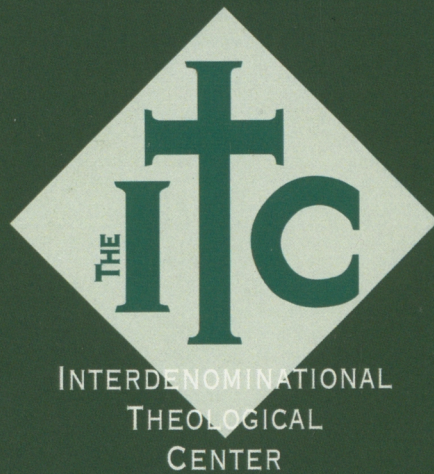


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*Exploring Pentecostalism in the
African American Tradition*

Volume 44, Fall 2016 / Spring 2017

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Volume 44

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A Brief Word from the Editor

I would like to thank Dr. Harold Bennett, President-Dean of the H. Mason Theological Seminary, for serving as the guest editor of this issue of the *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*.

This issue focuses on Pentecostalism and has valuable knowledge ranging from the beginning of the denomination to its current and diverse practices. I hope scholars, students and laity alike will find these articles informative and offering needed sources for additional research.

I take this opportunity to apologize for the delay of printing and distributing this Journal issue. Our goal going forward is to print and distribute the journal on a regular basis in the Spring and Fall annually. This issue is Volume 44 and comprises Fall 2016 and Spring 2017. You should receive the Volume 45 Fall 2017 issue by July of this year.

On behalf of the members of the editorial board and Journal consultants, I would like to express my appreciation for your loyal and continuing support.

Temba Mafico
Editor

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Essays on African-American Pentecostalism: Introducing the Discussion

Studies conducted by the Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life and the World Christian Database indicate that Pentecostalism is a complex, mushrooming, phenomenon on the worldwide religious scene. In fact, the literature indicates a proliferation of Pentecostal traditions in Latin America, West Africa, and in the United States.¹ At the center of this type of Christianity is belief in a baptism in the Holy Spirit. This baptism is an encounter between the Holy and the human being, which can best be understood by comparing it to two agents involving themselves in an intimate socio-psychological encounter, where one agent/entity is the "Divine Essence" and the other is the human being.² Within this Journal, the term Pentecostalism denotes that religious tradition that gives particular attention to how this encounter between the Sacred and the human being evidences itself in non-rational, psychomotor phenomena, dynamic worship experiences, healings, and in a vast array of "gifts" and "powers." Concomitant with this experience is *glossolalia* or the spontaneous, unrehearsed tongues-speech in an unknown language, which is believed to be a significant indicator that the moral agent has experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Accounts in the book of Acts and I Corinthians inform the theological visions in the Pentecostal traditions.

Within the African-American religious context, two major brands of Pentecostalism are present. It is important to note that the conversation about Pentecostalism amongst mainstream America in general and amongst Blacks in America in particular often reach back into the past and connect with William Joseph Seymour and his groundbreaking work in Los Angeles, California, and to the efforts of Charles Harrison Mason, Sr., and his work headquartered in Memphis, Tennessee, during the first quarter of the twentieth century. The work of Seymour at 312 Azusa Street, on the one hand, laid the groundwork for two Pentecostal theological or Christological trajectories in the Black Community. The issue of whether to view the Holy as a group of three or as a single entity, that is to say, whether one should speak or articulate an understanding of the Holy in a *Trinitarian conceptual framework* or *Jesus Only-Oneness* language is perhaps the main theological issue that distinguishes these two religious subgroups and informs subsequent doctrines that comprise the official ideologies of these faith communities. The work of Bishop Charles H. Mason, Sr., on the other hand, led to the formulation of an expression of Christianity that is authentically Black (there will be more discourse about the Pentecostal experience, its "Blackness" and its roots later in the essays in this Journal).

¹Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life. "Spirit and Power: A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals." <http://www.pewforum.org/2006/10/05/spirit-and-power/> (accessed September 25, 2017).

²Rodney Stark, "A Taxonomy of Religious Experience," *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion*, 5 (1965): 97-116.

The essays in this edition of the Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center (henceforth cited as JITC) explore different issues in Pentecostalism, with a specific concern for the African-American Pentecostal community. The African-American Pentecostal experience or traditions are often recognized by their fervency in worship and freedom in liturgical expression. While this subject will receive treatment in these critical essays, the articles in this edition of the JITC, too, will launch a multi-front investigation into Pentecostal studies. From conversations about subjects in moral epistemology to discussions about issues in Pentecostal historiography to explorations about themes in Pentecostal social ethics, public policy, and gender studies, these essays explore a range of topics, in diverse areas in biblical, theological, philosophical, sociological studies, from an Africentric Pentecostal perspective. The goal of these essays is to familiarize readers with key issues in the African-American Pentecostal traditions and to provoke other readers and scholars to embark upon fresh vistas in regard to expanding research and conversation on subjects in African-American Pentecostal studies. Enjoy!

Harold V. Bennett, PhD
Guest-Editor

¹For Research Center on Religion and Public Life, "Spirit and Power: A 10 County Survey of Pentecostals," <http://www.pewforum.org/2009/10/05/spirit-and-power/> (accessed September 25, 2011).
"Roberts' Book: A Testimony of Religious Experience," www.the-spirit.com/Roberts%20Book%20V110

