
DISCERNMENT NEWSLETTER

“...how is it that ye do not discern this time?” Luke 12:56

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Azusa or Pentecost? Now, Then or Later?



By Pastor Gary Osborne

“In the last days I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh.”

(Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17)

I'm unashamedly a Christian that believes God is still pouring out His Spirit on all flesh. I believe that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is as real and valid today as it was nearly 2,000 years ago on the day of Pentecost. I believe in the gifts of the Spirit. I am, to be blunt, a full Gospel Christian. This type of personal background isn't something I normally feel compelled to share when I write articles for Christian publications. But I think it's both justified and important in this instance. I believe examining an event that calls itself “Azusa Now” warrants disclosure. Some have already weighed in on this recent gathering, and more will undoubtedly follow. But many will scrutinize it from a theologically benign, or even hostile, position that denies the Spirit of God is still being poured out in the same manner as in the

first century A.D. I'm not one of those people. This article will not be prejudiced by a cessationist mindset. So having laid that groundwork, let's examine “Azusa Now.”

On April 9th an event was held in Los Angeles, California called “Azusa Now” in the L.A. Coliseum. It boasted hosts such as Lou Engle, Bill Johnson, Mike Bickle, Cindy Jacobs, Heidi Baker, Todd White, Daniel Kolenda, and Shawn Bolz—names all well known as leaders in the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement that has its roots in the Latter Rain/Manifest Sons of God. In fact, Bill Johnson's Bethel website stated that this “Azusa Now” ministry “is partnering with Lou Engle’s The Call to commemorate the 110th anniversary of the Azusa Street Outpouring.”¹ It was reported that this event was attended by nearly 100,000 people, and it lasted for some 15 hours while individuals prayed and worshipped, asking God to send another “Azusa” revival.

For those who don't know about the significance of this, a small amount of background is in order. In the summer of 1906 a relatively new congregation was meeting at the Apostolic Faith Mission on 312 Azusa Street in Los Angeles, California, when a time of revival broke out. From these meetings entirely new fellowships and denominations sprang forth, including the Assemblies of God. It was undoubtedly something that changed the landscape of Christianity in

¹ <http://bethelredding.com/calendar/azusa-now>

America, and eventually around the world.

Now, some 110 years later, NAR self-styled “apostles” Lou Engle and Bill Johnson have tried to recreate that original event with “Azusa Now.” Their expressed purpose was, and is (because they consider this an ongoing movement), “to believe for a fresh outpouring of signs, wonders, miracles and the proclamation of the gospel!”² And this recent event was, of course, filled with the obligatory “signs” that always accompany this type of spiritual jamboree. For example, the bizarre sight of watching Shawn Bolz call out “words of knowledge” to people in the audience with a cell phone that apparently already had all the “words” on it.³ Or the appearance of a giant gold angel standing over L.A.⁴ And an event like this wouldn't be complete without some example of ecumenism—this time in the form of Lou Engle prostrating himself to the ground to kiss the feet of Roman Catholic leader Matteo Calisi, appointed by Pope Benedict to serve on the Pontifical Council for the Laity.⁵

In fact, Azusa Now suffers badly from the same “Kingdom Now” teachings that so many previous events have taught. These NAR leaders are well known for holding Dominionist theology, and their beliefs drive these types of assemblies. They are seeking to network with other groups and leaders that share these beliefs.⁶ Specifically—along with the characteristic signs, wonders, and so-

² Ibid.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GC6sCweWaNl>

⁴ <http://www.charismanews.com/opinion/watchman-on-the-wall/56395-jeff-jansen-sees-huge-gold-angel-at-azusa-now>

⁵ <http://christiannews.net/2016/04/10/lou-engle-of-the-call-prostrates-himself-kisses-foot-of-catholic-leader-as-act-of-reconciliation/>

⁶ <http://herescope.blogspot.com/2016/02/7-mountain-politics-and-theology.html>

called prophetic words—this gathering also sought to emphasize ecumenism, as clearly demonstrated in this statement from the The Cry Movement's “Azusa Now” webpage:

“In our deeply divided world, perhaps the greatest miracle is love. Sadly, by 1916, the original Azusa Street Revival had officially ended. Segregation once again fractured the fragile unity of the Church, dividing God's children along the very same color lines previously and gloriously erased by the Holy Spirit. Even so, the flames of Azusa led to various renewal movements that spread like wildfire across the U.S. and abroad. Over the last 110 years, these movements have helped to produce more salvations than the previous 19 centuries combined! If the kingdom has expanded in spite of our division, how much more could it achieve in unity?”

We need a true jubilee of love and mercy to sweep our land. A dark question looms over our children's future: riots or revival? The only answer is to be found in Christ. Prayer, love and unity remain the Acts 2 template for breakthrough. On April 9, 2016, join a great multi-ethnic, multi-denominational, multi-generational assembly as we strike a match for awakening in our day. It's not just Azusa then. It's Azusa Now.”⁷

This type of all-inclusive spiritual undertaking, under the guise of ethnic, economical and/or denominational unity, is seemingly always being called for—or “prophesied”—as being on the proverbial doorstep. And while true Christian unity should be a heartfelt desire of all believers, the focus and the solution of the NAR always seems to be under the guise of some large-scale ecumenical movement that obliterates doctrine.

⁷ <http://thecrymovement.com/wp/azusanow/>

The biblical reality is that people are changed one by one when they are genuinely converted by Jesus Christ.

Is unity important? Absolutely! This was our Lord Jesus Christ's prayer in John 17, where He prayed for such unity among His followers (verses 20-23):

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me."⁸

Christian unity is firmly rooted in what Jesus prayed directly before these words. In verses 17-19 He prays to the Father:

"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth."⁹

Any kind of spiritual unity attempted through another "way" other than the Truth is doomed from the outset. How can Engle, Johnson, and the other NAR leaders speak of unity when they are willing to bow and kiss the feet of a Catholic? Where is the truth in that? I cannot walk hand in hand with people under the banner of Jesus Christ if they are worshipping another Jesus. Or, even if they claim to be worshipping the same Jesus that I am, but yet are contradicting the Word of God over and over again with their doctrines and practices, I cannot walk in unity with them. Paul spoke

strongly about this in his letter to the Galatians.

"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the Gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ."¹⁰

So ignoring the clear teaching of Scripture, and despite serious theological differences, the men and women who planned and led the Azusa Now event in L.A. have attempted to link arms in unity with those who preach another gospel.¹¹ For instance, read the words of Dean Briggs and note his blatant advocacy of ecumenism:

"In the invisible realm, intercessors of every stripe—evangelical, charismatic, Pentecostal and Catholic—felt the silver cord tremble in our hands. If prayerless vacuums have been responsible for eventually swallowing every previous revival, then the patient wisdom of God has been made plain. The Holy Spirit has preemptively architected a massive, global Worship-Prayer-and-Missions movement. Could this sustain the next wave in perpetuity unto His return?"¹²

Again, this cannot be the basis of unity! The early Church was unified as it

⁸ The New King James Version. (Jn 17:20-23)

⁹ The New King James Version. (Jn 17:17-19)

¹⁰ The New King James Version. (Ga 1:6-10)

¹¹ See documentation here:

<http://www.piratechristian.com/berean-examiner/azusa-redux-lou-engle-greg-laurie-uniting-denominations>

¹² <http://www.charismamag.com/spirit/prayer/25523-azusanow-the-power-of-the-silver-cord-between-heaven-and-earth>

*“continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”*¹³ Azusa Now fails horribly in this regard.

Nevertheless, I think the bigger question is whether a revival, or true work of God, can even be orchestrated and planned out like Azusa Now. This is, to me, the crux of the issue. Can we recreate sovereign moves of God? Well, Lou Engle states that this movement has been in the works for years in the short video he hosts on Bethel's “Azusa Now” page. Engle says that a “prophecy” was given in his living room that a “shift” would be coming to his ministry, stadiums would be filled, and that Billy Graham's “mantle” was coming on the nation.¹⁴

But this type of “prophecy” has been given many times before. I remember back in the 1990s when a host of TV evangelists and Latter Rain teachers spoke of filling stadiums with people that would supposedly come to the Lord by the thousands.¹⁵ This is not a new declaration. And while I would be the first in line with interceding for souls to be saved, a scheduled national “revival” is simply not something one can command God to do.¹⁶

Yes, we can seek the Lord for personal revival. We can renew our first love, as Jesus called the church as Ephesus to seek for, at any time. We can band together with other believers and pray for God to fill us afresh with His Holy Spirit, as the church at Ephesus was exhorted to do by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians

5:18. But this is a far cry from “declaring” or “decreeing” a supposed prophetic word from Almighty God that stadiums will be filled, and then schedule an appointed time for God to show up!

So often with these types of meetings the NAR/Latter Rain “prophets” introduce some spiritualized schedule and then ask God to bless it. This thinking is completely wrong. What we need to do is go to the Lord, in complete humility, and simply seek Him. He blesses His plan and His schedule, not ours.



But Azusa Now tried to manipulate the Sovereign Lord. They all tell Him when He should show up, performing signs and wonders for the spectators. This has been attempted many times by those in charismatic circles down through the years. And it always ends the same way, with a stadium filled with people clamoring for something “more”—anything—that might somehow “prove” that God actually came down in power and might.

I've witnessed this firsthand, observing men like Rodney Howard-Browne and Todd Bentley. And every time the so-called “signs and wonders” are poor excuses for genuine, biblical miracles. Someone is always healed of a migraine headache, or a sore back. A generic “word” is given that could apply to almost anyone for any reason. Or, if the operation is really sophisticated, some

¹³ The New King James Version. (Ac 2:42)

¹⁴ <http://bethelredding.com/calendar/azusa-now>

¹⁵ Read: <http://herescope.blogspot.com/2013/01/the-significance-of-youth-filled.html>

¹⁶ Read: <http://herescope.blogspot.com/2010/04/may-day-prayers.html>

information about specific people in the crowd may have been stealthily gleaned and then disseminated to an astounded audience. (Peter Popoff is an example that comes to mind, illustrating what I'm talking about.¹⁷) And, of course, in such orchestrated circumstances the person that gets up out of the wheelchair is never a true cripple.

Oh, don't get me wrong. I know the Lord does heal and perform miracles today. I know of legitimate, incredible healings and miracles. But I've never seen one at these types of events, and I've been to a lot of them over the last 35 years.¹⁸

So should we be declaring that God is going to bring a huge revival to us in a specific way, at a specific place, and at specific time—all of our own choosing—because that's where, when and how it happened last time?

I'm reminded of what A.W. Tozer said about such calls for revival:

“Our mistake is that we want God to send revival on our terms. We want to get the power of God into our hands, to call it to us that it may work for us in promoting and furthering our kind of Christianity. We want still to be in charge, guiding the chariot through the religious sky in the direction we want it to go, shouting ‘Glory to God,’ it is true, but modestly accepting a share of the glory for ourselves in a nice inoffensive sort of way. We are calling on God to send fire on our altars, completely ignoring the fact that they are our altars and not God’s. And like the prophets of Baal we are working ourselves into a

frenzy as if we could by violence command the arm of the Almighty.”¹⁹

Azusa Now is the poster child for everything Tozer said we should NOT do when it comes to revival.

Even still there is error in the Azusa Now phenomenon that is more profound than its silly “signs,” its rampant ecumenism, or its prophesying and then scheduling a national move of God. No, the deeper issue is in trying to duplicate a previous event in church history at all. What biblical rationale is there for attempting to re-create any spiritual undertakings outside of the pages of Scripture?

If we believe that the message of Pentecost, as defined in the book of Acts as well as the rest of the New Testament, is for today, why should we be trying to replicate some experience from 100 years ago? Such thinking is severely flawed, yet the Azusa Now crowd pushes this idea to the hilt. Lou Engle stated that

“William Seymour, the catalyst of that great revival, prophesied in 1913 that in roughly 100 years another revival far eclipsing Azusa would come. The fulfillment of Seymour's word is overdue... or right on schedule. Let us therefore ‘pray for the rain in the time of the latter rain.’ Who knows? Maybe like those who were baptized in the Spirit in the original Acts 2 upper room, we will say, ‘This is that which was spoken by William Seymour the prophet!’”²⁰

Imagine that! Instead of the prophet Joel and the Apostle Peter, people are going to William Seymour and putting alleged statements by him on the same level as the Word of God itself. What folly!

¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Popoff

¹⁸ For example, I wrote a 5-part series for Herescope blog titled “Lakeland’s Recycled Revival.” Click on earlier article sections links on the right hand column: http://herescope.blogspot.com/2008/06/lakelands-recycled-revival_20.html

¹⁹ A.W. Tozer, *The Size of the Soul* (Camp Hill, PA: Wingspread, 1992), 5.

²⁰ Elijah List Email Update dated March 30, 2016.

And the truth of the matter is there's no reason for such a statement or mindset. Read again what Peter said on the day of Pentecost nearly 2,000 years ago:

“But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

*“And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your young men shall see visions,
Your old men shall dream dreams.
And on My menservants and on My maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days;
And they shall prophesy.
I will show wonders in heaven above
And signs in the earth beneath:
Blood and fire and vapor of smoke.
The sun shall be turned into darkness,
And the moon into blood,
Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.
And it shall come to pass
That whoever calls on the name of the Lord
Shall be saved.”²¹*

Note that Peter links the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to the “last days.” And he states that the culmination of the Last Days is “*the great and awesome day of the Lord.*” The conclusion to Joel's prophecy has clearly not taken place yet. The sun has not been turned into darkness and the moon has not turned into blood (in spite of some predictions to the contrary of recent). This is a reference to the end of the tribulation period and the ultimate return of Jesus Christ at Armageddon (Rev. 19). And since we haven't seen those events occur, this means we are still in the “last days” that actually began at Pentecost. And this, in turn, means that God is still

saving “*whoever calls on the name of the Lord*” and baptizing people in His Holy Spirit.

Nothing has changed in almost 2,000 years. It is ongoing. Pentecost has never stopped! It continues today. What we have often called national revivals—whether it be the 1st Great Awakening, the 2nd Great Awakening, the original Azusa Street Revival, etc.—are nothing more and nothing less than the ongoing work of God pouring out His Spirit in these “last days.”

So why would we try to duplicate any subsequent revival or awakening that takes place beyond the biblical history that is written in the New Testament? There are a couple of problems with this line of thinking. Firstly, as I've noted previously a prior event may or may not have been genuine. It's as simple as that. Maybe it was and maybe it wasn't. And secondly, and just as importantly, there is no need to do so because God has not changed, and His program continues because we are still in the “last days.”

Yet Azusa Now was aiming at the tens of thousands! The “big one” as they say when referencing both earthquakes and heart attacks. They have even claimed that a “Second Pentecost” of a “Presence” is coming.²²

It is true that thousands were added to the true Church on the day of Pentecost. And after that we are told “*the Lord added to the Church daily those who were being saved*” (Acts 2:47). From that initial ingathering of souls we read in Acts that numerous people in Samaria

²² See Dr. Orrel Steinkamp's report: <http://herescope.blogspot.com/2014/05/a-second-pentecost.html> and read the 6-part article series “The Passion of the Presence” that begins here: <http://herescope.blogspot.com/2014/01/the-passion-of-presence.html>

²¹ The New King James Version. (Ac 2:16–21).

were saved and then filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 8); individuals were also saved one by one, such as the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8) and Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9); and that small gatherings of people were saved (Acts 10) and filled with the Spirit (Acts 19). But neither settings nor numbers were important in the biblical narrative. And I read of no occasion when any of the disciples planned out or announced far in advance that stadiums of people in specific locations would be saved. No, they simply went about their business of being led by the Spirit of God and proclaiming the Gospel to any and all the encountered.

I'd also note that nowhere in the New Testament do we ever read of Peter, John, James, Paul, or any one else trying to duplicate the day of Pentecost. At no time were they insisting that people from outside of Jerusalem come back to the city and reassemble in the same upper room.²³ Nowhere were they insisting that the "tongues of fire" that initially came down on the 120 be expected or encouraged. Rather, we read in Scripture that men and women who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ also trusted God for His promise to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

That's it. No theatrics. No orchestrations. No priming people to expect specific "signs and wonders," as was being claimed in the advertisements for Azusa Now.

What does the Bible teach? Simply repent, believe in Jesus, and then be filled with His Spirit.

I heard a story awhile back from a minister who mentioned meeting with a

small group of Christians in a mountain village in a country in Asia. He asked them a thought-provoking question that I think applies to the Azusa Now movement. He saw that the Lord was blessing this small group in a far away land, with no real technology or modern "evangelistic" know-how, and asked them what they thought of the Church in America. Their answer surprised him (and me). They told him that as best they could tell the Church in America seems to always develop an agenda on how they will get the work of the Lord done and then afterwards ask God to bless their plan. These small village believers, on the other hand, go to God with nothing and simply ask Him what His agenda is, in full accordance with His revealed will already outlined in the Scriptures, and then carry it out in His wisdom, power and strength. That's all they needed to make a difference in their village.

And that's still true for us today. God has already given us His agenda in His Word. And He's given us the power to accomplish it by pouring out the Holy Spirit that we might be witnesses for Him. There's no manipulating or planning out mighty moves of God on some regional, national or international level. At times He sovereignly does this as He wills. But we can't plan it!

Azusa Now? No. Azusa later or yet to come? No. How about a new and improved Pentecost now? No. Is God still doing the same thing He's been doing since the day of Pentecost? Absolutely! And that's where I'll keep my focus—on God's Word and in lifting up Jesus Christ. I pray you do as well.

²³ <http://herescope.blogspot.com/2006/02/geographical-heresies-of-new-apostolic.html>