

EDITORIAL

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The questions of origins has been a hotly debated one in Pentecostal studies over the past few years, ever since Walter Hollenweger and his students in Birmingham, particularly William Faupel, Douglas Nelson and Iain MacRobert, challenged the accepted status quo among white North American Pentecostal historians. Until that time historians of Pentecostalism were almost unanimous that it had begun in Topeka, Kansas in January 1901 under a former Methodist preacher, Charles Fox Parham. Promoting this view was particularly the study of Parham's biographer James Goff, but it also was a view maintained in earlier popular Pentecostal histories. Church of God (Cleveland) historians, in particular Charles Conn, had plumbed for an earlier date, 1896, in the North Carolina Appalachians, where this denomination has its roots. Hollenweger, most recently in his *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide*, argued that the question of origins was a theological one but limited his choice to one between Parham and the African American leader of the Azusa Street revival, William Joseph Seymour: "Where does one see the decisive contribution of Pentecost: in the religious experience of speaking in tongues as seen by Parham, or in the reconciling Pentecostal experience of Pentecost as seen by Seymour ... ?"¹

The debate has moved on since this time, and most scholars today accept the primacy of Seymour and the Azusa Street Mission in the genesis of American Pentecostalism, especially since Cecil M. Robeck's seminal 2006 work on the subject.² Robeck indeed sees Azusa Street as

1. Walter Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), p. 23.

2. Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006).

the birthplace of global Pentecostalism. But there have been other voices, including mine, that have called for a more nuanced approach to global Pentecostalism, without denying the significance of Azusa Street and American Pentecostalism. This editor has been “credited” in the past decade with promoting a “multiple origins” theory, again for ideological reasons, and this is probably best expressed in his 2013 book *To the Ends of the Earth*.³

Shameless self-promotion aside, this issue of *PentecoStudies* begins with two fine articles on the origins debate. The first, by Canadian sociologist Adam Stewart, surveys the literature and argues for a “polygenesis” on the basis of historical narratives about the revivals in the Hebden Mission in Toronto, Canada, and the Mukti Mission near Pune in India, both revivals contemporaneous with the Azusa Street revival. Stewart argues that a correct understanding of Pentecostal origins must take into account that the revival characteristics exhibited in Azusa Street were not unique, but in a continuous relationship with other evangelical revival movements of the early twentieth century (and even earlier). The arguments about whether or not there were historical links between these movements should not detract from the historical continuities that go back into the nineteenth century and of course, can be traced back much earlier. What eventually emerged as Pentecostalism (only in the second decade of the twentieth century) had transnational antecedents that did not usually self-identify as “Pentecostal”. Stewart concludes by considering some of the reasons why what Joe Creech called “the myth of Azusa Street” has played such a central role in American Pentecostal historiography.

Yan Suarsana from the University of Heidelberg in Germany brings a different perspective to this debate by a postcolonial discourse analysis of the events surrounding the Mukti Mission and its historiography. He critiques the view that the Mukti revival was a “Pentecostal” revival, and argues that the popular notion that these early twentieth-century revivals, including the Azusa Street revival, were initiating something brand new, is not supported by historical facts from nineteenth century holiness movements. When the term “Pentecostalism” is used it simply signifies a difference from other groups and renders a precise definition impossible. In relation to the events of Mukti, Suarsana deconstructs the various historical interpretations that were given at the time and subsequently:

3. Allan Heaton Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

nationalist, “Higher Life”, and finally Pentecostal narratives, each of which has its own particular “inventions” that uses various selections of events, sifting them to achieve its own ends. Both the selection and interpretation of these events have undergone a long process, influenced by ideological and theological perspectives, the personal interests of the interpreters, and power relations tied up with colonial India at the time. He pleads for an alternative historiography, one that listens to the margins rather than the colonial discourse of Western missionaries, and thereby discovers that there is more than one plausible version of historical “reality”. This article will certainly help historians of Pentecostalism (whether of the Mukti or the Azusa Street version of origins) remember that their “version” of what happened is ultimately only their interpretation of it and can never be considered final. Historians also live in a context, and it is only by contextualizing our “inventions” of history that we can consider the past with the humility that admits we actually don’t “really” know.

The third article by Ben-Willie Kwaku Golo of the University of Ghana deals with environmental concerns with respect to neo-Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana. Africa is beset by several crises including erratic rainfall patterns, deforestation and pollution, aggravated by social realities like poverty and urbanization, and if not addressed create further harm to the wellbeing of human society. Writing from an insider, participant observer perspective, Golo maintains that neo-Charismatic Christians comprising such a significant public face of Ghanaian society, are unable to give appropriate attention to growing environmental challenges in Africa because of their preoccupation with “spiritual” salvation and with economic liberation and material prosperity as the fruit of their spirituality. He considers the views of Ghanaian neo-Pentecostals on the subject and urges them to take environmental concerns as part of their theology and mission to all creation, to align with God’s concerns more holistically and thus be reconciled with the earth.

Mark Cartledge of the University of Birmingham returns with an article on one of the most significant Charismatic networks in North America, the “Catch the Fire” network based in Toronto, Canada, with roots in the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship, formally Vineyard, whose revival movement was popularly called the “Toronto Blessing” in the 1990s. This has grown into a global network of churches called “Partners in Harvest”. Cartledge uses historical and sociological material and examines this movement and how it has been studied over the years. He gives a useful analysis of sociological theories used to discuss the Toronto phenomena, including social exchange theories, institutionalization, routinization/

revitalization of charisma, ritualization and globalization which all explain aspects of the “revivalist spirituality” that describe its main characteristic and its global impact through its transnational networks.

The final article of this issue is written by Andy Lord, University of Birmingham theology graduate, assistant editor of this journal, and Anglican rector in Nottinghamshire. Here the focus is theological and discusses Charismatic renewal as experienced through ecumenical engagement with other traditions, in this case the Roman Catholic Trappist monastic tradition of Thomas Merton. Lord brings the writings of Church of England Charismatic leader David Watson into dialogue with Merton’s to illustrate what he terms a method of “receptive ecumenism”. His central question is what Charismatic renewal represented by Watson learns from the Roman Catholic spirituality of Merton, with a particular focus on the nature of the triune God.

There is something for everyone in this issue, and I hope that the reader will find these five articles as informative and stimulating as I have done.