

Decolonial Discourse on the Origins of the 20th Century American Pentecostal Movement

Mookgo Solomon Kgatle

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9556-6597>

University of South Africa

kgatles@yahoo.com

Abstract

Many church historians have done research on the foundation of the 20th century American Pentecostal Movement. However, these church historians have not used a decolonial discourse. This article is a decolonial discourse on the origins of the 20th century American Pentecostal Movement. The article assesses four prospects regarding the originator of the movement in order to conclude who can be observed as the true originator of the movement. The first likelihood discards a human contribution and only admits God or the supernatural as founder of the movement. The second likelihood is that the founder of the movement is Charles Parham. The third likelihood is that both Charles Parham and William Seymour are the originators of the movement, in what is termed an interracial theory. Finally, there is also the likelihood that the founder was an African-American, namely William Seymour. After the discussion of all four possibilities, this article concludes that William Seymour is the true originator of the 20th century American Pentecostal Movement. The purpose of the article is to demonstrate through a decolonial discourse the African-American origins of the 20th century American Pentecostal Movement and the implications thereof.

Keywords: African-American; decolonial discourse; supernatural theory; interracial theory; William Seymour; Charles Parham; 20th century; American Pentecostal Movement

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Introduction

While there are so many contemporary topics on the study of Pentecostalism, the researcher found it important to look at the roots of Pentecostalism, especially through a decolonial discourse. One appreciates the works done by church historians and Pentecostal theologians before, but the researcher felt that the roots of Pentecostalism needed to be revisited from a decolonial perspective. A review of the literature on the Pentecostal Holiness Movement done by Lovett (1972, 36) reveals several divergent points of view concerning its origin 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; it was interracial in its founding with an emphasis on Parham and the Topeka Bible School events of 1901 and William 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 William Seymour in Los Angeles in 1906. The fourth strand suggests that Pentecostalism came suddenly from heaven to a converted livery stable in the ghetto and the Holy Spirit exclusively initiated the movement. (Lovett 1972, 36)

The possibilities suggested by Lovett become the focal point in this article:

- The possibility that there is no link of the emergence of American Pentecostalism to any specific place or person but the sovereign God.
- Charles F Parham and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Topeka, Kansas in January 1901.
- The interracial origin that recognises both Charles F Parham and William Seymour as founders.
- William J. Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival that took place in Los Angeles, California between April 1906 and the end of 1909.

Thus, this article is an objective decolonial discourse that studies the above-mentioned possibilities. Each possibility will be discussed and scientific conclusions will be made based on available and recent literature on this subject. The article contributes to church history, especially in the area of Pentecostal history, as it traces the history of the Pentecostal Movement. While there is a need to trace a Pentecostal history, one must acknowledge that this study is limited to American Pentecostalism. The researcher cannot attempt in this paper to cover the entire spectrum of the complete Pentecostal history. As a point of departure, the paper will succinctly discuss the meaning of a decolonial discourse in general and apply it to the origins of the Pentecostal Movement. The paper will also discuss American Pentecostalism in context. The possibilities for the origins of the 20th century American Pentecostal Movement shall be discussed in

detail and conclusions will be presented thereafter. The decolonial discourse on the origins of the 20th century American Pentecostal Movement has certain implications on the study of church history, which will be discussed later in the article.

The 20th Century American Pentecostalism in Context

The 20th century American Pentecostal Movement arose out of a multifaceted entanglement of numerous religious movements and expressions within the nineteenth century. Pentecostalism occupied a small space within the broader context of world history. With the abolition of slavery and the rise of new religious movements that would prove both to empower and to constrict, the growth of industrialisation, and the rise of missionary movements, colonialism, racial hierarchies, and women's quest for equality, Pentecostalism appeared on the scene at an interesting juncture in the history of the world (Butler 2005, 345). Then came the American Civil War to disrupt things as the First World War was later to hinder the flow of the Pentecostal Movement. The holiness movements and revivals quietened down, but in the last 20 years of the 19th century there was an increasing turn to the theology of the Holy Spirit and the word "power" has become much more commonly used. It would all lead the way to the Pentecostal understanding of the Holy Spirit (Harper 2008, 106).

The 20th century American Pentecostal Movement became a form of Christianity that emphasises the work of the Holy Spirit and the direct experience of the presence of God by the believer. This emphasis has carried on to different parts of the world like Africa, Asia and others. Pentecostals believe that faith must be powerfully experiential, and not something found merely through ritual or thinking. Pentecostalism is energetic and dynamic to an extent that even the Pentecostal hermeneutic is an experiential one. What is quite distinct about a Pentecostal Movement is a belief in the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues. Many Pentecostals believe that once baptised in the Holy Spirit, a believer should immediately speak in tongues, otherwise it would mean that one is not baptised in the Holy Spirit. What is now known as the doctrine of initial evidence has become the trademark of Pentecostalism in America and beyond.

Since the Azusa Street Revival, Pentecostalism has grown beyond America. Three main streams can be distinguished, namely the classical Pentecostal denominations (including their mission churches); the charismatic movements within all traditional churches (including their mission churches); and a new type of emerging Christian church known as "Indigenous Non-White Churches" or African Initiated Churches. The number of Pentecostals steadily increased throughout the world during the twentieth century until, by 1993, they had become the largest family of Protestants in the world. Total membership of all three streams was over one hundred million in 1980 (Hollenweger 1986, 203). In 2000, there were an estimated 560 million Pentecostals in the world. This means that the Pentecostal Movement is by far the largest and most important religious movement of the twentieth century. This further means that in the not too distant future

there will be more Christians belonging to this type of Christianity than to the Anglican community. They will number almost as many as all other Protestants together.

Decolonial Discourse as a Method and Theoretical Framework

The decolonial discourse, according to Ramantswana (2016a, 184), “places the agenda of the damned at the centre not as a means of attaining White privilege, but as a means of realising the fullness of humanity by undoing the structures of oppression and domination, thereby dethroning whiteness.” Ramantswana continues to say that “the decolonial preference in this regard sets out to confront the power structures of coloniality—racial, gender, sexual, economic, geographical, political, and epistemological hierarchies set up by Euro-Western colonialism and modernity” (Ramantswana 2016b, 413). A decolonial discourse, according to Kgatle (2018, 2), “is more of a pro-black and pro-African project than an anti-West project. In other words, it is not about hating the West but loving Africa the more. It is a project of both embracing and nourishing African values and culture.”

Therefore, a decolonial discourse on the origin of the 20th century American Pentecostal Movement seeks to embrace blackness and African-ness when it comes to Pentecostalism. It is a desire to lift those who are considered to be in the margins, while they actually have contributed substantially to Pentecostalism. Decolonial discourse has a goal and objectives to uplift the black contribution in the movement. The decolonial discourse has two implications in this paper, which will be discussed later. It affords us an opportunity to look at the contribution of an African spirituality in Pentecostalism in particular and world Christianity in general. The other important implication is on the discipline of church history. The question that this article seeks to answer is: How is church history implicated by a decolonial discourse? As a theoretical framework, decolonial discourse will assist in investigating the true and proper originator of the 20th century American Pentecostal Movement.

Four Prospects for the Originator of the Movement

The Supernatural Theory

A supernaturally originated movement suggests that the Godhead is the founder. The view dismisses other possibilities and probabilities of a human leader or a founder. This theory, according to Gee (1949, 3), suggests that “although humans made a valuable contribution they cannot make such a claim.” The supernatural origin does not only dismiss the human element, but also the place or location of origin. God, after all, can move from one place to another and cannot be limited to one particular place. McClung (1986, 159) reiterates that “the Pentecostal explosion at the advent of the twentieth century was not an isolated event.” McClung continues that “although Azusa Street seemed to be a Manuscript [anonymised] focal point, especially from 1906 to 1908, the centre for the movement is not in any one place” (McClung 1986, 160).

Moreover, Lapoorta (1996) opines that “as the Pentecostal Movement spread throughout the United States, the importance of both Azusa Street and Los Angeles decreased. Therefore, the originator of the worldwide Pentecostal Movement is the Holy Spirit Himself as He was already at work in the first-century church. The fallible cannot be linked to such a great movement from God in human history.” This view is most probably because Parham “fell into an awful sin” and the civil authorities in Texas indicted him. Seymour’s African-ness, on the one hand, was also the reason for these proponents making acrobatic jumps across history ending up with a supernatural origin for which no human receives any credit.

The second point, as raised by Lapoorta, that American Pentecostalism spread to other places and therefore no particular place can claim its origins, is equally problematic. It speaks to the growth of American Pentecostalism post its beginning. It does not address the question raised in this article, that is, the origin of American Pentecostalism. Although it is true that American Pentecostalism spread to other areas, it does not dismiss the original place of American Pentecostalism. It is necessary, therefore, to place an emphasis on the place or area where Pentecostalism began.

The supernatural theory, as supported by Gee and McClung, is problematic. It turns into a conclusion that God originated everything else because the natural cannot claim the supernatural. The support for this view is because the natural is both fallible and vulnerable. In contrast, God uses humankind in all its weakness and sin to do great things. The dismissal of William Seymour is because of his African background or Charles Parham because of his sins. This article does not support the supernatural view because from the beginning God chose to work with humankind to change humankind. In a similar way as in the early church, God used Peter and the other apostles to usher many to a Pentecostal experience. Although they cannot claim originality, they did make a valuable contribution that deserves recognition.

Charles Parham

The knowledge of Charles Fox Parham is his acquaintance with the Holiness Movement of John Wesley and the message of “divine healing” propagated by John Alexander Dowie. According to Lapoorta: “He is also known for pioneering a Bible school where he taught that speaking in tongues is the initial evidence that one has been baptised in the Holy Spirit.” Lapoorta (1996, 23) says:

Parham was born on June 4, 1873, in Muscatine, Iowa. He was associated with the Congregational Church as a lay preacher. Parham joined the Methodists, before joining the fast growing Holiness Movement. His training as a minister was at South-Western Methodist Episcopal College at Winfield, Kansas. The remembrance of Parham was as the founder of the Topeka Bible School and the Divine Healing Home in Kansas. The healing ministry of Dowie influenced him. In addition, he personally experienced divine healing when he received healing from his physical disability.

Parham, following a summer tour of holiness-oriented groups in the eastern United States, became convinced that tongues were the biblical “sign” of Spirit baptism. Menzies (1990, 29) states:

He opened an informal Bible school, and during the fall months of 1900 urged students to search the scriptures for biblical teaching regarding this experience. On January 1, 1901, one of his students, Agnes Ozman, received a blessing. Within days, Parham, along with many of the students, reported the same experience. By 1906 Parham, with more than eight thousand followers, was the principal leader of the Pentecostal Movement in the Midwest.

Parham, according to Cerillo (1993, 77), “first formulated the new religion’s defining theological tenet.” He preached tongues as the initial evidence of Holy Spirit baptism. It was also because he first preached a Pentecostal full gospel message, which included the themes of conversion, sanctification, Holy Spirit baptism, divine healing from all sickness and the premillennial rapture of the saints. These themes appealed to the social and spiritual needs of the intellectually alienated, socially dislocated, physically and psychologically hurting, politically powerless and economically struggling poor and working-class people.

Burger and Nel (2008, 18) concur that Parham was the first person to formulate the basic Pentecostal dogma and that he played an important part in spreading the message, but argue that it would not be fair to call him the father of the 20th century American Pentecostal Movement. Burger and Nel (2008) continue to say that it is more accurate to credit it to his students because they were the ones who had studied the Bible and prayed for the fulfilment of the promise of Pentecost. William Seymour is one of those students who carried the message of Pentecostalism to Azusa Street. In other words, Parham is more of a catalyst of the 20th century American Pentecostal Movement as he laid a theological foundation that prepared the beginning of the movement. This view recognises Parham more as the trigger to Pentecostalism, not necessarily the one who began it. It is also important to note that most of what Parham believed and practised was more of a personal experience. There is no evidence of more people receiving a Pentecostal experience other than his students at Topeka. Hence, his contribution is more of a catalytic contribution that opened a way for American Pentecostalism to take place.

However, scholars such as Robbins (2004, 117) argue that “credit for the foundation of Pentecostal Movement is given to Parham because Pentecostalism was born from the ferment of holiness efforts to work out a stable form of frankly supernatural and experientially robust Christianity around the notion of the second blessing of the Spirit. Its primary innovation was to see speaking in tongues as the necessary ‘initial physical evidence’ of Spirit baptism.” Another reason cited by Letson (2007, 104) is that “Charles Parham appears to have been the channel through which all emerging ideas of the twentieth century flowed. He took part in camp meetings with their emphasis on

holiness and entire sanctification. In this sense, his main emphasis throughout the Holiness Movement was healing. He visited centres of healing established by John Alexander Dowie and A.B Simpson. After his tour ended, Parham returned to his Bible school in Topeka, Kansas with renewed zeal.”

Furthermore, Parham is one of the most enigmatic yet important figures in early Pentecostalism. According to Richie (2007, 138), Parham unabashedly advocated for “eschatological inclusivism.” For Parham, commitment to the absolute uniqueness and necessity of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour complemented openness to a possibility of divine reality and redemption in extra-Christian religions consummated in the eschatology by Christ. In conclusion, Friesen (2009, 42) says: “Parham’s preaching was not only grounded on the message of the Holiness Movement; the message of holiness and sanctification but also the message of eschatology. Parham believed that baptism in the Holy Spirit accomplished two things in the life of a Christian: it sealed the bride of Christ and bestowed gifts.”

The experience of his students in January 1901 led him to narrow his understanding of Spirit baptism. He still maintained that it sealed one as a member of the bride of Christ that is going to heaven before the end-time tribulation. However, he then believed that a genuine experience of Spirit baptism would give the recipient one particular gift: the gift of tongues. This gift gave one the power to witness at home and in foreign lands in an unknown, unlearned language. The support for Charles Parham as founder of the 20th century American Pentecostal Movement concerns the following: he participated in the camp meetings of the Holiness Movement built on holiness and sanctification that later became features of a Pentecostal Movement. Another highlight was his influence on the message of divine healing, and the fact that he experienced divine healing himself—also one of the features of the Pentecostal Movement. He believed that speaking in tongues is a biblical sign that one has been baptised in the Holy Spirit, and called it the second blessing. One of his students, Agnes Ozman, received the second blessing of speaking in tongues.

However, he is discredited for failing to unite people of all races. African American students such as William Seymour experienced discrimination in the Charles Parham Bible School. The revival of “second blessing” in Topeka, Kansas, did not spread to other regions of the world the same way that the Azusa Street Revival did in Los Angeles. Pentecost, as it happened in Acts 2, united people of all race, colour and ethnicity. Pentecost in the early church also spread to other regions of the world. For these reasons, Charles Parham cannot be seen as the founder of the modern-day worldwide Pentecostal Movement. This position, upheld in this article, however, does not discredit Charles Parham’s valuable contribution to the modern-day and worldwide Pentecostal Movement. If it had not been for his teaching on the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the gift of speaking in tongues, Pentecostalism was not going to be possible. Thus, he is more of a forerunner, a mentor or teacher of the Pentecostal Movement. This point is on the basis that although Parham taught the essence of Pentecostalism, it did

not start in his time but much later. Secondly, most of what Parham taught was more of a personal experience than the worldwide experience that spread to other areas.

Interracial Theory

The interracial theory recognises both Charles Parham, a white man, and William Seymour, an African American; it is the recognition of what happened in Topeka, Kansas's second blessing and what happened in the Azusa Street Revival. It is the recognition of both the teacher and the student because William Seymour was one of the students from Charles Parham's Bible School in Topeka.

Leadership in the Pentecostal Movement moved from one person to another. When Pentecostalism appeared in 1901, a white man, Charles F Parham, a former Methodist from Topeka, Kansas, led it. Parham insisted on speaking in tongues as the "initial evidence" of baptism in the Holy Spirit. This position on tongues became a distinguishing hallmark of the movement. Parham's leadership in the movement waned after 1907, precisely at a time when African Pentecostalism came to leadership under Seymour at Azusa Street (see Synan 1975, 43). The modern Pentecostal Movement of participation in the Spirit, according to Land (1992, 19), "precipitated the confluence of African American and Wesleyan spiritualities within the broader context of North American revivalism. In a way, both movements were also subsets of the broader North American revivalist context. Such a confluence and interracial theory of the origin of the Pentecostal Movement existed long before Charles Parham and William Seymour."

William J. Seymour, the African-American leader at Azusa Street, built on foundations laid by his teacher and patron, Charles F Parham. He had come to regard the ability of his students to speak in tongues as the new acts of the Holy Spirit in the last days. There, waiting for the endowment of power in one of the turrets of a sometime mansion known as Stone's Folly, Parham believed they had seen re-enacted events recorded in Acts 2. At Azusa Street in the years 1906 to 1908, amidst phenomena reminiscent of the Upper Room, Seymour and his disciples believed that they too experienced Pentecost (Jones 1999, 167). Pentecostalism entered the African community from two sources. One was the so-called Holiness Movement or the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification under the leadership of Charles Parham. The other one was the Azusa Street Revival that took place under the leadership of an African American preacher named William Seymour in Los Angeles between 1906 and 1908 (Russel 2004, 4).

While Parham communicated his own eagerness for the restoration of apostolic experience to his adherents on the one hand, Seymour carried the word to Los Angeles that ushered many to a Pentecostal experience on the other. In the tumultuous world of American radical evangelicalism in Los Angeles, as elsewhere, competing claims about spiritual power fuelled intense debate. Seymour offered verifiable "Bible evidence" for his views. He set his message of an encounter with the Holy Spirit in the context of an end-times restoration of the Apostolic Faith (see Blumhofer 2006, 59). The arguments

that support this view also agree on one thing. Two main events contributed to the origin of the Pentecostal Movement; one at Topeka, Kansas and the other at Azusa Street. Furthermore, these events built upon each other. It is an agreement that the Topeka, Kansas second blessing experience paved the way for the Azusa Street Revival that spread worldwide. This theory recognises both Charles Parham and William Seymour as founders.

The interracial theory equally has its loopholes, just like the supernatural origin view. Lovett (1972, 41) says: “It fails to make a clear distinction between the early interracial stages of the movement and the actual founding. It also fails to see that Parham’s efforts were a continuation of sporadic experience. Seymour’s Azusa Street Revival because of its nature and thrust was the torrential downpour that created a major worldwide flood.” The dismissal of interracial theory as the probable origin and foundation of the Pentecostal Movement is because it fails to separate the early development of the Pentecostal Movement and the origin of the Pentecostal Movement. It means that between the events of the Topeka, Kansas second blessing and the events of the Azusa Street Revival, one is an early development and the other is the founding event. Most scholars only recognise Seymour as a mere African American student of Parham. That view undermines the valuable contribution of Seymour because he was African and student of Parham.

William Seymour

This article has thus far discussed the possibility of a supernatural founder without a human leader, the possibility of Charles Parham as a founder, and the possibility that both Charles Parham and William Seymour are together founders of the Pentecostal Movement. The finding is that none of the above could be regarded as founder of the Pentecostal Movement. The last possibility under discussion is the argument that supports William Seymour, an African American, as the true founder of this movement. Support for this view is based on the events that occurred at the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles.

William Joseph Seymour was born on May 2, 1870, in Centerville, Louisiana. His parents were released slaves who used to work on the cotton plantations in the south of the United States. The Christian background of Seymour is in a Baptist church, but when he took up a job as waiter in Indianapolis, Indiana, he became a member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. When he moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, he joined the Evening Light Saints Church, which was in the holiness fold. Again, when he moved to Houston, Texas, in pursuit of his family, he became associated with an African Holiness Church that had a woman, Lucy Farrow, as pastor.

Seymour became a student at Parham’s Bible school in Houston. He received the teaching of the initial evidence doctrine at this school by Parham. Although he did not experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit in Houston, he firmly believed that it was a

necessity for every believer and those who spoke in tongues evidenced outward manifestation thereof (see Lapoorta 1996, 29). The twentieth century Pentecostal Movement in America originated from the womb of African religious experience. It was through Azusa Street in Los Angeles in 1906 to the world that the Pentecostal Movement ushered in the era of the Holy Spirit (Harper 2008, 108; Lovett 1972, 42).

Seymour, an African Holiness preacher and a student of Parham (a white man) in Houston, carried the new message to Los Angeles and became one of the key leaders in the Pentecostal revival, which occurred in a former African Methodist Episcopal Church in Azusa Street (McGee 1988, 58). Seymour's religious experiences represent a consistent merging of African and new-world components that persisted in precisely those churches that are closest to the African masses. The central place of such experiences and encounters is Azusa Street in Los Angeles (Poewe 1988, 141).

He assured followers that if they prayed for weeks with sufficient earnestness, God was ready to send a new Pentecost. As the miraculous event described in Acts, this latter-day outpouring of the Spirit was demonstrated with tongues of flame, healing, speaking in tongues, and other signs and wonders (Cox 1995). At Azusa, Africans, whites, Hispanics, and Europeans met and worshiped together. They crossed formerly impossible cultural lines. Although the success of the revival was short-lived, we still enjoy its fruits. Today, Azusa remains a common word within God's household (Liardon 1996).

The choice between Parham and Seymour depends on consideration of the essence of Pentecostalism. If the qualification of Pentecostalism is by a religious experience, then one might consider Parham as its founder. Again, if it is the oral missionary movement, with spiritual power to overcome racism and chauvinism, then there is only one candidate left. That candidate is Seymour, who of course does not exclude speaking in tongues but gives it its rightful place in spiritual life (Hollenweger 1999, 33). Seymour endorsed tongues to be a sure sign of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. He also found that speaking in tongues alone was an insufficient sign. Seymour discovered that some white people could speak in tongues and continue to treat people of colour as inferior to them (De Kock 2000, 102).

While speaking in tongues could serve as evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit, even as initial evidence, it was not absolute evidence. Seymour believed that tongues accompanied by the dissolution of racial barriers were the indisputable sign of the Holy Spirit. In the years between 1906 and 1909, the Azusa Street Mission became the focus of attention of thousands of people around the world. According to Letson (2007, 114), "stories of what was happening were carried in both secular and Christian press and much of it not very complimentary. Therefore, if anyone deserves the right of the recognition as the founder of modern-day Pentecostalism it must be Seymour. His vision, leadership, teaching and drive kept the movement on track."

Seymour summed up the evangelistic and missionary focus and impact of his work during the first decade of its existence. He viewed the purpose of the mission, indeed, of the “Apostolic Faith” people as a whole, as evangelisation of the entire world. During that decade (1906–1915), Seymour had witnessed the teachings of the “Apostolic Faith,” including the call to personal repentance and faith, the pursuit of personal and corporate holiness, and the acceptance of power for ministry through the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Robeck 2007, 75).

Seymour preached a message which highlighted the empowerment of Spirit baptism as the necessary force by which a new type of community could be formed, where race, gender and ethnicity would not be categories of division (Klaus 2007, 39). This multicultural perspective can be summarised as focusing on a new community of justice and equity. The anticipation and participation in this new community as a full member, certainly is a liberating experience by any definition. In addition, Afro-Pentecostal rituals permit and promote participation with varieties of experiences, perceptions, movements, styles, roles, gifts and talents. There is something for anyone and everyone to do (Leatherman 2008, 909). The hesitant and insecure are most encouraged when they take the risk to participate. Invitation to personal action, whether building a habitat for a humanity house or Afro-Pentecostal worship, encourages participation.

The story of a worldwide Pentecostal Movement is not complete without mentioning the Holy Spirit explosion at Azusa Street in Los Angeles, California, in 1906. The name of Seymour, an unlettered African minister with vision in only one eye, is central to the historic events of Azusa Street (Khathide 2010). Seymour stood virtually alone in his efforts to provide a theological framework that would account for the move of the Spirit (Coulter 2012, 298). Support for the view of Seymour as the founder of Pentecostalism is because of the following reasons:

- For the first time, this manifestation was unique and superior to all other physical motor phenomena.
- For the first time, the offering and seeking of speaking in tongues was for its own value, and given theological importance as a special sign and gift from God.
- Seymour taught that tongues were the first evidence, the inevitable accompaniment, of possession by the Holy Ghost.
- For the first time generally, a doctrinal framework called the baptism or filling of the Holy Ghost was inseparable to tongues.
- All other tongue-speaking occurrences were short-ended, limited to sporadic manifestations.
- Other events of the phenomenon were local in scope and isolated in circumstances of influence.

- Other ministers, under whose ministries tongue speaking had occurred, were often as eccentrics, quacks, or moral indigents, thereby discrediting the phenomenon itself.
- This was possibly the first time tongue-speaking was by foreigners or immigrants.
- Key leaders and founders of every major United States Pentecostal denomination that have developed, attended the Seymour meetings and received the experience at his hands.
- Historiographers of every major United States Pentecostal group have acknowledged the Los Angeles revival as the birthplace of the entire movement known as Pentecostalism.
- Without exception, all recognise Seymour as the acknowledged leader and founder of the Los Angeles revival (Tinney 1976, 34).

The African-American Origins

The first view is the supernatural one that disregards a human element and marginalises both Parham and William Seymour. Although it has the full recognition of the Godhead in the Pentecostal Movement, it removes the human element in favour of the divine. On the one hand, the dismissal of Parham is because of his sinful life and lack of character. On the other, the marginalisation of Seymour is because of the colour of his skin and his lack of education. Furthermore, this view dismisses the place of origin, citing that there is no parallelism between God as the originator of Pentecostalism and one single environment. The researcher has argued against this point because God uses men in their fallible state to reach other men. Equally so, God chooses and uses particular places to reach the entire world.

The second view recognises Charles Parham as the founder, and merely views William Seymour as a student and therefore a subordinate of Parham. William Seymour is too “African” to have a priority over Charles Parham. Scholars, who argue for the priority of Charles F. Parham, a white man, do so to establish his priority over William J. Seymour, an African American. The contribution of Parham, according to this article, is more of a catalyst or the theological foundation that prepared for the real Pentecostal experience which happened in Azusa Street. The dismissal of William Seymour as founder cannot be on the colour of his skin.

The third view that supports an interracial theory which recognises both William Seymour and Charles Parham, also overshadows the Azusa Street Revival by the Topeka, Kansas second blessing. It also fails to separate the early developments from the actual founding of the Pentecostal Movement. This is a failure to separate the theological or doctrinal foundation of the Pentecostal Movement from the actual

Pentecostal experience. Although there is consensus that Seymour built on the foundations of Parham, it does not make him (Parham) the founder.

The founder of the modern-day worldwide Pentecostal Movement is not a supernatural being in supernatural theory. Charles Parham did not found it, as other scholars suggest. This article does not support the interracial theory, according to which both Parham and Seymour founded the Pentecostal Movement. The position taken in this article is that William Seymour, an African American, is the true founder of the Pentecostal Movement. This suggests that the origins of the American Pentecostalism are African.

The acceptance of African-American origins of American Pentecostalism are based on the following scientific findings: In Azusa Street, there was the actual experience of Pentecostalism rather than the theological foundation in Topeka. William Seymour abolished the colour line that divided the races of the world because in the Azusa Street Revival, Africans, whites, Hispanics and Europeans worshiped together. In addition, he broke the gender line that divided men and women because in Azusa Street, women were offered an equal opportunity to minister in the same way that their men counterparts did. William Seymour was a man of character and he influenced other key leaders of Pentecostal denominations and churches. In addition, the Pentecostal experience at Azusa Street was neither instant nor sporadic. It continued for a long time and made an impact across the globe, at least for the next three and a half years.

Moreover, Pentecostalism has been growing up until today and has spread to other areas in the world. It has moved from just being an event at Azusa Street to becoming a worldwide phenomenon. In Africa, for example, Pentecostalism has reached different communities whereby people are coming together to worship in one place. The Azusa Street Revival has influenced the foundation of a Pentecostal Church in South Africa, Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM). According to Kgatle (2016, 321), “the link between AFM and Azusa Street Revival came through the American Missionaries, John G Lake and Thomas Hezmalhach, who prior to their trip to South Africa had contact with William Seymour of the Azusa Street Revival, Los Angeles.” Kgatle continues to say that the main impact of Azusa Street Revival in the early developments of the AFM of South Africa was its ability to unite people beyond their differences of race, gender, age, colour and Pentecostal experiences (Kgatle 2016, 321; Kgatle 2017, 1).

Decolonial Discourse Implications

A decolonial discourse on the origins of the 20th century American Pentecostal Movement has two implications on church history. One, it demonstrates the great contribution made by Seymour as an African-American by way of his inherited African spirituality. In other words, Seymour gave the movement an African dynamism that his mentors and teachers, like Charles Parham, could not give to the movement. Second, it demonstrates that the same African spirituality that Seymour contributed is a key player in world Christianity because African Pentecostalism is succeeding in reaching millions

of people. This is the reason why Christianity is growing in the global south. It shows us why immigrant churches that exist in the global north are growing at a higher speed than mainline churches. Thus, it has become clearer that the movement that began in the 20th century has had a huge impact on the 21st century, especially in the context of African Pentecostalism. This means that the contribution of Pentecostalism in world Christianity cannot be ignored either by practitioners of religion or theologians.

Conclusion

This article discussed the origins of the 20th century American Pentecostal Movements. The article assessed four possibilities for the founder of the 20th century American Pentecostal Movement, in order to arrive at the true founder of the movement. The first possibility rejects a human contribution and only acknowledges God or the supernatural as founder of the movement. The second possibility is that Charles Parham founded the movement. The third possibility is that both Charles Parham and William Seymour are the founders of the 20th century American Pentecostal Movement, in what is termed an interracial theory. Finally, there is also a possibility that the founder was an African American-William Seymour. After consideration of all four possibilities, therefore, this article contends that William Seymour is the true founder of the 20th century American Pentecostal Movement. Thus, decolonial discourse in this article has assisted in arriving at the acceptance of Seymour and his African spirituality as the true founder of Pentecostalism. The discourse has also assisted in demonstrating that African spirituality is the key role player in the propagation of Pentecostalism throughout the world.¹

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1 This article flows from Kgatlhe 2015, PhD thesis titled "Servant Leadership in Mark 10:35–45 applied to African Pentecostal Christianity." University of Pretoria.

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