

PENTECOSTALISM AFTER AZUSA:

some historical notes

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- | [Life After Azusa](#)
- | [C.H. Mason](#)
- | [the Oneness movement](#)
- | [Aimee Semple MacPherson](#)
- | [Web links on today's movements](#)

LIFE AFTER THE AZUSA REVIVAL

The dimming of the Azusa Street revival by 1908 would have ordinarily spelled trouble for a young movement, especially if it were tightly organized. But the Pentecostal movement had rolled past Azusa, into the Pacific Northwest and the Southeast. There were now plenty of elsewheres to go. Schools, book and pamphlet printers, traveling evangelists, musicians, camps, and an absolutely sizzling network of word-of-mouth communication, all sprung up almost overnight seemingly out of nowhere. (This was before air transport and mass electronic media; cars were few and slow, package delivery technology was crude, and many of the areas where Pentecostalism grew fastest did not yet have electric or telephone service.) Pentecostalism's lack of organization served it very well. There were also plenty of others than Seymour and Parham to lead them. Some of them were charlatans, others honestly held bizarre 'the-end-is-here' beliefs. But there were many capable leaders who were faithful and able to step up to the front, like **Charles H. Mason**, founder of the **Church of God in Christ**.

Mason had been a Missionary Baptist, but left them in 1895 to co-found and lead the denomination (a somewhat baptistic Holiness church). He was thus the head of an established church body before going to Azusa in 1907. Unlike Seymour, Parham and the other Pentecostal founders, Bishop Mason could ordain people so that they would be recognized as legitimate ministers by civil authorities and mainstream churches, capable of doing weddings and such. In the earliest years, Mason was the main source of ordinations for both white and black Pentecostal churches, thus leaving his mark on the entire Pentecostal movement.

Mason's visit to Azusa was a moving moment for him : "Then I gave up for the Lord to have His way within me. So there came a wave of Glory into me and all of my being was filled with the Glory of the Lord. When I opened my mouth to say 'Glory', a flame touched my tongue which ran down to me. My language changed and no word could I speak in my own tongue. Oh! I was filled with the Glory of the Lord. My soul was then satisfied." (testimony found in *Bishop C.H. Mason and the Roots Of the Church of God In Christ*, by Ithiel Clemmons, Pneuma Life, 1996, p.146). Having gone through that, he knew he could not continue as he was doing. He had to bring it wherever he would go.

Mason brought the new Pentecostal experience back to his churches, and many of them dived in with both feet. Yet many others didn't like it at all, including co-founder C.P. Jones, and the church split into a holiness church with a baptist touch, and Mason's Pentecostal group. Mason, as a well-established leader, had a lot to lose by taking part in this new Pentecostalism. It is a tribute to the man and a mark of his following the Spirit that he made the change and took his losses in stride. His church quickly grew into a major African-American church and the largest Black Pentecostal body in the nation. Mason continued to lead his church until his death in 1961 at age 95; he lived to see it become 400,000 strong. It has since grown to around 5 million, with no slowdown in sight.

PENTECOSTALISM SPREADS

There were other existing Holiness churches which went into the early Pentecostal movement, including the **Church of God (Cleveland TN)**. Their move came less because of a bold leader and more because of a full-scale

grass-roots switch to the new movement. But the big news came as **entirely new** bodies were created when congregations from a wide range of revivalist churches were swept together into something new by the new movement.

One of the most remarkable, strange, and influential women of the early 20th century was **Aimee Semple MacPherson** (1890-1944). In the 1920s and 1930s she was certainly the top woman spiritual leader of her time. She had been widowed, then married and divorced, and then briefly married again. She obtained a Methodist exhorters' licence, started **Bridal Call** magazine in 1917, and became an Assemblies of God ordained minister in 1919, but had to give that up in 1922. In 1922, her preaching tour included Australia, and she drew support from what was an unusually wide variety of church leaders for a Pentecostal preacher. To start off the new year in 1923, she started the Angeles Temple and formed the Foursquare churches. The 'Foursquare' refers to the four facets of a vision she received, teaching Jesus as Savior, Healer, Baptizer, and Coming King (and thus creating the Foursquares' emphases on salvation, divine healing, baptism in the Spirit, and readying for the Second Coming). In 1924, she started the field of religious radio, opening station KFSG in Los Angeles; she was a major success not just for her church, but for the newly-born radio medium. In 1927 she started the Angeles Temple Commissary, which became famous during the Great Depression for its food and other free mercies. Her lesser doctrines kept shifting around, and her personal, financial, and family life were quite a mess, but that did not stop her from inspiring millions to have confidence in themselves and in God - no small feat once the Depression hit. She died in 1944 of a supposedly 'accidental' overdose of pills.

[Back](#)

THE "ONENESS" MOVEMENT


The "oneness" movement emerged when **R.E. McAlister** spoke at a Los Angeles revival in 1913 about how new Christians must be baptized in Jesus' name only. **Frank Ewart** encouraged him to speak more in this vein, and they started baptizing people "in Jesus' name only" rather than by the Trinitarian formula found in Matthew. Ewart and Indianapolis preacher **G.T. Haywood** (1880-1931) set about to popularize this approach. When Haywood tried to get the Assemblies of God to accept a Jesus-only approach to baptism, a struggle took place. The end result was that the Assemblies overwhelmingly

chose to remain strictly Trinitarian in both theology and baptismal formula. This left Haywood and Ewart outside the church, along with several leaders of the Assemblies, including one of its co-founders, **Howard Goss**. They formed several separate church bodies, including the United Pentecostal Church and Haywood's Pentecostal Assemblies Of the World, and drew into their camp most of the "Apostolic" congregations that stemmed from the Azusa revival. Many of these, including Haywood's, actively opposed taking part in World War I (and wars in general), as poor folks being sent off to fight a rich folks' war.

[Back](#)

"The Pentecostal power, when you sum it all up, is just more of God's love. If it does not bring more love, it is simply a counterfeit."

----- **William J. Seymour** (quoted in **Apostolic Faith**)



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