

What really happened at Azusa Street?

The first tongue speaking in the 20th century was under Charles Parham's ministry in the 1901 Topeka Revival, but many trace Pentecostalism to the supposed revival that erupted under William Seymour in Azusa Street, Los Angeles. Both men came out of the Holiness Movement, were influenced by the cult leader Frank Sandford, the Welsh Revival and Methodism. After expulsion from Holiness churches, Seymour used 312 Azusa Street to promote tongues and revival in 1906. Almost immediately wild scenes broke out, getting the attention of the press; this resulted in 1,000 people trying to gain access to the small meeting room, so meetings were held three times a day, continuing for hours. These meetings (which actually followed the extravagances of Methodist frontier revivals, emotional Holiness conventions and earlier Shaker excesses), set the scene for future Pentecostal and Charismatic meetings to this day. The Toronto Experience and subsequent aberrations are nothing new.

Many blessings are claimed to have arisen from these meetings. Is this true? No it isn't and most Pentecostal historians gloss over the terrible wickedness and abandonment that occurred. Seymour rarely preached; when he did he simply uttered a few words of scripture before challenging people to *'let the tongues come forth'*, as later Charismatic preachers command, *'let the fire fall'*. All the phenomena associated with the Toronto Experience took place repeatedly: shaking, slaying in the Spirit, tongues, various physical gestures, gibberish, contortions, sexual impropriety, jerking, shrieking, barking, hooting, crawling etc. Women often lay on the floor for hours; blankets were kept ready to cover their nakedness (common in early Pentecostalism). Men would jump, women would dance. In the midst there were people attacking the abuses, while everyone sang different melodies, rhythms and words. It was utter chaos. In the cacophony, Seymour put his head in a shoebox to pray; others like Frank Bartleman put their heads under benches. Many times people fell off the platform onto benches and chairs. But there was worse to come. Worship was based on African traditions: expressive praise, shouting & dancing; most were poor, uneducated people; women wailed and screamed while men would fall or rush in crowds to the front. The bedlam opened the door for witches, mediums, spiritualists and voodoo. On visiting, Parham, who had trained Seymour, called it *'a seduction of the devil'*, *'the work of hypnotists and evil spirits'*, *'animalism'*, *'all kinds of spells'* and said, *'God is sick at His stomach'*. Occultists from all over Los Angeles attended and contributed seances and trances to the meetings. Although this disturbed Seymour, he could not control it. Even claims of early racial tolerance are false. There were disruptions between whites and blacks, Seymour made the Hispanics leave and then denied leadership to white people. Seymour's two female aids left and took his mailing list to start another work in Portland, while another leader started the Assemblies of God after being expelled in 1914. This is not the work of God!

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