CHAPTER 4

The Emergence, Development, and Pluralisation of Global Pentecostalism

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Introduction: Historical Development and Pentecostal Scholarship

This chapter offers a synopsis of the emergence, growth, and development of Pentecostalism worldwide. It begins with a historical and statistical overview followed by an assessment of traditional sociological explanations that focus on deprivation and sectarian religion. The chapter then offers another way to think about Pentecostalism by way of a dialogue between market theory and globalisation theory with attention given to the following: non-North American influences on early Pentecostalism, global social networks, and the increasing cultural diversity of contemporary Pentecostalism through migration primarily from Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

It is commonplace now to acknowledge that the most important transformation of Christianity worldwide was the emergence of a variety of renewal movements in the twentieth century referred to as Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity (see Cox 1995; Martin 2002; Anderson 2004, 2013a; Miller et al. 2013). In typical fashion, scholars questioned how this transformation was missed, how quickly it grew, what types of people joined its ranks, and its social impact. The general story-line revolved around the Azusa Street revival in the United States, its attraction among the disenfranchised, its experiential quality, and its anti-cultural stand. Increasingly, this narrative is challenged and a more nuanced and sophisticated history is emerging and debated among scholars. Likewise, theories of deprivation are questioned along with the suggestion that Pentecostals are far more progressive countering anti-cultural interpretations (see Miller and Yamamori 2007: 2; Wilkinson and Studebaker 2010: 1). While this new narrative is generating innovative and interesting research, it is also controversial, especially among American scholars who still hold to the central role of Azusa.

For example, introductory texts on religion in America typically present Pentecostalism in a similar pattern; the central role of the Azusa Street revival (1906–1909), speaking in tongues as its key characteristic, its growth among many different racial and ethnic groups, the association of Pentecostalism with the poor and disenfranchised, charismatic renewal among Catholics and mainline Protestants, and the role of missionaries in spreading Pentecostalism...
throughout the world (Ahlstrom 2004; Bridges 2006; Choquette 2004; Williams 2008). Pentecostal scholar Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. (2006, 2013: 42–62) offers the strongest argument for the central role played by the Azusa Street revival. Robeck’s research offers impressive detail on the Azusa Mission, its key leader William Seymour, the number of people who attended during its height from 1906–1909, the role of its newsletter, racial conflict, the impact of missionaries, and its eventual demise. The scholarship is excellent and offers the most detail on the revival. Robeck’s work is not questioned. However, his conclusion and theoretical orientation that Azusa is the birthplace of Pentecostalism is debated.

Allan Anderson has questioned this narrative writing several books that counter its assumptions. In his book An Introduction to Pentecostalism (2004: 19–38) Anderson offers a sustained critique of the central role of Azusa for launching the Pentecostal movement. Anderson argues that Pentecostalism is not an American invention and the historical evidence shows it is a far more global Christian event with revivals in places like India that were just as significant as Azusa for the emergence of the movement (also see Anderson 2013b: 30). Anderson focuses on the diversity of Pentecostalism culturally, theologically, and socially in an attempt to show the movement has developed in unique ways outside of North America with little or no influence. Anderson does not deny that Azusa was an important event. He does, however, offer an interpretation that examines the polycentric origins of Pentecostalism opting for an explanation that counters the more American view of historical diffusion from a single place (see Stewart 2010a: 32–34).

Anderson continues his analysis on the movement in another important book, Spreading Fires: The Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism (2007) where he accounts for the missionary character of Pentecostalism. Anderson argues that American missionaries were not the most significant factor in the spread of early Pentecostalism. Rather, the expansion of the Pentecostal movement is linked to the work of local Pentecostals in Africa, Asia, and Latin America who have no connection to America. Anderson critically evaluates the claims that American missionaries arrive first with the Pentecostal message and shows how the movement was far more contextual and linked to local revivals. Anderson develops his argument further in his book To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity (2013a) where he expands on how world Christianity was transformed by Pentecostalism. Anderson argues that this transformation is not just about the growing numbers but highlights other key factors including the cultural and theological imperative to take the message to the whole world, the role of local missionaries, women, the cultural appeal of healing and deliverance, Pentecostalism’s holistic approach, and its public role in politics.