

THAT OLD TIME RELIGION
THE INFLUENCE OF WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICAN RELIGIOUS CULTURE
ON THE MUSIC OF THE AZUSA STREET REVIVAL

by
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“Someone has said that every fresh revival brings in its own hymnology.
And this one surely did.”

- Frank Bartleman

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INTRODUCTION

In the April 18, 1906 edition of the *Los Angeles Times*, the Azusa Street Revival was announced to the world with the headline, “Weird Babel of Tongues.”¹ The article reported that the worshippers at a revival at 312 Azusa Street in Los Angeles “practice the most fanatical rites, preach the wildest theories, and work themselves into a state of mad excitement in their peculiar zeal.”² The article went on:

Colored people and a sprinkling of whites composed the congregation, and night is made hideous in the neighborhood by the howling of the worshippers who spend hours swaying forth and back in a nerve-racking [sic] attitude of prayer and supplication.³

The movement was started by a small group of black individuals who held a prayer meeting in a member’s living room on Bonnie Brae Street in Los Angeles, California. On April 9, 1906, the first member of the group began to speak in tongues. Speaking in tongues, or glossolalia, is the act of speaking in a language that one does not understand, and it is interpreted as evidence of an internal work by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. The experience is often referred to as being “filled with the Holy Spirit.”⁴ The doctrine distinguishes Pentecostalism, which was named after the

¹ “Weird Babel of Tongues,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 18, 1906.

² Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Vinson Synan, *The Holiness Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in*

⁴ Vinson Synan, *The Holiness Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997), 87.

Biblical event of Pentecost from other branches of Christianity.⁵ As described in the book of Acts, this spiritual gift was given by God in order to empower the disciples in Jesus' absence, and Pentecostals believe that this empowerment led to the growth of the early church.⁶

On the night of April 9 when the first member of the group spoke in tongues, all were swept up in spiritual power and joyful singing and dancing. They were so excited that they rushed outside to loudly speak in tongues on the front lawn and in the streets, drawing spectators to see what the commotion was about.⁷ Over the next several days, crowds arrived in larger and larger numbers to hear the sermon and the speaking in tongues, even though many had to stand outside around the open windows.⁸ It was only a few weeks before the small residence could no longer accommodate the crowds. The group relocated to an abandoned African Methodist Episcopal church nearby at 312 Azusa Street. Within just two years, the Pentecostal movement would spread from Azusa Street to more than fifty countries.⁹

⁵ Teresa L. Reed, *The Holy Profane: Religion in Black Popular Music* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2004), 16.

⁶ Acts 1:8 (New International Version): "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." *Apostolic Faith*, Vol. 1 No. 4, "Sanctified Before Pentecost," December 1906.

⁷ Douglas Nelson, "For Such a Time as This: The Story of William J. Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival" (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, UK, 1981), 191.

⁸ Vinson Synan, *The Holiness Pentecostal Tradition*, 96.

⁹ Ibid.

No one had ever seen anything like this revival before. Unlike most church services, the meetings were raucous and noisy, most often accompanied by singing, clapping, and dancing for hours on end. Services often went on all day and all night.¹⁰ There were no instruments or hymnals.¹¹ Instead, members of the church sang repetitive choruses or songs that were improvised on the spot. Additionally, services were collaborative. One participant remembered that at most services, a leader would simply open a Bible on the podium and participants would come forward as compelled by the Holy Spirit to pray, give testimony, guide the congregation in song, or deliver a message from God.¹²

The purpose of this paper is to relate the worship practices of the Azusa Street Revival in detail, and to investigate the relationship between these practices and the musical and religious traditions of the West and Central African peoples who were the ancestors of some of the most prominent and influential participants in the movement. These practices, which include musical improvisation, physical movement, clapping, indeterminate times of worship, spirit possession and musical collaboration, seemingly made their way across the ocean from Africa into the daily lives of African American slaves, where they were adopted by participants at the American camp meetings of the

¹⁰ “Weird Babel of Tongues,” 1.

¹¹ Shannon Kropf, “The Comforter Has Come: Music of the Azusa Street Revival” (master’s thesis, The University of Memphis, 2008), 31, 37;

¹² Lawrence Catley, interviewed by Vinson Synan, Leonard Lovett, *et al.*, May 1974, transcript by Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., Society for Pentecostal Studies, quoted in Stephen Dove, “Hymnody and Liturgy in the Azusa Street Revival, 1906-1908,” *Pneuma* 31, no. 2 (2009): 247–248.

early nineteenth century.¹³ These practices proved popular in the Methodist church and were reinforced by the compatible Methodist doctrine of sanctification. Finally, these West and Central African musical traditions became instituted in a Methodist outgrowth, the holiness movement. Pentecostalism was founded at Azusa Street by a small African American holiness prayer group, and the religious practices of the slaves' homelands remain preserved in many of the practices of Pentecostalism even today.¹⁴

The Second Great Awakening, also known as the Great Revival, took place from the late-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries. The camp meeting revivals were enormous religious gatherings that took place on the American frontier under large tents in woods or open fields, often with several thousand attendees, who tended to be rural folk living in sparsely inhabited areas where there was no religious community or full-time minister.¹⁵ The camp meetings emphasized an emotional, personal conversion experience encouraged by long prayer services and lots of lively singing. Camp meetings gave these isolated frontier families social fulfillment, entertainment, diversion, and hope.¹⁶ Music was the main event at the camp meetings, and was unlike any other white American sacred music at the time. Since many who attended were not literate, music could not be read from hymnals, and as a result, the camp meetings featured easy-to-learn refrains that were repeated between verses, the latter of which were sung or spoken by a

¹³ Tallmadge, "The Black in Jackson's White Spirituals," 144.

¹⁴ Iain MacRobert, *Black Roots and White Racism*, 9.

¹⁵ Synan, *Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 11.

¹⁶ John Lovell, *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame* (New York: MacMillan, 1972), 79-80; Robert Darden, *People Get Ready: A New History of Black Gospel Music* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 55.

preacher or song leader.¹⁷ The refrains were usually composed on the spot and placed between verses of pre-existing and already well-known hymns. Songs often began spontaneously in the service and were sometimes even improvised. The noisy outdoor setting of the meetings made hand-clapping and foot-stomping commonplace to keep the time among the throng of people. These songs came to be known as white spirituals.¹⁸

Accounts vary as to the exact circumstances of black participation in the camp meetings. Some report that blacks and whites sat on different sides of the same tent meeting, while other accounts say that blacks would crowd into small spaces reserved for them or stand behind the seated whites.¹⁹ By all accounts, however, black attendees played a large role in the music that was made at the gatherings, as this observation by disapproving Methodist minister John Watson illustrates:

In the blacks' quarter, the coloured people get together, and sing for hours together, short scraps of disjointed affirmations, pledges, or prayers, lengthened out with long repetition choruses. These are all sung in the merry chorus-manner of the southern harvest field, or the husking-frolic method, of the slave blacks...the example has already visibly affected the religious manner of some of the whites.²⁰

¹⁷ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 96–97; Darden, *People Get Ready*, 57.

¹⁸ Dena J. Epstein, “A White Origin for the Black Spiritual? An Invalid Theory and How it Grew,” *American Music* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1983): 58.

¹⁹ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 94; Darden, *People Get Ready*, 57.

²⁰ John Watson, *Methodist Error or Friendly Christian Advice to Those Methodists Who Indulge in Extravagant Religious Emotions and Bodily Exercises* (Trenton, New Jersey: D. & E. Fenton, 1819), quoted in Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 95–96.

Scholars long have surmised that the free and emotional style of worship associated with camp meetings was largely derivative of African musical style. For example, in 1981

William Tallmadge related the two traditions in the following passage:

For nearly fifty years before the beginning of the Kentucky camp meetings, variants of such hymns were sung as work songs, for pleasure, and for worship. With the responsorial character of African vocal practice as prototype, the process of hymn simplification and disintegration ascribed by Jackson to whites in the nineteenth century was accomplished by blacks during the last half of the eighteenth century. By the time camp meetings began, the transformed hymnody with its responsorial structure was ready and waiting in the wings. White singers of the early nineteenth century found the responsorial structure of Negro folk hymnody entirely appropriate to their needs, and they proceeded to do what white musicians in America have done from that time to the present; that is, they began to absorb and put into practice the black way of making music.²¹

The emotional and spontaneous nature of camp meetings was a perfect fit for the Methodist doctrine of sanctification, which gained acceptance around the same time. Sanctification, often referred to as “perfection” or “holiness,” is a second work of grace that follows the first work, that of salvation. Salvation is the Christian doctrine of God’s forgiveness of sins committed by the individual through the blood sacrifice of Jesus. Salvation also signifies a commitment to living life according to the teachings of the Bible. Perfection is a second step, taking salvation further by “[purifying] the believer of inward sin” (rather than only the sins committed up to this point) and giving a person “‘perfect love’ toward God and humanity.”²² Methodist theologian John Wesley, originator of the sanctification doctrine, said that sometimes the experience happened instantly as an internal, emotional experience, while other times it happened gradually

²¹ William H. Tallmadge, “The Black in Jackson’s White Spirituals,” *The Black Perspective in Music* 9, no. 2 (Autumn 1981): 144.

²² Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 6.

with earnest discipline.²³ Some of the more radical practitioners of the doctrine were asked to leave their more conservative parishioners and formed various other denominations collectively called the holiness denominations.²⁴ This eventually gave way to what some called a “third work of grace” that empowered the believer for service, such as evangelism.²⁵ The third work of grace increasingly became an instantaneous, emotionally charged experience (rather than a gradual process), giving theological justification for the radical worship practices of the camp meetings. This was the precedent for the Pentecostal doctrine of speaking in tongues that exploded on the night of April 9, 1906 with the beginning of the Azusa Street Revival.²⁶

Before Azusa Street and the camp meetings of the Great Revival, these characteristics, unconventional in the American sacred tradition of the time, abounded in varied cultures and traditions of West and Central Africa. Africans who eventually arrived in America as slaves largely came from the western coastal areas, the regions just south of the Sahara desert, and Central Africa.²⁷ Although populations in each of these countries of these regions have their own language, dialect, traditions, and culture, many of them share some cultural characteristics, including music.²⁸ For example, in 1959,

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 65–66.

²⁵ Ibid., 50.

²⁶ Ibid., 67.

²⁷ Darden, *People Get Ready*, 13; Jacqueline Cogdell Djedje, “African American Music to 1900,” in *The Cambridge History of American Music*, ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 103–104.

²⁸ Darden, *People Get Ready*, 13.

A.M. Jones compared the Sudanic-speaking Ewe tribe and the Bantu-speaking Lala tribe, noting that “even a moderate ear could tell without analysis that the musics are similar.”²⁹

When Africans came from their respective regions of Western and Central Africa, they brought with them a wide range of cultures and traditions, but had a base of similarities as well. Once in America, these previously unrelated cultures suddenly were forced to speak the same language and live in the same cultural environment. As Jacqueline Cogdell Djedje found when studying the slave population in Virginia, cultural mixing had a significant impact on their music-making:

Because their numbers were small and different African groups were forced to interact with each other as a collective rather than as members of distinct communities, the situation in Virginia suggests that a multi-layered culture existed which had an interesting impact on music making.³⁰

The resulting mixture of various different styles of music from West and Central Africa played a large role in revival music, including the music of the Azusa Street Revival.

²⁹ A.M. Jones, *Studies in African Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 199-201; Darden, *People Get Ready*, 14.

³⁰ Djedje, “African American Music to 1900,” 113.

CHAPTER ONE: THE BIRTH OF PENTECOSTALISM

Although the Azusa Street Revival is widely considered the beginning of the modern Pentecostal movement, the journey to Pentecostalism started long before that, and encompasses a wide range of musical and doctrinal influences. This chapter will outline that journey with three major historical events: the camp meetings of the Great Revival, which birthed a uniquely American approach to religion and sacred music; the holiness movement, which embraced many of the most emotional elements of the camp meetings; and finally, the Azusa Street Revival, which is the launching point of Pentecostalism and the main historical focus of this paper.

The Camp Meetings of the Great Revival (1800-1850)

The Christian worldview was a common element of everyday life to rural folk, but visitors to the Deep South were surprised to find that only a very small number of Southerners even attended church service.³¹ Life on plantations and farms was difficult work. Religious devotion took time and, to a certain extent, education: many rural Southerners could not even read the Bible or a hymnal. Between 1730 and 1750, apathy for religion was challenged by the Great Awakening, which was spurred by the itinerant English preacher and ex-entertainer, George Whitefield. Whitefield's highly theatrical and famously terrifying sermons on "hellfire and brimstone" were popular because there was no other form of theatrical entertainment in American culture at the time, particularly

³¹Darden, *People Get Ready*, 55.

in rural areas.³² Americans were converted to Christianity in large numbers, and the revivals that began in New England eventually spread to the South. Although the Great Awakening began to decline around 1750, Whitefield continued to make trips to the United States in 1764 and 1770, and scattered revivals continued to gain momentum, eventually culminating in “The Second Great Awakening” at the end of the eighteenth century.³³

By this time, devout Southern slave owners had begun to reinterpret their ownership of slaves in light of their new zealous religious views. Whereas there is little reason to suppose that before the Great Awakening slave owners were greatly concerned with the state of the slaves’ souls, the Southerners’ newfound faith made them increasingly aware of the cognitive dissonance created by the institution of slavery within Christianity. They resolved this dissonance with the idea that it was in God’s plan for slaves to come to America in order for them to hear the Word of God and be saved from eternal damnation.³⁴ This practice resulted in the attendance of slaves in the religious meetings of the Second Great Awakening in substantially greater numbers than in the First, and brought about the first religious gatherings in which blacks and whites worshipped together.³⁵

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ William W. Sweet, “Negro Churches in the South: A Phase of Reconstruction,” *The Methodist Review* 37, no. 3 (May 1921): 405.

³⁵ Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 93.

The Second Great Awakening gave birth to a historic, uniquely American gathering called the camp meeting. One of the largest and most well-known camp meetings took place in Logan County, Kentucky, in 1801, and meetings continued through the middle of the nineteenth century.³⁶ Attendees of the camp meetings would travel hours to participate, and would sometimes spend as long as a week there once they arrived.³⁷ Meetings were attended by poor white families, who were overworked, depressed, and, as Darden described them, “sensation-starved.”³⁸ They needed to feel that there was more to life than endless toil. They were also lonely. Life in rural America often meant living in isolation, far away from even the nearest neighbor. Camp meetings gave these families social fulfillment, entertainment, and hope.³⁹

Camp meetings grew out of the Methodist tradition and were usually conducted by itinerant Methodist evangelists who led the crowds through the emotional, personal conversion experiences central to Methodist doctrine.⁴⁰ According to the theology of the founder of Methodism, John Wesley, Christians needed to experience both justification and sanctification before true conversion could take place. Justification, or the “first work

³⁶ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 93; Lovell, *Black Song*, 79-80; Don Cusic, “The Development of Gospel Music,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Blues and Gospel Music*, ed. Allan F. Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 47.

³⁷ Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 93.

³⁸ Lovell, *Black Song*, 79-80; Darden, *People Get Ready*, 55.

³⁹ Don Cusic, “The Development of Gospel Music,” 47.

⁴⁰ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 2, 11; Randall J. Stephens, *The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 24.

of grace,” is the initial conversion to Christianity and the acceptance of God’s grace for the remission of previously committed sins.⁴¹ Justification is part of nearly every modern Protestant denomination and is often referred to as salvation, becoming “saved,” or being “born again.” After justification, another experience, sanctification, was necessary to complete the “entire work of God.”⁴² Sanctification is a “second work of grace” that cleanses the justified believer of innate sin that was the result of the fall of humankind by Adam in the Biblical book of Genesis.⁴³ It is also referred to as the process of perfection or holiness, as explained by Vinson Synan:

The perfection Wesley taught was a perfection of motives and desires. Total “sinless perfection” would come only after death. In the meantime the sanctified soul, through careful self-examination, godly discipline, and methodical devotion and avoidance of worldly pleasures, could live a life of victory over sin. This perfection, Wesley taught, could be attained instantly as a “second work of grace” although it was usually preceded and followed by a gradual “growth in grace.”⁴⁴

In the context of the camp meetings, both experiences, salvation and perfection, were encouraged by long prayer services and lots of lively singing.⁴⁵

Music was the main event at the camp meetings. Since most who attended were not literate, music could not be read from hymnals (in any case, it was too dark outside during nighttime gatherings to read from a hymnal anyway) and, as a result, the camp

⁴¹ Harold Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification* (Wilmore, Kentucky: Francis Asbury Publishing Company, 1981), 83.

⁴² John Leland Peters, *Christian Perfection and American Methodism* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1975), 8.

⁴³ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁵ Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 96.

meetings featured easy-to-learn refrains that were repeated between verses. The verses were sung or spoken by a preacher or song leader.⁴⁶ The refrains were usually written on the spot and placed between verses of pre-existing hymns. Other times, a chorus would be taken from one hymn and attached to another hymn, which came to be known as “wandering verses.”⁴⁷ These fusions and rearrangements of hymns were originally sung without the aid of a hymnal or songbook, but later became so popular that people became interested in performing them in their homes for entertainment. The interest resulted in the publications of several collections, including *A Collection of the Most Admired Hymns and Spiritual Songs with the Choruses Affixed as Usually Sung at Camp Meetings* by John C. Totten in 1809 and *The Christian Harmony or Songster’s Companion*.⁴⁸

Songs often began spontaneously in the service and were sometimes even improvised. Watson observed that the songs were “actually composed as sung”⁴⁹ and that many songs were “composed and first sung by blacks.”⁵⁰ Another observer, Louis F. Benson explains:

Spontaneous songs became a marked characteristic of the camp meetings. Rough and irregular couplets or stanzas were concocted out of Scripture phrases and everyday speech, with liberal interspersing of Hallelujahs and refrains. Such ejaculatory hymns were frequently started by an excited auditor during the

⁴⁶ Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 96–97; Darden, *People Get Ready*, 57.

⁴⁷ Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 97–98.

⁴⁸ John C. Totten, *A Collection of the Most Admired Hymns and Spiritual Songs with the Choruses Affixed as Usually Sung at Camp Meetings* (New York: John C. Totten, 1809); Jeremiah Ingalls, *The Christian Harmony or Songster’s Companion* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1981, 1805).

⁴⁹ Watson, *Methodist Error*, quoted in Reed, *The Holy Profane*, 17.

⁵⁰ Watson, *Methodist Error*, quoted in Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 98.

preaching, and taken up by the throng... The literary form of the Camp Meeting Hymn is that of the popular ballad or song in plainest everyday language... The refrain or chorus is perhaps the predominant feature, not always connected with the subject matter of the stanza, but rather ejaculatory. In some instances such a refrain was merely tacked on to a familiar hymn or an arrangement of one.⁵¹

Another common method of community music making was the “call-and-response,” as white revivalist Lucius Bellinger noted:

Brother McPhail... passed through that [revival] crowd... singing at the top of his trembling voice as he clapped his hands together, “O brethren, will you meet me, In Canaan's happy land?” And hundreds of happy souls replied, “By the grace of God we'll meet you, In Canaan's happy land.”⁵²

The noisy outdoor setting of the meetings made hand clapping and foot stomping commonly employed methods of keeping the time among the crowds of people.⁵³ The songs sung at the meetings came to be known as white spirituals.⁵⁴ Nearly every characteristic of this style was directly contradictory to the hymns written for traditional European Protestant worship, which generally favored lengthy, strophic poems that were intended to be read from published hymnals.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Louis F. Benson, *The English Hymn: Its Development and Use in Worship* (Reprint, Richmond: John Knox Press, 1962), 292–293.

⁵² Quoted in Tallmadge, “The Black in Jackson’s White Spirituals,” 140.

⁵³ Richard Crawford, *America’s Musical Life* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 418.

⁵⁴ Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 348.

⁵⁵ Eileen Southern, *Readings in Black American Music* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1971), 89.

Methodist hymns and subsequently the Methodist doctrine became the central focus of the camp meetings because of an unprecedented hymn procedure, recalled by one observer:

[The Methodists] succeeded in introducing their own stirring hymns, familiarly, though incorrectly entitled ‘Wesley’s Hymns’; and as books were scarce, the few that were attainable were cut up, and the leaves distributed, so that all in turn might learn them by heart... This will be acknowledged to have been of itself a potent engine to give predominance to the Methodists, and to disseminate their peculiar sentiments.⁵⁶

According to Louis F. Benson, the book referred to in this passage was *The Pocket Hymn Book*, known to contain Methodist hymns.⁵⁷ Popular subject matter in the hymns sung include the reuniting of believers in heaven; direct references to “sinners,” “backsliders,” and “mourners”; and military metaphors, including songs explicitly referring to a spiritual battle.⁵⁸ Benson maintains, however, that the most important part of the singing at the camp meetings was to achieve “nothing more than contagiousness and effectiveness.”⁵⁹

Certainly practices differed by location, but blacks appear to have played a large role in the music that was made at the gatherings:

⁵⁶ Robert Davidson, *History of the Presbyterian Church in the State of Kentucky* (New York: R. Carter, 1847), 134.

⁵⁷ Louis F. Benson, *The English Hymn*, 292.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 293.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 294.

A magnificent choir! Most likely the sound proceeded from the black portion of the assembly, as their number was three times that of the whites, and their voices are naturally beautiful and pure.⁶⁰

One of the most commonly noted observations of African American worship at the camp meetings was that the slaves stayed up all night singing when the whites had long since retired to bed.⁶¹ Another typically noted feature was dance and the predominance of the rhythm that often accompanied it:

In the camp of the blacks is heard a great tumult and a loud cry. Men roar and bawl out; women screech like pigs about to be killed; many have fallen into convulsions, leap and strike about them, so that they are obliged to be held down. It looks here like a regular fight...during all this tumult, the singing continues loud and beautiful, and the thunder joins in with its pealing kettle-drum. While this spectacle is going forward in the black camp we observe a quieter scene among the whites.⁶²

Indeed, their music-making did not go unnoticed. It is clear from accounts of the camp meetings that this is the closest that many whites had ever been to blacks and their distinct practices of making music.⁶³

The intermingling of black spirituals and rural white camp meeting music, two oral traditions, has proven to be problematic for modern scholars seeking to identify the true cultural roots of the camp meeting music. There was very little interaction between

⁶⁰ Frederika Bremer, *The Homes of the New World* (University of Wisconsin-Madison TUI Edition, September 1, 2000; originally New York: Harper and Brothers, 1853), 307.

⁶¹ Watson, *Methodist Error in Southern*, 96; Bremer, *The Homes of the New World*, 312; See also Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, 199.

⁶² Bremer, *The Homes of the New World*, 309.

⁶³ Darden, *People Get Ready*, 56.

African American culture and white American culture before this time.⁶⁴ Therefore the question became, who borrowed from whom? Some scholars believe that the spirituals sung at camp meetings had their origin in the European heritage of the white American attendees, and the slaves in attendance learned these traits from whites. Other scholars maintain that the opposite is true: the distinct musical characteristics of camp meeting music originated among the African Americans in attendance, and this influenced the music sung by white camp meeting attendees.⁶⁵ Dena Epstein and John Garst take a more moderate stance, arguing that the different traditions mutually influenced one another to create the new genre.⁶⁶ No one on either side of the argument (or anywhere in between) disagrees on the similarities between black spirituals and white revival music of the camp meetings, or “white spirituals” as they came to be known.⁶⁷ The black spirituals and white spirituals both contained “internal refrains as well as the verse-chorus structure,” and were performed in a “responsorial manner,” were developed completely orally, and incorporated physical movement, dance, and an emphasis on rhythm with hand clapping

⁶⁴ Ibid., 56.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 57. According to Robert Darden, the scholars who believe the camp meeting songs derived from European or white influence include Guy B. Johnson, George Pullen Jackson, and Newman I. White. Those who argue for the African origin of camp meeting songs include Nicholas George Ballanta, Lorenzo D. Turner, Melville Herskovits, John and Alan Lomax, and Dorothy Scarborough.

⁶⁶ Epstein, “A White Origin;” John F. Garst, “Mutual Reinforcement and the Origins of Spirituals,” *American Music* 4, no. 4 (1986): 390–406.

⁶⁷ Epstein, “A White Origin;” George Pullman Jackson, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands* (Hatboro, PN: Folklore Associates, Inc., 1964).

and foot stomping.⁶⁸ Scholars have not explored in any detail, however, which religious tradition has deeper cultural roots.

There is growing evidence that the origin of these worshipping practices lies in the cultures of West and Central Africa from whence the slave population came.⁶⁹ For example, in his study of 116 songs deemed by Jackson to be white spirituals, Tallmadge found that 100 of them showed fundamentally distinct African characteristics of music making.⁷⁰ Moreover, Nicholas George disagreed with scholars who proposed that slaves were influenced by white music-making in the following terms:

It is true that in a great many instances one may meet with spirituals which actually are arrangements of strains of Hymn tunes...but it is also true that although there are evidences of the effect of the environment of the American Negro, yet those evidences are overbalanced by others which go to prove the African origin of these Negro spirituals...No one who has been to Africa and has heard the music of the Africans would doubt the sincerity of the statement that the characteristics of the music of the American Negro could be traced to an African stem.⁷¹

Furthermore, in a collection of published spirituals, African American composer R.

Nathaniel Dett stated that rhythmic syncopation, one of the most distinct characteristics of West African music,⁷² was deliberately avoided in the music performed in most white

⁶⁸ Tallmadge, "The Black in Jackson's White Spirituals," 140.

⁶⁹ Reed, *The Holy Profane*, 18.

⁷⁰ Tallmadge, "The Black in Jackson's White Spirituals," 156.

⁷¹ Nicholas George Ballanta, *Saint Helena Island Spirituals* (New York: Institute of Musical Art, 1925), vi.

⁷² Olly Wilson, "The Heterogeneous Sound Ideal in African-American Music," in *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin', and Slam Dunking: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture*, ed. Gena Dagal Caponi (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 159.

Protestant churches in America prior to the camp meetings because at that time church leaders made strong efforts to keep their worship music free from influence of musical idioms outside of traditional Protestant worship music.⁷³

A few factors contributed to the unusually percussive nature of the camp meetings as noted by observers. Hand clapping and foot stomping were used to keep time among a large throng of people. This may have encouraged the use of faster songs, and discouraged styles of music that relied more heavily on melody or harmony, that were more fitting for a church with organ or piano accompaniment.⁷⁴ The camp meeting musical style, however, was already a part of African American musical practices among the slaves, whereas it was not a part of white sacred worship prior to the meetings.⁷⁵ Furthermore, scholar Olly Wilson states that the tendency toward rhythmic syncopations is one of the major characteristics of music influenced by the African roots of slaves.⁷⁶ This suggests that the rhythmic character of the camp meetings was highly influenced by the preferences of black worshippers. The disgruntled Methodist minister John Watson observed that the distinct worship style of the slave participants had “already visibly affected the religious manner of some of the whites.”⁷⁷ As Eileen Southern has suggested, there is no precedent in the white sacred tradition for dancing, dominance of rhythm, and

⁷³ R. Nathaniel Dett, *The Dett Collection of Negro Spirituals, Third Group* (Chicago: Hall & McCreary Company, 1936), 3; Darden, *People Get Ready*, 59.

⁷⁴ Reed, *The Holy Profane*, 16.

⁷⁵ Ibid.; Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 96–97.

⁷⁶ Wilson, “The Heterogeneous Sound Ideal,” 159.

⁷⁷ Watson, *Methodist Error*, quoted in Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 95.

spontaneous musical worship, yet there is much precedent in African culture for the same.⁷⁸ Additionally, with the accepted notion that the traditions of African American slaves were primitive, it is easy to see how this displacement of credit could have happened.⁷⁹

The Holiness Movement (1867-1894)

The holiness movement was an essential link between the camp meetings and the Azusa Street Revival because it played a large role in the evolution of the doctrine of Christian perfection, a “second work of grace” in addition to the “first work of grace,” salvation. As will be seen, this was a crucial development to the Pentecostal doctrine of the infilling of the Holy Spirit, which affected the way musical worship was practiced and understood within the early Pentecostal denomination.

The start of the holiness movement came after the Civil War with the deliberate effort by leaders in the Methodist church to reverse the growing disinterest in religion with a revival of the camp meetings of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Despite increased enthusiasm for Christianity during the First and Second Great Awakenings, interest in the rural camp meetings began to decline after the middle of the nineteenth century.⁸⁰ Church attendance was at an all-time low, and the intellectual and

⁷⁸ Southern, *Readings in Black American Music*, 89.

⁷⁹ Jackson, *White Spirituals*, 242–243.

⁸⁰ Paul A. Carter, *The Spiritual Crisis of the Gilded Age* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1971), 3–6.

industrial growth of the Gilded Age drew many people to urban centers, threatening the primacy of rural life in American culture.⁸¹ In the Methodist church, church elders became increasingly dissatisfied with the next generation of clergy.⁸² The younger clergy were accused of not being trained enough or respectful enough of traditional Methodist institutions such as the camp meeting, and many feared these institutions were at risk of dying out.⁸³ Although old Methodist campgrounds were still used, the tents were slowly being replaced by well-lit, comfortable cottages, which, for many, represented the unwelcome modernization of the entire denomination.⁸⁴ Even sanctification, one of the definitive doctrines of Methodism, seemed to be becoming unpopular. One Methodist minister, L.L. Hamline, lamented that the doctrine was “mere speculation” to a vast majority of Methodists.⁸⁵ This was because most Methodist ministers did not even profess to have the spiritual gift of perfection, so they could not lead others to the same experience.⁸⁶ A brief Methodist revival took place throughout the South from 1865 to

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, 20–21.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.; William Warren Sweet, *Methodism in American History* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1961, Pierce & Washabaugh, 1954), 333; A.M. McLean and Joel W. Eaton, eds., *Penueel, or Face to Face with God* (New York, 1869), xv; Emory Stevens Bucke *et al.*, *The History of American Methodism* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), 325–326.

⁸⁵ Charles Edwin Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion: The Holiness Movement and American Methodism, 1867-1936* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1974), 2.

⁸⁶ Ibid.; Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, 8.

1867, but it was short-lived.⁸⁷ Conservative Methodists felt that the only way to revitalize the dying movement was with the camp meeting revivalism that was so effective during the Second Great Awakening.⁸⁸

The result was a camp meeting revival meant to “realize together a Pentecostal baptism of the Holy Ghost” that was organized by Methodist writer J.A. Wood and his friend Harriet E. Drake of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.⁸⁹ Together with prominent leaders William B. Osborn and John S. Inskip, they formed an organization called “The National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Christian Holiness” (later shortened to The National Holiness Association), the central purpose of which was to organize the camp meeting.⁹⁰ Inskip himself explained the objective of the camp meeting in the following terms:

I believe this Camp-Meeting will prove an era in the history of Methodism, and will be a tidal mark of that onward wave for which the Church has been praying and laboring for eighteen centuries. The depths of hell are stirred already against us, and all heaven is interested for us; and if we but do our duty, this meeting will be pre-eminently successful, and all will go away filled with the Holy Ghost.⁹¹

The gathering that ensued, called the Vineland Camp Meeting, is largely considered the beginning of the holiness movement, or holiness crusade, which lasted

⁸⁷ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 23.

⁸⁸ Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, 342.

⁸⁹ Delbert R. Rose, *A Theology of Christian Experience* (Minneapolis: MN: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1965), 52; Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1987), 90.

⁹⁰ Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, 43.

⁹¹ McLean *et al.*, *Penueel*, 18. Recall that at this time, the infilling of the Holy Ghost referred to by McLean is meant to imply the experience of sanctification, and not the act of speaking in tongues.

from 1867 to 1894. This movement was named after the doctrine of Christian holiness or perfection, and its new zeal seemed to be the solution to the problem of Methodist decline. The meeting took place in Vineland, New Jersey, July 17 through 26, 1867 and was attended by approximately 12,000 people, both black and white.⁹² Although it was officially non-denominational, it drew most of its support from Methodist crowds.⁹³ The camp meeting was successful in reviving the sanctification doctrine, and soon the subject was once again a frequent one in sermons.⁹⁴

The music of the holiness movement was to a large extent handed down from its ancestor, Methodism. Many holiness hymns originated in Methodism, and later, newly composed holiness hymns were written based on the original Methodist doctrine of sanctification. According to specifications outlined by Mel R. Wilhoit, there appear to be three major themes on which holiness hymns focus. The first is on the cherished doctrine of sanctification and perfection, indicated by the recurrence of words such as cleanse, consume, fill, perfect, restore, sanctify, wash, spotless.⁹⁵ Another popular theme is unity, demonstrated with the common use of words such as all, every, full, and a third popular theme is power, indicated by dramatic word usage such as, fire, fountain, glory, love, power, rest, sin, salvation, victory, waves.⁹⁶ Since the holiness crusade was meant to

⁹² Vineland Historical and Antiquarian Society, *Images of America: Vineland* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2011), 103; Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, 18.

⁹³ Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, 342.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Mel R. Wilhoit, "American Holiness Hymnody: Some Questions: a Methodology," in *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 25 no. 2 (1990): 40–41.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

revive the camp meeting tradition of the early nineteenth century, it is likely that the music of the latter resembled that of the former. Sources seem to indicate a continuation of the tradition of emotional, lively, improvisational worship.⁹⁷

The holiness crusade was particularly popular with African American Methodists. In fact, one of the great leaders of the holiness crusade was a freed slave named Amanda Berry Smith, who had received the second blessing of sanctification in the church of John Inskip.⁹⁸ While many of the holiness camp meetings were bi-racial, Methodist church attendance at the time was not. In 1869, after a period of growing defection, only ten percent of mainstream Methodist congregations were predominantly black.⁹⁹ Although some of the segregation was due to the preference by African Americans for segregated worship, the schism was sealed by the Methodist General Conference, the official governing body of the Methodist denomination. The conference desired to “get rid of its colored membership,” which they virtually completed in 1870 by allowing the infrastructure for independent African American denominations.¹⁰⁰ The main African

⁹⁷ Howard A. Synder, “Formative Influences on B.T. Roberts: Abolitionism, Revivalism, Perfectionism,” in *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 34 no. 1 (Spring 1999): 188.

⁹⁸ Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, 342.

⁹⁹ Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, Jean Miller Schmidt, *American Methodism: A Compact History* (New York: Abingdon Press, 2012): 121.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*; Gross Alexander, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1904), 141.

American Methodist outshoots were African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) founded in 1887 and the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Zion, founded in 1821.¹⁰¹

The old-time religion of camp meetings and sanctification were back in style, but not every Methodist was happy about the new holiness trend. Strict adherents to the holiness doctrine grew increasingly hostile toward mainstream Methodists, and the latter came to believe that the holiness advocates considered themselves to be holier than other Christians.¹⁰² The address of the Bishop at the General Conference of the Methodist Church in 1894 officially spoke to this tension:

There has sprung up among us a party with holiness as a watchword: they have holiness associations, holiness meetings, holiness preachers, holiness evangelists, and holiness property. Religious experience is represented as if it consists of only two steps, the first step out of condemnation into peace and the next step into Christian perfection... We do not question the sincerity and zeal of their brethren; we desire the church to profit by their earnest preaching and godly example; but we deplore their teaching and methods in so far as they claim a monopoly of the experience, practice, and advocacy of holiness, and separate themselves from the body of ministers and disciples.¹⁰³

Another concern of conservative Methodists was that churches that preached the holiness doctrine were only loosely organized around the National Holiness Association, and spanned several different denominations. This was not acceptable to most conservative Methodists, who preferred a more organized system. They feared that radicalization would be more prevalent if worshippers did not have to answer to an organized church

¹⁰¹ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 28.

¹⁰² Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, 9; R. C. Horner, *The Feast of 1905: Seventeen Sermons And Addresses; Addresses And Experiences of Others: Being the Sixth Annual Feast of Pentecost of the Holiness Movement Church* (Ottawa, Holiness Movement Publishing House, 1905), 1.

¹⁰³ Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, 343; Charles Edwin Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion*, 63.

hierarchy. The result was the breaking off of holiness believers into their own denominations. From 1893 to 1900, around twenty-three holiness denominations were started.¹⁰⁴ It is somewhat peculiar that the holiness sects formed so many different denominations rather than one large movement. A plausible explanation for this fragmentation could be the holiness philosophy at the time that church bodies should be in accord theologically and philosophically.¹⁰⁵ Although the different groups disagreed on small variations in governance, worship, doctrine, or even emphasis on one belief or doctrine over another, they agreed on the doctrine of holiness.¹⁰⁶

According to the founder of Methodism, John Wesley, the experience of sanctification can happen either gradually or as an instantaneous, emotional experience.¹⁰⁷ During the 1890s, however, a monumental (albeit gradual) shift occurred that would forever change the notion of sanctification. Holiness churches began to emphasize the more charismatic and instantaneous aspects of the perfection experience, which was often called “the baptism in the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰⁸ Influential writers at the time, especially R.C. Horner, contributed to this notion. Horner was a Canadian holiness minister who had been asked to leave the Methodist church due to his radical doctrines. In his book, *Bible Doctrine*, he encouraged the demonstration of “physical

¹⁰⁴ Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, 344; Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 43.

¹⁰⁵ McLean *et al.*; *Penuel*, 18.

¹⁰⁶ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 49.

¹⁰⁷ Harold Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification*, 121.

¹⁰⁸ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 50.

manifestations” during the infilling of the Holy Spirit, including lying prostrate on the ground, having uncontrollable laughter, and dancing.¹⁰⁹ Even more controversial was Horner’s assertion that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was not, as was previously taught in holiness circles, part of the “second work” of grace that was sanctification, but was instead a “third work” of grace, after justification and sanctification.¹¹⁰ The third work was meant to empower believers for service to God. As a result of his writings, emotional demonstration during worship became increasingly prevalent in holiness churches. Another radical individual, Benjamin Hardin Irwin, described the “third work” experience as being “fire-baptized” because it felt as if his soul and body were on fire.¹¹¹ Those who received “the fire” would scream, dance, laugh uncontrollably, and get “the jerks.”¹¹² Speaking in tongues was a common experience among the fire-baptized, although Irwin did not teach that speaking in tongues was the initial evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit.¹¹³ The object of the fire-baptized experience was to gain power to live a life of holiness. Through Irwin, the notion of an extreme physical manifestation of the Holy Spirit became even more widespread. This style of worship—with unorthodox sounds, physical movements, spontaneity under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and a general emotional nature—found its home in the Pentecostal movement when Charles Parham, who would later solidify the doctrine of speaking in tongues, came to be a

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, 179–180.

¹¹² Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 52.

¹¹³ Ibid., 56.

proponent of Irwin's "third act of grace" views.¹¹⁴ Perhaps more importantly, the "third blessing" theology that yet another experience was available to believers, would become the basis for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the distinctive doctrine of the Pentecostal church. One historian described the fire-baptized movement as a "pre-Pentecostal tinderbox awaiting the spark that would set it off."¹¹⁵ That spark was the Azusa Street Revival.

William J. Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival (1906-1908)

Charles Parham, a white holiness evangelist from Topeka, Kansas, was directly connected to some of the most radical sects of the holiness movement, what author Randall J. Stephens calls "ultra-perfectionist views." Among them was Hardin Irwin's doctrine of the "third work [of grace]," a separate work after salvation and perfection that continued to advance the believer's spiritual life.¹¹⁶ Parham's one problem with the doctrine, however, was that it lacked a sign that believer had received this third work. After traveling all over the country and visiting various holiness leaders in search of this evidence, he came across Frank W. Sandford of Shiloh, Maine, many of whose followers reportedly spoke in foreign languages under the influence of the Holy Spirit's third work, just as the disciples had at Pentecost.¹¹⁷ Parham immediately felt that this was the missing

¹¹⁴ Stephens, *The Fire Spreads*, 188–189.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

link he had been looking for. Upon returning to Topeka, he began his own Bible school, where he taught his students what he had learned.¹¹⁸

Charles Parham later introduced William J. Seymour, a black son of former slaves from Louisiana, to this doctrine of speaking in tongues. These men played crucial roles in the formation of Pentecostalism. Although instances of glossolalia can be found prior to Azusa Street, Parham is considered the formulator of the specific doctrine that speaking aloud in tongues is evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁹ Seymour was the vehicle of this message to the masses and the catalyst of the Azusa Street Revival.¹²⁰

Historians disagree as to which man represents the beginning of the story of Pentecostalism. Klaude Kendrick and John T. Nichol believe that the founder of the Pentecostal movement was Charles Parham, and therefore ultimately endorse a white origin of Pentecostalism.¹²¹ Vinson Synan, who is considered a leader and pioneer on the topic of the holiness-Pentecostal tradition, takes the more diplomatic view that Parham and Seymour were equal catalysts for the Revival.¹²² These scholars also emphasize the

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Stanley M. Horton, “The Pentecostal Perspective,” in *Five Views on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1987), 105.

¹²⁰ Nelson, “For Such a Time as This;” Iain MacRobert, “The Black Roots of Pentecostalism,” in *Anthology of African American Religious Thought*, ed. Cornel West and Eddie S. Gloube (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 616–617.

¹²¹ Klaude Kendrick, *The Promise Fulfilled: A History of the Modern Pentecostal Movement* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1961); John T. Nichol *The Pentecostals* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1971).

¹²² Vinson Synan, *The Holiness Pentecostal Tradition*, 170.

influence of Christian religious traditions of the nineteenth century, namely the holiness tradition, itself a child of Wesleyan Methodism.¹²³

Leonard Lovett, Douglas Nelson, Iain MacRobert, James Tinney, Cecil M. Robeck, and Walter Hollenweger all believe that Seymour was the true leader of the movement, and therefore support the view that the history of Pentecostalism has at least some roots in African American culture.¹²⁴ Only one of these scholars, Iain MacRobert, goes so far as to assert explicitly that there was an African influence in the music of Pentecostals at Azusa Street. Several other scholars do not fall neatly into one category or the other. They include Edith Blumhofer, Donald Dayton, and Robert Anderson.¹²⁵

Both men clearly played important roles in the formation of the Pentecostal movement that found expression at the Azusa Street Revival. Charles Parham was primarily responsible for the doctrine of glossolalia, but Seymour and the members of his

¹²³ See Augustus Cerillo, "Beginnings of American Pentecostalism: A Historiographical Overview," in *Pentecostal Currents in American Protestantism*, ed. Edith L. Blumhofer, Russell P. Spittler, and Grant A. Wacker (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, Illinois, 1999), 229–254.

¹²⁴ Iain MacRobert, *The Black Roots*. Iain MacRobert, "The Black Roots of Pentecostalism." Leonard Lovett, "Perspective on the Black Origins of the Contemporary Pentecostal Movement," in *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 1, no. 1 (1972): 36–50; Douglas Nelson, "For Such a Time as This," 1981; James S. Tinney, "William J. Seymour: Father of Modern Day Pentecostalism," *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 4, no. 1 (1976): 34–37; Cecil M. Robeck, "The Past: Historical Roots of Racial Unity and Division in American Pentecostalism" (paper presented at the Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches of North America Conference, Memphis, TN, October 17–19, 1994); Walter Hollenweger, "A Black Pentecostal Concept: A Forgotten Chapter of Black History: The Black Pentecostals' Contribution to the Church Universal," *Concept* Special Issue no. 30 (June 1970).

¹²⁵ Edith Waldvogel (Blumhofer), "The Overcoming Life': A Study in the Reformed Evangelical Origins of Pentecostalism" (PhD diss, Harvard University, 1977); Dayton, *Theological Roots*; Robert Anderson, *Visions of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

African American prayer group provided much of the energy and impetus that caused the movement to grow from a local event into an international phenomenon. Based on first-hand accounts, a number of scholars have agreed that Seymour was the pioneer of the Azusa Street Revival.¹²⁶ Frank Bartleman, who was present at the revival, said: “Brother Seymour was recognized as the nominal leader in charge.”¹²⁷ Moreover, Parham’s distance from the movement is also suggested by his reaction to a visit to the mission during its peak in October 1906, when he reportedly was appalled by what he saw. After this visit he wrote that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and of speaking in tongues had gone “beyond the bounds of common sense and reason,” and that the movement was taken over by “holy rollers and hypnotists.”¹²⁸ He also disapproved of interracial worship, one of the cornerstones of the Azusa Street Revival:

I have seen meetings where all crowded together around the alter, and laying across one another like hogs, blacks and whites mingling; this should be enough to bring a blush of shame to devils, let alone angels, and yet all this was charged to the Holy Spirit.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Vinson Synan and Charles R. Fox, Jr., *William Seymour: Pioneer of the Azusa Street Revival* (Bridge Logos Foundation: Alachua, FL, 2012); Tinney, “William J. Seymour, Father of Modern Day Pentecostalism;” Nelson, “For Such a Time as This;” MacRobert, *Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA*; Walter Hollenweger, “A Black Pentecostal Concept: A Forgotten Chapter of Black History: The Black Pentecostals’ Contribution to the Church Universal,” in *Concept* Special Issue no. 30 (June 1970); Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission*.

¹²⁷ Frank Bartleman, *Azusa Street: How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982, 1925, e-book, Jawbone digital, 2012), chapter 3.

¹²⁸ Charles Parham, *Charles F. Parham, 164-202*, quoted in Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 102.

¹²⁹ Charles Parham, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness* (Baxter Springs, KS: Jopin Printing Company, 1944), 91–100, quoted in Iain MacRobert, *Black Roots and White Racism*, 60. To his death, Parham was a staunch segregationist and, later in life, supporter of the Ku Klux Klan, widely quoted approving of KKK members for their “fine work in upholding the American way of life” (Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 182).

Parham's apparent disgust suggests that he had little practical involvement in the revival. The following section will tell the story of the Azusa Street Revival, which started seemingly overnight in 1906 under the leadership of William J. Seymour, and began a steady decline in 1908.

William J. Seymour

William J. Seymour was born in 1870 in Louisiana to Simon and Phillis Seymour, who were former slaves. As an adult, Seymour moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1895, and then to Cincinnati, Ohio around 1900 in response to the hate crimes and other forms of discrimination taking place in the South. In Indiana he was a member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, a denomination in the throes of the schism between Methodist conservatives and progressive holiness seekers.¹³⁰ During his years as a member of the Methodist church, Seymour first learned the doctrines of perfection and sanctification, doctrines that would later form a bridge from earlier Protestant traditions to Pentecostalism.¹³¹

In 1903 Seymour's travels led him to Houston, Texas, likely in search of relatives lost during the time of slavery.¹³² There he met a man who would be a crucial figure both

¹³⁰ Synan, *William Seymour*, 30; Nelson, "For Such a Time as This," 160–161. Nelson claims that this was the first indication of Seymour's interest in "interracial reconciliation."

¹³¹ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 67.

¹³² Charles William Shumway, "A Critical History of Glossolalia" (PhD diss., Boston University, 1919), 113; Nelson, "For Such a Time as This," 35.

in his life and in the life of the Pentecostal movement, Charles Parham. Seymour was immediately interested in learning about the new phenomenon that Parham taught of the infilling of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues, and he asked Parham if he could attend the Bible school Parham was starting in Houston, which was called simply, “The Bible Training School.”¹³³ Parham obliged, although only under the condition that Seymour would not be allowed to learn in the classroom with the white students, but instead had to sit outside the door, which Parham had left ajar.¹³⁴

In 1905, while in Houston, Seymour became interim pastor for a black holiness congregation in the absence of its regular pastor, Lucy Farrow. Mrs. Neely Terry, from Los Angeles, happened to be visiting family in Houston and heard one of Seymour’s sermons. She was impressed. Later, the small black holiness group that Terry was a part of in Los Angeles was looking for a designated leader from outside the group, and Terry was reminded of Seymour. She sent a letter with her group’s request and train fare, and in January 1906, Seymour left Houston to join the group in Los Angeles.¹³⁵

Once in Los Angeles, however, things did not go according to plan. Seymour gave his first sermon on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and suggested that the evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit was speaking in tongues.¹³⁶ Although most of his

¹³³ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 92.

¹³⁴ Nelson, “For Such a Time as This,” 167.

¹³⁵ Nelson, “For Such a Time as This,” 168.

¹³⁶ The biblical doctrine of speaking in tongues, or languages that the speaker does not know or understand, has its origin in the New Testament book of Acts in the Bible (Acts 2:1-4). The gift of speaking in tongues was given to Jesus’ followers shortly after his ascent into heaven following his resurrection as a gift of spiritual strength in Jesus’ absence. This event is referred to as Pentecost.

congregation was open to his message, Seymour was turned away from his congregation because his doctrine about the nature of the baptism of the Holy Spirit was not in line with the absent leader of the group. He had no place to go, so a couple named Edward and Mattie Lee invited Seymour to stay with them. The three of them formed a small prayer meeting, and soon others began to join them. This group met in the Lee home during February and March, until an increase in numbers forced a move to a larger space, the home of Richard and Ruth Asberry at 214 (now 216) North Bonnie Brae Street.¹³⁷ On April 9, 1906, the members of the congregation had a spiritual breakthrough during a musical portion of their prayer meeting in which they spoke and sang in tongues. Afterwards, individuals from increasingly diverse races and backgrounds began to come to the group, which eventually grew so large that it needed to lease a vacant property at 312 Azusa Street that had previously functioned as an African Methodist Episcopal Church.¹³⁸ This would be the site of the historic revival and the start of the global Pentecostal movement, as will be described in the following pages.

“How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles”¹³⁹

The Azusa Street Revival was not the first instance of glossolalia noted in modern times.¹⁴⁰ Documented modern experiences of glossolalia occurred at the services of

¹³⁷ Robeck, *Azusa Street Mission*, 5.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Bartleman, “Asuza Street: How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles.”

¹⁴⁰ Instances of glossolalia in Christian traditions must be distinguished from sects that have shared Pentecostalism’s emotional, ecstatic, and charismatic worship style. Iain

Edward Irving at the Presbyterian Church on Regent's Square in London in 1831. Later, there were reports of glossolalia in the London services of Dwight L. Moody in 1875.¹⁴¹ Also, glossolalia reportedly occurred at the Camp Creek revival in North Carolina in 1896.¹⁴² One of the largest comparable events to precede Azusa Street was the Welsh revival in 1904, led by Evan Roberts, in which more than 30,000 people were converted and 20,000 joined the holiness church.

One Los Angeles man who attended the Welsh revival was Joseph Smale, a former pastor of the First Baptist Church. Inspired by what he saw in Wales, he started his own revival at his church when he returned to Los Angeles. Smale's revival was attended by a holiness minister named Frank Bartleman, who became interested in the phenomenon of speaking in tongues and the power it seemed to offer people in their spiritual life.¹⁴³ He was eager to see a revival of the scope of the Welsh revival in Los Angeles. Bartleman, who was also a writer, would later be one of the most important voices of the Azusa Street Revival.

MacRoberts, Synan, and Robeck have explained why the Azusa Street revival is generally considered to be the birth of modern Pentecostalism, even though several

MacRobert outlines several of those sects, which include Montanism in the second century AD; French Jansenists in 1731, and the Shaker communities of the northeast United States around the mid nineteenth century. The latter group, the Shakers, was heavily influenced by the Second Great Awakening, and cannot therefore be viewed as a source for the Pentecostal charismatic worship style (MacRobert, *Black Roots*, 6–7).

¹⁴¹ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 87–88.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 111. Scholars have long suspected that glossolalia was a typical occurrence at camp meetings in general, although there is no evidence to confirm this.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 86-90; Nelson, "For Such a Time as This," 184.

earlier religious revivals also included glossolalia and charismatic worship. For example, Cecil Robeck says that Azusa is studied for several reasons.¹⁴⁴ First, the movement grew at an unbelievable rate, evangelizing not only Los Angeles and the United States, but also the whole world. Second, it was not self-contained within only one denomination or sect of Christianity, but instead, Seymour led with his “vision of shared experience and communal cooperation” across denominations. Third, Azusa is the iconic event to which practically every Pentecostal group credits its origins.¹⁴⁵ Until the Azusa Street Revival, those who participated in tongues-speaking were considered to be on the fringe of their churches. Now, speaking in tongues is a part of mainstream Christianity in the United States and around the world. Many early Pentecostals, including Seymour himself, were excommunicated by their congregations because of their radical views. As a result, they gathered together in homes for their prayer and worship. This is exactly how the Azusa Street Revival began.

On April 9, 1906 at the home of the Asberrys on Bonnie Brae Street, the first member of the group, Ed Lee, began to speak in tongues, causing all the members of the group to be swept up in spiritual power. Overjoyed, they went outside to loudly speak in tongues on the front lawn.¹⁴⁶ Over the next several days, crowds arrived in large numbers to hear the sermons and glossolalia that was happening inside the house, even though many had to stand outside around the open windows to do so because there was no room. Soon, the crowds were so large that the services were moved outside, where Seymour

¹⁴⁴ See Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission*, 8–9.

¹⁴⁵ Robeck, *Azusa Street Mission*, 6–13.

¹⁴⁶ Nelson, “For Such a Time as This,” 191.

would preach from the front porch.¹⁴⁷ The other members of the group believed that this was the regeneration of early Pentecost as experienced by Jesus' disciples and described in the Bible in the first two chapters of the book of Acts. Others thought it was a sign of the end of the age and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to earth.¹⁴⁸ The movement's newsletter, *Apostolic Faith*, which would not come out until later that year, documents the surprising manner of the movement's growth:

The news has spread far and wide that Los Angeles is being visited with a 'rushing mighty wind from heaven.' The how and why of it is to be found in the very opposite of those conditions that are usually thought necessary for a big revival...No collections are taken. No bills have been posted to advertise the meetings. No church or organization is back of it. All who are in touch with God realize as soon as they enter the meetings that the Holy Ghost is the leader. One brother stated that even before his train entered the city, he felt the power of the revival.¹⁴⁹

Because of its rapid growth, a larger meeting space soon was needed. An old abandoned African Methodist Episcopal Church at 312 Azusa Street was decided on as the new meeting place. Although the place was in poor repair, with broken windows and doors, and debris all over the floor, it proved to be a fitting location for the revival meetings. Vinson Synan notes that it was reminiscent of the camp meeting atmosphere

¹⁴⁷ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 96.

¹⁴⁸ *Apostolic Faith*, "Pentecost in Munkti, India," Vol. 1 No. 10, September 1907.

¹⁴⁹ *Apostolic Faith*, "Gracious Pentecostal Showers Continue to Fall," Vol. 1 No. 3, November 1906. Many who attended services at the Mission claimed that there was no human leader of the meetings, but that the Holy Spirit was the leader. Contrary to denials of Seymour's leadership in writings years after the revival, which undoubtedly meant to discount his leadership because of his race, this denial of leadership is not intended to mean that Seymour was not a leader of the movement, but that the people were not being manipulated or coerced by a charismatic speaker. Further evidence of this view is in the claim that no collections were taken. In other words, unlike other religious movements in which the evangelist is making money from the success of revival services, no one was profiting from the meetings.

that many of the holiness attendees were used to. He adds that the poor felt more comfortable meeting in this environment than in a large cathedral-style church, which may have intimidated them.¹⁵⁰ Once the new location was secured, the congregation grew even more quickly. The *Los Angeles Times* ran a story on the movement on April 18, 1906, expressing the author's amazement at the interracial worship and the "gurgle of wordless talk."

Many different races and cultural identities were represented in the movement. The original group at Bonnie Brae Street was entirely African American, but because so many white worshippers began attending the meeting, soon the majority of those who attended were white. It is suspected that many of the white attendees first came to the revival to witness the spectacle.¹⁵¹ Reports, such as that of the *Los Angeles Times*, claimed "Syrian, Spanish, Italian, Negro" people were present.¹⁵² Nelson notes that this fact alone, the racial integration under the authority of an African American pastor, was remarkable.¹⁵³ Later, Seymour would describe the movement's integration in its newsletter, *Apostolic Faith*:

This meeting has been a melting time. The people are all melted together by the power of the blood and the Holy Ghost. They are made one lump, one bread, all one body in Christ Jesus. There is no Jew or Gentile, bond or free, in the Azusa Street Mission...[God] is no respecter of persons and places.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 97.

¹⁵¹ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 96.

¹⁵² This mix of races, and especially the white majority, is not surprising since both Robeck and Nelson claim that African Americans made up less than 1% of Los Angeles in 1906.

¹⁵³ Nelson, "For Such a Time as This," 196.

¹⁵⁴ *Apostolic Faith*, "Fire Still Falling," Vol. 1, No. 4, December 1906.

The meetings were ruled by spontaneity, and anyone who felt “moved by the Spirit” would sing or give testimony.¹⁵⁵ Services took place in the downstairs room of the revival’s location, called the Azusa Street Mission, three times a day, morning, afternoon, and night, and frequently ran together into one long service that lasted from sunup to sundown.¹⁵⁶ There was also an “upper room” used for prayer, modeled after the so-called upper room in which Jesus’ disciples prayed when first experiencing the Holy Spirit. The mission could hold 750 to 800 people inside, and often as many as 400 or 500 people would gather outside the building.¹⁵⁷ There were no musical instruments, hymnals, or a church choir, but singing was usually prompted spontaneously by a leader or congregation member, often in tongues.¹⁵⁸ Many receptive to the Pentecostal message came from holiness and Methodist backgrounds, so music was often based on hymns of that persuasion. After beginning with a familiar hymn, however, most of the music quickly evolved into improvisation that was often at least partly sung in tongues.¹⁵⁹

Although the most prominent form of singing that took place at the revival was improvisational, hymns were often used to begin musical portions of the service or as a springboard for improvisation.¹⁶⁰ Primary documents reveal that one of the most

¹⁵⁵ Synan, *The Pentecostal-Holiness Tradition*, 98.

¹⁵⁶ Nelson, “For Such a Time as This,” 196.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ Shannon Kropf, “The Comforter Has Come,” 37.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

commonly sung hymns at the revival was “The Comforter Has Come,” which was sung everyday along with “Heavenly Sunlight” and “Under the Blood.”¹⁶¹ No music was printed in the pages of *Apostolic Faith*, but words to some of the hymns sung were sometimes printed.¹⁶² In her analysis of hymn use at Azusa Street, Shannon Kropf notes that almost all of the hymns sung were written in the 1870s and 1880s and are in triple meter.¹⁶³ The range of the four-part SATB writing comfortably accommodates congregational singing, and harmony is dominated by tonic, subdominant, and dominant chords with some variation.¹⁶⁴ Other hymns collected by Kropf reflect common themes in subject matter. The blood of Jesus is a common theme (examples include, “The Blood is All My Plea,” and “Are you Wash’d in the Blood?”), probably because of the emphasis of the movement on the forgiveness of sin, represented in Jesus’ crucifixion on the cross. Other hymns focused on power or comfort provided by the Holy Spirit, or the imminent Second Coming of Christ, which was a central doctrine among early Pentecostals.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ *Apostolic Faith*, “Gracious Pentecostal Showers Continue to Fall,” Vol. 1, No. 3, November 1906.

¹⁶² Shannon Kropf, “The Comforter Has Come,” 34–39; *Apostolic Faith*, “A Missionary Family,” May 1907; *Apostolic Faith*, “The Holy Spirit Bishop of the Church,” Vol. 1, No. 9, June to September 1907; *Apostolic Faith*, “Testimony and Praise to God,” Vol. 1, No. 9, June to September 1907.

¹⁶³ Shannon Kropf, “The Comforter Has Come,” 39.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Robeck, *Azusa Street Mission*, 31, 236.

Regardless of which hymn the group sang, it was accompanied by the emotional freedom so characteristic of the movement, and often with singing in tongues.¹⁶⁶

Not everyone found the meetings at Azusa Street to be positive ones. One of the most common criticisms was of the interracial worship and prayer that was commonplace at the mission: a black woman and a white man would be seen praying together, for example. Another common objection was to the general fervor and radicalism of the meetings. Seymour tried to neutralize the enthusiasm of the people, who seemed only to feed off of each other, but it was no use. One critic, the head of the Holiness Association, wrote that “strange phenomena and wild, hysterical demonstrations followed such as rolling on the floor, with strange noises, as in deep agony.”¹⁶⁷ Naturally, some Christians believed that the movement was evil and that Seymour was “an instrument of Satan.”¹⁶⁸

Despite predictions by critics that the revival would be short-lived, it continued to grow larger and larger. In September 1906, the *Apostolic Faith* newsletter launched. The newsletter gave reports of “testimonies,” or stories of how people had been converted, healed, or delivered. It also gave reports and descriptions of what was going on at the mission, transcripts of sermons, and Biblical support for the tongues doctrine. There were 5,000 copies printed the first month. By 1908, 50,000 copies were being printed and distributed, not only all over the country, but also around the world.¹⁶⁹ Holiness people throughout the country were talking about the Azusa Street Revival. People traveled from

¹⁶⁶ Kropf, “The Comforter Has Come,” 64.

¹⁶⁷ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 101.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Nelson, “For Such a Time as This,” 37.

all over the country to see the revival with their own eyes, and brought the reports back to their home congregations. Some Los Angeles natives were so moved by their experiences, that they began congregations of their own elsewhere in the country modeled after the revival and Seymour's teachings.¹⁷⁰

Word of the Azusa Street Revival spread beyond the bounds of the United States as well. Many who attended the revival felt compelled to enter the mission field and preach the good news of Holy Spirit baptism in other countries far from home. In the zeal of the revival, people frequently decided to become missionaries and left on airplanes the very same day.¹⁷¹ Many missionaries, ill equipped with proper supplies or preparation, died within weeks of arrival in their new country from malaria or water-borne illnesses. Some remained, however, planting churches that are now centers of Pentecostal activity. Areas touched by missionaries directly or indirectly influenced by Azusa Street include China, Norway, Sweden, Germany, France, India, Japan, South America, and Africa.¹⁷²

On March 9, 1907 the congregation registered with the State of California as an incorporated institution under the name "Apostolic Faith Mission." Soon after, Seymour and the mission's other leaders purchased the building, which was previously being leased, for \$15,000. Trustees were appointed, and a constitution for the government of

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission*, 239.

¹⁷² Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 104–105; Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission*, 242–280.

the church bodies was adopted.¹⁷³ 1907 would be a year of success and fulfillment for both the leaders and attendees of the Mission.

The Movement's Decline

The decline of the Apostolic Faith movement began with two events in 1908: Seymour's marriage to Jennie Evans Moore in May, and the Azusa Street Mission's loss of the *Apostolic Faith* newspaper shortly thereafter. Seymour's marriage brought a "hornet's nest of criticism from a small but influential group at the Mission."¹⁷⁴ Many worshippers at Azusa Street believed that Christ's second coming was imminent, and probably would occur during their lifetimes. They therefore felt that marriage should not have been Seymour's priority.

Shortly after this conflict Clara Lum, the Mission's secretary, left the Azusa Street Mission to join Florence Crawford, the leader of one of the primary offshoots of the Azusa Street Revival in Portland, Oregon. Clara Lum took with her the mailing list for the *Apostolic Faith* newspaper except for those within the Los Angeles and surrounding area.¹⁷⁵ Seymour and his wife made a trip to Portland during the summer to attempt to take back the mailing lists, but it was futile.¹⁷⁶ It is generally believed (although impossible to prove) that Lum was a part of the group that opposed Seymour's marriage

¹⁷³ Robeck, *Azusa Street Mission*, 88.

¹⁷⁴ Nelson, "For Such a Time," 64.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 217; Robeck, *Azusa Street Mission*, 301–305.

¹⁷⁶ Nelson, 217.

on theological grounds.¹⁷⁷ Whatever the case, though, without the mailing lists for other national and international addresses, the movement lost its momentum, and a series of events followed that led to its demise. Theological conflicts, racial schisms, and a lack of global influence resulting from Lum's departure assured the end of an era for Azusa Street.

¹⁷⁷ Robeck, "For Such a Time as This," 310.

CHAPTER TWO: WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICAN INFLUENCES IN THE MUSIC OF AZUSA STREET

As discussed above, the modern Pentecostal church was born at the Azusa Street Revival thanks to the efforts of a small group of African American individuals who were meeting in a home for prayer. Within just a few months, these meetings had turned into large gatherings of people of all cultures, backgrounds, and races.¹⁷⁸ Based on descriptions in *Apostolic Faith*, we know that the music of the revival could best be described as uninhibited. Meetings did not have a set order of service or time frame and they often would last for hours.¹⁷⁹ Meetings included clapping, physical movement such as dancing, and speaking in tongues, all of which are almost always understood as a result of the presence of the Holy Spirit among the group or within individuals. Services also were collaborative: rather than having a set leader who controlled the service, everyone was welcome to participate by contributing a song, a message for the congregation that they felt was given to them by God, or an idea to the congregation.¹⁸⁰

Each of these practices has precedent in the cultures of West and Central Africa. Records indicate that these two regions are the main places from which African people were transported to the United States as slaves from the seventeenth through the early nineteenth centuries.¹⁸¹ According to Jacqueline Cogdell Djedje, the countries most affected by the slave trade were the modern-day nations of Ghana, Senegal, Gambia,

¹⁷⁸ “Weird Babel of Tongues,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 18, 1906, 1.

¹⁷⁹ *Apostolic Faith*, “Ask What Ye Will,” Vol. 1, no. 1, Sept 1906.

¹⁸⁰ *Apostolic Faith*, “Bible Pentecost,” Vol. 1, no. 3, November 1906.

¹⁸¹ Djedje, “African American Music to 1900,” 103.

Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Ivory Coast, Benin, Togo, Nigeria, Gabon, and Camaroon.¹⁸² The ethnic groups that will be the focus of the comparison between African culture and the camp meeting traditions of the Great Revival and the Azusa Street Revival meet two criteria: they exist in the regions listed above that are known to have been affected by the slave trade, and they had established empires before the arrival of Europeans in the fifteenth century.¹⁸³ Not every ethnic group can be analyzed in this study, but a representative sample will be attempted, including the Ibo of Nigeria, the Yoruba of Nigeria and Benin, the Akan of Ghana and the Ivory Coast, the Ashanti and the Ga peoples of Ghana, the Dan-speaking people of Liberia and the Ivory Coast, and the Bamana people of Mali, Guinea, and Senegal.¹⁸⁴ The ethnic groups represented in this study were chosen because there is substantial information available about their musical and spiritual cultures. There is still much to be learned about many ethnic groups in Africa, but it is to be hoped that future scholarship will shed light on other aspects of African influence on revival music.

Four major areas of similarity between West and Central African practices and common practices at the Azusa Street Revival will be explored in this chapter: spirit possession in music, physical movement and rhythm, musical collaboration, and indeterminate times of worship. Each of these sections will begin with an explanation of the use of the practice at the Azusa Street Revival, followed by its use at the camp

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 103–111.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 103–111.

meetings of the Great Revival. Finally, the practice in these two revival traditions will be compared with its use in the traditions of West and Central Africa.

Spirit Possession in Music

Spirit Possession at the Azusa Street Revival

Spirit possession at the Azusa Street Revival took the form of glossolalia, or speaking in tongues. As described in the book of Acts, this spiritual gift was given by God in order to empower the disciples in Jesus' absence. While most Protestants believe that this event was a miracle meant that occurred just once, Pentecostals believe that this gift is still available today to those who seek it in prayer. The baptism of the Holy Spirit often occurs during special times of prayer and music, such as the revival at Azusa Street, although it is said to be possible at any time and place. The infilling of the Holy Spirit has several purposes: it offers the power to lead a holier life and withstand temptation, the ability to have a more intimate relationship with God, and the capacity to overcome fear in order to accomplish God's plan for one's life. Additionally, it is said to give believers a deep spiritual joy, create unity among believers, and convey otherwise hidden messages from God to His people in the form of an interpretation of tongues.¹⁸⁵ One participant at one of the Azusa Street Revival's primary offshoots in Salem, Oregon, described his experience of the Holy Spirit: "He fills me with His glory. Since I have received the baptism with the Holy Ghost, I have understood God better and His truth has opened up

¹⁸⁵ Dayton, *Theological Roots*, 89–94.

to me as never before. It enables me to stand in every place. I have sweet fellowship with my Lord in all trials and tests.”¹⁸⁶

Often, speaking in tongues is a private experience of the individual, but it can also be used as a means of conveying a message from God to a congregation during a church or revival service. In this case, one person is compelled by God to speak in tongues for the entire congregation to hear. This often takes place during music or prayer segments of church or revival services. Since tongues are in another language, they require an interpretation afterwards, either by the speaker or tongues or another individual in the congregation, in order to convey a message. The following explanation of the interpretation of speaking in tongues comes from the website of the Assemblies of God, one of the largest Pentecostal denominations in the world:

In 1 Corinthians 14 the apostle Paul clearly taught that public speaking in tongues in the assembly of believers is in order only when followed by an interpretation ... Final responsibility for giving an interpretation of tongues in a public assembly rests with the one who gave the utterance in tongues. The speaker either must be assured that someone else in the assembly will provide the interpretation, or he must be prepared to do so himself (1 Corinthians 14:13, 27-28)... The purpose of tongues with interpretation is twofold. One purpose is to provide a sign for unbelievers that they might believe. The other purpose is to edify the church body. Tongues with interpretation declares the mighty works of God, exalts His name, and prompts the believers to worship Him in spirit and in truth.¹⁸⁷

There are more than sixty examples of tongues and interpretation in *Apostolic Faith*. After one member of the congregation spoke in tongues aloud, another came forth with its interpretation:

¹⁸⁶ *Apostolic Faith*, “Pentecost in Salem Oregon,” Vol. 1, No. 4.

¹⁸⁷ The Assemblies of God, “Questions About Tongues,” http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/topics/baptnhs_faq_tongues.cfm#alwaysinterpretation (accessed April 17, 2014).

‘Jesus is coming again soon. Do not reject His voice. Don’t reject Him, don’t reject Him. He was nailed on the cross for you.’ The above is the interpretation of a message in an unknown language given by one who came a sinner and is now filled with the Holy Ghost speaking and preaching in new tongues.¹⁸⁸

In another instance, the tongues and interpretation did not occur at the Azusa Street

Revival, but in the home of a man and his wife. The editors of *Apostolic Faith* explain:

[The woman] broke out in tongues and interpreted. Her husband wrote the interpretation in English, and sent it to us, and we feel it is of God for His people. The message is as follows: ‘This work is of God that you are reading of. Let no one put their hand on it. Let all press in and have their part. God has many richer blessings for His faithful children. Seek Him earnestly and pray for His gifts which are a witness of the Spirit.’¹⁸⁹

One of the most common occurrences of glossolalia at Azusa Street was improvisational singing in tongues, often referred to as “singing in the Spirit.”¹⁹⁰

Apostolic Faith reads, “The singing is characterized by freedom... Often one [member of the congregation] will rise and sing a familiar song in a new tongue.”¹⁹¹ This is an example of a common method of improvisation at the revival. The singer often began with a familiar hymn as a foundation, then retained the melody but replaced the words with glossolalia. Sometimes, the tune is changed as well, such as in the following instance:

The most wonderful moment though was when I burst into a beautiful baritone solo, using one of the most pure and delightful languages I have ever heard. The

¹⁸⁸ *Apostolic Faith*, “Pentecost in Salem Oregon,” Vol. 1, No. 4.

¹⁸⁹ *Apostolic Faith*, “Other Pentecostal Saints,” Vol. 1, No. 4.

¹⁹⁰ Revival writer Frank Bartleman called it “singing in the Spirit,” while scholar Cecil M. Robeck defines it as “harmonious singing in tongues.” Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission*, 148.

¹⁹¹ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, 52; *Apostolic Faith*, “Gracious Pentecostal Showers Continue to Fall,” Vol. 1, No. 3, November 1906.

tune and words were entirely new to me, and the rhythm and cadence of the verses and chorus seemed to be perfect. I sang several times later on.¹⁹²

Frank Bartleman, who attended the Azusa Revival services recalled,

The spirit of song given from God in the beginning was like the Aeolian harp, in its spontaneity and sweetness. In fact, it was the very breath of God, playing on human heartstrings, or human vocal chords. The notes were wonderful in sweetness, volume, and duration. In fact, they were oftentimes humanly impossible. It was ‘singing in the Spirit.’¹⁹³

One observer described his experience of hearing “singing in the Spirit” for the first time:

I have attended many large holiness camp meetings and conventions, but I never felt the power and glory that I felt in the Azusa Street Mission, and when about twenty persons joined in singing the ‘Heavenly Chorus,’ it was the most ravishing and unearthly music that ever fell on mortal ears...I know it came direct from heaven.¹⁹⁴

All examples of singing in the Spirit from the Azusa Street Mission took place in the context of a communal church service or prayer meeting, although, like tongues and interpretation, such practices did not need to take place in such an organized context. To Pentecostals, this is the holiest singing because it comes directly from God: “When the Holy Ghost comes in He speaks for Himself and sings His own songs.”¹⁹⁵ It was extremely important to early Pentecostals that the church service was led by the Holy Spirit, and not by the agenda of any person.

¹⁹² *Apostolic Faith*, “Baptized in New York,” Vol 1, No. 4, December 1906.

¹⁹³ Frank Bartleman, *Azusa Street*, chapter 3.

¹⁹⁴ *Apostolic Faith*, “A Chicago Evangelist’s Pentecost,” Vol. 1, No. 6, February-March 1907.

¹⁹⁵ *Apostolic Faith*, “A Catholic that Received Pentecost,” Vol. 1, No. 3, Nov 1906.

Improvising music under the influence of the Holy Spirit has at least three benefits for believers. The first is faith: the improviser must rely on the Holy Spirit to provide the words and notes to him or her and then speak out, trusting that God will provide the music that will result. The second is proximity to God: believers feel that it is almost as if God Himself is whispering the words and notes into the musicians' ear.¹⁹⁶ The third is that it is an effective way to facilitate community music-making, an important aspect of Pentecostalism. One of the most common ways of improvising includes call-and-response, a commonly used technique in many African American musical traditions. Call-and-response involves a song leader who improvises, often on a pre-existing melody or song, and the group repeats a short chorus. It is possible that this is the technique used in first-hand accounts describing the formation of new songs at the Azusa Street Revival: a familiar hymn is used as a starting point by a song leader, who improvises the melody or words while the group repeats a chorus: "Someone happened to want to sing a song and started it. Everyone followed. If one didn't want to sing the song then on the program he sang some other one. It was all the same."¹⁹⁷ Call-and-response often includes improvisatory elements, particularly in the "call," or solo portion of the song. Improvisation by anyone in the congregation, especially with glossolalia, was another form that dominated the music of the revival.¹⁹⁸ Additionally, improvisation in both American revival music and West African music lends itself well to communal activities because it is inclusive and non-restrictive. For example, unlike prepared music,

¹⁹⁶ Reed, *The Holy Profane*, 22.

¹⁹⁷ As quoted in Robeck, *Azusa Street Mission and Revival*, 145.

¹⁹⁸ Kropf, "The Comforter Has Come," 64–79.

improvisation in the context of the Azusa Street Revival requires no set number of singers, no rehearsals, no hymnbooks, and no minimum skill level. This is consistent with the strong spontaneous atmosphere at the Azusa Street Revival. One congregant at Azusa remembered, “I would start to sing some of the real old hymns. Part of the words I knew and part I did not, but the Lord would put those in my mouth I did not know.”¹⁹⁹ Further, as in the slave songs and camp meeting songs, no musical instruments or hymnbooks were available.

Another characteristic of the Azusa Street Revival that was considered a definite manifestation of the Holy Spirit was called being “slain in the Spirit,” referred to twenty-nine times in *Apostolic Faith*. Being slain in the Spirit means that the Holy Spirit has filled the receiver to such an extent that he or she can no longer stand and thus falls to the ground. The receiver may stay lying on the ground, usually appearing unconscious or sleeping, for a matter of minutes or hours. One observer at Azusa noted that there were so many people slain in the Spirit that “you can’t move about the altar.”²⁰⁰ Another time, “those convicted fell under the power of the Holy Spirit as people used to do in Wesley’s days and were lying on the floor.”²⁰¹ This indicates that manifestations of spirit possession such as being slain in the Spirit were also an important part of the precedent of the Pentecostal revival meeting to which the above observer refers, the camp meetings of the Great Revival. Indeed, firsthand accounts of the camp meetings demonstrate that this was the case. One observer claimed that what he saw was unlike “anything heard of since

¹⁹⁹ Kropf, “The Comforter Has Come,” 37.

²⁰⁰ *Apostolic Faith*, “Portland is Stirred,” Vol. 1 No. 5.

²⁰¹ *Apostolic Faith*, “Pentecost in Denver, Colorado,” Vol. 1, No. 7, April 1907.

the days of the Apostles”: “They generally fell flat on the ground in agony of distress. I saw at one time about five hundred lying thus. Some laid but a few minutes, others for hours.”²⁰²

Spirit Possession at the Camp Meetings of the Great Revival

Improvisational singing like the singing in the Spirit of the Azusa Street Revival was also known to occur at the camp meetings. A leader might sing a hymn verse, and then a congregation member would sing an often invented, simple chorus. The chorus was repetitive enough that everyone could sing along, even if they did not know the words.²⁰³ One scholar, Louis F. Benson, asserts “spontaneous song became a marked characteristic of the camp meetings... such ejaculatory hymns were frequently started by an excited auditor during the preaching, and taken up by the throng.”²⁰⁴ There is abundant evidence that this style was first practiced by the slaves in attendance at the meetings, and later used by whites. One observer notes, “When the minister gave out his own version of the Psalm, the [black] choir commenced singing so rapidly that the original tune absolutely ceased to exist — in fact, the fine old psalm tune became thoroughly transformed into a kind of negro melody.”²⁰⁵ Many scholars believe that improvisation at the camp meetings was accompanied by speaking in tongues, but there is no record that confirms this. Even if glossolalia did not occur at the camp meetings, improvisational

²⁰² McLean, *Peneal—or, Face to Face with God*, xiv.

²⁰³ Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 97.

²⁰⁴ Benson, *The English Hymn*, 292–293.

²⁰⁵ Henry Russell quoted in *The Holy Profane*, 16.

singing was a means of emotional freedom to allow God to express himself through the participants, just as it later was at the Azusa Street Revival.

This was quite different from the conventions within Anglican-influenced American church tradition prior to the camp meetings. There was no place for such fluid, improvisational worship within an ordered service. Whereas the objective in both revivals' services was to be obedient to the Spirit's guidance, which was thought to be spontaneous and fluid, more traditional church services sought to be obedient through strict compliance to a pre-set liturgy. Spontaneity, improvisation, or interjection by a congregation member was considered wildly inappropriate and potentially sinful.²⁰⁶ A famous publication by an appalled Methodist minister makes clear this prevalent attitude:

What in the name of religion, can countenance or tolerate such gross perversions of true religion!...I have known in some camp meetings, from 50 to 60 people crowded into one tent, after the public devotions had closed, and there continued the whole night, singing tune after tune...some of these...are actually composed as sung, and are indeed almost endless.²⁰⁷

Spirit Possession in the Cultures of West and Central Africa

Revival practices such as improvisation and being slain in the Spirit bear a striking resemblance to musical and cultural religious practices in West and Central Africa. As in the Azusa Street Revival, the visitation of spiritual forces is central to many musical practices of West and Central Africa. William Komla Amoaku, an ethnomusicologist from Ghana, claims that he has “never participated in a traditional

²⁰⁶ Graham White and Shane White, ““At Intervals I Was Nearly Stunned by the Noise He Made”: Listening to African American Religious Sound in the Era of Slavery,” in *American Nineteenth Century History* 1 no. 1 (2000): 34–61.

²⁰⁷ Watson, *Methodist Error*, quoted in Reed, *The Holy Profane*, 16.

musical activity in which there was no allusion to the gods or spirits.”²⁰⁸ George Eaton Simpson observed that spirit possession was indeed brought from cultures in West and Central Africa to the United States where they have been modified and still have a prominent place in many grassroots movements and religions such as Pentecostalism.²⁰⁹ Scholarship suggests that there are at least three fundamental elements of West African spirit possession that also exist in the worship of the Azusa Street Revival. These elements will now be explored. They include: spirit possession as an outward sign of an inward change, the communication of a message from the deity to the community at large, and a loss of control of the physical body.

An outward change as a sign of an inward change. According to William K. Olupona, the general process of spirit possession involves “the body’s appearance” being “temporarily replaced by another.”²¹⁰ This is achieved by outward symbols such as trembling, trance, and glossolalia.²¹¹ The customs of spirit possession from group to group in Africa vary, and some of those methods will be discussed presently, but the goal of virtually every instance of spirit possession in the traditions of West and Central Africa

²⁰⁸ William Komla Amoaku, “Toward a Definition of Traditional African Music: A Look at the Ewe of Ghana,” in *More Than Drumming: Essay on African and Afro-Latin American Music and Musicians*, ed. Irene V. Jackson (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 35.

²⁰⁹ George Eaton Simpson, *Black Religions in the New World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 17.

²¹⁰ Jacob K. Olupona, *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, and Expressions* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000), 232–233.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

is internal transformation.²¹² This inward change is often any improvement of quality of life in the individual: from sickness to wholeness, from sadness to joy, from powerlessness to power, or from problem to solution.²¹³ Scholar Fritz Kramer states the following:

Invariably the ritual is said to transform the suffering and trauma into a state where the spirit host can master his ecstasies, trances, or hyperkinesia until finally, either recuperating or healed, he is able to help, heal, and mediate in his community. The differences between world pictures, types of trance, and hyperkinesia prove secondary when compared with the sudden change from sickness to health, from misery to joy and fulfillment, or from impotence to the power of the medium, helper, and healer one has experienced in one's own suffering.²¹⁴

Samuel Floyd agrees: "Africans relied on spirits for catharsis, confessing their troubles to them as a means of seeking relief."²¹⁵

The outward change that occurs is merely a sign to participants that the inward change is taking place. One of the most comprehensive works on the inward and outward changes in spirit possessions in West and Central Africa is Jacob K. Olupona's study *African Spirituality*. He describes how the process of spirit possession takes place among the Ashanti people of Ghana:

A god may take possession of someone, whereupon he or she may appear to have gone mad. A priest will be consulted, and he may discover that a deity has come upon the person. A brass shrine must be made so that the god can be transferred

²¹² Fritz Kramer, *The Red Fez: Art and Spirit Possession in Africa* (London: Verso, 1993), 91–92.

²¹³ Adama and Naomi Doumbia, *The Way of the Elders* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2004), 9.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 17.

from the person to the shrine. This will enable the afflicted person to communicate regularly with the deity and to become its servant, thus normalizing the relationship. When all preparations have been made, the possessed person will dance, accompanied by drumming and singing, sometimes for as long as two days. . . . People may come to the shrine to receive advice from the god about their sufferings and ailments.²¹⁶

Another example Olupona gives is of the Dan-speaking peoples of Liberia and the Ivory Coast. Instead of intangible signs of possession such as the appearance of madness, the Dan-speaking tribes use wooden masks in order to illustrate that a person is being manifested with a spirit.²¹⁷ When possessed, the people perform moral and legal roles for their society, such as giving advice or moderating domestic or social disagreements.²¹⁸

George Simpson outlines other changes that often take place during spirit possession: “During trance, an alteration of consciousness occurs which brings physiological and psychological changes in the individual. These changes may affect sensory impressions, memory functions, and concepts in identity.”²¹⁹

As in these African religious traditions, the outward signs at the Azusa Street Revival, including glossolalia, being slain in the spirit, “singing in the spirit,” and dancing, are an indication of an internal change taking place, one that will restore an individual physically or spiritually. Physical healing was a large part of the change that happened at Azusa, but spiritual transformation played an even bigger part.²²⁰ Early

²¹⁶ Olupona, *African Spirituality*, 32.

²¹⁷ Olupona, *African Spirituality*, 35.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Simpson, *Black Religions in the New World*, 18.

²²⁰ There are more than one hundred mentions of healing in *Apostolic Faith*. One example of the doctrine of healing among the early Pentecostals is found in *Apostolic*

Pentecostal doctrine taught that the first spiritual change is justification, or religious conversion.²²¹ After that, all of a Christian's life is a journey toward perfect sanctification or perfection, the ultimate spiritual transformation.²²²

Communicating information to the community. There are numerous examples in cultures of West and Central Africa in which information is provided to the community through people who are possessed with spirits. John S. Mbiti notes that “in many African societies the spirits and the living-dead act as intermediaries who convey human sacrifices or prayers to God, and may relay His reply to men.”²²³ Spirits often appear in the dreams of priests or shamans to relay information to the community at large.²²⁴ For example, among the Ashanti of Ghana, the priest stands near a curtain covering the doorway of the shrine and becomes possessed by the god. The priest then speaks in a spiritual language and the priest's spokesperson interprets his words and tells the supplicant the solution to the problem.²²⁵ In their book, *The Way of the Elders*, Adama and Naomi Doumbia explore the culture of the Bamana people who live in West Africa, primarily in Mali, Guinea, and Senegal. According to the Doumbias, the spirits impart

Faith: “A sanctified body is one in perfect health, through faith in God. It does not mean we could not get sick, but we are maintained in health by faith.” “Pentecost in Lamont, Okla.,” Vol. 1, No. 5, January 1907.

²²¹ Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification*, 83.

²²² “The Apostolic Faith Movement,” *Apostolic Faith*, Vol. 1, No. 1, September 1906.

²²³ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), 81.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ Olupona, *African Spirituality*, 32.

knowledge to those present at the religious ceremony by causing people present to speak in different languages, and another person present will interpret the message to the rest of the community.²²⁶ This is similar to what occurred at the Azusa Street Revival through the interpretation of tongues. As one participant put it, “The interpretations of these messages and of many others given in different languages through several, was the work of the Holy Spirit through chosen instruments and was uplifted towards God for all the saints assembled.”²²⁷ The belief of the leaders of the Azusa Street Revival in the action of the Holy Spirit on believers might have stemmed in part from the common belief in spirit interaction in African society.

Freedom in physical body. It has already been made clear that the freedom attained by surrendering control of the physical body was one of the most notable features of the Azusa Street Revival. These expressions of freedom included being slain the spirit, dancing, and speaking in tongues. In contrast with prior Christians in America, early Pentecostals believed that individuals should strive toward emotional and physical freedom in order to allow God to be in control. One illuminating passage in *Apostolic Faith* says, “So many people today are controlled by men. Their salvation reaches out no further than the boundary line of human creeds, but praise God for freedom in the Spirit.”²²⁸ Another describes his experience at the revival thus: “I felt the power of the

²²⁶ Doumbia, *The Way of the Elders*, 6.

²²⁷ *Apostolic Faith*, “Pentecost in Denver, Colorado,” Vol. 1, No. 7, April 1907.

²²⁸ *Apostolic Faith*, “River of Living Water,” Vol. 1, No. 3, November 1906.

Holy Ghost permeate my being...He so gently laid me backward upon the floor, taking complete control.”²²⁹

The surrender of physical control is an important part of many cultures in West and Central Africa.²³⁰ Among the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria, “jerky dancing” is a crucial aspect of spirit possession.²³¹ As discussed below, the word “jerks” is used in both early holiness circles and at the Azusa Street Revival to describe the kind of seemingly uncontrollable movements that take place under the influence of the Holy Spirit.²³² When the Ashanti people are possessed, they look like they have “gone mad.”²³³ Scholar J.O. Lucas notes that descriptions like this usually serve to indicate that a person is surrendering some control in their physical body:

The emotional element is the most prominent in West African religion. On the occasions of some religious festival or dances the emotional disposition is developed to a high degree of ecstasy, resulting in physical exhaustion of the person or persons concerned. This is also the case when a person is said to be inspired or enthused by a god.²³⁴

²²⁹ *Apostolic Faith*, “Ye Are My Witnesses,” Vol. 1, No. 8, May 1907.

²³⁰ Kramer, *The Red Fez*, 91.

²³¹ Olupona, *African Spirituality*, 42.

²³² *Apostolic Faith*, “Gracious Pentecostal Showers Continue to Fall,” Vol. 1, No. 3, November 1906.

²³³ Olupona, *African Spirituality*, 42, 32.

²³⁴ J.O. Lucas, *Religions in West Africa and Ancient Egypt* (Lagos, Nigeria: Nigerian National Press, 1970), 42.

Vocal improvisation is another way of expressing a spirit's control over a group or individual in some West and Central African cultures.²³⁵ As Mbiti puts it, African peoples "have no creeds to recite: their creeds are within them, in their blood and in their hearts."²³⁶ Samuel Floyd suggests that the prominence of improvisational singing in West and Central Africa is connected to the regions' strong oral story telling tradition.²³⁷

Another reason for the presence of improvisation in some African cultures could be that it is an effective way to facilitate community music-making, an important aspect of culture in West and Central Africa. Margaret Thompson Drewal observes of the Yoruba people of West Africa,

Periodically repeated, unscripted performance — including most ritual, music, and dance in Africa — is improvisational... It is indeed the playing, the improvising, that engages people, drawing them into the action, constructing their relationships, thereby generating multiple and simultaneous discourses.²³⁸

There is an element of repetition in West and Central African musical improvisation, contrary to the long-standing Western misconception that it consists of mostly "free, collective improvisation."²³⁹ One of the most common techniques of improvising using repetition includes call-and-response, a favorite technique at the Azusa Street Revival as

²³⁵ Reed, *The Holy Profane*, 18; Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 7; Ashenafi Kebede, *Roots of Black Music: The Vocal Instrumental, and Dance Heritage of Africa and Black America* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, Inc., 1982, 1989), 141; Francis Bebey, *African Music: A People's Art* (New York: L. Hill, 1975), 30.

²³⁶ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 67.

²³⁷ Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 123, 141.

²³⁸ Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual*, 7.

²³⁹ David Locke, "Improvisation in West African Musics," in *Music Educators Journal* 66, No. 5 (January 1980): 128–129.

discussed above. It is likely that improvisation became such a large part of Pentecostal worship at Azusa Street because of the clear relationship of the practice with spirit possession, as Floyd has suggested.²⁴⁰ The following account describes this phenomenon:

Especially did the enchanting strains of the so-called ‘Heavenly Choir,’ or hymns sung under the direction of the Holy Spirit as to words and tune thrill my whole being. It is not something that could be repeated at will, but supernaturally given for each special occasion and was one of the most indisputable evidences of the presence of the power of God. Perhaps nothing so greatly impressed people as this singing; at once inspiring a holy awe, or a feeling of indescribable wonder, especially if the hearers were devout in attitude.²⁴¹

Jacqueline DjeDje confirms many of the resemblances between West African and Azusa music-making when she describes the following characteristics that unify the traditional music of West Africa: melismatic singing with ornamentation (improvised); if a soloist has vocal accompaniment by a group, “the response is drone-like: a short melodic or rhythmic phrase repeats variously;” most of the musical content consists of the soloists’ rapid declamatory phrases; and a “high-pitched, tense quality” to the singer’s voice.²⁴² We have already seen how improvisation and call-and-response technique play a major role in the music of the Azusa Street Revival, as well as the frequency of rapid solo-singing as a means of leading the group, or engaging in spiritual expression. It is interesting to note, however, that the “high-pitched” quality so common in West African music also has a place in the music of Azusa Street: an observer recorded in *Apostolic*

²⁴⁰ Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 141.

²⁴¹ A.W. Orwig, “My First Visit to the Azusa Street Pentecostal Mission,” in *Holy Ghost Revival on Azusa Street: The True Believers* ed. Larry E. Martin (Joplin, MO: Christian Life Books, 1988), 62.

²⁴² Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje, “West Africa: An Introduction,” in *The Garland Handbook of African Music*, ed. Ruth M. Stone (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 144.

Faith that “suddenly a high-pitched musical voice is heard cutting into everything—prolonged, and then dying away. It is a woman praising Christ in the Spirit.”²⁴³ Perhaps this is an isolated incident, as there are no other documented examples of this phenomenon, but the coincidence is certainly compelling and consistent with many other similarities between Azusa and characteristics of West African worship.

It is clear that spirit possession is a central element in both the culture of West and Central Africa and at the Azusa Street Revival. Both traditions emphasize physical evidence of spirituality and share three main purposes of spirit possession: as an outward sign of an inward change (usually from a state of deficiency to a state of sufficiency), to convey messages to the community, and to surrender control to the spirit itself. In both traditions, improvisational singing, and being in a trance state (or in the case of Azusa Street, being “slain in the spirit”) or exhibiting apparently uncontrolled bodily motions are practices of expressing freedom from control. Even tone qualities of singers’ voices and common vocal techniques are present in both cultures. Now that a common focus on spirit possession in both traditions has been established, it is time to examine how influences of African physical movement and rhythm from African cultures are present at the Azusa Street Revival.

²⁴³ *Apostolic Faith*, “New Scandinavian Revival,” Vol. 1, No. 6, February-March 1907.

Physical Movement and Rhythm

Physical Movement and Rhythm in the Music of the Azusa Street Revival

Besides glossolalia, one of the most peculiar practices at the Azusa Street Revival to outsiders was the use of physical movement. Two kinds of physical movement were characteristic of the Azusa Street Revival: rhythmic physical movement, including dancing, clapping, and foot stomping, and physical movement compelled by the Holy Spirit, such as the “the jerks” and being “slain in the Spirit.” Pentecostal scholar Cecil Robeck claims that rhythmic physical movement in particular prompted more than one reporter to note “scenes that duplicate those of the negro revival meetings of the South,” since these characteristics were already associated with both African American musical styles of worship and camp meetings.²⁴⁴ One reporter described an Azusa service in July 1906, “Another negro started ‘I am washed in the blood,’ and a genuine camp-meeting time followed, with clapping of hands and stomping of feet.”²⁴⁵ It is clear that rhythmic movement was an important part of music at Azusa Street. Besides clapping and stomping rhythms, however, many participants were inspired by the Holy Spirit to dance or otherwise move with joy: “For about 2 hours at the depot, the saints sang, while some wept and rejoiced in the Spirit, and some danced before the Lord.”²⁴⁶ There is reason to suspect that dance was far more common than *Apostolic Faith* makes it seem. The lack of passages that explicitly utilize the word “dance” has to do with the early Pentecostals’

²⁴⁴ Quoted in Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission*, 137.

²⁴⁵ Quoted in Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission*, 145.

²⁴⁶ *Apostolic Faith*, “Ask What Ye Will,” Vol. 1, no. 1, Sept 1906.

opposition to social dancing, as illustrated in this passage: “Christ’s yoke is easy, but the yoke of Satan is bondage, it is heavy. He makes you spend your money for the theaters, parties, and dances and for that which does not satisfy you, and he brings many aches to your heart.”²⁴⁷ The Azusa documents describe a physical movement referred to as “the jerks,” which appear to suggest uncontrollable movement that occurs when one is under the influence of the Holy Spirit.²⁴⁸ Another passage describes the scene as somewhat chaotic, with many different physical expressions of the Holy Spirit happening at once: “The manifestations of the Spirit when the souls were touched were different according to [1 Corinthians] 12. Some were knocked down to the floor, some were overflowed gently while sitting in their chairs. Some cried with loud voice, others shouted Hallelujah! clapped their hands, jumped or laughed with joy.”²⁴⁹ In another instance, “Joy unspeakable” filled “faces with glory, has been manifested by singing, clapping the

²⁴⁷ *Apostolic Faith*, “The Salvation of Jesus,” Vol. 1, No. 12, January 1908.

²⁴⁸ *Apostolic Faith*, “Gracious Pentecostal Showers Continue to Fall,” Vol. 1, No. 3, November 1906.

²⁴⁹ *Apostolic Faith*, “Pentecost Spreads to Other Lands,” Vol. 1, No. 11, January 1908. The biblical passage mentioned, 1 Corinthians 12, refers to the notion that the Holy Spirit manifests itself in different ways in different people: “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.” (1 Corinthians 12:7-11 NIV)

hands, shouting praises, dancing, and losing strength as under an ‘exceeding weight of glory.’”²⁵⁰

Physical Movement and Rhythm in the Music of the Camp Meetings of the Great Revival

In his study, Cecil Robeck seconds Eileen Southern’s observation that the worship of Azusa Street was the “heir to the shouts, hand clapping and foot stomping, jubilee songs, and ecstatic seizures of the plantation ‘praise houses.’”²⁵¹ Methodist John Watson observed the black camp meeting participants disapprovingly:

With every word so sung, they have a sinking of one or [the] other leg of the body alternately; producing an audible sound of the feet at every step, and as manifest as the steps of actual Negro dancing in Virginia, etc. If some, in the meantime, sit, they strike the sounds alternately on each thigh.²⁵²

Watson’s response illustrates that this style of music-making was not considered within the bounds of appropriate sacred worship among American Protestant churches at the time. Another observer, Bremer, illustrated the power of movement in the camp meetings:

We saw in one a zealous convert, male or female, as it might be, who with violent gesticulations gave vent to his or her newly-awakened feelings, surrounded by devout auditors; in another we saw a whole crowd of black people on their knees, all dressed in white, striking themselves on the breast, and crying out and talking with the greatest pathos; in a third women were dancing ‘the holy dance’ for one of the newly-converted.²⁵³

²⁵⁰ *Apostolic Faith*, “Manifestations of the Spirit in India,” Vol. 1, No. 9, June-September 1907.

²⁵¹ Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 260; Robeck, *Azusa Street Mission*, 137.

²⁵² Watson, *Methodist Error*, quoted in Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 98.

²⁵³ Quoted in Epstein, *Sinful Tunes*, 199.

Clearly, both physical movement and rhythm characterized the music and worship style at the camp meetings.

Physical Movement and Rhythm in the Cultures of West and Central Africa

In his book *Slave Religion*, Albert J. Raboteau asserts, “So essential are music and dance to West African religious expression that it is no exaggeration to call them ‘danced religions.’”²⁵⁴ Many ethnic groups of West Africa, including the Akan, the Fon, the Egun, the Yoruba, and the Ibo, use dance as a central part of religious and social life.²⁵⁵ No activity in these tribes is complete without dance.²⁵⁶ One of the most common dance movements in West and Central African cultures is stomping, which is also one of the most mentioned forms of movement in both the Azusa Street Revival and the camp meetings of the nineteenth century.²⁵⁷ For the Yoruba, the word for “rejoice” and the word for “dance” come from the same root, and can even be joined together to form a new word meaning, “feast.” This suggests that for the Yoruba people, the concept of happiness or joy is entangled irrevocably in both the concepts of dance and

²⁵⁴ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 18.

²⁵⁵ Lucas, *Religions in West Africa*, 245.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*; Jones, *Studies in African Music*, 51.

²⁵⁷ Ashenafi Kebede, *Roots of Black Music*, 102.

community.²⁵⁸ This is very similar to descriptions of physical movement at Azusa Street, where dancing was associated with joy manifested in physical movement.²⁵⁹

In many cultures of West and Central Africa, dance is used to express other communal emotions besides joy, such as pride, sadness, or even animosity.²⁶⁰ As Ashenafi Kebede puts it, “There is no doubt that the act of dancing advances a feeling of belonging and solidarity among the participating group.”²⁶¹ One dance common among the Akan is a warrior dance for men that expresses pride in being a military leader for his king or his tribe.²⁶² In turn, the king’s mother, representing women and the stability of family culture, dances to express “motherliness,” peace, and other values that the warriors are fighting in battle to preserve.²⁶³ Another dance that provides community cohesiveness and participation is called the *adowa*, practiced among the coastal Ga people in Ghana.²⁶⁴ The *adowa* is a woman’s dance that originated as a funeral dance expressing grief, sorrow, and mourning. With time, its use became broader and it is now also performed to thank the gods or ancestors for the annual harvest. Likewise, for the

²⁵⁸ Lucas, *Religions in West Africa*, 245.

²⁵⁹ *Apostolic Faith*, “Manifestations of the Spirit in India,” Vol. 1, No. 9, June to September 1907; See also *Apostolic Faith*, “Ask What Ye Will,” Vol. 1, no. 1, Sept 1906.

²⁶⁰ Robert B. Fisher, *West African Religious Traditions*, 19. Kebede, *Roots of Black Music*, 102.

²⁶¹ Kebede, *Roots of Black Music*, 102.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ Robert B. Fisher, *West African Religious Traditions: Focus on the Akan of Ghana* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 20.

participants at Azusa Street, physical movement was used to express emotion, whether sadness, anguish, joy, or gladness:

The intensity of their encounter with God led many at the mission to respond in ways that before their encounter, they could ‘only imagine.’ It was a life-changing moment, a transformative time that produced a range of responses. There were those who, ‘surrounded by [His] glory’ at the mission broke into dance. Others jumped, or stood with hands outstretched or sang or shouted with all the gusto they could muster. Others were so full of awe when they encountered God that their knees buckled — they fell to the floor, ‘slain in the Spirit.’²⁶⁵

Among the Akan, movement plays a crucial role in religious ceremony in a ceremonial dance called the *Akom*. The *Akom* dance is a possession or trance dance that is performed by the priests to assist them in getting into or out of a trance state of possession during which the priest communicates with the deity on behalf of the community.²⁶⁶ The priests dance to the beat of a drum, and often those present will join in the dance circle. Eventually, the priest dances again in order to be released from the trance. According to Fisher, the dance among the Akan is to serve as a social element during periods of spiritual change:

Dance creates a milieu for anti-structure during the period of liminality, which once more re-creates and renews culture. Ritual is associated, therefore...with social transitions, while other ceremonies are linked with social states...Once the priest goes to his room and the group goes back to its village, life returns to normal, but with a sense of change.²⁶⁷

As demonstrated in previous chapters, the sense of change following a communal religious experience was likewise a significant part of the culture of Azusa Street,

²⁶⁵ Robeck, *Azusa Street Mission*, 131.

²⁶⁶ Fisher, *West African Religious Traditions*, 17–18; Olupona, *African Spirituality*, 381.

²⁶⁷ Fisher, *West African Religious Traditions*, 19.

especially concerning dance. Whether healed, saved, sanctified, or filled with the Holy Spirit, the goal of the revival service was for each individual to leave his or her previous state, go into a trance or spiritual state (often with the aid of dancing under the influence of the Holy Spirit), and return to life changed. Testimonies of God's transforming power in the lives of people fill *Apostolic Faith*:

A brother who had been a spiritualist medium and who was so possessed with demons that he had no rest, and was on the point of committing suicide, was instantly delivered of demon power. He then sought God for the pardon of his sins and sanctification, and is now filled with a different spirit. A little girl about twelve years of age was sanctified in a Sunday afternoon children's meeting, and in the evening meeting she was baptized with the Holy Ghost. When she was filled those standing near remarked, 'Who can doubt such a clear case of God's power.' In about an hour and a half, a young man was converted, sanctified, and baptized with the Holy Ghost, and spoke with tongues. He was also healed from consumption, so that when he visited the doctor he pronounced his lungs sound.²⁶⁸

In one passage of *Apostolic Faith* that details the use of movement at the revival, the writer is careful to note that the manifestations of the Spirit such as jumping for joy happened "when the souls were touched" by the Spirit.²⁶⁹ This indicates that the person was previously not in direct contact with the Holy Spirit, but was moved to dance after being connected to the Spirit.

In African culture, dance is typically accompanied by the use of rhythmic instruments.²⁷⁰ Just as there is a dance for every part of African life, so there is a drum rhythm for every occasion and ritual.²⁷¹ Rhythmic patterns often are played on musical

²⁶⁸ *Apostolic Faith*, "The Old-Time Pentecost," Vol. 1, No. 1, September 1906.

²⁶⁹ *Apostolic Faith*, "Pentecost Spreads to Other Lands," Vol. 1, No. 11, January 1908.

²⁷⁰ Kebede, *Roots of Black Music*, 102.

²⁷¹ Fisher, *Religions in West Africa*, 34; Doumbia, *The Way of the Elders*, 8.

instruments, but the human body, through such activities as foot stomping and hand clapping, also served as a significant “instrument” in African societies and still plays a major part in music-making.²⁷² Although drums were not used at Azusa Street, hand clapping and foot stomping were a major part of worship at the revival services: “Total abandonment before God that led up to sanctification was often demonstrated at the altar through...enthusiastic, festival celebration with singing, shouting, clapping, leaping, and dancing.”²⁷³ Scholars have noted that the absence of musical instruments at the Azusa Street Revival was directly associated with the hand clapping and foot stomping of the slaves, who made music without the aid of instruments.²⁷⁴ For both African American slaves and participants in the Azusa Street Revival, a restraint contributed to the absence of musical instruments: instruments were not available. Although this fact surely could help create a similar sound, there are other ways to make music without instruments besides relying heavily on percussion instruments (or, in this case, hands and feet). It is no coincidence that the percussive nature of the Azusa Street Revival so closely resembles the music made by the slaves: they are directly linked through the camp meetings.²⁷⁵

Another of the similarities between the Azusa Street Revival and traditional practices in West and Central Africa is the strong relationship between speech and

²⁷² Kebede, *Roots of Black Music*, 96.

²⁷³ Robeck, *Azusa Street Mission*, 174.

²⁷⁴ Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 260; Robeck, *Azusa Street Mission*, 137.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

rhythm. According to Cameroonian musician and writer Francis Bebey, much of West African music grew out of the “intonations and rhythmic onomatopoeias of speech.”²⁷⁶ The bond between language and music is so intimate in West African culture that it is actually possible to tune an instrument so that the music it produces is linguistically comprehensible.²⁷⁷ The language “spoken” by the slit-drum, for instance, is so realistic and specific that the messages it transmits can only be understood by members of the community where the particular language is spoken.²⁷⁸ Jacqueline Cogdell Djedje explains that in traditional West African music, “the text dominates in the reading and recitation of poems and incantations, and in the calling of praises. Songs are freer, though somewhat dependent on verbal patterns, chants, and acclamations.”²⁷⁹ This description could very well be used to describe the music of the Azusa Street Revival, which is likewise freely improvised and based on speaking in tongues. This is illustrated in numerous examples in *Apostolic Faith* of “singing in the Spirit,” spontaneous singing of glossolalia.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁶ Francis Bebey, *African Music*, 120.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

²⁷⁹ Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje, “West Africa: An Introduction,” 149; See also Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 28.

²⁸⁰ For a close study of glossolalic singing, see chapter entitled, “The Heavenly Choir: Singing in the Spirit,” in “The Comforter Has Come,” Shannon Thomas Kropf.

Musical Collaboration

Musical Collaboration at the Azusa Street Revival

In contrast with previous traditions in American Protestant worship, the nature of music at the Azusa Street Revival was participatory. There are no examples of music in *Apostolic Faith* in which one person is performing and all others are restricted to spectators. Instead, in every example, everyone present participated, as they desired. Even the basic structure of music favored at the revival facilitated communal participation more effectively than reading hymns from hymnals. These forms include call-and-response and improvisation, the latter of which was often referred to as “singing in the spirit.” Recall that the Azusa Street Revival began spontaneously in a small prayer group that met in one member’s living room. The group had no access to hymnals. Even if they had, there would presumably not have been nearly enough hymnals to accommodate the large crowds that came day after day to the mission. This did not, however, stop the attendees of the revival from singing well-known hymns. In her thesis, Shannon Thomas Kropf points out that not knowing all of the words to songs sung at the revival was sometimes a problem.²⁸¹ Call-and-response was one way that revival leaders remedied the problem. The advantage of this form is that many people can participate without knowing all the words. Improvisation likewise requires no hymnal or pre-planned agreement among the group, yet all are free to participate. Another notable characteristic of music at the Azusa Street Revival was that there was no designated song leader.²⁸²

²⁸¹ Kropf, “The Comforter Has Come,” 37.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 37.

Often songs were directed by leaders of the revival, such as William Seymour himself, but any member of the congregation could lead the group in song.²⁸³

Musical Collaboration at the Camp Meetings of the Great Revival

If music was participatory in nature at Azusa Street, it was even more so at the early camp meetings. Hymnals were not used here, either:

The fast-paced songs featured simple refrains and choruses, which were well suited to group singing. The refrains and choruses were patchworked together from existing hymns and easily remembered from meeting to meeting – all necessary in a mostly illiterate culture used to the ‘lining out’ of hymns... Additionally, many of the camp meetings were held at night, lit only by flickering torches—another reason to avoid complicated hymnals and sheet music.²⁸⁴

Call-and-response singing was a frequently employed method of having everyone participate. Dena Epstein claims that at the camp meetings, “the call-and-response style of singing so familiar to [black participants] was ideally suited to the participatory service of the camp meeting, where vast numbers of people required musical responses that they could learn on the spot.”²⁸⁵ Improvisation was common at the camp meetings as well.²⁸⁶ Regardless of the musical form used, the aim was always the same: the participation of everyone.²⁸⁷

²⁸³ Bartleman, *Azusa Street*, chapter 3: “The Fire Falls at Azusa;” Robeck, *Azusa Street Mission*, 149; Kropf, “The Comforter Has Come,” 38.

²⁸⁴ Darden, *People Get Ready*, 57.

²⁸⁵ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, 199.

²⁸⁶ Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 97.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Musical Collaboration in the Cultures of West and Central Africa

Music in parts of West and Central Africa is characterized by higher-than-average participation compared with other cultures.²⁸⁸ In his article on African rhythm, John M. Chernoff explains just how prevalent communal participation in music is:

In African societies, the extent of participation in music making is comparatively high, and African musical activity is often described as participatory in nature. Instead of isolating performers and spectators, African musical contexts exhibit a high degree of integration of spectators into the music-making process. Many people who would merely listen within other cultural idioms are involved in African music making through accompanying handclapping, singing, and the use of simple percussion instruments like wood blocks or rattles.²⁸⁹

As Chernoff notes, the traditional Western notion of music performance involves two roles: performer and spectator. This concept of a skilled musician performing for a silent audience would be completely foreign to West Africans.²⁹⁰ German scholar Theo Sundermeier also emphasizes participation as a central part of West African society: “In the individual’s life interdependence takes the form of participation... There is not merely a sharing in the life forces of the environment, but also in giving to the community.”²⁹¹

This characteristic illustrates a crucial element of West and Central African culture: the emphasis on community over individualism. Whereas the European tradition has long prioritized individual Christian devotion — the personal relationship with God

²⁸⁸ John M. Chernoff, “The Rhythmic Medium in African Music,” *Papers from the Commonwealth Center for Literary and Cultural Change* 22, no. 4 (Autumn 1991): 1093.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁰ Darden, *People Get Ready*, 18.

²⁹¹ Theo Sundermeier, *The Individual and Community in African Traditional Religions* (Hamberg, Germany: Lit Verlag, 1998), 18.

— the African tradition values a corporate faith.²⁹² Theo Sundermeier illustrates this point in the following statement:

For the Westerner, life means individuality. We know each other as individuals; the development of life is understood as enhancing individuality. Community, being with others, is secondary. For Africans, it is the other way round. Individuals only exist because of the community...Individuals exist only in so far as they are members of a group.²⁹³

Furthermore, West African religions value above all “interrelationships between God, the spirits, the ancestors, and the community.”²⁹⁴ To a person from West or Central Africa, life is all about relationships: relationships between people, God, spirits, and even nature. Leonard E. Barrett sums up this worldview:

All Africans see a vital relationship of being between each individual and his descendants, his family, his brothers and sisters in the clan, his antecedents and also his God—the ultimate source of being. Thus the world is not just an abstraction: it is a force field with all things interacting.²⁹⁵

With this philosophy in mind, it is much easier to see how and why music of West and Central Africa involves participation of the group. As a result, musical forms that facilitate group participation tend to dominate the music in these African societies. These

²⁹² Mbiti, *African Religions*, 67; Leonard E. Barrett, *Soul Force: African Heritage in Afro-American Religion* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1974), 17; Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 21.

²⁹³ Sundermeier, *The Individual and Community*, 17.

²⁹⁴ MacRobert, *Black Roots*, 12.

²⁹⁵ Leonard E. Barrett, *Soul Force*, 17.

involve, as Chernoff suggests, singing, hand clapping, and dancing,²⁹⁶ as well as call-and-response styles, widely considered to have originated in West and Central Africa.²⁹⁷

Indeterminate Times of Worship

Indeterminate Times of Worship at the Azusa Street Revival

Dozens of references in *Apostolic Faith* demonstrate that worship services at the Azusa Street Revival often did not end until well into the early morning hours.²⁹⁸ Although officially, three services were offered daily, morning, afternoon, and evening, it was more common for the services to blend into one another to create one all-day service.²⁹⁹ *Apostolic Faith* explains, “The meetings begin about ten o’clock in the morning and can hardly stop before ten or twelve at night, and sometimes two or three in the morning, because so many are seeking and some are slain under the power of God.”³⁰⁰ One service did not end until five o’clock in the morning.³⁰¹ The *Los Angeles*

²⁹⁶ Chernoff, “The Rhythmic Medium in African Music,” 1093.

²⁹⁷ Darden, *People Get Ready*, 19; Southern, *Music of Black Americans*, 96.

²⁹⁸ Just to name a few of these instances: *Apostolic Faith*, “Fire Falling at Herman” Vol. 1, No. 1, September 1906; *Apostolic Faith*, “Gracious Pentecostal Showers Continue to Fall” Vol. 1, No. 3, November 1906; *Apostolic Faith*, “Pentecost Among the Young People” Vol. 1, No. 4, December 1906; *Apostolic Faith*, “Pentecost in San Jose” Vol. 1, No. 4, December 1906.

²⁹⁹ Nelson, “For Such a Time as This,” 196.

³⁰⁰ *Apostolic Faith*, “The Old Time Pentecost” Vol. 1, No. 1, September 1906.

³⁰¹ *Apostolic Faith*, “In the Last Days,” Vol. 1, No. 9, June-September 1907.

Times reported that “night is made hideous in the neighborhood by the howlings of the worshippers who spend hours swaying forth and back in a nerve-racking [sic] attitude of prayer and supplication.”³⁰²

Indeterminate Times of Worship at the Camp Meetings of the Great Revival

Church services that could last all night were not standard in 1906, but the camp meeting tradition that preceded the Azusa Street Revival had long been known for services that extended into the night for indeterminate periods of time. One observer claimed that one camp meeting continued “from Saturday till Tuesday — above 70 hours — without one minute’s intermission.”³⁰³ Frederika Bremer described the scene at a camp meeting she visited late at night:

The later it grew in the night, the more earnest grew the appeals; the hymns short, but fervent, as the flames of the light-wood ascended, like them, with a passionate ardor. Again and again they arose on high, like melodious, burning sighs from thousands of harmonious voices. The preachers increase in the fervor of their zeal; two stand with their faces turned toward the camp of the blacks, two toward that of the whites, extending their hands, and calling on the sinners to come, come, all of them, *now* at this time, at this moment, which is perhaps the last, the only one which remains to them in which to come to the Savior, to escape eternal damnation! Midnight approaches, the fires burn dimmer, but the exaltation increases and becomes universal.³⁰⁴

Some noted that the African American participants in particular were likely to stay up past the white participants and sing and dance all night. One observer says, “At sunrise... an alarm... gave the sign of the general rising. At half past five I was dressed and out.

³⁰² *Los Angeles Times*, “Weird Babel of Tongues,” April 18, 1906.

³⁰³ McLean *et al.*, *Penuel*, 18.

³⁰⁴ Bremer, *The Homes of the New World*, 308.

The hymns of the negroes, which had continued through the night, were still to be heard on all sides.”³⁰⁵ Clearly, ongoing worship is a distinct characteristic of revival music, and it seems also to have begun among black participants.

Indeterminate Times of Worship in the Cultures of West and Central Africa

It is extremely common for the religious ceremonies of many of the peoples of West and Central Africa to likewise extend for many hours, or even days. For example, the Ashani people of Ghana have possession ceremonies that sometimes last for as long as two days.³⁰⁶ Adama and Naomi Doumbia assert that in Senegal and other cultures of West Africa, it is common for ceremonies to last for several hours or even several days.³⁰⁷ Likewise, during the possession ceremonies of the Akan people, “the devotees stay on for the whole day or night. The deity and ‘his children’ enjoy a feast with songs, drumming, drinks, and food.”³⁰⁸ Considering that many of these examples take place during spirit possession ceremonies, it is reasonable to suspect that indeterminate times of worship in African culture are often a way of showing that the spirits, rather than the people, are in control. The same is certainly true of the camp meetings and the Azusa Street Revival: having indeterminate times of worship is comforting to people because it indicates that God is in control of their meeting. Before the spiritual rhetoric of the camp meetings beginning around the late eighteenth century, church services were preplanned

³⁰⁵ Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, 199.

³⁰⁶ Olupona, *African Spirituality*, 32.

³⁰⁷ Doumbia, *The Way of the Elders*, 8.

³⁰⁸ Fisher, *West African Religious Traditions*, 18.

and programmed. At the camp meetings, indeterminate times of worship began as a way to show that God, rather than man, was in charge.

CONCLUSION

The charismatic characteristics of music at the Azusa Street Revival were not new. In America, they were first cultivated in the camp meetings of the Great Revival by white Americans who noticed great emotional expression, catharsis, and community in the activities in the camps of blacks and desired these qualities in their own worship. Slaves at the camp meetings danced, shouted, and improvised their songs freely, often staying up singing together all night. As demonstrated in this paper, these characteristics were not unique to the camp meetings, but were instead a part of the West and Central African heritages of the slaves. This influence is also apparent in the music of the Azusa Street Revival.

The practice of glossolalia was a central part of musical expression both in the cultures of West and Central Africa and at the Azusa Street Revival. William Seymour and his all-black prayer group are responsible for turning this little known but international practice that had occurred around the world in isolated instances into a permanent and far-reaching religious movement. It was not the invention of the doctrine of glossolalia by Charles Parham that mattered. In fact, the doctrine of the infilling of the Holy Spirit has long existed even before American camp meetings, in the Biblical book of Acts. What matters is the execution of that doctrine by Seymour and other black Americans present at the prayer meeting that started the Azusa Street Revival.

Since the Azusa Street Revival, many sects of Christianity have employed a charismatic worship style inspired by Pentecostals, and yet few acknowledge the similarities between that style and traditional West and Central African practices. Perhaps even more important is the historical path by which those practices became a part of

American culture, but scholars continue to gloss over this story rather than illuminating it. In reality, African American identity was exactly the key that was needed to open the door to Pentecostalism because of two factors of black identity: West and Central African culture and African American experience. The first of these has been explored above. Certain aspects of Christianity that were previously not in the forefront of American religious practice were appealing to black Americans because of similar precedents in West African traditional practices.

The most important of these aspects to Pentecostals is the infilling of the Holy Spirit among the disciples in the book of Acts after Jesus' ascent to heaven.³⁰⁹ Other previously neglected Bible stories that became part of the Christian canon through early Pentecostals include King David of the Old Testament dancing before the Lord.³¹⁰ Black Americans found biblical evidence and established doctrines, especially those doctrines concerning the Holy Spirit, that were consistent with practices preserved from their African heritage. Many characteristics of worship explored in this study stem from the central role of spirit possession in West African traditions. Practices such as improvisational singing, dancing, and indeterminate times of worship served to demonstrate that the spirit was in control. Benefits of spirit possession include the unity of participants, the demonstration of faith in God and proximity to God, outward signs that show an inward change, and a means of communicating information to the community through interpretation of unknown languages.

³⁰⁹ Acts 1-2.

³¹⁰ Robeck, *Azusa Street Mission*, 133.

Another dimension of African American influence on the music of the Azusa Street Revival is that of the black American experience at the turn of the twentieth century. At the time of the revival, African Americans were newly freed from slavery, but were among the lowest on the social ladder. Seymour came into contact with a doctrine that resonated with his identity as a black man, not only because of the cultural traditions of his West and Central African heritage, but because, at the Azusa Street Revival, “the ‘color line’ was washed away in the blood,” and all people were treated as equal, regardless of the color of their skin.³¹¹ Although Pentecostal scholar Donald Dayton has suggested the significance of black American identity to early Pentecostalism, he does not focus on the Azusa Street Revival or, even more specifically, on the music of the revival, leaving open a fertile subject for future research.³¹²

Another area with potential for future scholarship lies in the subject matter of the music of Azusa Street. There is an emphasis in the hymnology of the Revival on the subject of the blood.³¹³ Within Christianity generally, blood is a symbol of Jesus’ death on the cross as a sacrifice to pay the price for the sins of the world. The focus on blood in the hymnology of the Revival demonstrates the significance of atonement of sin, a necessary element of justification and sanctification.³¹⁴ There is an interesting parallel between the life-giving blood of Jesus and the “vital force” contained in blood that is a

³¹¹ Frank Bartleman, *Azusa Street*, chapter 3.

³¹² Dayton, *Theological Roots*, 93–97.

³¹³ Kropf, “The Comforter Has Come,” v.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

common belief among many West African groups.³¹⁵ This is just one example of the many ways that African American heritage in Pentecostalism has yet to be fully realized.

As demonstrated here, the constant exchange of ideas between different cultures profoundly affects the history of music and culture. The story of the influence of West and Central Africa in the music of the Azusa Street Revival, as the beginning of the modern Pentecostal tradition, is an example of this transfer of musical and cultural practice from one milieu to another, through individuals, interpersonal networks, and institutions. These complex processes, in turn, help shape musical and cultural expression, and their effects that remain visible — and audible — today.

³¹⁵ M. Y. Nabofa, “Blood Symbolism in African Religion,” *Religious Studies* 21 no. 3 (September 1985): 390.

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