

1-1-1974

Trance: From Africa to Pentecostalism

David M. Beckmann

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Beckmann, David M. (1974) "Trance: From Africa to Pentecostalism," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 45, Article 4.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol45/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

Trance: From Africa to Pentecostalism

David M. Beckmann

The author, a student at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, studied indigenous religious movements in Asia and Africa during 1969–70 as a John Courtney Murray Fellow of Yale University. His book about indigenous churches in Ghana, *Eden Revival*, is in the process of publication. Observations of indigenous Afro-American churches in the Caribbean during 1971 were made possible by a partial grant from the World Mission Institute of Concordia Seminary.

Pentecostalism began at the turn of the century, at first a religious oddity nearly confined to the poor of this country. Now Pentecostalism is a formidable force in American religion. Pastors of traditionally non-Pentecostal churches are often confronted by members of their own congregations who "speak in tongues." The movement has spread to most of the nations of the world, and altogether it may include 25 to 35 million Christians.¹

This burgeoning movement is usually understood as a 20th-century extension of white revivalistic Protestantism: Wesleyanism in England, the Great Awakenings in this country, more revivalism in the 19th century, and the Holiness movement. This article argues that speaking in tongues, the most dramatic innovation of Pentecostalism, has more important Afro-American and African antecedents.

Pentecostalism has other characteristics: faith healing, spirited music, certain theologies, a typical piety. This article, however, focuses on speaking in tongues, the movement's most distinctive feature. Occasionally a Pentecostal may speak in an actual language unknown to him, but Felicitas Goodman's linguistic analysis has shown that a Pentecostal utterance is usually a repetitive string of syllables, similar from one utterance to the next, entirely unlike ordinary language.

Speaking in tongues is a trance experience. A person in his ordinary state of mind has difficulty even mimicking speaking in tongues. By "trance" I mean an altered state of consciousness accompanied by agitation or activity. In trance as in other altered states of consciousness such as dreams and daydreams, visions and mystic experiences, the person's normal orientation to reality temporarily fades. Trance should be distinguished from these quiet states of mind, however. Entranced activity might be speaking or singing, twitching or rolling, dancing or convulsing, but by definition there must be activity.²

This essay argues that trance, of which speaking in tongues is a stylized form, is a gift which Afro-Americans brought with them into Christianity. This thesis is based on six points which this essay will seek to prove:

1. Outside the Christian tradition the religious cult in which trance is sought as evidence of spirit possession is characteristic only of African culture. Trance in African cults is strikingly similar to trance in American Christianity.
2. Within the Christian tradition there were only a few minor instances of trance attributed to the Holy Spirit before the Second Great Awakening. Trance was usually attributed to demons.

¹ Walter J. Hollenweger, *Black Pentecostal Concepts* (Geneva, 1970), p. 9.

² Goodman, *Speaking in Tongues* (Chicago and London, 1972), pp. 58-60.

3. The widespread occurrence of trance during the Second Great Awakening was associated with the first major successes in evangelism among Afro-American slaves.
4. Some of the earliest documents of Afro-American religion report the continued incidence of trance.
5. Pentecostalism began in a revival among Afro-Americans.
6. Pentecostal missions have generally been best received in those parts of the world most influenced by Africa.

I

Outside the Christian tradition the religious cult in which trance is sought as evidence of spirit possession is characteristic only of African culture. Trance in African cults is strikingly similar to trance in American Christianity.

Erika Bourguignon gathered data on trance experience and belief in spirit possession from 488 representative societies all over the world, excepting the Judeo-Christian tradition.³ She found that trance and possession need not be associated. In our own culture, for example, hypnotic trance is understood as a psychological change, not spirit possession. Among traditional societies where trance is not understood as spirit possession it is most often interpreted as soul absence. Belief in possession, moreover, need not be associated with trance. For example, in many cultures spirit possession is thought to manifest itself in illness.

Bourguignon categorizes the trance experienced in some 19th-century revivalistic religion and 20th-century Pentecostalism as a form of "possession." This anthropological terminology seems strained in speaking of Christian trance, because the Spirit of Jesus is too gentle to overpower

devotees as do many other spirits. On the other hand, the 19th-century revivalists who experienced trance certainly took it as special evidence of the Holy Spirit with themselves, and most 20th-century Pentecostals consider speaking in tongues to be necessary evidence of the Spirit's indwelling presence. This can rightly be categorized as "possession" belief for purposes of comparison.

Bourguignon reports that among traditional societies in the world trance is most frequently interpreted as spirit possession in Africa and areas influenced by Africa. Cult groups in which trance is encouraged and understood as spirit possession appear throughout Africa, in the Afro-American Caribbean region, and in the North African Islamic area.

Elsewhere she found nothing so similar to trance in its modern Christian contexts. In the Islamic cultural area she found brotherhoods where trance is sought through meditation, breathing exercises, and self-torture; such means are used to stimulate trance neither in Africa nor in American Christian groups. She also found belief in possession by jinns, sometimes evidenced by trance; jinn possession, however, is thought to cause disease, and the jinns are sometimes expelled by flagellation. Similarly, in India possession-trance is most often associated with disease; the object is to get the spirit out, and beatings may be used. Northern Asia is characterized by classical shamanism—soul-loss illness, possession illness, shamanistic trances which are interpreted as possession by various spirits or the absence of one of the shaman's souls. This pattern of Asiatic shamanism extends from China into Hungary, Finland, and Lapland. Among North American Indians noninspirational shamanism seems to have been the dominant pattern; apparently possession belief and trance experience were both rare. Trance does occur in

³ "World Distribution and Patterns of Possession States," *Trance and Possession States*, ed. Raymond Prince (Montreal, 1968), pp. 3-34.

South American Indian religion, especially in Chile and Argentina, but it is not connected with possession belief. There is no impersonation, but rather a heightened sense of the trancer's own powers. Bourguignon's work shows that the possession-trance cult, paralleled within Christianity by some 19th-century revivalism and 20th-century Pentecostalism, is a predominantly African cultural configuration.

Possession-trance in Africa often includes the same two types of glossolalia found in Pentecostalism. One is rhythmic, alliterative pseudo-language. The other is actual foreign language; in most cases the person possessed has had previous contact with the language, even though he may be unable to speak it in his normal state of mind. According to L. Carlyle May's survey of anthropological literature, outside Pentecostalism these two types of glossolalia are characteristic only of northern Asia and Africa.⁴ It seems, however, that glossolalia did not survive as part of the trance experience of Afro-American Christians during the 19th century. It needed to be reintroduced with a Christian rationalization at the beginning of the Pentecostal movement in this century.

Most American slaves were taken from the west coast of Africa.⁵ The first section of *Spirit Mediumship and Society in Africa*, edited by John Beattie and John Middleton, discusses possession-trance in a variety of traditional West African contexts.⁶ There are differences in the forms and meanings of trance in different West African situations. One spirit descends on a certain day each year, for exam-

ple, while another spirit comes down unexpectedly from time to time. There are some general characteristics of trance in West Africa, however, and most of them are also characteristics of trance in its modern Christian contexts. Trance is understood as an affirmation of divine presence and an opportunity to get divine help. All kinds of people can be possessed, but women predominate. The initial trance is often preceded by personal troubles. It is usually violent; it takes experience to conform trance to social norms. In West Africa trance is public and theatrical; Pentecostals also use trance in private devotion, following St. Paul's advice (1 Cor. 14:18-19). When a person is possessed in West Africa, he often takes on the personality of the god. If the god is envisioned as a crippled man, for example, the possessed person will probably limp. A person may be possessed by several gods in succession and undergo several personality changes. This is impossible in monotheistic religion, but there is a sense that those in whom the Holy Spirit is active will take on the personality of Jesus.

II

Within the Christian tradition there were only a few minor instances of trance attributed to the Holy Spirit before the Second Great Awakening. Trance was usually attributed to demons.

According to T. K. Oesterreich's pioneering study, trance was rare in the ancient civilizations which were to contribute most to the Judeo-Christian tradition.⁷ The Babylonians and Assyrians wrote about demon possession, but they associated it with illness, not trance. There are only obscure references to trance among the ancient Egyptians. Among the Greeks trance was cultivated at several oracles, notably Delphos, and later

⁴ "A Survey of Glossolalia and Related Phenomena in Non-Christian Religions," *American Anthropologist*, XLVIII (1956), 75-93.

⁵ Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston, 1941), pp. 33-53.

⁶ (New York, 1969), pp. 3-66.

⁷ *Possession: Demoniacal and Other*, trans. D. Ibberson (New Hyde Park, N. Y., 1966), pp. 147-56 and 311-48.

in the imported cults of Dionysos and Cybele.

Evidence of trance is also scanty in the Old Testament. Some prophets saw visions and heard auditions; perhaps a few experienced trances too. Ezekiel wrote of being thrown to the ground, lifted up, and carried from place to place by the Spirit. The prophets of Baal evidently danced themselves into frenzy (1 Kings 18); Elijah, by contrast, prayed quietly to the Lord. The clearest example of prophetic trance is Saul; when he prophesied he was "turned into another man," stripped off his clothes, and lay naked before Samuel for hours afterward (1 Sam. 10 and 19). Saul was also tormented from time to time by an evil spirit (1 Sam. 16 and 18), perhaps the lone example of demoniacal possession-trance in the Old Testament.

The New Testament includes several references to "speaking in tongues," which seems to have been a trance experience. It is evident from 1 Cor. 12-14 that speaking in tongues was prominent in that congregation and that Paul himself had the "gift." Those who spoke in tongues would have been considered "mad" by an outsider. Paul says of the experience that "the spirit prays, but the mind is unfruitful," implying that normal thinking processes were temporarily arrested. In the Book of Acts speaking in tongues is associated with the reception of the Holy Spirit on three occasions: Pentecost (2:4), when the first Gentile is converted (10:46), and when some disciples of John the Baptist receive the Spirit (19:6). In both 1 Corinthians and Acts speaking in tongues is closely associated with prophecy; some of the early Christian prophets may have been entranced when they spoke.

Trance, including speaking in tongues, continued into patristic Christianity, but already in the second century some fathers of the church

warned that trance was a sign of false prophecy. Montanus and a few of his assistants cultivated trance, delivered inspired prophecies, and perhaps spoke in tongues. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons at the end of the second century, described a pretended Christian prophet named Marcus who used his gift to seduce women; he convinced them that they could share his spiritual power through sexual intercourse. Heretics like Montanus and scoundrels like Marcus probably precipitated the cessation of trance as an element of Christian piety. By the end of the fourth century it was a thing of the past. Chrysostom, well traveled in the East, then wrote that tongues "used to occur but no longer take place." Augustine, well traveled in the West, concurred: "These signs were adapted to the times."⁸

It was the darker interpretation of trance, demon possession, which proved more tenacious. The synoptic gospels and the Book of Acts firmly established the connection between trance and demons. They sometimes attribute physical ailments, like dumbness or blindness, to demons (Matt. 9:32; 12:22). They sometimes attribute supernatural knowledge (Mark 1:23-24; Acts 16:16) or frightening power (Mark 5:3-4) to demons. But they always attribute the loss of normal consciousness and violent motor activity to demons (Mark 1:21-28 and Luke 4:31-37; Mark 5:1-20 and Luke 8:26-39; Matt. 17:14-21, Mark 9:14-28, and Luke 9:37-43; Acts 19:13-17).

Christians of the patristic period gained a reputation as exorcists. There were Jewish and pagan exorcists

⁸ E. Glenn Hinson, "A Brief History of Glossolalia," in *Glossolalia*, by Frank Stagg, E. Glenn Hinson, and Wayne E. Oates (Nashville and New York, 1967), pp. 47-56; Johannes Leipoldt, "Die Fruehgeschichte der Lehre von der goettlichen Eingebung," *ZNW* 44 (1952-53), 118-45, trans. by Karl Reko.

too, but the Christian literature of the time bristles with references to demon possession. Zeno of Verona, writing in the fourth century, describes in typical fashion a demon-possessed man:

His face is suddenly deprived of color, his body rises up of itself, the eyes in madness roll in their sockets and squint horribly, the teeth, covered with a horrible foam, grind between blue-white lips, the limbs twisted in all directions are given over to trembling, he sighs . . . and complains that he is driven out.⁹

The same pattern of demon possession was repeated again and again through the Middle Ages and into the present. Oesterreich catalogs numerous cases of demon possession from antiquity into modern times. In some periods demon possession was more common than in others, but it has always been characterized by the loss of normal consciousness, agony, writhings, and shocking conversation.

Oesterreich lists 23 instances of demon possession epidemics; most of them occurred in convents or monasteries, and none of them involved more than a few dozen people.¹⁰ The dance epidemics which plagued Europe from the seventh to the 16th century were a related phenomenon; the painful mania was probably caused by ergot poisoning, but the convulsions were interpreted as demon possession.¹¹ The Salem witch trials of the early 17th century were also related; the girls attacked by witches would lose normal consciousness, shout, and sometimes fall into convulsions.¹²

There is no record of trance attributed to the Holy Spirit in the

Middle Ages. The heretics of the late Middle Ages were sometimes "enthusiasts," but only in the sense that they believed in continuing revelation; they did not prophesy in trances.¹³ Instead, the meditative tradition of mysticism flowered. Pseudo-Dionysius first combined Christianity with neo-Platonism in the fifth century, and his system was developed by a long line of Christian mystics, including such notables as Bernard, Catherine, and Eckhardt. Mystics may reach an altered state of consciousness, but the climax of mysticism, unlike trance, is in absolute stillness.

The Illuminati of 16th-century Spain, condemned as heretics, may have experienced trance when they trembled and stuttered during prayer. Some of the early Quakers—only at the very beginning of the movement—would tremble, fall, even vomit while reputedly under the influence of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴

Trance appeared in two very different Christian movements of 18th-century France.¹⁵ A group of Huguenots, the Camisards, were stirred to rebellion by hundreds of entranced child preachers. These children reputedly did miracles, spoke languages they had never learned, and foretold the future. A child preacher would fall down, his stomach and throat would swell, and entranced he would vent his prophecy. The Camisard revolt was crushed in 1701, but some exiles settled in England. They may have been a factor leading to the outbreak of trance under John Wesley's preaching; and they definitely influenced Ann Lee, who later founded the Shakers.

Trance also appeared among the Jansenists, a French group of archaizing Roman Catholics. Healing

⁹ Oesterreich, *Possession*, p. 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 188-89.

¹¹ E. Louis Backman, *Religious Dances in the Christian Church and in Popular Medicine*, trans. E. Classen (London, 1952), pp. 170-327.

¹² Chadwick Hansen, *Witchcraft at Salem* (New York, 1969), pp. 12-29.

¹³ R. A. Knox, *Enthusiasm* (Oxford, 1950), pp. 71-116.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 150, 241.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 356-73.

miracles took place at the tomb of a man many Jansenists thought to have been a saint, and in 1731-32 cures were accompanied by convulsions. The cemetery finally became crowded with people rolling, leaping, shaking, and dancing. The "convulsionaries" barked and spoke in tongues. They performed pious plays, childish stunts, and feats of seemingly superhuman strength. When officials closed the cemetery, many of the "convulsionaries" continued to meet secretly.

The Quakers, Camisards, and "convulsionaries" were tiny movements at the fringes of society. Trance experience moved slightly closer to respectability through John Wesley. It began in Bristol, England, in the spring of 1739. Some Camisards had settled there; perhaps they had some effect. John Wesley himself had visited a Camisard prophet in January 1739. He thought her trance might have been "hysterical or artificial" and was unsure whether it was from God or not.¹⁶ When his own hearers responded with similar symptoms several months later, however, he was more sympathetic.

On April 17 several repentant sinners cried out in pain; the congregation prayed until they experienced the joy of forgiveness. On April 26 during a sermon "one, and another, and another sunk to the earth; they dropped on every side as thunder-struck."¹⁷ Prayer and song brought them to the comfort of new life in Christ. Wesley was surprised, but he was willing to allow God the use of such amazing means to accomplish His purposes. Shouting, falling, and even convulsions continued to punctuate the revival at Bristol, and in the years following John Wesley and other revivalists sometimes provoked similar entranced responses elsewhere in

¹⁶ John Wesley, *Journal*, ed. Nehemiah Curnock, II (London, 1938), 136-37 (Jan. 28, 1739).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 180 ff.

England and the American colonies.

In order to appreciate the later contribution of Afro-Americans two points must be made. First, trance was still an extraordinary and comparatively rare event. The response of most of John Wesley's converts was nothing more than "warmth" and "earnestness." Only a few would shout, faint, or fall. Convulsions, holy laughing, and other spectacles were highly remarkable. Trance-like phenomena occurred mostly at Bristol in 1739 and in the first few years afterward. Revivalists were of divided opinions about them; John Wesley and, more moderately, Jonathon Edwards defended them, while Charles Wesley and George Whitefield disapproved. Second, even John Wesley usually interpreted trance not as evidence of the Spirit's presence but as the last throes of the devil. Sometimes he understood shouting or falling as evidence of strong Christian feeling, but more often he understood them as violent struggles toward repentance preceding a sinner's peace with God.¹⁸ These two qualifications do not denigrate the historical importance of these early instances of Christian trance. Other aspects of African religion were totally suppressed, but these instances of trance in 18th-century revivals prepared the way for popular tolerance of this element of the black religious heritage.

For the sake of completeness, it is necessary to mention the Shakers. Their leader, Ann Lee, and others among them had been influenced by Quakers, Camisards, and Methodists. They experienced trances, shook their heads and limbs in worship, saw lights in the sky, and heard heavenly voices. Ann Lee, who came to believe she was the female Christ, led the Shakers from Manchester, England, to the wilderness of New York. They were an isolated oddity on the American

¹⁸ Knox, *Enthusiasm*, pp. 520-35.

frontier. After the Second Great Awakening was well under way, they heard news of the "exercises" at camp meetings and sent missionaries to gather part of the revival harvest into their own sect.¹⁹

III

The widespread occurrence of trance during the Second Great Awakening was associated with the first major successes in evangelism among Afro-American slaves.

Black people formed a large part of this country's early population. In 1790, according to the first national census, a fifth of the country's population was black. Much of the African religious heritage must have survived. Few blacks were converted to Christianity before the 19th century. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, the Moravians, and the Roman Catholic Church made some early mission attempts, but with little success.²⁰ A few free Negroes in the North were Christians, but slaves only began converting to Christianity in significant numbers during the Second Great Awakening at the turn of the 19th century. Then, for the first time, significant numbers of Afro-Americans became Christians and, at the same time, trance exploded into Christianity on an unprecedented scale.

For the most part the emotion of the First Great Awakening in this country had been no more than intensity of conviction, but revivalistic Protestants were out to convert the world, including Afro-American slaves. As revival spread to the South—to large numbers of blacks—during the Second Great Awakening, it came to include trance reminiscent of Africa. Baptists and Methodists, among whom trances were most prominent, were

willing to accept slaves as Christian brothers; by about 1800 blacks formed approximately one fourth of both Baptist and Methodist memberships in the United States.²¹

The Separate Baptists of Virginia and North Carolina were the first American group to encourage trance in Christian worship. Observers of the local Baptist revival of the late 1760s and 1770s were bewildered at the gesticulations, darting eyes and "holy whine" of the Separate Baptist preachers. Congregations normally responded with fits and falling, sometimes visions. Is it coincidental that the Separate Baptists were also notable for their success among slaves? Antislavery feeling was strong among the early Baptists, and slaveholders in the Cumberland protested to the Virginia legislature that Baptists were secretly organizing night meetings to instruct slaves in Christianity.²²

There followed a revival among the Methodists of Virginia in the early 1770s. As one local preacher admitted, the same "excesses" took place in Methodist churches:

I have no doubt that the work now carrying on is genuine: yet there are some circumstances attending it which I disliked—such as loud cries, tremblings, fallings, convulsions.²³

The early Methodists were generally opposed to slavery too, and nearly all Methodist congregations in Virginia were racially mixed.

In 1785–88 there was a brief interdenominational revival in and around

²¹ Charles C. Jones, *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes* (Savannah, 1842), p. 53.

²² William Warren Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier*, I (New York, 1964), 70-88; John B. Boles, *The Great Revival 1787-1805* (Lexington, 1972), p. 7.

²³ A letter from Devereaux Jarret (May 7, 1776) excerpted in Francis Asbury, "A Brief Narrative of the Revival of Religion in Virginia," *Journal*, ed. Elmer T. Clark, J. Manning Potts, and Jacob S. Payton, I (London and Nashville, 1958), p. 213.

¹⁹ Edward Deming Andrews, *The People Called Shakers* (New York, 1963), pp. 3-34 and 71-74.

²⁰ See articles in the *Journal of Negro History* (October 1917, July 1923, and January 1961).

Virginia which also included various forms of trance. These successive revivals in Virginia gathered momentum in preparation for the more exuberant Kentucky camp meetings at the turn of the century. The great majority of Kentucky settlers were from Virginia.

The outbreak of unfettered trance that was to reshape American Christianity began in a small way in Logan County, Ky., spread through a series of camp meetings in the Cumberland, and climaxed at Cane Ridge, near Lexington, in 1801. Nearly a tenth of Kentucky's population attended the camp meeting at Cane Ridge. Thousands were converted. Even more amazing were the extreme forms of trance witnessed there. Some of the converted jerked spasmodically, laughed "holy laughs," or "barked." Others danced hysterically, shouted, or sobbed. Some people jumped in the air. Others writhed on the ground or lay quiet and insensible. Although less disciplined, it was reminiscent of possession at West African shrines, but now trance was being attributed to the Holy Spirit's work. Small bands of Christians all over the South had been praying for revival, and news of Cane Ridge inspired the Second Great Awakening. Similar camp meetings were held in Tennessee, North Carolina, Georgia, southern Ohio Territory, western Pennsylvania, and Maryland.

Historians have long debated the origins of the physical exercises that characterized the Second Great Awakening. Only Melville Herskovits pointed to black influence. John B. Boles' *The Great Revival 1787-1805* is the most enlightening study available, but he specifically confines his scope to "white Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians."²⁴

There were also large numbers of

²⁴ Herskovits, *The Myth*, pp. 230-32; Boles, p. vii.

blacks active during the Awakening. The slaves of Kentucky could be especially influential. There were far fewer slaves in Kentucky than elsewhere in the South, but they were more respected and in more intimate contact with their masters. In the upper South generally, but especially in Kentucky, a high proportion of slaves were skilled or domestic workers. There were no large plantations in early Kentucky, so slaves worked side by side with their masters. Because of antislavery feeling among many whites in Kentucky, slaves were relatively well treated and well educated. The white people in Kentucky were different, too: unsettled, younger, more open to change.²⁵

Slaves were regular members of the congregations that prepared for the Awakening. For example, three of the 26 charter members of Fork of Elkhorn Baptist Church were slaves. According to the minutes of that typical little congregation, blacks and whites were disciplined in the same way, and whites were sometimes disciplined for mistreating slaves. Minutes from the Elkhorn Baptist Association in the decades before the Awakening reveal great soul-searching over the slavery question.²⁶

Benjamin Lakin, a circuit rider in Kentucky and Tennessee, wrote in his journal:

This evening my soul was fill'd with love while I had some conversation with a Black man about the dealings of God with his soul. He spake so feelingly and powerfull of the work of Grace on his soul that it much affected me.²⁷

Lakin spent the final years of his ministry in Versailles, Ky. He wrote in one sentence of livelier meetings there and successes among blacks, apparently without imagining the con-

²⁵ J. Winston Coleman, *Slavery Times in Kentucky* (Chapel Hill, 1940), pp. 3-84.

²⁶ Sweet, *Religion*, I, 25-51 and 420-23.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, IV, 212.

nection between the presence of slaves and the "shouting" that shocked some of his members.²⁸

The journal of Bishop Richard Whatcoat, another circuit rider, mentions only one time that a person fell down at conversion; it was a black man.²⁹ Every time Whatcoat noted the presence of blacks at a meeting he also wrote that it was "a powerful meeting" or "a time of refreshing."

There were many blacks at Cane Ridge, too. An eyewitness wrote that the crowds at Cane Ridge were clustered about every 100 yards to hear different preachers,

and about 150 yards in a south course from the house was an assembly of black people, hearing the exhortations of the blacks.

One man's letter to a friend reporting some results of the Cane Ridge meeting in Lexington included this note:

It is with pleasure I inform you, 58 were baptized at Bryant's yesterday—from 8th February to 8th March, 120 have been added to that church, among whom were a number of our acquaintance, and several poor black people, some of whose experiences have astonished me. This is the work of the Lord, and it is marvellous in our eyes.³⁰

Blacks had an independent role at nearly all camp meetings. They would set up their own camps behind the white preacher's rostrum. At least at one camp meeting an official tried without success to convince the blacks that "convulsive outbursts [were] wrong, and disturbing to themselves and others." At the early camp meetings the black services often mingled with those of the whites, adding to the excitement. At later, more staid meetings a partition was usually erected to separate the races until the last night; then the wall would come down, the curfew for blacks would be

²⁸ Ibid., IV, 258-60.

²⁹ Ibid., IV, 77.

³⁰ Ibid., I, 610 f.

suspended, and the frenzy would reach its climax.

By 1830 genuinely frenzied camp meetings were, for the most part, a thing of the past. Trance evidently continued as part of the piety of many blacks and some lower-class whites, but most clerical support for trance ended at nearly the same time as did the antislavery sentiment among Southern Baptists and Methodists. The number of Christian slaves continued to increase, but no longer were they welcomed into integrated congregations. New converts were being made on plantations in the deep South, where paternalistic missionaries worked together with plantation owners to rid the slaves of their "primitive" past. Charles C. Jones wrote *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes* in 1842 to plead the cause of this work. He claimed that the Negroes were in a horrible moral and spiritual condition:

True religion they are inclined to place in *profession*, in *forms and ordinances*, and in *excited states of feeling*. And *true conversion*, in *dreams, visions, trances, voices*.³¹

During the middle period of the 19th century Christian slaves either worshiped in special sections at the back of white churches or by themselves under strict supervision. According to former slaves interviewed after the War Between the States, many of them also worshiped covertly in their own manner.

IV

Some of the earliest documents of Afro-American religion report the continued incidence of trance.

Reconstructing the black lineage of Pentecostalism is like putting together a puzzle from which a third of the pieces have been lost or hidden. We have almost no records of African or Afro-American culture from the

³¹ (Savannah), p. 126.

17th or 18th centuries, and those written in the 19th century are often superficial and bigoted. Only after patiently examining each bit of scattered evidence does the overall picture become clear.

Early travelers' tales included superficial observations, and abolitionist publications gave biased information about slave life, especially its crueler aspects. The first reliable documents of Afro-American religion were published later, mostly after the War Between the States and mostly by northern preachers and teachers. They found a rich array of African folklore intact. They found a system of folk medicine, similar to the type of medicine traditionally practiced in Africa. There were good medicines to help oneself, bad medicines to harm enemies. A conjure doctor could charm a person for evil, and in such cases that person might seem entranced. An article in the 1891 *Journal of American Folklore*, for example, reported a conjured girl who "became hysterical very suddenly and seemed to show symptoms of insanity."³²

They also found a distinctive black religiosity, often including trance. The conversation of many freedmen was punctuated by religious references and visionary imagery. After the war virtually all blacks chose to worship in their own churches, where services were highly emotional, sustained by spirituals and dramatic sermons, often swelling into trance, sometimes climaxing in "holy dance."

In 1863 the Rev. Charles A. Raymond published an early account of black religion in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. He wrote in detail about the times he discovered Sarah, his own house slave, entranced. In one instance he found her alone in her cabin:

Gazing forward with a far-reaching, glaring vision, she commenced, slowly

raising her hands and bringing the palms gently together, ejaculating, "O Jesus! O Jesus!" the repetitions increasing in quickness with each utterance. When she had thus reached the climax of rapidity in her ejaculations, she suddenly clapped her hands above her head with great violence, and with a loud shout of "O Jesus!" and a high leap from the doorstep of the cabin, she broke for the grove, hands clapping and shouts meanwhile continuing.³³

Sarah was proud of her "mazes," as she called them, but Raymond was appalled and treated her harshly. Elsewhere he writes of observing several black congregations on the verge of "convulsions," but the preachers, cognizant of white intolerance, restrained them.

Miss Elizabeth Kilham, a white schoolteacher, described her harrowing visit to "Old Billy's church" for *Putnam's Monthly* in 1870:

Men stamped, groaned, shouted, clapped their hands; women shrieked and sobbed, two or three tore off their bonnets and threw them across the church, trampled their shawls under foot, and sprang into the air, it seemed almost to their own height, again and again, until they fell exhausted, and were carried to one side, where they lay stiff and rigid like the dead. No one paid them any farther attention, but wilder grew the excitement, louder the shrieks, more violent the stamping, while through and above it all,—over and over again,—each time faster and louder,—rose the refrain, "Jesus said He wouldn't die no more!"³⁴

In conversations with her students and other blacks it became clear to Miss Kilham that trance was the definitive experience of Christianity for most.

³³ "The Religious Life of the Negro Slave," pp. 816-820.

³⁴ Bruce Jackson, ed., *The Negro and His Folklore in Nineteenth Century Periodicals* (Austin and London, 1967), pp. 127-28.

³² "Concerning Negro Sorcery in the United States," *Journal of American Folklore*, IV (1890), 281-87.

William E. Barton reported a similar church service in Kentucky for *New England Magazine* in 1899:

In the earlier demonstrations the men rather lead, but from the time when Aunt Melinda cries out "Nebbah mind de wite folks! my soul's happy! Hallelujah!" and leaps into the air, the men are left behind. Women go off into trances, roll under benches, or go spinning down the aisle with eyes closed and with arms outstretched. Each shout of the preacher is the signal for some one else to start; and, strange to say, though there are two posts in the aisle, and though the women go spinning down like tops, I never saw one strike the post . . . I have seen an old man stand in the aisle and jump eighty-nine times after I began to count, and without moving a muscle of his thin, parchment-like face, and without disturbing the meeting.³⁵

Later recollections confirm the evidence of contemporary documents. Booker T. Washington, for example, recalled that in his hometown young men had been called to the ministry by sudden trances.³⁶ Interviews with former slaves also point back to the importance of trance, often called "shouting," in 19th-century black piety.³⁷

W. E. B. DuBois' *The Negro Church* reveals that trance was still a vital element in black religion at the turn of the century, despite the efforts of some educated black clergymen. A contributor from a "black belt" county in Georgia sadly reported that "the great shout, accompanied with weird cries and shrieks and contortions" was still predominant in nearly all the black churches there.³⁸

It should be noted that some rural whites in the South included trance

in their piety too and that many blacks did not. C. C. White, an elderly black preacher in Texas, told his biographer of only one mild instance of trance he recalled in a church setting during his childhood. When the first Pentecostal church started in his area, the black Baptist preachers tried to run them out. It was said Pentecostals could conjure a person, which indicates that trance was familiar to these people only in a demonic context.³⁹

In the few records we have of 19th-century black religion I have yet to find evidence that anyone spoke in tongues. The Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.) claims to be "America's oldest Pentecostal church" on the basis of a recollection of some type of glossolalia which occurred at a revival among poor rural whites in Cherokee County, N. C., in 1896. There was apparently shouting, weeping, dancing, glossolalia, and yet more tumultuous forms of trance during this backwoods revival. The practice of speaking in tongues was then discontinued, however, and probably would have been forgotten had it not been revived after contact with the Azusa Street revival of 1906.⁴⁰ It is not improbable that there were other incidents of glossolalia among illiterate, often isolated blacks and whites in the rural South of which we do not know since the vast majority of these people left little record of their religious practices.

V

Pentecostalism began in a revival among Afro-Americans.

The Great Awakening set the mold for American Protestantism. During the 19th century there were successive revivals, notably that led by Finney in

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

³⁶ *Up from Slavery* (Boston, 1928), p. 82.

³⁷ Charles S. Johnson and A. P. Watson, *God Struck Me Dead* (Philadelphia and Boston, 1969), pp. 75 and 114.

³⁸ (Atlanta, 1903), p. 58.

³⁹ C. C. White and Ada Morehead, *No Quittin' Sense* (Austin and London, 1969), pp. 8 and 123.

⁴⁰ Charles W. Conn, *Like a Mighty Army* (Cleveland, Tenn., 1955), pp. 1-85.

the first half of the century and that led by Moody at the end of the century. During the Holiness movement the theology of "baptism in the Holy Ghost" was developed.

There were a few other scattered instances of trance in 19th-century Christianity. In London in 1831 Edward Irving encouraged his congregation, later named the Catholic Apostolic Church, to speak in tongues. Lars Levi Laestadius sparked a revival in north Scandinavia beginning in 1854 which encouraged trance behavior apparently derived from Asiatic shamanism through the Lapps. A Lappish Laestadian service will climax as worshipers jump to their feet entranced; they sing, shout, glossolate, and hug each other, while some individually make confession to their preacher. A Presbyterian group in Armenia began speaking in tongues in 1880, perhaps again due to the influence of Asiatic shamanism. Finally, a Christian home for widows and orphans in Mukti, India, was the site of several extraordinary experiences: dreams, visions, religious shaking. In 1906 a 9-year-old spoke in tongues. The news was much publicized among Pentecostals, and it stimulated a rush of missionaries to India.⁴¹

These incidents were, however, ephemeral. The Pentecostal movement actually began at the Azusa Street Mission, a predominately black congregation in Los Angeles. The mission was led by a black preacher, W. J. Seymour, who, in turn, was a student of C. F. Parham. Parham, a white minister, headed a racially integrated Bible school in Topeka, Kans. His 40 students were searching for sure evidence of the "baptism in the Holy

Ghost." From their study of Acts they concluded speaking in tongues was the evidence they sought. They prayed for this gift together. The first to receive it was a black girl named Agnes Ozman. Parham and his students preached their discovery in Kansas and then in Texas. Seymour carried the message to a black Holiness church in Los Angeles. He and his message were locked out of church, so he began leading home prayer meetings. Some of his followers began speaking in tongues, and they opened a church on Azusa Street. Their prayer meetings, graced with glossolalia and other marvelous "signs," continued with vigor for three years.⁴²

At first the revival was mocked in the press. The *New York American* reported:

Faith Gives Quaint Sect New Languages to Convert Africa. Votaries of Odd Religion Nightly see "Miracles" in West Side Room. Led by Negro Elder. The leaders of this strange movement are for the most part Negroes.⁴³

Pentecostalism was opposed by church leaders too, but Pentecostal evangelists preached from references to speaking in tongues in the New Testament. Trance seemed alluring to experience-hungry Protestants, especially since this stylized form of trance, speaking in tongues, could be justified from the Bible. Pentecostalism soon proved irresistible to many Baptist and Holiness leaders.

All the older Pentecostal churches' origins can be traced to Azusa. The overseers of some Holiness and Baptist churches went to Los Angeles seeking the "gift," and returned to share it with their churches. This was true of the Church of God in Christ, a black Wesleyan body which is now

⁴¹ John Thomas Nichol, *Pentecostalism* (New York, Evanston, and London, 1966), pp. 22-24 and 46-47; Bjoern Collinder, *The Lapps* (New York, 1949), pp. 20-21 and 146-63; John P. Kildahl, *The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues* (New York, Evanston, San Francisco, and London, 1972), p. 18.

⁴² Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, pp. 21-46; James S. Tinney, "Black Origins of the Pentecostal Movement," *Christianity Today* (Oct. 8, 1971), pp. 4-6.

⁴³ Hollenweger, *Pentecostals*, p. 23.

the largest Pentecostal church in the world. Scores of zealous evangelists traveled from Azusa to introduce the experience into established congregations or start new congregations. Even today there are hundreds of independent Pentecostal congregations. The Assemblies of God, the largest white Pentecostal church, organized a large part of this disparate movement.

From the United States, Pentecostalism spread to other parts of the world. T. B. Barrett carried the Pentecostal message from Los Angeles to Norway, and from there it spread through northern Europe. Later, American and European missionaries initiated the movement in South America, Africa, and parts of Asia. Nearly all the Pentecostal groups in the world have roots in the original revival at Azusa Street Mission.

At first the Pentecostal movement was racially integrated, and blacks were prominent among early leaders. Pentecostalism was accepted by many blacks and those whites most likely to be influenced by blacks. The 1936 census showed that Pentecostals were to be found predominantly among blacks and low-income rural white Southerners.⁴⁴ Already in 1908, however, the whites who had been part of the Azusa Street Mission had withdrawn, and in the years that followed, white and black Pentecostals throughout the United States separated themselves.

Early Pentecostals were often more exuberant than some of their spiritual heirs. A newspaper account of a meeting in Los Angeles in 1928 reported:

Concurrently with the speaking in tongues, dancing is going on . . . An elderly matron arises and holding her arms out horizontally, pirouettes majestically to and fro in front of the altar.

A sturdy, bearded son of the soil jumps up and down, whirls around and around like a dancing dervish. A female saint takes it into her head to dance up one aisle and down the other, and proceeds to do this, keeping time to the music provided by a burly negro who follows her with a banjo. . . . All the saints proceed to stand on tip toe and groan and shriek at the top of their voices for several minutes.⁴⁵

Black Pentecostal congregations generally still allow for jumping and dancing in the Spirit, as well as glossolalia. Dreams and visions, phenomena closely allied with trance in Africa and among 19th-century Afro-Americans, are also frequently encouraged in contemporary black Pentecostal churches. White Pentecostal groups are now more inclined to limit themselves to glossolalia, following more closely the model outlined in 1 Corinthians.

VI

Pentecostal missions have generally been best received in those parts of the world most influenced by Africa.

The Pentecostal movement has shown awesome missionary strength. Thousands of missionaries and their zealous supporters have spread the movement to most of the countries of the world. For various reasons they have met with a more enthusiastic response in some places than in others. The African cultural heritage has been one major factor.

Statistics for Pentecostal churches are even less reliable than most religious statistics. The movement has always been loosely organized, the number of independent mission efforts is bewildering, and many missionaries never report statistics. Nevertheless, membership figures for Pentecostal churches, as reported in the *World*

⁴⁵ Robert P. Richardson, "Pentecostal Prophets," *Open Court*, XLII (1928), 678 f., cited in Nichol, *Pentecostalism*, p. 75.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

*Christian Handbook*⁴⁶ and in the second volume of Hollenweger's *Handbuch der Pfingstbewegung*,⁴⁷ are accurate at least to the order of magnitude. I calculated adherents of Pentecostal churches as a percentage of each nation's population, using the figures for "Total Christian Community" in the *World Christian Handbook* supplemented by similar statistics for some additional churches reported by Hollenweger. I passed over the Pentecostal churches for which neither the *World Christian Handbook* nor Hollenweger's *Handbuch* supplied statistics.

There are 19 countries in which the number of Pentecostal adherents is more than one percent of the entire population. Six of these are African: Kenya, Liberia, Republic of the Congo, South Africa, Togo, and Zaire. Ten are nations or territories in the Americas with large numbers of blacks among their populations: Bahamas, Barbados, Brazil, British Honduras, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Panama, Puerto Rico and the United States. St. Kitt, Nevis, Anguilla, and Montserrat also included high percentages of Pentecostals, but these islands seem too small to be tallied alongside the others. Only three of the countries which are more than one percent Pentecostal lack significant Afro-American populations: Chile, El Salvador, and Sweden. One percent is an arbitrary figure. Guatemala and Indonesia, two more countries without many black citizens, include just under one percent Pentecostals, but several African nations also rank just below one percent.

These striking calculations do not include the indigenous Pentecostal churches of Africa and the Caribbean region. Pentecostal missions have sparked an indigenous Pentecostal

movement in Africa and the Caribbean which dwarfs the missions themselves. This movement has been led by local leaders and directed toward traditional religious concerns. The worship of a typical Afro-Pentecostal church usually includes not only glossolalia but also entranced bodily agitation, dreams and visions, healing, exorcism, African-style music, dramatic ritual, exuberant singing, clapping, and dancing.⁴⁸ This is in contrast to Pentecostalism in Sweden and Chile, where African culture has had little influence. Swedish Pentecostals are known for their reserve; their pastors discourage spectacular displays. Most Chilean Pentecostals have never had a trance experience; warm fellowship, valued work, and intimate worship are more important.⁴⁹

Although the development of Afro-Pentecostal churches has been largely independent, they originated from Pentecostal missions. Trance was derived from African religion, but the Biblical argument which allows for it in Christian worship, C. F. Parham's innovation, was carried back to Africa and Afro-Americans in the Caribbean by missionaries.

The indigenous Pentecostal ("Zionist") movement of southern Africa was sparked by missionaries associated with the Apostolic Faith Mission who arrived in 1908.⁵⁰ A French official reported trance in response to the preaching of the West African Chris-

⁴⁸ This section draws heavily on my observations of Afro-Pentecostal churches in Africa (especially Ghana) 1969-70, in this country 1970-71, and in the Caribbean area (especially Guyana) during 1971. The field work in Guyana was made possible by a partial grant from the World Mission Institute of Concordia Seminary.

⁴⁹ Steve Durasoff, *Bright Wind of the Spirit* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1972), p. 103; Christian Lalive D'Epinay, *Haven of the Masses* (London, 1969), pp. 195-200.

⁵⁰ Bengt Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (London, 1961), pp. 47-50.

⁴⁶ (Nashville and New York, 1967).

⁴⁷ (Geneva, 1956/67).

tian prophet William Wade Harris during the First World War, but it was only sorcerers who were convulsed as evil spirits were driven from them.⁵¹ Trance as evidence of the Holy Spirit was introduced to West Africa by the Apostolic Church, a Welsh Pentecostal group which supervised two early indigenous churches in the 1930s. Faith Tabernacle in Nigeria and the Church of the Twelve Apostles in Ghana had practiced faith healing and revelatory visions, but speaking in tongues became part of their piety during their association with the Apostolic Church.⁵² The Canadian Pentecostal Mission introduced Christian trance to East Africa in 1919; several of the original indigenous Pentecostal churches, including the African Israel Church Ninevah, began as secessions from that mission. More recently organized indigenous churches which practice trance may have imitated these predecessors.⁵³ The practice of "shaking" and other trance phenomena among indigenous ("Ngunzist") churches in the Republic of Congo and Zaire was derived from traditional religion, but Pentecostal missions, also popular, may have had some influence on the way trance is understood and practiced in these indigenous churches.⁵⁴

In the Caribbean region trance was practiced among nominal Christians at Afro-Catholic shrines before the introduction of Pentecostalism. *Vodun* in Haiti is the best known of various

systems in which African deities have been syncretized with Roman Catholic saints. These spirits possess their devotees, and, as at traditional African shrines, each spirit evidences its own personality. Indigenous Pentecostalism in the Caribbean is a distinct and later development. The myriad Afro-Pentecostals are called "Shakers," "spiritual Baptists," "Jordanites," and yet other names in other places. They share Protestant beliefs and the interpretation of trance as evidence not of numerous spirits but of the Holy Spirit Himself. The origins of most groups are obscure, but many claim to have originated in Pentecostal missions. The Caribbean region has been subject to Pentecostal missionaries, literature, and radio broadcasts since the beginning of the movement in the United States. Indigenous leaders today, even if repudiated by most local Pentecostal missionaries, turn to other missionaries, Pentecostal literature from the United States, or mission radio broadcasts for inspiration.

David B. Barrett has published estimated statistics for adherents to African "independent churches."⁵⁵ He does not distinguish between independent churches which are Pentecostal and those which are not, but his statistics indicate that, including indigenous Pentecostal churches, at least another five African nations should be added to the list of countries whose populations are over one percent Pentecostal: Botswana, Gabon, Ghana, Lesotho, and Rhodesia. More than half the independent churches of these nations are almost certainly Pentecostal, and in each case Barrett's estimate exceeds two percent of the population. Nigeria should also probably be added; the sum of Barrett's estimate and the figure derived from

⁵¹ W. J. Platt, *An African Prophet* (London, 1934), p. 61.

⁵² David M. Beckmann, *Eden Revival: Spiritual Churches in Ghana* (St. Louis, 1974); H. W. Turner, *African Independent Church*, I (Oxford, 1967), 25-34.

⁵³ F. B. Welbourn, *East African Christian* (Ibadan, 1965), p. 147.

⁵⁴ Efraim Andersson, *Messianic Popular Movements in the Lower Congo* (Uppsala, 1958), pp. 52 and 109; Hollenweger, *Handbuch*, II, 74-82.

⁵⁵ *Schism and Renewal in Africa* (Nairobi, Addis Ababa, and Lusaka, 1968), pp. 87-88.

the *World Christian Handbook* is over one percent of Nigeria's population, and the well-known independent churches of central and southern Nigeria are predominantly Pentecostal. On the other hand, although Barrett estimates that adherents of independent African churches account for over two percent of the populations of Malagasy and Malawi, these two nations should probably not be included on the list; their independent churches seem to be predominantly non-Pentecostal.

By our admittedly coarse calculations this brings the tally of countries over one percent Pentecostal to 25, of which 22 are African or include considerable numbers of Afro-Americans. Statistical information about indigenous Pentecostals in the Caribbean area is virtually nonexistent. The Afro-Pentecostal churches there are considered somewhat disreputable, often meeting half secretly or even illegally. Research understandably

lags behind parallel efforts in Africa. If the number of indigenous Pentecostals were known, perhaps other Caribbean countries would be included with the 25.

Pentecostalism in Africa and among Afro-Americans in the Caribbean region has grown as verdantly as a hothouse plant returned to its natural environment. Together with the other five points argued in this article—possession-trance cults and glossolalia in traditional Africa, the dearth of trance attributed to the Holy Spirit in the Christian tradition, the coincidence of the conversion of slaves and the outbreak of trance during the Second Great Awakening, the prominence of trance in the piety of 19th-century black people, and the black beginnings of Pentecostalism—this demonstrates the African origins of the trance experience in Pentecostalism.

St. Louis, Mo.