

# Think on These Things

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## Pentecostalism

by Gary E. Gilley, Pastor-teacher at Southern View Chapel

Pentecostalism has become the fastest growing segment of 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" (*Christian History*, "The Rise of Pentecostalism," issue no. 58, vol. XVII no. 2, p.3). In addition, the largest church in the world (the Yoi Do Full Gospel Church) is a Pentecostal church in Korea, pastored by David Yongji Cho, with a weekly worship attendance of 240,000. Two Pentecostal Churches in Buenos Aires attract together 150,000 each week (ibid.).

Just who are the Pentecostals, how did they originate and what do they believe? The intent of this paper is to answer these questions.

### Pentecostal History

Most consider the father of Pentecostalism to be Charles Parham, a young college student from Kansas with roots in the Methodist Church. While the Wesleys could not be defined as Pentecostals, their theology laid the foundation upon which the Pentecostal movement would be built. Principally, it was the Methodist view that sanctification was a second work of grace, separate from salvation, coupled with the Holiness belief of a third experience, the "Baptism with the Holy Ghost and fire," that intrigued Parham. Parham was also influenced by a fresh desire within his denominational circles to experience divine healing and speaking in tongues — practices that most Christians at the end of the nineteenth century believed had ceased with the Apostolic age.

In 1900 Parham opened a Bible college to promote

these views, which he deemed "Apostolic Faith" theology. An interesting footnote is Parham's theory that God would soon give His church the gift of tongues, in the form of known languages, so that the world could be quickly evangelized.

"This end-time revival, accompanied by believers speaking in known languages they had never learned (xenolivia), would bring to an end the church age and bring back a triumphant Christ" (ibid. "American Pentecost" by Ted Olsen, p. 12). Of course later, when the rubber met the road, this theory proved untenable, and a new theory that tongues were unknown languages rose to the forefront.

While Parham and his followers would not be the first modern day Christians to speak in tongues (that honor apparently goes to W. F. Bryant and his disciples in 1896, later forming the Church of God in Tennessee), Parham was the first to teach that tongues are the initial evidence of "the baptism of the Holy Spirit." It was at a New Year's Eve watchnight service in 1900 that Agnes Ozman, one of Parham's students, finally spoke in tongues. Before the week was over about half (of 34) members of the school, including Parham, had spoken in tongues. Pentecostalism had its birthday, but the movement, meeting with skepticism at every turn, had a hard time getting out of the nursery. It was not until late 1903 at a revival in Galena, Kansas, that Parham and his teachings gained notoriety. Soon Parham could boast of up to 25,000 followers, but an even stronger Pentecostal movement was taking place in Wales in 1904-1905. It seems to be a little known fact to many modern heralds of revival that the "Welsh Revival" was not a movement of God similar to the Great Awakening, but was actually the European counterpart to the rise of American Pentecostalism. Actually, in many ways the Welsh Revival

was a strong catalyst for this side of the ocean. If God was performing these signs and wonders in Wales, so the reasoning went, He could do it here as well.

We discover the next important chapter in Pentecostalism in Texas, where in 1905 Parham opened a Bible school and began publishing a newspaper entitled *The Apostolic Faith*. Out of the Bible school emerged the next great luminary in the Pentecostal movement, William J. Seymour, a southern black Holiness preacher. Seymour soon moved to Los Angeles, where, after several turns of events, he spearheaded a revival at what would be called the Azusa Street Mission. It was here that a *Times* reporter claimed that "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" (Ibid. p. 15).

Regardless of such criticism, by September 1906 the church reported about 13,000 people had received the "baptism of the Holy Spirit." Although Seymour would seldom preach, meetings would often begin at 10:00 A.M. and continue until two or three the following morning.

Thousands of pilgrims, curious about and hungry for what Seymour claimed to offer, poured down Azusa Street between 1906 and 1909. But while the Azusa Street Revival weathered the external storm of criticism, it soon began to unravel internally. Perhaps the handwriting was on the wall as early as October 1906, when Parham came to preach. He was shocked by many manifestations being portrayed as from the Holy Spirit, but were really, he believed, of the flesh or demonic. Parham and Seymour split and never reconciled. Although Seymour, from that time forward, eclipsed Parham as the dominant personality in the movement. Shockwaves also came over racial tension. In the early months of Azusa Street, blacks and whites, men and women, shared leadership, although blacks were predominate. But soon Seymour asked all the Hispanics to leave and eventually wrote by-laws that prevented anyone except African-Americans from holding office in the Mission. By 1909 the revival was spent, and eventually faded into history. Even the mission building was razed after Seymour's death. However, even as the Azusa Street Revival's fires died out, a movement had ignited that would not die. Pentecostalism had spread all over the world.

Denominations such as the Assemblies of God and the United Pentecostal Church had been formed, and a large segment of the American church would forever view Azusa Street as the high water mark of modern Christianity.

## **Pentecostal Beliefs**

Unlike charismatics, who by definition have infiltrated every denomination and doctrinal persuasion, Pentecostals have definite theological distinctives. Below are some important doctrinal issues in Pentecostalism.

### *Sanctification*

The Pentecostal movement emerged from the Wesleyan/Holiness movement of the 1800s. John Wesley had taught that through an instantaneous experience, some time after conversion, a believer could become "entirely sanctified" or reach a state of "Christian perfection." By this Wesley did not mean that a Christian would never make a mistake, but that he could cease from sin in this life. Seizing upon this understanding of sanctification, Pentecostals have gone on to call it the "baptism of the Holy Spirit," which is evidenced by the experience of speaking in tongues.

In 1910 a Pentecostal minister by the name of William H. Durham challenged this teaching, proposing a gradual process of sanctification in which the sanctifying work of Christ was "appropriated" over one's life. Today Pentecostals are lined up behind both positions.

### *The Trinity*

In the decade following Azusa Street a number of Pentecostals began to question the proper formula for baptism. While Jesus had commanded baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, these individuals noted that the baptisms in the book of Acts were in the name of Jesus only. With this understanding some began to baptize and rebaptize in Jesus' name only. But what began as a baptismal formula soon led to a denial of the Trinity. Denominations, such as the Assemblies of God, rejected the "Oneness Pentecostals," who as early as 1915 began forming their own denominations. Two of the largest are the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World and the United

Pentecostal Church. The estimated range is from 1.5 to 5 million Oneness Pentecostals worldwide.

### *Practices*

Pentecostals are defined more by what they do than what they believe (of course their practices spring from their beliefs). Pentecostals believe in exorcism, speaking in tongues, faith healing, and a few (about 2500) in snake handling, and in general they seek supernatural experiences.

### *Women Preachers*

Pentecostalism, from day one, has not shied away from welcoming women preachers and leaders in churches and denominations. The Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.) began ordaining women in 1909 and by 1913 twelve percent of its ministers were women. The Assemblies of God first ordained women in 1914, and at one point a quarter of their ministers were women. Some of the best known have been Aimee Semple McPherson (1890-1944); Maria Beulah Woodworth-Ettor (1844-1924); and Kathryn Kuhlman.

### Who Are The Pentecostals?

*Some of the best known Pentecostal Denominations are:*

- ◆ Church of God in Christ
- ◆ International Church of the Foursquare Gospel
- ◆ Church of God (Tenn.)
- ◆ Church of God of Prophecy
- ◆ Pentecostal Holiness Church
- ◆ Fire-Baptized Holiness Church
- ◆ Pentecostal Free-Will Baptist Church
- ◆ The Assemblies of God
- ◆ The United Pentecostal Church

Although there are many resources from which to learn about Pentecostalism, I found issue no. 58 of *Christian History* magazine a simple and reliable help. I used it liberally in my research for this paper. In addition, you might check out Christian History's Web site (<http://www.christianhistory.net>), which has a link to the Azusa Street Web site providing copies of the original documents and newspaper clippings from the days of the revival.

**Books of value (although we may not agree with all they contain) in the study of various aspects of the Charismatic movement:**

*The Modern Tongues Movement*  
by Robert Gromacki

*The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues*  
by J. Kildahl

*Tongues in Biblical Perspective*  
by Charles Smith

*The Corinthian Catastrophe*  
by George Gardiner

*The Charismatics*  
by John MacArthur

*Charismatic Chaos*  
by John MacArthur

*Christianity in Crisis*  
by Hank Hanegraaff

*Counterfeit Revival*  
by Hank Hanegraaff

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**Southern View Chapel**  
3253 S. Fourth Street  
Springfield, IL 62703  
(217)529-1876  
**fax:** (217)529-1891  
**e-mail:** SVCHAPEL@AOL.COM  
**Web site:**  
[http://www.cnsnet.net/  
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