar, drums, tambourines, and bass fiddle, piano or small combo."

Their call to a "born-again" Spirit-filled life has, unfortunately, resulted in tremendous conflict and persecution in their families and barrios, where they are derisively labeled the "Aleluyas."

The Pentecostal movement, along with a host of other religions, is shattering the stereotype that to be Latino is to be Roman Catholic. Today an estimated 1 million Latinos have embraced the Pentecostal/charismatic movement and attend one of the 10,000 congregations and prayer groups in 40 Latino Pentecostal/charismatic traditions throughout the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

Gastón Espinosa is the 1997-1998 César Chávez Fellow at Dartmouth College.

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Links:

[Andrés Tapia](#) is a Christian journalist specializing in Latino concerns, especially among Pentecostals and evangelicals. His work has appeared in ***Christianity Today, Harper's, The Chicago Tribune, Salon,*** and other periodicals.

They Shall Take Up Serpents

Few have taken the Bible more literally than George Hensley and the snake handlers.

Ted Olsen

"And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." These were Jesus' last words on earth, according to Mark's Gospel (though only in the later manuscripts).

Pentecostals believe in exorcisms, speaking in new tongues, and laying hands on the sick; so why not taking up serpents? To an illiterate Tennessee preacher named George W. ("Little George") Hensley, it seemed inconsistent. So when he preached on the Mark passage one Sunday in 1910, he concluded by taking a large rattlesnake out of a box with his bare hands. He handled it for several minutes, then ordered his congregation to handle it too or else be "doomed to eternal hell."

Hensley's fame spread throughout the Appalachian region and soon caught the attention of A. J. Tomlinson, then General Overseer of the Church of God. He ordained Hensley into the denomination (though there is no record of Tomlinson handling snakes, his daughter did).

At first, most of the snakes were brought to the church by unbelievers looking for a good show. At one early meeting, hecklers threw a box full of cottonmouths, copperheads, and rattlesnakes in front of the former moonshiner while Hensley was preaching. The congregation ran out of the building, but Hensley simply bent down and picked up the snakes, as one observer put it, "like a boy would gather stovewood in his arms to carry to the house."

For a decade, Hensley traveled around the region preaching, handling snakes, and drinking poison. At the end of the exhibitions, awed observers would rush down the aisles for the altar call. But Hensley had trouble at home and did not support his family when away on his evangelistic trips. His neighbor began to make obvious overtures to his wife, but she refused to leave her husband. The enraged neighbor attacked the preacher with a knife, beating him severely. Once he recovered, Hensley resigned his ministry, left his family, and reassembled his whiskey still.

Before long, he was arrested and convicted for selling his moonshine. On the chain gang he was a model prisoner—until he escaped and fled to Cleveland, Ohio. There he remarried and began to preach again. He and his family moved to Kentucky and again began to handle snakes. He continued to travel, to have marital troubles (he was married four times), and to handle snakes. By the 1940s, the movement had captured both the attention of the national media and the local lawmakers, and the practice was outlawed. But Hensley and his followers continued to "obey God's law not man's law." They were, of course, repeatedly arrested.

"It's the rulers every time," Hensley preached. "It's the rulers that persecutes the people. ... But I've handled 'em all my life—been bit four hundred times 'till I'm speckled all over like a guinea hen. ... I'll handle 'em even if they put me on the road gang again! Just you wait! Now it's handlin' serpent that's again' the law, but after a while it'll be against the law to talk in tongues, and then they'll go after the Bible itself!"

Once bitten

Today about 2,500 Pentecostals practice snake handling. The churches are autonomous (all mainstream Pentecostal organizations, including Tomlinson's Church of God, have long since condemned the practice), and they are marked by strict literal interpretations of the Bible. Jewelry is forbidden, including wedding rings and watches. Women may not cut their hair. Members greet each other "with a holy kiss."

In the early days of the movement, the bitten were shunned—the person was considered to be "in sin" or lacked sufficient faith. Today most adherents believe even the devout will be bitten occasionally.

Believers say God allows snake bites, (1) to punish sins in daily life, (2) to prove the snakes have not been tampered with and are still quite deadly, (3) to try the faith of the victim and other worshippers, and (4) to show God's healing power.

But one of the most common reasons given is that the handler did not have the "anointing." Snakes must only be handled when a believer is completely under the power of the Holy Ghost: an experience marked by speaking in tongues and physical frenzy. Many receivers of this anointing have no recollection of the experience or even of handling the serpents.

The founder of the movement lived into his seventy-fifth year. On July 24, 1955, Hensley was bitten again. Like so many times before, he refused medical treatment. But by the following morning, he was dead. Officials, showing a complete misunderstanding of Hensley's faith, listed his death as suicide.

Ted Olsen is assistant editor of Christian History.

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More resources:

Serpent handling is a minuscule segment of Pentecostalism—about 0.005 percent—but David L. Kimbrough's [*Taking Up Serpents: Snake Handlers of Eastern Kentucky*](#) is so good we had to include it. It's sympathetic and insightfully descriptive.

[Salvation on Sand Mountain : Snake Handling and Redemption in Southern Appalachia](#) by

Dennis Covington, is more of a first-person account. It too is somewhat sympathetic, but Covington (who grew up among the snake handlers) distances himself from the practice at the end.

Links:

[Serpent-Handling Believers](#) by

Thomas Burton is another somewhat sympathetic look, but we've only read the introduction.

[Serpent-Handling Believers:](#)

The introduction to Burton's book is available for reading online.

An overview

of the snake handling movement, including a brief history and summary of beliefs, is available at the [New Religious Movements](#) area of the University of Virginia's Sociology department site.

For a surprisingly sympathetic evangelical perspective on serpent handling, see columnist Terry Mattingly's ["Snakes, Miracles, and Biblical Authority,"](#) which compares a snake handler and a church historian.

For a senior's perspective on snake handling, check out ["Risking Snakebite Tests Religious Faith"](#) from the Maturity News Service.

The ***Augusta Chronicle***

also did an
issue on
snake and
fire handling
not too long
ago, called
["Taking Up
Serpents."](#)

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 58: The Rise of Pentecostalism

The Rise of Pentecostalism: Christian History Timeline

The Rise of Pentecostalism

Vinson Synan

Holiness Roots

1867 National Holiness Association forms in Vineland, New Jersey

1879 Isaiah Reed forms the largest holiness association in America, the Iowa Holiness Association

1887 A. B. Simpson founds the Christian and Missionary Alliance to promote the Holiness "Fourfold Gospel"

1895 B. H. Irwin teaches a third blessing "baptism of Fire," splitting the Iowa Holiness Association and forming the Iowa Fire-Baptized Holiness Association

1896 Schearer Schoolhouse Fire-Baptized Holiness revival experiences tongues

1897 Charles H. Mason and C.T. Jones form the Church of God in Christ in Lexington, Mississippi

1898 First congregation of the Pentecostal Holiness Church in Goldsboro, North Carolina

Pentecostal Birth

1901 Agnes Ozman speaks in tongues in Topeka. Charles Parham calls tongues the "Bible evidence" for baptism in the Spirit

1902 First congregation of the Church of God formed at Camp Creek, North Carolina

1905 William Seymour accepts Pentecostal doctrine from Parham in Houston, Texas

1906 First General Assembly of the Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.)

1906-1909 Azusa Street Revival; Pentecostalism becomes global under Seymour's leadership

1907 T. B. Barrett opens Pentecostal meetings in Oslo. Begins Pentecostal movements in Scandinavia, England, and Germany

1907 G. B. Cashwell spreads Pentecostalism in the South

1908 John G. Lake begins South African Apostolic Faith Mission

1908 Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.) accepts Pentecostalism under A. J. Tomlinson

1909 Luigi Francescon and Giacomo Lombardi begin Italian Pentecostal movements in the U.S., Italy,

Argentina, and Brazil

1909 German evangelicals condemn Pentecostals in the "Berlin Declaration"

1909 Florence Crawford founds the Apostolic Faith Church in Portland, Oregon

Maturing Movement

1910 W. H. Durham begins "Finished Work" movement in Chicago

1912 Maria Woodworth-Etter becomes a popular Pentecostal preacher in Dallas

1914 The Assemblies of God formed in Hot Springs, Arkansas

1916 The Oneness Movement splits the Assemblies of God

1919 Pentecostal Assemblies of the World incorporated

1923 A. J. Tomlinson forms the Church of God of Prophecy

1927 Aimee Semple McPherson forms International Church of the Foursquare Gospel in Los Angeles

1928 Mary Rumsey opens first Pentecostal missions to Korea and Japan

1943 American Pentecostal churches accepted as charter members of the National Association of Evangelicals

1945 Several mergers produce the United Pentecostal Church (Missouri)

1948 Healing crusades begin under William Branham and Oral Roberts

World Events

1867 Karl Marx predicts a proletariat takeover in *Das Kapital*

1877 Thomas Edison invents the phonograph, recording the words "Mary had a little lamb"

1883 Friedrich Nietzsche, in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, writes, "I teach you the Superman. Man is something to be surpassed."

1900 Sigmund Freud publishes *The Interpretation of Dreams*, one of the seminal works of psychoanalysis

1901 Guglielmo Marconi sends the first wireless message across the Atlantic Ocean

1903 Bicycle mechanics Orville and Wilbur Wright fly the first airplane

1905 Albert Einstein begins publishing his theory of relativity

1912 The *Titanic* sinks, killing 1,500 passengers and crew

1917 Bolshevik troops, led by Vladimir Lenin, take control in Russia

1925 Adolf Hitler pens *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle)

1926 Television invented in London by John Logie Baird

1927 Charles Lindbergh crosses the Atlantic Ocean alone in his *Spirit of St. Louis*

1941 Rudolf Bultmann questions biblical history in his *New Testament and Mythology*

1945 Atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki

Vinson Synan is dean of Regent University's divinity school (in Virginia Beach, Va.) and author of The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century (Eerdmans, 1997).

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Resources:

Vinson Synan is the author of one of the main scholarly works on Pentecostalism, [The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century](#).

Fortunately, it's also one of the best reads.

Links:

[The International Pentecostal Holiness Church](#) has their own beautifully designed (and inclusive) timeline.

Another
[Pentecostal
timeline](#) is
available
online.

Hell-Hatched Free Lovism'

Evangelicals were none too eager to welcome the Pentecostals

Grant Wacker

Almost immediately after the birth of Pentecostalism, the branch of Christianity that gave birth to the movement was disowning the offspring. The parent, radical evangelicalism, regarded the child as an ugly mutant. Abusive words flew back and forth for decades, subsiding into sullen silence only in the 1930s.

A mere craze

These "radical evangelicals"—Holiness Wesleyans and "higher life" fundamentalists (such as the Christian and Missionary Alliance)—repeatedly called the new movement a "fad" or a "craze." *The Christian Witness and Advocate of Bible Holiness*, for example, charged that the "new fanaticism" would soon "have its run and lie a curiosity in the museum of ten thousand dead follies."

Others highlighted the notoriety of the revival's geographical birthplace. F. W. Pitt, a prominent London pastor, dismissed the stirring as a peculiarly American phenomenon, "the land of wonder-meetings and freak religions." Another writer affirmed what many suspected: Los Angeles harbored more fanatics than any city in the United States.

Still another arrow in the critics' polemical quiver was minimizing the numerical size of the menace. Phineas F. Bresee, founder of the Church of the Nazarene, dismissed the revival as of "small account," exerting "about as much influence as a pebble thrown into the sea."

As the months wore on, fear eroded restraint. By 1908 for most, the bugle had sounded. It was time to choose sides and to expose toleration for what it really was: flirtation with the Devil.

Families dissolved, churches split, denominations broke apart. The most conspicuous divisions took place within the Church of God in Christ, the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church, the Holiness Church of North Carolina, and the Christian and Missionary Alliance, all of which ruptured or suffered severe defections between 1907 and 1910. Many fellowships witnessed steady and painful attrition.

Seething immorality

In the face of this real-life nightmare, evangelical leaders mounted a multi-pronged counterattack, specifying Pentecostals' defects one by one.

Perceived sexual immorality ranked high on everyone's list. What Pentecostals did on the floor of the camp meeting aroused the darkest of suspicions. Thus when A. T. Pierson, editor of the prestigious *Missionary Review of the World*, first alerted his readers to the Pentecostal menace in July 1907, he observed that their meetings involved instances of "shocking impropriety." Two months later Pierson judged that he had erred on the side of "mildness and moderation."

To

Accumulating evidence from reliable eyewitnesses contained "statements of facts too shocking to print." Other leaders felt no compunctions about exposing Pentecostals' so-called depravities.

Pentecostals,
their record of
accomplishment
was nothing
less than
supernatural.

Southern Holiness evangelist W. B. Godbey detected a good deal of "hell-hatched free lovism" in their circles, adding, for good measure, that gamblers, atheists, whores, and thieves also spoke in tongues. Even Reuben A. Torrey said Pentecostal meetings, "seethed with immorality of the grossest character."

In their critics' eyes, Pentecostals' spiritual pride ranked even worse than their sexual misdeeds. Denver preacher Alma White found Pentecostals the most "self-righteous, self-sufficient" people on earth. One Free Methodist minister left a Pentecostal meeting in Chicago shaken less by the doctrines he heard than by the "offensive, arrogant, and bombastic manner" in which they were presented. A Nazarene author said that Pentecostals treated their ability to speak in tongues as a prize, "worn as a peacock carries its tail feathers."

Spiritual pride seemed to spawn other worms, especially looseness with the truth. Critics suspected Pentecostals exaggerated the number of people who attended their meetings, misstated the results of their services, and told outright falsehoods about miraculously speaking foreign languages.

Above all, they perjured themselves when they recounted the healings that took place in their meetings. In a work symptomatically called *Faith Healing Tragedies*, F. W. Pitt claimed that he had attended many healing meetings and, yes, he had seen a few cures but only of slight nervous conditions.

Worse yet, according to the critics, Pentecostal religion actually endangered the physical body. Enthusiasts got hurt when they fell into trances, bumping into objects or crashing to the floor. Critics claimed the records bristled with stories of devotees sprawling to the ground after discarding their crutches, fighting back tears after tossing away their eyeglasses, or even dying after stopping desperately needed medical treatments. Famed Bible teacher Harry A. Ironside knew one adolescent woman who had lost all of her hair because of the "unnatural excitement" of Holy Ghost meetings. On several occasions, some said, the determination to fast until Jesus returned had led to near or actual death by starvation.

"Strain upon the brain"

Physical harm proved only half of the peril. "Good honest people," stormed an Alabama educator, were turned into "wild eyed fanatics ... with love leaked out and their faith forever ruined."

China Inland Mission personnel worried that meetings of the local Pentecostal Missionary Union produced "consequences of a dangerous character," including "strain upon the brain" and, occasionally, "insanity." *The Nazarene Herald of Holiness* alleged—without a scrap of proof, it should be said—that Pentecostal teaching actually stirred converts to go out and murder their enemies.

The situation became especially volatile when children were involved. In Alliance, Ohio, Quaker Pentecostal Levi Lupton made the mistake of inviting a boy to his camp meeting. The boy's mother sprang into action. She hired local toughs, who invaded the meeting, squirted Lupton and several worshippers with sulfuric acid, then retrieved her child.

If the wrenching of families aroused the most intense passions, the disruption of local churches ran a close second. "No community is safe from this most dangerous heresy," thundered one editor.

In Alabama a Holiness college president wrote to a friend that the Pentecostal eruption marked one of the saddest events of his life. "[It has] slashed and utterly ruined ... the work of God," he sighed. Everywhere in the world, protested Jesse Penn-Lewis, Pentecostals inflicted "division and separation among Christians."

As anger turned to bewilderment, evangelicals found a master explanation for everything: Satan. By this reckoning, Pentecostalism was—take your pick—"a gross deception of Satan," a "gigantic scheme of Satan," a "satanic attack ... at our Lord Himself," wholly "of the Devil," "purely of the Devil," a "monstrous heresy ... from hell."

Turning the tables

Pentecostals fought back. And their response was often every bit as vigorous, innovative, and unfair as the attacks of their critics.

The most common retort was, in effect, "Look at our record, see what we have done." To Pentecostals, their record of accomplishment was nothing less than supernatural.

Souls saved, bodies healed, addictions eradicated, debts paid off, marriages restored, even adolescent children tamed and brought back into the loving folds of family and church.

A. P. Franklin, stationed in India as a missionary of the Scandinavian Alliance, wrote of the struggle within himself when he first heard of the Pentecostal teaching:

"The Devil tempted me to believe that we were on the wrong track, that it was some sort of made up hypnotism, or altogether from the Devil himself." But when Franklin opened his eyes and observed the dramatically changed lives of those who had undergone the baptism experience, he knew beyond doubt that the movement could only be of God.

Of all the indictments against them, Pentecostals found the charge of schism the most incredible. With a regularity that bordered upon litany, they pointed out that the revival had brought together Friends, Brethren, Methodists, Salvationists, Baptists, Congregationalists, even Roman Catholics.

In the words of T. B. Barratt, patriarch of the revival in Norway, the new movement was proving itself "able to melt long-divided hearts." Barratt clearly spoke for thousands of Pentecostals around the world: "Instead therefore of ruining and blighting the lives and the homes of people, as our opponents state, this revival is sent by God."

In the face of so much good accomplished, how could anyone court God's wrath by mocking the Pentecostal revival? True believers among the Pentecostals offered many answers. Many of the detractors, they asserted, were backsliders to begin with. Some were born fighters who would rather foment trouble than save souls. Other critics had already proved themselves intractably obstinate, very much like the foolish virgins in the Scripture. Some were simply and inexplicably perverse, for no good reason.

And then there was pride—stubborn, damnable pride. As far as evangelist Frank Bartleman could see, God had finally by-passed the Holiness missions in California because they were "too well satisfied with their own goodness." The Lord demanded a "humble people," but the Holiness folk were "too proud of their standing."

And so it went, year in, year out. Occasionally gentler spirits like Aimee McPherson spoke up, but not often. Relations improved somewhat after World War II, but even today the two groups often find themselves on opposite brinks of the ecumenical canyon, eyeing each other with suspicion.

Grant Wacker is associate professor at Duke University Divinity School, and co-editor of Church History journal. This article appeared in a slightly different form in the Journal of Ecclesiastical History in July 1996.

Links:

A lot of the angry criticism radical evangelicals expressed a century ago is still around. For example, the [20th Century Tongues: Faith or Fake?](#) site has rotating skull-and-crossbone images to indicate Pentecostalism's "danger."

Other cessationists, like the ones behind [Pentecostalism: In the Light of the Word](#), are not nearly as bombastic. "The Bible teaches that tongues have ceased," argues the author. "I cannot and you may not base your faith on your experience. That is pure subjectivism."

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 58: The Rise of Pentecostalism

Sister

Aimee Semple McPherson was the first Pentecostal to become a national sensation.

Edith L. Blumhofer

In the spring of 1913, a 23-year-old Salvation Army lass was rushed to the hospital with appendicitis. Her husband wired her mother that her life hung in the balance.

For months the young woman had felt her spiritual life also was in peril. Though she had been working in the Salvation Army, she'd had a deep gnawing sense that God expected more of her.

In later sermons, she often recounted dramatically what happened in that hospital: her condition deteriorated until a hospital attendant came to move her into a room set apart for the dying. She struggled to breathe as she heard a nurse say, "She's going."

Then she heard another voice: "Now will you go?" She understood it to mean she was to choose between going into eternity or going into ministry. She yielded to ministry. Instantly, she said, the pain was gone, her breathing eased, and she soon regained her strength.

Within a decade, the young woman would become an American phenomenon. Though hardly known today, during the 1920s, her name—Aimee Semple McPherson—appeared on the front page of America's leading newspapers three times a week. Today historians consider her, along with Billy Sunday, the most significant revivalist in the early twentieth century.

Gospel car

Aimee was born in October 1890, to James and Minnie Kennedy, a Methodist and a Salvation Army devotee respectively, in Ontario, Canada. As a teenager, Aimee was introduced to Pentecostalism through the preaching of Robert Semple. Much to the alarm of her parents, she began praying for the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Her prayers were eventually answered, and she quit high school to give more time to the local Pentecostal mission. When Robert proposed, she promptly accepted. She was 17 when they married, but two years later, in Hong Kong, just as the couple began a missions career, he died.

Aimee returned from Hong Kong to join her mother and to don the Army uniform. She also married a young businessman named Harold McPherson, who loved her enough to try to go her way after her hospital experience. For a few years, they shared a hand-to-mouth existence. They lived in a gospel car plastered with Bible verses and slogans—**Where will you spend eternity?** and **Jesus saves**—and loaded with religious tracts.

In the summer of 1917, Aimee began issuing *The Bridal Call*, a monthly magazine that mobilized her scattered following into a network of supporters and began attracting the attention of the press.

But neither adoring crowds nor a friendly press could heal a growing rift between husband and wife. After a short preaching stint, Harold McPherson quietly filed for divorce.

Still Aimee was on the upswing. In 1918 she accepted an invitation to preach on the other side of the country. The automobile trip to Los Angeles was an adventure only a handful of intrepid women had undertaken before her. All along the way, she preached, distributed tracts, and visited small congregations.

She devoted her energies to the recovery of "Bible Christianity." Using Hebrews 13:8 ("Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever") as her theme, she explained that the "full menu" of Bible Christianity was available for listeners' firsthand experience. She spoke often about the lavish feast Christ offered the faithful and summoned people with the words of a familiar gospel song: "Come and dine, the Master calleth, come and dine!"

Sister's
comings
and
goings
from the
city's
Union
Station
drew
more
people
than had
the visits
of
presidents
...

From Los Angeles in 1919, McPherson launched a series of meetings that catapulted her to fame. Within a year, the largest auditoriums in America's largest cities could not hold the crowds that flocked to hear her. She acquiesced to popular demand that she pray for the sick, and "stretcher days" became hallmarks of her campaigns.

Reporters marveled at her oratorical skills: "Never did I hear such language from a human being. Without one moment's intermission, she would talk from an hour to an hour and a half, holding her audience spellbound." Pastors from many denominations threw their support behind her city-wide campaigns. In 1922, her ministry took her to Australia, the first of a number of trips abroad.

Motherly pastor

On January 1, 1923, McPherson dedicated Angelus Temple, which held up to 5,300 worshipers. The ceremonies included hundreds of colorfully clad gypsies (who had named her their queen), a roster of prominent Protestant preachers, and thousands of adoring fans. With a permanent pulpit, new possibilities quickly became realities: a church-owned radio station was launched in 1924, and her Bible school moved into its own building in 1925.

"Sister" (as she was fondly referred to) was a citizen of note in a burgeoning city. Angelus Temple floats won prizes in Rose Bowl parades, and the Temple itself became a tourist attraction. Sister's comings and goings from the city's Union Station drew more people than had the visits of presidents and other visiting dignitaries.

Well-advertised illustrated sermons offered the faithful who shunned nearby Hollywood entertainments a taste of theater. Parades, uniforms, award-winning bands, catchy music, and programs for all ages enlisted people's participation. Ambitious programs to feed the hungry and respond to natural disasters gained goodwill.

People responded as well to the motherly qualities McPherson radiated. During midnight forays into Denver's red light districts, she promised Denver's outcasts a bright future if they would be true to themselves. She embraced Winnipeg prostitutes with the assurance that she loved them and that there was hope for them in Christ. In San Francisco's Barbary Coast, she walked into a "dive," sat down at the piano, and got the crowd's attention by playing "Jesus, Lover of My Soul."

Popular demand quickly overwhelmed her. People stood in line for hours for seats. A prayer room was open around the clock, and daytime services accommodated those who wanted to "tarry" for baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Kidnapped?

But hints of problems lay just beneath this flourishing façade. Some complained about Minnie Kennedy exercising too much financial control; others, about her theology (not distinctly Pentecostal; too ecumenical). But the storm that left permanent damage broke in May of 1926.

As Sister later told it, she was kidnapped on Tuesday afternoon, May 26, from the beach near Santa Monica and spirited away to a cabin where she was held prisoner.

That evening, Minnie Kennedy appeared in Sister's place, led the lively singing, and narrated the slide show. Only at the end of the service did she say that Sister had gone for a swim, failed to return, and was presumed drowned. "Sister is gone," she concluded. "We know she is with Jesus."

For the next few days, Los Angeles talked of little else. Thousands walked aimlessly on the Ocean Park Beach where Sister had last been seen. Police devised contingency plans for crowd control if Sister's body were retrieved. An elaborate memorial service was held for McPherson on June 20.

Three days later, Sister reappeared in Douglas, Arizona, with a tale of having escaped from kidnapers. The crowds that had mourned her loss prepared a lavish welcome home. On Saturday, June 26, 150,000 lined the route from the train station to Angelus Temple, cheering and wishing Sister well.

But some law enforcement officials challenged her kidnapping story. Charges and counter-charges swirled until December when the Los Angeles district attorney acknowledged that he had no case against McPherson.

On her daily radio shows, she presented herself as victim—of kidnapers, of a corrupt law enforcement system, of the press, and of hostile clergy.

When the focus finally shifted in January 1927, Sister immediately set out on a national evangelistic tour. Her support base remained strong; crowds thronged her meetings. But press coverage changed. In the public's mind, McPherson had lost her innocence, and the images of feminine naivete and purity no longer applied. The months of innuendo left a legacy of unanswered questions that took a toll on her popular image.

Popular even in decline

Sister continued her ministry, but her appeal was less universal and more tied to her version of Pentecostalism. Discontent among some of the Temple faithful erupted into bitter quarrels that the local press turned into media events. She lent her name to various business schemes that failed. Serious illness also plagued her through much of the 1930s. A disastrous third marriage lasted less than two years.

Sister's most notable public achievement in the 1930s was a social program. The Angelus Temple's Commissary provided food, clothing, and other necessities to needy families—no questions asked. When the Depression hit, she added a Free Dining Hall, which supplied over 80,000 meals in its first two months of operation. (Today Angelus Temple is home to five ethnic Foursquare congregations, and the Commissary still distributes free meals).

In the 1940s, she began barnstorming again, though she continued to battle illnesses. In September 1944, she felt well enough to address 10,000 people in the Oakland Auditorium. The next morning, her son Rolf found her unconscious in her room. Shortly before noon, Sister died of complications of kidney failure and the effects of the mixture of prescription drugs she had been taking. Sister's funeral took place on her fifty-fourth birthday, October 9, 1944.

McPherson was, of course, a much more complex person—in her personal relationships, in her

understanding of media, in her concern for people—than can be expressed here. In her day, her followers gave her the respect not of a passing phenomenon but of someone who had indeed touched their lives. Though her popularity had shrunk significantly since the 1920s, the day before her funeral, 50,000 people filed past her coffin.

Edith Blumhofer is associate director of The Public Religion Project at the University of Chicago divinity school. She is author of Aimee Semple McPherson: Everybody's Sister (Eerdmans, 1993).

The Great 'I am' or 'I was'?

As I ponder and pray in the stillness, I dream as a dreamer of dreams. A steepled church stands before me—a church with open doors. Within it I see the preacher stand; hear his voice in earnest call. But 'tis the throng that flows through the street outside that holds my anxious gaze.

"Pit-a-pat! Pit-a-pat"—say the hundreds and thousands of feet, surging by the church doors of our land.
"Pat! Pat! Pit-a-pat!"—hurrying multitudes, on business and pleasure bent.

From out the church door floats the voice of Pastor and Evangelist in an effort to halt the down-rushing throng in their headlong race toward destruction and attract their attention to the Christ.

"Stop! Stop! Giddy throng, surging by like a river, take your eyes from the bright lights of the gilded way," they cry. "Leave the paths of death, enter our open door and listen while we tell you the sweet though ancient story of 'The Great I WAS.'

"Eloquently, instructively, we will tell you of the wonderful power Christ '**used**' to have, the miracles He '**used**' to perform, the sick He '**used**' to heal. 'Tis a graphic and blessed history of those things which Jesus did almost 1900 years before you were born. They happened far, far away across the sea which you have never sailed, in a country which you have never seen, among people you have never known. Wonderful, marvelous, was the power that '**used**' to flow from 'The Great I WAS'"

"And we," say the heavy, groping, lonely feet, "are bereaved and seek comfort and rest. For us the shades of night are falling. The knowledge that Christ '**once**' dried tears and bare the heavy load is blest indeed, but Oh! **we** of **today** need succor **now**. Preaching 'The Great I WAS' can never satisfy our longings, WE NEED 'THE GREAT I AM'"

And out o'er the heads of the people I hear the message ring:

"Awake! thou that sleepest, arise from the dead! The Lord still lives today. His power has never abated. His Word has never changed. The things He did in Bible days, He still lives to do today. Not a burden is there He cannot bear nor a fetter He cannot break.

"Here bring your sins, He'll wash them away. Here bring your sicknesses, He'll heal you today. We serve not a dead but a **living** God not 'I WAS,' but 'The Great I AM.'

"Come young, come old; come sad, come glad; come weary and faltering of step; come sick, come well! come one, come all unto 'The Great I AM.' There is food for the hungry, there is strength for the faint; there is hope for the hopeless, and sight for the blind."

Sermon excerpt by Aimee Semple McPherson

More resources:

Edith Blumhofer's biography, [Aimee Semple McPherson : Everybody's Sister](#) presents her life empathetically and thoroughly.

You can try to find Aimee's hard-to-find [This Is That](#) at Amazon.com or one of the used bookstores at www.abebooks.com.

Links:

[The Aimee Semple McPherson Resource Center](#) offers images, histories, and works by and about the evangelist. The International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, which Aimee founded, has a page called [Our Heritage](#), which contains a lot of information about Sister's life.

Even [Aimee Semple McPherson's grave](#) is online.

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The Rise of Pentecostalism: A Gallery - Setting the Vision

Pentecostalism's early leaders were as varied as they were dynamic

editors

Maria Beulah Woodworth-Etter (1844-1924)

Pre-Pentecostal herald of "signs and wonders"

Many shouted, others wept with a loud voice," wrote Maria Woodworth-Etter about one of her meetings. "Other times the power would sweep over the house in melting power. In a few minutes, everyone in the congregation would be weeping, saints and sinners." But Woodworth-Etter's meeting occurred years before the Pentecostal movement began.

At these meetings, congregants would fall into trances or experience visions that could last for hours. Woodworth-Etter often went into trances, too, standing perfectly still with her hands in the air while the service continued. She called the experience "the power," but critics dubbed her the "voodoo priestess."

A frequent charge was that she hypnotized the people. Two doctors in St. Louis tried to have her committed as insane during a meeting she conducted there in 1890.

Born near Lisbon, Ohio, she had a rough first 35 years—five of her six children had died, and her first husband was caught in adultery. Distraught, she turned to the Quakers and became a preacher at a revival meeting. In 1912, at age 68, Woodworth-Etter joined the larger Pentecostal movement when she accepted Pentecostal pioneer F. F. Bosworth's invitation to speak at his Dallas church. She stayed for six months, gaining favorable publicity in Pentecostal publications as far away as England.

Woodworth-Etter became one of the best known Pentecostal evangelists at the turn of the century, and her ministry made it more possible for later woman preachers and healers, like Aimee Semple McPherson and Kathryn Kuhlman, to minister publicly.

Charles H. Mason (1866-1961)

Seeker of slave Christianity

Charles Mason grew up hearing about the passionate Christianity of the slaves from his parents, both of whom had only recently been freed when Charles was born. He was enthralled even as a child, and constantly prayed, said one family member, "above all things [for] a religion like the one he had heard about from the old slaves and seen demonstrated in their lives."

At age 14, one year after his father died of the plague in an Arkansas swamp shack, Mason lay dying of tuberculosis. But on a Sunday morning, his wife recounted in his biography, he "got out of bed and walked outside all by himself. There, under the morning skies, he prayed and praised God for his healing, [and he] renewed his commitment to God."

In 1891 Charles was ordained as a Baptist minister. But before he began preaching, he married Alice Saxton, who was so opposed to his plans for preaching that she divorced him two years later. About that same time, Mason struggled with the increasingly liberal Arkansas Baptist College, and dropped

out. "I packed my books, arose, and bade them a final farewell to follow Jesus, with the Bible as my sacred guide," he later recounted.

Increasingly interested in Holiness "second blessing" teachings, he joined with Charles P. Jones to form the "Church of God in Christ" (COGIC)—a name he said God gave him while walking down a street in Little Rock, Arkansas. A decade later Mason felt "a wave of glory" while visiting the Azusa Street Revival and began to speak in tongues. When he returned to Memphis to share his experience, Jones expelled him. But Jones took a large portion of cogic members and, after a lengthy legal battle, the name of the denomination.

Though the COGIC at one time had as many white ministers as black—it was the only Pentecostal church in America authorized by the government to ordain ministers—Mason continued to seek the "spiritual essence" and "prayer tradition" of the slave religious experience. In 1913, the white cogic ministers broke off to form the [Assemblies of God](#) (AG), but Mason continued to work on both sides of the racial divide, speaking at AG conferences and meetings. "The church is like the eye," he often said. "It has a little black in it and a little white in it, and without both it can't see."

Today the COGIC has almost 7 million members in the U.S.—more than twice that of the AG.

Gaston Barnabas Cashwell (1862-1916)

Southern apostle of Pentecost

When the Pentecostal Holiness Church (PHC) met for its annual conference in Lumberton, North Carolina, in November 1906, one of its most prominent members, G. B. Cashwell, was absent. But he had left a letter: "I realize that my life has fallen short of the standard of holiness we preach; but I have repented in my home in Dunn, North Carolina, and I have been restored. I am unable to be with you at this time, for I am now leaving for Los Angeles, California, where I shall seek for the baptism of the Holy Ghost."

But when the blond, middle-aged, 250-pound Holiness preacher from North Carolina arrived at the Azusa Street Revival, he was very uncomfortable. He found many of the practices "fanatical," and when a young black man laid hands on him for the baptism in the Holy Spirit, he was repulsed. But he soon "suffered a crucifixion" and "died" to his prejudice. He returned to the church and asked the black leaders to lay hands on him and pray. Immediately, he began to speak in tongues.

Cashwell returned to Dunn the next month, and began preaching to his fellow Holiness believers about Spirit baptism and speaking in tongues. Though his superior in the phc opposed his teachings, Cashwell continued to preach across the region. He soon became known as "the apostle of Pentecost in the South."

Only two years later, however, Cashwell left the phc, apparently frustrated after not being elected its president. But in that time, he had brought four major Holiness denominations—the phc, the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church, the Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.), and the Pentecostal Free-Will Baptist Church—into the Pentecostal movement.

Ambrose Jessup (A.J.) Tomlinson (1865-1943)

The Dream Team

The Assemblies of God was no solo effort

Though many Pentecostal denominations sprang out of the dynamic vision of one person, the [Assemblies of God](#) (AG) did not. The role of some of the men pictured here (the first Executive Presbytery of 1914):

Thomas K. Leonard (1861-1946, seated left) proposed the name "Assemblies

Church of God visionary

Unsatisfied with his mystical Quaker heritage, traveling Bible salesman A. J. Tomlinson joined a church called "The Church of the Living God for the Evangelization of the World, Gathering of Israel, New Order of Things at the Close of the Gentile Age." After another few years of close contact with Holiness believers, the Indiana-born Tomlinson had a vision:

"Jesus had started the Church of God when he was here on earth, and a record was kept of its progress and activities for several years after the death of its founder. The period known as the Dark Ages had come after the Church of God had departed from the faith and the church was lost to view."

Understanding it to be the only "True Church of God," in 1903 Tomlinson became the leader of a small band of Holiness believers in Camp Creek, Tennessee, known as the Church of God (though it had recently changed its name to the Holiness Church). By 1909 he was its general overseer.

Tomlinson began teaching Pentecostal doctrines as early as January 1907, but truly brought the denomination into the Pentecostal movement after speaking in tongues at a G. B. Cashwell revival meeting in 1908.

Though he was made "permanent general overseer" in 1914, he was removed from the denomination in 1922. Taking 2,000 members with him, he formed the Tomlinson Church of God, later renamed the Church of God of Prophecy.

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More resources:

There are several books on Maria Woodworth-Etter, including her own [Diary of Signs & Wonders](#) and [The Original Maria Woodworth-Etter Devotional](#).

A 1969 biography of A.J. Tomlinson, [A. J. Tomlinson: Former General](#)

of God," and its first headquarters, in Findlay, Ohio.

Eudorus N. Bell (1866-1923, seated center) in December 1913 published in his ***Word and Witness*** newspaper the "call" for Pentecostals to meet in Hot Springs, Arkansas, the meeting that resulted in the AG.

John W. Welch (1858-1939, standing left) came to Pentecostalism out of Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA) background, and similarities between the AG and CMA are largely due to him. During the Oneness controversy, he was a leading defender of Trinitarianism.

Joseph R. Flower (1888-1970, standing

[Overseer of the Church of God](#) by Lillie Duggar, is also available.

[The Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements](#)

contains lengthy biographical sketches of these and other important Pentecostal leaders.

Links:

Charles H. Mason's [Church of God in Christ](#) contains a lot of denominational history.

America Online users can read more about Charles H. Mason in "Building the Church of God (in Christ)," from the[April 8, 1996, issue of Christianity Today: CT4/08/96 ARTICLE: Building the Church \(of God in Christ\),](#)

second from left) founded the Christian Evangel, which became the ***Pentecostal Evangel***, the official AG magazine. He served so many official positions in the early years, his name was synonymous with the AG.

Mack M. Pinson (1873-1953, standing far right) signed the call for the Hot Springs meeting and was a key player in the Oneness controversy, slowing down the rebaptizing of believers.

[Part 1](#)
[CT4/08/96](#)
[ARTICLE:](#)
[Building the](#)
[Church \(of](#)
[God in Christ\),](#)
[Part 2](#)

More
biographical
sketches are
available at
Ambassador
Journal's
[Christian](#)
[History](#) area.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 58: The Rise of Pentecostalism

Loose the Women

In Pentecostalism's early years it was not unusual to see women preaching, pastoring, and leading.

David G. Roebuck

In 1916 Maria B. Woodworth-Etter declared, "God is calling the Marys and the Marthas today all over our land to work in various places in the vineyard of the Lord; God grant that they may respond and say, 'Lord, here am I. Send me.' ... My dear sister in Christ, as you hear these words may the Spirit of God come upon you, and make you willing to do the work the Lord has assigned to you."

Following the example of their Holiness predecessors like Phoebe Palmer, and the Salvation Army's Catherine Booth, women ministered prominently at the beginning of Pentecostalism.

"Fit men and women"

Charles Fox Parham established Bethel Bible College in 1900 in Topeka, Kansas, to "fit men and women to go to the ends of the earth to preach." Agnes Ozman, the first to experience Spirit baptism, was an evangelist training for the mission field at Parham's school. Parham ordained women and commissioned them to ministry, and these women assisted Parham in his evangelistic campaigns. He often left women in charge when he moved on to the next meeting.

Women also participated at the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles. *The Apostolic Faith* featured testimonies, articles, and reports of women evangelizing, pastoring, and going out as missionaries. At one point, at least six of Azusa's twelve-member credentials committee were women.

In addition to approving and supporting numerous independent ministries, Pentecostal denominations issued ministerial credentials to women. The Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee) began in 1909 to acknowledge "women who engage in the ministry of the Word" by granting them evangelists' licenses. By 1913, 12 percent of its ministers were women, with the percentage peaking at 18 percent around 1950. The [Assemblies of God](#) (AG) received ordained women into fellowship at its first General Council in 1914, and by 1936, there was one ordained woman for every four ordained men.

Women also founded Pentecostal denominations. Florence Crawford founded the Apostolic Faith Mission in Portland, Oregon, and Aimee Semple McPherson founded the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (ICFG). The ICFG early on boasted that 37 percent of its ministers were female.

Although women did pastor, this was viewed as expedient only

In black Pentecostalism, Madgalena Tate founded the Church of the Living God, Pillar and Ground of Truth, while Ida Robinson founded the Mount Sinai Holy Church after hearing God say in a dream, "Come out on Mount Sinai and loose the women." Both denominations allowed women to be not only pastors (allowed in a few other black Pentecostal denominations) but also bishops.

Preacher, yes; elder, no

While most denominations allowed women's Spirit-inspired preaching, few gave them authority to hold church offices. Although women often did pastor, this was viewed as expedient only because of the urgency of the "last days." Women started congregations

because
of the
urgency
of the
"last
days."

in their homes as Bible studies or prayer groups and continued as pastors when no male was available to lead. So the anointing of the Holy Spirit on an individual woman outweighed denominational non-recognition.

The Church of God licensed women to preach, but would not ordain them. General Overseer A. J. Tomlinson wrote, "Let the good sisters feel at perfect liberty to preach the gospel, pray for the sick or well, testify, exhort, etc., but humbly hold themselves aloof from taking charge of the governmental affairs."

In 1914 the [Assemblies of God](#) agreed that women could be ordained as evangelists and missionaries but not as elders. E. N. Bell, the first ag general chairman, defended this view by stating the apostle Paul "meant what he said. ... The squabbles in the church, the disputing and disorder—men should handle it."

After World War II, Pentecostals increasingly aligned themselves with evangelicalism, which emphasized male leadership. In the 1950s, Pentecostals, like other Americans, aspired to the middle class and were anxious about the possible collapse of the home, so the stay-at-home mom became a powerful symbol. The result is that today the female preacher or pastor is the rare exception in Pentecostal circles.

David G. Roebuck is director of the Hal Bernard Dixon, Jr. Pentecostal Research Center in Cleveland, Tennessee.

Go Now

A forerunner of Pentecostalism argues with God.

Maria Woodworth-Etter preached the Pentecostal message as early as 1885, and by 1912 she was one of Pentecostalism's most popular evangelists. In this excerpt from A Diary of Signs and Wonders, she describes her call to ministry.

The dear Savior stood by me one night in a vision and talked face to face with me, and asked what I was doing on earth. I felt condemned, and said, "Lord, I am going to work in thy vineyard."

The Lord said, "When?"

I answered, "When I get prepared for the work."

Then the Lord said to me, "Don't you know that while you are getting ready souls are perishing? Go now, and I will be with you." ...

I told him that I could not talk to the people; I did not know what to say, and they would not listen to me.

Jesus said, "You can tell the people what the Lord has done for your soul; tell of the glory of God and the love of Jesus; tell sinners to repent and prepare for death and the judgment, and I will be with you."

Still I made one excuse after another, and Jesus would answer, "Go, and I will be with you."

I told him I wanted to study the Bible; that I did not understand it well enough. Then there appeared upon the wall a large open Bible, and the verses stood out in raised letters. The glory of God shone around and upon the book. I looked, and I could understand it all.

Then Jesus said again, "Go, and I will be with you."

I cried, "Lord, I will go. Where shall I go?"

And Jesus said, "Go here, go there, wherever souls are perishing."

Praise the Lord for his wonderful goodness in revealing his word and will in such a wonderful way, to such a poor weak worm of the dust. ... I was to be God's mouth-piece. I must trust God to speak through me to the people the words of eternal life.

More resources:

[The Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements](#) contains lengthy biographical sketches of many female Pentecostal leaders, and examines the various ways Pentecostals have allowed women to serve.

Elaine J. Lawless's *[God's Peculiar People: Women's Voices and Folk Tradition in Pentecostal Church](#)* mainly deals with Oneness Pentecostals, but is still worth a look.

[God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission](#) by R. Marie Griffith deals largely with women in the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement, and was recently reviewed in [Christianity Today](#).

Links:

[The Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research](#) has had several articles about women and Pentecostalism, most notably "[History of Women in the Pentecostal Movement](#)," by Cheryl J. Sanders of the Howard University School of Divinity.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 58: The Rise of Pentecostalism

The Pentecostal Tradition

A sampling of ecstatic experiences reported in different eras of church history

Stanley M. Burgess

THE EARLY CHURCH

Clement of Rome (died c.96), and **Ignatius** (c.35-c.107) document the continued operation of spiritual gifts among average Christians.

Irenaeus of Lyon (c.130-202) describes charismatic gifts, especially prophecy, in his church in southern Gaul (modern France), warning against Gnostics who fabricate the gifts to win the naive.

Tertullian (c.160-c.225) and the Montanist "New Prophets" (whose condemnations as heretics has recently been questioned) practice healing, prophecy, and tongues. Tertullian separates "apostles," who have the Spirit fully, from "believers," who have it partially.

Antony of Egypt (251?-356) is said to practice healing and the discernment of spirits, as well as perform signs and wonders.

The heretical **Messalians** (c.360-800) teach that everyone is possessed from birth by a personal demon, driven out only by prayer and the reception of the Holy Spirit. They practice laying on of hands for this Spirit baptism, and they expect visual proof of the demon's departure.

THE MIDDLE AGES

Augustine (354-430) declares (as does John Chrysostom in the East) that *glossolalia* has ceased but also reports numerous divine healings.

Simeon the New Theologian (949-1022), an Eastern mystic, reports his most intimate spiritual experiences, including a "baptism in the Holy Spirit" distinct from those graces received in the sacraments. This Spirit baptism is accompanied by compunction (awareness of one's guilt before God), penitence, copious tears, and an intensified awareness of the Trinity as light dwelling within.

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) experiences ecstatic visions, gifts of tears and compunction, wisdom, knowledge, and prophecy. Numerous miracles are attributed to her. She also is said to sing "concerts" in the Spirit and to write entire books in unknown languages.

The Cathars (c.1140-1300), the most radical heretics in the West, replace all Catholic sacraments with *consolamentum*—baptism with fire and the Holy Spirit. Members are expected to observe a severe ascetic lifestyle intended to lead to perfection.

Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) emphasizes the laying on of hands for reception of the gifts of healing, miracles, foreknowledge, irrefutable wisdom, diverse tongues, and interpretation of tongues.

THE REFORMATION AND BEYOND

Thomas Müntzer (1490-1525), a radical German reformer, emphasizes the "inner word" and baptism of the Holy Spirit, direct revelation in visions and dreams, Holy Spirit possession and guidance, as well as radical social reforms and the imminent return of Christ.

Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556), founder of The Society of Jesus (the Jesuits), frequently receives divine communication in visions, the gift of tears, and *loquela* (sung *glossolalia*).

Though the movement's founder, **George Fox** (1624-1691), discourages speaking in tongues, some Quakers do. Early Quaker literature also records visions, healings, and prophecies, which are likened to the day of Pentecost.

Jansenists, a radical Augustinian movement in the Roman Catholic church from 1640 to 1801, become known for their signs and wonders, spiritual dancing, healings, and prophetic utterances. Some reportedly speak in unknown tongues and understand foreign languages in which they are addressed.

Tears, trembling, groans, loud outcries, religious "noise" and ecstasies mark the first Great Awakening, though **Jonathan Edwards** (1703-1758) says the signs are not necessarily evidence of the Spirit's operation.

Stanley M. Burgess is professor of religious studies at Southwest Missouri State University, and co-editor of the Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements (Zondervan, 1988).

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More resources:

Stanley Burgess is co-editor of the [*Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*](#), a necessary resource for anyone interested in studying Pentecostalism.

The other indispensable books for studying where Pentecostalism came from and where it's going are Vinson Synan's [*The Holiness-Pentecostal*](#)

*Tradition:
Charismatic
Movements in
the Twentieth
Century* and
*Pentecostalism:
Origins and
Developments
Worldwide* by
Walter J.
Hollenweger.

Links

The International
Pentecostal
Holiness Church
has their own
beautifully
designed (and
inclusive)
timeline.

Another
Pentecostal
timeline is
available online.

The Rise of Pentecostalism: Christian History Interview - Pentecostalism's Global Language

It's not tongues but a different way of being a Christian.

interview with Walter J. Hollenweger

Why is Pentecostalism so popular? It is nearly half a billion strong worldwide, and has been and continues to be the fastest growing Christian movement in the world. It has made inroads not only in third-world regions like Africa and Latin America, but it also continues to attract huge followings in the United States and Europe.

Walter J. Hollenweger is the leading expert on worldwide Pentecostalism, which he has been studying for more than 40 years. Having grown up in the Pentecostal church, he later became ordained in the Reformed Church of Switzerland. From 1965 to 1971 he was executive secretary of the World Council of Churches, then served as professor of mission at England's University of Birmingham for 18 years. His seminal book *The Pentecostals* (Hendrickson, 1972) was recently followed up by *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Hendrickson, 1997).

What is a Pentecostal?

Worldwide there is so much variety that about all one can say is that a Pentecostal is a Christian who calls himself a Pentecostal. Though Americans tend to focus on the gift of tongues, overall Pentecostals emphasize that God has given several gifts—not just speaking in tongues but also healing and the so-called rational gifts like organization or building a school. Diverse gifts to diverse people. It's not a strictly theological definition but a phenomenological one.

Why is speaking in tongues the focus in America?

There are many reasons, of course, but one is that American and other middle-class cultures, as in Switzerland, find tongues an extraordinary phenomenon, so these experiences get a lot of attention. In Africa or Mexico, on the other hand, speaking in tongues and healings are not considered extraordinary—they can even be found in some indigenous pagan religions. (Speaking in tongues is not even "supernatural," as many Pentecostals have found out.) Tongues aren't even spoken in a lot of third-world Pentecostal churches. Instead, third-world Pentecostals focus on corporate worship, singing together, and Christian education. American Pentecostals don't seek education as much as an experience of the supernatural.

Our issue covers Pentecostalism up to about 1950. What have been the key changes in Pentecostalism since then?

First, more and more young Pentecostals are becoming scholars through reputable universities. It's true for Pentecostals in Europe, North America, and Latin America. It's also true for Africa and for Asia.

There are now several hundred young Pentecostal scholars with doctorates, and that, of course, changes the breadth and depth of Pentecostalism. Most of them have maintained their roots in Pentecostalism, so they are now bilingual. They can speak in the university language, in the language of concepts and definitions, but they can also speak in the oral language of Pentecostalism, and I think that is an extremely important part of their success.

Second, this increase in education has led in many places to more ecumenical openness. In the past, nobody wanted to talk to the Pentecostals, and the Pentecostals didn't want to talk to any of the other churches because they saw them as a lost cause. Now, for instance, there is a worldwide dialogue between Pentecostals and Roman Catholics that has been going on for 20 years. There have also been many contacts with the World Council of Churches, and the latest example is a global dialogue with the Presbyterian churches.

David du Plessis, a pioneer in ecumenism, has been instrumental in both these changes. He went to the Catholics. He went to the World Council of Churches. He went to all the universities. And the fact that he was a reasonable man and also a Pentecostal astonished many people. They thought Pentecostals were all a little crazy and could not think properly. But when they got to know him, they realized that it is possible to speak in tongues and be a critical scholar.

Another change, of course, is the worldwide explosive growth to nearly half a billion adherents. Why is Pentecostalism so popular?

Some scholars think it has to do with its theology and doctrine. But Pentecostal theology is not homogeneous. Others think it's because of Pentecostals' aggressive evangelism. That is partly true because a real Pentecostal is by definition an evangelist, whose faith is as infectious as the flu.

The most important reason is that it is an oral religion. It is not defined by the abstract language that characterizes, for instance, Presbyterians or Catholics. Pentecostalism is communicated in stories, testimonies, and songs. Oral language is a much more global language than that of the universities or church declarations. Oral tradition is flexible and can adapt itself to a variety of circumstances.

Can't oral tradition drift off into sub-Christian and even heretical beliefs?

Certainly, but overall there is a basic evangelical consensus among Pentecostals. They are similar to the early church in this respect. Early Christians didn't have a formal, written confession of faith, as Presbyterians and others do today. They had the stories of Jesus. Even Jesus didn't spell out doctrine; he gave his followers stories of miracles, and taught through proverbs and parables.

The earliest church was united, but not as much through their theology as through the Lord's Prayer, Paul's collection for Jerusalem (his theological "enemies"), baptism, and the Eucharist. Their statements of faith were simple, and the simplest was "Jesus is Lord." It was a very different way of achieving togetherness, and it was achieved through these oral forms.

Ironically, when the ecumenical confessions came later, they did not unite the church. They divided it, as propositional theology always does. But across divided theology, it is possible to pray together, to sing together, and to act together. That's what Pentecostals do at their best.

Is it fair to say that when you convert to Pentecostalism, you are converting not to a certain theology but to a new experience of faith?

Yes, and that has important evangelistic consequences for Pentecostals.

In many circles, when you become a Christian, you talk about gaining a new understanding of the Lord's Supper and baptism (they are either more or less sacramental), but other people are not terribly interested in that. When you become a Pentecostal, you talk about how you've been healed or your very life has been changed. That's something Pentecostals talk about over and over, partly because people are interested in hearing that sort of thing.

Pentecostalism today addresses the whole life, including the thinking part. More mainline forms of Christianity address the thinking part first and that often affects the rest of life, but not always.

Yet it seems most Pentecostals are far more right-brained and intuitive than left-brained and rational.

Indeed, the "orality" of Pentecostalism—the singing, the dancing, the speaking in tongues—accents the intuitive. But a mature Pentecostal will try to connect the intuitive and the rational. Always emphasizing the analytical will destroy faith. But only emphasizing the intuitive leads to chaos. A challenge of the Pentecostal movement is to combine rational thinking with its spontaneous emotional side.

This is the challenge for all Christians, really. The rationalist needs the Toronto Blessing and has to be slain in the Spirit to realize that. It sometimes seems silly to me, but you'll notice that it is rationalists and intellectuals who fall down. People who have a balanced emotional and intuitive life don't need that. True, some rationalists dance, sing, go walking in the mountains, or play a musical instrument, but then they go back to their science, to rational lives, and the two are not connected.

What most concerns you as you think about Pentecostalism in the coming century?

First, Pentecostalism must confront its tendency to segregate and separate into countless denominations. It's happening all the

time, and it really is a scandal.

The other challenge is common to all Christian churches: What do we do with the ecological threat to the world? What do we do with the threat of hunger and the plight of refugees? It's a challenge that will hit Pentecostals harder than any other churches because their largest churches are on the poor side of the world. But as Christians, we have a contribution to make—not just in money but in prayer and in developing solutions that politicians cannot.

But Pentecostals are not known for their social activism.

That's true in some ways, but it is a misconception in others. Many of Martin Luther King's marchers were black Pentecostals. In Brazil there are many Pentecostals sitting in parliament. And in many third-world countries, Pentecostals are trying to develop new ways of gaining political influence without the game playing we have in the West. In Latin America, for example, they try to work with sectors of the Catholic church to get water or a school or a new street for a poor district. So there are quite a number of places where Pentecostals take up the structural issues, but they do not take them up by founding political parties. They start from the local needs and the local misery people experience every day.

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The Rise of Pentecostalism: Recommended Resources

The Rise of Pentecostalism

editors

Overviews and Surveys

One of the main works on Pentecostal history is also one of the easiest reads: Vinson Synan's *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Eerdmans, 1997). This revision of the 1971 *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States* will likely be as influential as the original.

While Synan's book provides an overview of Pentecostalism from Holiness camp meetings to charismatic Catholics, Edith Blumhofer takes a focused approach in her *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (University of Illinois, 1993)—though her discussion ends up ranging wider than the title suggests.

Swiss-born Walter J. Hollenweger takes a global perspective on *Pentecostalism in Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Hendrickson, 1997), a follow-up to his landmark 1969 book *The Pentecostals* (translated into English in 1972).

Any student of Pentecostalism should own a copy of *The Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Zondervan, 1988). It contains more than 800 entries (and 300 photographs) written and edited by the top scholars of Pentecostalism; it includes everything from biographical sketches to lengthy discussions of theological distinctives.

Getting specific

Fields White Unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism (Arkansas, 1988) by James Goff, Jr. examines Parham as "a symbol for the sociological origins of Pentecostalism." Don't let the abstract introduction fool you; from Parham's frontier roots to his fall into obscurity and rejection, his life is fascinating.

One of Pentecostalism's most fascinating personalities was Aimee Semple McPherson, whose life is presented empathetically and thoroughly in Edith Blumhofer's *Aimee Semple McPherson: Everybody's Sister* (Eerdmans, 1993).

Serpent handling is a minuscule segment of Pentecostalism—about 0.005 percent—but David L. Kimbrough's *Taking Up Serpents* (University of North Carolina, 1995) is so good we had to include it. It's sympathetic and insightfully descriptive.

Films and Videos

Robert Duvall's *The Apostle* (October Films, 1997) is a powerful and sympathetic portrayal of an amalgamation of Pentecostal preachers. Duvall should have won that Best Actor Oscar—it's the closest you can get to a classic Pentecostal church service without actually attending one.

C. T. L. Productions has produced two videos about Azusa Street: *From Tragedy to Triumph: The William Seymour Story* and *God's Glorious Outpouring: The Azusa Street Revival*. Call (800) 727-3218 to order.

The Web

Azusa Street (<http://www.dunamai.com/brightspot/azusa.htm>) includes primary sources from the revival. There's a hyperlinked Pentecostalism timeline at <http://www.li.net/~rlongman/histpent.html>. For a more academic look, check out the Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research (<http://web2010.com/pctii/cyber/>).

Christian History online (<http://www.christianhistory.net>) includes links to these and other Pentecostal history sites in our Pages of History area. We also hope to include "extras," like sound clips of Aimee Semple McPherson preaching.

Back issues

Two Christian History back issues have addressed Pentecostalism's roots: Issue 23 (Spiritual Awakenings in North America) and Issue 45 (Camp Meetings & Circuit Riders). Call (800) 806-7798 to order.

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