

History and doctrines of a major Pentecostal denomination:
Assemblies of God History

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Fall 2019: THEO5113 Pentecostal Theology & History
in SUM Bible College & Theological Seminary

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SUM Bible College & Theological Seminary, 2019
Nov 10, 2019

Introduction

There are moments that last a second and there are moments that live on forever. What started was one moment around one idea to reach every person everywhere for Jesus, turned into a monumental moment called as Assemblies of God. The Azusa Revival was one of the focal points of immerging Pentecostal moment. E.N. Bell a well-educated person was the first person to start the first Pentecostal newspaper “Word and Witness”, and first chairman of Assemblies of God. Bell was the first leader of the moment and now this has turned to 66 million. This paper is about the history and doctrines of Assemblies of God History, a major Pentecostal denomination. Authors in this paper focused on the literature of the mentioned topic to summarize the history of assemblies of God. From the time when assemblies of God were found till date were under discussion to point out the changes. The assemblies of God were founded in 1914 in Arkansas. With time this grew into a movement. From the literature, review author came to know about various important things about assemblies of God. Such as the association and missionary efforts to build the relationship with churches of other countries (around 140 countries). Similarly, the relevant believes of the Assemblies of God are also under discussion in this paper. The main objective of this paper is to deeply understand the history, doctrines and believes of Assemblies of God by reviewing the literature.

The history of the Assemblies of God dates back to 1914. This paper recounts its history up to the present. It provides Assemblies of God and non-Assemblies of God with a historical, cultural and theological perspective of its history.¹

By the middle of the 19th century a way has spread all across America carrying Gaspar to the edge of the frontier. It looked like nothing can get the way of this monumental move the God. However, than came the civil war and America trial by fire and a crisis so large and so bloody that no one can imagine to survive. The post war period forced American to search their souls. If the union can be threatened, what else their life will remain formable, their future, their faith? Questions like these carried many to the foot of the cause. However, it prompted others to wonder over the teaching of Christ to criticism, modernism, resulting in a social gospel, without God's presence or power. For time it looked as the way of the spirit they cartelized for the first half of the century had washed up on the beach. But the God was not finished moving. By the 1890's small groups of agars stated to develop leaders begin exploring the scriptures going over the new testaments in search of the biblical model of ministry. This search lead to the count of first Pentecost recorded in Acts Chapter 2. It was about this time that the leaders of several groups begin to talk seriously about uniting. This join together might not only helped them in flam of revival but also makes them do perform more effective the work God had given them to do.

The beginning of the Assemblies of God denomination has a history that is not only colorful, but a time in history when ideas were meeting, and people influenced by Pentecostalism coming out of the Azusa Street Revivals were going back to their

¹ Kay, W. K. (2009). [Pentecostalism](#) (p. 223). London: SCM Press.

respective churches and denomination, and not finding a welcoming home with their new-found beliefs. In the forming of a denomination that became a world movement, the beliefs that emerged after the Pentecostal movement, needed organization, structure, and definition.

As J.R. Ziefle writes, “The genius of the Pentecostal movement lay in its ability to hold two seemingly incompatible impulses in productive tension. I call the two impulses the primitive and the pragmatic...idealism versus realism, or principle versus practicality.”²

Emergence of the Pentecostal Beliefs

Though the emergence of the Pentecostal beliefs were filled with differences, the Assemblies of God denomination emerged to not only bring organization to the churches who shared a common theology, but eventually gave theological guidance for churches and its members to give distinction to the denomination. This paper will trace the roots of the Assemblies of God denomination and how it began shaping its view of the Holy Spirit and its transformational power in the lives of those who are believers.

While Assemblies of God churches today are known as a denomination, what sets it apart is its freedom of controversy over theological sticking points and fodder for arguments among leaders that have plagued other denominations. This essay will explore what makes Assemblies of God churches different and free from disagreements over important tenants of its beliefs while navigating often-polarizing beliefs in Pentecostalism.

² Fahlbusch, Erwin, Encyclopedia of Christianity, Vol. 1-3, 144

The Assemblies of God, by some standards, is a new denomination, which emerged and formed in the last century. Just over 100 years old, the denomination was formed in April 1914 in Hot Springs, Arkansas. At that time, approximately 300 ministers and laypersons associated with the emerging Pentecostal movement gathered. Among the 300 gathered were 120 men and women who were delegates from their respective Pentecostal denominations.³

These congregations “felt concerned about the future of American Pentecostalism” and “shared a distrust of established denominations and sought to establish a structure that would facilitate limited cooperation as well as accountability without diminishing congregational autonomy.”⁴ What this means, is that while they wanted a council that would give their congregation organization, they wanted how their churches would operate on a daily basis left to the local congregations.

Out of this gathering, leaders of the new movement created the General Council of the Assemblies of God.”

What is interesting is that while they agreed to form the denomination, a statement of faith was not set at this gathering. However, they did set a structure for coordinating other efforts as a denomination. “The degree of consensus made a statement of faith seem unnecessary. The group voted to coordinate support for foreign missions and Bible school education and to issue credentials to would-be evangelists, missionaries, and pastors who met certain qualifications. They also announced their

³ Fahlbusch, Erwin, Encyclopedia of Christianity, Vol. 1-3, 144

⁴ Fahlbusch, Erwin, Encyclopedia of Christianity, Vol. 1-3, 144

intention to discountenance errors in doctrine and practice.”⁵ The result of this was not so much a denomination, but more a loose fellowship. _____ explains the beginnings of the denomination in this way:

As the denomination first formed, the group of ministers tried to “leave their doctrinal position flexible but who, after debate within their ranks, hardened their statement of faith.” Mel Robeck, in a compelling piece of scholarship, tells the story of the adoption of the doctrine of speaking with tongues as the ‘initial evidence’ of baptism in the Holy Spirit. The story is of a group of ministers (who became the largest Pentecostal denomination in the United States, Assemblies of God) who at first attempted to leave their doctrinal position flexible but who, after debate within their ranks, hardened their statement of faith.⁶

While this idea of a loose fellowship sounded like a good idea in 1914, the newly formed denomination was already experiencing some dissention in its ranks just a couple years later. By 1916, there were serious disagreements among churches over key doctrinal issues. This led the leadership to create a statement of faith.

Later in the forming of the denomination, the General Council also took a stand on some key theological issues, such as the classical Trinitarian understanding of God, and the Oneness or ‘Jesus only’.⁷ These strong stances of the denomination, unfortunately, caused some Pentecostals to leave the council, and there was a parting of ways from the Pentecostal denomination as a whole.

⁵ Fahlbusch, Erwin, Encyclopedia of Christianity, Vol. 1-3, 144

⁶ Kay, W. K. (2009). [Pentecostalism](#) (p. 223). London: SCM Press.

⁷ Kay, W. K. (2009). [Pentecostalism](#) (p. 223). London: SCM Press.

However, these theological stances are important to denominational beliefs as a protection from those who might try and influence the church outside of its established beliefs. “If we return to the purpose of theology and see it as a form of discourse that defends Christian against each new danger as it arises, while at the same time helping the church to understand itself.”⁸

In 1916 was also where the Assembly of God denomination made a clear delineation from other Pentecostal Christians, marked by their beliefs in the nature of God beliefs surrounding sanctification.⁹

And this is where the fork in the road is visible. Those Pentecostal Christians who had been influenced by Durham were forced into making a choice by the controversy over the nature of God. All the other Christians who had been resistant to Durham and who continued to believe in sanctification as separate from Pentecostal baptism were unaffected by the Trinitarian–Oneness dispute. Great swathes of Pentecostalism, including the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) and associated denominations like the Church of God in Christ, did not undergo any of the trauma associated with the decisive 1916 General Council meeting of Assemblies of God.¹⁰

⁸ Kay, W. K. (2009). [Pentecostalism](#) (p. 223). London: SCM Press, Page 223

⁹ Kay, W. K. (2009). [Pentecostalism](#) (p. 223). London: SCM Press, Page 223

¹⁰ Kay, W. K. (2009). [Pentecostalism](#) (p. 223). London: SCM Press, Page 223

One major distinction made in the debate resolved the difference between speaking with tongues in Acts 2 and speaking with tongues in 1 Corinthians 12.

- The first occurs in Jerusalem as the apostles received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.
- The second refers to speaking in tongues within congregational meetings.

Pentecostals drew a distinction between the sign of tongues and the gift of tongues: 'The full consummation of the baptism of believers in the Holy Ghost and fire is indicated by the initial physical sign of speaking with other tongues as the Spirit of God gives them utterance (Acts 2:4).' They went on to say that 'this wonderful experience is distinct from ... the gift of tongues', which has a different purpose and use. The sign of tongues necessarily implied that anyone who had not spoken in tongues had not been baptized in the Spirit. As time went on, this position was made more dogmatic through subtle changes to the way the story of Pentecostalism was told and the suspicion with which scholars who questioned the unanimity of the founding fathers and mothers of Pentecostalism were treated.¹¹

Early Pentecostal theology

In this chapter we have outlined early Pentecostal theology as denominational and relating to:

- The nature of God
- Speaking in tongues

¹¹ Kay, W. K. (2009). [*Pentecostalism*](#) (pp. 228–229). London: SCM Press.

- Baptism in the Spirit.¹²

As described in the introduction part that how did the first Pentecostal theology come into being. These early believers did more than just studying, they worshiped and they prayed. This is reason why the earlier worshipers were spiritually strong as compare to the today's believers and worshipers and they believe that God is going to send an end time revival to the churches. In 1906 William Seemore has some evangelistic services and meetings over a three years period and that was so intense that it captured the attention of the believers and non-believers alike from all over the world.

By 1913 there were hundreds of congregations and dozens of publications from coast to coast which then became as Pentecostal. In the forming of a denomination that became a world movement, the beliefs that emerged after the Pentecostal movement, needed organization, structure, and definition. This was named after the incredible experience after the first century that was becoming a modern day reality in so many lives.

Difference between the Apostolic Churches and the Assembly of God

The question arises here is what is the importance of Apostolic moment in the Assembly of God and Assembly of God domination. The first thing is that the modern day United States of America Apostolic can trace their roots back to the Assembly of God. In 1901 they have tremendous holiness and that Jesus Strick spread in 1906 which

¹² Kay, W. K. (2009). [*Pentecostalism*](#) (p. 233). London: SCM Press.

lead to the formation of Assembly of God^{13, 14}. In 1916 Mr. Bell give a strong initiative to the Assembly of God and around 150 ministers at time were dismissed and the apostolic concepts were considered to be anti-Crist.

The first prominent and basic difference between Apostolic Churches and the Assembly of God is that the Assembly of God believes in the holy ghosts is not essential according to them the charisma of Holy Ghost is an extra improvement for solvation.

The assemblies of God and Ecumenical Cooperation

In 1961 Klaude Kendrick announced as a matter of fact that ‘Pentecostals have avoided participation both in the World Council of Churches and in the National Council of Churches’. He went on to suggest two reasons for this apparent choice. ‘Partly this is because the older denominations seem to regard the Pentecostal sects as “not yet qualified for recognition” in the family of churches, but mainly it is because Pentecostals themselves entertain serious objections to the Councils as presently constituted.’ Neither the history of the Assemblies of God published two years earlier, the work of a professional journalist who collaborated with the executive officers of the Assemblies of God, nor the authorized history of the Assemblies of God authored by Carl Brumback and published simultaneously with Kendrick’s work even mentioned the subject.¹⁵

¹³ Nolivos, E. H. (2016). [Ecuadorian Pentecostalism at the Middle of the Earth](#). In *Global Renewal Christianity: Latin America* (Vol. 2, p. 165). Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House.

¹⁴ Page 165, *Global Renewal Christianity: Spirit-Empowered Movements Past, Present, and Future*, Vol. 2: Latin America, Yong, A., Synan, V., & Alvarez, M. (2016). *Global Renewal Christianity: Latin America* (Vol. 2). Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House.

¹⁵ Robeck, C. M., Jr. (2007). [The Assemblies of God and Ecumenical Cooperation: 1920–1965](#). In W. Ma & R. P. Menzies (Eds.), *Pentecostalism in Context: Essays in Honor of William W. Menzies* (p. 107). Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.

In 1916 serious dissension over the Trinity led the General Council to exclude Oneness (or Jesus only) advocates from the council. The doctrinal crisis prompted the adoption of a Statement of Fundamental Truths. The statement endorsed such basic Christian doctrines as the incarnation, justification by faith, the substitutionary atonement, Christ's physical resurrection, and the premillennial return of Christ. It also affirmed divine healing and the baptism with the Holy Spirit, evidenced by speaking in tongues. After review, all credentials were reissued in 1917, and the Assemblies of God began a long period of steady growth. Over the years, the growth of bureaucracy resulted in the transformation of a loose fellowship into a full-fledged denomination.

The Worldwide Assemblies of God Fellowship

The global explosion of Pentecostal forms of Christianity in the past decade contributed to the international growth of the Assemblies of God. The World Assemblies of God Fellowship (organized in 1989 as part of the denomination's decade-long evangelization program for the 1990s) became a primary vehicle for reporting and nurturing expressions of renewal in Assemblies of God units around the world. In 1994 leadership passed from the denominational offices in Springfield, Missouri, to Seoul, Korea. David Yonggi Cho, pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul (with 750,000 members in 1995, it has been billed as the world's largest church), the first non-Western leader of the association, hosted a mass meeting of Pentecostals in Seoul in September 1994, during which satellite hookups facilitated the participation of an estimated 10 million people in a single prayer meeting.

In 1995, after Seoul (where Cho's church accounts for some three-fourths of Assemblies of God adherents in Korea), the next largest Assemblies of God congregation (with 345,000 members) was in São Paulo, Brazil. Of the ten largest Assemblies of God congregations in that year, eight were in Brazil and two in Korea. In Africa, LaBorne Assembly of God in Kinshasa, Zaire, headed the list with 12,000 members. In Madras, India, New Life Assembly of God was attracting some 6,000 adherents. Remarkable successes in Brazil have not been routinely replicated in the rest of Latin America, just as the large membership in Korea has not translated into significant presence in other Asian nations.¹⁶

Speaking in Tongues - The debate resolved the difference between speaking with tongues in Acts 2 and speaking with tongues in 1 Corinthians 12.

The Lexam Cultural Ontology Glossary defines speaking in tongues as the act of speaking a language one did not acquire by natural means. This often related to either divine revelation or worship. The language may or not be intelligible by another human.¹⁷

Discussion

By the middle of the 19th century a way has spread all across America carrying Gaspar to the edge of the frontier. It looked like nothing can get the way of this monumental move the God. However, than came the civil war and America trial by fire and a crisis so large and so bloody that no one can imagine to survive. The post war

¹⁶ Blumhofer, E. L. (1999–2003). [Assemblies of God](#). In *The encyclopedia of Christianity* (Vol. 1, p. 146). Grand Rapids, MI; Leiden, Netherlands: Wm. B. Eerdmans; Brill.

¹⁷ Lexam Cultural Ontology Dictionary

period forced American to search their souls. If the union can be threatened, what else their life will remain formable, their future, their faith? Questions like these carried many to the foot of the cause. However, it prompted others to wonder over the teaching of Christ to criticism, modernism, resulting in a social gospel, without God's presence or power. For time it looked as the way of the spirit they cartelized for the first half of the century had washed up on the beach. But the God was not finished moving. This success in the movement regardless of difference in the groups at that time are the common believes such as:

- Salvation through Jesus.
- Healing for sick.
- The soon return of Jesus.
- Holy Spirit baptism with evidence of speaking in tongue¹⁸.

Knowing that the ranks were divided, the council leaders opens the meetings with the prayers and worshipping. Then it was decided to develop general assemblies of God and cooperative fellowships.

From the literature review and discussions in the previous sections author in this section described and listed the basic truths of the Assemblies of God¹⁹; the first believe is that The Bible is inspired by God and is the infallible, authoritative rule of faith and conduct and there is only one true God. Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the man was created upright and good. However, man by voluntary transgression fell and

¹⁸ Blumhofer, E. L. (1999–2003). [Assemblies of God](#). In *The encyclopedia of Christianity* (Vol. 1, p. 146). Grand Rapids, MI; Leiden, Netherlands: Wm. B. Eerdmans; Brill.

¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assemblies_of_God_Statement_of_Fundamental_Truths

thereby incurred not only physical death but also spiritual death, which is separation from God. Similarly, the salvation is received through remembering and presenting yourself and your belief toward God and faith toward the Jesus Christ. There were two ordinances. The first is that the believer's baptism by immersion is a declaration to the world that the believer has died and been raised together with Christ, becoming a new creation. The second ordinance is that the Lord's Supper is a symbol expressing the believer's sharing in the divine nature of Christ. There will for sure a final day of judgement and eternal damnation. There will new heavens and new earths.

Conclusion

After the literature review and the discussion of the history of Assemblies of God, author has conclude the topic with few notable and important aspects and points which readers should know. When it comes to believes the Assemblies of God includes Pentecostal and Evangelical beliefs. Similarly, as the believers of Assemblies of God are traditionally Pentecostals, and respects all the Christians should empowered to have baptism in the Holy Spirit. One of the lesson learned from the Assemblies of God is the discretion from the occurrence of salvation. Besides, the Assemblies of God believes in the other spirituals such as divine, haling, and supernatural spiritual abilities. The statement of the fundamental truth of the Assemblies of God unites many branches and communities around the world and international cooperation. Additionally, advocating and practicing medicine is yet another aspect of the history of Assemblies of God.

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