

THE PAST: Historical Roots of Racial Unity and Division in American Pentecostalism

by Cecil M. Robeck, Jr.

Introduction

In the Fall of 1970 I moved to Pasadena, California, to begin my Master of Divinity studies at Fuller Theological Seminary. Our orientation to seminary life took place at a hotel in the San Bernardino Mountains. I drew a young United Methodist from Alabama as a roommate.

As we introduced ourselves to one another, he asked me what my denominational affiliation was. I replied that I had been a member of the Assemblies of God all of my life. I didn't know quite how he would respond, because at that time, Pentecostals were still a rare novelty at Fuller. But I can tell you that I was not at all prepared for his response. "Oh," he said with a straight face, "then you are a racist!"

"A racist," I protested, "you don't even know me. I've *never* been a racist. I've been reared in a home in which my father has always preached the equality of persons regardless of color, where he has always argued for equal opportunity for everyone, and where the "N" word has never been tolerated. I'm no racist. In fact, some of my best friends in high school and college have been black. How is it that you can call me a racist?"

"Well," he said in a Southern drawl, "that's not been my experience of the Assemblies of God. I've found them to be narrow and bigoted where I come from. Their

churches are all white. Their record on civil rights has been terrible, and some of them even belong to the Klan.”

I was stunned! I didn't quite know how to respond. “Things must be a whole lot different in the South than they are out here in the West,” I noted with some embarrassment. “I've never heard of this before.”

I went away from that conversation a bit off balance, insisting that I was not a racist. Still, this incident caused me to think, and I began to wonder why, even in “progressive” California, I saw so few African-Americans in our congregations. In most churches, black faces weren't even present, and when they were, they were so few in number they could easily be overlooked. I wondered why I had never heard a sermon on racism, or for that matter on civil rights. I wondered, too, if I really was a racist but I didn't know it. For the next two years I was troubled deeply by these questions.

In 1972, I enrolled in a special course on Assemblies of God polity - a small course taught at Fuller by Dr. Russell P. Spittler. For my term project, I decided to look at the issue of race relations among a wide range of predominantly white Pentecostal denominations; holiness, finished-work, even oneness. And everywhere I looked I came to the same conclusion. Our record on racial issues has been almost unequivocally abysmal. Based upon what I knew about God and even what little I knew about the Azusa Street revival of 1906-1909, I didn't understand why differences in race or in skin color should make any difference in the way people were treated.

Since 1970, a number of historians and other scholars have reached similar conclusions regarding the issues of prejudice, discrimination, and racism among

Pentecostals.¹ Our history is clearly fraught with more examples of racial division than it is with examples of racial unity. Our task in this paper is to look quickly at some of our common history as well as at our unique histories to see what issues might emerge on the topic of race. I will attempt to do this by looking at two primary examples in American Pentecostalism. The first of these is the story of the Azusa Street mission and the second comes from the annals of the Assemblies of God. I will make reference to a number of other denominations as well, but in more limited ways.

It is my intent to build up the Church rather than merely to discredit it. We are not

¹David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *White Sects and Black Men in the Recent South*, Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1971; Vinson Synan, *The Holiness Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971, especially 165-184; Iain MacRobert, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988; Douglas J. Nelson, "For Such A Time As This: The Story of Bishop William J. Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival," unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, England, 1981; Howard N. Kenyon, "An Analysis of Ethical Issues in the History of the Assemblies of God," unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, 1988, pp. 42-176; Howard N. Kenyon "Black Ministers in the Assemblies of God," *Assemblies of God Heritage* 7:1 (Spring, 1987), 10-13, 20; Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecost Between Black and White: Five Case Studies on Pentecost and Politics*, Belfast, Ireland: Christian Journals Limited, 1974, 13-32; Hans A. Baer, "The Socio-Religious Development of the Church of God in Christ," in Hans A. Baer and Yvonne Jones, eds. *African Americans in the South: Issues of Race, Class, and Gender*, Southern Anthropological Society Proceedings, No. 25, Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1992, 111-122; Lawrence Neale Jones, Michael P. Hamilton, ed., "The Black Pentecostal," *The Charismatic Movement*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975, 145-158; Douglas J. Nelson, Paul Eelbert, ed., "The Black Face of Church Renewal: The Meaning of A Charismatic Explosion, 1901-1985," *Faces of Renewal: Studies in Honor of Stanley M. Horton*, Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1988, 172-191; Hans A. Baer and Merrill Singer, "Toward a Typology of Black Sectarianism As A Response to Racial Stratification," *Anthropological Quarterly* 54:1, January, 1981, 1-14; David Rees-Thomas, "The Holy Spirit is Color Blind," *CAM* 27:3 (January 1974), 3-5; Janenne I. Froats and Jennifer E. Kerslake, "Black and White: A Gray Area in the Assemblies of God," *Evangelical Lance* (February 21, 1992), 4-6; Howard Elinson, "The Implications of Pentecostal Religion for Intellectualism, Politics, and Race Relations," *The American Journal of Sociology* 70:4 (January, 1965), 403-415; Julia Kirk Blackwelder, "Southern White Fundamentalists and the Civil Rights Movement," *Phylon* 40:4, Dec. 1979, 335-341; Leonard Lovett, "Racism and Reconciliation," *Charisma* 18:9 (April, 1993), 14-15; James S. Tinney, "William J. Seymour; Father of Modern-Day Pentecostalism," *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 4:1 (1976) 34-44; Cecil M. Robeck, Jr.; Jan A. B. Jongereel, a.o. (Ed.) "The Social Concern of Early American Pentecostalism," in *Pentecost, Mission and Ecumenism: Essays on Intercultural Theology Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity* 75 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1992) 97-106; Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., "Taking Stock of Pentecostalism: The Personal Reflections of a Retiring Editor," *Pneuma The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 15:1 (Spring, 1993), 35-60, esp. 45-51.

really helped if we attempt to assess our predecessors by today's standards. Nor are we fair to assign them motives which we believe they had without clear evidence from their own pens or mouths. They need to be viewed as people of their time in order for us to understand what it was that led them to take the positions which they took. They need to be judged objectively on the basis of how they lived up to the standards which they claimed for themselves.

On the other hand, we must face an obvious fact. Our Pentecostal churches and organizations, white or black, have been and for the most part continue to be highly segregated along racial lines. In spite of our claims to be different from the world and even different from much of the rest of the Church because we are "Spirit-filled," one could not readily see the difference were they to attend our Sunday morning services. Our churches are, generally speaking, as racially divided as those of virtually every other Christian tradition or denomination. In most cases, our churches and institutions, Pentecostal churches and institutions, do not even reflect the interracial character of most other social institutions in America these days.²

In order to facilitate our discussion it is important for us to come to terms with a few definitions. The first of the terms to be defined is *prejudice*. Anyone of any color is capable of prejudice based upon racial or ethnic differences. Prejudice involves making a judgment before you have all the facts. It is a willingness to accept as fact something

²The work place has long been integrated even if African-American and other minority status ethnic-Americans have frequently been relegated to blue-collar jobs. Since the 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown vs. The Board of Education*, schools have been in the process of integrating. With the successes of the Civil Rights era came a broader range of racially diverse ethnic-American politicians in government. Sadly, the churches of the U.S. on the whole have not made similar strides.

which is unproven. Racial prejudice frequently thrives on the use of a stereotype or an unfavorable portrayal of a person of another color, race, or ethnic group. It is an *attitudinal* issue based upon inadequate or inaccurate presuppositions or biases. It detracts from the full humanity of others by not taking them seriously in all their God-given uniqueness as fellow creatures made in the image of God.

The second term in need of definition is *discrimination*. To discriminate is to discern a difference, to distinguish between two or more things. As such, the term does not necessarily convey a negative connotation. It can even be used in a positive way to distinguish between things of differing value. In 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22, Paul encourages discrimination concerning the things of the Spirit when he writes:

Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.³

But discrimination has a downside as well. Anyone of any color is capable of discrimination based upon racial or ethnic differences. Discrimination is *an unfavorable action* toward people simply because they are members of a particular racial or ethnic group.⁴ In Acts 6:1 we see the charge of discrimination in these negative terms. The Hellenists, that is, the Jews of the Diaspora complained against the Hebrews, that is, the Jews of Palestine, “because their

³All Scripture citations throughout this paper will be from the *New Revised Standard Version*.

⁴S. Dale McLemore, *Racial and Ethnic Relations in America* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Third Edition 1991, 1983, 1980), 134.

widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food.” The Hebrews seem to have had an air of superiority, that is a prejudice or attitude which translated into an act of discrimination against the Hellenists. The apostles, therefore, worked to develop a system in which all the widows were fairly treated.

Jesus, too, seems to have had discrimination in mind when in the Sermon on the Mount He spoke against murder, anger, the hurling of insults and the labeling of others as “fools.”⁵ For us to label another person as a “fool” is for us to engage in an act of discrimination. Once again it is an attempt to dehumanize another person, to engage in an act of discrimination which functions in an unfavorable manner against them. For centuries we have trained our soldiers to look at the enemy in depersonalized and dehumanized ways by labeling our enemies with epithets like “nips,” “japs,” “krauts,” “huns,” “gooks,” and so on. We do this so that our soldiers will have fewer psychological barriers to cross when it becomes necessary for them to kill the enemy. An enemy who is depersonalized, who is made to appear less than fully human, is easier to kill than is one who, like me, is made in the image of God.

In much the same way, the hurling of racial epithets like “nigger” or “honkie” or “wetback” or “greaser” or “kike” or “dago” or “wop” or “polack” or some other equally disparaging label is actually an attempt to rob some person or

⁵ “You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council and if you say ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire” Matthew 5:21-22.

some race of its full humanity. It runs, as Jesus noted, in the company of some very unsavory actions like manifestations of rage and even murder. These terms are discharged with the intention of causing damage to the persons against whom they are aimed.

Racism is the third and perhaps the most difficult term to define. On the one hand, victims of racism are convinced that they know it instantly when they see it. It is stark, and evil, and unmitigated. It is as profoundly flagrant as the powerful blows which crashed down upon Rodney King.

On the other hand, racism is frequently invisible to the perpetrator. It is subtle. It is insidious. It is camouflaged. It often comes in sophisticated and devious garb. I would even venture to say that it is one of the most deniable of all sins in which white Christians, including Pentecostals, participate. Again it is like the blows upon Rodney King, but this time justified on the basis that those doing the bashing are just doing their job.

Racism is something which is taught and learned. No one is ever born a racist. One has to develop a prejudice against another race and be given power to act on that prejudice at a variety of levels in order to be classed as a racist. Racism requires the presence of both prejudice and power.⁶ In American society, then, those who have had the primary access to power have been white. Racism is a white problem, but it is so much a part of the fabric of what it means to be white

⁶Joseph Barndt, *Dismantling Racism: The Continuing Challenge to White American*, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991, 28; Lovett, "Racism and Reconciliation," 14.

in this country that whites seldom really think about it. It has been institutionalized so well in American law and society that it is the way white Americans live.

Racism by its very nature is *an institutionalized system of oppression which enables or empowers a dominant group of people to oppress another visibly identifiable group of people.*⁷ Racism seldom emerges today in white sheets and burning crosses, though it is clearly present there. More frequently, however, racism clothes itself within respectable institutions and their policies thereby allowing racism to hide behind institutional practice.

I became peculiarly aware of this fact this summer when I sat as one of twelve jurors in a "racial discrimination in the workplace" lawsuit. The plaintiff, an Hispanic, charged that he had repeatedly been passed over for promotion because of racial bias, while others with less experience and less seniority had been given positions above him. The defendants justified their acts as being mere "judgment calls" regarding suitability for promotion, a matter of "sound business practice." It is frequently the institution, its policies and practices which give racism its power. We found the defendants guilty.

People play active or passive roles with respect to the institutions in which they participate, whether they be governmental, educational, corporate, or even

⁷Among those books which are helpful in defining and illustrating the nature of racism are Barndt, *Dismantling Racism*; George D. Kelsey, *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965; Gunnar Myrdal with Richard Sterner and Arnold Rose, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1944, 1962; and McLemore, *Racial and Ethnic Relations in America*.

ecclesiastical. Pentecostal leaders as eminent as Aimee Semple McPherson who, from her earliest days of ministry insisted upon holding meetings among Southern blacks, also spoke at a number of Ku Klux Klan meetings.⁸ Charles F. Parham was singing the praises of the Klan as late as 1927.⁹ To be sure, in spite of public pronouncements by some Pentecostal leaders against membership in the Klan, I have been told within the past five years by at least one national leader in a Pentecostal denomination that there continue to be some Pentecostals in his denomination who are regular members of the Klan.¹⁰ The specter of pointed

⁸See for instance, Edith L. Blumhofer, *Aimee Simple McPherson: Everybody's Sister*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993, 186-189, 194-195, and 275-278. It is not apparent that "Sister" ever sought for the approval or the endorsement of the Klan although she benefited from it for several years. But by 1924 it is clear that while she and the Klan both advocated so called "traditional values" she publicly criticized the hypocrisy entailed in the anti-semitism of the Klan who claimed to be worshippers of the Jewish messiah. Her illustration of a black man who was refused a place to worship in a white church effectively ended any further relationship with the Klan.

⁹See on this James R. Goff, Jr., *Fields White Unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism*, Fayetteville, Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press, 1988, 157.

¹⁰There clearly is and has been for many years a basic discomfort among predominantly white Pentecostal groups about the probability that some of their members might be members of the Ku Klux Klan. Membership in such organizations is clearly difficult to prove. [Cf. Mickey Crews, *The Church of God: A Social History*, (Knoxville, TN.: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990, 66 who surveyed church literature and conducted personal interviews but was unable to turn up a single "Church of God member who was a member" of the Klan.]

According to the *Cyclopedic Index of Assembly Minutes and Important Business Acts 1906-1984*, Cleveland, TN.: White Wing Publishing House, no date, 233-234, at the 19th Assembly of the Church of God (1923) the following question was raised and answered:

Q. What about our members being member of the K.K.K.?

A. They should not any more than any other lodge or order. We do not need to raise a fight against such institutions particularly but our people are not to be members of them.

On the other hand, it seems clear that with large white constituencies in the southern states, some membership in the Klan must be assumed. According to Vinson Synan's narrative of Pentecostal Holiness history, in 1925 every general officer of the denomination was required to make known "*if he is in fellowship or affiliated in any way with the Ku Klux Klan.*" Italics mine. Synan goes on to note that apparently one of the top leaders of the Pentecostal Holiness Church had to resign from the Klan. (Cf. Vinson Synan, *The Old Time Power*), Franklin Springs, Ga.: Advocate Press, 1973, 178.

In a real sense, most white Pentecostal leaders were attempting to distance themselves and their followers from radical organizations such as the Klan by the mid '20s. Only Charles F. Parham held out hope for what he called "these splendid men." What they needed was to have their entire membership converted, at

hoods and burning crosses, intimidation, senseless beatings and even lynchings which have been employed by the Klan and its members are clearly actions which have been advocated by that institution. Power for some individual and group actions is derived from such institutions. But one need not belong to an institution which openly embraces racist attitudes and practices in order to participate in racist attitudes and actions. It is generally more subtle than that among Pentecostals.

Paul S. Carter is more candid than most when in his controversial, unauthorized history of the First Assembly of God Church in Memphis, Tennessee, he describes the reason the congregation left its home on East McLemore and moved to North Highland. “The racial make-up of the neighborhood was changing and many of the white families were moving out east, “ he observed. “This brought on a desire to move the church to a location, farther out, where the neighborhood make-up was more acceptable to our church membership.”¹¹

What has long been suspected in the actions of many Pentecostal congregations which have fled the cities for the suburbs is articulated in this history. The value which the local institution placed on a racially homogeneous congregation appears to have been that on which the people of the congregation acted. The desire to be with their friends, with those like themselves, led them to

which point the Klan would “be able to realize their high ideals for the betterment of mankind...” See “Leaves By the Wayside: Ku Klux Klan,” *The Apostolic Faith*, Baxter Springs, KS, 3:3 (March, 1927), 5.

¹¹Paul S. Carter, *Heritage of Holiness* (Memphis, TN: Paul’s Press, 1991), 151.

move the congregation to its new location rather than to stay and work to meet the needs of a changing neighborhood. That involves at one level an active role in racism. It is not as overt or evident as the action of the Klan, but decision makers acted on racial biases.

There is a passive side to racism as well, one which is less noticeable but just as problematic as active participation in racist acts. The buses of Los Angeles have recently carried signs which read, "Hate, Racism, and anti-Semitism survive only when good people look the other way." The history of German Christianity carries a profound lesson in what might be termed passive racism. For the most part, up to and during the Second World War, German Christians were silent as the government rounded up, then murdered some 6 million Jews. Many Christians knew it was happening, yet they chose to look the other way as Hitler's policy of Jewish extermination was being carried out all around them.¹²

White Pentecostals of the Apostolic Faith Mission in South Africa were noticeably silent at the arrest, imprisonment, and torture of a black minister in that denomination, Frank Chikane. But more troubling yet is the fact that the white prison guard who was, according to institutional policy, justly responsible for administering torture to Frank Chikane was himself a member of the same denomination. How is it that neither he, nor the Apostolic Faith Mission said

¹²Richard Gutteridge, *Open Thy Mouth for the Dumb!: The German Evangelical Church and the Jews, 1879-1950* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976; Alan T. Davies, *Anti-Semitism and the Christian Mind: The Crisis of Conscience after Auschwitz* New York: Herder and Herder, 1969; and Barndt, *Dismantling Racism*, 56-57.

anything? Fear of governmental reprisal surely must have entered their minds, or perhaps it was the conviction that Mr. Chikane had broken the law, but in either case, they participated in passive acts of racism by their unwillingness to condemn the action.¹³ In the end the Reverend Frank Chikane was never charged, he was merely imprisoned.

In our own country, passive acquiescence to racism has been a regular practice among most white Pentecostal groups as well. It has appeared repeatedly in what might be described as acts of conformity to social mores, be they local, regional, or national. It has appeared in their submission in the final analysis to the canon of “American law and society.” But that is to jump ahead of ourselves. We Pentecostals have not always been passive racists and it is on our history of racial unity that I would like now to focus our attention.

I. Race and the Azusa Street Mission

A. Was the Color Line Washed Away in the Blood?

At the beginning of the Twentieth Century, an independent holiness preacher of divine healing set up shop in Topeka, Kansas. The Reverend Charles F. Parham and a number of his students soon came to the conclusion that what the church needed was a baptism of power on the sanctified life. Parham established a Bible school there, where on December 31, 1900, Agnes S. Ozman is said to have received this baptism with its anticipated “Bible evidence,” the ability to speak in

¹³For Frank Chikane’s account of this incident see Ron Sider, “Interview with Rev. Frank Chikane,” *Transformation* 5 (April/June, 1988), 9-12 and his autobiography, Frank Chikane, *No Life of My Own*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989.

other tongues.¹⁴ Over the next five years Parham moved throughout Kansas, Missouri and Texas, taking his message of “Pentecost” with him.

It was in late 1905 that Charles Parham and William J. Seymour met each other through their mutual friend, a black woman named Mrs. Lucy Farrow. As a result, when Parham came to the Houston area and set up a short-term Bible school, Lucy Farrow was instrumental in getting Seymour enrolled in the school. Because Parham chose to honor the local Jim Crow laws, Seymour is said to have been separated from the white students that Parham had attracted, but in spite of this fact he came to accept Parham’s teaching on the “Bible evidence” of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ Just after the new year and before his classes were completed, William Seymour was invited to come to Los Angeles to serve as the pastor of a small holiness congregation founded by Mrs. Julia Hutchins.

When Elder William J. Seymour arrived in Los Angeles, California, on February 22, 1906, he was responding to an invitation from “the colored people of the City” who had been led by the Spirit to invite him to “give them some Bible teaching.”¹⁶ He began his ministry two days later, but was quickly locked out of

¹⁴See on this Agnes N. O. La Berge, *What God Hath Wrought*, Chicago: Herald Publishing Co. Press, no date, reprinted by New York: Garland Publishing House, 1985. Cf. Sarah E. Parham, *The Life of Charles E. Parham: Founder of the Apostolic Faith Movement*, Joplin, MO: Hunter Printing Co., c. 1930, reprinted by New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1985.

¹⁵Without a doubt Douglas Nelson’s unpublished Ph.D. dissertation “For Such A Time As This: The Story of Bishop William J. Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival” is still the best account of these events. Nelson has published a small part of his findings in his article “The Black Face of Church Renewal”, *Faces of Renewal*. Iain MacRobert has drawn very heavily from Nelson’s dissertation for his own work *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA*.

¹⁶W. J. Seymour, *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Azusa Street Apostolic Faith Mission of Los Angeles C*, Los Angeles: W. J. Seymour, 1915, 12.

the facility, allegedly because he preached Charles F. Parham's "Bible evidence" doctrine, that the ability to speak in other tongues was the "Bible evidence" of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.¹⁷ As a result of the ensuing argument, the Holiness Church Association sent its president, Dr. J. M. Roberts to hear Seymour out. Roberts then asked Seymour to discontinue his preaching on the subject.¹⁸

Seymour was not rejected by everyone, however, and he was soon invited to the home of Ruth and Richard Asberry, 214 No. Bonnie Brae Street, where throughout the month of March and the first half of April Seymour conducted evening prayer meetings and Bible studies and was free to teach what he believed. While the Bible study group was predominantly a group of African-Americans, there is sufficient documentation to suggest that from time to time whites also attended those meetings.¹⁹ When on April 9, 1906, the Holy Spirit was poured out

¹⁷For a good analysis of this doctrine as it was taught by Parham, see James R. Goff, Jr., "Initial Tongues in the Theology of Charles Fox Parham" in Gary B. McGee, ed. *Initial Evidence: Historical and Biblical Perspectives on the Pentecostal Doctrine of Spirit Baptism*, Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991, 57-71. For the interaction between Parham and Seymour on this doctrine and Seymour's theological analysis of this doctrine see Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., "William J. Seymour and 'The Bible Evidence,'" in the same volume, pp. 72-95.

¹⁸"Bro. Seymour's Call," *The Apostolic Faith*, Los Angeles, 1:1 (September, 1906), 1. For a second eyewitness account of the meeting between Seymour and Roberts, see Mrs. W. H. McGowan, "Another 'Echo from Azusa'" (Covina, Ca.: Mrs. W. H. McGowan, (ca. 1956). This tract has since been incorporated into Mrs. R. L. (Clara) Davis, *The Wonderful Move of God: The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit from Azusa Street to Now*, Tulsa, OK: Albury Press, 1983, 54; reprinted as *Azusa Street Till Now* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1983, 1989), 17 in an edited version. Cf., Nelson, "For Such A Time As This," 187-188.

¹⁹See, for example Frank Bartleman, *How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: F. Bartleman, 1925), 43-44. This work has been reprinted along with three other books by Bartleman in *Witness to Pentecost: The Life of Frank Bartleman* New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1985 with an extended introduction by Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. It has also appeared under the title *What Really Happened at "Azusa Street?"* (Northridge, CA: Christian Publications, 1962) as John G. Meyers, ed. *Another Wave Rolls In* (Northridge, CA: Voice Publications, 1970) as *Another Wave of Revival* (Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), and as *Azusa Street: The Roots of Modern Pentecost* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1980) with an extended introduction by Vinson Synan.

in this Bible study and people began to speak in tongues, it quickly became apparent that a new facility would be needed for their meetings. Indeed, word spread so rapidly that within six days of the outpouring this group had located and begun to renovate the facility at 312 Azusa Street in the heart of Los Angeles. Services must have begun about Easter Sunday, April 15, for by two days later the *Los Angeles Daily Times* had sent a reporter, pen in hand, to break the news to the world of this “newest religious sect.”²⁰ In that initial *Times* report, the congregation was described as a group of “colored people” with “a sprinkling of whites.”²¹

From its inception, then, the Azusa Street mission had a racially integrated constituency. Such things were not unheard of in 1906 Los Angeles. The city had few, if any, of the so-called Jim Crow laws in effect which governed many of the Southern states during that time.²² Other churches such as Joseph Smale’s First New Testament Church were more or less racially integrated. The Holiness Church of Southern California and Arizona regularly included both blacks and

²⁰“Weird Babel of Tongues,” *Los Angeles Daily Times* (18 April, 1906), 2:1.

²¹“Weird Babel of Tongues,” 2:1.

²²For us to note that Los Angeles had few if any Jim Crow laws is not for us to say that there was no racial prejudice in Los Angeles. There was, and it reared its head in various forms. African-Americans were clearly not welcome in a few parts of the city. Cf., “Edendale Indignant Over Negro Neighbors,” *Los Angeles Express* (October 2, 1907), 2:11; “Police Aid Negroes to Occupy House,” *Los Angeles Herald* (October 8, 1907), 6; “Negroes Turned Down,” *Pasadena Evening Star* (August 21, 1906), 1; “Puts Ban on Anti-Negro Signs,” *Los Angeles Herald* (May 7, 1907), 12; “Negroes Thank Mayor Harper,” *Los Angeles Herald* (May 12, 1907), 2:5.

whites and frequently featured a black evangelist in Los Angeles meetings.²³ But there were also some churches which were important black churches by this time²⁴ just as the majority of Los Angeles churches catered to whites. All of this is understandable when we realize that in the years following reconstruction many southerners, black and white, had emigrated to the Los Angeles area often bringing their social and cultural mores with them. Still, the Azusa Street mission was different from her predecessors.

Azusa Street was a racially integrated congregation led by an African-American pastor and a racially integrated staff and board. While the mission continued to be known as the “colored church,”²⁵ reports of the mixing of the races at the mission are numerous.²⁶ Most of the reports emphasize the large

²³See Josephine M. Washburn, *History and Reminiscences of the Holiness Church Work in Southern California and Arizona*, South Pasadena, CA: Record Press, 1912. rpt. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1985, 160.

²⁴Among these churches serving the 5,000 members of Los Angeles’ African-American population in 1906 were First African Methodist Episcopal Church (900 members), Wesley Chapel (500 members), and Second Baptist Church (500 members). For a brief overview of these and several other black churches in 1909 see G. R. Bryant, “Religious Life of Los Angeles Negroes,” *Los Angeles Daily Times* (12 February, 1909), 3:7. Estimates of the size of Los Angeles’ African-American population in 1906 are based upon an estimate of 2.3% of the entire population of the city’s 228,300 reported in “Uncle Sam Is Shown An Early Portrait of His Favorite Niece,” *Los Angeles Evening News* (16 April, 1906), 1. The actual racial breakdown for 1900 and 1910 is available in J. McFarlane Ervin, “The Participation of the Negro in the Community Life of Los Angeles,” M.A. Thesis, University of Southern California, 1931, rpt. San Francisco: Rand E. Research Associates, 1973, 10.

²⁵See, for instance, “Bible Pentecost” *The Apostolic Faith*, Los Angeles, CA, 1:3 (November, 1906), 1, which notes that “As they inquire their way to the Apostolic Faith Mission, perhaps they are asked, ‘O, you mean the Holy Rollers, or ‘It is the Colored Church you mean?’”

²⁶See, for example “Rolling and Diving Fanatics ‘Confess,’” *Los Angeles Daily Times* (23 June , 1906), 1:7, which mentions some 700 congregants of which “the majority of the occupants of the place were colored men and women, with a sprinkling of white people,” or “Religious Fanaticism Creates Wild Scenes,” *Los Angeles Record* (14 July, 1906), 1, which notes “There were 500 people in the Azusa St. Church. Whites and blacks mingled.”

number of blacks in the services, but in late August or early September of 1906 William F. Manley visited the mission and was struck by the fact that during that particular evening service he found about 25 “colored” and 300 “white” worshippers.²⁷ The range of nationalities which came to the mission and the transformation of racial attitudes among some who came to the mission during this period led Frank Bartleman to make his often quoted observation that in this humble mission “the ‘colorline’ was washed away in the blood.”²⁸

Indeed, for a good number of people this was undoubtedly the case. When in 1907 the mission was incorporated with the State of California it included a number of officers who were white, while the pastor, at least one trustee and several staff members were black.²⁹ Even those from the outside were struck by the unique mix of races at the mission. When the southern evangelist George B. Cashwell visited the mission in late 1906, he noted that “a new crucifixion began in my life and I had to die to many things...” Chief among these many things was his racial prejudice.³⁰

²⁷William F. Manley, “True Pentecostal Power, with Signs Following,” *The Household of God*, 2:9 (September, 1906), 6.

²⁸F. Bartleman, *How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles*, 54.

²⁹Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. “Azusa Street Mission,” in Stanley M. Burgess and Gary McGee, eds., *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House/Regency Reference Library, 1988, 34.

³⁰G. B. Cashwell, “Came 3,000 Miles for His Pentecost,” *The Apostolic Faith* (LA) 1:4 (December, 1906) 3; Carl Brumback, *Suddenly...From Heaven: A History of the Assemblies of God*, Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1961, 84; Vinson, Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971, 123. Cf. Robeck, “The Social Concern of Early American Pentecostalism,” 100-102.

It was Elder Seymour who set the stage for such things, embracing all who came to the mission. “No instrument that God can use is rejected on account of color or dress or lack of education,” *The Apostolic Faith* announced. If the revival “had started in a fine church, poor colored people and Spanish people would not have got it,” the paper continued, “but praise God it started here.”³¹

Late in the fall another announcement was made in the mission’s newspaper. While it is both untitled and anonymous it seems clear that it represents the thinking of the mission’s leaders. “One token of the Lord’s coming is that He is melting all races and nations together, and they are filled with the power and glory of God,” it proclaimed. “He is baptizing by one spirit into one body and making up a people that will be ready to meet Him when He comes.”³² This time the announcement proclaimed a view of ecclesiology which was decidedly inclusive of all races, almost miscegenistic in character as though these races were melted into a new humanity, the Church (Cf. Ephesians 2:14-16)

In April, 1907, a full year after the Azusa Street revival had begun, *The Apostolic Faith* continued to make the same point. The Church is composed of people from all races and nations who, by the blood of Christ, have been made into a family. On the surface and before its reading public, at least, the mission set forth the image that Jesus’ prayer in John 17:21 was clearly being answered through the blood of Christ and the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Those of

³¹“Bible Pentecost,” *The Apostolic Faith* 1:3 (November, 1906), 1.

³²“Bible Pentecost” *The Apostolic Faith*, Los Angeles, 1:3 (November, 1906), 1.

disparate races and nations who had been bought by Christ's blood were now being molded into a family unit of sisters and brothers. And they were *satisfied* with that reality.³³

Theoretically this was the case. Those who visited the mission were quite satisfied to be considered part of the same family of God. But when it came to actually living together under one roof, not everyone who came to the mission was equally satisfied. The Baptist pastor from nearby Glendale, California, Elmer K. Fisher, received his Pentecostal experience at the mission, quickly aligned with Pastor Joseph Smale's First New Testament Church, then founded an independent mission which would become known as The Upper Room, while it is clear that Fisher and Seymour would come to differ over the doctrine of the "Bible evidence" in 1907³⁴, Bartleman's note that "most of the white saints" left Azusa Street in September, 1906, to join Fisher's newly-founded mission suggests that many of the white congregants, though by no means all of them, had not submitted fully to the blood which was washing the color line away.³⁵ The seeds

³³"It is the Blood of Jesus that brings fellowship among the Christian family. The Blood of Jesus Christ is the strongest in the world. It makes all races and nations into one common family in the Lord and makes them satisfied to be one. The Holy Ghost is the leader and He makes all one as Jesus prayed, "that they all may be one;" untitled article, *The Apostolic Faith*, Los Angeles, 1:7 (April, 1907), 3.

³⁴Robeck, "William J. Seymour and 'The Bible Evidence,'" 72-95, especially 78-82, explores the theological issues which separated Seymour from Fisher.

³⁵Bartleman, *How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles*, 84. Between late summer 1906 when Bartleman took about 25 whites from the mission, mostly former members of the Los Angeles Holiness Church, and formed a new congregation at Eighth and Maple, and Fisher took many of the whites from Azusa Street along with a number of people who were disgruntled with Pastor Joseph Smale at First New Testament Church, (Charles F. Parham, "Leadership," *The Apostolic Faith*, Baxter Springs, KS, 1:4 (June, 1912), 8, claims merely that Fisher "stole his congregation from Azusa") and the spring of 1911 when William Durham walked away with a very large number of those who were now at the mission and formed a

of racial dissatisfaction were clearly present.

One of the reasons such problems may have arisen was the degree to which local newspaper reporters were willing to pounce on the mixing of the races at Azusa Street. Indeed, the most significant stumblingblock which the mission posed before the entire community of Los Angeles, the real *scandal* of Pentecost at the mission, may yet prove to be the extent to which the issues of prejudice and discrimination were overcome by those who came and *stayed* at the mission. The breakdown was so complete that it crossed both racial and gender lines. White women saw nothing wrong in hugging their black pastor or even kissing him on the cheek. Nor was it uncommon for a young black woman to “throw her arms around the neck of some white man...and beg him to ‘come to the altar.’”³⁶

One reporter labeled such events as “disgusting scenes”. “Whites and Blacks Mix in a Religious Frenzy,” he announced.³⁷ Another paper thundered, “Religious Fanaticism Creates Wild Scenes,” “Holy Kickers Carry On Mad Orgies,” and “Negroes and Whites Give Themselves Over to Strange Outbursts of Zeal.”³⁸ Such headlines were designed to inflame the imagination, titillating the

new congregation just five blocks away at Seventh and Los Angeles Street, there were about half a dozen splits which occurred at the mission. All of them fell along racial lines. But throughout these years, many other whites continued to pour into and go out of the mission.

³⁶“Women with Men Embrace,” *Los Angeles Daily Times* (3 September, 1906), 11.

³⁷“Women with Men Embrace,” 11.

³⁸“Religious Fanaticism Creates Wild Scenes,” *Los Angeles Record* (14 July, 1906), 1.

casual reader with sexual innuendo like a supermarket tabloid.³⁹ Little wonder is it, then, that pastors who were not already sympathetic to emotive or affective religious expression labeled the whole undertaking in their sermons as “a disgusting amalgamation of African voodoo superstition and Caucasian insanity...”⁴⁰

In late October, 1906, Charles F. Parham came to Los Angeles. He planned to take charge of Seymour’s work; after all, Seymour had been his student and he was using Parham’s name, the Apostolic Faith, to describe the work. In fact, Seymour had looked forward to Parham's arrival. But Parham was not prepared for what he would find. What he found distressed him deeply. Coming from Texas where Jim Crow laws were strictly enforced and racial segregation was the socially acceptable status quo, Charles Parham was not at all ready to accept Seymour’s egalitarian convictions.⁴¹ Parham attempted to seize control of the mission, but was strongly rebuffed for his efforts by the multitude who supported Elder Seymour.⁴² As a result, Parham and his associates first distanced

³⁹See for example, “Wife Prefers Holy Rollers to Husband, *Los Angeles Express* (7 September, 1906), 4; “Says Wife Went with Jumpers,” *Los Angeles Record* (7 September, 1906), 1; and “Found with Holy Rollers,” *Los Angeles Herald* (8 September, 1906), 3, in which Mr. Emil Hugo notifies the police and the press that his wife has disappeared, deserted him, taking all their money, and given it to the mission.

⁴⁰“New Religions Come, Then Go,” *Los Angeles Herald* (24 September 1906, 7; “Denounces New Denominations,” *Los Angeles Examiner* (24 September, 1906), 5.

⁴¹Goff, *Fields White Unto Harvest*, 131.

⁴²Nelson, “For Such a Time As This,” 208-210.

themselves from the mission then proceeded to attack it.⁴³

Parham's rejection by the mission in late 1906 only hardened his resolve to bring to an end what was happening in this revival. Parham soon became sidetracked due to charges about his personal life.⁴⁴ In 1912, however, he began to reemerge and he went after the revival. He labeled it a "counterfeit Pentecost" and "a cross between the Negro and Holy Roller form of worship."⁴⁵ A full two-thirds of those who claimed to have been baptized in the Spirit at the Azusa Street mission, he asserted, were merely subject to nothing more than "animal spiritism." The famous heavenly choir about which many witnesses raved, he downgraded to a form of "Negro chanting" and declared that it had nothing to do with "the Pentecostal baptism."⁴⁶ With great conviction he announced the fall of "all who now accept or propagate the wild fire, fanatical, wind-sucking, chattering,

⁴³Mr. W. R. Quinton announced that Parham's faction would "conduct dignified religious services, and have no connection with the sort which is characterized by trances, fits and spasms, jerks, shakes and contortions. We are wholly foreign to the religious anarchy, which marks the Los Angeles Azusa Street meetings, and expect to do good in Whittier along proper and profound Christian lines;" in "Apostolic Faith People Here Again," *Whittier Daily News* (13 December, 1906), 1.

⁴⁴In July, 1907, Charles F. Parham was arrested in San Antonio, Texas, on moral charges. "Evangelist is Arrested," *San Antonio Light* (19 July, 1907), 1; "Voliva Split Hits Preacher," *San Antonio Light* (21 July, 1907), 2. There was some speculation at the time that a group of John Alexander Dowie's followers under the leadership of Voliva had entrapped or falsely testified to these charges. Ultimately the charges were dropped. The allegations were simply left to simmer. In essence, they figure greatly in the decline of Parham's influence in early Pentecostalism. It was following this set of events that a number of those who had been members in the Apostolic Faith Movement developed a relationship with the Church of God in Christ. See below, pp. 22-23.

⁴⁵Charles F. Parham, "New Years Greetings," *The Apostolic Faith* [Baxter Springs, KS.] (January, 1912), 6. He may well have drawn from the Reverend Burdette's sermon of September, 1906. See above, note 40.

⁴⁶Parham, "New Years Greetings," 6. See also Charles F. Parham, "The Apostolic Faith," *The Apostolic Faith* [Baxter Springs, KS.] 1:8 (October, 1912), 6 where he continues to criticize the manifestations at Azusa Street as nothing more than the common practices "by the Negroes of the Southland".

jabbering, trance, bodily shaking originating in Azusa, as the true work of Pentecost.”⁴⁷

Parham continued to stew in his anger over his rejection by those at Azusa Street. He was a leader shunned, and as time passed his complaints against those who had shunned him took on increasingly racist tones. There was no longer any attempt to restrain his language, the worst of which seemed to be aimed at the mixing of gender and race in the second floor prayer room. There, he generalized, a wealthy and cultured “white woman” could be frequently found “thrown back in the arms of a big 'buck nigger,' held tightly while shivering and shaking” in what Parham disparagingly labeled a “freak imitation of Pentecost.”⁴⁸ His failure to contain the revival at Azusa Street had degenerated into the use of unrestrained racial epithet, and a denial of any legitimacy to the revival at that mission.

B. It Will Not Be So Among You (Mark 10:43a)

Elder William J. Seymour was understandably hurt by the abuse and racial prejudice with which he was confronted while serving as pastor of the Azusa Street mission. For three exciting years the mission had been at the center of Pentecostal activity around the world. Then the revival had faltered. From Seymour’s perspective, the Holy Spirit had been grieved. In 1915, Seymour, now a bishop, took time to reflect on a number of issues which had troubled him for

⁴⁷Parham, “Leadership,” 9.

⁴⁸Charles F. Parham, “Free-Love,” *The Apostolic Faith*, Baxter Springs, KS, 1:10 (December, 1912), 4.

several years. Some of these were pastoral, others were social, and still others were theological in nature. Seymour struggled deeply with the pain he felt over the various kinds of divisions which had taken place at the mission. One of these divisions had to do with the intrusion of racism.

As Seymour summarized the situation a decade after the sudden onslaught of revival, he noted that his desire was that black and white Christians would learn to get along. One can almost feel the wistfulness which lay behind his revelation that "...some of our white brethren have prejudices and discrimination."⁴⁹ If it had been up to Seymour, the races would have continued to mix with no limitations placed upon anyone. But prejudice and discrimination had emerged as a real problem, not only in the larger social context of America or even Los Angeles, but now it was a growing problem within the Pentecostal churches. The blood which had, in some minds, washed the color line away at the mission, had apparently left others untouched.

If racial prejudice and discrimination could be laid at the feet of the whites, Seymour was clear that not all white Pentecostals were racists. Some had continued to be loyal to their black sisters and brothers while others had not. Even those who had deserted the mission had not all been racially motivated. Some had merely been victimized by what he termed "wild fire and fanaticism." In fact, some African-Americans at the mission had deserted for exactly the same reasons. But Seymour was equally clear that some white Pentecostals had caused division

⁴⁹Seymour, *The Doctrines and Discipline*, 12.

explicitly by introducing racial issues.⁵⁰ And Seymour struggled with the painful consequences.

It appears that some of the blacks who had stayed at the mission were ready to exclude all whites as racists. This fact troubled Seymour as much as the rejection by whites troubled him. His black parishioners were now in danger of *reacting* to white racism in equally divisive and sinful ways. They were about to counter the prejudice and discrimination which the whites had unleashed upon them with a reactionary prejudice and discrimination against the whites. Seymour knew that even Pentecostals were capable of engaging in racially motivated acts of oppression and retaliation against one another, what he labeled as “race war in the churches.”⁵¹ It was this reality which led Bishop Seymour now to address his flock.

The result was a compromise solution which he hoped would satisfy both the blacks who had been burned one too many times by white racism and the whites who had remained loyal to the mission. “We want all of our white brethren and white sisters to feel free in our churches and missions,” offered Seymour.⁵² Whites would, therefore, continue to be welcome at the mission. They could attend and participate fully in worship, but their ability to participate in all activities of the mission would now be slightly curtailed. No longer would whites

⁵⁰Seymour, *The Doctrines and Discipline*, 12.

⁵¹Seymour, *The Doctrines and Discipline*, 12.

⁵²Seymour, *The Doctrines and Discipline*, 12.

be welcome to serve in any governance role. All leadership roles at the mission and its daughter churches, from the Bishop to the trustees would now be filled by “people of Color.”⁵³ This action was passed by unanimous vote of the mission’s membership on May 19, 1914.⁵⁴

On the other side of the compromise, Bishop Seymour had a word for his black brothers and sisters. His criticism of prejudice and discrimination of some white Pentecostals was not to be construed as a blanket judgment against all whites. Neither were the limitations on roles of governance to people of color to be construed as some perverted form of paternalism over whites. Whites might choose to act in such ways, but as Bishop of the mission, William J. Seymour urged his black parishioners not to stoop to the same level. Even if many white Pentecostals engaged in prejudice and discrimination, Seymour announced, “we can’t do it because God calls us to follow the Bible.”⁵⁵

Seymour’s appeal to the Bible was based on the normative character of what he found there about God, the nature of sin, salvation, and the church. At issue were not merely a series of diverse opinions or even the issues of ethnicity, race, or color. What was really at stake was the unity of the body of Christ formed by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:12-14). Christ’s church was literally being torn apart by people who harbored racist ideas or sentiments and who took racist

⁵³Seymour, *The Doctrines and Discipline*, 49 (Article C).

⁵⁴Seymour, *The Doctrines and Discipline*, 48.

⁵⁵Seymour, *The Doctrines and Discipline*, 12.

actions. The disunity of the church which resulted was a travesty of the gospel. Seymour argued that for people to confess that they were Christians, then to manifest some form of prejudice, discrimination or other racial act was highly hypocritical. He cited Paul's challenge to Peter's hypocrisy over Jewish/Gentile relations in Galatians 2:11-20, and he noted Jesus' repeated warnings to the Pharisees as adequate evidence that hypocrisy should not be tolerated within the body of Christ. All who claimed to follow Christ were to obey His command to love everyone, and to pursue peace and holiness (Hebrews 12:14).

Jesus alone should be exalted (Matthew 17:8), continued Seymour, not one race over another. The color of one's skin should not matter, for salvation is a spiritual matter. "Jesus Christ takes in all people in his Salvation," he went on. Christ doesn't discriminate between blacks, whites, the Chinese, Indian, or Japanese. Why? -- because "God is Spirit" and it is precisely by virtue of the new birth, a birth of water and Spirit (John 3:3-5) that all claims to belong to Christ must be understood, for in that act the Spirit of Christ who is the sole measure of true Christian identity comes to reside in all such individuals (Romans 8:9).⁵⁶

Seymour's compromise which limited white participation in mission business and which urged blacks to follow the Bible must be viewed, then, not as a *final* solution to the racial problem, but as an *interim* solution "for peace," a concession to human frailty upheld by an increasingly segregationist racism which was permeating American society, including the church. It was a pragmatic

⁵⁶Seymour, *The Doctrines and Discipline*, 12-13.

expediency which Bishop Seymour hoped would provide all of his flock “greater liberty and freedom in the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁷

In the end, William Seymour knew that the path down which he led his flock would offend some critics. But he was committed to follow through with his plan. “We are sorry for this,” he apologized, but he hoped that everyone who took the time to read his “Apostolic Address” would come to the same conclusion that he had reached. In May, 1914, Bishop Seymour did what he thought was best for the mission and its ongoing work, both short and long term, and limited the role which whites could play.⁵⁸

II. Race and the Assemblies of God

A. The Church of God in Christ and the Assemblies of God: Siblings or Offspring?

From the beginning of the modern Pentecostal Movement discussion over how Pentecostals of various colors should relate to one another, and specifically how white Pentecostals should best relate not only to their black Pentecostal brothers and sisters but to the whole of the black citizens of the United States has been taking place. The Azusa Street mission provided an egalitarian model during its first decade, and of all churches it seemed to enjoy the greatest success at racial inclusivity on a substantial scale in those early years.

Another group which held the same potential was the Church of God in

⁵⁷Seymour, *The Doctrines and Discipline*, 12.

⁵⁸Seymour, *The Doctrines and Discipline*, 12.

Christ. Formed in 1897 when Elders Charles Harrison Mason and Charles Price Jones were expelled from the Baptist churches for preaching sanctification as a second definite work, this work grew steadily. In February-March, 1907, Mason made a visit to the Azusa Street mission where he received “the enduement from on high.”⁵⁹ He returned to Tennessee where, after extensive discussion with C. P. Jones, the two decided to go their separate ways . In August, 1907, the Church of God in Christ was reorganized under Bishop C. H. Mason, and formally incorporated.⁶⁰ Such action made the Church of God in Christ unique among Pentecostals. It was the first Pentecostal denomination to incorporate and guarantee that its ministers could receive travel advantages from various railroads. Throughout the South, a number of Pentecostal groups had come into existence during the last decade of the Nineteenth Century or the first decade of the Twentieth Century. Some of these, like the Church of God in Christ, were previously identified with the Wesleyan-Holiness Movement, but when they received the message of the baptism of the Spirit, complete with the “Bible evidence” of speaking in other tongues they moved into the Pentecostal camp.⁶¹ Others were newly formed as Pentecostal groups, one of which was Charles F.

⁵⁹C. H. Mason, “Tennessee Evangelist Witnesses,” *The Apostolic Faith*, Los Angeles, 1:6 (February-March, 1906), 7 CF also a short announcement in the same issue, p. 1, column 1.

⁶⁰C. E. Jones, “Church of God in Christ,” Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee, eds. *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Publishing House/Regency Reference Library, 1988, 204-205.

⁶¹Examples include the Free-Will Baptists, many of whom became Pentecostal Free-Will Baptists, and the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church, the Holiness Church of North Carolina and the Tabernacle Pentecostal Church, all of which merged to form what has become the International Pentecostal Holiness Church.

Parham's Apostolic Faith Movement, a group whose primary strength was in Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas and which, according to best estimates, numbered about 8,600 members in 1906.⁶² Most of these groups, as with those that would be established later, catered primarily to members of one race or another, although none of them could be accused of withholding the message of salvation from members of another race.

In these early years of the Pentecostal Movement, membership rules were somewhat elastic. It was possible for an individual to carry credentials with more than one organization at a time. While a person might hold primary allegiance to one organization, she or he could hold credentials with a second organization as well.⁶³ Between 1910 and 1914 the Church of God in Christ was especially inviting to those who might choose to hold credentials with more than one organization at a time. From Bishop Mason's perspective two facts seem to be certain. The fact that the Church of God in Christ was incorporated meant that its ordinations had legal status which other Pentecostals wanted. Thus, it could become a means whereby, even in the South, the Church of God in Christ could provide a service to Pentecostal believers regardless of color. Perhaps it would also be possible to facilitate a multiracial fellowship under the name Church of God in Christ. Subsequently, however, more than one white group took the name

⁶²Goff, *Fields White Unto Harvest*, 169-70.

⁶³Aimee Semple McPherson is a prime example of one who participated in the practice. At one time she held credentials with at least four such organizations. See Blumhofer, *Aimee Semple McPherson: Everybody's Sister*, 16.

Church of God in Christ or negotiated a relationship with Mason's group.⁶⁴

By July, 1910, leaders of Charles F. Parham's Apostolic Faith Movement such as E. N. Bell, Howard A. Goss, D. C. Opperman, and Arch P. Collins could be found distancing themselves from Parham by signing credentials which commended their bearers to the "CHURCHES OF GOD IN CHRIST," and in unity with the Apostolic Faith Movement."⁶⁵ On paper, at least, there were over 350 such ministers⁶⁶ which made it appear that these white ministers composed roughly half of all Church of God in Christ leadership.⁶⁷ What now seems quite apparent is that while these white ministers received ordination from the Church of God in Christ, they continued to function along segregated lines. For them, it was a marriage of convenience, not an integrated fellowship.⁶⁸ Howard Goss who negotiated with Mason for the ability to sign these credentials would later label it "an association...mainly for purposes of business." But was it only a business proposition for Mason?⁶⁹

⁶⁴See William W. Menzies, *Anointed to Serve: The Story of the Assemblies of God*, Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1971, 91.

⁶⁵Sample copies are on file with the Assemblies of God Archives in Springfield, Missouri, 1445 Boonville Ave., Springfield, MO, 65802.

⁶⁶"Ordained Elders, Pastors, Ministers, Evangelists and Missionaries of the Churches of God in Christ With Their Stations for 1914," *Word and Witness* (December, 1913), 4.

⁶⁷I. C. Clemmons, "Charles Harrison Mason," in Stanley M. Burgers and Gary B. McGee, eds. *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Publishing House/Regency Reference Library, 1988, 587.

⁶⁸James C. Richardson, "Why Black and White Pentecostals Are Separated," *Logos Journal* (May/June, 1980), 21.

⁶⁹Howard S. Goss as told by Ethel E. Goss, *The Winds of God: The Story of the Early Pentecostal Days (1901-1914) in the Life of Howard Goss*, New York: Comet Press Books, 1958, 163.

By the end of 1913, some of these same individuals were looking to form a totally new entity. A call was issued to the subscribers of E. N. Bell's *Word and Witness* by Bell, Goss, and D. C. Opperman, for a meeting which would be held April 2-12, 1914, in Hot Springs, Arkansas. As it might be surmised, the mailing list was virtually all white and largely southern. They issued a call to the "Churches of God in Christ, and to all Pentecostal or Apostolic Faith Assemblies."⁷⁰ The local *Sentinel Record*, in an ad probably submitted by Goss or Bell, merely advertised the meeting as "The General Assembly of the Church of God in Christ."⁷¹

Bishop Mason had embraced Howard Goss in 1910 making possible a relationship between many disgruntled Apostolic Faith Movement preachers and his own Church of God in Christ. His interest in working with the white community would continue among those who chose to align with the Church of God in Christ, and it would emerge more fully in 1926 with the incorporation of the White Churches of God in Christ. At that time Bishop Mason is said to have asked Elder August Feick to organize and "set in scriptural order" the "white phase of the work."⁷² But in April 1914, Bishop Mason made it possible for these

⁷⁰"General Convention of Pentecostal Saints and Churches of God in Christ," *Word and Witness* (December 20, 1913), 1.

⁷¹"The General Assembly of the Church of God in Christ," *The Sentinel Record*, Hot Springs, AR, (April 5, 1914), 4.

⁷²Letter from August Feick to the General Council of the Assemblies of God (6 April, 1926). Feick was then serving as the pastor of the Woodworth-Etter Tabernacle in Indianapolis, Indiana, which for a time would function as the headquarters to the White Churches of God in Christ. Letter on file in the Assemblies of God Archives.

white ministers to leave the relationship which they shared in name, and form a new group known as the Assemblies of God. There is therefore, some truth to the allegation that here “the segregating practices of the prevailing American culture” came into play.⁷³ To be sure, there were a number of factors which gave rise to the Assemblies of God, but the issue of race was surely one contributing factor.⁷⁴ Mason, however, blessed the separation with his presence and prayers, and a number of other blacks who sat in the balcony and sang in the Spirit.⁷⁵

The poignant significance of this break is that it gave rise to two conflicting views of the historic relationship between the Assemblies of God and the Church of God in Christ. In blessing their departure, even if the departure were made because of white dissatisfaction with black leadership, Mason can be seen as giving birth to a new *offspring*, the Assemblies of God.⁷⁶ On the other hand, those who formed the Assemblies of God tended to emphasize the relative independence they had experienced when they carried the Church of God in Christ name, claiming the relationship to be merely a business necessity. Hence, the view

⁷³Stephen Strang, “Let’s Heal the Wound of Racism,” *Charisma* 19:7 (February, 1994), 114.

⁷⁴William W. Menzies, *Anointed to Serve*, 91 notes that “It must be observed that much of the impetus” for the merger of two southern white groups using the name Church of God in Christ including one group in Florida as well as The Apostolic Faith/Church of God in Christ group “came out of dissatisfaction of the two white bodies with an uncomfortable relationship with Elder Mason’s Church of God in Christ, almost entirely a Negro organization.”

⁷⁵H. M. Cadwalder, “I Remember,” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (April 5, 1964), 6. Whether these “colored brethren” were required to sit in the balcony due to Jim Crow legislation or they were required to sit there with other non-delegates is unknown.

⁷⁶This is the position held by many in the Church of God in Christ and articulated by Bishop Ithiel Clemmons in “Insidious Racism in American Religious Statistics,” *The Whole Truth* (February, 1983), 3.

commonly held within the Assemblies of God has long been that the two organizations are no more than *siblings*.⁷⁷

The Assemblies of God emerged as a full-fledged organization from that meeting in Hot Springs. It had been successful at bringing together a number of ministers from the South and Mid-west as well as a few from other parts of the country. It elected leaders and *The Weekly Evangel* became its official voice. In June, 1915, the *Evangel* carried a small report from Denison, Texas, about the fine results which had recently been counted in Denison and Cotton Mills. Almost incidentally it notes that “the Colored people” were having fine meetings, too. The article suggests by its wording that in these early Assemblies of God meetings in Texas, the races did not mingle although there was some communication between them.⁷⁸ Whichever historiographical interpretation one takes says a great deal about how these groups ought to relate to one another now.

The formation of a *national* organization such as the Assemblies of God, even if it were loosely connected, must have brought together people with differing views on racial issues. If this were not the case, there would have been no reason for Warren F. Carothers to have written an article published by the Assemblies of God in August, 1915. Titled “Attitude of Pentecostal Whites to the

⁷⁷One example of this occurs in a 1955 exchange between Ralph M. Riggs and the Reverend D. Lawrence Williams, in which Riggs noted that “...the Assemblies of God have been content in the past to allow the Church of God in Christ to be the counter part of our church in its dealings with the colored people in the United States;” letter from Ralph M. Riggs to the Reverend D. Lawrence Williams, D. D., 8 July, 1955 Race Relations File, Assemblies of God Archives.

⁷⁸“Denison, Texas,” *The Weekly Evangel* (June 26, 1915), 1.

Colored Brethren in the South,” this article was clearly an attempt to address the concerns about segregationist practices in the South. It was aimed specifically at “our Northern brethren” and its primary purpose was to assure them that the practice of segregation even in Assemblies of God churches throughout the South was being done for very good reasons.⁷⁹

It is possible that this article would never have been published were the author not a member of the Executive Presbytery of the Assemblies of God. W.F. Carothers had been a Methodist preacher since 1896 and he had served as pastor of the Texas Holiness Church in Brunner. In 1905 he met Charles F. Parham, embraced the Pentecostal message, and was appointed field director of the Apostolic Faith. In 1906 he had authored a small book on *The Baptism with the Holy Ghost*, and three years later he authored a second volume on *Church Government*. By 1912 he had had a painful falling out with Parham over the way the Apostolic Faith was being run, and in 1914 he threw his lot with the Assemblies of God. That fall, he was elected to the Executive Presbytery.⁸⁰

W.F. Carothers justified southern segregation by arguing that although all humanity shared one blood (Acts 17:24-26), God had created a multiplicity of nations which God divided along color lines. From his perspective the U. S. was

⁷⁹W.F. Carothers, “Attitude of Pentecostal Whites to the Colored Brethren in the South,” *The Weekly Evangel* (August 14, 1915), 2.

⁸⁰Minutes for “Thursday, Nov. 19th,” *Combined Minutes of the General Council of the Assemblies of God in the United States of America, Canada and Foreign Lands held at Hot Springs, Ark. April 2-12, 1914 and at the Stone Church, Chicago, IL, Nov. 15-29, 1914*, St. Louis, MO: The Gospel Publishing House, no date, 10.

white and Africa was black. Because of slavery “a whole nation” of blacks had been “imported” into the South thereby breaking down the natural “geographical barriers” which God had instituted. Racial friction was the inevitable result of this intense intermingling of persons because God had intended to maintain “racial purity and integrity of the different nations.” That this racial friction was only intensifying was because the Holy Spirit was now at work in what Carothers called “a final effort to preserve the integrity of the races.”⁸¹

Carothers went on to argue that while prejudice existed within much of southern society, it did not exist among Pentecostals. Segregation within the churches as it was practiced by southern Pentecostals could not be used as a sign that they were racially prejudiced, but rather that they were in cheerful conformity to what he called “wholesome regulations” which were necessary in the South. “...The Pentecostal people of the South,” he contended, “have not the slightest prejudice or lack of divine love for the colored people, nor is there any lack of mutual interest in the work they are doing and in their spiritual welfare.” Indeed, “A proper separation of the races looking to the integrity of each,” Carothers reasoned, “is no more ‘prejudice’ than is a proper separation of the sexes. Both alike are but the dictates of common decency and of a wholesome regard for the decrees of the Almighty.”⁸²

It is evident that the Assemblies of God did not have a national policy on the

⁸¹Carothers, “Attitude of Pentecostal Whites to the Colored Brethren in the South,” 2.

⁸²Carothers, “Attitude of Pentecostal Whites to the Colored Brethren in the South,” 2.

issue of racial relations. Those north of the Mason-Dixon line were free to mix if they chose to do so, and the polity of the Assemblies made that possible. But it is equally clear that the strength of the fellowship lay in the South. For an executive presbyter from the South to write an article such as this in the official, national, weekly voice of the fellowship was for the leadership of the fellowship to take a fairly strong public stand in favor of the status quo. A trajectory had been set down which path the Assemblies of God would now proceed.

*B. "American Law and Society": A Canon **Above** the Canon*

The trajectory for racial relations in the Assemblies of God which was set in the teens continued to guide the fellowship in the 1920s and 30s. The policy of the organization which combined the independence of congregationalism with the relaxed connectional character of a modified presbyterianism cleared the road for regional acceptance or rejection of African-American applicants for ministry. Not surprisingly, there are very few African-Americans who sought credentials during those years, but those who did were typically from north of the Mason-Dixon line.⁸³ So rare in the history of the Assemblies of God was the ordination or the recognition of a pre-existing ordination for a single African-American prior to 1962 that it was popularly assumed that none had ever taken place.⁸⁴

At least four persons were ordained or had their ordinations recognized

⁸³For an extensive discussion of this period see Kenyon, "An Analysis of Ethical Issues in the History of the Assemblies of God," 65-82.

⁸⁴In 1962, the Reverend Bob Harrison was ordained. It was widely touted that this was the first such ordination. Others had been ordained, but the total number of such cases was extremely small.

shortly after the Assemblies of God formed. The husband and wife team of I. S. and Mattie Neeley, who were previously members of the Church of God in Christ group that met in Hot Springs, Arkansas, were missionaries to Cape Palmas (Liberia), West Africa. Isaac and Martha Neeley were supported for a time by a black Pentecostal congregation in Chicago, but following his death in 1923, Martha Neeley continued on as an Assemblies of God missionary until 1930.⁸⁵

The third African-American with ordination was E. S. Thomas. His name appears first in the ministers' list of the Assemblies of God in 1915. In this listing he is the first and possibly the only minister in the Assemblies of God who ever carried the designation "(colored)" following his name.⁸⁶ The Reverend Ellsworth Thomas ministered in New York, and he was a member of the Assemblies of God until his death in 1936.⁸⁷

The Christian Evangel, successor to *The Weekly Evangel* as the voice of the Assemblies of God, also mentions a Lee Hawkins who, for a short time in

⁸⁵I. S. and Mattie Neeley are listed among the "Ordained Elders, Pastors, Ministers, Evangelists and Missionaries of the Churches of God in Christ With Their Stations for 1914," 4. Their names appear again in the 1920 list of missionaries of the Assemblies of God.

⁸⁶*Minutes of the General Council of the Assemblies of God in the United States of America, Canada and Foreign Lands held at Turner Hall, St. Louis, MO., October 1-10, 1915* (no city: no publisher, no date), 16. The designation "colored" in any ministerial list would make it possible for those who would not want to invite a black minister into their pulpit not to do so accidentally. The crossing of the color line would have to be intentional. This practice of designating the race of the minister in ministerial listings began in 1913 in the Church of God (Cleveland, TN); Joseph E. Jackson, *Reclaiming Our Heritage: The Search for Black History in the Church of God*, Cleveland, TN.: Church of God Black Ministries, 1993, 34. That same year, 1913, the Pentecostal Holiness Church "voted to drop the colored convention from the roll. Thus the Black Pentecostal Holiness Church joined the Black Fire-Baptized Holiness Church as segregated versions of the movement": Vinson Synan, *The Old Time Power*, Franklin Springs, GA: Advocate Press, 1973, 153.

⁸⁷Kenyon, "An Analysis of Ethical Issues in the History of the Assemblies of God," 71-72.

1919, held credentials as well, but he was ultimately dismissed by the credentials committee for charges of a “serious nature.”⁸⁸

Throughout the '20s and '30s little more could be said about how blacks were perceived or whether they were becoming a greater part of the Assemblies of God. Howard Kenyon’s unpublished Ph.D. dissertation , “An Analysis of Ethical Issues in the History of the Assemblies of God,” has done a credible job of assessing the literature and practices during those years.⁸⁹ He notes that it was 1939 when the General Presbytery went on record as recommending:

...that when those of the colored race apply for ministerial recognition, license to preach only be granted to them with instructions that they operate within the bounds of the District in which they are licensed, and if they desire ordination, refer them to the colored organizations.⁹⁰

The fact that this issue came before the General Presbytery in 1939 signals that someone had begun to raise the question of what role African-Americans might play within the Assemblies of God. The question, it turns out, originated in the Eastern District because Robert Brown, pastor of the prestigious Glad Tidings Tabernacle, was supportive of the full ordination of qualified candidates regardless of race. Indeed, he had recommended several for ordination including

⁸⁸“Lee Hawkins, Colored: Reported Disaster,” *The Christian Evangel* (17 May 1919), 13. Note here the designation “Colored.” As far as I can determine the practice of designating certain ministers as “colored” was limited to 1915 in the ministerial listing, and this is the only place I have seen it in the *Evangel*. I believe it is safe to assume that the practice was both short-lived and infrequently invoked. It did, however, provide the opportunity for acts of discrimination on the bases of race to occur.

⁸⁹See in particular pp. 72-82 of Kenyon’s dissertation.

⁹⁰General Presbytery minutes, 1939, 2, as quoted in Kenyon, “An Analysis of Ethical Issues in the History of the Assemblies of God,” 84.

Ellsworth Thomas.⁹¹

Without a national policy in place, however, the General Presbytery had been put into a quandary. What were they to do? On the one hand there were those who were now beginning to signal strong support for the ordination of blacks. On the other hand, the bulk of Assemblies of God constituency still lay south of the Mason-Dixon line where racial segregation was a fact of life, indeed, racism was institutionalized through governmental legislation in the form of Jim Crow laws.

The General Presbytery debated the issue and came up with a solution which, in the vacuum of no national policy, made it possible for any district which wished to do so to grant a license to preach to any qualified candidate regardless of race. At the same time it chose not to force the issue on those who would clearly oppose the idea by refusing the ordination to blacks which could only be granted by the national body. Instead, it chose to encourage those who were interested in ordination to seek it in churches such as the Church of God in Christ. It was a delicate attempt to balance the issues on the floor, but it was also a vote for the status quo. The issue would not go away, however.

In 1942, a “National Conference for United Action among Evangelicals” was convened in St. Louis, Missouri. In the end, the National Association of Evangelicals emerged as a new entity. The Assemblies of God, Pentecostal Holiness Church, Church of God (Cleveland, TN.), and the Open Bible Standard Churches had been invited to the meeting and now became charter members of the

⁹¹Kenyon, “An Analysis of Ethical Issues in the History of the Assemblies of God,” 83-84.

NAE. It may have been their contact which, in part, spurred thinking about the ways in which black and white Pentecostals might relate to one another.

Whatever the case may be, beginning in 1943 pressure began to grow for greater inclusion of blacks in the Assemblies of God. It came in the form of a resolution at the General Council that year, “That provision be made through our Missions Department in cooperation with our various District Councils to promote missionary activity among our American colored people.” In subsequent discussion, the situation in the South, the need for evangelism among African-Americans, and the question of whether or not such activity would be viewed as “competition” for the Church of God in Christ were all reviewed. Ultimately, the resolution was referred to the Executive Presbytery for further study.⁹²

Two things are significant about this proposal. First, nothing was mentioned about the ordination question. Second, it is clear that while the resolution brought the situation of the African-American to the General Council floor for the first time, it did so in a way which separated “our American colored people” from the white American majority by viewing their needs as best handled by the Missions Department in cooperation with various District Councils. Still the issue had been raised.

Between General Councils, the Executive Presbytery acted to formulate a plan which might conceivably gain national support. In 1945 when the General

⁹²*Minutes of the Twentieth General Council of the Assemblies of God Convened in Springfield, Missouri, September 2-7, 1943, 13.*

Council met again, Ernest S. Williams, then General Superintendent, introduced “Brother Bruce Gibson of New York City, a representative of the colored race,” to the delegates. The purpose of his visit to the Council was to encourage the delegates to think seriously about establishing a “colored branch” of the Assemblies of God. Following discussion, a resolution undoubtedly written beforehand was offered and adopted. It read:

RESOLVED, That we encourage the establishment of Assembly of God churches for the colored race and that when such churches are established they be authorized to display the name, “Assembly of God – Colored Branch.”⁹³

There was more to come.

It is evident from the minutes of the 1945 General Council that the Home Missions Committee was already prepared to deal with the issue of a “Colored Branch.” It had prepared and now presented revisions to Article X of the bylaws dealing with the Home Missions Department. Sections 5a and 5b defined a branch and described the relationship which the branch had with the General Presbytery, the District Councils, and membership in the General Council.⁹⁴ But according to Section 5c, these provisions would not apply “to the work among the Negro (or Colored) people of the United States.”⁹⁵ The Committee went on to elaborate on the special character of the black-white relationship. “*Conforming to American*

⁹³*Minutes of the Twentieth General Council of the Assemblies of God Convened in Springfield, Missouri, September 13-18, 1945*, 31.

⁹⁴*Minutes* (1945), 35.

⁹⁵*Minutes* (1945), 36.

law and society,” it offered:

...our work amongst the *Colored People* will remain distinct and separate, and the Colored Branch when formed shall be under the supervision of the Home Missions Department. It is further understood that no transfers to or from any District shall be given or received.⁹⁶

The report was adopted by the Council.

It seems somewhat anomalous today that during this same General Council the delegates adopted a resolution which condemned Anti-Semitism and disapproved of any minister who might choose to identify with those engaged in Anti-Semitic behavior or rhetoric.⁹⁷ It is even more ironic that these same delegates excoriated the Vatican for what they called “religious discrimination and suppression” and pledged themselves to loyal cooperation with a rousing but edited quotation from Lincoln’s *Gettysburg Address* given in the midst of a war being waged, in part, over the issue of freedom for America’s black slaves.⁹⁸ But that was the nature of *American law and society* in 1945.

By today’s standards the establishment or continued operation of a “Colored Branch” would be viewed as a highly paternalistic, even a racist act. It allows to stand unchallenged the norms, standards, and prejudices of a segregated and racist society and provides them with the power which comes with their

⁹⁶*Minutes* (1945), 35. Italics mine.

⁹⁷*Minutes* (1945), 38-39.

⁹⁸*Minutes* (1945), 39. “... we, herewith pledge to our President prayerful lives, co-operation and loyalty in his duty of preserving for us ‘a government of, for, and by a free people which shall not under God fail nor perish from the earth.’” This version of the quotation from Lincoln is slightly abridged from Lincoln’s original. Copies of these two resolutions were subsequently released for publication in the *Protestant Voice, United Evangelical Action* and the Associated Press. *Minutes* (1945), 40.

institutionalization within the church. Prejudice plus power, after all, yields racism.⁹⁹

But in 1945 there were a number of denominations with such branches. Such separation was not difficult to envision. The subjection of black leaders to white leaders was rampant in American society. It was the peak period of Jim Crow and racial segregation. Furthermore, there was precedent for complete segregation among the Pentecostal Holiness people, and the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) had long had a black branch.¹⁰⁰ It was, therefore, not an unthinkable way to go.

Even with this vote in hand, the issue of whether or not to establish a “Colored Branch” within the Assemblies of God was not over. Throughout the next two decades the issue would continue to be debated at various levels. What was clear was that despite the vote of 1945, there was not the resolve to implement the action. In 1947 the Resolutions Committee again moved the “establishment of a Colored Branch of the Assemblies of God” because, it said, requests were coming from the black community for help and it claimed that “no testimony comparable to that of the Assemblies of God” was being presented

⁹⁹ See above, note 6.

¹⁰⁰ See above, note 86. For a revealing look at southern pentecostal thinking from this general period, see the extended editorial, “Christianity, the South and Race Agitation,” *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* (5 September 1946), 3-5.

among the thirteen million African-Americans in the U.S.¹⁰¹ The issue failed to materialize on the agenda of the 1949 Council, perhaps because it was still being debated behind the scenes, but the 1949 Council was dominated by another more inflammatory issue, the New Order of the Latter Rain.¹⁰² It is probable that this issue moved to the fore because it affected more churches in the Council than did the question of blacks. That year was also the time when the Assemblies of God constituency first discussed becoming members of the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America which was largely born from the fellowships which already held membership in the NAE.¹⁰³ In fact, the issue of whether the Assemblies of God should maintain membership in the NAE and take membership in the PFNA were each subject to considerable debate during this Council. In the end, the Assemblies of God voted positively on both issues but never addressed the issue of a “colored branch.”¹⁰⁴

During the 1950s and '60s the fact that the Assemblies of God had never acted on the authorization of its constituency to establish a “Colored” branch

¹⁰¹*Minutes of the Twenty-Second General Council of the Assemblies of God Convened at Grand Rapids, Michigan, September 4-9, 1945*, 43. Here the gap between the Assemblies of God and the Church of God in Christ seems to be especially wide.

¹⁰²*Minutes of the Twenty-Third General Council of the Assemblies of God Convened at Seattle, Washington, September 9-14, 1949*, 26-27.

¹⁰³*Minutes*, (1949), 27-28, 29.

¹⁰⁴*Minutes*, (1949), 27-29. The PFNA included the following eight denominations: Assemblies of God (250,000 members), Church of God (91,000), International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (54,000), Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (35,000), Pentecostal Holiness Church (30,000), Church of the Open Bible Standard (10,000), International Pentecostal Assemblies (10,000), and the Elim Missionary Assemblies (4,000), according to the *Minutes of the Constitutional Convention of the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America, Des Moines, Iowa, October 26-28, 1948*, p.9.

could be viewed in several ways. The only norm or canon to which the Assemblies had ever appealed on the subject of race relations was “American law and society.” The denomination could be said, therefore, to have dragged its feet with respect to the issue of race just as the American public was doing.

Yet, clearly there were continuing struggles at the level of denominational leadership on what to do. From time to time, letters would be addressed to the General Superintendent which prodded him for action. Always, the response was the same. In one such response Ralph M. Riggs wrote:

I agree heartily with you that our colored brethren are dear to the heart of God and need the gospel as well as everybody else. The only matter which is in doubt is how we can best discharge our responsibility toward them.¹⁰⁵

The struggle was, indeed, a genuine one. The year 1954 brought with it the unanimous decision of the U. S. Supreme Court on *Brown vs. The Board of Education* in which the claim for “separate but equal” public schools was destroyed. Ralph M. Riggs attempted to engage the services of the Reverend Nicholas B. H. Bhengu to initiate and facilitate some contact between the Assemblies of God and the Church of God in Christ.¹⁰⁶ Bhengu was a black Assemblies of God evangelist from South Africa who held a highly publicized tour through Canada and the U.S. He encouraged Riggs to think seriously about a “Colored wing” of the Assemblies of God.

¹⁰⁵Letter from Ralph M. Riggs to Miss Selina Kirby, 24 September 1953, Race Relations File, Assemblies of God Archives.

Letter from Ralph M. Riggs to Rev. N. Bengu [sic.], 20 December 1954, Race Relations File, Assemblies of God Archives.

Internal memos show that the leadership in Springfield was very concerned about the ramifications of such a move. The General Presbyters and the General Council had debated the issue at length in the '40s. Indeed, there was concern that there might be a “breach of peace” within the Assemblies were there to be such a move at this time. Riggs responded to Nicholas Bhengu by pointing out the “revolutionary” character of this suggestion in light of the “race prejudice which exists, especially in our Southland.”¹⁰⁷

Given the task of oversight which Riggs had for a fellowship which was now truly national, the dilemma must have been highly frustrating. Lines had been drawn and there appeared to be no simple solution to a problem which stretched the credulity of submission to a biblical canon when decisions had already been made to conform to the canon of “American law and society.” For the time being it would have to be that the Assemblies of God would wash its hands of the issue by simply referring all such racial questions to the Church of God in Christ as its sibling or else explore ways with Church of God in Christ leaders about how the two groups might work together. In point of fact, both methods were simultaneously employed.

When Noel Perkins was asked why the Assemblies of God did not undertake evangelism among the black and Native American populations, D. C. Foote, then Finance Secretary responded in his absence. The General Council had

¹⁰⁷Letter from Ralph M. Riggs to Rev. Nicholas B. H. Bhengu, 23 February 1955, Race Relations File, Assemblies of God Archives.

never addressed the issue favorably, he noted. Moreover, a number were arguing that

the Church of God in Christ is the exact counterpart of the Assemblies of God in doctrine and...since it is a sound organization with actually a larger constituency than the General Council of the Assemblies of God, there is no need of instituting a new movement in competition with it.¹⁰⁸

In the meantime, Ralph Riggs was attempting to explore the possibility that the Assemblies of God and the Church of God in Christ engage in “some friendly exchange...” After all, “The Assemblies of God have been content in the past to *allow* the Church of God in Christ to be the counter part of *our* church in its dealings with the colored people in the United States.”¹⁰⁹

In spite of Riggs’ best effort at developing rapprochement, the letter attests to a kind of paternalism. It is very doubtful that Riggs would have recognized it as such for his letter was reflective of the surrounding white culture. The Church of God in Christ was portrayed as a younger sibling which the Assemblies had *allowed* to work with the black population. Now, however, Riggs was reaching out to them, willing to grant them a greater level of equality, and as a gesture of good will, give them the opportunity to purchase Sunday school literature with their own imprint. In later correspondence he suggests that it might even save

¹⁰⁸Letter from D. G. Foote to Rev. George A. Ramocan, 22 June 1955, Race Relations File, Assemblies of God Archives.

¹⁰⁹Letter from Ralph M. Riggs to Reverend G. Lawrence Williams, D.D., 8 July 1955, Race Relations File, Assemblies of God Archives. Italics mine.

them money.¹¹⁰

The initiative which Riggs took must be viewed as a genuine attempt to find a solution to his racial dilemma. He seems personally to have been committed to a greater racial equality. "It is certainly high time in American living and in our church experience that we come closer together," he wrote to Battle.¹¹¹ And his suggestion would provide two points of deniability for the Assemblies of God. For those who were demanding that the Assemblies reach out to the African-American community, Riggs could point to a tangible cooperative effort with the Church of God in Christ. For those who were opposed to the Assemblies of God reaching out to embrace the African-American community within its ranks, he could safely say that he had intentions which merely recognized a sister organization with a fine ministry in the black community. In this way, Riggs could avoid the pressure to integrate on the one hand and the pressure to segregate on the other. In either case he would not extend the Assemblies of God beyond the limits common to American law and society.¹¹² But Riggs' letter must also be

¹¹⁰Letter from Ralph M. Riggs to Rev. W. L. Battle, 29 August 1955, Race Relations File, Assemblies of God Archives.

¹¹¹Letter from Ralph M. Riggs to Rev. W. L. Battle, 26 September 1955, Race Relations File, Assemblies of God Archives.

¹¹²In a letter from Ralph M. Riggs to Rev. N. B. H. Bhengu, 12 October 1956, Race Relations File, Assemblies of God Archives, Riggs notes that "You yourself have said that 'any scheme to integrate the Negro church to the white will be disastrous.' This is exactly what our brethren (The General Presbytery in its Fall, 1955 meeting) felt. On the other hand, to build up a separate church for our colored brethren would likewise seem counter to the present trend in American life. As you know, our Supreme Court has ruled in favor of integration. If we therefore build a church according to the segregation pattern, that would look as if we were defying the present trend in American life. So, rather than run into either of these difficulties, we feel it would be better for us to maintain the status quo at the present time."

placed within the context of a white dominated and racist society. Conformity to American law and society would have left Riggs blind to his own racial presuppositions.

Throughout the fall and into 1956, Riggs continued to make overtures to the Church of God in Christ. A number of the Executive Presbytery, including Riggs, visited the Church of God in Christ convocation in December, 1955. In February 1956 he was still in correspondence over the possibility of a joint publication which he tried to sell by convincing Bishop J. O. Patterson that the material which the Church of God in Christ was using, material published by the “International Council of Religious Education Sunday School lessons” were produced by “modernists” and the Assemblies of God provided a viable *pentecostal* alternative which could be used to “indoctrinate” Church of God in Christ people “with our glorious Pentecostal message.”¹¹³ In the end, Riggs’ appeals to the Church of God in Christ failed and he was forced by continuing pressures within the Assemblies of God to look for other solutions.

The 1950s were very turbulent years. Following the end of World War II and the takeover of mainland China in 1949 by Mao Tse-tung, the Cold War moved steadily toward center stage on the international scene. Within the country, the opportunistic Senator Joseph McCarthy dominated the first half of the decade with his charges that communists had managed to infiltrate many American

¹¹³Letter from Ralph M. Riggs to Bishop J. O. Patterson, 28 February 1956, Race Relations File, Assemblies of God Archive. Riggs had used a similar appeal with the Reverend W. L. Battles in his 29 August 1955 correspondence.

institutions. The Supreme Court was actively reversing a half-century of Jim Crow laws and the Civil Rights Movement began to become a formidable movement under the leadership of such able spokespersons as the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. The Republican party benefited from the turmoil of the '50s and Vice President Richard Nixon's appeal to American fears of communism made believers of many Pentecostals. Many even suggested that the agitation toward integration was "Communist inspired."¹¹⁴

The General Presbytery of the Assemblies had reviewed the issue of race relations in 1955, then expunged all records of their discussion. In 1956, however, they authorized a study on the questions of segregation and integration. This apparently came at the recommendation of the Executive Presbytery who were looking for "a convenient and deliberate approach to the whole matter" because the handwriting was on the wall. "Even the churches are going to be challenged concerning their attitude," noted Riggs.¹¹⁵

As a result of this action, a study commission with members from both northern and southern states was appointed. It would broaden the discussion by

¹¹⁴In a letter from Ralph M. Riggs to Reverend and Mrs. J. S. LaGrone, 10 February 1956, Race Relations File, Assemblies of God Archives, Riggs notes "We have heard that it is the opinion of some very fine Christian Negroes of the South that much of the present agitation is Communist inspired." T. L. Lowery, a Church of God (Cleveland, TN) evangelist who at that time shared W. F. Carothers' concern that segregation was the only plausible solution for God's plan to keep the races pure (see above notes 81-82) charged in very explicit terms, "This trouble in America is caused by Communist front organizations. The purpose is to cause trouble among the citizens of the United States; and if possible, a civil war." T. L. Lowery, *America's No. 1 Problem: Segregation* (Cleveland, TN: Rev. T. L. Lowery, no date, Third Edition), 3.

¹¹⁵Letter from Ralph M. Riggs to Reverend F. J. Lundquist, 12 September 1956, Race Relations File, Assemblies of God Archives, 1.

defining the issue of race relations beyond the relations between blacks and whites. It would provide a temporary response to critics thereby buying more time for the fellowship, and by producing a report, it would enable the fellowship to move beyond what Riggs called “an expedient dodging of the issue” which he believed had characterized their actions to date.¹¹⁶ Earlier in the year the National Association of Evangelicals had strengthened the hand of all its members by struggling with these issues and passing a resolution on “Human Rights” which condemned “discriminatory practices against racial minorities” as a violation of Jesus’ teachings, a hindrance to evangelization and a source of alienation to the gospel, and which called those in authority to work toward “equal rights and opportunities for every individual.”¹¹⁷

The report on “Segregation versus Integration” was a year in the making. While federal troops were called into Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957 to aid in the school desegregation process, the committee worked. Riggs invited Bishop Charles H. Mason, whom he addressed as “Venerable father and brother in Christ,” to attend the 1957 General Council of the Assemblies of God in

¹¹⁶Letter from Riggs to Lundquist, 12 September 1956, 1.

¹¹⁷“NAE Convention Resolutions,” *United Evangelical Action* 15:6 (May 15, 1956), 7. The Church of God (Cleveland, TN) would wait until 1964 to pass such a resolution (“Resolution on Human Rights,” *Church of God Evangel* 54:28 [14 September 1964], 15), while the Assemblies of God would wait until 1968.

Cleveland, Ohio.¹¹⁸ Mason sent a representative to the Council,¹¹⁹ and both Ralph M. Riggs and Thomas F. Zimmerman, then Assistant Superintendent, responded by attending the Golden Jubilee Convocation of the Church of God in Christ in December.¹²⁰ Once again, Riggs attempted to reopen his proposal regarding a joint publication venture, but again the proposal went without response.¹²¹

In mid-1957 the nine-page report on “Segregation versus Integration” was submitted to the General Presbytery. It began by noting the complexity of the issues being addressed. It contended that the question of integration was not merely a southern problem, but rather, a national one. As a result it acknowledged that it was a genuine question which needed to be faced by Pentecostals.

“If we will lay aside our prejudices and concern about what outsiders may think, and consider the principles from a Christian standpoint,” the drafters argued, “we can come up with the correct answers for our churches.” The report went on to observe that:

Our greatest danger is allowing the fear of outside opinion to cause

¹¹⁸Letter from Ralph M. Riggs to Senior Elder C.H. Mason 6, August 1957, Race Relations File, Assemblies of God Archives.

¹¹⁹*Minutes of the Twenty-Seventh General Council of the Assemblies of God Convened at Cleveland, Ohio, August 28 - September 3, 1957*, 5.

¹²⁰Letter from Ralph M. Riggs to Bishop D. Lawrence Williams, D.D., 27 November, 1957, Race Relations File, Assemblies of God Archives.

¹²¹Letter from Ralph M. Riggs to Bishop A.B. McEwen, 6 December, 1957, Race Relations File, Assemblies of God Archives. It appears that all initiatives offered by Riggs regarding the publication venture fell on deaf ears because Riggs missed the point of what it takes to overcome racism. He did not know how to be sensitive to issues of self-determination or the uniqueness of racial identity. He simply viewed the issue through the eyes of white society as a man of his day.

us to form a policy that we ourselves do not wholly agree with. Full Gospel people must decide what they feel is scriptural and Christian and stand on these convictions. The racial question is no exception.¹²²

According to the drafters of this document, Scripture affirmed that before God, everyone was equal (Genesis 3:20; Acts 17:28; Romans 2:11). This was an important observation since the Assemblies of God had held since 1916 that the Bible was “The infallible rule of faith and conduct.”¹²³ It had, theoretically, at least, incomparable normative standing for all of faith and life. But the drafters also naively noted that equality was something granted to American citizens by the law, and the U.S. Constitution granted equal rights to everyone.¹²⁴

The Assemblies of God was guilty of neglecting the spiritual needs of African-Americans, the drafters claimed quite self-critically, while investing heavily in African missions.¹²⁵ That inequity could be redressed by offering assistance to black churches with similar doctrine, establishing a means of training and education for those interested in leading black churches, by providing assistance to "young Negro ministers," and perhaps most importantly by treating

¹²²“Segregation Versus Integration,” General Presbytery File, 1.

¹²³“A Statement of Fundamental Truths Approved by the General Council of the Assemblies of God, October 2-7, 1916” in *Minutes of the General Council of the Assemblies of God in the United States of America, Canada and Foreign Lands held at Bethel Chapel, St. Louis, MO, October 1-7, 1916*, 10.

¹²⁴“Segregation Versus Integration,” 2.

¹²⁵“Segregation Versus Integration”, 8. This was a potentially dangerous admission because the Assemblies of God people as a whole had been and continue to be highly invested in the concept of foreign missions. By raising the inequity issue over what was spent on Africans as opposed to African-Americans, the report held the potential for undermining a growing foreign missions program, on the one hand, or raising the ire of the giving constituency.

them as peers, as equals.¹²⁶

These were noble intentions, indeed, but this document also conveyed a number of concerns. Its guiding recommendation was that since integration of Assemblies of God churches was inadvisable because of unresolved issues in the larger society, no public statement on the issue should be made by the Assemblies of God until it was absolutely essential to do so.¹²⁷ To move too rapidly could result in even “greater mistakes.”¹²⁸ There were many problems which needed to be handled. Fear was expressed that a policy of full integration would be detrimental to existing “Negro ministry,” because black pastors were traditionally educationally disadvantaged. Whites were also less likely to call a black pastor than a white one and capable black ministers might be left without employment.¹²⁹ Full integration, it was assumed, would also hinder whites from carrying out the Great Commission at two levels. First, few African-Americans would choose to attend an integrated church where whites were in the majority, and second, “unsaved white people” would not “attend or allow their children to attend Sunday School where any number of Negroes go.”¹³⁰ It was only reasonable, then, to move slowly, accommodating to the culture region by region, allowing each

¹²⁶“Segregation Versus Integration,” 8-9.

¹²⁷“Segregation Versus Integration,” 7.

¹²⁸“Segregation Versus Integration,” 2.

¹²⁹“Segregation Versus Integration,” 4.

¹³⁰“Segregation Versus Integration,” 5.

region to move as quickly or slowly as it chose to move on the issue and only when “the general public is ready and it will not interfere with the progress and expansion of our movement” announce to the public that “we consider all men equal.”¹³¹ In essence, once again, the canon of American law and society was invoked, a canon which would blunt the prophetic edge of *the canon* allegedly embraced by the fellowship for *all* matters of faith and practice, according to its doctrinal affirmation. The General Presbytery accepted the document’s recommendation and the Executive Presbytery released a brief statement highlighting the polity of the Assemblies of God for use in responding to inquiries on the official position of the fellowship.¹³²

The General and Executive Presbyteries had begun to form a national policy on race relations. It was formed by a “tip-of-the-hat” to Scripture with an overriding conformity to the mores of American law and society, that is, the policy would be to go only with what the market would bear, and it could be facilitated by working through the fellowship’s existing polity. This policy avoided a breach in the fellowship and it did not prematurely commit the

¹³¹“Segregation Versus Integration,” 7. In a Letter from Ralph M. Riggs to the Reverend Kenneth Roper, 24 January 1956, Race Relations File, Assemblies of God Archives, Riggs had already laid out this position as that which was held by the General Presbytery which “felt that it would be best for us to mark time...until the matter had developed further in the public consciousness and practice.” Cf. Edith Blumhofer, *The Assemblies of God: A Chapter in the Story of American Pentecostalism*, Springfield, MO.: Gospel Publishing House, 1989, 2:17, and Kenyon, “An Analysis of Ethical Issues in the History of the Assemblies of God,” 100-101.

¹³²This “Integration Statement” reads:
INASMUCH as the Assemblies of God is a cooperative fellowship made up of sovereign churches which retain their right of self-determination and are affiliated on a voluntary basis in accordance with adopted Constitution and Bylaws, matters of procedure along these lines are left to local determination and are not established by organizational action.

Assemblies to a particular position before the public. When in April 1958 the Tuskegee Institute did a survey of what churches had done regarding the issue of desegregation, the General Secretary J. Roswell Flower's response was consistent with this policy and to the point.

The Assemblies of God is a vigorous missionary and evangelistic association which has not concerned itself with social and racial problems. No actions of any nature have been taken to encourage or discourage desegregation in any community or the country as a whole. There are a few ordained ministers of the colored race in the Assemblies of God and some of our churches, particularly in the northern states, do have members of the colored race. That is about the extent of the church's participation in desegregation.¹³³

As the decade ended, new questions emerged. Membership of the Assemblies of God in the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America, as well as that of other southern-based pentecostal denominations during this period may also shed light on certain PFNA actions as well. It is highly unlikely that the PFNA would reflect a position which was different from that taken by many of its constituent member churches. The *Minutes* of the organization's Eleventh Annual Convention (1958) note for the first time that "A representative of the Church of God in Christ made inquiry concerning possible membership of his group with the PFNA...." He was told that it would be necessary for him to submit a formal application which would be reviewed by the Board of Administration.¹³⁴

Nothing appears to be out of order with the advice which was given,

¹³³Letter from J. Roswell Flower to Mrs. Burton W. Lewis, 23 April 1958, Race Relations File, Assemblies of God Archives.

¹³⁴*Minutes of the Eleventh Annual Convention-PFNA* (1958), 5.

according to these minutes. But there appears to be no record of any prior or subsequent applications, formal or otherwise, having ever been submitted to the PFNA. What is troubling about this observation is the statement attributed to the Reverend R.O. Corvin, who, for some years served on that Board of Administration. He is reported to have acknowledged publicly in the late '70s "...that the all-white PFNA had, in the past, received applications from Black Pentecostals to affiliate, but had 'by agreement' prevented their joining."¹³⁵ If this were the policy of the Board of Administration during the 1950s it would not have been out of character with white pentecostal sensitivities of the time.

In December 1958, the Assemblies of God named a final committee to study the feasibility of establishing some form of "Colored Fellowship."¹³⁶ It made its report to the General Presbytery in 1959. Its findings differed little from the recommendations made at the 1945 General Council, although it was slightly less paternalistic.¹³⁷ The work of the committee was commended, the report was tabled, and the presbytery agreed that the report should receive no publicity.¹³⁸

With the new decade, however, a new factor seems to have emerged. It was finally observed by the Assemblies of God leadership that there was really

¹³⁵"News Notes on Black Religion," *Spirit: A Journal of Issues Incident to Black Pentecostalism* 3:2 (1979), 37.

¹³⁶General Presbytery Minutes, (1959), 36. See also the Letter from Ralph M. Riggs to the Reverend C.C. Grace, Superintendent, 10 December, 1958, Race Relations File, Assemblies of God Archives.

¹³⁷"Report of the Committee to Consider a Colored Fellowship," General Presbytery File (1959), 2 pp.

¹³⁸General Presbytery Minutes (1959), 17.

nothing but precedent which would not allow an African-American to be ordained. A few African-Americans, as we have already observed, had already been ordained. The issue ultimately, rested, then, on the recommendation of the District Council. The Constitution and Bylaws of the Assemblies of God had continued to be silent on the issue and as such, appeal could be made to them, that all the basic qualifications necessary for ordination had been met with no mention of race whatever. Robert Harrison, an experienced musician, pastor, and evangelist of the Northern California-Nevada District Council, who worked with Billy Graham for several years, was a prime candidate. After nearly two more years of deliberation and debate, Harrison was granted ordination by action of the Executive Presbytery July 17, 1962.¹³⁹

If the 1950s were troubled years, the '60s were worse. President Kennedy attempted to marshal church support for civil rights.¹⁴⁰ In 1963 he was assassinated. Two years later saw the Watts riots, and throughout the early '60s Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. offered two competing models for moving ahead. The Black Power movement grew and whites throughout the country felt threatened. Suddenly, on April 4, 1968, a shot rang out and Martin Luther King, Jr., lay dead.

Some seem to have missed the point of these events, often complaining

¹³⁹For Harrison's account of these events see *When God Was Black*, 90-95.

¹⁴⁰"Jack Seeks Church Help In Solving Rights Woes," Springfield, MO, *Leader Press* (June 18, 1963), 13.

about the coercive nature of government legislation on the issues or the confrontational character of demonstration. In some cases they pander a conservative political agenda while offering simplistic assessments of the events.¹⁴¹ Others were more critical, offering somewhat more mature and informed reflections.¹⁴² But 1968 was a watershed year, for it was the year in which the General Presbytery adopted for the first time a statement regarding social concern. In this statement they went on record as opposing the “social ills that unjustly keep men from sharing in the blessings of their communities,” and abhorring “the moral evils that destroy human dignity and prevent men from receiving the blessings of heaven.” It went on to offer that “community-betterment projects and legislature actions on social improvement” while useful, only addressed the symptoms rather than the causes of the problems. Economic justice, too, was viewed as useful but insufficient. The real issue was sin and it was in addressing sin that the church could make its most significant contribution. The Presbytery went on to pledge that the Assemblies of God would, not through coercion and confrontation, but by living consistent Christian lives, “exert our influence as Christian citizens to justifiable social action in areas of domestic

¹⁴¹R.C. Cunningham, “Watts - a Year Later” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (17 July, 1966), 4, seems to focus only on the relationship between alcohol and the riot. No thought is given as to *why* alcoholism is so high in this area. LeRoy Johnson, “Civil Disobedience,” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (14 July, 1968), 6-8, provides a helpful discussion of his topic but fails to apply it to contemporary events. So, too, J. Robert Ashcroft, “God and Government,” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (29 September, 1968), 10-11, Similar articles may be found in other pentecostal periodicals of the period. Cf. Arnie M. Cribb, “Today’s Need -- Christian Citizens,” *Pentecostals Holiness Advocate* (20 March, 1965), 4-5.

¹⁴²A rare but somewhat insightful and sensitive piece is L. Calvin Bacon, “Eyewitness at a Funeral,” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (14 July, 1968), 20-21 in which he struggles with his personal politics and feelings amid the realities of this important event.

relations, education, law enforcement, employment, equal opportunity, and other beneficial matters.”¹⁴³

By 1970 the Assemblies of God leadership had held a conference with a group of black pastors, inviting them to provide the Assemblies of God with recommendations and advice on how to begin to minister with some effectiveness within the African-American community while avoiding a competitive spirit with the Church of God Christ.¹⁴⁴ A short account of this conference was presented in a dialogue format to the Assemblies of God constituency through *The Pentecostal Evangel*.¹⁴⁵ In subsequent years a slow but steady program of accepting and encouraging the ordination of African-Americans and the establishment of Assemblies of God churches within the African-American community has been underway within the fellowship,¹⁴⁶ but no comparable program designed to shape

¹⁴³“A Statement of Social Concern” is printed in Appendix C of Menzies, *Anointed to Serve*, 394-395.

¹⁴⁴Bob Harrison’s *When God Was Black* was published shortly after this encounter and contains a number of excellent insights which have not yet been adequately considered. More recently, evangelical William Pannell has made these same as well as other pressing and critical observations which are just as applicable to the Assemblies of God as they are to the larger evangelical community in *The Coming Race Wars? A Cry for Reconciliation*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993.

¹⁴⁵Announcement of the conference was made in “Church Leaders Meet to Discuss Ways of Reaching Black Americans for Christ,” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (15 February 1970), 29. The dialogue appeared two months later in “How Can We Reach Black Americans for Christ?” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (26 April, 1970) 6-8, 20.

¹⁴⁶“Assemblies of God Officials Meet with Blacks in Leadership Conference,” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (8 February, 1981), 28; “Seminar Focuses on Ministry to Blacks,” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (16 January, 1983), 13; Robert W. Pirtle, “Reaching Black America in the Decade of Harvest,” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (16 December, 1990), 17; “National Black Fellowship Formed,” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (10 February, 1991), 29; Robert Harrison, “Reclaiming Black America,” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (18 August, 1991), 16-17; and “Division Of Home Missions Hosts National Black Caucus,” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (20 February, 1994), 25.

the attitudes of the people, and no program of making clear how to apply the fellowship's Statement on Social Concern has been put in place.¹⁴⁷

T.E. Gannon, National Director of Home Missions, alone has come the closest to making a public admission that the Assemblies of God, through its unwillingness to speak directly to the issues of racial relations in unequivocal terms, bears some guilt in fostering racism when he wrote that:

The many social ills, injustices, and racial imbalances that blacks have experienced make our task [of evangelism among blacks] all the more difficult, this is because *the church has been identified with the system that has imposed and perpetuated these ills*, and partly because the church has been slow to raise its voice against these wrongs when and where they exist.¹⁴⁸

III. Romans 12:2, Conformity or Transformation? Some Concluding Observations

At the beginning of this brief survey on some of the historical roots of racial unity and division I suggested that we might learn some things by looking at racial issues as they were handled at the Azusa Street mission and how they have been addressed by the Assemblies of God. I chose the Azusa Street mission and its African-American pastor precisely because virtually every pentecostal denomination throughout the world can and frequently does trace its origins to

¹⁴⁷For a brief survey of racial attitudes in one Assemblies of God congregation in 1977, see Dave Ytterock, "Probing Our Moral Identity," *Agora: A Magazine of Opinion within the Assemblies of God*, 1:2 (Fall, 1977) 6-9, esp. 8.

¹⁴⁸T.E. Gannon, "Unrestricted Compassion," *The Pentecostal Evangel* (15 September, 1974), 20. Italics mine. See above, page 5.

that mission.¹⁴⁹ I chose the Assemblies of God because of its unique relationship to the Church of God in Christ, because of its relative size and dominance as a predominantly white pentecostal denomination in the U.S., and because its response to racial issues was so easily documented. It is now time to see what we have learned from these examples and ask what implications their stories hold for all of us.

A. Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism: Roots of Division

The issues of prejudice, discrimination, and racism are endemic to life in the Twentieth Century. They are not merely problems of the American South. They are American problems. They are not, however, merely problems of the American people. They are, in fact, problems which face all people everywhere. All one needs to do is observe the racial, ethnic, and cultural conflicts of Serbia with her neighbors, or the internecine struggle between tribes in Rwanda to recognize the international and human dimensions of these problems. But from what this study has demonstrated, pentecostalism in the U.S. has mirrored these problems within its history just as the American people have lived it out in theirs. It is true that even within pentecostal, so-called “Spirit-filled” circles, Paul’s words to the Romans laments our claims to the contrary, “There is no one who is righteous, not even one” (Romans 3:10). Prejudice and discrimination, at least, have been present throughout our common histories.

¹⁴⁹See on this Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., “Pentecostal Origins from a Global Perspective,” in Harold D. Hunder and Peter D. Hocken, *All Together in Our Place: Theological Papers from the Brighton Conference on World Evangelizatio*, (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993, 166-180.

Racism is a stronger term yet, however, for it requires not only a prejudicial attitude and discriminatory practice, it requires power to implement these things on a systematic basis, individually, culturally and institutionally. Within the American context, the power which is necessary to engage in this sin has traditionally been held by whites. While prejudice, discrimination, even retaliatory acts of prejudice and discrimination may be found among African-Americans, racism by its very definition within the American context cannot be laid at their feet. This is difficult for white pentecostals to understand because they have frequently confused prejudice and discrimination with racism. But racism is the sin of white America against “the other.” The extent to which predominantly white pentecostal groups have benefited from maintaining the status quo within American society, the extent to which they have played an active role in keeping the races separated, the extent that they have remained silent when unjust racial policies have been enforced or just racial policies have been left unenforced, they are guilty of racism.

Pentecostals as a whole must identify and admit to those acts of prejudice, discrimination, and/or racism of which they are guilty before forgiveness can be given.¹⁵⁰ It will require soul searching, honesty, and a willingness to change regardless of their fears. It does not come when a single well-intended person asks forgiveness on behalf of all others of the same race without their knowledge and

¹⁵⁰I John 1:9 conditions forgiveness on the ability of the sinner to confess his or her sins. The verb “to confess” which the apostle uses in this text, *homologeō* (ὁμολογέω) means quite literally “to speak” or “to say” (*logōō* (λογέω)) “the same thing (*homo*).” It means, therefore, that we must call sin what God calls it, sin, before we can be forgiven.

approval. The confession must be owned by those who say, “Amen.” Once the confession is made, attitudes and actions require dramatic changes which are consistent with the words of confession. Nothing less than repentance and conversion are acceptable. As a result, Pentecostals will need to be challenged to think in new, inclusive ways when addressing “the other.”¹⁵¹ Whatever blacks and whites do in their relationships with one another needs also to be reflected between their relationships with all “other” groups.

B. “Love One Another”: Roots of Unity

Bishop William J. Seymour was a rare man in the early days of the modern pentecostal movement. He recognized that any issue which separated Christians from fellowship with one another was an attack on the unity of the Church. There is, after all, only One Church and that is the Church of Jesus Christ. The divisions which came at the Azusa Street mission split the fellowship which had inspired Frank Bartleman to describe it as a place where “the ‘colorline’ was washed away in the blood.” Seymour, like Bartleman, believed that to be true until the colorline reemerged. And Seymour saw only one solution. In spite of the division he would continue to offer a welcome even to those who exploited the color issue. He exhorted his members to do the same and to refuse to sink to the same level as his detractors.

¹⁵¹For two articles which are highly insightful along these lines see Miroslav Volf, “When the Unclear Spirit Leaves: Tasks of the Eastern European Churches after the 1989 Revolution,” *Cross Currents: Religion and Intellectual Life*, 41 (1991), 78-92; and Miroslav Volf, “Exclusion and Embrace: Theological Reflections in the Wake of ‘Ethnic Cleansing,’” in William A. Dyrness, *Emerging Voices in Global Christian Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991, 19-40.

Jesus noted that “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Paul also enjoined the Romans to “love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor” (Romans 12:10). For an individual or a congregation or a denomination or some interdenominational fellowship to allow or to foster racism, discrimination, or prejudice is to violate both of these words of advice. Racism must be viewed as falling into the same category as murder. Neither can be tolerated in a community ruled by love. To date, the treatment of black Pentecostals by white Pentecostals in this country has fallen far below the level of a loving relationship or of an attribution of honor.

Failure to live up to our divine calling as loving sisters and brothers in the Lord sends a very mixed message to those outside the Church. White Pentecostals have contended that they have been most concerned about carrying out the mandate of the Great Commission. But their treatment of African-Americans in general has contaminated the message which they say they intend to communicate, a message rooted in reconciliation.

The ways we have chosen to live our lives without consulting with or considering how our actions might impact people of another race are numerous. A few examples will suffice to make the point.

1. Flight from the cities to the suburbs has demoralized many Christians who through no fault of their own cannot afford to run from ghetto life and now find themselves isolated with even fewer resources.
2. The development of a plethora of Christian schools, the initiatives toward

voucher credits, and the rise of the home schooling movement have left public schools, especially in the cities, without adequate resources to provide for quality education among those who have stayed.

3. The adoption of political views on candidates, on social issues such as law and order, legislation like California's "three strikes" bill, English only legislation, closed national borders, health care, and welfare, or the so-called moral issues such as single parent family life, illegitimacy, abortion, euthanasia, nuclear arms, military intervention and the like, without first living among our Pentecostal neighbors whose families, friends, and neighbors will inevitably be impacted by our actions does not give adequate evidence that we even care what they think, to say nothing of loving them and giving them preferential treatment in our honor for them.
4. The kind of "evangelicalization" among some white Pentecostals who are looking for social and ecclesial acceptability which has been accompanied by a downgrading, even denial of what might be termed "Africanisms"¹⁵² that once abounded in all Pentecostal churches has included turning our backs on the gifts of those who were partners in our founding.

As we assess the ways in which black and white Pentecostals have often worked at cross purposes on many of these issues, it is not so difficult to see why Islam is making such inroads among young black men in the U.S. It is not a divided house in the same way that the Pentecostal Movement is divided and it appears to give young men a sense of pride, self-esteem, and purpose which has not been found in the same way within the Pentecostal Movement. The rise of

¹⁵²See on this topic Joseph E. Holloway, ed. *Africanisms in American Culture*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990. I am aware of the debate over the validity of "Africanisms" which is being waged within the African-American community, and I side with those who grant them validity. In short, Africanisms may be viewed as phenomena which were part of "primitive" African culture, but which may also be found within Christian expressions among African-Americans. A phenomenon such as speaking in tongues, trance, dancing, or the use of drums might now be attributed to the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's gifts, whereas within the primitive African culture the phenomenon was present but the source, power, and meaning were without Christian explanation. James Tinney tried desperately if somewhat less than felicitously, to alert Pentecostals to this problem during the 1970s and early 1980s. See, for instance, "The Blackness of Pentecostalism," *Spirit*, 3:2 (1979), 27-36; and "Black Roots and Branches of Pentecostalism," *Sojourners* (September, 1980), 29-30. See also Diana L. Hayes, "Slain in the Holy Spirit: Black Americans and the Holy Spirit," *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*, 20:1-2 (Fall 1992/Spring 1993), 97-115, who tends to view this phenomenon as an Africanism.

Islam among black men may, in fact, be a judgment upon a racially divided church, which the church must now endure or overcome. The way to confront the issue is to begin again in a relationship of forgiveness, reconciliation, love, and honor for the other. We need to develop a sensitivity to the needs, hurts, hopes, and aspirations of one another.¹⁵³

C. Reclaiming Our Heritage

The story of racial unity and division as it has been portrayed within this paper is not a very happy one. In a very real sense and to a great extent, the Pentecostal Movement has lost its prophetic promise, the ability to provide a viable model in which disparate races dwell together in harmony as the reconciled people of God. This has happened due to fear of the unknown, coupled with a capitulation to contemporary culture. We have, in fact, conformed to the world. It is not impossible, in the power of the Spirit, to have our minds, hearts, and lives transformed by the renewing work of the Spirit. It needs also to be said that there are a number of people and even a few Pentecostal groups which provide for us a vision for what we might do together. It is on these that I want to concentrate for a moment.

1. William J. Seymour and Charles H. Mason provide us with two examples of men who were open and inclusive of those who came to them,

¹⁵³Bennie Goodwin, *Speak Up, Black Man* (No city: Bennie Goodwin, 1972) 27, notes that “The underlying problem involved in most, if not all, negative racial-ethnic-class relationships are due to the gross, many times unconscious, unfeeling responses to the unnoticed needs of the minority group.”

regardless of race. Both of them broke with the culture to provide something for those they served. When those who were white left their ranks, each of them responded in much the same way. Bishop Mason remained cooperative and supportive of all Pentecostals, regardless of race. He didn't allow that to be mistaken for weakness, for he clearly made his own decisions. Still, he made himself vulnerable to the requests and initiatives of white Pentecostals. Seymour did not capitulate to white prejudice and discrimination but chose, instead, to follow Scripture and to exhort his congregation to do likewise. It may be due, in part, to the fact that both of these men had parents who had been slaves that they were able to understand the meaning of Jesus' words that

whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant,
and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all
(Mark 10:43b-44).

Following Jesus' own example, they chose to serve rather than to be served.

2. At least one Pentecostal group, which is predominantly white, has had a reasonably good track record on the issue of race. A.J. Tomlinson who led the Church of God until 1923, also founded the Church of God of Prophecy. Tomlinson, while not perfect, nevertheless, made specific moves which ultimately brought about complete integration within the ranks of his followers. Even when Tomlinson was still General Overseer of the Church of God, he addressed the

General Assemblies in 1919¹⁵⁴ and in 1922 on the full relationship between all Christians regardless of race. He lamented the limitation placed on interracial relationships south of the Mason-Dixon line and he strove to integrate African-Americans into full partnership in the church.

Upon his death, A.J. Tomlinson was succeeded by his son Milton A. Tomlinson as General Overseer of the Church of God of Prophecy. He maintained the full integration of African-Americans within the church, thus avoiding the extremes of total segregation, paternalistic oversight, or inaction. As of 1991, African-Americans accounted for 16% of the denomination's membership,¹⁵⁵ blacks and members of other ethnic and racial minorities continue to work in positions of leadership, among them Bishop E.L. Jones who serves as the General Field Secretary, and Adrian Varlack who until 1993 served as World Missions Secretary, coordinating all work of the church outside the U.S.

The Church of God of Prophecy has not previously participated in the PFNA, largely because of their exclusivist ecclesiology. But their experience is worth reviewing, and under relatively new leadership, they may now be open to cooperation with the PFNA or its successor.

3. One final illustration comes from the Apostolic Faith Church of God. It began as a direct offspring of the Azusa Street mission when in 1911 William J.

¹⁵⁴A.J. Tomlinson on "The Colored People" in *Minutes of the Fourteenth Annual Assembly of the Church of God, held at Cleveland, Tenn., October 29 - November 4, 1919*, 13.

¹⁵⁵Total membership in 1991 was 70,276, of whom 11,322 were African-Americans. Figures are taken from the "Black Membership Survey Sheet, 1991."

Seymour visited Virginia and established Elder Charles W. Lowe as “Senior Bishop and Chief Apostle of the Apostolic Faith Mission, Handsome, Virginia.”¹⁵⁶ Through the years this movement grew and it splintered into a half dozen small denominations.

Bishop Oree Keyes was elected to lead one of those groups and he took the position with the humble heart of a servant. As the Lord began to speak to him, Bishop Keyes was burdened over the disunity which had come to the original work, some over personalities, some over policy. As a result of God’s prompting, he went to the bishops of these other small denominations and asked them if they would consider coming back together. They refused. Over the next year, Bishop Keyes continued to wait on God for a solution to the problem which he believed the Lord wanted to address. In 1980 he called a meeting in which he told the other bishops of his burden. As a token of his sincerity, he volunteered to resign as bishop of his group in order to facilitate the merger of these groups into the single denomination they would become. The group heard his plea and in 1980 remerged and elected him as Senior Bishop of the Apostolic Faith Church of God.

I bring to you the example of Bishop Oree Keyes who was so burdened for the cause of Christian unity among his pentecostal sisters and brothers that he was willing to lay his own future on the line. If Pentecostals are going to be honest about the issues of prejudice, discrimination, and racism, some new action must

¹⁵⁶Elder Otis J. Smith and Bishop Oree Keyes, eds., *Manual of the Apostolic Faith Church of God* (AFCOG), Franklin, Virginia: General Assembly AFCOG; no date.

be taken. Jesus laid it on the line (Philippians 2:6-11). Bishop Keyes followed His example. For the sake of the gospel, for the reconciliation which is available only through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, I urge the leadership of the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America and its constitutive bodies to do the same.

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