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## Perspective on the Black Origins of the Contemporary Pentecostal Movement

### INTRODUCTION

A review of the literature on the Pentecostal-Holiness Movement reveals several divergent points of view concerning its origins and founding. The first strand of thought suggests that twentieth century Pentecostalism began during the turn of the century under the leadership of Charles Fox Parham. The second strand of thought suggests that the Modern Pentecostal Movement had no single founder but was interracial in its founding with emphasis on Parham and the Topeka Bible School events in 1901 and W. J. Seymour in the Los Angeles Azusa Street Revival of 1906. The third strand of thought suggests that the Pentecostal Movement of the twentieth century was primarily Afro-American in origin under the leadership of W. J. Seymour in Los Angeles in 1906. A fourth strand suggests that twentieth century Pentecostalism came suddenly from heaven to a converted livery stable in the ghetto and was exclusively initiated by the Holy Spirit.

The primary purpose of this paper is to briefly review the first two strands as they are reflected in current Pentecostal literature that discusses the founding of the contemporary Pentecostal Movement with a major emphasis on a theoretical synthesis of the two latter strands.

*Webster's New World Dictionary* defines perspective as a sense of proportion in viewing and judging things in their proper relationship. It is my contention that previous studies have not viewed the origin of the Pentecostal Movement in its proper relationship. This paper attempts to take seriously the Pentecostal theory of the "latter rain" in viewing the origin of contemporary Pentecostalism. That is the reason the Pentecostal Movement is also referred to as the "Latter Rain" Movement.

The Pentecostal "latter rain" theory of history has its locus in the prophecy of the age of the Spirit in Joel 2:23-25. This view of history is a departure from the traditional periodization of church history. The rationale is based on the two main rainfalls that occurred annually in Palestine. The first was called the early or the former rain and it fell about Autumn to prepare the ground for sowing the seed for the winter harvest. After this there would be an occasional light shower until the latter rain fell. The latter rain was heavier than the early rain.

The first period, from the first through the fourth centuries is designated as the period of *Early Showers*. The pneumatic line moves from the descent of the Spirit in Acts through the fourth century affecting

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such personalities during the Post-Apostolic Age as Montanus, Irenaeus, Clement, Polycarp, Tertullian, and Chrysostom in a charismatic way; the second period, from the fifth through the sixteenth centuries is designated as the *Long Drought*. During this period, Pentecost all but disappeared, except for occasional occurrences among such groups as the Waldenses 1010 A.D. and the Albigeneses in France, circa, twelfth century, and personalities such as St. Francis Xavier, St. Domnick and St. Louis Bertrand.

The third period, from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, designates as the *Later Showers* made a charismatic impact on parts of France and England characterized by noteworthy outbursts of glossolalia. The phenomenon occurred among the Huguenots and the Cevenols of France. The second Pentecostal effusion occurred in England during the nineteenth century under the leadership of a Scottish Presbyterian pastor named Edward Irving. Likewise, the Ranters, who flourished during the Commonwealth era (1648-60) experienced glossolalia. The same can be said of the early Quakers. Mother Ann Lee, founder of the Shakers who were heirs of Wesleyan and Quaker tenets demonstrated Pentecostal tendencies.

The fourth period, from about 1900 is designated as the *Latter Rain*. Pentecostals believe that Pentecost all but disappeared from the church for a period upward of 1800 years during the second and third period with occasional showers every now and then. For half a century prior to 1900, many restless Christians had been praying for the promised "latter rain." Between 1830 and 1905, periodic showers such as isolated revivals of the Spirit brought promise of the "latter rain." The "latter rain" did not break upon the world in one massive downpour, but rather like light scattered showers falling here and there before the real torrential storm breaks. Among the early raindrops of the Latter Rain expectations were the Welsh Revival from 1904 to 1906 and the efforts of Charles Parham in Texas and Kansas and other Holiness adherents. It was on Azusa Street, the watershed of Pentecostal History, that the "latter rain" poured.

There is obviously great danger in formulating some single theory of history and forcing the facts to fit the thesis. For the historian may become the prisoner of a particular frame of reference, and his results may represent only a distorted explanation of the past in an attempt to predict and even shape the future. Adherents of the "latter rain" theory must use caution and be open to the eclectic approach to history which emphasizes diversified causes to explain events. The mood of this paper is interpretive rather than apologetic.

#### HOLINESS MOVEMENT: A PRECURSOR TO THE PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT

There is a general consensus among most historians writing about Pentecostalism that the nineteenth century American Holiness Movement

(a child of eighteenth-century Methodism) bore twentieth-century Pentecostalism.<sup>1</sup> The Pentecostal Movement originated among those who were already active Christians in search of some kind of religious experience lacking in their churches. That is partially the reason why Methodism is the most important of historical religious traditions for researchers engaged in the task of research on Pentecostalism to understand.

From the point of view of history of doctrine it appears that Pentecostalism with its emphasis on an instantaneous experienced baptism of the Holy Spirit, an event subsequent to conversion took its cue from the Methodist-Holiness quest for an instantaneous experience of sanctification, a "second blessing," or a "second work of grace" after justification. The Modern Pentecostal Movement developed from the extreme left wing of the Holiness Movement among adherents who took seriously Wesley's doctrine of perfection.

The Holiness Movement developed largely from adherents of Wesley's doctrine of sanctification who felt that the general stream of his followers had waned long ago. Under the direct influence of Jeremy Taylor, William Law and Thomas a Kempis, Wesley was driven to strive after "purity of intention" which was the core of his later doctrine. It is not enigmatic to understand why Wesley's *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* in 1766 is now recognized as the doctrinal foundation of the Holiness Movement. For Wesley, sanctification, considered as a whole, is a process of development which begins at the very moment a person is justified. (*Works XI*, 442) Perfection is the completion of the development of sanctification begun at regeneration. It is nothing more nor less than that habitual disposition of the soul which, in sacred writings, is termed holiness; and which directly implies, the being cleansed from sin, "from all filthiness both of flesh and spirits," and by consequences, the being endued with those virtues which were also in Christ Jesus; the being so "renewed in the spirit of our mind," as to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect." Perfection for Wesley means one thing, purity of motive. "Perfection in the sense of infallibility does not exist on the face of the earth." (*Works XI*, 394)

Charles Finney, born one year after Wesley's death, referred to as the institutionalizer of revivalism, is said to be the second most important formative influence on early classical Pentecostal belief. Bruner states that it was Finney's revival methodology that was the shaping influence on Methodist theology in the Holiness Churches, and formed

<sup>1</sup> See Bloch-Hoell, *The Pentecostal Movement*, Oslo: (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964), p. 12. Nichols, John T., Kendrick, Klaude, *The Promise Fulfilled: A History of the Modern Pentecostal Movement* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1961), chapter 4. Kelsey, Morton T., *Tongue Speaking: An Experiment in Spiritual Experience*, Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1964), pp. 70-72. Bruner, Frederick D., *A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, (Grand Rapids, Mich., W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), p. 45. Synan, Vinson, *The Holiness: Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, (Grand Rapids, Mich., W. D. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), chapter 1. Hardon, John A., *The Spirit and Origins of American Protestantism*, (Dayton, Ohio, Pflaum Press, 1968), p. 232. Hardon, John A., *The Protestant Churches of America*, (Westminster, Md., The Newman Press, 1957), p. 295.

the major historical bridge between Wesleyanism and Modern Pentecostalism.<sup>2</sup>

Methodologically, American revivalism has been the most formative influence on the modern Pentecostal Movement. It was Sweet who stated that "revivalism . . . in a real sense may be characterized as an Americanization of Christianity, for in it Christianity was shaped to meet America's needs."<sup>3</sup> Indeed it was through the preaching of especially, Charles Finney and Dwight Moody toward the end of the nineteenth century that revival methodology became an important influence in American Christianity and the American churches. In the milieu of interconfessional revivals and Holiness camp meetings the Modern Pentecostal Movement was formed.

McLoughlin refers to the Holiness Movement as the second wing of Protestantism and points out the similarity between the religious tenets of Holiness believers and those of all pietistic movements since the Reformation. "These tenets consisted of an extremely literalistic reliance upon the Bible, a puritanical morality, pessimistic or escapist outlook on world history, and a perfectionist view of the meaning of salvation."<sup>4</sup> Older denominations were tempted to refer to them as "Holy Rollers," "come-outers" or radical "fringe" groups.

#### CLASSICAL PENTECOSTAL VIEW OF ORIGINS

Between 1880 and 1907 the Methodists split into Holiness and anti-Holiness factions occasioned by a controversy over Wesley's doctrine of sanctification. During the height of the turmoil, the Pentecostal Movement is said to have begun. Several revivals occurred during the turn of the twentieth century almost simultaneously in the South and Western portions of the United States accompanied by the strange phenomenon of glossolalia (tongues-speaking).

It was during this period that Reverend Charles Fox Parham, a native of Muscatine, Iowa, started his ministerial career as a supply pastor in the Methodist Episcopal Church in Kansas, and first isolated the phenomenon of glossolalia as the evidence of the baptism of the Holy Ghost. It was his conceptualization of glossolalia, a formally stated doctrine based on Acts 2:1, that laid the doctrinal foundations of the Modern Pentecostal Movement more than anyone else. It was at Bethel Bible College, Topeka, Kansas, January 1, 1901, under the leadership of Parham that the "baptism of the Spirit" fell first upon a Miss Agnes N. Ozman who spoke in tongues. Parham's baptism came on January 3 with several students and under the influence of this new zeal sought to evangelize Missouri and Texas.

The classical or old-time Pentecostal<sup>5</sup> interpretation of the origin of

<sup>2</sup> Bruner, *Op. Cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> Sweet, William W., *Revivalism in America: Its Origin, Growth and Decline* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1945), p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> McLoughlin, Jr., W. E., *Modern Revivalism* (New York: Ronald Press, 1959), p. 466.

<sup>5</sup> Classical Pentecostals refer to early Pentecostals whose public image entailed many elements such as emotionalism, fanaticism, theological and biblical, fundamentalism and an apocalyptic eschatology. However, there are areas of classical Pentecostalism where the negative elements are not typical.

the Modern Pentecostal Movement emphasizes the linkage of the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of glossolalia. J. Russell Flowers, former General Secretary of the Assemblies of God, a major exponent of the classical view says in reference to the Pentecostal experience of Agnes Ozman:

This decision to seek for a Holy Spirit baptism with the expectation of speaking in tongues was a momentous one. It made the Pentecostal Movement of the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup>

It appears that Flower's point of view prompted John Nichols, a reputable historian of Pentecostalism, to infer that this event was significant, not because Miss Ozman had spoken in tongues, for there had been sporadic outbursts of glossolalia throughout the history of the church. For him, "the importance of these events in Topeka is that for the first time the concept of being baptized or filled with the Holy Spirit was linked to an outward sign — speaking in tongues."<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, Nichols is lured on by Klaude Kendrick's recommendation that narrative Modern Pentecostalism should begin with Charles Fox Parham,<sup>8</sup> and hails him as the Father of Contemporary Pentecostalism, a distinction not given to him by the leaders of the larger Pentecostal groups. Vinson Synan, who has written one of the best accounts of the Pentecostal Movement is correct when he asserts that "most Pentecostal writers acknowledge Parham's place as the formulator of the Pentecostal doctrine," but is incorrect when he states that "none call him the Father of the movement because of later questions about his personal ethics."<sup>9</sup> Donald Gelpi, a Jesuit Priest, whose concern is to theologize about Pentecostalism, in his historical survey of Pentecostalism, uncritically, refers to Parham as the leader of American Pentecostalism and reminds us that he (Parham) preached a Pentecostalized Wesleyanism.<sup>10</sup>

The problem with the classical view of the origins of Modern Pentecostalism in hailing Parham as the founder is that first, it runs counter to the "latter rain" theory as espoused by especially classical Pentecostals. John Wycliffe was essentially engaged in the same task as the later Martin Luther in his attempt at church reform. Wycliffe is referred to as the dawn-star of the Protestant Revolt, while Martin Luther is revered as the catalyst of the Protestant Reformation. Secondly, to convene a meeting where a few individuals received the baptism of the Holy Spirit was not unprecedented as the historical evidence has shown. However, the almost totally unplanned efforts of W. J. Seymour, the Black Apostle of Pentecost, were unprecedented. Without instruments of music, no choir, no collection or financial arrangement, no bills posted to advertise the meeting, without any organized church support, indi-

<sup>6</sup> Flower, Roswell J., "Birth of the Pentecostal Movement," *Pentecostal Evangel*, Vol. 38, 1950, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Nichols, *Op. Cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>8</sup> Kendrick, *Op. Cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>9</sup> Synan, *Op. Cit.*, p. 98.

<sup>10</sup> Gelpi, Donald L., *Pentecostalism: A Theological Viewpoint*, Paramus, (New York: Paulist Press, 1971), p. 31.

viduals from some thirty-five nations heard the message of Pentecost during this three-year revival and returned to initiate the movement in their own nations.

### INTERRACIAL ORIGINS OF PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT

John Hardon simply indicated that two names stand out in Pentecostal history: Charles Fox Parham and William J. Seymour. Parham was white and Seymour a Negro, which partly explains the interracial character of most Pentecostal churches. He further mentions that Parham's disciple, Seymour, carried the Pentecostal message to California and attracted large crowds in the now famous Azusa Street Revival. In three years Azusa attracted the curious and fervent from all parts of America and even from overseas.<sup>11</sup>

Vinson Synan builds the best case for the interracial origins of the Modern Pentecostal Movement. He admits the controversial nature of his position, but goes on to state in a rather guarded manner that Parham and Seymour share roughly equal positions as founders of Modern Pentecostalism. He acknowledges that Parham laid the doctrinal foundation of the movement, while Seymour served as the catalytic agent for its popularization. In this sense, says Synan, "the early Pentecostal Movement could be classed as neither 'Negro' nor 'White,' but as interracial."<sup>12</sup>

Synan is willing to concede that Seymour in fact was the key figure in the Azusa Street Meeting, a fact he claims is extremely important to Pentecostals of all races. While all Pentecostals acknowledge their debt to Seymour, few are willing to recognize him as the "founder" of the movement. Synan further alleges that Negro Pentecostals refer to Seymour as the "apostle and pioneer" of the movement and often attempt to demonstrate that the Pentecostal Movement began as a Negro phenomenon, later accepted by Whites.<sup>13</sup> (The person Synan refers to for evidence in his footnote as an example of Negro Pentecostals who are pro-Seymour happens to be a White Bishop in the Church of God In Christ, R. L. Fidler, editor of "The International Outlook").

The problem with Synan's and Hardon's interracial theory of the origins of the Pentecostal Movement is that both fail to make the clear cut critical distinction between the early interracial stages of the movement and the actual founding. For them it is safer to say that the Azusa Street Revival was conducted on the basis of complete racial equality. We might further add that it is commonly known in Pentecostal circles that during the interracial period of the movement between 1906 and 1924, many White ministers from unincorporated Pentecostal fellowships including the White Assemblies of God were ordained by Bishop Charles H. Mason, founder of the Church of God in Christ. The question is not about interracial fellowship (though the

<sup>11</sup> Hardon, *The Protestant Churches of America, Op. Cit.*, p. 170.

<sup>12</sup> Synan, *Op. Cit.*, p. 1968.

<sup>13</sup> Synan, *Loc. Cit.*

sincerity of true fellowship can be challenged based on the refusal of Whites to defy laws, mores and prejudices and serve under Black leaders with the awareness that it is better to obey God than man), but rather was used by God to initiate a simple prayer service in a converted livery stable at 312 Azusa Street in 1906, which was the fountain head of the modern Pentecostal Movement.

It should also be stated that the difficulty of the interracial theory of the origins of Contemporary Pentecostalism in some Pentecostal circles is that it fails to take serious the "latter rain" view of history. The exponents of the interracial view are so eager to stress the interracial character of the early movement they fail to see that at best, Parham's efforts were a continuation of sporadic light showers, while Seymour's Azusa Street Revival because of its nature and thrust was the torrential down-pour that created a major worldwide flood. Even Synan admits:

The Azusa Street Revival is commonly regarded as the beginning of the Modern Pentecostal Movement. Although many persons had spoken in tongues in the United States in the years preceding 1906, this meeting brought this belief to the attention of the world and served as the catalyst for the formation of scores of Pentecostal denominations. Directly or indirectly, practically all of the Pentecostal groups in existence can trace their lineage to the Azusa Mission.<sup>14</sup>

#### BLACK ORIGINS: FROM A STABLE TO THE WORLD

The twentieth century Pentecostal Movement in America originated from the womb of the Black religious experience. From a converted livery stable in the ghetto on Azusa Street in Los Angeles in 1906 to the world, the Pentecostal Movement has ushered in the era of the Holy Spirit. Once again God has used a "saving remnant" from the ranks of the despised and oppressed people of the earth to inject new life and power into the church universal.

Black Pentecostalism is what it is, for most part, for reason of its own unique experience in America. Several formidable obstacles have contributed to the misunderstanding and for the most part, a deliberate omission of the leadership role and contribution of Black Pentecostals to the church universal.

Attempts to objectively evaluate Black Pentecostalism have been hampered by preconceived notions about such things as illiteracy, religious fanaticism, unrestrained emotionalism and mere religious exhibitionism. Historically some of these notions are justifiably correct, but should never be used as a deterrent to at least conduct a fair hearing.

Black Pentecostalism has defied innumerable attempts to codify or classify it objectively because of its experiential emphasis. Our heritage of suspicion steers us away from any religious experience that borders on the realm of what we have defined as normal and abnormal behavior. Black Pentecostals would contend that their encounter with the Spirit

<sup>14</sup> Synan, *Op. Cit.*, p. 114.

does not belong to the normal Christian life and at points, defies theological formulations. They would agree with Karl Stern:

That there is always something abnormal about faith. There always remains an element of madness in the spiritual encounter . . . whenever in the history of revelation man and God meet face to face, as it were, something happens which is not at all normal.<sup>15</sup>

Objective evaluations of Black Pentecostalism collapse when it faces a dimension of spiritual effusion that cannot be pre-structured, pre-planned, pre-programmed or regulated by any official ecclesiastical decree.

The history of fragmentation and divisiveness among Black Pentecostals on such matters as the nature and function of charismatic gifts such as speaking in tongues and baptism has also been a problem in objectively evaluating the movement.

The problem of little or no historical material and nomenclature has been a deterrent toward objective evaluation. For example, there are over ten Churches of God and tracing their history can be problematic. A researcher would be baffled when confronted by two entirely different denominations with virtually the same names such as the Free Church of God in Christ, headquarters in Enid, Oklahoma, founded by J. H. Morris, a former Baptist in 1915 who later merged with the Church of God in Christ in 1921 and by 1925 departed and adopted the name, Free Church of God in Jesus Christ, and the Church of God in Christ founded in 1895 by Charles H. Mason, with headquarters in Memphis, Tennessee.

The view that the Holy Spirit was the founder of the Modern Pentecostal Movement is held by several historians including Stanley E. Frodsham, Carl Brumback and an eyewitness account by Frank Bartleman.<sup>16</sup> It is in this frame of reference that the Pentecostal Movement is often referred to as a "movement without a man."

It is interesting to note that Frodsham in his book, *With Signs Following*, long recognized as the standard work on the story of the Pentecostal Revival in the twentieth century, discusses in detail the Topeka, Kansas event at Bethel College and includes all key personalities except one, Charles Fox Parham. In his discussion of Pentecost in Los Angeles, he begins with W. J. Seymour and reviews with candor his entry into Los Angeles and the subsequent revival. Seymour is not projected as the founder but as having played a significant role in the Azusa revival. As a classical Pentecostal, Frodsham uses personal testimonies and eye-witness accounts to discuss the Revival proceedings. He relies heavily on Frank Bartleman who wrote from his personal diary about, "What Really Happened at Azusa Street?," which is the title of his work. Quoting an eye-witness Frodsham writes:

<sup>15</sup> Stern, Karl, *The Third Revolution*, (Garden City, N. Y., Doubleday, 1961), p. 163.

<sup>16</sup> See Brumback, Carl, *Suddenly from Heaven* (Springfield, Mo., Gospel Publishing House, 1961), p. 48-58 also, Block-Hoell, Nils, *The Pentecostal Movement*, Oslo: pp. 18-20.



No collections are taken. No bills have been posted to advertise the meetings. No church organization is back of it. All who are in touch with God realize as soon as they enter the meeting that the *Holy Ghost is the leader*.<sup>17</sup>

Frank Bartleman attempts to link the Los Angeles Revival with the Welsh Revival under the leadership of Evan Roberts. He infers that prayer services conducted in the First Baptist Church of Los Angeles by its pastor Joseph Smale in 1905 laid the foundation for the Azusa Street Revival. In February 1906 he wrote:

We had been for sometime led to pray for a Pentecost. It seemed almost beginning. Of course, we did not realize what a real Pentecost was. But *the Spirit did*, and led us to ask aright. In the New Testament Church, seven of us seemed providentially led to join hands and agree in prayer to ask the Lord to pour out his Spirit speedily, with signs following. Where we got the idea from at that time I do not know. He must Himself (the Spirit) have suggested it to us. We did not have "tongues" in mind.<sup>18</sup>

It was one month later that Bartleman met Seymour in a prayer meeting on Bonnie Brae Street. He later writes concerning the proceedings of the Azusa Street Revival:

Brother Seymour was recognized as the nominal leader in charge. But we had no Pope or Hierarchy. We were brethren . . . The Lord Himself was leading . . . Brother Smale was God's Moses, to lead the people as far as the Jordan, though he himself never got across. *Brother Seymour led them over*.<sup>19</sup>

It becomes clear that the omission of Parham by Bartleman is deliberate in order to project Joseph Smale (as the Moses for Contemporary Pentecostalism). Bartleman is left alone in his projection of Smale. Very little mention is made of Smale by other Pentecostal writers in their discussion of the origin of Contemporary Pentecostalism.

W. H. Turner discusses the Topeka and Los Angeles outpourings without mentioning the names of Parham or Seymour, hails the latter outpouring as the greatest and most publicized of the early Pentecostal revivals. He remarks, "and there was no one outstanding personality directing the meeting. It was instead, a true Holy Ghost revival poured out upon people who were already saved and sanctified and prepared for the reception of the Holy Spirit in his fulness."<sup>20</sup>

The historical problem inherent in the combined views of Turner, Frodsham, Bartleman and Brumback who attribute the birth of the Pentecostal Movement exclusively to the work of the Holy Spirit is quite obvious. Such views fail to make allowance for the Spirit's use of a human agent in performing its ministry in the world. The Spirit does not work in a mold or vacuum. If one affirms that the Spirit did in fact work and was fully in charge, the affirmation itself presupposes the utilization of man or even a particular man or group in the schema of historical process and events in a specific place at a given time.

<sup>17</sup> Frodsham, Stanley, E., *With Signs Following*. (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1946), p. 33.

<sup>18</sup> Bartleman, Frank, *What Really Happened at Azusa Street?* (ed., John Walker, Los Angeles: 1962), p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32-36.

<sup>20</sup> Turner, W. H., *Pentecost and Tongues* (Franklin Springs, Ga., Advocate Press, 1939), pp. 95-100.

More recent definitive research points to the Black origins of the Modern Pentecostal Movement. E. G. Homrighausen says Pentecostalism started sixty years ago in a small Negro church in Los Angeles and has spread to all continents. In areas of Africa and Latin America it far outnumbers traditional Protestantism, and is fast becoming one of the recognized types of Christianity, especially in the third world.<sup>21</sup> James Finney agrees by indicating that both Black and White Pentecostals in America can be traced back to a little band of Black believers who met in a storefront church on Azusa Street in Los Angeles in 1906. That:

Pentecostalism, unlike the major expressions of Protestantism, was not imported by the slave master to justify slavery and pacify those in chains.<sup>22</sup>

Dr. Walter J. Hollenweger, professor of missions at the University of Birmingham, England, wrote a multi-volume study of Pentecostalism which is fairly comprehensive.<sup>23</sup> In this encyclopedic survey, Hollenweger argues from primary and secondary sources that the Azusa Street Mission is regarded by Pentecostal publicists as the place of origin of the Worldwide Pentecostal Movement.<sup>24</sup> That originally Parham was the leader of the Azusa Street revival, but from November 1907 on, his name no longer appears on the official letterhead of the organization. In 1908 the Whites withdrew.<sup>25</sup> In June 1970, Hollenweger raised a question that implied some rather weighty presuppositions in regard to the Black origins of Pentecostalism.

Why did Pentecost begin within the Black community? He replies, theologically one must answer that it was God's providence. As he chose the despised children of Israel to bring blessings to the whole world, he chose again Black people to bring blessings to the church universal.<sup>26</sup>

Recently, I had the distinct privilege of interviewing a participant-observer of the Azusa Street Revival from its inception,<sup>27</sup> Bishop Mack E. Jonas, of the Ohio Northwest Jurisdiction of the Church of God in Christ. During the taped interview, Jonas indicated that he was among the first Blacks to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit during the meeting on Bonnie Brae Street, which later moved to Azusa Street. He knew Seymour and Parham personally. Based on this interview it is doubtful whether Parham assumed any kind of leadership role in the revival or was asked by Seymour to help curb certain excesses. It is

<sup>21</sup> Homrighausen, Elmer G., "The Church in the World, Pentecostalism and the Third World," *Theology Today*, January 1970.

<sup>22</sup> Finney, James S., "Black Origins of the Pentecostal Movement," *Christianity Today*, October 8, 1971, also Lovett, Leonard, "Pentecostal Renewal for the Whole Church," *Pentecostal World*, Vol. 1, No. 5, January 1972.

<sup>23</sup> Hollenweger, Walter J., "Charisma and Oikemene, The Pentecostal Contribution to the Church Universal," *One in Christ*, Vol. VII, No. 4, 1971, p. 325; Professor of Missions at the University of Birmingham, England, former Secretary of Evangelism in the Division of World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches. He has written a ten-volume collection of source material on the Pentecostal Movement.

<sup>24</sup> Hollenweger, Walter J., *The Pentecostals*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota, Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), p. 22.

<sup>25</sup> *Loc. Cit.*

<sup>26</sup> Hollenweger, Walter J., "Black Pentecostal Concept Interpretation and Variations," *Concept*, No. 30, June 1970, p. 16, W. C. C., Geneva.

<sup>27</sup> Personal Interview with Bishop Mack E. Jonas, Cleveland, Ohio, March 1972, Tape.

also doubtful whether Parham's revivals were interracial based on the Jonas interview. Parham was said to have conducted revivals where he made segregated altar calls, with the Whites on one side and Blacks on the other. William J. Seymour, the one-eyed unattractive apostle of Pentecost from Houston, Texas defied the racist mentality of his time and opened the revival to everyone, a factor of supreme importance in explaining the success of the revival. Parham was later barred from the Azusa Street meetings because of his denunciation of fanaticism. Synan reminds us that Parham once criticized the Azusa Street meeting because of their "disgusting" similarity to "Southern darkey camp meetings." Although Seymour was his most famous disciple, Parham spent the later years of his life as an avid supporter of the Klu Klux Klan, praising its members for their "fine work in upholding the American way of life."<sup>28</sup>

During the interview when the question was raised as to who should be recognized as the Father of twentieth century Pentecostalism, Jonas, virtually leaping from his chair, stated unequivocally, "Seymour! Seymour!" My research has led me to believe that when Whites failed to "europeanize" Pentecostalism and purge it of its "Africanisms" they separated and formed their own denominations. The avoidance of local problems of socio-economic injustices and discrimination in changing society on the part of early White Pentecostals led to what Fidler refers to as a "fatalistic premillennialism" which allowed White Pentecostals to relegate those close range problems to "when Jesus comes," while in foreign areas they could "rush the rapture" with a distant paternalistic application of Christian love and concern."<sup>29</sup>

#### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON THE PENTECOSTAL EXPERIENCE

One could ask, is this the era of the Holy Spirit? Was Karl Barth's prediction correct in pointing to the last quarter of the twentieth century as the period when the Holy Spirit would dominate the thought of theologians? Was it ironic or prophetic that Paul Tillich's final volume of his trilogy discussed the Holy Spirit and the church? Is contemporary theology in need of a theology of the Spirit hammered on the anvil of oppression which may very well be an oral theology that emerges from the heart, defying fixed categories and systematic formulations?

A theological assessment of Pentecostalism is long overdue. The Pentecostal effusion is an enriching process for believers. Pentecost symbolizes a new dimension in one's being. It is a mountaintop experience. Black Pentecostals would contend that before Pentecost, the disciples were merely commissioned. After Pentecost they were equipped

<sup>28</sup> Synan, *Op. Cit.*, p. 180.

<sup>29</sup> Fidler, R. L., "Pentecostal History Lends Important Role to Blacks," *The International Outlook*, 4th Quarter.

enough to turn the world upside down. The empirical encounter in the Upper Room in Jerusalem generated the power to proclaim the message of calvary to the ends of the earth. Black Pentecostals exalt personal encounter rather than deify it. Encounter with the Spirit is stressed when they testify that "I went to a meeting one night, my heart was not right but the Lord followed me" or "my dungeons shook and my chains fell off."

Black Pentecostals have now come to believe in some quarters that even the serious task of liberation (which means freedom from my personal hang-ups as well as from the bondage of the oppressor), cannot be fully accomplished until witnesses are endued with power from on high. Acts 1:8 is the scriptural imperative; "But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." The word for power in this passage is "dunamis." The derivation comes from a word which signifies ability — the power to accomplish anything. This word power means inherent ability as latent power is resident in dynamite, so power resides within you. Endued literally means "clothed."

For with great fervor, they point to the fact that "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him (Acts 10:38); and the words from the lips of the Emancipator, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.'" (Luke 4:18) "And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee." (Luke 4:14).

One must ask whether the norm for a theology of oppressed people can be found within Pentecostalism. In Latin America and Africa, Pentecostalism far outnumbers traditional Protestantism, concomitant with this phenomenal growth is a growing concern for societal change. Especially is this true in parts of Africa where colonialism has denuded countless persons. A theology developing out of any oppressive situations such as the Black scene in America must begin with socio-cultural factors that act upon one's humanity for good or evil.

There is a strand in modern theology that emphasizes God's immanence to the point that His individuality as well as His personality is diluted through His creation. Such a view is no more than a pantheism which binds the Creator to the finitude of the created order and He becomes subject to such processes as change, death and decay. It would be proper to send out funeral notices that such a God is dead. On the other hand when God's transcendence is over-emphasized so that all metaphors concerning Him possess only symbolic meaning, thus reducing Him to a metaphysical abstraction, some kind of corrective is needed. The Pentecostal experience is the synthesis of both truths that guard against the extremes.

In this experience God is transcendent; the "Other," the "One Above" who comes to man from outside of and beyond himself. The supernatural nature of the Holy Spirit's gifts underscores the transcendence of God's being. The personal nature of these manifestations delivers transcendence from the abstractions of human thought categories, while the

"incarnational" aspect of these personal self-manifestations of deity delivers one from the error of pantheism.<sup>30</sup>

It is my sincere conviction that there can be no authentic theological reflection or explication of the Pentecostal experience unless the interpreter has participated in the experience. All else is fatuous, superfluous and meaningless banality apart from an empirical spiritual encountering of the Spirit. The interpreter must operate within the circle of Pentecostal faith. Pentecostal faith is based on the belief that the event which occurred on the Day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2:1 is repeatable in the form of a Spirit baptism which is subsequent to and distinct from conversion, sanctification and is an enduement of power for service with speaking in tongues as the initial consequence of the Spirit's presence. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is for Christian believers, a fact of profound importance. The baptism of the Holy Ghost is not a "saving" experience, but rather an "empowering" one, thus enabling the believer to become a more effective witness. The sources for Pentecostal reflection is the Bible. The norm for Pentecostal reflection is in the witness of the Scripture and experiential encounter coalescing in the life of the Spirit-filled believer.

Authentic Pentecostalism has a built-in dynamic that no semantic skill or logical analysis can fully decipher. It is not in search of potent theological "fuel" to empower and keep the ship of "churchianity" afloat. The power is inherent in the experience and apart from the experience there is no power.

Renewal and liberation appear to be the key themes in many of the prevailing and emerging new theologies. Many social activists have now conceded that social action alone has failed to provide an adequate dynamic for the church and have seized upon "renewal" as a reactivating force within the church in the world. The white theological mentality has begun to co-opt terms such as liberation and oppression from the Black experience and have rendered them helpless in their misapplication from ecology to gay liberation. Pentecostalism affirms with dogmatic insistence that liberation is always the consequence of the presence of the Spirit. Authentic liberation can never occur apart from pentecostal encounter and likewise, authentic pentecostal encounter cannot occur unless liberation becomes the consequence. It is another way of saying no man can experience the fullness of the Spirit and be a racist. This was demonstrated during the early Pentecostal Movement and is evident in the neo-charismatic movement. God was saying to America and the world that there is a Spirit in the world that can bridge racial, denominational and class barriers. If America hears, she can be saved, if the Nation refuses to hear, she will be destroyed from within. From a converted livery-stable in the ghetto of Los Angeles, the Modern Pentecostal Movement was formed ushering in an era of renewal by the Spirit for the church universal.

<sup>30</sup> Ervin, Howard M., *This Which Ye See and Hear*, (Plainfield, N. J., Logos International, 1972), pp. 50-52.

Since it is my contention that the Modern Pentecostal Movement began in the Black community; I find it impossible to reflect in a relevant theological manner apart from the nexus of the Black religious experience.

