

# THE ORIGINS OF THE PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT

Written by Vinson Synan, Ph.D.

The Pentecostal movement is by far the largest and most important religious movement to originate in the United States. Beginning in 1901 with only a handful of students in a Bible School in Topeka, Kansas, the number of Pentecostals increased steadily throughout the world during the Twentieth Century until by 1993 they had become the largest family of Protestants in the world. With over 200,000,000 members designated as nominal Pentecostals, this group surpassed the Orthodox churches as the second largest denominational family of Christians, surpassed only by the Roman Catholics. In addition to these "Classical denominational Pentecostals," there were over 200,000,000 "Charismatic" Pentecostals in the mainline denominations and independent charismatic churches, both Catholic and Protestant, which placed the number of both Pentecostals and charismatics at well over 420,000,000 persons in 1993. This explosive growth has forced the Christian world to pay increasing attention to the entire movement and to attempt to discover the root causes of this growth.

Although the Pentecostal movement had its beginnings in the United States, it owed much of its basic theology to earlier British perfectionistic and charismatic movements. At least three of these, the Methodist/Holiness movement, the Catholic Apostolic movement of Edward Irving, and the British Keswick "Higher Life" movement prepared the way for what appeared to be a spontaneous outpouring of the Holy Spirit in America.

Perhaps the most important immediate precursor to pentecostalism was the Holiness movement which issued from the heart of Methodism at the end of the Nineteenth Century. From John Wesley, the Pentecostals inherited the idea of a subsequent crisis experience variously called "entire sanctification," "perfect love," "Christian perfection", or "heart purity". It was John Wesley who posited such a possibility in his influential tract, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1766). It was from Wesley that the Holiness Movement developed the theology of a "second blessing." It was Wesley's colleague, John Fletcher, however, who first called this second blessing a "baptism in the Holy Spirit," an experience which brought spiritual power to the recipient as well as inner cleansing. This was explained in his major work, *Checks to Antinomianism* (1771). During the Nineteenth Century, thousands of Methodists claimed to receive this experience, although no one at the time saw any connection with this spirituality and speaking in tongues or any of the other charisms.

In the following century, Edward Irving and his friends in London suggested the possibility of a restoration of the charisms in the modern church. A popular Presbyterian pastor in London, Irving led the first attempt at "charismatic renewal" in his Regents Square Presbyterian Church in 1831. Although tongues and prophecies were experienced in his church, Irving was not successful in his quest for a restoration of New Testament Christianity. In the end, the "Catholic Apostolic Church" which was founded by his followers, attempted to restore the "five-fold ministries" (of Apostles, Prophets, evangelists,

pastors, and teachers) in addition to the charisms. While his movement failed in England, Irving did succeed in pointing to glossolalia as the "standing sign" of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, a major facet in the future theology of the Pentecostals.

Another predecessor to Pentecostalism was the Keswick "Higher Life" movement which flourished in England after 1875. Led at first by American holiness teachers such as Hannah Whitall Smith and William E. Boardman, the Keswick teachers soon changed the goal and content of the "second blessing" from the Wesleyan emphasis on "heart purity" to that of an "endowment of spiritual power for service." Thus, by the time of the Pentecostal outbreak in America in 1901, there had been at least a century of movements emphasizing a second blessing called the "baptism in the Holy Spirit" with various interpretations concerning the content and results of the experience. In America, such Keswick teachers as A.B. Simpson and A.J. Gordon also added to the movement at large an emphasis on divine healing "as in the atonement" and the premillennial rapture of the church.

### **THE NINETEENTH CENTURY HOLINESS MOVEMENT**

Since Pentecostalism began primarily among American holiness people, it would be difficult to understand the movement without some basic knowledge of the milieu in which it was born. Indeed, for the first decade practically all Pentecostals, both in America and around the world, had been active in holiness churches or camp meetings. Most of them were either Methodists, former Methodists, or people from kindred movements that had adopted the Methodist view of the second blessing. They were overwhelmingly Arminian in their basic theology and were strongly perfectionistic in their spirituality and lifestyle.

In the years immediately preceding 1900, American Methodism experienced a major holiness revival in a crusade that originated in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania following the Civil War. Begun in Vineland, N.J in 1867 as the "National Holiness Camp Meeting Association," the holiness movement drew large crowds to its camp meetings, with some services attracting over 20,000 persons. Thousands claimed to receive the second blessing of sanctification in these meetings. Leaders in this movement were Methodists such as Phoebe Palmer, (also a leading advocate of womens' right to minister); John Inskip, a pastor from New York City, and Alfred Cookman a pastor from New Jersey.

From 1867 to 1880, the holiness movement gained increasing force within the Methodist churches as well as in other denominations. During this period, many holiness advocates felt that this movement might revive the churches and bring new life to Christi-anity worldwide. After 1875, the American holiness movement, influenced by the Keswick emphasis began to stress the pentecostal aspects of the second blessings, some calling the experience "pentecostal sanctification." An entire hymnody was produced which focused on the upper room and a revolutionary "old-time pentecostal power" for those who tarried at the altars. Practically all the hymns of the early Pentecostal movement were produced by holiness writers celebrating the second blessing as both a cleansing and an endowment of power.

The holiness movement enjoyed the support of the churches until about 1880 when developments disturbing to ecclesiastical leaders began to emerge. Among these was a

**"come-outer" movement led by radicals who abandoned any prospects of renewing the existing churches. Led by such men as John B. Brooks, author of "The Divine Church", and Daniel Warner, founder of the "Evening Light" Church of God in Anderson, Indiana, this movement spelled the beginning of the end of the dream of remaking the churches in a holiness image. At the same time, other radicals began promoting such new teachings as "sinless perfection," a strict dress code of outward holiness, "marital purity," and a "third blessing" baptism of fire after the experience of sanctification.**

**The first Pentecostal churches in the world were produced by the holiness movement prior to 1901 and, after becoming pentecostal, retained most of their perfectionistic teachings. These included the predominantly African-American Church of God in Christ (1897), the Pentecostal Holiness Church (1898), the Church of God with headquarters in Cleveland, Tennessee (1906), and other smaller groups. These churches, which had been formed as "second blessing" holiness denominations, simply added the baptism in the Holy Spirit with glossolalia as "initial evidence" of a "third blessing."**

**Pentecostal pioneers who had been Methodists included Charles Fox Parham, the formulator of the "initial evidence" theology; William J. Seymour, the pastor of the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles who spread the movement to the nations of the world; J.H King of the Pentecostal Holiness Church, who led his denomination into the Pentecostal movement in 1907-08; and Thomas Ball Barratt, the father of European Pentecostalism. All of these men retained most of the Wesleyan teaching on entire sanctification as a part of their theological systems. In essence, their position was that a sanctified "clean heart" was a necessary prerequisite to the baptism in the Holy Spirit as evidenced by speaking in tongues.**

**Other early Pentecostal pioneers from non-Methodist backgrounds accepted the premise of second blessing holiness prior to becoming pentecostals. For the most part, they were as much immersed in holiness experience and theology as their Methodist brothers. These included C. H. Mason (Baptist), of the Church of God in Christ, A.J Tomlinson (Quaker), of the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), B.H Irwin (Baptist) of the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church, and N.J. Holmes (Presbyterian) of the Tabernacle Pentecostal Church. In the light of the foregoing information, it would not be an overstatement to say that pentecostalism, at least in America, was born in a holiness cradle.**

## **THE ORIGINS OF PENTECOSTALISM**

**The first "pentecostals" in the modern sense appeared on the scene in 1901 in the city of Topeka, Kansas in a Bible school conducted by Charles Fox Parham, a holiness teacher and former Methodist pastor. In spite of controversy over the origins and timing of Parham's emphasis on glossolalia, all historians agree that the movement began during the first days of 1901 just as the world entered the Twentieth Century. The first person to be baptized in the Holy Spirit accompanied by speaking in tongues was Agnes Ozman, one of Parham's Bible School students, who spoke in tongues on the very first day of the new century, January 1, 1901. According to J. Roswell Flower, the founding Secretary of the Assemblies of God, Ozman's experience was the "touch felt round the world," an event which "made the Pentecostal Movement of the Twentieth Century."**

As a result of this Topeka pentecost, Parham formulated the doctrine that tongues was the "Bible evidence" of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. He also taught that tongues was a supernatural impartation of human languages (xenoglossolalia) for the purpose of world evangelization. Henceforth, he taught, missionaries need not study foreign languages since they would be able to preach in miraculous tongues all over the world. Armed with this new theology, Parham founded a church movement which he called the "Apostolic Faith" and began a whirlwind revival tour of the American middle west to promote his exciting new experience.

It was not until 1906, however, that pentecostalism achieved worldwide attention through the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles led by the African-American preacher William Joseph Seymour. He learned about the tongues-attested baptism in a Bible School that Parham conducted in Houston, Texas in 1905. Invited to pastor a Black holiness church in Los Angeles in 1906. Seymour opened the historic meeting in April, 1906 in a former African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church building at 312 Azusa Street in downtown Los Angeles.

What happened at Azusa Street has fascinated church historians for decades and has yet to be fully understood and explained. For over three years, the Azusa Street "Apostolic Faith mission" conducted three services a day, seven days a week, where thousands of seekers received the tongues baptism. Word of the revival was spread abroad through "The Apostolic Faith", a paper that Seymour sent free of charge to some 50,000 subscribers. From Azusa Street pentecostalism spread rapidly around the world and began its advance toward becoming a major force in Christendom.

The Azusa Street movement seems to have been a merger of White American Holiness religion with worship styles derived from the African-American Christian tradition which had developed since the days of chattel slavery in the South. The expressive worship and praise at Azusa Street, which included shouting and dancing, had been common among Appalachian Whites as well as Southern Blacks. The admixture of tongues and other charisms with Black music and worship styles created a new and indigenous form of pentecostalism that was to prove extremely attractive to disinherited and deprived people, both in America and other nations of the world.

The interracial aspects of the movement in Los Angeles was a striking exception to the racism and segregation of the times. The phenomenon of Blacks and Whites worshipping together under a Black pastor seemed incredible to many observers. The ethos of the meeting was captured by Frank Bartleman, a White Azusa participant, when he said of Azusa Street, "The color line was washed away in the blood." Indeed, people from all the ethnic minorities of Los Angeles, a city which Bartleman called "the American Jerusalem," were represented at Azusa Street.

The place of William Seymour as an important religious leader now seems to be assured. As early as 1972 Sidney Ahlstrom, the noted church historian from Yale University, said that Seymour was "the most influential black leader in American religious history." Seymour, along with Charles Parham, could well be called the "co-founders" of world pentecostalism.

## **AMERICAN PENTECOSTAL PIONEERS**

The first wave of "Azusa pilgrims" journeyed throughout the United States spreading the Pentecostal fire, primarily in holiness churches, missions, and camp meetings. For some time, it was thought that it was necessary to journey to California to receive the "blessing." Soon, however, people received the tongues experience wherever they lived.

American pentecostal pioneers who received tongues at Azusa Street went back to their homes to spread the movement among their own people, at times against great opposition. One of the first was Gaston Barnabas Cashwell of North Carolina, who spoke in tongues in 1906. His six-month preaching tour of the South in 1907 resulted in major inroads among Southern holiness folk. Under his ministry, Cashwell saw several holiness denominations swept into the new movement, including the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), the Pentecostal Holiness Church, the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church, and the Pentecostal Free-Will Baptist Church.

Also in 1906, Charles Harrison Mason journeyed to Azusa Street and returned to Memphis, Tennessee to spread the pentecostal fire in the Church of God in Christ. Mason and the church he founded were made up of African Americans only one generation removed from slavery. (The parents of both Seymour and Mason had been born as southern slaves). Although tongues caused a split in the church in 1907, the Church of God in Christ experienced such explosive growth that by 1993, it was by far the largest Pentecostal denomination in North America claiming some 5,500,000 members in 15,300 local churches. Another Azusa Pilgrim was William H. Durham of Chicago. After receiving his tongues experience at Azusa Street in 1907 he returned to Chicago where he led thousands of mid-western Americans and Canadians into the pentecostal movement. His "finished work" theology of gradual progressive sanctification, which he announced in 1910, led to the formation of the Assemblies of God in 1914. Since many white pastors had formerly been part of Mason's church, the beginnings of the Assemblies of God was also partially a racial separation. In time the Assemblies of God church was destined to become the largest Pentecostal denominational church in the world, claiming by 1993 over 2,000,000 members in the U.S. and some 25,000,000 adherents in 150 nations of the world.

## **MISSIONARIES OF THE ONE-WAY TICKET**

In addition to the ministers who received their pentecostal experience at Azusa Street, there were thousands of others who were indirectly influenced by the revival in Los Angeles. Among these was Thomas Ball Barratt of Norway, a Methodist pastor later to be known as the pentecostal apostle to northern and western Europe. Receiving a glossolalic baptism in the Spirit in New York City in 1906, he returned to Oslo where he conducted the first pentecostal services in Europe in December of 1906. From Norway, Barratt traveled to Sweden, England, France, and Germany where he sparked other national Pentecostal movements. Under Barratt such leaders as Lewi Pethrus in Sweden, Jonathan Paul in Germany and Alexander Boddy in England were brought into the movement.

From Chicago, through the influence of William Durham, the movement spread quickly to Italy and South America. Thriving Italian Pentecostal movements were founded after 1908 in the USA, Brazil, Argentina, and Italy by two Italian immigrants to Chicago, Luigi

Francescon and Giacomo Lombardy. Also, in South Bend, Indiana (near Chicago) two Swedish Baptist immigrants, Daniel Berg and Gunnar Vingren, received the pentecostal experience and felt a prophetic call to Brazil. Their missionary trip in 1910 resulted in the formation of the Brazilian Assemblies of God, which developed into the largest national pentecostal movement in the world, claiming some 15,000,000 members by 1993. Also hailing from Chicago was Willis C. Hoover, the Methodist missionary to Chile who in 1909 led a pentecostal revival in the Chilean Methodist Episcopal Church. After being excommunicated from the Methodist Episcopal Church, Hoover and 37 of his followers organized the "Pentecostal Methodist Church" which by 1993 grew to number some 1,500,000 adherents in Chile.

African Pentecostalism owed its origins to the work of John Graham. Lake (1870-1935) who began his ministry as a Methodist preacher but who later prospered in the business world as an insurance executive. In 1898 his wife was miraculously healed of tuberculosis under the ministry of divine healer Alexander Dowie, founder of a religious community called "Zion City" near Chicago, Illinois. Joining with Dowie, Lake became an Elder in the "Zion Catholic Apostolic Church." At one point, Lake testified to an instant experience of entire sanctification in the home of Fred Bosworth, an early leader in the Assemblies of God. In 1907, he received the pentecostal experience and spoke in tongues under the ministry of Charles Parham, who visited Zion while the aging Dowie was losing control of his ministry. Out of Zion also came a host of almost 500 preachers who entered the ranks of the pentecostal movement, chief of whom was John G. Lake.

After his pentecostal experience, Lake abandoned the insurance business in order to answer a long-standing call to minister in South Africa. In April 1908, he led a large missionary party to Johannesburg where he began to spread the Pentecostal message throughout the nation. Coming with him was his wife and seven children as well as Holiness evangelists Thomas Hezmalhalch and J.C. Lehman. Only Lehman had been to Africa before 1908, having served for five years as a missionary to the Zulus. Hezmalhalch, lovingly known as "Brother Tom," was born in England and was sixty years of age when he arrived in South Africa. Before the end of his first year in South Africa Lake's wife died, some believed through malnutrition. Lake nevertheless succeeded in founding two large and influential pentecostal churches in Southern Africa. The white branch took the name "Apostolic Faith Mission" (AFM) in 1910, borrowed from the name of the famous mission on Azusa Street. This is the church that eventually gave David duPlessis to the world as "Mr. Pentecost." The Black branch eventually developed into the "Zion Christian Church" (ZCC) which by 1993 claimed no less than 6,000,000 members and, despite some doctrinal and cultural variations, was recognized as the largest Christian church in the nation. In its annual Easter conference at Pietersburg, this church gathers upwards of 2,000,000 worshippers, the largest annual gathering of Christians on earth.

After his African missionary tour of 1908-1912, Lake returned to the United States where he founded churches and healing homes in Spokane, Washington and Portland, Oregon before his death in 1935. Throughout the rest of the century, pentecostal denominational missionaries from many nations spread the movement to all parts of Africa. In addition to the AFM and ZCC churches, the Pentecostal Holiness Church in South Africa was founded in 1913 under the leadership of Lehman who had come with Lake in 1908. In 1917, the Assemblies of God entered South Africa when the American church accepted the mission

already established by R.M. Turney. The Church of God, (Cleveland, Tennessee) came to the country in 1951 through amalgamation with the Full Gospel Church. In retrospect, the work of Lake was the most influential and enduring of all the South African pentecostal missions endeavors. According to Cecil Rhodes, the South African "Empire Builder," "His (Lake's) message has swept Africa. He has done more toward South Africa's future peace than any other man." Perhaps the highest accolade was given by no less a personage than Mahatma Ghandi who said of Lake, "Dr. Lake's teachings will eventually be accepted by the entire world."

Soon after Lake returned to the United States, the movement reached the Slavic world through the ministry of a Russian-born Baptist pastor, Ivan Voronaev who received the pentecostal experience in New York City in 1919. Through prophecies, he was led to take his family with him to Odessa in the Ukraine in 1922 where he established the first Pentecostal church in the Soviet Union. Although he was arrested, imprisoned and martyred in a communist prison in 1943, Voronaev's churches survived incredible persecution to become a major religious force in Russia and the former Soviet Union by 1993.

## NEO-PENTECOSTALS AND CHARISMATICS

This first wave of pentecostal pioneer missionaries produced what has become known as the "Classical Pentecostal Movement" with over 11,000 pentecostal denominations throughout the world. These continued to proliferate at an amazing rate as the century came to an end. In retrospect, the pattern established in South Africa was repeated in many other nations as the movement spread around the world. That is, an enterprising Pentecostal pioneer such as Lake, broke the ground for a new movement which was initially despised and rejected by the existing churches. This phase was followed by organized pentecostal denominational missions efforts which produced fast-growing missions and indigenous churches. The final phase was the penetration of pentecostalism into the mainline Protestant and Catholic churches as "charismatic renewal" movements with the aim of renewing and reviving the historic churches.

Strangely enough, these newer "waves" also originated largely in the United States. These included the Protestant "Neo-pentecostal" movement which began in 1960 in Van Nuys, California under the ministry of Dennis Bennett, Rector of St. Marks Episcopal (Anglican) Church. Within a decade, this movement had spread to all the 150 major Protestant families of the world reaching a total of 55,000,000 people by 1990. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement had its beginnings in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1967 among students and faculty of Duquesne University. In the 26 years since its inception, the Catholic movement has touched the lives of over 70,000,000 Catholics in over 120 nations of the world. Added to these is the newest category, the "Third Wave" of the Spirit which originated at Fuller Theological Seminary in 1981 under the classroom ministry of John Wimber. These consisted of mainline Evangelicals who moved in signs and wonders, but who disdained labels such as "pentecostal" or "charismatic." By 1990 this group numbered some 33,000,000 members in the world.

In summary, all these movements, both Pentecostal and charismatic, have come to constitute a major force in Christendom throughout the world with explosive growth rates

**not seen before in modern times. By 1990, The Pentecostals and their charismatic brothers and sisters in the mainline Protestant and Catholic churches were turning their attention toward world evangelization. Only time will reveal the ultimate results of this movement which has greatly impacted the world during the Twentieth Century.**

**Oral Roberts University, 7777 S. Lewis Avenue, Tulsa OK 74171**