

# The Function and Practice of Fasting in Early Pentecostalism

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## Abstract

This article is a first step toward the development of a Pentecostal theology of fasting. An examination of early Pentecostal periodical literature from 1906 to 1915 shows that Pentecostals practiced both individual and corporate fasting, but there is no mention of universally established fast days. Fasting was viewed through the theological lens of the Fivefold Gospel, which was the core belief system of the movement. Therefore, fasting was valuable particularly in preparing seekers for the experiences of sanctification, Spirit baptism, and divine healing. Fasting was generated by affectivity – the seeker's passionate pursuit of God and deep-seated love for others, whether the other be sinner or believer. Pentecostals practiced a kind of fasting that might be described as crisis oriented fasting in which fasting was joined with prayer as a means of appealing to God for the outpouring of God's grace in identifiable acts of revival, salvation, sanctification, healing, and Spirit baptism either for oneself or for others.

**Keywords:** fasting, liturgical theology, spirituality, spiritual disciplines, Pentecostal theology



Source: <http://www.312azusa.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/AzusaStreet2.png>

## Introduction

Fasting has been an important element in the spirituality of Judaism and Christianity from their beginnings. The *Didache*, one of the most ancient Christian documents, urges believers to fast for one's enemies (1:3), to fast before baptism (7:4), and to fast every Wednesday and Friday (8:1). Fasting in conjunction with the Christian calendar soon became well-established in early Christianity, and the number of fast days increased over the centuries.

The Eastern Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, and many other traditions emphasize fasting as a vital element of corporate liturgical life and worship, but most Protestant churches relegate fasting to the discretion of the individual. Pentecostalism, however, occupies an interesting historical space because it emerged out of the Wesleyan–Holiness movement and, consequently, inherited John Wesley's Anglican (and Orthodox) appreciation of fasting but without the liturgical formalization of the practice (Wesley 1829:304-18). Wesley was an Anglican, but he was influenced by Orthodox theology. S.J. Land (2010:207) argues that in Pentecostalism, 'there is a core; a spiritual fundament present in the first part of the century with roots in the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries and, through Wesley, all the way back through eastern and western sources to the early church'.

Pentecostal scholars have produced only a minimal liturgical theology and no stated theology of fasting, partly because Pentecostalism is not a monolithic movement and also because Pentecostal scholars have been influenced by the modern separation of theology from spirituality, a separation that has been challenged recently by many Pentecostal theologians (e.g. Land:2010). While Pentecostalism may lack a formal, unified liturgical theology (but see Augustine 2012 and Chan 2006), C.E.W. Green, argues that Pentecostals practice a lived sacramental spirituality (2012:177-81; cf. Tomberlin 2010).

This article is the first step toward a Pentecostal theology of fasting. Following the lead of recent works in constructive Pentecostal theology (e.g. Alexander 2006; Green 2012; McQueen 2012), I will examine the early Pentecostal periodical literature from 1906 (when the Azusa St. revival began) to 1915. According to Land, who takes his cue from W.J. Hollenweger, these first ten years of the movement are crucial for establishing the 'heart' of the Pentecostal tradition (Land 2010:1; Hollenweger 1988:551). As with any renewal movement, Pentecostalism's core values and beliefs were generated in the heart and minds of its founders.

Periodical literature is the focus of my investigation for several reasons. First, the early Pentecostals produced few book-length works on theology. Most of the early theological discussions were carried on within the pages of the numerous periodicals. Second, none of the early books included discussions of fasting. Third, the Pentecostal movement had no central authority that was tasked with formulating guidelines for Pentecostal theology and practice. The periodicals, published by Pentecostal leaders

and often representing the various newly formed denominations, were the nearest things to authoritative theological voices.

Although the periodical research could be presented chronologically or by looking at one periodical after another, I have chosen to organize the material topically. I will first examine the customs and conventions regarding the practice of fasting, then I will study the function and meaning of fasting. Following this analysis of fasting as represented in early Pentecostal periodicals, I will offer summarizing conclusions.

### **The Practice of Fasting in Early Pentecostalism**

The early Pentecostals, having emerged from the Wesleyan–Holiness movement, naturally adopted fasting as an important practice. For example, holiness leader Phoebe Palmer ‘followed Wesley’s lead by reserving Fridays for fasting in order to maintain her spiritual zeal’ (Williams 2013:5; cf. Sisson 1887:14; and Judd 1880:126-42). In fact, the Pentecostal revival in Los Angeles is said to have arisen as a result of prayer and fasting. It is reported in the *Apostolic Faith* newspaper that the Azusa Street Mission began soon after William Seymour came to Los Angeles. A group of people had been praying together for about a year for revival. Their desire was to see sinners converted and the sick to be healed. They ‘felt led of the Lord to call Bro. Seymour’ in the same way that Cornelius sent for Peter in Acts 10. We read,

Every afternoon at 3 o’clock they would pray for the induement of power. [Seymour] told them he did not have the Pentecost but was seeking it and wanted all the saints to pray with him till all received their Pentecost ... There was a great deal of opposition, but they continued to fast and pray for the baptism with the Holy Spirit, till on April 9th the fire of God fell in a cottage on Bonnie Brae. Pentecost was poured out upon workers and saints. Three days after that, Bro. Seymour received his Pentecost ... And the fire has been falling ever since. Hundreds of souls have received salvation and healing (Seymour 1906a:1).

Similarly, the Pentecostal outpouring upon what would become the Church of God (Cleveland) was preceded by fasting. According to A.J. Tomlinson (2011:139-40), ‘They prayed, fasted, and wept before the Lord until a great revival was the result.’ Very soon people were baptized in the Holy Spirit, and ‘a number of miraculous cases of healings were wrought by the power of God’.

### **Fasting as Both an Individual and Corporate Practice**

Of the more than 50 reports of fasting that I uncovered in the early literature, about half refer to individual fasting, and about half refer to corporate fasting. When I speak of corporate fasting, I mean fasting within small groups, local churches, or denominations. What is missing is the mention of any universal days of fasting among Pentecostals. Unlike other traditions, Pentecostalism has no established fast days.

Individual fasts were encouraged for personal spiritual renewal (Vian 1907:6) or sanctification (Batman 1906:4), but sometimes people fasted as a means of intercession for others (Ham 1910:6). People fasted when in need of divine guidance (Murphy 1915:2), when desiring the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Bunkley 1908:4), and when seeking God for physical healing (Gill 1907:6).

Corporate fasting included the days of fasting preceding the Azusa St. revival (Seymour 1906a:1), and subsequent special fast days at the Mission (Scott 1907:2). Before conventions and other meetings, churches and denominations would call upon their constituents to fast (Buckalew 1914:8). A.M. Flowers urged the entire Church to fast 'every Thursday' (1915:4). In time of need, the Church might call a corporate fast day (Tomlinson 1915:2), and children in an orphanage fasted together (Moorhead 1910:114). Small groups, larger groups, and entire denominations would designate fast days aimed at spiritual revival (Mason 1911a:1).

#### Fasting in Conjunction with the Liturgical Calendar and in Times of Crisis

Early Pentecostals, particularly those who came out of liturgical churches, would sometimes fast in accordance with the Christian calendar. For example, The annual Easter convention at the Boland Street Mission (England) designated Good Friday as a fast day (Wigglesworth 1910:67). On another occasion, Ascension Day was observed as a fast day (Boddy 1909b:76). Pentecostals sometimes fasted in preparation for the sacraments of footwashing (Ham 1910:6), the Lord's Supper (Williams 1916:23), and ordination (Tomlinson 1912:18). Regular fasting that was not necessarily associated with the Christian calendar was also encouraged (Flowers 1915:4).

For the most part, fasting did not follow a liturgical calendar, but was undertaken on the occasion of a crisis or an important event. As mentioned above, people report that they fasted when sick, when in need of spiritual renewal, and when desiring divine direction. They fasted in anticipation of special meetings and whenever they believed that their prayers needed additional strength.

#### Other Aspects of the Practice of Fasting

In regard to the length of Pentecostal fasts, the early literature includes reports of fasting that lasted from one to fourteen days. Often, a single fast day was observed before conventions and other special meetings (Boddy 1908a:5; Boddy 1908b:5; Wigglesworth 1910:67; Mason 1911a:1). W.R.P. Ham testified that he fasted one day in preparation for the sacrament of foot washing (1910:6), and one writer suggested that everyone should fast 'one day of every week' (Flowers 1915:4). The Church of God called for a 'special day of prayer and fasting' because of a financial need (Tomlinson 1915:2), and at an orphanage in India, the children fasted from morning to evening (Moorhead:114).

Several persons wrote of fasting for three days, including G.W. Batman (resulting in sanctification) (1906:4), a group of Christians in Indianapolis (resulting in physical

healings) (Crawford 1909:1), and the participants at the Azusa St. Mission (resulting in 'an increase in power') (Scott 1907:2).

On the fourth day of Cora Nelson's fast, Jesus appeared to her (1914:7); and it was six days of fasting that prepared G.B. Cashwell for his visit to Azusa St. (1906:2). The Christian Alliance of Spokane, WA 'held a ten days' fast' (Ryan 1907:4), as did a group in New York City (Argue 1908:4).

The length of the fast was not always predetermined. Julia Divine, 'fasted and prayed many days' before she was baptized in the Holy Spirit (1910:5-6), and Anna Bauers vowed that she would not eat until her baby was healed of diphtheria. After 'three days and nights' of fasting, the baby was healed instantaneously (1908:14-15). R.J. Scott fasted for three days before the Lord appeared to him and gave him instructions regarding his immediate future (1907:2). Margaret Gill and a friend fasted for four days until she was healed of an incurable illness (1907:6), and a man from Berlin testified that after 14 days of fasting, he received the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Boddy 1909a:6).

## **The Function of Fasting in Early Pentecostalism**

### **Fasting as a Companion to Prayer**

Early Pentecostals viewed fasting as a necessary accompaniment to any urgent prayer. In an article entitled 'Why You Can't Get Your Prayers Answered,' Sam C. Perry of the Church of God writes that sometimes prayers are not answered until we fast: '... there are blessings and decrees sometimes that seem to be out of our reach except through fasting and prayer' (1915:3). A reader of *Word and Witness* requests prayer for revival in San Antonio: 'It will take some real prayer and possibly fasting to break through in that sinful city' (Lohman 1912:2). It is implied that prayer alone may not be sufficient – fasting must be added. The Church of God (Cleveland, TN) called 'a special day of prayer and fasting' on account of a financial need (Tomlinson 1915:2). The urgency of the situation required desperate measures that included prayer and fasting.

R.L. Hatcher encouraged Pentecostal believers to imitate Jesus Christ and the apostles, and one part of that imitation is prayer and fasting. He wrote,

If we pray fifteen minutes for faith we think that will do until dinner. Then we pray for more faith about five minutes then load the stomach with the good of the earthly table and deprive ourselves of the bread of life and fail to drink from the fountain. God help us to look and live. Jesus said we could cast out devils by fasting and prayer. Some of us fast but little and pray less (1915:2).

Hatcher compares and contrasts the appetite for 'earthly' food with the appetite for 'the bread of life.' He also points to the benefit of fasting and prayer as a means of obtaining spiritual power enough even to 'cast out devils.'

In early Pentecostalism, fasting is almost always joined with prayer. What follows includes many other types of prayer that were accompanied by fasting.

### **Fasting for Unity among Believers**

'Believers in Sanctification' is the title of E.N. Bell's article in which he laments the divisions between the 'Finished Work' stream of Pentecostalism and the Wesleyan–Holiness stream. He writes, 'Is it not about time to mourn and call a solemn assembly of fasting, that God may take away these divisions which disgrace God and His people before an unbelieving world?' (1914a:3). Bell calls for fasting as a vehicle for mourning over the lack of unity in the movement. For Bell, division among believers is a troubling matter that calls for fasting and repentance. Similarly, Alice Taylor writes, 'we began praying, and fasted ... and the Lord is bringing His saints together as Jesus prayed in the 17th of John' (1907:1).

### **Fasting for Personal Spiritual Renewal**

Under the heading, 'He's Coming Soon,' the writer encourages the readers to fast as preparation for the return of Jesus: 'Come! Awake! Be ready! You can be ready if you will. Stir up the gift that is in you, by prayer and fasting if needs be, and testimony, and praise, until you are all aglow and overflowing with His love again' (Tomlinson 1910a:8). The words 'fasting if needs be' suggest that fasting is able to bring about a depth of revival that could not be achieved by any other means.

Another writer had come to Azusa St. and was at first critical of the revival. His opposition caused him to backslide. He writes, 'Afterward I received pardon and the cleansing blood again through fasting and prayer and much study of the word. Eight weeks ago, I received the baptism with the Holy Ghost and spoke with new tongues' (Seymour 1906b:3). After fasting, prayer, and reading the Bible, he received forgiveness and the same Spirit baptism that he had earlier criticized.

### **Fasting for Revival and Conversion of the Lost**

Another important purpose of fasting was to plead with God for revival and the conversion of lost souls. In a testimony, M.L. Ryan tells of a group who were praying for revival. Then, he says, 'the Christian Alliance held a ten days' fast and prayer,' and the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them (1907:4). His description of the resulting revival takes the form of elements from the Pentecostal Fivefold Gospel – people were saved, sanctified, baptized in the Holy Spirit, and healed in body.

Philip Sidersky testifies that he sold all that he owned and went to North Carolina to serve as pastor of a 'little band of holiness people.' He writes that three of them had received their Spirit baptism, and he adds, 'The Lord laid the burden of the people on my heart. We fasted and prayed 'till God heard and answered. We now have a church, about 50 have received Pentecost' (1910:6). Sidersky's fasting was generated by a

'burden' that was given to him from the Lord. His flock was made up of 'holiness people,' but only three had been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

In a report of activities at the Azusa Street Mission, we read, 'Three days of fasting and prayer were set apart at the Mission for more power in the meetings. The Lord answered and souls were slain all about the altar the second night. We have felt an increase of power every night' (Scott 1907:2). Apparently, Seymour and other leaders at the Mission perceived a decrease in the effectiveness of their meetings. Therefore, they added three days of fasting to their prayers. The visible sign of 'more power' was the large number of people who were 'slain all about the altar.'

Writing in *Confidence*, A.A. Boddy suggests a fast in preparation for the Whitsuntide Conference at Sunderland, England. He writes, 'One thing ought to precede the conference, that is a week of fasting and prayer' (1908a:5). As Boddy continues, he makes a clear connection between corporate fasting and spiritual revival. He insists that when God's people fast and pray, a 'great revival must break out.' After that conference, we find this retrospective comment: 'Wednesday, June 3, we observed as a special day of Prayer and Fasting ... The Lord wonderfully answered our prayers' (Boddy 1908b:5).

J.W. Buckalew includes his account of corporate prayer and fasting for revival. He writes, 'The Lord rolled the lost souls on our hearts and we began to cry, fast and pray for God to give us a revival.' Buckalew reports that many were converted, healed, and baptized with the Holy Spirit (1914:8). In the same spirit as Buckalew, A.M. Flowers urges every reader to fast weekly for the conversion of lost souls (1915: 4).

### **Fasting Resulting in Divine Guidance and/or Revelation**

Fasting has resulted in revelations and divine guidance when Pentecostals fasted to find God's will. Revelations have also come even when the fast was for other purposes. R.J. Scott, who had come from Winnipeg, Canada to the Azusa St. revival, wrote to his people back in Canada,

I expected to be back in Winnipeg, Canada, ere this, and would have been had not God spoken so plainly to me on the night of April 6, just after coming through three days of fasting and praying that God would show me what I was to do. About midnight ... Jesus appeared in a door ... between me and heaven ... and said to me: 'It is not my will that you should take your family back to Winnipeg just now.'

He reports that Jesus appeared again later in the night and said, 'Go, tell My people, behold I come quickly' (1907:2). Scott's vision is quite remarkable, but his original purpose for fasting was not to receive a vision. He fasted only as an aid in discerning God's will in his life.

Mrs. G.W. Murphy fasted with the purpose of discerning the will of God for her ministry. Murphy, much like John Wesley, was refused access to the official pulpits; but she

reports that after her fast, she was offered the opera house for free; and she began holding services there (1915:2).

According to the testimony of Cora A. Nelson, she fasted in order to receive 'more power' from God. On the fourth day of fasting, however, 'Jesus appeared' to her and said, 'I have chosen you to preach my Gospel' (1914:7). Nelson's fasting brought a response from God that exceeded her stated request. She asked for spiritual power, and the Lord used her time of fasting as an opportunity to call her into ministry.

### **Fasting Resulting in Various Worship Phenomena**

Many of the early reports of fasting include various manifestations of the Holy Spirit, including healings, Spirit baptisms, glossolalia, and people falling in the floor under the power of the Spirit. Other, less defined phenomena are also reported. In an article regarding ministry to orphans in India, Max Wood Moorhead reported that at one point during a time of worship, the head of the school dismissed the children,

but they would not be dismissed. Standing on their feet the power of God fell on them ... They shouted and praised God victoriously for an hour, for He had put a new song in their mouths. They had fasted all day, and instead of partaking of their evening meal at six o'clock, they danced and sang God's praises for some little time. This was not merely exuberance of spirits; in a score of instances boys and girls had prayed through to victory, and for the first time in their lives and really tasted the joy of sins forgiven — for the first time had really received Jesus as personal Saviour in their hearts (1910:114).

The original purpose of their fast is not stated, but after fasting for about 12 hours, the children 'shouted and praised God.' They 'danced and sang God's praises' as an expression of the joy that had come to them through the Holy Spirit.

In 'Further News from Nyack, New York,' A.W. Vian reports on the Annual Council of the Christian and Missionary Alliance and testifies to the following:

The Holy Ghost did wonderfully quicken and strengthen physically all those who thus fasted and waited upon him. Some men and women each fell under the power about the first night and came through speaking in tongues. I never heard such soul agony for sin, self-life, backsliding, etc., and soul travail for lost and perishing, mighty intercessions, visions of the cross, blood, throne, and deep whole souled shouts of glory and praise, all testifying 'Jesus is coming soon' (1907:6).

Vian describes meetings that were directed by the Holy Spirit in which the participants were so taken up into worship that they became oblivious to time. The nature and purpose of their fasting is not stated, but the revival is quite extraordinary.

### **Fasting in Preparation for Receiving the Sacraments**

Early Pentecostals were very loosely organized, and liturgical practices varied from one group to another. Although they had no formal liturgy, they practiced a number of



sacramental ordinances, and they often viewed fasting as a part of the preparation for receiving the sacraments. For example, missionary W.B. Williams writes that on Good Friday, 'most of our women spent the entire day in the church, fasting and praying, preparatory to receiving the sacrament of the Lord's Supper' (1916:23). Many Pentecostals accepted footwashing as a sacrament, and W.R.P. Ham testified, 'I fasted Tuesday in preparation for feet washing' (1910:6).

Like other Christian traditions, many Pentecostals practiced fasting in preparation for ordination. In a note regarding the State Convocation of the Church of God in Christ, we read that those who 'are not ordained may come that we, after prayer and fasting, may lay hands on them, that they may be fully set apart for the work of the ministry' (Mason 1911b:3). In regard to the ordaining of ministers, the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) decided 'It is also advised that the presbytery fast before laying hands on in ordination' (Tomlinson 1912:18). In both of these cases, it appears that the elders were the ones who fasted, so that they might be prepared to lay hands upon those who were to be ordained.

### **Fasting for Sanctification**

Pentecostalism emerged from the holiness movement, and after their conversion experiences, Pentecostals were expected to seek for entire sanctification. The process of self-examination and prayer that led to sanctification often included times of fasting. G.W. Batman testifies,

I fasted and prayed for about three days and during that time I put off the old man Adam in the form of inbred sin and God came in and destroyed the devil's workshop by casting his tools on the outside. Praise God I got real evidence that I was sanctified and the Blood applied. After that, I received the baptism with the Holy Ghost and fire (1906:4).

E.N. Bell tells about a Christian brother who desired sincerely to be completely sanctified: 'At last, jaded from fasting and chastened in mind, his soul experienced and uplift which he called entire sanctification' (1914:2). In a third example, W.W. Rose writes, 'My wife received the Holy Ghost and this put me to praying for the carnal mind to be removed and for the Holy Ghost. I began to fast and pray and didn't want my wife nor anyone else to hear me pray until one night I told my wife that we would have prayers ... The Lord opened the windows of heaven and sanctified me ...' (1915:2).

These descriptions suggest that fasting was an occasion for consecration, soul searching, and self-denial that intensified the seekers prayers and re-directed their affections toward God. After three days of fasting, Batman was able to 'put off the old man Adam;' and Rose expressed his desire to be rid of 'the carnal mind.' In none of these cases are we told how the seeker was able to determine that sanctification had occurred, but they express assurance of having been sanctified (cf. Bunkley 1908:4).

## **Fasting for the Baptism in the Holy Spirit**

In early Pentecostal literature, fasting most commonly functions as preparation for Spirit baptism. In some cases, the fast is carried out by the person who is seeking for the baptism in the Spirit; but at other times, people fast on behalf of (or along with) other believers who are seeking the experience. In still other cases, a group of people might pray and fast for revival in general, and the resultant spiritual outpouring includes Spirit baptism for those who have not previously received the experience.

### *Corporate Fasting for the Holy Spirit*

In a report of corporate fasting for the Holy Spirit, we read that after a ten-day fast in Spokane, WA, 'Over one hundred souls have been saved, cleansed, and baptized with the Holy Ghost and fire' (Ryan 1907:4). The fast resulted in multiple types of spiritual experiences, including conversions, sanctifications (those 'cleansed'), and Spirit baptism. Another testimony, entitled, 'Italians and Indians Receive the Holy Ghost,' describes a trip in which A.H. Argue visited Toronto, Ottawa, Athens, and New York City. He states that while he was in New York City, 'twenty-five received the [Spirit] baptism in one week. Five of the Saints were fasting for ten days and, no doubt, God was there in a special way' (1908:4). Argue credits the ten day fast with generating the Holy Spirit's outpouring.

Alice Taylor reports on still another corporate fast in New Orleans, Louisiana. She writes,

As soon as we received these *Apostolic Faith* papers, we began praying, and fasted and prayed, and Glory to His name, He made Himself known in our midst, and came and baptized four with the Holy Ghost and fire ... The fire is falling down here ... He is giving the gift of speaking with tongues and other gifts (1907:1).

A minister by the name of A.H. Post recounts that he had ministered for more than 30 years in what he calls a 'leading' denomination. For some time he had been seeking for a 'deeper fullness of God's love ... With this conscious need, a cry went up to God for a Pentecost.' He was aware of three people who had come from Texas to Los Angeles, in search of the Pentecostal experience, and he writes,

So earnest became this little band that, with much fasting – they continued almost day and night for some days, till, indeed, their day had fully come, and as suddenly as on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit fell upon them and filled them, and all began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave utterance (1907:4).

Post's testimony suggests that fasting was practiced when one became 'earnest' in seeking God.

Agnes Ozman describes going in the fall of 1900 to the Bible school run by Charles Parham in Topeka, Kansas where they engaged in the study of Scripture and spent much time in prayer. She writes, 'We were urged to seek for and to receive the promised baptism in the Holy Spirit. Our hearts became very hungry for this induement. We prayed earnestly and also fasted, as the Lord laid it upon us.' After a time of prayer

and fasting, Agnes received her spirit baptism on January 1, 1901 (1909:2). Ozman's testimony suggests that fasting was practiced corporately as the students sought God for the promise of the Holy Spirit. Agnes was the first to receive the experience there at Parham's Bible school.

### *Individual Fasting for the Holy Spirit*

Anyone who was hungry for the Holy Spirit was encouraged to seek God with fasting, prayer, and waiting upon God (called 'tarrying'). The process of seeking involved a deep and passionate hunger for God. Mary Bunkley writes,

I began to ask Jesus to baptize me with the Holy Ghost ... I was so hungry for the Holy Ghost that I could do nothing much but fast and pray. I began to feel that I cannot live in this world if I did not receive the blessed Comforter ... He did not leave me waiting long before He gave me my hearts desire. On September 21st He baptized me with the blessed Holy Ghost. Glory! (1908:4)

Bunkley's passionate desire for God's Spirit is evident in her testimony and it moved her to fast and pray until her desire was fulfilled.

A similar passion is evident in the testimony of Cora A. Nelson. She states that she had a deep hunger and thirst for more of God. She writes, 'This was in 1904. I began to fast and pray for more power. On the fourth day of fasting and prayer at 9 o'clock in the morning, Aug. 27, Jesus appeared to me ... At this I opened my mouth and began to sing and speak in some unknown language' (1914:7). The fact that she sang and spoke in an unknown language would have been a sign to her that she had received the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

F.L. Juillerat fasted and prayed for weeks, and he repeatedly attended meetings and sought for God in the altars with others praying for him. In his testimony entitled 'Durant, Fla.,' he writes, 'In 1895, the Holy Ghost put a hunger in my heart for Pentecost ... I fasted and prayed for the Holy Ghost.' Finally, after some time, he reports that on a Tuesday morning he received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit 'came in and testified for Himself in songs of other tongues, glory to his name' (1907:3).

The hunger and thirst for God did not always produce an immediate experience of Spirit baptism. Sometimes the seekers would wait before God for days, weeks, or months. M.D. Sellers, in 'Two classes of seekers,' observes that not everyone receives their spirit baptism easily or quickly. He observes that for many it requires a time of 'prayer, restitution, confessions, fasting and waiting' (1908:4).

In a letter from Lake View, North Carolina, Anna Kelly writes that she had been a satisfied Christian for about 14 years, but then she began to passionately seek God. She writes, 'About three years ago, my heart began to hunger and thirst ... So I prayed and fasted' (1908:3). Kelly states that on January 30, 1907 she received her spirit baptism. Apparently, her time of fasting enabled her to focus upon God more effectively,

so that she became 'completely out of self.' At that point, the Holy Spirit came and filled her.

An architect from Berlin by the name of Beyerhaus had been influenced by a missionary from Scotland who stayed in his home in Germany and by leaders of the Salvation Army whom he had met when he visited London. He testifies,

by their very looks and living I knew that they had something I did not know anything about ... After 14 days' fasting and longing to receive the Holy Ghost, I asked the Lord one evening so to purge me that I might not continue in sin. I asked the Lord to make it a reality, and a wonderful joy and purity streamed through my body and lit up things around me.

Beyerhaus declares that he eventually received the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the sign of speaking in tongues (Boddy 1909a:6). He speaks of a deep 'longing' for the Holy Spirit and a desire to be purged from sin.

S.J. Mead, who was a missionary to Africa, heard of the meetings at Azusa St. and he came to Los Angeles in search of spiritual fullness. He writes,

The first night at the meetings, my heart went out for the baptism. I went forward to be prayed for, and hands were laid on me, and prayer was made, that I might receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I continued praying and fasting, in hope and much comfort. One evening, in complete abnegation of self ... my soul was flooded with Divine love; and I commenced to speak as I would sing a new song (1906:3).

Although Mead was hungry for the Spirit, he did not receive his baptism on the first night when they laid hands on him and prayed for him. It was only after he 'continued praying and fasting,' which led to his 'complete abnegation of self,' that he was baptized in the Holy Spirit.

G.B. Cashwell of Dunn North Carolina traveled to Los Angeles to become part of the Azusa St. revival. He writes of his experience,

I was six days on the road, was fasting and praying to the Lord continually. As soon as I reached Azusa Mission, a new crucifixion began in my life and I had to die to many things, but God gave me the victory. The first altar call I went forward in earnest for my Pentecost. I struggled from Sunday till Thursday. While seeking in an upstairs room in the Mission, the Lord opened up the windows of heaven in the light of God began to flow over me in such a power as never before.

He then went to the room where worship was ongoing, and he writes, '[I began to] speak in tongues and praise God ... He filled me with His spirit and love ... The Lord also healed my body [of arthritis]' (1906:2). Cashwell's earnest desire for spiritual fullness caused him to fast and pray during his six day trip to the west coast. The fasting was part of the 'crucifixion' that prepared him to overcome his racism and submit to the

leadership of William Seymour, an African-American. Cashwell's visit to the Azusa revival transformed his life and filled him with love for all people. Cashwell left California and went back east and brought the Pentecostal revival to NC and GA, where he became a leading voice in the early Pentecostal movement.

In an article entitled, 'Have Ye Received the Holy Ghost Since Ye Believed?', A.F. Lee begins with Acts 19 and deduces that the gift of the Holy Spirit is incumbent upon every believer. He sees the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the home of Cornelius as a paradigm for today's believers. He writes, '... the consecration must be so sincere and complete that there shall be a willingness of heart to comply with every requirement of the Divine will ... This may be seen by what occurred at Caesarea in the household of Cornelius where the company had been prepared for the reception of the truth through fasting and prayer — Acts 10:30, 31.' He infers, therefore 'that where the consecration is complete and the heart fully yielded, God condescends to bestow His blessing upon His children' (1909:23). Apparently, fasting is considered by him to be a part of the full consecration and yielded heart that are necessary for the reception of the Spirit.

Julia McCallie Divine's experience of seeking for the baptism in the Holy Spirit shows evidence of great passion and of waiting. She writes, 'I fasted and prayed many days ... I must have the conscious presence of God. All the world, its glitter and pride, sank out of my view; and my heart panted after God.' She fasted so much that she grew weak. She writes, 'I was so weak from the awful spiritual conflict that toward evening I lay down on a cot, nigh unto death ...' Soon afterwards, while praying at the home of a friend, she received her spirit baptism (1910:5-6). Divine's testimony suggests that her fasting was helpful in shifting her gaze away from the 'glitter and pride' of the world until her 'heart panted after God.' Fasting was a sign of her desperation to attain the 'conscious presence of God.'

Other examples of fasting as a part of the seeking process for Spirit baptism include G.W. Batman and C.B. Herron. Batman writes that he 'fasted and prayed for about three days' for the experience of sanctification. Afterwards, he 'received the baptism with the Holy Ghost and fire' (1906:4). In a report from India, missionary C.B. Herron states, 'One native Christian has been immersed and is waiting daily before the Lord for his [Spirit] baptism ... He is here fasting three days before the Lord and praying' (1914:4). Finally, in a historical review entitled, 'History of Tongues,' V.P. Simmons lists the groups throughout history who spoke in tongues. In the case of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Camisards, he finds a connection between fasting and their reported experiences of Spirit baptism (1907:2).

### **Fasting for Divine Healing**

The Pentecostal Fivefold Gospel declares that Jesus is savior, sanctifier, Spirit baptizer, healer, and coming king. This survey has already shown that fasting often produced reports of healing. The following testimonies are further examples of fasting by early Pentecostals when they were praying for divine healing for themselves and for others.

### *Fasting for the Healing of Others*

Anna Bauers offers an impassioned narrative regarding her baby's illness. The child grew sick with very bad sore throat, which Bauers diagnosed as diphtheria:

He gradually grew worse, until it seemed at mortification had commenced ... I vowed before God I would not eat until He healed my child. I fasted three days and nights ... At last I went to the bed where lay my baby, threw myself over the child, and cried, 'Oh, God! Oh God! How much longer can I stand this?' Almost instantly a bright light shone over my head. I closed my eyes, the brightness was so intense, but I saw it just as plainly. I soon raised up, took my baby up, went to the kitchen to my husband, and said, 'My baby is healed!' ... In a few minutes my darling was playing on the floor as well as ever (1908:14-15).

Fasting to Bauers and to other early Pentecostals was a means of access to the throne of God, a way of deepening and strengthening one's prayers. A briefer but similar account is given by Lillie Tilghman in a letter to the *Evangel*. She writes, 'I had been fasting and praying for God to heal two of our children that were having chills...' She goes on to report that all of her children were healed (1915:2).

The Church of God in Christ was led by C.H. Mason, who was known to fast often. Under his influence, the church practiced frequent fasting. The 'Report of the Annual Convocation Held at Lexington, Miss., July 23-August 20, 1911' describes a fast day: 'July 28 (Sixth Day) — The Lord gave us today to fast and pray for the healing of the sick' (Mason 1911a:1). During the convention, a fast day was devoted explicitly to the healing of the sick. It is reported, however, that the Holy Spirit moved upon the congregation and many were converted and baptized in the Spirit.

Finally, missionaries Edmund S. Barr and his wife speak of fasting as a part of spiritual 'battle.' Residing temporarily in St. Petersburg, Florida, they write, 'we began the battle, preaching, praying, fasting, asking God to move the dark clouds and give victory' (1914:7). The Barrs had located a small group of believers with whom they could share fellowship, worship, and ministry. Their attempts at evangelism were not met with approval, but they fasted and prayed, finally declaring that those who sought God for healing were healed 'every time.'

Other testimonies of fasting on behalf of others who were sick include Anna E. Kirby, who writes in 'A letter from China,' 'Sisters Law and Pittman both have the smallpox and are in a boat on the water, quarantined. Oh, it was so sad to us when we heard it, but the little church went to fasting and prayer for their deliverance, and felt God had heard our prayers' (1908:1). Apparently, the entire church fasted and prayed for the two sick women. Also, in a report of the camp meeting at Pleasant Grove, Florida, we read, 'after considerable fasting and prayer, the sick were healed and were able to attend the services' (Tomlinson 1910b:1). In another report from Indianapolis Indiana, it is stated, 'recently the saints went down before God in a fast of three days, and the result was that many were healed. There was a general time of heart-searching and giving up of

the self life and pride, and wonderful manifestations of the Spirit were seen in the meetings' (Crawford 1909:1). The fasting resulted not only in healings but also in self examination, repentance, and other spiritual phenomena.

### *Fasting for the Healing of Oneself*

Given the role of fasting in the nineteenth-century healing movement as an aid to personal faith (e.g. Judd 1880:126-42), we would expect to find many narratives of fasting for one's own healing. However, stories of fasting on behalf of others who are sick far outnumber the cases where people fasted for their own healing. The following example, therefore, is notable. Margaret Gill writes,

I want all of you to know how the Lord has cured me of an incurable disease of about eight years' standing, and made me perfectly whole ... The Lord sent Sister Kennison from Redlands over to pray for me, and she came and we fasted and prayed for about four days. We had a hard fight with the devil, but thank the Lord, we at last got glorious victory (1907:6).

The sick woman fasted, but she states clearly that she was not alone. Sister Kennison prayed and fasted with her and for her. The two of them fought side by side until the victory was won.

## **Conclusions**

### **Conclusions Regarding the Practice of Fasting**

The early Pentecostals practiced both individual and corporate fasting, but there is no mention of universally established fast days. Individual fasts were encouraged for personal spiritual renewal or sanctification, but sometimes people fasted as a means of intercession for others. People fasted when in need of divine guidance, when desiring the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and when seeking God for physical healing.

Before conventions and other meetings, churches and denominations would call upon their constituents to fast. In time of need, the Church might call a corporate fast day; and small groups, larger groups, and entire denominations would designate fast days aimed at spiritual revival. Early Pentecostals would sometimes fast in accordance with holy days such as Good Friday or Ascension Day, and they sometimes fasted in preparation for the sacraments of footwashing, the Lord's Supper, and ordination. Regular fasting that was not necessarily associated with the Christian calendar was also encouraged. For the most part, however, fasting did not follow a liturgical calendar, but was undertaken on the occasion of a crisis or an important event, or whenever they believed that their prayers needed additional strength. Fasting never appeared to be mandatory, but was the choice to fast was left up to the individual.

It is clear that Pentecostals practiced fasting for varied lengths of time (from 1 to 14 days in the testimonies examined here), depending upon the urgency of the situation.

They often continued to fast either continuously or repeatedly until God sent the answer to their prayers.

### **Conclusions Regarding the Function of Fasting**

This overview of early Pentecostal fasting leads to several observations regarding its function and meaning. Despite the well-known theological distinctions between the Finished Work and Wesleyan–Holiness streams of the tradition, the early literature regarding fasting does not betray those differences. In the Finished Work stream, where all the benefits of the Cross are already accomplished and available to believers simply by the confession of faith, we would expect fasting to be superfluous; but that is not the case. Fasting (at least until 1915) continued to serve a crucial role in the reception of spiritual blessings such as Spirit baptism and divine healing, just as it did among Wesleyan Pentecostals. Apparently, fasting had been such an essential part of pre-Pentecostal spirituality, that both streams continued to value it as companion to prayer.

In early Pentecostalism, fasting was utilized as an aid to any kind of urgent prayer, especially when pleading for revival and the salvation of lost souls. Pentecostals also resorted to fasting when in need of divine guidance and when specific needs were evident in the life of an individual, in the society, or in the church. In addition to their view of fasting as an aid to prayer and as a spiritual discipline, which they inherited from the Wesleyan–Holiness movement, early Pentecostals saw fasting through the theological lens of the Fivefold Gospel, which was the core belief system of the movement. Therefore, fasting was valuable particularly in preparing seekers for the experiences of sanctification, Spirit baptism, and divine healing (for themselves and for others). Most of the testimonies suggest that fasting was generated by affectivity – the seeker’s passionate pursuit of God and deep-seated love for others, whether the other be sinner or believer. Thus, fasting was a part of relationality, and those who fasted approached God not with a attitude of entitlement but with humility, consecration, obedience, and supplication – as a needy child would approach a parent.

Pentecostals did not practice fasting as penance, punishment, or to subjugate the desires of the physical body; but fasting could be an aid to repentance and sanctification as the desires of the body were directed toward God. Pentecostals did not practice fasting as a memorial of past events such as the crucifixion; instead, they always looked forward. Fasting was seen as preparation for the sacraments and ordinances of the Church. Furthermore, fasting on a regular basis was encouraged as a means of self-examination and deeper spiritual formation, especially in light of the soon return of Jesus.

Eastern theology distinguishes between two kinds of fasting, liturgical and ascetic, and early Pentecostals practiced both; but more often, they practiced a third kind of fasting that might be described as crisis oriented fasting. Most often, early Pentecostal fasting was joined with prayer as a means of appealing to God for the outpouring of God’s



grace in identifiable acts of revival, salvation, sanctification, healing, and Spirit baptism either for oneself or for others.

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