



Book : *Azusa Reimagined. A Radical Vision of Religious and Democratic Belonging*

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Through a dept-historical exploration, theological analysis, and critical theory, Keri Day vividly unveils the rich findings of various facts within the Azusa Street Revival in 1906, from which the US. Pentecostalism sprang up. This is an interesting statement: “One might assume that Christian churches have been the only groups to employ the biblical language of Pentecost, but this is not so. Nor was the Azusa Revival... the only community employing the language of Pentecost in envisioning America’s future.” (p. 17).

Day delineated the spiritual dynamic of Pentecostalism revival in Azusa Street as the critics and corrected the historical practices of America's capitalism, black slavery, white supremacy, and rampant racism. “Azusa might be interpreted as a rebellious, counter-cultural social space where general antagonisms and differences aren’t suppressed, punished, or excluded but experimented with.” (p. 95 see also p. 98). The spiritual gift of speaking in tongues or healing is seen as the exclusion of the embodiment of a subversive community that stands to combat the segregated culture in that era (p. 7), where black people could not feel a sense of belonging (p. 41).

The Azusa community criticized radicalized concepts of citizenship that governed early capitalist endeavors such as world fairs and expositions through its sermons and social practices. “Azusa’s religious life embodied a critique of America’s racial-capitalist order” (p. 3) Azusa also envisioned more profound democratic human belonging and caring practices than the white nationalist allegiances fostered by early American capitalism. Day makes Azusa's challenge to this warped economic ecology visible in this lucid work, demonstrating how Azusa offers not only a radical critique of racial capitalism but also a way for contemporary religious communities to cultivate democratic practices of belonging against the backdrop of late capitalism's deep racial divisions and material inequalities (p. 4, 17).

Spirit-field people's spiritual transformation resulted in a new community where equality, compassion, and gender-respect attitude demonstrated naturally as the antithesis of the picture of the Kingdom of God. It embodied subversive forms of religious and political agency. The ministry of Azusa Street’s leadership consisted of five men and seven women (Such as Lucy Farrow, Sister Prince, Florence Crawford, Claura Lum, etc.), and the black prominent leader of the Movement, William Seymour, ministered to white men and women. Of course, this early Pentecostal church (Apostolic Faith Mission) in Azusa Street is not the only movement that took care of this issue and saw racism as a theological problem. The Black liberation theology had already existed long before, but according to Day, “it has failed, at particular historical moments, to think radically about the questions of gender and sexual justice as well as to offer substantive critiques of American capitalism, which black womanist theology and black queer theology, by contrast, have made efforts to address” (p. 8).

A black woman’s guidance influenced Seymour’s religious experience of the Spirit, Rev. Lucy Farrow. At the time, this was a scandalous appearance of Christianity of the limited

access of women in ministry; according to Cheerly Gilkes, as Day quoted, many Baptists and Methodist women left their denominations and joined holiness and Pentecostal communities that participated or came out of the Azusa movement. So, the Azusa congregation (the Apostolic Faith Mission) was more egalitarian in its leadership approach, which gave women a prominent place to lead. “These women’s guardianship and preservation of these practices fostered a radical relationality at Azusa, into which Seymour is initiated. The actual origins of his vision of radical relationality and just relationships lie in religious practices that black domestic women not only cultivated, preserved, and guarded but which they headed..” (p. 92 see also p. 84). Not only was its correction to the discrimination of women by the Azusa Street Movement (early Pentecostal churches) but also the problem of so-called white Evangelical Christianity, which “repudiate and haughtily deny fellowship to every Christian lady and gentlemen happening to be African descent” (p. 41 see also p. 113). So, “Azusa Street Revival must be rethought as a radical intervention into the racist character of Christian orthodoxy” (p. 60).

The last important point I highlight in this book is the aspect of Azusa’s erotic Life. The Azusa Street Revival was a social space that was erotically charged and queer. “Queer mixture” of rich and poor, black and whites, who “behave lustfully” toward each other (p. 103ff). The meaning of erotic life here is not a pornography desire but erotic as we share those physical, emotional, sensual, psychic, and passionate expressions of what is most profound, strongest, and richest within each of us (104). Day states, “American capitalism thrived off the erotic life of racism, as the nation’s market machinery depended upon particular kinds of racial welcoming, bonding, and belonging.” (p. 108). “American relations of intimacy and belonging were couched in terms of whiteness and capitalist progress. The erotic.. was used in service to capitalism and white cultural hegemony” (p. 115). Day, then, comes with the counter phenomena of the spiritual lifestyle of the Azusa congregation through its liturgical life that disrupted the erotic landscape of racism linked to the capitalist system of America (p. 49). This brings about respect for the blacks and immigrants as the subject. The worship time in the Azusa Movement was generous, rather than an appetite, where a welcoming desire for intimacy and connection was not grounded in the erotic world of white racial bonding and belonging (p. 116-18). This reflects a broader queer sociality (p. 123), where it exceeds the boundaries that link to the erotic life of racism that “corrupts belonging, connection, and even generosity” (p. 125).

As I reflect on this brilliant work, this work contributes to my growing knowledge of the field, which is the place for modern Pentecostal history. I was born into a family of Pentecostal pastors and now teach on issues of Pentecostalism (Pentecostal Theology and Spirituality; and Pentecostal and Global Christianity). During the last 10 years, I have read many books related to Pentecostalism, but what I know about the Azusa Street incident is only limited to how the beginning of the revival that gave birth to the Pentecostal movement whose leaders are black priests. Apart from that, indeed I also read (though not much) how the initial posture of the Pentecostal movement had a very anti-racism face, but what I read in this book broadened my horizons that this process intersects with issues not just simply saying anti-racism, but a detailed explanation of the aspects of his resistance to what has been considered a necessity in society, namely patriarchal hegemony and aspects of commercialization that exploit black people, especially women.

The question is why the current Pentecostal movement now seems to have lost this important historical legacy. Pentecostal churches are more preoccupied with issues of manifestation of powers and speaking in tongues which are considered the main things of the Azusa Street Awakening and for the benefit of empowering believers for evangelism, but forget (or indeed don’t study history) aspects of transforming the lives of recipients of the fire Pentecostal is to a life of resistance or subversion of what society permissively accepts about

the myth of the superiority of a certain race, gender, and skin color. Early Pentecostal spirituality promoted justice, equality, and genuine love for all people.

Of course, those called 'progressive Pentecostal' scholars have been considerably writing the above issues; it mainly takes its point of departure from a prospective proposal for Christian mission holistic discourse, which lacks the historical rationale of the Azusa Street Movement's theology and praxis spirituality. Because of this undue fact, emerging Pentecostal scholars who may not do an in-depth exploration of the Azusa Street movement, which provides this holistic wealth of Pentecostal spirituality, then refer more to Pentecostal spirituality issue to the events of Acts 2, because it is considered more complete with carrying out holistic theological work. In reality, Day's work presented Azusa Street church (Apostolic Faith Mission), carried much on holistic spirituality, not only concerned about private spirituality. It encountered social issues, equality, justice, and gender.

What I also appreciate about Day's book is that even though the author reviews the different versions of the founder of the Azusa Street movement, namely Charles Parham (white pastor) vs William Seymour (black pastor), and what are the differences between the two figures, the author finally wants to emphasize the collectivity aspect of many individuals, especially blacks and women (including black women), in carrying out the transformation. Even so, at the same time, through this book, I just got an answer to the question of few people, including myself, why modern Pentecostal history is always linked to William Seymour, not to Charles Parham, who, in fact (and Seymour's teacher) experienced the Baptism of the Holy Spirit with the sign of speaking in tongues from Seymour. I appreciate this book because the author revealed that Parham was more concerned with the doctrinal aspects of speaking in tongues as initial evidence. Meanwhile, Seymour, although he also preached about the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, was not too concerned with doctrinal matters but with the aspect of transformative experience. This experience drives the community into an inclusive social entity—Azusa Street to experience the transformation of multicultural relationships.

I also appreciate this book in terms of how the Azusa Street Movement (Apostolic Faith Mission) is very well explained as a movement that criticizes two established Christian forces, namely: white evangelicalism, which helps perpetuate racism and does not provide a place for women; and another group of black liberation theologians, who pay attention to issues of equality of all skin colors and gender but fail to criticize American capitalism which participates in the exploitation of black people and the preservation of patriarchal culture.

In my opinion, what needs to be developed in future projects after this work is to continue on the issue of contemporary experiences from racial capitalism, which reveal the enduring of democratic belonging because lingering effects of structural racism continue to shape the terrible racial and economic experiences that black and brown communities endured. Because in an era where the emergence of neo-capitalism is also a severe problem that must be faced by the churches. For Pentecostals, it is necessary to develop historical investigations as to why the migration of Azusa Street spirituality did not carry over to the spirit of Pentecostalism missions in countries where Pentecostal missionaries were stationed.