

Book Review

‘Fields White Unto Harvest’

by James Goff Jr.

(April, 2003)

This is 264 pages of accurate and surprisingly frank material concerning the history of the Pentecostal movement. The author, (a direct descendant of a co-worker of Charles Parham who founded the movement), divorces himself from his own Pentecostal roots and ties, and documents the progression of the movement from its beginnings in Topeka in 1901. Nowhere do we see the authors doctrinal views or Pentecostal distinctives.

There is no book in the world I know of that is as accurate, objective and readable as this book. It is a must for every Pentecostal and a must for every reference library. The documentation is simply the best and most scholarly available. (There are 80 pages of notes, references and sources at the end of the book alone). The book also includes photographs and photostats of exhibits.

The book defines clearly the Pentecostal movement as: *‘A Christian confession or ecclesiastical tradition holding the distinctive teaching that all Christians should seek a post-conversion religious experience called the Baptism with the Holy Spirit, and that a Spirit baptised believer may receive one or more of the supernatural gifts known in the early church: instantaneous sanctification, the ability to prophesy, practise divine healing, speaking in tongues (glossolalia), or interpret tongues’.*

Goff also takes the reader back to the holiness movement of the 19th Century, when there was a new emphasis on the Holy Spirit. The 1890’s saw radical holiness movements breaking away from Methodists, and

the teaching of sanctification became divided into different views, including the erroneous view of what some now call 'Entire Sanctification'. Divisions in the doctrine of the Trinity also followed.

It was Charles Parham who first formulated the definition of Pentecostalism by linking tongues with the Holy Spirit Baptism. '*Glossolalia*' (γλωσσο-tongue/λαλτα-speak) became the proof or evidence of a post conversion experience. Parham actually had three main teachings which included the above. Two of these teachings were *rejected*: these were that Spirit filled believers are 'sealed' as the bride of Christ, and that the 'glossolalia' would be the tool for a world endtime revival, (P. 173). However, the teaching of 'the evidence of tongues' for a subsequent Baptism with the Spirit remained as the *distinctive* teaching that defined and separated the Pentecostal movement from historical Christianity.

An interesting thread to the movement shown by Goff is the Sociological aspect. At the inception of the movement there were social problems and influences that gave the new Pentecostal experience a climate in which it was readily accepted.

That Charles Parham was the founder of the Pentecostal movement, is well proved in this book. It is only in more recent times that the Pentecostal movement has sought to distance itself from this history. The reason becomes clear when one reads the documentation of the life of Parham...

Earlier in life Parham had suffered a viral infection of the brain which some believe caused him to behave in a disorderly manner. He was in fact rejected for ordination by the Methodist Church. He denied the doctrine of eternal punishment, opposed medical and medicational treatment and believed serious diseases to be demonic. He was also influenced by a cult like centre called '*Shiloh*' run by a Frank Sandford near Durham, Maine, and believed that missionaries could be endowed with special powers for last days mission work. Parham was documented as having mental, emotional, psychological and sociological disorders.

In 1907 he was arrested for homosexual acts with a 22 year old man in San Antonio, Texas. From then unto his death in 1929 he was considered by the movement as a 'fallen prophet'. However, he continued his religious endeavours up to the end, including raising funds for a trip to the Holy Land to search for the Ark of the Covenant. This trip never materialised as Parham claimed to have been 'mugged' in New York and had all his money 'stolen'.

Many writers and leaders have sought to reject Parham as the founder. But it was Parham who founded the *first* Pentecostal magazine called '*Apostolic Faith*', he issued the *first* Pentecostal minister credentials, and it was he who *first* formulated the new Pentecostal doctrine of a *subsequent* Baptism With the Spirit.

Parham was a Bible College teacher at Topeka, Kansas, USA and mentor of a William Seymour who founded the Azusa St. church some years later to which various Pentecostal affiliations trace their roots.

The [unknown] Tongues movement is clearly traced to Topeka in 1901. Before this only isolated cases of unknown tongue speaking can be found with mystics, Roman Catholics and extreme sects, and some isolated occurrences by individuals during holiness camp meetings.

The part of this book that should shock all Christians is the history of the Topeka event in 1901 where the 'tongues movement' began. This event also documents Parham's true understanding of 'tongues'. *Parham did not believe in unknown tongues* but rather '*Zenoglossa*' - (*Zeno*-foreign/ *Glosso*-tongue speaking). He believed true tongues to be *real human earthly foreign languages* as in Acts 2 and they would be supernaturally and instantly given to Christians for the purpose of missionary work in other countries.

After suffering a nervous breakdown in 1899 Parham attempted to reproduce Acts 2. However, the event at Topeka was proved to be something very different. Parham later rejected the same phenomenon at Azusa St. which had been imparted by Seymour. The unknown tongues of today are traced precisely to the Topeka event and the later Azusa St.

The book traces the developments of Azusa St. And Parham's eventual denouncement of this movement as occultic. Much of this history is today being re-written or is presented selectively, but this book leaves no stone unturned and the background of references and bibliography is simply exhaustive. At times this book reads like a novel as it traces the fascinating history of men such as Parham and Seymour to the very end.

Christians who are lovers of truth will want to read this scarce classic and learn from history. Whatever one thinks of the Pentecostal movement, the irrefutable documentation in this book will enlighten and give a source of valuable information as to how, where and why this movement originated.

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