

NON-WESLEYAN PENTECOSTALISM: A TRADITION
“THE FINISHED WORK”

William W. Menzies

Introduction

In June, 1995, a remarkable outpouring of the Holy Spirit began at the Brownsville Assembly of God, Pensacola, Florida. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, have visited Pensacola. Many have come away with a renewed spiritual experience and a revitalized ministry. What is happening in Pensacola is evidently happening in many other localities as well. Some of the local outpourings are a direct result of contact with Pensacola; some are not. Significantly, a common thread in the testimonies of those impacted by the current flow of revival is that it is essentially a renewal of holiness, of concern for the sanctified life. Some would see in the Pensacola revival a call to Pentecostals to recover their holiness roots. Evidently, somewhere along the way, the Pentecostal movement (or at least part of it), generally pictured as a direct outgrowth of the nineteenth-century Holiness Movement, drifted away from the emphasis on sanctification. With this new focus of attention on personal holiness, it is timely that we attempt to reconstruct the story of the roots of the modern Pentecostal movement, giving particular attention to the streams of influence regarding the doctrine of sanctification. The practical implications of this for today's Pentecostals may be significant. The Pentecostal revival has featured effectively the empowering of the Spirit for evangelistic and missionary service. Somehow, through the years an earlier priority on the interior development of a holy life has apparently been muted. Is God calling Pentecostals to take a fresh look at the importance of Holy living?

The story is not as simple as it might appear, however. Today, the Pentecostal movement is divided along the line of teaching about sanctification. Some adopt a Wesleyan understanding of sanctification as a “second blessing;” a crisis experience that cleanses the soul from inbred sin, preparing one for a third work of grace, called baptism in

the spirit. Most Pentecostals today adopt a different view of sanctification, seeing sanctification as a continuing process flowing from the point of regeneration. For these non-Wesleyans, baptism in the Spirit is a second experience, not a third one. The series of lectures for this week centers on the retracting of the story of how the Pentecostal revival divided along two differing views of the doctrine of sanctification. It is hoped that by addressing this story, young Pentecostals of today will be able to relate constructively and congenially with others whose theological understanding may differ from their own. And, beyond this, it is hoped that all will be challenged to ponder what God is saying to us about living lives separated unto God.

In studying the origins of the modern Pentecostal revival, it is clearly evident that virtually all of the initial leaders and participants held to a Wesleyan view of sanctification. In truth, scholars such as Vinson Synan rightly report that the modern Pentecostal movement is a direct descendant of the nineteenth-century Holiness movement.¹ Certainly, from the beginnings of a connected history, reaching back to Charles F. Parham's Bible School in Topeka, Kansas, where the Spirit was poured out in 1901, and on to the great Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles that flowered in 1906, there is a solid phalanx of leaders who uniformly advocated the Wesleyan doctrine. For Parham, Seymour, and others with whom they worked in the first decade, baptism in the Spirit was perceived to be a "third work of grace," conditional upon receiving the second, and prior, work of the Holy Spirit, which rooted out the sin principle in the believer. The logic was that one must be cleansed before one could be filled. So up to a point, Holiness Pentecostal scholars are right--that is, if one limits the field of view to events of that first decade, up to 1910. However, the story is not so simple after that. One must explain what transpired so that virtually all Pentecostal bodies that came into being after 1911 adopted a non-Wesleyan view of sanctification. In fact, very quickly the centers of growth and influence shifted to those bodies that espoused the non-Wesleyan sanctification theology. Holiness (Wesleyan) Pentecostalism became largely a provincial view found principally in the American southeast states, in pockets in the Midwest, and among the West Coast descendants of the Azusa Street revival, principally the followers of Florence Crawford in Oregon. The broader, more representative,

¹ Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans., 1997), x.

Pentecostal bodies, such as the Assemblies of God, adopted a non-Wesleyan Theology of Sanctification. For most Pentecostals, within a short time following the close of the Azusa Street phase of the revival, sanctification was understood to be a quality of life maintained by faith and diligence, a condition that normally is expected to grow throughout one’s Christian life. The notion that a crisis experience of sanctification is a necessary prerequisite to baptism in the spirit was rejected. Today, most Pentecostals around the world identify themselves as non-Wesleyan in their understanding of sanctification. The lectures of this week are intended to shed light on how this major change took place, so we can better understand the complex history of the Pentecostal revival. Our first endeavor will be to visit the story of William H. Durham and his teaching of “the Finished Work.” Without question, the influence of Durham on the shaping of emerging groups like the Assemblies of God is strategic.

William H. Durham: Early Years

William H. Durham was born in 1873 in Kentucky. At the age of 18 he joined a Baptist Church but did not have a genuine experience of salvation. This came some years later, In 1898, while he was in Minnesota, Durham experience a vision of the crucified Christ. He points to this moment as the time when he was born again. Early in his experience, he encountered issues related to the teaching of sanctification. For some months Durham enjoyed a wonderful sense of victory in his Christian experience, but then there were times when he felt he had “lost the victory.”

I was told that sanctification was what I needed, and I sought this blessing the best I knew how for a long time. Sometimes I would think the work was done, then again would realize that it was not, till finally, some three years after my conversion, God gave me light and grace to definitely trust the blood of Christ and rest my faith on His finished works.²

He felt at that time that he had experienced sanctification. At once he launched into full-time Christian service, preaching what was

² William H. Durham, “Pentecostal Testimony of Pastor Durham, “ The Pentecostal Testimony (1909), 6

essentially a Wesleyan message of entire sanctification. In 1901, Durham became a pastor of a humble fellowship in Chicago called the North Avenue Mission, where his ministry flourished. Like many Holiness advocates of the time, he felt he had received the fullness of the spirit, but doubts continued to plague him. He had to acknowledge in honesty with himself that his experience did not match what he read of the apostolic church in the Book of Acts. In April, 1906, word spread of a Pentecostal outpouring in Los Angeles. Durham was convinced that God was at work in Los Angeles but was offended at the teaching that speaking in tongues is the accompanying evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit, and preached against the doctrine. Yet, he did believe that those who spoke in tongues had something he did not have. In January, 1907, the Holy Spirit began to fall on people in Chicago. Among the first to receive was Elder J. C. Sinclair, a man with whom Durham had labored, one that Durham felt had the Holy Spirit before this experience, if anyone did. The powerful, radiant experience of Elder Sinclair was a challenge to Durham, for he now felt that Sinclair indeed had something he himself did not have. He was particularly impressed with Sinclair's singing in the spirit, since he knew that the man could not sing! At this point, Durham began to seek God for the baptism in the Spirit in great earnest. His pastoral duties in Chicago limited his ability to wait on the Lord; so Durham made a trip to Los Angeles, visiting the Azusa Street Mission. After several days of earnest seeking, on March 2, 1907, Durham received the Pentecostal experience with the accompanying sign of speaking in tongues. In the weeks that Durham was at Azusa Street, he had ample opportunity to observe the revival. Here is a sample of his comments:

I shall ever cherish the memory of that place; for as soon as I entered the place I became conscious that God was there. I knew I was in his Holy presence. There were hundreds of people present. God seemed to be controlling everything so far as I could see. No man had anything whatever to do with what was happening. The Holy Ghost seemed to have full control, and yet the order seemed perfect. My soul was melted down before the Lord; but to me the wonderful thing was yet to happen. After some hymns had been sung a wave of power and glory seemed to sweep over the place, and a large number began to sing in the spirit, what is called in this work the "Heavenly Anthem." I had never heard anything in my life so sweet. It was the Spirit of God Himself, and I knew it. I would have given much to be able to sing in that choir, but had my

life depended upon it could not have sung a word; for I had not yet received Him who was doing the singing. And there I saw, more plainly than ever before, the difference between having the presence of the Spirit of God with us and having Him living within us in person, and I resolved then there that I would never cease seeking, till I had received Him in Pentecostal fullness, and by the grace of God I kept that resolve.³

On Feb. 26, 1907, at an afternoon meeting at the Azusa Street Mission, with about thirty people present, the Holy Spirit fell on Durham, an experience repeated on subsequent occasions, as well, over the next several days. Here is how he describes the event:

I was at the end of everything and the Lord knew it, and as three of His dear children stood over me and told me just to surrender all to God and not to try to do anything I did so, when, O joy! A thrill of power went through me followed by another. And then it appeared as if every one of my pores were suddenly opened and a mighty current was turned on to me from every side, and so great was the infilling that it seemed at the time as if the physical life would be crowded out of my body. I literally gasped for breath and fell in a heap on the floor. My strength was gone but I was perfectly conscious of everything, so lifted my heart to God and earnestly entreated Him to finish the work at this time, and so intense was my longing to have the work finished that I was reaching heavenward with one hand all the time.⁴

Such powerful visitations of the Spirit continued for several more days before Durham received the fullness of the Spirit. Seymour was present on the evening of March 2, 1907, when Durham was baptized in the Spirit. He prophesied that “where I should preach the Holy Spirit would fall on the people.” Indeed, when Durham returned to his Chicago pulpit, the Pentecostal message spread quickly throughout the American Midwest. His meetings were crowded, sometimes lasting far into the night. It was reported that a “thick haze...like blue smoke” often rested on the building. When this occurred, those who entered the mission would fall down in the aisles.

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid., 7

Not only did Durham have an impact on ordinary believers, but his ministry attracted the attention of many other ministers of the gospel. Sometimes as many as 25 ministers from out of town would be in a meeting, seeking the baptism in the Holy Spirit. His preaching was acclaimed by thousands. The litany of leaders who later became prominent pioneers of the burgeoning Pentecostal revival who came to hear him is impressive. They included A.H. Argue of Winnepeg, E. N. Bell, a Baptist minister who became an early leader of the Assemblies of God, Howard Goss, Daniel Berg, the founder of the Assemblies of God in Brazil, and Luigi Francescon, a pioneer of the Pentecostal movement in Italy. Aimee Semple (before she married Harold McPherson) was instantly healed of a broken ankle through Durham's ministry in 1910. Certainly the ministry of Durham in Chicago in these years was one of the important factors in the spread of the Pentecostal message in the Midwest.⁵

Durham's Teaching on Sanctification

Durham emphasized a Christological view of sanctification. For him, the focus is on the believer's position in Christ. The victory of the believer centers in the cross and the "finished work of Christ."

When one really comes into Christ he is much in Christ as he will ever be. He is in state of holiness and righteousness. He is under the precious Blood of Jesus Christ and is clean. Every sin has been washed away. This is the state one enters on conversion. If he keeps there he will continue to be holy and righteous. There is no reason why should not remain in the state he is brought into in conversion. The Scripture clearly teaches that a converted person is to reckon himself dead, Rom. 6:11. Such a one is exhorted to present himself to God as alive from the dead, Rom. 6:13, not to seek for a second work of grace. In fact all the teaching of Scripture on the subject is that all in conversion we become identified with Christ and come into a state of sanctification, and we are continually exhorted to live the sanctified life in the Holy Spirit. Living faith brings us into Christ, and the same living faith

⁵ See Richard Riss, "William H. Durham." In *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds, S.M. Burgess and G.B. McGee (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 255-256.

enables us to reckon ourselves to be 'dead indeed' and to abide in Christ. It is a sad mistake to believe that any one, or even two experiences, as such, can ever remove the necessity of maintaining a helpless continual dependence on Jesus Christ, and bearing our daily cross, and living the overcoming life.⁶

Durham sees Paul's teaching in Galatians as a significant reinforcement of this view.

In the days of Paul, when a man or church backslid, they were called to repentance. They were classed as backsliders, and exhorted to return to their first state of grace. His letter to the Galatians was written for the express purpose of pointing out their mistake in departing from the blessed place of grace into which faith in Christ had brought them. What a mistake holiness teachers have made in teaching that the Galatians were justified and not sanctified. No such thing is even hinted at in the epistle. They were turning from the faith of Jesus Christ to the works of the law. They were in danger in falling from grace entirely. They had begun in the Spirit and were ending in the flesh, and as a result were losing their justification, and of course their sanctification. They had come into Christ, the Sanctifier, when they believed on Him, and they had receive the Holy Spirit.⁷

Of people like Demas, whom Paul admonished, Durham says, "It was not a second work of grace they needed, but to repent and get back into the grace they had once been in"⁸ It is clear that Durham understood the baptism in the Holy Spirit to be a profound experience with God that can be described as the "fullness of the spirit," but is not conditional on a particular quality of sanctification. There is an underlying assumption that being overwhelmed by the Spirit, as occurs in Spirit baptism, is inconceivable without a sensitivity to one's personal condition of holiness. However, for Durham, personal holiness is an on-going discipline of life that centers in renewing one's place in Christ. Sanctification is the victory of the Christian over sin as one continually reckons oneself dead to sin and alive to Christ (Rom 6).

⁶ Durham, "Sanctification." *The Pentecostal Testimony* 1:8 (1911), 2.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

It is clear that Durham did not want to confuse the interior work of the Spirit in the moral domain of sanctification with the overflow of the Spirit that engulfs the individual in Spirit baptism. The believer was admonished to appropriate the benefits of the finished work of Christ, not a second crisis experience subsequent to conversion. Durham objected to the teaching of entire sanctification because he understood it to be a circumvention of the need for an ongoing sanctification process in the life of the Christian believer.

Durham: From Chicago to Los Angeles

Durham first aired his views on sanctification at a large Pentecostal convention held in Chicago in 1910. This opened up considerable controversy, since many of the Pentecostal leaders held to the Wesleyan position. In the months that followed, Durham was able to persuade a significant number of these leaders of the Biblical soundness of the “finished work” doctrine.

Early in 1911, Durham virtually abandoned the work in Chicago, and moved his operations to Los Angeles, including his occasional periodical, *The Pentecostal Testimony*. He had a sense of mission to communicate his “finished work” message. He went first to Elmer Fisher’s Upper Room Mission with his message, but was turned out. From there, he attempted to minister in the Azusa Street Mission. He reports,

On February 14th, we began meetings in Azusa Mission. From the first day the power of God rested upon the meetings in a wonderful way... The work in Los Angeles was in a sad condition. Those who had been the leaders, in most cases, had proven so incompetent that the saints had lost all confidence in them, and this had resulted in state of confusion that was sad indeed to see. Scores were really in a backslidden state, and yet in their hearts they longed to follow Jesus. Scores of others were, and for months had been, crying to God to send some one who would preach the truth and lead his people on.⁹

⁹ Durham, “The Great Revival at Azusa Street Mission—How it Began and How it ended,” *The Pentecostal Testimony* 1:8 (1911), 3.

Frank Bartleman, an eyewitness to the events in Los Angeles, reported that at once there was a wonderful flow of the power of God at the place where the great revival had flourished earlier.

I had gotten back just in time to see it. God had gathered many of the Old Azusa workers back, from many parts of the world, to Los Angeles again evidently for this. It was called by many the shower of the Latter Rain. On Sunday the place was crowded and five hundred were turned away. The people would not leave their seats between meetings for fear of losing them.¹⁰

Bitter controversy followed Durham’s Los Angeles ministry. On the one hand, he was obviously received with joy by many, and was instrumental in bringing fresh life back to the old Azusa Street Mission. His teaching on sanctification evidently set many free from bondage. On the other hand, some of the early leaders fought back, repudiating Durham’s teaching as a serious departure from orthodoxy. Brother Fisher had already denounced him and was doing all in his power to oppose him. Even so, many from the Upper Room Mission left Fisher’s work to follow Durham. For some time, Durham was welcomed at the Azusa Street Mission. What evidently had been a dwindling group was immediately revitalized. William Seymour, the Azusa Street Mission pastor, was away at this time. Upon his return to Los Angeles, Seymour opposed Durham, and even locked the door of the mission to prevent the popular preacher from having access. Durham had taken a vote among the hundreds of people now attending the Azusa Street Mission to see which leader they wanted—whether it would be the Wesleyan Seymour or the non-Wesleyan Durham. Durham reports that only about 10 out of the several hundred wished to stay with Seymour as a leader.¹¹

For the next several months Durham preached in Los Angeles in a hall that had been leased for a year. On Sundays, a thousand people attended the meetings. On Weekdays, as many as four hundred came to hear Durham. It is apparent that the original Azusa Street Mission and Fisher’s Upper Room Mission were in decline but that Durham’s ministry was flourishing.

¹⁰ Frank Bartleman, *Azusa Street* (reprint, Plainfield, N.J.: Logos International, 1980), 150.

¹¹ Durham, *op.cit.*, 4.

In February, 1912, Durham returned to preach in Chicago at the invitation of a friend. He conducted a strenuous two-week meeting that was evidently greatly blessed by the Lord. However, the physical exertions of these stressful days exacted a great toll on his body. He returned to Los Angeles in a weakened condition. He died of pneumonia on July 7, 1912, not yet forty years of age.

Concluding Thoughts

By 1914, when the Assemblies of God came into being, many of the leaders emerging among the isolated and scattered missions and meeting halls, had adopted the sanctification teaching of William Durham. Certainly this is true to M.M. Pinson, Howard Goss and E. N. Bell, the first chairman of the General Council. The teaching of Durham from 1910 onward had opened up acrimonious attacks and counter-attacks among Pentecostals. It is noteworthy that M.M. Pinson, who preached in the opening session of the first council in Hot Springs, Arkansas, in April, 1914, used the occasion to call for harmony among the people on this very point, titling his message, "Entire Sanctification"¹² During the first years of this broad fellowship of local assemblies, a strong anti-creedal sentiment prevailed. It was assumed that a common belief in the authority of the Bible, and in a shared set of values, largely unwritten, was all that was necessary. In 1916, out of the crisis occasioned by the so-called "Jesus Only" teaching, it became apparent that no longer was it possible to function as a fellowship of believers and churches without a written statement of faith, not intended to be a comprehensive theology, but at least articulating a common point of view on critical matters. In the statement of Fundamental truths, one of the 16 points listed to clarify the position of the Assemblies of God was a paragraph on sanctification. The language of that statement clearly expresses a Reformed point of view that sanctification begins with regeneration and is progressive through the Christian life. Surprisingly, however, the term employed to describe this was "entire sanctification." It seems that a term dear to Wesleyans was consciously employed to avoid giving offense to those in the fellowship (including J. Roswell Flower) who continued to advocate the Wesleyan second-blessing teaching about sanctification. The ambiguity lay, of course, in defining that

¹² General Council Minutes, 1914, 3.

term to mean quite the opposite! In 1961, by vote of the General Council, that point in the Statement of Fundamental Truths was amended so that no longer was the term "entire sanctification" used.¹³

Pentecostal denominations that grew out of the Assemblies of God, including the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel and the Open Bible Standard Churches, hold the same view of sanctification as the Assemblies of God. Many autonomous national church bodies, some certainly influenced by the American Assemblies of God, hold the doctrine of sanctification taught by that group. Most Pentecostals in the world today identify themselves with the non-Wesleyan view of sanctification. In this paper, I have attempted to demonstrate that the teaching of William Durham at a critical formative phase in the history of the young revival movement had a powerful impact on shaping the view that prevailed.

A final note should be added at this point. In 1947, with the formation of the World Pentecostal Fellowship, and a year later, the formation of the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America, Pentecostals who had grown up in virtual isolation from the larger church world—and even in isolation from one another—were now thrust into the unfamiliar territory of having to engage in conversation with one another. It was immediately evident that a major dividing line appeared along the different doctrines regarding sanctification, with a large number of Pentecostals adhering to the traditional Wesleyan holiness view of a second blessing, and an even larger number advocating the Reformed view of progressive sanctification. Over the years, it has become apparent that at least part of the theological differences are to some degree semantic, rather than substantive. Our Wesleyan Pentecostal friends want to give emphasis to the need for cultivating a holy life, and usually allow for a principle of growth within the life of the believer, not unlike that taught by non-Wesleyans. And, pressed on the point, many Wesleyans will qualify the term "entire-sanctification" in such a way that it defuses the judgment that they are teaching a species of "perfectionism."

What is really called for is not an exercise in name-calling, but a common search for what God is saying to the Pentecostal movement a century after its birth. If, in fact, God in his matchless grace pours out His Spirit in powerful ways to empower believers to be bold witnesses in a dark world, and if, in fact, He does not wait until hungry believers are entirely sanctified to use them, is there not a humbling challenge for

¹³ General Council Minutes, 1961, 92.

all Spirit-anointed believers to invite the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of holiness—to search our hearts and to cleanse us from every evil way?