

## A Christian Broadcasting Network Interview With

### Dr. Vinson Synan on his book: *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal*

**CRAIG VON BUSECK:** You've written a book called *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal*. Can you tell us about the earliest days of the Pentecostal renewal? How did it begin and what caused it to grow?

**DR. VINSON SYNAN:** The background of it was the Holiness Movement that had been around for the whole 19th century -- mainly from Methodist roots. The Methodists had sort of read these people out of the church by 1894 and there were a lot of people, maybe 100,000 in America, who were seeking a deeper walk with God in what they called the second blessing of sanctification, which they also called the Baptism in the Holy Spirit.

And so as the new century came on the world, there were people who believed there would be a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit to usher in a new century -- a century of world evangelization.

This movement started in Topeka, Kan., in a Bible school led by a former Methodist pastor, Charles Fox Parham. In a watch night service, December 31, 1900, going over into the very first day of the century, a young lady by the name of Agnes Ozman asked the teacher and the students to lay hands on her and to pray that she would be baptized in the Holy Spirit. She expected to speak with tongues in what they call the Bible evidence.

Well, she did speak with tongues. They said she spoke the Chinese language. She was unable to speak English for three days. When they tied speaking with tongues to the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, that's what created the Pentecostal Movement. Then not only tongues, but healing, casting out of demons, prophecy and many other gifts of the Spirit began to be manifested there in Topeka.

It spread from there down to Houston, Texas, where a black man, William Joseph Seymour, was brought into the movement by Parham. Then he went to Los Angeles in 1906 in the famous Azusa Street Meeting. From there that movement spread all over the earth -- overnight almost. It was a tremendous beginning for a movement.

**VON BUSECK:** Church historians have given evidence of times of "tongues speaking" occurring in different areas and in different times since the birth of the church on the day of Pentecost. Though speaking in tongues was manifested at times, no one was taught to seek for the experience as they were taught to seek for justification, sanctification and so forth. What was it that inspired Charles Parham to encourage his Bible students to seek the "Baptism of the Holy Ghost?"

**SYNAN:** Well, he had studied the teachings of the Holiness Movement, including salvation,

sanctification, healing, and the Second Coming. And he noticed that there was no standard evidence of receiving the second blessing -- Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Some people said you would shout or weep or fall on the floor. The way he tells it, he was teaching his students the major doctrines of the Holiness Movement at that time, and when he got to Baptism in the Holy Spirit, he told his students there are many different ideas of how you know you've received this. He said, "I'm going on a weekend preaching revival at a Free Methodist church in Kansas City." And he gave a homework assignment to the students. He said, "Study the Scriptures and when I get back report on what is the Bible evidence. How do you know you received the Holy Spirit?"

Well, when he got back, the students said, to tell the truth, when we study the Scriptures, we see that they spoke with tongues in almost every case. If you want to know what the Bible evidence is, it has to be tongues. He said he was astonished at the answer. There are other people who believe that he already knew what the answer was and that he was trying to get the students to confirm it.

J. Roswell Flower, the founding secretary of the Assemblies of God, said, "Agnes Ozman's experience [being baptized in the Holy Spirit] made the 20th century Pentecostal Movement." After this, millions of people sought to receive an instantaneous Baptism in the Spirit, expecting to speak with tongues. That's what made it different from the Holiness Movement and other movements of the day.

**VON BUSECK:** As you said, six years after Agnes Ozman was baptized in the Holy Spirit, the Pentecostal Movement was launched to the world at the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles. What happened at those meetings that caused such a tremendous outpouring?

**SYNAN:** I've studied this for most of my life and there are people writing books and doing research on Azusa Street. There's nothing, humanly-speaking, that we can come up with that explains everything about Azusa Street. It has to be, in my view, a supernatural work of God. Here is a black pastor born in Louisiana to parents who had been slaves. He had been to Indianapolis and worked at a railroad station and as a waiter in restaurants. He had gotten into the Holiness Movement and had learned about tongues from Parham. He was invited to California to preach in a little black holiness church. They locked the door on him. He had not spoken in tongues yet, but he preached that it was the evidence.

Then he started holding prayer meetings in the home of a friend by the name of Asbury. For maybe two weeks they prayed and fasted. And then they began to

speaking in tongues in that prayer meeting in the home. And the crowds grew so large until he would speak on the front porch to hundreds of people on the streets.

They had to find a place to meet. They looked around downtown Los Angeles and found an old AME (African Methodist Episcopal) Church, which is now the First AME Church of Los Angeles. It was the first black church building in Los Angeles. But it had been sold and used as a stable and a lumber warehouse and all kinds of stuff. It was a broken-down shambles of a building. It had been burned and it looked terrible. But Seymour and his followers, made up mainly of black porters, washer women, maids -- just very poor people -- started a meeting in April of 1906. The central attraction was speaking in tongues and healing. People came from all over Los Angeles and then it got into the religious press. Stories were printed all over the country that people were speaking in tongues just like the apostles did.

And so there was a lot of curiosity. People came from all over the country, and even from Europe. That meeting went on for three-and-a-half years -- three services a day, seven days a week. The pastor was a black man, but soon the majority of the people were white. And so it was Azusa Street with Seymour that made this a worldwide movement through Frank Bartleman, who wrote articles that went all over the world. Soon people were speaking in tongues in Jerusalem, in Stockholm, in London and Rome -- all over the world, it just spread like an explosion.

**VON BUSECK:** Who were some of the most important leaders in the Pentecostal movement in the first half of the 20th century? Who were the key leaders, and can you tell us about them?

**SYNAN:** Well, the leadership changed. Nobody stayed in charge for very long. In fact, they often say it is a movement without a man. There's no Luther, there's no Calvin, there's no Wesley who molded the movement into one church. It exploded and there were many churches starting all over, everywhere.

The first leader, of course, was Parham. Now he's the leader for about five years. Then Seymour, for three-and-a-half or four years, becomes the national leader. Then he drops out of sight because the mailing list for his paper called "Apostolic Faith" was moved to Portland, Ore.

Then the leadership moves to Chicago -- I call it the Chicago connection. William H. Durham was the pastor of the First Pentecostal Church in Chicago. From his

church came all kinds of leaders. Italians spread Pentecostalism all over the world in Italian communities. From Chicago came Willis Hoover in Chile. He started the first Pentecostal movement in South America. From the Chicago area came Daniel Bergan Goonivingren, who went to Brazil and started a mass movement there. Durham was the founding theologian of the Assemblies of God was in the Chicago area.

In Memphis you have Charles Harrison Mason, who goes to Azusa Street, is baptized in the Spirit, comes back and turns his church, Church of God in Christ, into a Pentecostal church. And so Memphis becomes a great center. That has become the largest Pentecostal church in America with six million members.

And there were others here and there. In my church, I come from the Pentecostal Holiness Church, a man from Dunn, N.c., G. B. Cashwell went to Azusa Street and spoke in tongues. They said he spoke in German. He came back to Dunn and held a Pentecostal meeting, which they called Azusa Street east. And there, leaders of four or five different Holiness denominations came, spoke with tongues, and the Pentecostal Holiness churches became Pentecostal; through his ministry the Church of God in Cleveland, Tenn., became Pentecostal. So you see it spreading.

And then it breaks out in Europe with Thomas Ball Berritt; Louise Patros in Sweden; it goes into Russia with J. A. Voreniov; into Korea -- it spreads all over the earth in a very short time.

**VON BUSECK:** Some of the strongest churches and denominations that we have today grew out of the Pentecostal Movement -- denominations like the Pentecostal Holiness Church, The Assemblies of God, The International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, The Church of God in Christ and others were birthed at that time. Why have these denominations prospered around the world in light of the fact that many started with very humble beginnings?

**SYNAN:** The only thing I can say is that they released a tremendous power -- the power of the Holy Spirit -- and not just tongues, but all the gifts were released into the church. These people were excited. They believed Jesus was coming any moment. They had to win the world before Christ returned. That gave them a big motivation.

I think it was the joy of worship -- the power of praising God, singing in the Spirit, clapping their hands, dancing before the Lord. It was a very expressive kind of worship. It attracted poor people, mainly. But in time, by the middle of the 20th century, it was going into Episcopal churches, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and even the Catholic Church. But I think the growth came because very simple people believed God.

In the religious world there were a lot of people who said we see the power of God working. It was noisy and it was messy. These people shouted, they danced, but the common people heard this message gladly. The movement spread like wildfire all over this nation and all over the world.