For the better part of the past century the Pentecostal and ecumenical movements have remained aloof from one another, crossing at significant theological intersections but never fully engaging to any depth. A number of factors have contributed to this estrangement, not least of which have been Pentecostalism’s dominant alliance with conservative evangelical critics of ecumenism and the ecumenical movement’s own tendency to regard Pentecostals as sectarian. One of the consequences has been the failure of either movement to engage adequately with the ecumenical character of Pentecostalism, leaving its ecumenical implications relatively unexplored.¹ Now however there are signs on both sides of the divide that things are changing. A more ecumenical consciousness can be found among many Pentecostal churches and leaders, and a renewed commitment on the part of the World Council of Churches (the major institutional vehicle for the modern ecumenical movement) to securing Pentecostal participation is being heard.² In this new season,
important insights can be gained from re-examining aspects of the originating Pentecostal vision from the beginning of the century.

The following pages will examine some of these dimensions of the Pentecostal vision as they emerged from the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles in 1906. Under the leadership of William J. Seymour, the Azusa Street revival set in motion a global Pentecostal movement which has arguably become the dominant missionary form of Christianity in this century. The movement that spread from Azusa Street in 1906 prefigured important themes and commitments that would come to characterize the ecumenical movement as well. Prominent among these were a challenge to the divisions among Christian churches of the world and a call for the unity of people across boundaries of race, gender, class and language. Aspects of this vision were realized in the experience on Azusa Street during the course of the revival over several years. One of the more compelling features noted in many of the reports and later reminiscences of the event, for instance, was the fact that people of several races and many nationalities were joining together in worship through the power of the Spirit. The leadership of the revival was interracial, and it included women as well as men. Its participants came from a number of nationalities resident in the city of Los Angeles, giving it an international character even prior to the influx of visitors from across the world.

The distinctive feature of the revival that drew the most attention was the baptismal experience of the Holy Spirit accompanied by glossolalia.


4. While tongues did feature prominently in the Azusa Street revival and would come to mark off the Pentecostal movement from other Holiness and evangelical movements, the emphasis given them at Azusa Street was different than that which became normative for Pentecostal theology, as we shall see below. J.R. Goff, Jr