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EDITORIAL: EARTHLY MINDED AND HEAVENLY GOOD?

JEFFREY S. LAMP, EDITOR

As I pen these words, we in the United States have recently observed the Martin Luther King, Jr., federal holiday. Over the long holiday weekend, my wife and I saw the motion picture, *Just Mercy*, a powerful and moving portrayal of a case in rural Alabama in the late 1980s of an African American man wrongfully convicted of a brutal murder. The film chronicled the efforts of a young civil rights lawyer to get his client a new trial so that evidence suppressed in the original trial might be presented in order to right the previous wrong. The events portrayed in the film, occurring some thirty years ago, continue, to our shame, to reflect the lives and conditions of many in minority communities today.

Sadly, throughout its history, Christianity has often proven complicit in the perpetration of injustices against those outside of the spheres of power in the societies in which the Church is present. A movement that began with the ministry of an itinerant Jewish carpenter’s son who frequently kept company with outcast and oppressed members of society, a movement that found receptive audiences among those largely from the lower classes of the Greco-Roman world, soon found itself in seats of power in the Empire, and in the flow of history, would find itself a willing partner of those wielding power in the world. Christianity all too frequently has been co-opted, and indeed has co-opted itself, in order to exercise power in the world, even if, at times, this exercise has violated the core principles of its charter to exist.

Around the turn of the twentieth century would come a movement of the Spirit, landing squarely in the midst of the unjust structures of the world. At first, it would find a home among the poor, the outcast, the uneducated. It would be embraced by men and women of diverse races and ethnicities, reflecting the gathered faithful on the Day of Pentecost. At its best, this Spirit movement has shown itself to be a people who welcomed all as brothers and sisters, equal in the sight of God their Father, extending the kingdom of a benevolent God to those who found themselves outside the spheres of the powerful, the prosperous, the positioned, and the privileged. Of course, as time passed, the injustices of the world outside the movement crept into the movement and manifested as the sins of racism, sexism, classism, nationalism, and the like.

As I began editing the studies published in this issue of *Spiritus*, I noticed that some of them addressed the involvement of Spirit-empowered movements in a world in
which numerous social maladies prevail. How has Pentecostalism positioned itself to act and respond in such a world? How has it done so previously? What are the prospects for future engagement? What might Pentecostals do to prepare themselves better for a complex world of social interactions? We did not set out to craft the issue around these questions; it just turned out that some of the articles in hand nicely constellated around these questions.

Keeping with the Journal’s practice of opening each issue with a study on Oral Roberts, Daniel Isgrigg contributes an intriguing piece that examines Oral Roberts’ evolving understanding of prosperity theology in light of Roberts’ early experience of poverty and how it affected him psychologically. Isgrigg interprets key moments in Roberts’ personal life and ministerial career against the background of his poor upbringing in light of current research conducted on the biological effects of socioeconomic status. The result is a fascinating case study of how personal experience is a significant shaper of theological perspective.

Following Isgrigg’s article are two studies that probe biblical and theological topics of interest for Pentecostals. J. Lyle Story examines the story of Nathaniel’s calling in John 1:45–52. Story draws connections between this passage and the Old Testament to highlight how both the original participants in the narrative and the post-resurrectional community would find their identity in and relationship with Jesus through the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit. Chris E. W. Green examines the tendency in Pentecostal circles to construct Spirit christologies that stress the incompatibility between the divine and the human such that God must limit God’s power in order to allow creation to exist in its own integrity. Green offers an alternative approach, following Cyril of Alexandria, that argues that creation finds it genuine telos only as Christ, in the fullness of his divinity, enters into human emptiness in order to take it unto himself and transform it into glory. The result is a Spirit christology seen not as the “elimination of God, but as the gracious realization of God in creation and creation in God.”

Arto Hämäläinen follows with a study of the history of collaborations among Pentecostal groups on local, regional, and global levels. Acknowledging the pragmatic benefits of collaboration in missional and evangelistic efforts, Hämäläinen argues for a theological basis for efforts aimed at unity among Pentecostals, especially as this extends beyond national, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. Paul Miller contributes a fascinating study that examines the role of the Holy Spirit in missionary work in nineteenth-century Hawaii. Miller identifies both positive and negative results of this work, correlating success with those instances where missionaries exercised conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit and failure with times when the leading of the Spirit was muted. The most intriguing part of the study consists of Miller’s examination of the
role that the Christianization of Hawaii played in the decline of indigenous cultural expression and the loss of political independence in nineteenth-century Hawaii.

Daniel Topf examines the reasons behind Pentecostalism’s historical lack of emphasis in scholarship and formal theological education. Looking beyond the stock answer of a latent anti-intellectualism in Pentecostal circles, Topf suggests that a more informed assessment takes into consideration the historical roots of nineteenth-century American fundamentalism, the socioeconomic reality that many early Pentecostals emerged from the margins of society and did not have the means to invest in establishing higher educational institutions, and the theological adherence to a dispensational eschatology tempered desires to focus attention on long-term projects such as formal theological education. Allan Anderson looks at the relationship between Pentecostalism and global development, noting that Pentecostalism has long been ambivalent regarding sociopolitical involvement yet has engaged in projects that cohere quite well with the aims of global development. Anderson argues that as Pentecostalism continues its worldwide growth it will find itself well-positioned to minister more holistically to people in their circumstances.

The final study is a collaborative project carried out in an undergraduate honors course, Science and Sustainability, at Oral Roberts University in Spring 2019. Under my supervision, a group of students examined the relationship between caring for God’s creation and caring for human beings, drawing on a case study of the effects of mercury pollution on the unborn. The structure and argument derive from the students; my contribution was to provide further factual detail at points. This study is an example of the Journal’s desire to be a venue for collaborative work between students and their instructors.

The history of Pentecostalism is replete with evidence of effectiveness in evangelism and the cultivation of personal and congregational spiritual fervor. Its record regarding attention to more terrestrial matters is somewhat spotty. Yet the good news, as evidenced by the articles in this issue, is that there are those who are focused upon crafting a Pentecostalism that takes its social voice seriously and is prepared to do the hard work of self-examination, scholarship, and training future generations to take their place in God’s church and world, to bring together heaven and earth in response to the petition of the prayer Jesus taught us to pray (Matt 6:10).

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*Summer 2019*
Exploring the Psychological Impact of Poverty and Prosperity in the Life of Oral Roberts

Daniel D. Isgrigg

Keywords prosperity gospel, biology of inequality, poverty, City of Faith, Pentecostalism

Abstract

The origin of the prosperity gospel is most often linked to the influence of American Pentecostal Christianity, particularly to Oral Roberts and his concept of “seed faith.” In light of this, this study seeks to understand Oral Roberts’ concepts of poverty and prosperity by exploring the psychology of his own experience of poverty. It will suggest that the biology of inequality he experienced as a child shaped the development of his prosperity theology.

Introduction

As a tradition whose first adherents were from poor and minority classes, Pentecostals have always been interested in the interplay between poverty and their Pentecostal faith.¹ It is not a surprise, then, that today Pentecostals have become increasingly interested in the extent to which Pentecostals are engaged in social issues such as poverty.² As Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori have documented, the global Pentecostal church is a progressive form of Pentecostalism that is engaging social issues, especially work among the poor.³ The emphasis on personal transformation inherent in the Pentecostal message has been directly linked to upward social mobility as converts become honest, faithful, and hardworking citizens. As Miller and Yamamori recognize, “financial gain is an unintended consequence of a changed life.”⁴ Thus, for many global Pentecostals, the gospel truly has become “good news to the poor” not just in a spiritual sense, but in a this-worldly sense that can affect a person’s economic situations.
In placing a focus on the benefits of faith to lift believers out of poverty, a stream of Christian teaching has emerged in Pentecostal and Charismatic circles known as the “prosperity gospel.” As Jacob Ayantayo defines it, the “prosperity gospel” is the teaching that emphasizes the benefits of the faith primarily in terms of “material possession or acquisition.” Emphasis is often placed on the gospel’s ability to give believers success, health, and wealth through the principles of faith and divine economics. In this theology, it is not just that the gospel leads people out of poverty through neo-liberal economic uplift; it is God himself who provides financial resources to those who believe in him. Critics of this form of “health and wealth” teaching point out that often this spiritualized materialism commercializes religion and turns faith into little more than an economic transaction. Worse, it has too often been used as a litmus test for divine approval, implying that material blessing equals favor from God and poverty equals the opposite.

Originally a North American phenomenon, the prosperity gospel has expanded its influence globally, especially in the Majority World. In many of the poorest global contexts, such as Africa, preachers emphasize “the spirit of prosperity in order to counter the spirit of poverty, which is claimed to be the cause of African problems.” The message is so popular that many “prosperity churches” have become some of the largest Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Africa. Critics of the prosperity gospel have argued that the pastors of these megachurches have used the prosperity message to enrich the preacher more than uplift the poor. Further, it is often the churches in urban settings that have benefitted most, which has done little to uplift the poor outside the already middleclass in these communities.

The origin of the prosperity gospel is most often linked to the influence of American Pentecostal Christianity in the last few decades, particularly to Oral Roberts and his concept of “seed faith.” Kate Bowler labels Oral Roberts as the “major architect of the prosperity gospel.” Furthermore, the spread of prosperity in Africa was primarily through Archbishop Benson Idahosa, who is considered the pioneer of the prosperity gospel in Africa and was a close friend of Oral Roberts, who exported his ideas of God’s blessings and “seed faith” into his African context and gave rise to current prosperity leaders such as David Oyedepo in Nigeria. In light of the blame placed on Roberts for the negative effects of the “prosperity gospel” in the Majority World, this study seeks to understand Oral Roberts’ concepts of poverty and prosperity by exploring the psychology of his own experience of poverty. It will use Roberts as a case study on the psychological effects of poverty and how his experience shaped his concept of God and the promise of material provision.
Kate Bowler’s examination of prosperity teaching in America notes that Oral Roberts once quipped, “I tried poverty; I didn’t like it.”[^11] This is a fitting quote to illustrate how Oral Roberts’ prosperity teaching cannot be understood apart from his impoverished upbringing. Roberts was born in 1918 in rural Oklahoma where his father Ellis and mother Claudius made their home prior to statehood. Ellis was a tenant farmer who owned a 160-acre farm in Pontotoc County, Oklahoma. Originally Methodists, the Roberts were saved, sanctified, and filled with Holy Spirit when pioneer Pentecostal revivalists came to Ada in 1914.[^12] So impacted by his conversion and call to the ministry, Ellis sold his land and launched into pastoral and evangelistic ministry. Shortly after he sold it, oil was discovered on his land and the new owners were becoming wealthy. But Ellis did not regret it. He said, “You can have your oil money. I’ve got an oil well in my soul. Many people are getting saved in my meetings. That’s worth more than all the oil fields in the world.”[^13]

This decision to sell all for the sake of the gospel ministry led the Roberts family into a life of poverty that deeply affected Oral. Despite Ellis pioneering twelve churches as an evangelist, ministry did little to provide for the Roberts family who did not own a home or a car. On one occasion, Ellis was invited to preach in a town fourteen miles away. In order to save money on bus fare, he walked to and from the church in the dead of winter, arriving home in the middle of the night. When Claudius asked why the church did not drive him home, Ellis replied as Oral listened in from his bed, “They knew I had no way except to walk, but no one volunteered.”[^14] On another occasion, while Ellis was at a revival, Oral’s mother announced to her children, “We’re out of groceries, and I’m sorry but we’ll have no supper tonight.”[^15] Events like this shaped Oral’s remembrance of the church and ministry. He lamented that church members took advantage of Ellis’ love and care for them by intentionally keeping him in need in order to “be poor like Jesus.” Oral famously recalls that the deacons would say, “God, you keep Rev. E. M. Roberts humble and we’ll keep him poor.”[^16]

Oral’s accounts of how the strain of poverty tore his father apart “emotionally and spiritually” demonstrate how much his experience as a young child traumatically impacted him even later in life.[^17] His father’s decision to choose ministry over stability meant that Oral would be destined to be poor and made him angry with God and with his parents. Ellis, who was once a tenant farmer, turned to sharecropping to make ends meet and would move to various farms to pick cotton during harvest seasons.[^18] Oral just could not understand why his father had given up being a successful farmer for a life of suffering in ministry.[^19] He and his brother would ask, “Why did papa have to
preach? We hardly ever had enough to eat.”

He knew the calling to serve God should be an honorable calling, yet he could not understand why serving God meant poverty, hunger, depression, and suffering. He recalls, “Why was it that we were ‘supposed to be poor’? The doctors lived in good houses, so did the lawyers and merchants, and many others.” The only reward his family received for sacrificing for the ministry was “stinking poverty.”

The suffering Roberts experienced as a child led him into a deep sense of hopelessness. He was a bright student who loved school and hoped one day to be a lawyer or Governor of Oklahoma, but often missed school because he was expected to join his father in the fields until the harvest was finished. By his teen years, Roberts came to the conclusion that if he stayed in his parents’ house he would never achieve his educational and life goals. So at the age of sixteen he ran away to live with the basketball coach at Atoka High School, nearly fifty miles away, hoping to elevate himself by playing basketball. He quickly realized that life was not any better there. At sixteen he had to support himself by working several jobs. He recalls, “I couldn’t make enough to eat on. Many times I didn’t have enough to eat or the right place to sleep.”

To add to his misery, he was beginning to grow sick and developed tuberculosis, which left him bedridden and dying after collapsing during a basketball game. Roberts’ coach drove him home to Ada, which for Oral meant “back to poverty, back to religious faith that found no place in me, back to dreaming with no way out.” After struggling for several weeks, Oral was saved and later received his healing in the tent of George Moncey.

The Poor Evangelist

Following his healing, the effects of his sickness and poverty were still very much with him. The months of weakness he endured kept him from finishing high school and left him with few options for a career path moving forward. As a result, Roberts felt called to follow his father in the same path of ministry, which he also knew meant choosing a life of poverty. Yet, Roberts believed in his ability to be successful in ministry. He jumped in whole-heartedly and quickly became a sought-after speaker in the Pentecostal Holiness Church (PHC) denomination. For the first couple years while traveling and preaching, Oral and Evelyn often lived in the homes of other families, sometimes weeks at a time or until Evelyn would get fed up and take the kids to her parents’ house. Evelyn recalls, “[We] never really knew what a home was like. Rebecca Ann, our oldest child, was carried from place to place until she was past two years old.” Although a successful revival speaker, Oral suffered from the same challenges of poverty and instability as his father. To supplement his income during revivals, Oral would do side
jobs such as hanging wallpaper in the town where he was ministering.\textsuperscript{27} Worn to the point of exhaustion and in search of more financial provision, Oral decided to turn to pastoral ministry, taking his first church in Fuquay Springs, North Carolina, in 1941. In 1942, he moved his family back to Oklahoma to pastor the Shawnee PHC. The Shawnee PHC was a sacrifice at first, but by the time Roberts had been there a year he had already seen several wage increases and even noted his salary was the highest in the area among PHC churches at forty dollars per week.\textsuperscript{28} Roberts also enrolled at Oklahoma Baptist University.\textsuperscript{29} Although he enjoyed a living wage, he was uncomfortable staying in one place and in 1943 returned to evangelistic ministry and for a short time in 1945 considered becoming a missionary to Palestine.\textsuperscript{30}

In 1946, after several more years of successful evangelistic ministry, Roberts was once again looking for stability and came to Enid, Oklahoma, to pastor the Enid PHC. Although he was successful in the new church, beneath the surface, he was suffering psychologically and admitted he was miserable.\textsuperscript{31} Roberts’ struggle in ministry went beyond simply not having God’s power in his life; he lamented that although he preached the abundant life, he suffered from depression and constant torment of not having enough.\textsuperscript{32} He recalls that his family did not have enough clothes and that sometimes Evelyn had to leave items at the checkout stand in the grocery store when she did not have enough money.\textsuperscript{33} Roberts resented his church board for not doing more to supply for the needs of his family, and like his father before him, concluded that the church was simply unconcerned. It was in this struggle that he discovered 3 John 2, the verse that would change his life and set him on a course toward making a name for himself in healing evangelism.

**The Biology of Inequality**

“\textit{I have never been a person who can live with a need. Something has to give—me or the need.}”\textsuperscript{34}

Research concerning the biological effects of socioeconomic status is just now beginning to catch up with the social effects on health, education, and emotional development.\textsuperscript{35} Researchers are beginning to understand that the stress of poverty has significant impact on brain development. The stress of “not enough” handicaps the whole person to where people are continually hindered by unmet basic needs. Lucy Jewell has identified this as the “biology of inequality.” The awareness of poverty and lack actually changes a person’s brain in a way that limits their cognitive wellbeing and makes them more susceptible to a number of psychological inequities.\textsuperscript{36} She says,

“\textit{I Tried Poverty}” | 9
Structural violence and status syndrome are not just abstract theories. We are now beginning to understand the mechanics of how this happens in the body. Through the mechanism of stress, social and economic inequality produces measurable changes in the human body at the genetic and synaptic level. Growing up in a disadvantaged environment correlates with greater social and psychological problems, such as anxiety, impulsiveness, and depressiveness. In this way, poverty is more than psychological; it is biological even to the genetic level, affecting cognition, development, and health. Jewell says, “These factors of inequality manifested in poor health and scarcity mentality become encoded into the DNA and can be passed on to the next generation, continuing the cycle of poverty.”

The concept of the “biology of inequality” is instructive to understanding Roberts’ story. Each of his autobiographies tell of his own family’s food insecurity, lack of education, and poor health. Though a brilliant man, his upbringing of poverty and disease affected his educational life. His childhood dreams of being a lawyer and Governor of Oklahoma seemed destined for disappointment because he missed school so often due to his father’s seasonal farming. By the time he was a sophomore, he had been in ten different schools. Even when he attended school, his issues with stuttering affected his reading skills and made him the target of bullying. His socio-economic status also made him susceptible to disease, contracting tuberculosis at age sixteen. His poor health once again kept him from attending and graduating from high school, opting some years later for a GED. His experience as an adult was not much different. In 1943, he enrolled for a year and a half at Oklahoma Baptist University, and later enrolled in Phillips University in Enid, Oklahoma, in 1946. In both cases, his proclivity to endure only short tenures in ministry appointments—a trait highly characteristic of children from impoverished backgrounds—hindered his ability to stay focused on his education and he never finished.

Experiencing poverty during early adolescence can alter the human psyche with feelings of insufficiency and insecurity that manifest as the constant sense of “never enough.” The stress of watching his parents struggle as a child and his own struggles with his family greatly impacted the psychology of Roberts. No matter how successful he became in ministry, he still struggled with having enough. In fact, it was this feeling of dissatisfaction that led him in 1947 to search for greater fulfillment in ministry through launching into healing evangelism. Even still, at the height of his popularity as America’s healing evangelist, he admitted, “No matter how large the crowds grew or how many thousands were healed, or how many souls were saved, I still felt a certain emptiness that would not go away.” Statements like this suggest that Roberts may
have never been able to recover fully from his compulsion to achieve to compensate for his feelings of inadequacy as a child.

**God’s Sufficiency for Roberts’ Poverty**

At the lowest point in his emotional health while pastoring in 1946, Roberts discovered 3 John 2. Prior to this discovery, Roberts struggled with the attitude among Pentecostals that poverty was good for Christians. Depression era Pentecostals were critical of wealth and often taught that Jesus was poor and therefore those who followed Jesus should also be poor, especially pastors. For Roberts, this attitude was nothing more than justification for the church to place a low priority on the pastor’s family and their needs. Beyond that, it ingrained in him the idea that God was not concerned with physical and financial needs. But the discovery of 3 John 2 changed all that in his mind. In it he discovered that God desired not for people to be poor, as his childhood had conditioned him, but “to prosper and be in health.” He said, “I found that there was a true scriptural basis for believing that God wants man to be happy, normal, healthy, strong and prosperous.” Poverty, like disease, then, was an enemy that Jesus came to conquer.

It is no coincidence that Roberts developed his view of prosperity alongside his view of healing. Like sociologists today, he recognized the correlation between disease and poverty. Roberts understood the role stress could play in the psychology of poverty as a root cause of poor health. Similarly, he recognized, no doubt by his own experience, that those who live in poverty are more susceptible to societal disadvantages that bring disease. He says, “Poor housing tends to breed disease, and disease among the poor affords little opportunity for adequate medical care.” The theological connection between healing and divine provision was a logical one in his mind. In Roberts’ mind, the gospel was good news for both. If God was a healing God who could address the symptoms of poverty, then addressing poverty with the provision of God was also part of the healing gospel. He also recognized that it was the worry and stress created by poverty that also caused sickness.

**Poverty and the Origin of “Seed Faith”**

What Roberts accomplished over the next four decades was nothing short of remarkable. Through his healing ministry, millions of people came to faith in Christ and were healed in his crusades. Roberts’ televised tent crusades brought Pentecostalism into the mainstream and he also had a prolific radio and print media ministry. In the early
1960s, Roberts made the transition from evangelist to founder of the nation’s first Charismatic university, Oral Roberts University (ORU). In the 1980s he launched into the field of Christian medicine by opening the medical school at ORU and building the City of Faith Medical and Research Center. In each successive decade, Oral Roberts continued to reinvent himself and his ministry to push the envelope of what was possible for Christian ministry. Although there is no doubt that Roberts was a man of unique faith and vision, there was certainly more to his accomplishments than simply talent and personality. He was driven by an intense sense of mission to accomplish impossible goals that required God to be a God who provided.

During this first decade as a healing evangelist, Oral Roberts Ministries required a large donor base to fund his healing crusades, television ministry, nation-wide radio programs, and distribution of hundreds of thousands of magazines around America and to 154 foreign countries. To help him fund this, Roberts discovered the practical value of wealth by befriending a number of wealthy Pentecostal businessmen who supported his ministry and whom he organized into the Full Gospel Businessmen’s Fellowship with Demos Shakarian. These wealthy men became the backbone of his support and acquainted him with the power of wealth for accomplishing big things. Even so, during the evangelistic era, Roberts kept his own wealth private and continued to project the image of a flashy, but not materialistic, evangelist.

The first development in Roberts’ teaching of prosperity came in 1957 with the introduction of the “blessing pact,” a special giving arrangement he created for his partners to join with him in meeting the financial demands of ministry. Connected with the “blessing pact” was the idea that God would reward believers who invested in worthy ministries. Roberts also began to emphasize God’s abundance and surplus for believers who faithfully gave. In 1958, he commented,

**GOD DEALS IN SURPLUSES!** God is not interested in your starving to death. He is not interested in your being so stricken with poverty that you cannot clothe, house and feed yourself and your family, or find your useful place in society. God knows that you’re in a material world. He knows that you have needs, and he has promised to add all these things unto you if you put his kingdom first.

The surplus rested in God’s goodness as the hope that one does not have to live in poverty. However, the key to experiencing God’s abundance was also linked to one’s generosity. As one blessing pact partner declared, “Since I received this blessed supply from God, I joyously pass a portion on to you to use for God’s work.” At this point,
giving originated out of abundance—such as was the case with his wealthy business friends—rather than giving out of needs.

Over the next decade, Roberts’ drive to achieve meant his demand for support needed to grow exponentially as he maintained his previous ministry initiatives while launching his newest venture: Oral Roberts University. Between 1962 and 1985, Roberts built a 500-acre university campus with twenty-five state of the art buildings—fourteen of which were built during the decade of the 1970s. Just as soon as one building was going up, the next campaign would launch. His pace was relentless. Each building required massive fund raising campaigns to solicit contributions from his base.

As the demands of building the university increased, the amount of provision needed for the ministry was growing exponentially. The previous emphasis on God’s abundance through the “blessing pact” began to morph into the idea of “seed-faith” in 1969 through the three keys to the “blessing pact”: 1) recognize God is your source; 2) give a seed that represented your faith; and 3) then expect a miracle. The key, however, was no longer that you gave out of your abundance, but out of your need. He says, “Your Blessing Pact giving is a higher law of faith. You give BEFORE you have received, you give as seed money for God to multiply back to you.” The emphasis on giving out of your need was a crucial step that fueled the idea of the prosperity gospel. Rather than giving because one has prosperity, one gives as a way to achieve prosperity.

Each phase of his ministry, from the tent to the university, was to some degree motivated by the biology of inequality in which he was constantly revisiting his feelings of insufficiency and insecurity rooted in his impoverished childhood. At each stage in his ministry, the demands to achieve tested his own adequacy and his belief in the sufficiency of God to provide for his needs. This is particularly seen in the development of his prosperity teachings, which slowly developed as the demand for funds increased.

From Sufficiency to Prosperity

In 1970, Roberts released what is perhaps his most famous book, *The Miracle of Seed Faith*. Up until 1970, Roberts’ emphasis on blessing was primarily focused on God’s abundance to help believers and meet their needs. The idea of using giving to God as a means to gaining wealth was largely absent from his preaching and teaching. Like healing, God’s provision flowed out of his goodness and desire to bless people who had faith in God. However, the financial demands of the university led him to emphasize that “sowing” into God’s ministry through the “blessing pact” was a way to “reap a harvest” for a person’s own need. Thus, the message of “seed faith” became the primary
way to maintain his financial base that now included the university, the Hollywood style prime-time television specials, and worldwide ministry through the World Action Teams. The university alone required a budget of several million dollars per month to expand the buildings on campus and create the new Graduate Schools of Theology, Medicine, Law, and Dentistry in the mid-to-late 1970s. A significant factor that also led to a change in Roberts’ giving message was related to his base. In the years after starting ORU, Roberts’ financial situation was changing from classical Pentecostals and Full Gospel Businessmen in the 1950s to Christians from mainline Charismatic communities, particularly the United Methodist Church. By the late 1970s, many of Roberts’ earliest Pentecostal supporters had moved on in a time when the American economy was struggling and Roberts’ many initiatives had overtaxed his support base.

Things came to a head in 1977 with the announcement that Roberts was going to build a 120-million-dollar, three-tower City of Faith Medical Complex and Research Center. This decision, however, was not made because of the tide of success as a ministry; it was born out of a “desert” experience following the death of daughter Rebecca and son-in-law Marshall Nash in a plane crash in 1977.59 Behind the scenes, Roberts was also dealing with the deteriorating marriage of his son Richard and his wife Patti, who divorced officially in 1978. On top of that, Oral’s brightest son, Ronnie, had been caught up in years of drug abuse and self-destruction that eventually led to his suicide in 1982.60 After years of declaring “God is a good God” and seemingly having success to everything to which they put their hands, the Robertses were once again emotionally placed in a place of powerlessness. No amount of fame or fortune he had achieved could bring Rebecca back, save Richard’s image, or restore Ronnie.

What I am suggesting is that the personal emotional trauma of 1977 awakened in Oral Roberts the “biology of inequality” to a point that he had a compulsive need to build the City of Faith, despite the enormous cost and difficulty. To do this, it would test his fundamental assumptions about God’s goodness and sufficiency. How could a minister with a $10 million dollar per month budget possibly feel poor? The answer may lie in the “Relative Income Hypothesis,” which posits that perceptions of poverty are relative and contextual.61 Helen Rhee points out, “the notion of sufficiency, or for that matter of necessities, has been evolving and contextualized—inevitably so.”62 While the secular press believed his appeals for millions were motivated by self-enrichment, I suggest that it was more plausible that Roberts’ trauma re-awakened his biology of inequality. For Roberts, it did not matter how many millions God provided in the past, psychologically he was still the struggling minister who did not have enough to do what God was demanding him to do. In these moments, Roberts was faced with the
questions of his earliest years: Does serving God mean suffering lack? Will God provide what he demands?

The emotional responses to Roberts’ lack in funding the City of Faith quickly became more controversial in early 1981 when the stress of raising the final $45 million was fully upon him and he claimed that he saw a vision of a “900 foot Jesus” that held the City of Faith in his hands. Dismissed as emotional manipulation by outsiders, Roberts’ psychological trauma seems apparent in his appeals. Roberts even went on television on *Larry King Live* and the *Donahue* show to defend his vision. To his critics he said, “Yes, I have always seen Jesus, by the eyes of faith, as He has met the needs of the people through the years. But I also saw Jesus, just as I reported, lifting up the City of Faith. I hope I will see him again.” But the reality was, God had already provided Roberts with $75 million in cash to that point to build the hospital.

Over the next year Roberts began to promise that if his supporters would help him build the hospital debt-free, that God would also give “the money you need for your bills and debts.” To do this, nothing less than a full on commitment to “seed-faith” and prosperity teaching would be necessary to accomplish his goals. Thus his message of prosperity was solidified, evident in the books he released during this time including *Flood Stage: Opening the Windows of Heaven* in 1981, *If You Need to Be Blessed Financially Do These Things* in 1982, and *Attack Your Lack* in 1985.

While the City of Faith opened debt-free in 1981 (although somewhat unfinished), the expenses of running the hospital and medical school kept Roberts in a constant place of need. His pleas for funding and the resulting emotional turmoil continued. Roberts often mentioned the strain he was under in his articles about the City of Faith in the *Abundant Life* magazine. During the financial crisis in 1985, Roberts opened up about his struggles on national television.

I have asked God why this emergency happened to us. . . . You know, “What have we done to deserve this thing? Haven’t we obeyed you Lord? There’s no other man in the twentieth century who has built a university, a medical school, and a medical center. And I did it because God commanded me to. Now why have you brought us this far?”

Within this appeal, one can hear the echoes of the same questions he expressed as a little boy about his father’s experience. Why does obedience to God lead to insufficiency?
Before the City of Faith and the controversies, Roberts was one of the most influential figures in American culture. But now his financial base was abandoning him and the American public was turning on him, leaving him friendless and searching for a new support base. Stepping into this vacuum, the leaders of the burgeoning Word of Faith movement welcomed him into their family, led by Kenneth E. Hagin and his protégés Kenneth Copeland and Fredrick K. C. Price. Up until this point, despite their similar Pentecostal origins and close proximity in Tulsa, Roberts and Hagin were not closely associated. In the first decade and a half, the “Faith Movement” was not well received by the primarily mainline Charismatic faculty and students on the campus of Oral Roberts University.69

In 1979, in the midst of Roberts’ declining support and greatest fundraising demands, Kenneth Hagin invited Roberts to attend his annual Campmeeting in Tulsa. During one of the services, Hagin shared about his deep appreciation for Roberts and surprised him by taking a love offering to help him with his vision.70 That night, Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, John Osteen, and Pat and Debbie Boone led the way as the audience overflowed with pledges to save the City of Faith. This gesture deeply moved Roberts and he commented, “I sat with my head in my hands, tears flowing down my cheeks, realizing that nothing like this had ever happened in my behalf.”71 Roberts found new friends that would walk with him through his most difficult times. In fact, three years later it was Hagin who stepped in to comfort the family when Ronnie committed suicide in 1982 and assured Roberts that Ronnie “has not gone to hell” but that he was actually saved through his death.72

Over the next few years, Roberts was a regular speaker at Hagin’s Campmeeting and his rhetoric about prosperity followed suit. He was still careful about the “faith” principles around campus, but he could not deny that God was providing through this new constituency. Speakers at ORU chapel services began to shift from mainline Charismatics and Hollywood celebrities to Word of Faith preachers. The introduction of Word of Faith messages on campus caused controversy among some of the storied faculty, including Howard Ervin and Charles Farrah.73 This alliance was also problematic for the United Methodists, who removed their affiliation with the seminary, which hurt Roberts deeply. However, this gave him the opportunity to initiate his own ministerial fellowship called “International Charismatic Bible Ministers,” filled largely with independent Charismatic and Word of Faith ministers including Copeland, Jerry Savelle, Mike Murdock, Earl Paulk, and other emerging independent Word of Faith
Charismatic ministers. Many of these same ministers joined the Board of Regents at ORU as well.

These new prosperity influences were the final step in the process of transforming Roberts’ theology of simply God’s ability to supply basic needs into a full-blown prosperity message that promised financial blessings through giving. His new Word of Faith friends landed him the reputation as not only a “health and wealth” charlatan who used God to “pickpocket” gullible Christians, but the leader of them. Criticism over his financial excesses increased for decisions such as purchasing their 2.4 million dollar home in Palm Springs in 1982. Worse, Roberts was being lumped in with his fellow televangelists Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart who were embroiled in financial and sexual scandal.

The image of Roberts as the worst of all prosperity preachers was solidified when in July 1986, Roberts announced that if he did not raise eight million dollars, God would “call him home.” While Roberts’ plea was intended to raise the money to continue to scholarship the students in his medical school, this brazen statement seemed to be the final straw for those in the mainline churches who had supported him. The public ridicule only added to his feeling of abandonment. He commented,

Few people have had their loses and failures trumpeted by the media. . . . I stopped reading the ridicule after I saw there was no end to it. It hurt so bad I sometimes felt as King David did: “Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then I would fly away and be at rest.”

In 1987, the United Methodist Church withdrew its support from Roberts, the ORU seminary, and several of the Methodist faculty left. Two years later in 1989, heartbroken, Roberts closed ORU Medical School and City of Faith in defeat. Roberts called this “a disaster” that “took away a part of my soul.” Roberts eventually stepped down as president in 1991 and moved to his home in California where he could find some distance from his own pain.

**Conclusion**

Considering the development of Roberts’ view of prosperity in the 1970s and 1980s, critics of the so-called “health and wealth” gospel are rightly justified in their critiques and in pointing to Roberts as a source. He certainly was responsible for concepts of “seed faith” that have been used by prosperity teachers globally as justification for self-enrichment. However, his view of prosperity did not begin this way. Roberts’ view of prosperity began as the “sufficiency gospel” rather than “prosperity gospel.” Through
faith and the Scriptures, especially 3 John 2, he was able to overcome his own anxiety of insufficiency by believing in a God who desired to meet basic human needs. Roberts was able to reprogram the biology of inequality in ways that provided him hope that things could get better by believing in a God who cared about his needs. Roberts’ orientation was not toward worldly abundance, but toward God’s sufficiency. He did not advocate for believers to enjoy boundless riches, only that God would supply their needs and enable people to live “the abundant life” and to accomplish what God has set before them. Because of this, he was able not only to overcome decades of poverty, but also to believe that he could ultimately accomplish anything God asked him to do.

Roberts’ development of prosperity teachings was also rooted in his experience of poverty. His need for a further developed “prosperity gospel” was ultimately governed by psychological factors of lack of security, rather than theological or materialistic factors. At the end of the day, he was not self-enriching; he was coping with an acute sense of loss related to the two highly debilitating forms of personal trauma: a child’s premature death and a child’s suicide. In Roberts’ case, his religious views helped him find meaning in order to make sense of his loss. The City of Faith represented Roberts’ reconstruction of meaning as a coping and recovery mechanism out of his grief. He could not save his children, but he could save others through a hospital, a place of healing and recovery. The only way to do that was to raise money and go all in on God’s ability to provide in a time when he was also coping with the abandonment of his support structure. Into this space, ministers from the prosperity wing of his movement enabled him to focus on the material aspects of God’s blessings in order to accomplish his vision.

As we consider the doctrine of prosperity as it has advanced into the world, it is necessary to recognize that Roberts’ view of prosperity originated in the simple concept of God’s goodness and provision for believers. That belief allowed Roberts to escape his own poverty by moving him into a sphere of sufficiency and security that counteracted the biology of inequality. Roberts’ experience is proof that belief in God’s sufficiency has a powerful effect on poverty by alleviating the psychological stress and regulating the biological and emotional states. But Roberts’ story also illustrates the dangers of turning God’s sufficiency into a means to an end. For Roberts, his emotional trauma triggered a sense of overcompensation that resulted in Roberts’ overemphasis on God’s abundance. This has resulted in others who used Roberts’ views of seed faith as means for self-enrichment.

While the abuse of prosperity theology is problematic for global Christianity, it should not negate the powerful impact of belief in a God who provides to those in difficult socio-economic situations. As Amos Yong notes, the social uplift that faith in
God brings should not be the privilege of Western societies. He says, “Why is it implausible that God should transform the poverty of his people into affluence across the southern hemisphere as God has done so in the Western world?” Indeed, if God can provide for an impoverished Pentecostal Holiness preacher in depression era Oklahoma, why would he be so limited in impoverished systems globally? As Yong points out, “Minimally, I suggest that in impoverished situations, such a prosperity message will engender hope and perhaps motivate a certain course of action that anticipates the gradual, if not more efficient, overcoming of poverty.” When hope is coupled with other values such as hard work, resiliency, community responsibility, and innovation, it fuels possibility thinking and enables one to overcome the biology of inequality. Perhaps if this idea of faith in God to provide as a form of sufficiency gospel could supplant the prosperity gospel, the work of elevating the poor could be more effective in the type of social uplift that the gospel requires of the church.

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Notes

1 This research was originally presented at the 2019 Scholars Consultation of Empowered21 held 3–4 June 2019 in Bogota, Colombia, where the theme was “Poverty, its impacts, and the responses of Spirit-empowered communities.”

2 The theme of social engagement among Pentecostals was front and center in the 2018 Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies.


4 Miller and Yamamori, Global Pentecostalism, 165.


8 Clifton Clarke, _Pentecostal Theology in Africa_ (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 139.
11 Bowler, _Blessed_, 234. The actual origin of this phrase Bowler does not identify. While I cannot confirm this phrase, it was certainly consistent with his attitude.
12 Ellis Roberts, “God’s Hand on My Life,” _Healing Waters_, August 1951, 6. Ellis and Claudia attended a brush arbor revival hosted by Luther Dryden, Dan York, and Dan Evans four miles from their home.
14 Oral Roberts, _How I Know Jesus Was Not Poor_ (Altamonte Springs, FL: Creation House), 14.
16 Roberts, _How I Know Jesus Was Not Poor_, 7.
17 Roberts, _How I Know Jesus Was Not Poor_, 5.
18 Louis M. Kyrakoudes, “‘Lookin’ for Better All the Time’: Rural Migration and Urbanization in the South, 1900–1950,” in _African American Life in the Rural South, 1900–1950_, ed. R. Douglas Hurt (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 16, points out that both blacks and whites in the South were stuck in the cycle of yearly moving from farm to farm in search of lower rent or better yields to improve their economic status.
19 Roberts, _How I Know Jesus Was Not Poor_, 14.
20 Roberts, _Expect a Miracle_, 14.
21 Roberts, _How I Know Jesus Was Not Poor_, 6.
23 Roberts, _Expect a Miracle_, 22.
25 Isgrigg and Synan, “An Early Account of Oral Roberts’ Healing Testimony,” 170–73, gives the account of Roberts’ early success, preaching 600 times in the first four years of his ministry.


Lucy A. Jewell, “The Biology of Inequality,” *Denver Law Review* 93:3 (2018), 611–12, points out, “one’s material environment can get under one’s skin and into one’s genetic and brain pathways.”


Roberts received enough life experience credits from his years in ministry to apply for and receive his B.A. and M.Div. from Oral Roberts University in 1989. He was awarded an honorary doctorate from Centenary College in 1975.

Jewell, “The Biology of Inequality,” 631, points out that children from poverty show reduced ability to filter distractions and hindered achievement because of short attention spans.

Roberts, *Expect a Miracle*, 64.


51 Harrell, *Oral Roberts*, 193. Roberts certainly enjoyed a significant level of personal wealth, becoming a shrewd businessman and owning various properties and land investments in addition to his own ranch in Bixby, Oklahoma.
54 The order of buildings are as follows: Timko-Barton Hall, Braxton Hall, Sharkarian Hall (1962); EMR Hall, Claudius Hall, Health Resources Center, Learning Resources Center (1965); Prayer Tower (1967); University Village, Student Activity Center (1969); Mabee Center (1972); Susie Residence Tower, Wesley Residence Tower (1972); Howard Auditorium (1973); Athletic Residence Hall, Christ Chapel (1975); Francis Hall, Susie Hall, School of Medicine (1976); Baby Mabee, J. L. Johnson Baseball Stadium (1977); Student Apartment Complex, Graduate Center (1978); City of Faith (1978–1981); Grandview Hotel (1981); Journey through the Bible (1986).
55 There is a joke often told around the university that on the day Oral Roberts died, he called out to God, “Not yet Lord! Just one more building!”


69 Harrell, Oral Roberts, 423.

70 Harrell, Oral Roberts, 424.


72 Roberts, Expect a Miracle, 209–10.


76 Harrell, Oral Roberts, 355.


78 It is important to understand that Roberts’ commitment to begin the medical school was attached to the idea that he would raise the money to scholarship all of the ORU Medical School students so that they were not hindered by debt after graduation. The goal was to scholarship doctors to serve as healing agents in medical missions around the world. This was the obedience to which Oral Roberts felt God had called him. He felt that if he could not obey God to raise the money to keep the medical school going, he had no more assignment here on earth. See John R. Crouch, Jr., “Healing through Prayer and Medicine,” 191–203; Thomson K. Mathew, “Oral Roberts’ Theology of Healing: A Journey from Pentecostal ‘Divine Healing’ to Charismatic ‘Signs and Wonders’ to Spirit-empowered ‘Whole Person Healing’,” Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology 3:2 (2018), 303–23.

79 Roberts, Expect a Miracle, 300.

80 Roberts, Expect a Miracle, 327–29.

81 Roberts, Expect a Miracle, 298.

82 The story of the devastation of the City of Faith decisions do not end in 1991. Over the next decade, Richard Roberts attempted to navigate a university and ministry saddled with fifty million dollars in debt and declining enrollment. These tensions eventually led to a


86 Yong, “A Typology of Prosperity Theology,” 19.

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The Call of Nathanael

A New Recruit for the Jesus Movement (John 1:45–51)

J. Lyle Story

Keywords fig tree, Jacob, Johannine christology, John 1:45-51, Nathanael, prophetic revelation

Abstract

The call of Nathanael narrated in John 1:45–51 not only depicts the call of this disciple of Jesus, but also functions paradigmatically as an invitation for future generations of disciples to personal relationship with Jesus and participation in his messianic mission. The article argues that the horticultural metaphors of the fig tree in the Nathanael narrative and the vine in Jesus’ discourse in John 15 illustrate complementary aspects of discipleship, with the former emphasizing personal relationship with Jesus and the latter a relationship of abiding. It is through the work of the Holy Spirit that disciples, both original and future, are grafted into life in Christ and his mission in the world.

Introduction

The Evangelist John tells an inviting story about Jesus, who calls Nathanael to discipleship and in doing so, Jesus reveals where Nathanael was prior to Jesus’ call—under a fig tree. Jesus’ prophetic insight into Nathanael’s physical location then evokes a Messianic confession including Jesus’ divinity, then followed by Jesus’ own self-declaration, the Son of Man accompanied by angels ascending and descending—even upon the Son of Man. Several questions emerge.

What does this short story of Nathanael’s encounter with Jesus signify? What bearing does the immediate context of the Baptist’s declaration of Jesus as the Son of God who will baptize in the Holy Spirit imply for this short story? What does the Evangelist invite his readers to grasp from this narrative? How can Nathanael accord divinity and Messianic identity to Jesus as a result of Jesus’ prophetic revelation of
Nathanael, “being under the fig tree,” when Jesus was not present? Is there special nuance with the fig tree that the Evangelist intends that his readers perceive? What are readers to make of other allusions in the story, including the motif of an “Israelite in whom there is no guile” and the reference to Jacob’s vision of the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man, not a ladder? Are these motifs interrelated? Since John’s Gospel is replete with hidden meaning and veiled allusions to the Old Testament (e.g. John 3:14–15), it is important to ask if the Evangelist conveys more than topographical detail or local flavor.

Earlier, the Evangelist twice highlighted that Jesus is the one upon whom the Spirit descends and remains: the descending and remaining of the Spirit (τὸ πνεῦμα καταβαίνον . . . ἔμεινεν ἐπ’ αὐτόν, John 1:32; τὸ πνεῦμα καταβαίνον καὶ μένον ἐπ’ αὐτόν, John 1:33). Both the descent and remaining of the Spirit are central; these are the vital divine clues by which the Baptist knows that this is the one (Jesus) who will baptize in the Holy Spirit and whose identity is the Son of God (John 1:33, 34). The motif of ascending and descending of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus parallels the ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. Certainly, the role of the Holy Spirit is crucial for Jesus’ new companions.

Nathanael’s invitation is also preceded by a previous call narrative (John 1:35–42) in which the Baptist transfers two (one unnamed) of his disciples to Jesus. Their joyous witness is spontaneous and contagious, for Andrew leads Peter to Jesus, who calls him by name and renames him Cephas (Rock). The text also suggests that the unidentified disciple of the Baptist also finds another. Although Peter finds Jesus, he quickly discovers that Jesus knows and finds him.¹ Both call narratives demonstrate similar structure: a contagious witness (“come and see”), finding, being found and known, confession of Jesus’ identity, his affirmation, and a chronological marker in both stories, “the next day” (1:35, 43).

It is striking that in the call narratives of John 1 that the initial disciples “trust” in Jesus before the first sign at the wedding of Cana.² As Carson notes, the Evangelist “provides concrete examples”³ of those who did receive Jesus (John 1:11–12).

The story is climactic,⁴ for this call builds upon the various christological terms for Jesus (John 1) that others say about him, climaxed by Jesus’ own self-declaration of being the Son of Man. The story properly prefaces Jesus’ ministry of “signs” that begins in John 2. The story portrays the spontaneous and contagious assembling of Jesus’ companions. The Evangelist underscores the eschatological significance of Nathanael’s call, under the fig tree, by exercising prophetic insight and his allusions to the Old Testament. The Evangelist intends that his readers absorb the important pattern of seeking, finding, inviting, seeing, celebrating, confessing, and being known and found
The repeated invitation, “Come and see” (John 1:39, 46), extends not only to the original disciples, but also embraces the Evangelist’s readers.

It will be shown that through the Evangelist’s use of the Old Testament that Jesus’ call to Nathanael offers an invitation to personal relationship with Jesus and the community’s new identity, to a new and fruitful age, and to participate in Jesus’ Messianic mission as his companions. The immediate context implies that this new community will find its dynamic in the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

While the mashal of the vine (John 15) portrays the new relationship of abiding in the post-resurrection period on the day of the Paraclete when Jesus will be “in them” (John 14:17–20), the call of Nathanael under the fig tree develops the idea of the relationship to Jesus in the initial Jesus movement. Intertextuality assists the Evangelist’s readers in grasping the story’s significance.

Structure and Interpretation

How does the Evangelist tell this unique story? What structural and thematic clues does the Evangelist provide that would lead his readers to understand his thrust? As a whole, the paragraph reveals a series of cause-effect relationships in that one comment leads to another response.

Invitation to Nathanael (John 1:45). John informs his readers that Philip invited a certain Nathanael⁶ to meet Jesus, the son of Joseph,⁷ the one promised by Moses and the prophets. The identification of Nathanael, coupled with Philip’s statements about Jesus’ identity, genealogy, and geographical origin, and the fulfillment of Jewish hope, is thoroughly Jewish. The Evangelist parallels this story with the previous narrative when Andrew (one of the two unnamed disciples of the Baptist, 1:37) identifies Jesus as “the Messiah” (τὸν Μεσσιάν), which the Evangelist then identifies as “the Christ” (Χριστός, 1:41). The narratives of Andrew’s witness to Peter and Philip’s witness to Nathanael are paired and both reveal a vibrant and compelling witness,⁸ joined with a Messianic identification.

Nathanael’s Skeptical Response (1:46a). In response to Philip’s contagious invitation, Nathanael is skeptical: “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” The Evangelist does not really provide the explanation for Nathanael’s sarcasm. Scholars suggest a local proverb reflecting jealousy between the two towns of Cana and Galilee,⁹ or because Nazareth is unknown in the Old Testament and Jewish literature generally.¹⁰ Current readers can only surmise but not argue with certainty.

Jesus’ Revelation (1:47). Although Nathanael is initially cynical, he nonetheless follows Philip’s call, “Come and see” (1:46b),¹¹ and sees Jesus. With prophetic insight,
Jesus then directly addresses him as “a true Israelite in whom there is no guile” (ἁλθῶς Ἰσραηλίτης ἐν ὦ δόλως οὐκ ἔστιν, 1:47). Clearly, Jesus is “in the know” of Nathanael’s character through his prophetic revelation. Through intertextuality, the Evangelist’s readers note the transposition of the name change from “Jacob” to “Israel” (Gen 32:28). The term “Israelite” (Ἰσραηλίτης) is positive (par. to Rom 9:6–8), and depicts Nathanael as a member of God’s chosen people by spiritual birth, rather than by heredity; the label, “Israelite,” contrasts with later pejorative statements, “Jew” (Ἰουδαίος) and “sons of Cain” (John 8:44). The Baptist’s stated purpose concerning Jesus was “in order that he might be revealed to ‘Israel’” (ἵνα φανερωθῇ τῷ Ἰσραήλ, 1:31), and since Nathanael is the last of the disciples (according to John 1) to be called an “Israelite,” he initially fulfills the Baptist’s stated goal.

* Nathanael’s Question to Jesus’ Revelation (1:48a). In response to Jesus’ prophetic insight into his character, “without guile,” Nathanael is clearly disarmed, “How do you know me?” (πόθεν με γινώσκεις). He is unnerved; from his perspective, how could Jesus know something of his character when they have never met? Michaels states, “With a touch of humor, the Gospel writer highlights Nathanael’s candor as a way of confirming him as a man without deceit.” For the Evangelist, the key verb “I know” (γινώσκω, fifty-three occurrences) is central to his gospel. He links the verbal forms of “I know” (γινώσκω) with the Gospel’s core reality, “the eternal life” (ἡ αἰώνιος ζωή). Eternal life equates with the dual knowing the one true God and Jesus as “the sent one of God”: “that they might know you the only true God, and him whom you have sent, Jesus Christ” (ἵνα γινώσκοσιν σὲ τὸν ἀληθινὸν θεόν καὶ ὅν ἀπέστειλας Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν, 17:3). From the Semitic perspective, such knowing accentuates a relational knowledge or experience. In Jesus’ “High-Priestly Prayer” (John 17), “knowledge of the one God is not theoretical speculation, which allows the one who has it to live according to his own caprice.” Such knowledge is deeply personal, reciprocal, and ongoing, noted by the use of the present subjunctive, “that they continue to know,” and is certainly appropriate since Jesus prays for those who are already disciples. However, they also need to mature in their understanding and relationship of the intimate bond between Father and Son, which must likewise deepen in their relational experience with Jesus.

The Evangelist claimed that the Logos was the agent of creation (“all things were created through him,” πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ, 1:3; the world was created through him, ὁ κόσμος δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, 1:10). Yet, tragically, the world/creation “did not know him” (ὁ κόσμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἤγνω, 1:10) and “his own did not receive him” (οἱ ἰδιοὶ αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβεν, 1:11). In the next chapter, the Evangelist affirms Jesus’ interior knowledge twice: “because he knew all people” (διὰ τὸ αὐτὸν γινώσκειν πάντας, 2:24); “he (Jesus)
did not have need for anyone to witness to him about man, for he himself knew what was in man” (οὐ χρείαν εἶχεν ἵνα τις μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ ἄνθρωπον. αὐτὸς ἐγνώμενεν τί ἦν ἐν τῷ ἄνθρωπῳ. 2:25). The two remarks possess a certain “bite.” Jesus perceived the fickleness of the sign-seekers who seem to be present for “the show” but are not there for truly “knowing” Jesus.

For those who do “know” and “receive” Jesus, the mashal of the winsome shepherd emphasizes the mutual knowledge of the shepherd and sheep. Jesus says, “I know (γνῶσκω) my own and my own know (γνώσκουσι) me even as the Father knows (γνώσκει) me and I know (γνῶσκω) the Father” (10:14–15, 27). The truth that emerges is somewhat unique to the Fourth Gospel. Nathanael is amazed at Jesus’ discernment of him as an Israelite “in whom there is no guile” (1:49). But Jesus also knows the shallow faith of the Passover worshipers in Jerusalem (2:23–25). He knew the past and present life of the Samaritan woman (John 4), and how he would supply food for the hungry people in ch. 6. He also knows the evil intent in the heart of Judas (6:70; 13:27). What is exceptional in 10:14–15 is the affirmation of a reciprocal or mutual knowledge that binds Jesus to his disciples, “I know my own and my own know me.” The expression “to know (another)” is equated theologically with “to be in another,” in the language of mutual indwelling (14:20).

Jesus’ Further Prophetic Revelation (1:48b). Jesus then exercises further prophetic insight through his awareness of where Nathanael was prior to Philip’s invitation. He declares that before Philip had called him, “I saw you (being) under the fig tree” (ὦντα ὑπὸ τὴν συκῆν σε). Jesus’ prophetic seeing of Nathanael under the fig tree is comparable to other incidents in John’s Gospel where Jesus possessed “interior, prophetic, or second sight.”

Later, the Evangelist tells the story of the Samaritan woman when Jesus reveals his prophetic insight of her past and present marital status (John 4:17–18). In both John 1 and 4, Jesus’ interior insight leads to a response of wonder and confession: the woman—“Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet” (4:19) leads to, “Come see a man who told me all the things that I have done. Can this be the Messiah?” (4:29, 37); Nathanael—“How do you know me?” (1:48) leads to, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God and you are the King of Israel!” (1:49). The sequence emerges in both stories: a) a person meets Jesus for the first time, b) prophetic insight, c) Messianic confession.

Telford minimizes such prophetic insight, since other individuals and groups possessed this power and because there was not enough evidence to equate prophetic insight with Messiahship. However, Telford fails to see the similar progression with the Samaritan episode and other instances in the Fourth Gospel of similar prophetic insight. Perhaps it is not clairvoyance per se that distinguishes Jesus from other
visionaries, but that he as Messiah knows what is in the heart of a person (John 2:24–25). Other Johannine texts reinforce Jesus’ prophetic insight (6:70–71; 13:26; 16:30), including the mutual knowledge of the shepherd and sheep (10:3–4).

Jesus’ prophetic status emerges from numerous references that link prophet with Jesus’ interior knowledge of people and circumstances. Jesus is made privy to what people are thinking or doing and he is in the know as to particular events that will unfold. What Jesus knows, does, and says are due to the empowerment of the Holy Spirit/Paraclete, not omniscience. Jesus’ prophetic insight is grounded by the descending and remaining Holy Spirit; this is the clue for the Baptist (τὸ πνεῦμα καταβαίνον . . . ἐμείνεν ἐπ’ αὐτόν, John 1:32; τὸ πνεῦμα καταβαίνον καὶ μένον ἐπ’ αὐτόν, 1:33).

This important pericope about Jesus and the Holy Spirit is central for the two call narratives for the initial Jesus movement. Jesus’ giftedness as a Spirit-empowered prophet enables him to “know” situations, motivations, problems, and what will immediately unfold in some narratives. Otto interprets this prophetic gift as “a gift of penetration . . . a capacity of second sight . . . characteristic of the primitive charismatic.” This prophetic ability to know is not unique to Jesus, since there are instances of such prophetic knowledge in the Old and New Testaments. What is new is that Jesus as Messiah knows his own, whom he summons to companionship in his Messianic mission.

In addition, Jesus’ mention of the fig tree opens a window to numerous Old Testament allusions that bear upon the Nathanael’s call with respect to: a) the fig tree; b) Joshua’s companions in Zech 3:8–10; and c) Jacob in Gen 28:12. Intertextuality provides such support.

a) The fig tree metaphor is often linked with two other horticultural symbols of the vine/vineyard and olive tree in both testaments, and frequently designate the people of God, their call, history, blessing, judgment, necessary fruit, vocation, and God’s hope and expectation for them, as well as promise. One metaphor can be found with another symbol, for example, the barren fig tree in the vineyard (Luke 13:6–9) or within the full horticultural trio; they all are used in parabolic form, many of which depict the people of God.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fig Tree</td>
<td>Jer 24:1–10; 29:17; Amos 8:1–3; Mark 11:12–25 par; 13:28–31 par; John 1:45–51</td>
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<tr>
<td>Olive Tree</td>
<td>Zech 4:1–14; Rom 11:11–24; Rev 11:1–13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vine/Vineyard &amp; Fig Tree &amp; Olive Tree</td>
<td>Judg 9:7–12; Hab 3:17; Jer 5:17 LXX; Hag 2:19 (with pomegranate); Jas 3:12; 2 Kgs 18:31–32; Amos 4:9; Deut 8:8</td>
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The use of this horticultural trio in both testaments is not incidental. Nathanael’s call “under the fig tree” should not be isolated from its connection within the full horticultural trio. A certain fluidity of symbolism emerges in which a picture changes from the fruit of the vine to the whole vineyard, sometimes by a parallelism of members (Hos 9:10). The metaphors combine in an idiomatic expression of idyllic peace, “every man under his vine and under his fig tree” (2 Kgs 18:31 = Isa 36:16; 1 Kgs 4:25; Mic 4:4; Zech 3:10; 1 Macc 14:12). The texts associate the horticultural trio with the blessings of the Messianic age of fertility and promise (Gen 49:11–22). The language of the Bible (as canon) is replete with horticultural metaphors derived from human relationships, experience, history, and vocation, when the people of God encounter him in unique ways. Caird notes, “the metaphors derived from human relationships have a special interest and importance, because they lend themselves to a two-way traffic in ideas.”

Scholars have drawn attention to what Nathanael was doing under the fig tree, for example, praying or studying the Torah. Derrett aptly responded, “Those who study under the shade of a fig tree were often students of the Torah, but one can hardly say that to be under a fig tree is to be a Torah-student, for at that rate, sleepy Arab camel-drivers would be Torah-students.” Some scholars have denied any significance to the fig tree and regard its presence as purely incidental. However, investigation into what Jesus meant by seeing Nathanael under the fig tree is more fruitful, including reference to Zechariah.

b) Clearly, Zechariah intimates a Messianic era with Joshua’s companions. In the new age, God’s servant, the branch, will come forward, and the iniquity of the land will be removed in one day (Zech 3:8-9). The promise also affirms Joshua (LXX—Ἰησοῦς), the high priest along with your companions (οἱ πάλισίον σου), are labeled as men fit for a sign (Zech 3:8); they will share in the events of the new age, blessed with the fruit of the
horticultural trio. “In that day, declares the Lord of Hosts, every one of you will invite his companion (τὸν πλησίον αὐτοῦ) to sit under his vine and under his fig tree” (Zech 3:10). The Messianic age will see no vine and no fig tree without fruit whatever the season. Zechariah follows this promise with the vision of the golden lampstand flanked by two olive trees and depicts Joshua and Zerubbabel as sons of oil (Zech 4:14). It is also important to note that both the religious leader and civic leader must be: 1) purified (Zech 3:3–4); 2) clothed (Zech 3:5) and anointed (Zech 4:14); 3) their work is to be accomplished by my Spirit (4:4), not by worldly might. In Zech 6:11–13, Joshua is called the Branch who will work in concert with Zerubbabel. These companions of Joshua (Jesus) can be regarded as “a company assembling to see the Messiah’s work,” in conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit.

The Nathanael story focuses upon this very assembling of Jesus’ companions, in an atmosphere, experience, and expression of spontaneous, contagious, and joyful witness. Derrett suggests that Jesus recognized a potential recruit from the signs of the new age approaching, a “companion of Jesus fitted for a sign in his connection with the Messiah.” Nathanael is later found in a missionary role in a post-resurrection appearance (John 21:2). Thus, the Evangelist may suggest the eschatological significance of Nathanael’s call, under the fig tree, as in Mic 4:4; 1 Kgs 4:25, where “sitting under his vine and fig tree” is one of the blessings of the new age.

Nathanael’s Messianic Confession (1:49). Jesus’ further prophetic insight evokes Nathanael’s dual confession of Jesus as the Son of God and Israel’s King/Messiah (Ῥαββί σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, σὺ βασιλεὺς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ), a paired confession that accords with the stated purpose of John’s Gospel (20:30–31). The emphatic pronoun “you” (σὺ) in both affirmations underscores Jesus’ identity in Nathanael’s spontaneous witness. He echoes the Baptist’s pronouncement of Jesus’ identity as Son of God (1:34), and implicitly, Jesus, the one who will baptize in the Holy Spirit (1:33).

Jesus’ Promise of Greater Revelation (1:50–51). This sequence of revelation-confession then serves as a further steppingstone for a greater revelation for all the disciples (pluralis “to you,” ὑμῖν; “you will see,” ὄψεσθε), for Nathanael’s companions will see the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man (Gen 28:12)—upon a person, not a ladder. D. Moody Smith makes the cogent comment, “Jesus’ response sounds like, ‘You haven’t seen anything yet!’” Nathanael’s companionship is superseded by the full community, with Jesus’ invitation to initial commitment and growing trust with the full assurance of heaven’s openness.
and communication in a fully relational commitment. In Jesus’ Upper Room Discourse, he promises that they will do greater things than these (μεῖζονα τούτων, John 14:12), a promise that is based upon Jesus’ going to the Father, and their ensuing experience of the Holy Spirit when Jesus will be in them (John 14:17–20).

c) Through intertextuality, the other Old Testament allusion is found in Jacob’s experience at Bethel, when “the angels of God were ascending and descending” (LXX: οἱ ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ ἄνεβαινον καὶ κατέβαινον, Gen 28:12) upon the heavenly ladder. When Jacob awakens from his revelatory dream, he senses the reality of God’s presence: “Surely Yahweh is in this place” (Gen 28:16).

It seems clear that John knew and accepted the interpretation which understood Gen 28:12 to say that the angels of God ascended and descended upon Jacob, or Israel, and that for “Israel” he substituted “Son of Man” . . . . Jacob as the ancestor of the nation of Israel, summarizes in his person the ideal Israel in posse just as our Lord, at the other end of the line, summarizes it in esse as the Son of Man.35

The Evangelist later expresses the ascent motif in connection with the Son of Man being lifted up (John 3:13; 12:32), namely, on a cross. Ashton surveys several conjectural interpretations of the transposition from Jacob to the Son of Man, and concludes, “It lies in the picture. It is simply that there is no other route between heaven and earth.”36 The present participles, “ascending” and “descending,” convey continuous communication between heaven and earth, in which humans experience communication with the invisible God of glory.37 This language also accords with the Baptist’s language of the descending and remaining Spirit in John 1:32–33.

The Jacob story also emerges in Jesus’ characterization of Nathanael as “a true Israelite in whom there is no guile” (δόλος, John 1:47). Guile had surely characterized Jacob’s life, “with guile he took your blessing” (μετὰ δόλου ἔλαβεν τὴν εὐλογίαν σου, Gen 27:35–36; Gen 25:26).38 Michaels suggests that a link can also be found in Hos 9:10: “Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree in its first season, I saw your fathers.”39 “The point would then be a comparison between finding the new Israel among the disciples of John, and God finding the old Israel in the days of the patriarchs.”40

Nathanael’s spontaneous confession of Jesus as the Son of God and King of Israel well accords with the stated purpose of the Fourth Gospel that Jesus’ signs lead to trust in Jesus the Messiah and Son of God (John 20:30–31), and will result in eternal life.41 Jesus then promises greater wonders that are in store for all these disciples who are and will be Jesus’ companions, “You [pl. δψεσθε] will see the heavens opened and the
angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man” (1:51). Keener notes, “the Johannine principle that those who are genuinely ‘from God’ heed others who are from God” (3:20–21; 1 John 4:6).

The sequence of christological terms in John 1 is deeply rooted in the Old Testament, for the Evangelist consciously formulates a series of witnesses to Jesus. John intends that his readers embrace initial discipleship, which means an initial trust in Jesus’ real identity and their ongoing vibrant witness to him. The christological titles, voiced by others, lead to Jesus’ own solemn and climactic claim about himself:

- The Word—John 1:1;
- Pre-existence—1:1, 2, 15, 30;
- Agent of creation—1:3, 10;
- The Shekinah—1:14;
- Contrast between Moses (Law) and Jesus (grace and truth)—1:16;
- Christ, Elijah, the Prophet—1:25 (the Baptist’s disavowal of these titles);
- The one who comes—1:25 (after me);
- Lamb of God—1:29 (who takes away the sin of the world), 1:36;
- The one upon whom the Spirit descends and remains 1:32, 33;
- The one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit—1:33;
- Son of God—1:34;
- The Messiah (translated as Christ)—1:41;
- Son of God/King of Israel—1:49;
- Son of Man—1:51.

With the double Amen-saying, Jesus claims the climactic title “Son of Man” for his own self-designation, similar to the use in the Synoptic Gospels, as distinct from the post-resurrection titles given to Jesus. Barrett draws a parallel with the trial scene:

Nathanael has hailed Jesus as King of Israel (seemingly equaling “Messiah”); Jesus answers him by promising a vision of himself as the Son of Man. In Matt 26:64, when the high priest asks Jesus if he is the Messiah, Jesus answers him by promising a vision of the “Son of Man.” Clearly Jesus refers to Daniel’s apocalyptic Son of Man (Dan 7:13–14), which the high priest now recognizes, followed by the blasphemy charge and the tearing of his robe. “The Son of Man is both in heaven and on earth (3:13); He descends to give life to the world (6:27, 53); He ascends again to his glory (6:62), but this
ascent and glorification are by way of the cross (3:14; 8:28; 12:23, 34; 13:31).46

The Johannine community now sees that the “house of God” (Bethel) is not a physical place or a ladder47 (John 2:19–21; 4:21–24), but a person, the Son of Man, who links heaven and earth, who invites his people to be recruits of the new people of God. This new community will find its empowerment in the baptism in the Holy Spirit. In the mashal of the vine (John 15) with its powerful thrust upon mutual indwelling, the community is accorded privileged communication (15:15). The personal and communal atmosphere, experience, and expressions reveal a life of spontaneous and contagious witness, joy, and fruitfulness. Thus, the new community of companions assembles around this very person, not a place.

Implications

What are the inferences from this short call narrative and what bearing does this story have for Christian individuals and Christian faith communities? A few items stand out:

- The invitation to discipleship, joyous experience, and witness to the incredible person of Jesus, and to share as his companions in his Messianic mission remains constant over the centuries. The Evangelist does not intend that this story is simply to be read as a mere historical event, but a solid invitation to John’s readers then and now. The call to share as Jesus’ companion is not a somber “call to duty,” but a joyous participation in mission; membership in this community requires initial trust and receptivity in the wonder of eternal life. Such a call is an immense privilege that should grip John’s readers.

- Untold blessings lie in store for the people of God, both in the present and future. The story concludes with solid and communal promises that bear upon present experience as well as future hope (a trust, certainty, and emotion oriented to the future). The promises of fruitful blessings of the Messianic age can be counted on as trustworthy.

- Through the use of agrarian language and Old Testament allusions, the Evangelist intends that his readers sense the continuity between the old and the new. The new Messianic age does not negate the promises to Israel; indeed, the new people of God are squarely grounded in the Old Testament people of God. There is no hint of a replacement theology that “God has had it with Israel,” and now the new people of God are the only people that matter to God.
• While the Christian life originates in trust, the people of God need to understand that they are “in process,” and that they are very much in a discovery mode as to the real identity and purposes of Jesus as their lives unfold. The Evangelist would have his readers, then and now, ponder the choir of voices as they sing of his identity, meaning, and purposes for them. The call narrative concludes with an open-ended promise.

• The agrarian image of the fig tree joins together with the other agrarian image of the vine (John 15) as representative of the people of God. Yes, the first image of the fig tree affirms an invitation to participate in Jesus’ Messianic mission as a new recruit. However, the second image of the vine is an invitation to “abide” in Jesus in the post-resurrection period, when they are empowered by the Holy Spirit—a day when Jesus will “be in you,” on the day of the Paraclete (“in that day” ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ, 14:20). The experience of mutual indwelling incorporates Christians, Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit. References to the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room Discourse correspond with the Baptist’s witness of the Holy Spirit, which descended and remained upon Jesus (John 1:32–33).

• The Nathanael story is also communal in nature, paired with the communal language of the mashal of the vine. The community of believers is central, for the invitation to “join up” is not simply private or personal in nature. The call to authentic community relationship and companionship stands against our Western proclivity to rugged individualism.

• The invitation to witness orients the community, then and now. The life of witness is fundamental for the Evangelist. He witnesses to the Logos in the opening prologue (John 1:1–18), followed by the witness of the Baptist (1:36), and two of the Baptist’s disciples leave him and follow Jesus (1:37–39). Witnessing continues with each of the two who finds (1:41) a brother and brings him to Jesus (1:41–52). Then the Evangelist states that Jesus finds Philip, and Philip finds Nathanael (1:43–45) and brings him to Jesus (1:47). The entire Nathanael story is natural and simple but also filled with nuance. The verbs “I find” (εὑρίσκω, 1:41, 43, 45) and “I follow” (1:37, 38, 40, 43) are significant and their order varies in the narrative. The two disciples “follow” and “find” but Philip is “found” and then “follows.” In addition, the Evangelist also makes it clear that it is not simply a matter of finding, following, or knowing Jesus, but also an issue of being known by Jesus, just as Jesus knows Peter and knows Nathanael.
In telling the story of the growing Jesus movement, the Evangelist directs his readers to embrace Jesus’ identity and their unique companionship with him and to participate in the new and fruitful life of the Messianic age. The Evangelist intends that his readers experience both initial commitment and growing trust in the one who sees them before they see him and who finds them before they find him, and knows them before they know him. Jesus, with his recruits/companions, constitutes the new people of God, and they are recipients of promise, joy, and hope.48

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Notes
1. Andrew is one of two of the Baptist’s disciples; the second disciple is unnamed.

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glorious in that which is familiar or close to home.” J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 129.


11 The language, “come and see,” is issued to the first pair of disciples (John 1:39).


17 See J. Ramsey Michaels, “Nathanael Under the Fig tree,” *Expository Times*, 78 (1966–67), 182–83. Lightfoot supports the clairvoyant thrust. J. Lightfoot, *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae* (Oxford: University Press, 1859), 3:246–47. In particular, Moule provides strong evidence that the phrase, “under the fig tree,” indicates “accurate knowledge of a person’s whereabouts and movements.” C. F. D. Moule, “A Note on ‘Under the Fig Tree,’” *Journal of Theological Studies* 48 (1954), 182–83. In the *History of Susana*, when Daniel cross examines the two wicked elders who are giving false evidence about Susana, he asks them separately under what tree and in what part of the garden they had seen the alleged offence take place. They gave contradictory answers: one says, ὑπὸ σχῖνον (RV “a mastic tree”), the other ὑπὸ πρῖνον (RV “a palm tree”), and so their lie was detected. Supposing then that “under the tree” was a stock question—a proverbial expression, meaning, “Can you tell me all about it?”—the Johannine phrase might mean quite simply that Jesus knew all about Nathanael, as though he had watched his every movement as the heart of Elisha watched Gehazi in 2 Kgs 5:26. For further references to prophetic insight in the Mishnah, see Ferdinand Hahn, “Die Zussamengehörit des ‘Wissens’ Jesu über den Menschen mit dem Bekanntnis des Menschen zu ihm ist für den Evangelisten konstitutiv,” in *Neues Testament und Kirche*, ed. Joachim Gnilka (Freiburg: Herder, 1974), 180. Schnackenburg however sees the power to read hearts as recalling the Hellenistic demigods (θεῖος ἄνδρες). Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangeliums* (Freiburg: Herder, 1965), 316. However, the Fourth Gospel is more concerned with Jesus’ intimate union with the Father.

Contra scholars such as Green who interpret this phenomenon as “an omniscience that surfaces repeatedly in the Lukan narrative.” Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), 216. See also Wilhelm Michaelis, “προφήτης κτλ.” *TDNT* 6:781–864. Michaelis cites Greek sayings from Strack-Billerbeck, vol. 2, which reflect the omniscience of a true prophet: “A prophet of truth is the one who always knows everything, on the one hand, the things that have happened as they occurred, the things which are occurring as they occur and the things which will be as they will be” (H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* [München: C. H. Beck, 1922–28], 2:133, translation mine); “A prophet of truth is the one who always knows everything and has insight into everything” (Ps.-Clem., *Hom.* 2.6.1, translation mine); and “wherefore having confidence he set forth concerning the things which will be, for he is a prophet, without stumbling” (*Hom.* 3.11.2, translation mine).


E.g., Elisha knows of Gehazi’s greed with respect to Naaman’s gifts (2 Kgs 5:26); “Elisha the prophet, who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom” (2 Kgs 6:12).

E.g., Peter “knows” the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:3–4: 9); Paul also knows the Satanic origin of Elymas, the magician (Acts 13:9–10).


Lightfoot was sure that Nathanael had retired there, “either for prayer, meditation, reading, or some other religious performance,” *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae*, 247; Cheyne suggests the same, “Nathanael,” 3:3338–39.

Jeremias states that Nathanael was sitting under the tree that represented the knowledge of God and his word. Joachim Jeremias, “Die Berufung des Nathanael,” *Angelos* 3 (1930), 27. See Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 2:371, for Rabbinic references.


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33 Smith merely interprets the fig tree mention, “while you were still at home,” Johannine Christianity, 76.
35 C. H. Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1952), 245–46. He also notes the link of “the descent of the angels upon Jacob,” or Israel, with the prophecy of Isa 49:3, δούλος μου εἰ σύ, Ἰσραήλ, καὶ ἐν σοι εὐδοξασθόσομαι.
37 See Michaels, “Nathanael Under the Fig Tree,” 137.
38 Boismard, Du Baptême, 98–103. Michaelis has called into question the relationship of John 1:51 to Gen 28:12, but his argument is unconvincing, since there are so many parallels: angels ascending-descending, Jacob-Israel, guile-no guile, Wilhelm Michaelis, “Joh. 1, 51 Gen. 28:12 und das Menschensohn-Problem,” Theologische Literaturzeitung 85 (1960), 461–78.
39 Michaels, “Nathanael Under the Fig Tree,” 183. See Jer 8:13; Mic 7:1. Keener fails to connect the fig tree imagery with the people of God, The Gospel of John, 486.
41 For the double Amen-saying, see Michaels, The Gospel of John, 334–35.
42 Windisch interprets this angel motif as a reference to postresurrection angelic appearance, since these are lacking in John’s account. Hans Windisch, “Angelophanien um den Menschensohn auf Erden,” Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 31 (1932), 199–204. Lincoln argues that mention of angels points to realized eschatology, while angels in the apocalyptic discourse point to the Parousia, The Gospel According to Saint John, 122.
43 For full discussion of the titles, see Ashton, Understanding the Fourth Gospel, 255–62.
44 Ashton cogently argues that this is a Messianic title (Matt 11:3; John 6:14; 11:27), Understanding the Fourth Gospel, 254.
47 See Keener for a full discussion of the ladder in Judaism, The Gospel of John, 489–90. The verb “I abide” (μένω) is very important for the Fourth Gospel (forty occurrences). In the
Synoptic Gospels, the uses of the verb surface in texts that merely mean to stay in a geographical location. For the Fourth Gospel, the verb emerges predominately in dealing with mutual indwelling (twelve occurrences of the verb in the *mashal* of the vine—John 15).

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Abstract

This article proposes a constructive Pentecostal Spirit christology, primarily in conversation with a feature of Cyril of Alexandria’s thought. After considering key features of kenotic Pentecostal Spirit christologies, and showing their limitations, the article takes up the task of constructing an alternative account of kenosis via a re-reading of the Christ hymn in Philippians 2.

**Introduction: The Problem with (Some) Spirit Christologies**

Pentecostal Spirit christologies, whether academic or popular, often, perhaps even normally, assume a basic incompatibility between the human and the divine. In these contrastive accounts, God must limit his power in order for creation to come into being and exist in its own right. And in the incarnation, the Son’s divine nature must “go quiet,” so to speak, for his humanity to have its own voice.¹ It is almost axiomatic: insofar as God is fully God, we cannot be fully ourselves; insofar as we are fully ourselves, God is not fully God.

Ken Archer puts the point sharply: “Such limitation creates the necessary space which enables God and humanity (as well as creation) to enjoy authentic interpersonal relationships.”² Keith Warrington follows the Assemblies of God theologians, William Menzies and Stanley Horton, in regarding the Son’s incarnation as the giving-up of privileges “enjoyed with the Father in past eternity.”³ And Andrew Gabriel takes the same tack, although he is focused on the doctrine of the Spirit:
With respect to divine omnipotence, the Spirit acts kenotically as the Spirit makes room for creaturely freedom, even to the point of allowing creatures to resist him. In this sense, the Spirit “surrenders” or “empties himself” as he exercises his power within created reality. This is a divine self-limitation (kenosis) of the exercise of divine power . . . The powerful “fire” of the Spirit can even be quenched and restrained. Even the church sometimes resists the Spirit and, therefore, it is in continuous need of reform. One can resist the Spirit. The kenotic Spirit generally does not force. Rather, believers are invited to “walk by the Spirit” and to be “led by the Spirit” (Gal. 5.16, 18).  

Amos Yong, perhaps the best-known theologian in the global Pentecostal movement, draws on a version of this model in his theology of disability: “A world that is contingent, that includes spontaneity, and that features free creatures is possible precisely because God ‘withdraws’ himself in order to create ‘space’ for others (the world and its various creatures).” Here, “withdrawal” seems to be a metaphor for divine self-limitation, which makes the world possible but also immediately and necessarily puts the world at risk. God “distances” himself from creation, and so creation is vulnerable to evil and evils. But if God were not “distant,” creation would not be itself at all. “In such a world [that is, a world in which God has decided to limit his powers], genetic mutations have evolved creatures and whole species that have perished because of inability to adapt to their environment, have resulted mostly in spontaneous abortions, and have produced congenital disabilities (e.g., Down Syndrome); this same world has also allowed accidents to happen (e.g., head injuries), and disabilities caused by the irresponsibility of free creatures (e.g., fetal alcohol syndrome).”  

In an earlier work, Yong argues that Spirit christology, unlike Logos christology, better appreciates Jesus’s humanity, and in this way frees Pentecostals from the unnecessary restrictions of ancient Hellenistic metaphysics, thereby reframing the Oneness-Trinitarian debates. Spirit christology also highlights Jesus’ life as model of the Spirit-anointed life, 6 which, Yong believes, is where the emphasis should be given Pentecostal desire to imitate Christ.  

In a more recent work, Yong makes it clear that he, like the Catholic Charismatic Ralph Del Colle, does not want to reject “high christology” out of hand. He does, however, want to emphasize the Spirit-empowered humanity of Jesus, because, he believes, this is the best way for contemporary believers to grasp the nature and purpose of the Spirit-filled life. What Jesus did, he did humanly and in the power of the Spirit. Therefore, we, who are also filled with the same Spirit, can and should expect to do the same.
Sammy Alfaro’s approach is more radical than Yong’s. His brackets out the categories and concerns of Nicene orthodoxy. Like Yong and Warrington and others, Alfaro holds that Pentecostal spirituality is focused on Jesus’ humanity, and just in this way on his utter dependence on the Spirit. But Alfaro goes further than most in insisting that this “utter dependence” is possible only if the divine attributes are willingly given up. “In becoming dependent, the Son surrendered the independent use of his divine attributes in incarnation. The Word became flesh and exercised power through the Spirit, not on its own.”

Alfaro finds this kenotic Spirit christology everywhere in early Pentecostal teaching:

Jesus became the Captain of our salvation on account of his complete dependence on the Spirit on his way to Calvary. He lived and died as a man, but a man guided by the power of the Holy Spirit. During his earthly existence, Jesus relinquished his divine powers and relied on the Spirit in order to become God’s perfect and spotless sacrificial Lamb.

He believes that the view of the Charismatic Anglican vicar A. A. Boddy is representative of primitive Pentecostalism: “at no time did Jesus exercise his divine powers independently, but was always relying on the Spirit to accomplish his mission.”

In an early editorial on divine healing, A. A. Boddy states that Christ’s life was “the representative human life lived under our conditions”—as opposed to God’s conditions—precisely because he “accepted conditionally the Holy Ghost as we may accept Him to be the indwelling Divine Life.” Around the same time, an unnamed contributor to the Weekly Evangel claims that “The Lord of glory emptied Himself and took the place of absolute dependence upon His Father. The place of ‘Nothing’ that God might be ‘All.’” And Elizabeth Sisson, a formidable figure in the early movement, contended that what Christ did in giving up his rights, all Christians must do:

As the Father wanted none of the living of Christ’s humanity, when He was here in His human life, wanted only His emptiness, as a human shell in which God could express Himself in word and action, so Christ wants over again our perpetual self emptied lives, in which to live, in the glory of the Father. As Faith appropriates such ideal Divine Provision, the supply comes forth.
Pentecostal Spirit Christology and Nicene Metaphysics

Other examples—and counter-examples, no doubt—could be given, but the point stands: Pentecostals past and present have looked and continue to look to Jesus as the exemplary man of the Spirit. And as a rule, they have done so by arguing that Jesus is a man of the Spirit precisely because he gave up the use of his divine resources. They hold that he had to do so, because, as I have said, they assume that the divine and the human exist in radical competition with each other. But Kathryn Tanner is right, I believe, in insisting that there is no competition between God and all that is not-God. Creation is not itself in relative independence from God, but in absolute dependence upon him. God does not distance himself from us in order for us to be free, but frees us by being the inmost source and ultimate end of our existence. Creation is fully itself just because God is “all in all.”

All to say, creation does not need the diminishment or withdrawal of God, but God’s nearness, God’s fulfilling fullness. And it is that very nearness, that same fulfilling fullness that Christ embodies. He does not give up his intimacy with the Father in order to become human or to depend upon the Spirit. It is his intimacy with the Father, his filial communion, that constitutes his humanity and is revealed at his baptism. The Spirit rests upon Christ as the sign that his humanity is fully opened up, absolutely available, to the divine life. And what is true in Christ is true of the relation of God to all creation. In becoming finite, taking finitude up as his own, “the infinite Word shows once and for all equally the non-duality of God and the world and the non-identity of God and the world.”

The divine is not an “other” to the human in Christ, and God is not an “other” to creation. God’s transcendence is more radical than that. “God differs to the point of being the non-other.” God is non aliud—not a thing at all—and therefore is not affected or effected as things must be. It is just for this reason that God can be one with the creature without confusion or violation of any kind, either to God or to the creature. That is to say, the creation is in the creator and the creator is in the creation in such a way that the creator is always creator and the creation is always creation.

Cyril of Alexandria on Christ and the Spirit

So, how should we speak about Christ’s relation to the Spirit? Is a non-competitive, non-contrastive Spirit christology possible? I believe it is, and I think that Cyril of Alexandria shows how it might be done. Cyril can at times talk about Christ
surrendering his glory, or of his descending to “human humiliation.” But he regularly insists that when Christ was “emptied” this does not at all mean that his divine nature was eliminated or changed in any way. Instead, the Word shared with his flesh his divine glory. Cyril does not think Christ had to rid himself of his divine powers in order to be truly human. The opposite is true: he was truly human precisely because his humanity was brought into absolute and abiding communion with his divinity. In him, the emptiness of sinful human existence is filled to overflowing with the fullness of the life of God.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus prays to be restored to his former glory, the glory he had with the Father in the beginning (John 17:5). And yet at the very beginning of the Gospel it is said: “the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory . . .” (John 1:14). Cyril holds these truths together: if in one sense God’s glory is hidden or veiled in the incarnation, in another sense it is revealed. God, being God, is always inherently glorious. But God, being a living God, and a gracious God, can be differently glorious according to our needs. In Christ, that glory simply is the full humanity fully alive.

This seems to be what Cyril has in mind when he describes Christ’s humanity as a coal glowing with divine fire. The flesh of God bears the glory of God, makes the divine glory humanly experienceable: “the Word of God [is] united with the manhood, and not as having cast aside what he is, but rather as having transformed what he assumed into his own glory and power.” Taking up human nature as his own, the transcendent Christ is not changed or limited but changes it by his unlimited changelessness. He becomes what it is only so that it might become what he is.

At the beginning of the Scholia, Cyril says the Fall stripped humanity of the Spirit, ruining our nature, making it unworthy of intimacy with God. Christ, in giving/receiving the Spirit, restores the Spirit to us, “re-rooting” the Spirit in our nature. “He received the Spirit for our sakes in order to sanctify our entire nature. He did not come to help himself but to become for all of us the door, the beginning and the way to heavenly blessings.”

God the Word is “full” in regard to his own nature, and perfect in every respect. From his own fulness he gives out his benefits to all creatures, as he said, “I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh” (Isa. 44:3). When we say that he was “emptied out” it has no derogatory reference to the Word’s own nature nor, as might be thought, was he changed or made inferior in any respect. For he himself, just like his Begetter, is unalterable and immutable,
and was never capable of any passibility. But when he became flesh, that is became man, he appropriated the poverty of humanity to himself . . .

Here, Cyril identifies the incarnation with Pentecost. Christ, at one with the Spirit, both receives (humanly) and gives (divinely) the Spirit. As Cyril says in his commentary on the Gospel of John, Jesus “receives the Spirit through himself for us.” Humanity, because of sin, is by nature “empty,” just as God, by nature, is full, fulfilling, overflowing. “He was emptied in this way, by reason of our likeness, being full, as God.” Christ has taken our humanity as his own, and in this way has laid claim to our emptiness. At his baptism, he shares his communion with the Spirit with us, filling our emptiness with his fullness, the divine nature he and the Spirit share with the Father. Importantly, Cyril does not think that Christ has to limit or negate his divinity in order to “make room” for the Spirit. Human being itself, as Christ makes it his own, is itself the room the infinite Spirit fills up beyond all measure.

Cyrillian Christology and the Philippians Christ-Hymn

Cyril’s theology harmonizes perfectly with the Christ hymn in Philippians 2. Of course, I know that this passage can be and often is read to mean that in order to be found in human form Christ had to give up the form of God. But I am convinced it should be read differently. God makes obedience and suffering his own by taking on human nature, and does so by “remaining what he was.” “He was made like us, not losing His own nature, for He is unchangeable as God.” Christ’s kenosis, his pouring out of his fullness into the emptiness of human nature, not only unveiled God, it also exalts humanity—and in particular the humanity of those treated most inhumanely.

Jesus did not have to surrender his divine privileges in order to come and live a human life. In fact, it is a mistake to think of God as privileged in the first place. He is not philanthropic, condescending to help those who are beneath him. He is love, drawing his creatures into full equality with himself. It follows, then, that the incarnation is not a humiliation for God, although it certainly reveals that God is humble. As Anselm says, “In the incarnation of God it is understood that no humiliation of God came about: rather it is believed that human nature was exalted.”

In becoming “obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross,” Christ did not alter himself, did not become less or other than he was and is and shall be. Said differently, taking on humanity, Christ was not stripped of his dignity; instead, he dignified our nature, and in the process revealed that a slave, even a criminal slave, is no less human, no less worthy than a lord. Better, in a world such as ours, a world
corrupted by the powers of sin and death, a world of injustice and tragedy, it is only in the form of a slave that Christ could perform his humanity fully. That is to say, God’s “form,” when expressed humanly, is necessarily given in the “form of a slave.” It is not the becoming human that is humbling for Christ; it is the becoming “obedient to the point of death” (Phil 2:8). Christ became human and then humbled himself—and even this did not make him less God-like. His kenosis in its entirety simply disclosed what God is like. God exalts himself in humanity. All to say, in spite of what we have come to think, kenosis is not emptying (in the sense of the divine becoming less itself) but filling (in the sense of making humanity more itself by giving it a share in divine life). In Cyril’s words, God the Word does not empty himself of his fullness but in his fullness descends into emptiness and fills it with himself.34

**Conclusion: Beyond the Imitation of Christ**

Precisely this is the theme of Frank Macchia’s recent *Jesus the Spirit Baptizer*. Pentecost reveals that God, as the ever-abundant source of all things, is also their fulfillment. Jesus “baptizes us in the Spirit from the fullness of his own Spirit-led life as the faithful Son of the Father.” Just so, Macchia argues, we understand kenosis, or self-emptying, not as the elimination of God, but as the gracious realization of God in creation and creation in God. “This divine self-emptying in Christ imparts to us the flourishing of life in the Spirit, the love of the Father in the image of the faithful Son. This divine self-giving frees us to be ourselves as we were created to be and shows us the wisdom by which that life is to be attained and lived.”35 That is, Pentecost frees us to live as Christ in the power of the Spirit. Not in the sense that we merely imitate him, but in the sense that he lives our lives with us and we live his life with him. This is what Paul means when he says, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:19–20).

In conclusion, then, following Macchia, who is himself following Cyril, we can say that Christ’s kenosis is not the “scaling down” of his divinity in order to make his humanity viable. Instead, his humanity is viable precisely because it is fully open to his fulfilling divinity. Christ’s humanity is held in full communion with the Father by the Spirit. The divine neither recedes nor dominates and the human is neither diminished nor overwhelmed. Christ is both truly fully human and truly fully divine.

Because we confess that this full and fulfilling communion is true of Christ, we can affirm that it is true of God’s relation to creation as a whole. That is, God is not the one above the many but the all in all. And that means creatures do not have to be less
than themselves in order for God to be God any more than God has to be less than himself in order for creation to be creation. It is exactly the other way around, in fact. Happily, creation is itself just because God is God, the infinite generosity at the beginning, middle, and end of all things.

In this light we can see that Jesus is not to be regarded as the model of the Spirit-filled life but as the indwelling source of that life, more intimate with us than we are with ourselves. Jesus is not an exhibit of a type, but is in and of himself the archetypal reality of life in the Spirit, and as we are in him and he is in us, that reality cannot not come alive in our lives. Therefore, we do not so much seek to do what he did as to let what he is doing happen in us.

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Notes

1 Ralph Del Colle (Christ and the Spirit: Spirit-Christology in Trinitarian Perspective [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994]) is a notable exception to this rule, as is Frank Macchia, whose work I will take up later in this article.


3 Keith Warrington, Pentecostal Theology (London/New York: T & T Clark, 2008), 34.

4 Andrew Gabriel, The Lord Is the Spirit (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 190. Notice, for Gabriel, kenosis is, by definition, divine self-limitation. This view is not limited to Pentecostals, of course. David Law’s view (see “Kenotic Theology,” in Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology, eds. I. A. McFarland, D. A. S. Fergusson, and K. Kilby [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014], 262) seems to be typical: “Despite its problems, however, some version of kenosis is arguably necessary if Christianity is to hold fast to the doctrine of the incarnation, for only if Christ lays aside or scales down some aspect of his divine nature is it possible to conceive of him being divine and yet able to live a genuinely human life. Furthermore, kenosis is central not only to Christology, but to Christian life and discipleship as such. The notions of self-giving, self-sacrifice, service, and love of others which it denotes are essential for Christian existence.”

5 Amos Yong, Theology and Down Syndrome (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 180.
6 Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 110.

7 In his own words, (Amos Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology* [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014], 241), “Understandings of Jesus of Nazareth as anointed by the Spirit to accomplish the works of God provide a more conducive framework for seeing Jesus’ solidarity with human beings and project a springboard for envisioning missional discipleship in his footsteps.”


10 Alfaro is no doubt correct in this: many early Pentecostals did suggest that Jesus could be the exemplar only if he refused the uses of his divine powers. They did not want to deny that Jesus was God, of course. They did not hold to a so-called “low christology.” But they did want to say that Jesus, as God, had the power to give up his powers, and that he did so for our sakes, revealing in his self-denying ministry what it means to live in radical dependence on the Holy Spirit.


17 In terms of his creatureliness, Jesus is no less dependent on the Father than he is on the Spirit: “The Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise” (John 5:19).


19 So Tyler Wittman (*God and Creation in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019], 17): “God’s relation to creation must be ‘non-contrastive’ and characterized by ‘non-duality.’ This means that God is not a thing alongside other things, and so God’s agency in and among creatures does not crowd out or frustrate created agency in the way that two creatures may displace one another.”


24 Cyril, *Scholia on the Incarnation of the Only Begotten 9*.


26 Cyril, *Scholia on the Incarnation of the Only Begotten 12*.


29 Cyril, *Scholia on the Incarnation of the Only Begotten 5*.

30 Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John, Vol. 1*, 82.

31 Cyril, *Scholia on the Incarnation of the Only Begotten 12*.

32 Cyril, *Scholia on the Incarnation of the Only Begotten 7*.


34 Cyril, *Scholia on the Incarnation of the Only Begotten 17*. In a similar vein, Sergei Bulgakov, *The Comforter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 250, distinguishes two modes or movements within the one hypostatic “descent” of the Spirit that marks the beginning of the New Creation. At the Annunciation, which is Mary’s Pentecost, the Spirit rests upon and so is revealed in the humanity of the Theotokos. At the Baptism, Christ’s Pentecost, the Spirit rests upon and so is revealed in the humanity of the God-Man. This new descent entails a new relationship for Jesus to the Spirit. And by “virtue of His anointment in His personal Pentecost which is His baptism, the anointment becomes accessible in Him to the entire world.”

PENTECOSTAL COLLABORATION

A PRAGMATIC NECESSITY OR A SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLE?

ARTO HÄMÄLÄINEN

Keywords Pentecostal collaboration, Pentecostal-Charismatic cooperation, ecumenism, three-self principle, ecclesiology, theology of unity, cross-cultural partnership

Abstract

Collaborative structures between Pentecostal churches and denominations were initiated soon after the national and denominational entities were established. This tentative phase of collaboration did not generate permanent organizational structures. However, it indicated a desire for cooperation, which in turn paved way for the contemporary manifold networking among Pentecostals. This collaboration is now taking place both within continents as well as globally. The aim of this article is to evaluate whether this development towards more permanent and organized collaboration has been a result of practical or theological needs. An additional theme of discussion is the collaboration between Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, which is demonstrated, for example, by the Empowered21 organization. This collaboration has a strong missiological dimension—the shared sense of urgency to finish the task given by Jesus to his disciples, to reach the whole world for Christ. This article elaborates the potentiality of this collaboration and it aims to provide constructive proposals for future development. This elaboration is constructed within a contextual framework, which is an important methodological aspect to be considered within the theme. Therefore, the perspectives used in this article are interdisciplinary. It utilizes historical sources together with personal experience, various theological considerations, and cultural anthropology. In the contemporary world, the collaboration between the Pentecostal-Charismatic churches and missions is important and needed for the fulfillment of the Great Commission, not only from a practical point of view but also to pursue a theology of unity.
Introduction

From the dawn of humankind, people have understood the power and synergy of collaboration. In ancient times, they united together in building a tower reaching up to the sky. Now, Paris, New York, Toronto, Kuala Lumpur, Shanghai, and Dubai have left the tower of Babel in their shadows. Globalization has enabled more and more effective partnerships and agreements in international trade. Though turmoil exists on the global stage, in many ways, the need for collaboration today has not disappeared.

A Historical Synopsis of Pentecostal Collaboration

Churches and missions have cooperated together as well. Large international organizations such as the World Council of Churches (WCC) have been formed, preceded by the International Mission Council, which paved the way for the establishment of the WCC. Not all Christians were in favor of the WCC, so then the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA, later, Fellowship) was formed. In addition, evangelical Christians interested in world missions and evangelism became united under the Lausanne covenant and movement that was inspired especially by Billy Graham.

Besides the global networks, churches have their own national and local structures. The older churches have a long history of providing unity in their structures, but newer churches and denominations, especially from the time of the Reformation and after, have developed their forms of unity and cooperation in various ways, emphasizing New Testament elements. Some have adopted the episcopal structure, while others, the Presbyterian or congregational model, and some combining these last-mentioned patterns.

Some Pentecostal denominations had their structure in place before becoming Pentecostal, like the International Pentecostal Holiness Church, the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), and the Church of God in Christ. Their holiness backgrounds provided them a framework for unity and collaborative activities. The Assemblies of God (AG), though having origins and tracing its history back to various evangelical movements, had to create its own structure at its founding in 1914.1 The same occurred with the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel in 1923.2 In Europe, Pentecostals of the Nordic countries formed their Presbyterian-Congregational structure by inheriting some features from the Baptists through the Swedish Pentecostal pioneer Lewi Pethrus, who was expelled from that denomination. Later, contacts with the AG in the US through immigrant connections influenced the development of structures in many other countries, along with the model from the Nordic countries by the influence
of Thomas Barratt and Lewi Pethrus. The strong missionary work from Nordic countries brought the influence of their structure to different parts of the world.³

The urgency of missionary work not only was the motivator for cooperative structures in forming the AG in 1914, but it also influenced the development of European Pentecostals. The significant feature, however, is that the structure usually was limited to a single denomination. Structures binding the various Pentecostals together were rare at the beginning of the movement. This then resulted in Pentecostalism having several faces in the same target country of missionary work, which often created confusion in the minds of the indigenous people.

The heritage of the Azusa Street revival was radical in the point of view of unity and collaboration. Pastor Seymour’s vision was of a shared experience and communal cooperation between various Christian groups.⁴ He crossed ethnic and gender boundaries. The leadership group was racially mixed and included both women and men.⁵ That, however, did not become a generally followed norm in the long-term development of Pentecostalism.

Opposite to the spirit of Azusa Street, the development of global Pentecostalism has been characterized by fragmentation. There seems to be over 11,000 Pentecostal denominations in the world.⁶ That picture, however, is a little bit misleading because one has to realize that classical Pentecostals are well-structured today. Gina A. Bellofatto and Todd M. Johnson estimate the number of Pentecostals will be 115 million by 2020.⁷ Most of these belong to two umbrella organizations: the Pentecostal World Fellowship (PWF) and the World Assemblies of God Fellowship (WAGF), the former having over sixty million members and the latter over sixty-eight million members. In spite of some overlapping, the total number is still not very far from the figure Bellofatto and Johnson have given.

Although the early attempts for Pentecostal global unity and cooperation did not bring much in concrete results, they did show the desire for connection among the believers of the new movements in various countries. The International Pentecostal Conference was held in Amsterdam after World War I in 1921. At that time, the attention of the many new Pentecostal churches was mainly on the national and local level.⁸ The influential early Pentecostal leader in Great Britain, Donald Gee, had a vision for Pentecostal European cooperation. An opportunity to take a step in building that unity was offered by the Swedish Pentecostal movement, and Gee’s vision came to fulfillment in Stockholm in 1939. When World War II was over, global collaboration moved forward. The first Pentecostal World Conference took place in Zürich, Switzerland, in 1947.⁹ Since then, it has been held continuously, the last one (the twenty-fifth) being held in Calgary, Canada, in 2019. The conference organization
became the basis for the PWF in 2004. The mission of the PWF was defined in 2011 by formulating its seven objectives:

1. To promote and encourage regional and continental alliances among Spirit-filled networks;
2. To promote and connect Spirit-filled leaders—shapers of communities and nations;
3. To speak to governments and nations when and where social justice and religious rights are compromised and/or violated for the sake of the gospel;
4. To foster world missions and support humanitarian efforts and where possible to provide relief aid;
5. To serve as a cooperative fellowship for Pentecostal theological institutions to promote the development of education and leadership training;
6. To change the global contour of Christianity by emphasizing coordinated worldwide prayer;
7. To organize a triennial celebration (Pentecostal World Conference) that will gather the global Spirit-filled family to advance the mission and purposes of the Pentecostal fellowship.¹⁰

The other global Pentecostal umbrella organization, the WAGF, also has a strong emphasis on world evangelization. It is a fruit of the global action initiated in 1988 that was named the “Decade of Harvest.” The instrumental figure for this initiative was J. Philip Hogan, the executive director of the Division of Foreign Missions, USA. One year later, the organization for the Decade of Harvest developed its structure. It then became the basis for the WAGF. The name was finalized to its present form in 1993. The basic tasks are very similar to the PWF, and its practical actions have been very focused on missions and evangelization.¹¹

The forming process of the WAGF revealed differing views among Pentecostals in regards to the need for structure. Some had a desire for a strong organization while others preferred a loose coalition for collaboration. The latter opinion won, however, but at the same time, emphasized effectiveness.¹²

Besides these global organizations, continental Pentecostal organizations have also been established. In Europe, the same kind of debate that concerned the WAGF establishment took place. The Nordic countries especially were afraid of any strong hierarchical organization. In other parts of Europe, many Pentecostals were in favor of a more centralized structure, although not in the strictest form. Because of this dichotomy, Europe initially had two different structures for Pentecostal unity: the
European Pentecostal Fellowship (EPF) and the Pentecostal European Conference (PEC). EPF started in 1966 and PEC in 1969. The last-mentioned was started by the initiative of the Swede, Lewi Pethrus. He, and especially the Nordic countries’ Pentecostals, emphasized the independence of the local churches. The feeling was so strong that they struggled with the organization being in any way above or besides the local church.¹³

The two European organizations merged in 1987 by establishing the Pentecostal European Fellowship (PEF). The desire for unity was stronger than the ecclesiological differences. When PEF was registered in Belgium in 2005, huge steps had been taken from the time of the dichotomy in European Pentecostalism. Still, during that time, many Nordic-background workers emphasized the total independence of the local church.¹⁴ The thinking in recent years, at least in Finland, has changed much towards a collaborative direction between the local and national church.

An interesting detail in historical development is the International Pentecostal Council, which was established in Europe in 1912. Members consisted of Europeans, but Americans were invited to participate in the meetings as guests.¹⁵ That is perhaps a curiosity, but in any case, it shows the early interest in Pentecostal cooperation. Another early attempt for collaboration was the Pentecostal Missionary Union of Great Britain and Ireland from 1909–1925. The Pentecostal Fellowship of North America (PFNA) was born in 1948.¹⁶ Because it consisted of only white Pentecostal groups, it voted to disband in 1994, making room for the multiracial organization, Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches of North America (PCCNA).¹⁷ In recent years, the Pentecostal mission directors in North America have started a platform for common reflection and collaboration.

Pentecostal collaboration in missionary work has been increasing since the 1990s. The Pentecostal European Mission (PEM) was established in Finland in 1991. It is the world missions branch of PEF. From the start, it provided fellowship, coordination, cooperation, and implementation in missions. Fellowship takes place in the annual consultations where the mission leaders and other key people in mission meet with each other. Coordination means knowing each other and where and how each member operates. Cooperation means practical actions together, for example, humanitarian actions in catastrophic events. Implementation deals with matters that are lacking or difficult to create by individual member organizations, such as mission training or special collaboration in reaching unreached people groups.

PEM created a strategy in 2010 with goals to be reached by 2020. It included increasing the number of missionaries and intercessors, and touching unreached people groups in the mission program. It also emphasized the importance of reaching everyone
in Europe with the gospel. It is already now clear that PEM exceeded the goal concerning unreached people groups (over 280 being reached instead of 200, which was the goal). However, the goal of an increased number of missionaries, long- or short-term, seems not to be reached. Older sending churches have decreasing numbers, although new senders are increasing their numbers. The number of intercessors is not so easy to identify. The starting point was to have at least ten intercessors per missionary.

PEM works in close cooperation with PEF. Their common goal is to reach every European with the gospel. The implementation towards this goal takes place as a common effort under the name Impact. The first one took place in Brussels in 2006. In these big city actions, the various Pentecostal groups or churches in the city work together. Through the years, in many cases, this has been the first-ever joint action between the various Pentecostal denominations. Often collaboration has continued on after the Impact event.

Similar to PEM, Pentecostal Asia Mission (PAM) was started in 1994. It was born to meet the need of providing a forum for Asian Pentecostal leaders, mission organizations, and missionaries from other continents working in Asia. Because Asia is a huge continent, the continental gatherings generally take place every third year, but in between are regional events like the East Asia, South East Asia, and South Asia consultations.

The youngest Pentecostal collaborating organization exists now in Africa. After coming together at Nairobi in 2016, African Pentecostal leaders gathered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 2018. There they decided to form the Africa Pentecostal Mission Fellowship (APMF). Like PEM and PAM it invites all types of classical Pentecostals to gather under its wings. The next consultation will take place at Kampala, Uganda, in May 2020.

In Latin America, the AG churches have formed a strong mission coordination organization, Misiones en Conjunto (MEC). It has been a powerful instrument in helping new Pentecostal sending organizations (mission departments of the national churches) to emerge. However, a broader forum for all the various Pentecostal organizations for world missions is still lacking although the need and goal of establishing that has been identified.

Besides continental cooperation, several country or regionally focused cooperative projects are taking place. Dick Brogden, a front-line figure in Pentecostal missions, describes multifaceted international mission teams as a many-sided diamond. According to his experience, this kind of endeavor offers advantages and disadvantages, but multifaceted teams can better empower strengths. In my view, generally speaking, this kind of collaboration has been practiced too little in Pentecostal missions.
My observation is that Pentecostal collaboration and unity is practiced much more than many have recognized. Although it can be improved and developed greatly, it is not as absent as many seem to think. The next question is this: What is the basis for cooperation? Is it only a pragmatic matter or is it inspired by biblical theology? As one aspect of my doctoral dissertation, I asked the Finnish Pentecostal missionaries and the pastors of our partnering churches in Latin America, Africa, and Asia to give their reason for cooperation. It was a spiritual principle for seventy percent of the missionaries, but for the national pastors, it was only forty-four percent. For some reason, the last mentioned could not see that it was so much a biblical principle as did the missionaries. Why this was is an interesting question. This would require more research. Are there cultural factors leading in that direction or has teaching been lacking in some aspects and been concentrated too much on pragmatic issues?

Vinoth Ramachandra talks about managerial missiology, which he sees being based on capitalism. That can lead easily to an overly-pragmatic approach to missions. The famous Latin American missiologist, Samuel Escobar, shares the same concern. He sees this trend emphasizing management of mission practice, and identifies the roots of this approach in the Church Growth School and the AD2000 and Beyond Movement. The same criticism is targeted also to the 10/40 window and people group concepts. I agree that there is a danger in becoming too pragmatic and forgetting the Missio Dei aspect, but I cannot agree fully with the critics. The urgency of the spreading of the gospel and as quickly as possible is very biblical (Rom 9:1–4; 2 Thess 3:1; 2 Pet 3:12). The ethnic groups are in the center of Jesus’ plan (Matt 24:14; Rev 5:9; 7:9). It is in every case good for our Pentecostal missiology to strengthen our roots in theology, and to avoid extreme pragmatism that ignores a solid biblical foundation. What can we then understand as central pillars for a sound Pentecostal mission theology? I will view it from the perspective of unity and cooperation.

**Pentecostal Mission Theology Concerning Unity and Collaboration**

The roots of unity are found in the first chapter of the Bible. The Hebrew word Elohim is a plural, and we can see the triune God at work. God creates by his Word, which John connects in his gospel with Logos. Elohim creates by his Word, which became flesh in Jesus, and the Spirit moves. The divine Trinity is an inspiring model for all efforts of unity. The full common understanding, harmony, and seamless working together brings forth all beauty and the astonishing fine tuning that is contained in the whole universe.
The same harmony and collaboration is evident in the plan of salvation. After the fall of human beings, God started his rescue operation, Missio Dei. Its goal was to restore the broken connection between God and human beings: “to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ” (Eph 1:10). Through his atonement, Jesus rebuilt the connection between God and human beings.

The cross has two dimensions: vertical, which represents the connection between God and human beings, and horizontal, the connection between people. Jesus summarized these in the Great Commandment, loving God and loving your neighbor. The cross is the starting point for both of them. The vertical is the basis for the horizontal. Only by experiencing God’s love toward themselves are people able to accept and love themselves. This does not lead to individualism but to accepting the other as an equal, reconciled and loved by God. The basis for unity is in the atonement. It is the only effective medicine for racism and cultural superiority. The only basis for perfect equality is the atonement.

The atonement has three dimensions. First, it deals with everyone personally. God so loved the world “that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). For too many, the atonement remains at this level. However, it also has a global dimension. “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32). This fact brings us to world missions, which has a geographical scope: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. We are dealing with the reasons for the existence of the church. We need to know these theological roots. The church is first of all the witness of Christ on this earth. Pentecostal power is for missions (Acts 1:8). In some churches, evangelism and missions are only lines in the budget, and the reasons for the existence of the church are never taken into consideration.

The atonement connects believers also to eternal glory. Visible things are earthly but invisible things are eternal. “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Cor 4:18). The concept of the transcendent does not easily fit the contemporary worldview of the Western world. The risk of losing an understanding of heaven and thus becoming materialistic is very much a reality. The supernatural and transcendent is a uniting bond between believers, part of the theology of unity. As a test, I must ask, how often we do sing about heaven nowadays?

Unity is mentioned about 400 times in the Bible. It is not a secondary question. Jesus highlights it in his prayer in John 17: “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21). Unity is connected to the credibility of our
witness. The more fragmented Pentecostalism is, the weaker is our testimony. All aspects that make our unity stronger will fortify our testimony in this world.

The opening of Albania to Christianity offers a practical example of this. Albania had officially made a decision to be an atheistic country, and attempts to evangelize were not successful because of heavy governmental control. As evangelical mission directors, after hearing about the change in the country, we united together. We wanted to avoid the mistake of the past, having several different mission organizations competing and overlapping in their activities. We established the Albanian Encouragement Project (AEP) as a common face before the authorities in 1991. Over sixty organizations became members. Although various denominations were later registered individually, AEP still exists as the common representative of different missions.

One of the strongest metaphors concerning unity is Jesus’ speech about the vine (John 15:1–8). The life in the vine is our Lord himself, the elixir keeping the tree flourishing and producing fruit. We as his disciples have a role as well. Paul writes to the Ephesians: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3). The creator of unity is the Spirit, not us, but we can help in keeping the influence of the Spirit. We can make the Spirit sad, even quench him, but we also can be the influence in keeping his impact fresh. We can make him happy by offering him space in our activities and personal lives.

The Holy Spirit creates unity. That was evident on the day of Pentecost when people from different countries and cultures experienced his impact. In the incident of the building of Babel (Gen 11:1–9), the different languages separated people from each other. On the day of Pentecost, people from various countries were united to hear God’s great message in different languages. Babel separated, Pentecost united. “Koinonia” broke the linguistic, nationalistic, and social borders. The same thing took place in the Azusa revival at the beginning of the last century.

Unity was not just left to the level of speech or to a feeling of belonging together. It led to mutual care of each other, of social justice. The voluntary giving for the common good was a spiritual attitude, found later also in the gathering of aid organized by Paul for the suffering believers in Jerusalem and Judea (Acts 11:29–30; Rom 15:25–27). Paul called it “koinonia” (Rom 15:26). That was an expression of unity and collaboration. Koinonia and deaconry was not only a matter inside the local church but it was an expression of mutual love between the churches in different countries.

The theology of unity is visible in many ways in Paul’s activities. Among the strongest of his expressions is to equate the church to the body of Christ, which he uses in several contexts. He shows the Ephesians that the offices of apostles, prophets,
evangelists, pastors, and teachers are meant for building the body of Christ (Eph 4:11). These special giftingst were serving both the individual local churches as well as the wider body of Christ. Every local church needs an apostolic understanding about the unreached both near and far away. The prophetic gift helps God’s perspective to be seen. The evangelist transmits the zeal for soul-winning to the believers. The gift of pastoring is a necessity for every local church, and sound teaching keeps the church on the right and solid way.

Paul underlines the spiritual gifts, different services given by God through individuals and different workings being for the common good (1 Cor 12:4–7). Only a few are called to be apostles but in principle, all could prophesy. This kind of common priesthood has been a strength in Pentecostalism. The spiritual gifts and various workings (energematon) can take place through any and every believer. This kind of common priesthood creates a unique unity that is not based only on ordained workers. God can work through any believer with his spiritual gifts and energematon. The last-mentioned seems to cover all possible ways the Spirit may work by affecting “to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (Phil 2:13). This kind of practicing of common priesthood creates a special kind of unity, based not only on the position of those who have been ordained and blessed for a special leadership position. The Lord can give energematon through whomever he chooses to use.

In his letter to the Ephesians Paul develops the theme of unity to an astonishingly high level by making a parallelism between Christ and the church as a marriage (Ephesians 5). Through the Lord’s Supper, this deep unity is realized in a concrete way. Paul speaks about participation in the body and blood of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 10:16) by again using the Greek word koinonia, unity. We need to understand that both in a vertical way, as unity with Christ, and also as horizontal, being united with other believers as a local church, national church, international Pentecostal family, global evangelical community, and as a universal unity with all Christians everywhere.

To Paul, koinonia also meant unity in evangelism and world missions. He writes about that to the Philippians: “I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now” (Phil 1:4–5). The Greek word for partnership here is koinonia. That koinonia was realized, for example, by giving financial support to Paul (Phil 4:15–16). Paul is transparent about financial matters and twice confirms receiving money from the Philippians when he left Macedonia and went to Thessalonica.

The operative collaboration becomes very clear in Acts 20:4. Paul has on his team two missionaries from Thessalonica (Aristarchus and Secundus), one from Berea (Sopater), one from Derbe (Gaius), one from Lystra (Timothy), and two from Asia (Tychicus and Trophimus). Of these, Aristarchus followed Paul to Rome. Timothy was
his closest co-worker to the end of his life. Tychicus and Trophimus are mentioned by Paul later again connected to his activities.

In Paul’s teams, we can see the embryo of mission sodality. Not all decisions were made by the sending church (Antioch), although it was instrumental in the sending process. Expertise was needed to enable good implementation, and that was provided by Paul’s team. They knew the circumstances, culture, and other challenges. Paul created unity by his letters both on the theological and practical level. He systematically built unity between the local churches he established. That was not only on the basis of the letters themselves, but he would send the letters with his trusted messengers who, by their presence, strengthened the ties between the churches and also with the apostle. The messengers became heralds and symbols of the unity. The doctrinal statement of the Jerusalem council, which defined the relationship between Jewish and Gentile believers, was sent by the trusted representatives, Silas and Judas Barsabbas, from the Jewish “headquarters” to Antioch, the original Gentile ministry hub.

The deep desire of Jesus Christ was to see his followers in unity. He prayed for that in John 17: “so that they may be brought to complete unity” (v. 23). The Greek word *teteleiōmenoi* means that we are perfectly made one (*eis hen*). That, of course, does not allow us to limit our unity only to the Pentecostal family, but asks how we can promote the goal of Jesus with a broader perspective. What then are the practical ways we can implement joint actions? I will come to that later.

Mark L. Williams, who has worked as overseer of the Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee, bases his theology of collaboration on two metaphors used by Paul: God’s field and God’s building. We are there as workers who belong to God. We are working together, we are co-workers, and we are God’s fellow-workers. We are partners who belong to God. Paul’s language expresses close-knit fellowship and interdependence. Paul uses compound nouns to express this Christian togetherness, terms like “fellow citizens,” “fellow heirs,” “fellow laborers,” “fellow prisoners,” “fellow servants,” and “fellow soldiers.”

Pentecostals significantly emphasize the role of the local church in all Christian activities, and in that way, Pentecostals belong to the congregational wing of evangelicals. There is usually some kind of networking or uniting organization for the local churches. Quite often local churches strongly emphasize the independence of every individual church. At the same time, some common matters are dealt with by the national church structure. But especially in the Nordic countries, the role of the Pentecostal national church has been minimized in order to protect the independence of the local church. That has, however, led to an understanding that the only structure...
highlighted in the New Testament is the local church. That view ignores the wide and strong collaboration we can see through the writings of Paul.

Melvin Hodges was a great influencer in Pentecostal ecclesiology and missiology. He followed Roland Allen and also the initiators of the three-self church concept, American Rufus Anderson and British Henry Venn. Self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating churches, for the congregational Anderson were local churches, and for the episcopal Venn, also national churches. The principle of interdependence was important for the latter. That was important also for Melvin Hodges. He has a special chapter in his classic book *The Indigenous Church* entitled “The National Organization.” In it he reasons for the need of this connecting structure by referring to Paul’s way of addressing his letter to the church in Corinth. It is not only to one local church but “together with all his holy people throughout Achaia” (2 Cor 1:2).

In other ways, Paul also models the importance of the working together with different local churches, which we can understand as an example for denominational collaboration. He sent letters through which he built doctrinal unity. He provided messengers to keep the various churches informed and reminded them about mutual fellowship. He emphasized permanent partnership in prayer. He trained new workers on his teams, providing coaching and mentorship. His teams were international, consisting of members from different churches in various regions of the Roman Empire (Acts 20:4). To Paul, networking in missions was key in spreading the gospel to new areas, and therefore he challenged different churches to partnership in order to reach these areas. The church of Rome was in his mind as he planned to go to Spain to preach the gospel there (Rom 15:23–24).

German missiologist Gustav Warneck identifies a danger in the three-self formula. It can promote mere independence at the cost of unity and collaboration. This is a real pitfall that we can see in the history of the Nordic countries’ mission history. The biblical three-self formula practiced by Paul also included collaboration of the churches, in that way avoiding the danger of self-satisfaction and limitation to the local level.

William A. Smalley considers the three-self formula a Western concept based on Western ideas of individualism and power. It is an interesting question as to how much it is actually the case because we find the same concepts in Paul’s ministry. At least this formula does not promote the use of foreign decision makers, foreign money, or foreign manpower in promoting the spread of the gospel. The decisive aspect is whether the formula is used as a real value affecting decision making or more as a slogan just to give the impression that local people are involved in the programs. That does not necessarily include them as real owners of the process. The Apostle Paul’s principle is still valid: “Not that we lord it over your faith” (2 Cor 1:24). He was not the owner of
nor overruling the Corinthians, but as he says: “we work with you for your joy” (1:24). He worked together honoring the ownership of the local people.

Paul Hiebert added a fourth self to the formula: self-theologizing. His concern was to provide for new indigenous churches the right to read and interpret the Scriptures from their own cultural context. This is sometimes misunderstood by supposing it as an alternative to make new hermeneutics even to the classical basic doctrines. In fact, it is only opening the way for contextualization from the indigenous starting point. Westerners are not necessarily the best experts to make contextualization in matters that include local cultural dimensions. We can see this also in Paul’s way of handling these matters. He writes to the Corinthians concerning the practice of head coverings: “Judge for yourselves” (1 Cor 11:13). Even by giving them elements for decision making, he leaves the final word to them. In this matter, including cultural dimensions, Paul was not dictating to them, but appealing to their own assessment.

Australian Alan Tippet has developed a six-self formula. He pays attention to more organic features like self-image, self-function, self-determination, and self-giving. The other two are close to self-supporting and self-propagation. The danger when becoming self-supporting is that one can also become selfish, interested only in one’s own financial situation. Tippet rightly pays attention to this danger by reminding us about the very nature of the Christian lifestyle. It is giving, just as God gave the best he had.

Charles Kraft emphasizes the dynamic equivalence that we need for practicing the life modeled in the New Testament and for being mindful that Christ is still alive. That leads us also to Pentecostal self-understanding, which means relying fully on the work of the Holy Spirit: “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit” (Zech 4:6). The church and its mission should not be self-empowered but Spirit-empowered. This enables the church and its missions to be self-governed, self-supported, and self-propagated. To be a real “self-church” means to be an unselfish church. It depends fully on the leadership and work of the Holy Spirit, and that is the real secret of the Pentecostal growth story.

Goals for Unity and Collaboration for Pentecostal World Missions

According to the statistics of Patrick Johnstone, there are about 751,000 Pentecostal local churches in the world. PWF has over sixty million members and WAGF over sixty-eight million. There is some overlapping in the figures. Roughly half of the PWF members are AG churches. We can talk quite safely about one hundred million Pentecostals altogether in those two umbrella organizations. The WAGF also has accurate statistics about the number of missionaries. The PWF has started to gather
such information. Brad Walz, the chairman of the missions commission of the WAGF, by placing the current number of missionaries at 11,000, states a goal of 35,000, which means ten churches supporting one missionary. We can also pose the question: What if all 751,000 local Pentecostal churches would send one missionary each? Then the evangelization of the world would be finished quite soon.

Not all of these Pentecostal churches are members of PWF and/or WAGF. A major challenge is to invite all Pentecostals to practice John 17:23, to strive for the perfect oneness of which Jesus spoke. PWF and WAGF have taken steps to strengthen their collaboration. Last year they formed a joint commission for religious liberty, the Pentecostal Commission on Religious Liberty (PCRL). The mission commissions of both organizations have increased their cooperation by organizing joint meetings and even its first global mission Congress (Madrid 2018). That development is promising for the future.

Even classical Pentecostals are not all under the umbrellas of PWF and WAGF. A large number of churches in Africa and Asia that were started by missionaries from other continents have never been connected to the global Pentecostal networks. They have millions of believers as members. As an example, the Nordic countries’ background Pentecostals in East and Central Africa number more than twenty million but only one church is a member of the PWF.

WAGF has brought a new category to its member status called “affiliated partners.” This offers a way to be connected to the WAGF if the “mother” denomination is a member of the WAGF. That means that many African, Asian, and Latin American churches started by WAGF members can join in the WAGF activities, not as official members (if they are not ready for that), but as “affiliated partners.”

More challenging is the connection with the larger Pentecostal-Charismatic family. The largest network of that category is the Empowered21 (E21) movement. It is not a church organization but a facilitator for reaching all people with the gospel by 2033. E21 conferences in different parts of the world are gathering thousands of Pentecostal-Charismatic leaders together and inspiring them to finish the task Jesus mandated. The question is whether all of them have proper structures in their world missions activities. Can the classical Pentecostals with their structures offer something to these churches that are lacking ways to send and support? A large part of the Pentecostals-Charismatics that are lacking in mission structures are the independent churches. To what extent can John 17 theology inspire those churches to find ways of building collaboration with those Pentecostals who have experience in practicing missions?

What would the future picture of Pentecostal-Charismatic missions look like? A development that already is in existence is the growth among the new senders outside of
the Western world. The practical results of that development depend much on the way the new senders are practicing their missions. The continent with the smallest percentage of evangelical believers is Europe. At the beginning of this decade, the evangelicals in Europe were just 2.5% of the population, in Asia 3.5%, in Latin America 16.7%, in Africa 17.2%, in the Pacific 17.8%, and in North America 26.8%.\(^{34}\) If we want to follow Paul’s principle to preach Christ where he is not yet known, it means to concentrate efforts especially into Europe and Asia.

When missionaries come from other continents to Europe and Asia, the missions and missionaries have the same challenges faced by Western missionaries when they started working in other continents: whether to start their own work or to find a partner among the existing churches and missions. Often, the African Pentecostals are establishing their own churches in Europe without paying attention to the existing Pentecostals. John 17 theology is then nowhere seen. A dialogue is needed, and that has already been noted in the new organization, APMF. On the other hand, the European churches need to develop a structure enabling the involvement of African, Asian, and Latin American missionaries in their national structures.

Another important way of looking at the challenges in world missions is dealing with the unreached people groups. From all people groups (over 17,000 all together) still over 7,000 are unreached.\(^ {35}\) The greatest number of them are found in India and its neighboring countries, but there are also quite a number in North Africa and on the belt from South Sahara to the Horn of Africa. There are many also still in South East Asia.\(^ {36}\)

Alan R. Johnson has dealt widely and deeply with the questions of the unreached and of frontier missions in his book *Apostolic Function in 21st Century Missions*. He calls for a renewed understanding of the role of apostolic ministry that is needed if we want to finish the task Jesus gave us. Johnson urges us to go where the church does not exist.\(^ {37}\) He sees, as a key, apostolic teams working in the power of the Holy Spirit.\(^ {38}\) He emphasizes also the need of teams with a multiplicity of giftings.\(^ {39}\) I personally believe that we need to develop international teams where the leveraging of cultural differences maximizes the potential of the group. The relational gifts of Africans can be connected to the analytical mindset of task-oriented Westerners. The final result may exceed what could be reached by a more monocultural way of working. If this takes place under the context of the leadership of the Holy Spirit, we may experience the same results as Paul’s missionary teams. We need to be Spirit-driven.

Uchechuckwu Ama, a Nigerian mission director, is concerned about the developing Pentecostal missions becoming too self-centered. The three-self churches may become selfish churches. He urges a move from a self-driven to a Spirit-driven
Of course that does not lead to abandoning the three-self formula, for it can certainly be practiced in a Spirit-driven way. Ama, in any case, is observing the pitfall of becoming too managerial or mechanistic in missions.

Dick Brogden points to several important aspects in partnership, starting with prayer. In 2011, he suggested Friday as a special day of prayer for unreached people. That initiative has been widely put into practice. He also sees the bigger possibility for an ecumenical partnership including Catholic, Protestant/Evangelical, and Pentecostal. This has taken place in the Global Christian Forum where Catholics, the WCC, the WEA, and the PWF are coming together, not as church organizations, but as a forum for discussing actual common matters, while at the same time, getting to know each other better. It has also resulted in some fruit like the gathering in Tirana, Albania, dealing with “Discrimination, Persecution, and Martyrdom.” Christians are the most persecuted religion today. A historical turning point took place in Tirana when the churches asked mutual forgiveness because of persecution and discrimination against each other.

How much are Pentecostals ready to practice a broad ecumenism? It seems not to be a problem to join hands in Bible translation and distribution of the Scriptures. We can even agree with many that Europeans are in need of knowing Jesus as their personal Savior. There is still, however, some reluctance toward the idea of the one church ecumenism. Cecil Robeck’s comment a long time ago still seems to be valid: “To note all of this, however, is not to say that Pentecostals have rejected ecumenism, only that they have rejected one particular form of instrument of ecumenism. If ecumenism is something viewed as something ‘spiritual’, something created by the Holy Spirit, a genuine unity or koinonia in the Spirit, a fellowship of all those who are ‘blood bought Christians’, then Pentecostals have embraced rather than rejected ecumenism.”

The growth of Pentecostalism has made other Christians interested. Brogden gives warnings when we become excited about the interest of others wanting to work with us Pentecostals. We must not give up our Pentecostal praxis nor must we be so proud that we refuse to partner with others. He encourages the benefit international missionary teams receive, having seen the result in practice through the Live Dead teams. Not denying challenges in this kind of partnership, he however encourages us to find the strengths in this formula of working. “The time has come for collaborative and prayerful teams who are able to reproduce themselves.”

An important area for international partnering is, according to Brogden, the “Way-maker” role of missionaries in creative-access areas. These people usually are not officially known as missionaries. They are tentmakers or “business as mission” people who know the context and open the way for others like them or for international teams.
Brogden warns that we cannot make a mistake by counting the tentmakers as less than missionaries nor giving them less training.  

Besides training, Brogden stresses partnership in leadership and sacrifice. The former should be free from paternalism, based on relationships that are fluid, multi-lateral, and fraternal. Concerning sacrifice, both faith and realism are needed. He refers to the methods of the early church including mystery and pain, joy and suffering, because Jesus is worth everything. “Grain of wheat must not only be willing, but happy, to fall into the ground and die. Happy because otherwise they remain alone, but dying they produce much fruit.”

**Cultural Challenges for Developing Partnerships**

Working together requires a common understanding of worldview. That is the deepest level of our innermost self and being and directs our decision making. Paul Hiebert states that worldview consists of three levels. The surface level deals with the pattern of behavior, cultural products, and signs and rituals. The middle level under it includes the beliefs, and the deepest level consists of worldview themes. Unfortunately, the worldview does not change immediately when a person becomes a follower of Christ. He/she is still at least partly affected by the former world view. Only a long-term discipling process brings changes.

We can see that dramatically displayed in the massacre of Rwanda in the 1990s. In that time, Rwanda was a quite strong, formally Christian country. However, 800,000 people were killed. Why? The worldview of the African tribes included a superiority of their own tribe. In the worst way, the other tribe is not human. They are like animals. That was literally realized, for when killing each other, the people were shouting, “Kill those cockroaches!” The Christian worldview had not yet changed their attitudes in spite of the fact they might have known how to sing in the church. We can more easily learn behavioral practices than experience a renewal of our minds, which is encouraged by Paul in writing to the Romans (Rom 12:1–2).

There are differences in cultural matters, for example, concerning individualism-collectivism, individualistic-egalitarian, time- and event-orientation, dichotomistic-holistic thinking, crisis or non-crisis orientation, task- or person-orientation, status or achievement focus, and concealment of vulnerability or willingness to expose vulnerability. Any of these different cultural views can, if not given sensitive attention, endanger the possibilities for long-term collaboration. In many cultures, especially in Asia, losing face is a shame, and that kind of vulnerability is avoided to the utmost. It represents the concealment of vulnerability, and the co-worker from the other culture
needs to be aware of this possible difference to avoid risking the demise of collaboration. In spite of globalization, old cultural features have not disappeared, although they might not be easily visible.

Even the Apostle Paul was aware of cultural challenges by writing to the Corinthians: “you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully” (2 Cor 1:14). Paul represented Jewish culture, although, while raised in Tarsus, he had also learned Hellenistic culture. In Corinth, there were still barriers to overcome. The Hellenistic world was large, and surely many special features were included in the culture of the local context. Paul, however, believed that it was possible to grow in cultural understanding.

Conclusion

Is collaboration in world missions for Pentecostals a pragmatic or theological matter? Pentecostals are known as hands-on people who want to see things happening, people changing, growing in faith, practicing their faith, loving their neighbors, showing compassion toward the suffering, establishing churches that grow, and seeing sick people healed. They believe that God’s kingdom takes place already on earth even though not yet in its final fulfillment.

There is, however, increasing theological reflection behind all this. Pentecostals want to see everything based on the Bible. That is why they have developed a theology of collaboration and unity. From the very beginning, they have been open to an ecumenical approach, but they want to keep their theology clear concerning on which basis they are ready to take actions together, recognizing at the same time that the kingdom of God is broader than their denominations.

Collaboration can become much more effective among Pentecostals themselves and between Pentecostals and other Christians. That needs to be built on the basis of God’s word and on the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The movement needs to be Spirit-driven, not selfishness-driven. Pentecostal collaboration is not aiming to build a tower to heaven. It helps people to see that there is a stairway built higher than the tower in Babel (Gen 28:12). The top is really reaching heaven. Through that stairway, which starts from the cross, heaven and earth are connected (John 1:51; Eph 1:10). There Jesus accomplished what Paul writes: “to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.” That stairway does not fall short to anyone willing to use it. The challenge to us is whether we will show everyone the way to it.
Notes

18 Daniel Costanza, From Rome to Zagreb. 50 Years of Fraternal Cooperation for the Sake of Europe (Rhode-St.-Genese: PEF, 2016), 21.
20 Hämäläinen, Leadership: The Spirit and the Structure, 236.


33 *WAGF Newsletter*, December 2019.


41 Brogden, “Planting Churches among Unreached Peoples,” 16.

42 Brogden, “Planting Churches among Unreached Peoples,” 16.


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The Holy Spirit and the Nineteenth-Century Mission to Hawaii

Highlights and Lowlights

Paul Miller

Keywords mission, culture, cultural adaptation, cultural traits, civilization, economics, education, holism, holistic evangelism, population, Holy Spirit, success and failure, hope

Abstract

This article explores the missionary successes and failures of nineteenth-century Hawaii. It then explores the Holy Spirit connection to these successes and the lack of such a connection regarding the failures. It suggests missionary failures in the area of supernaturalism and Holy Spirit listening, failures to which the missionaries were particularly prone given their almost mono-focus on “civilization” and “education.” It then suggests native Hawaiian failures in, first, addressing their depopulation problem and, second, in attaining their aspirations of economic progress. Finally, facing these failures, it probes certain Holy Spirit perspectives as their potential solution.

What Happened: The Positives

The mission story of nineteenth-century Hawaii is one both of exhilarating successes and crushing disappointments. Ever since Captain Cook first made Western contact in 1778 with a previously isolated Hawaii, Hawaii had increasing and plentiful contact with Western traders. It was only in 1820 when seven missionary couples and four Hawaiian boys were sent out from Boston by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) that the gospel first came to Hawaii. But already in 1824 and 1825 they were reporting “the outpouring of the Spirit of God upon the islands” that “brought thousands . . . into praying circles or societies.”

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Keen with interest, after some years, numbers of the notable high chiefs and chiefesses relocated just to be near the missionaries where they could learn the message of salvation. By their seventh year on the island of Hawaii, the Hawaiians had already built a church capable of seating 4,800 people and were occasionally preaching to crowds of over 10,000.

Then again in 1837–1838 waves of revival hit the islands in which the waves of “weeping natives” reminded the Hilo missionary, the Reverend Titus Coan—himself converted under Charles Finney—of the “great and powerful awakenings under the preaching of Nettleton and Finney” he had seen. In the autumn of 1838, a congregation of at least 10,000 assembled on the western shore of Hawaii to hear the gospel being preached. At Hilo Coan baptized 1,705 on the first Sunday of July in 1838; Bingham in the west of the island of Hawaii preached regularly every Sunday to a congregation of 3,000.

By 1853 the native Hawaiian church had already sent out their own native Hawaiian missionary, John Kekala, to the Marquesas and out of a native population of about 71,000, over 56,000 were Protestants. The ABCFM moved to declare Hawaii Christianized and terminate the mission.

Contemporaries observed that, eventually, the “Bible was in every hut”—remarkable given that upon the missionaries’ arrival in 1820, Hawaii had neither a written literature nor an alphabet. The New England missionaries—with their Puritan-based educational emphasis—saw literacy and the creation of an alphabet as one of their first tasks, though needing first to learn the language themselves. Literacy was so eagerly embraced by the Hawaiians that by the second half of the nineteenth century they had a higher literacy rate than the United States!

And the Bible was no mere ornament on the shelf. Indeed, in Hawaii the chiefs had established the Bible as a basis of law, being careful to adapt it to their Hawaiian situation. This was all part of the wider holistic vision of the early missionaries: economic, social, and political well-being. All were embraced as relevant.

In 1836, with the approval of the majority of the chiefs, the missionaries sent back to their sending board, the ABCFM, and other interested philanthropists, a memorial outlining their wider holistic needs:

The people need competent instruction in agriculture, manufactures, and the various methods of production, in order to develop the resources of the country. . . . They need competent instruction immediately in the science of government, in order to promote industry, to secure ample means of support, and to protect the just rights of all. They need much instruction and aid in
getting into operation and extended influence those arts and usages which are adapted to the country.

They added a prescient warning of what would happen should the native Hawaiians not be helped to develop their resources themselves:

But foreign speculators may be expected to seize on the advantages which the country affords for agriculture, manufacture and commerce; and an inevitable flux of foreign population, induced only by the love of pleasure and gain, would doubtless hasten the waste of the aborigines; and at no distant period, the mere moldering remnants of the nation could be pointed out to the voyager.¹⁰

Trade and business introduced increasing prosperity for both commoners¹¹ (patchily) and chiefs (mightily, at least for the first decades¹²) while in the political sphere, by 1840 Hawaiians had developed their own constitution, starting with a “Declaration of Rights, Both of the Chiefs and People.” Its very first sentence ran:

“God hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the earth,” in unity and blessedness. God has also bestowed certain rights alike on all men and all chiefs, and all people of all lands.¹³

Such a pronouncement is a moving testimony to the Hawaiian church’s awareness of their faith’s public implications; additionally, it is a near-revolutionary commitment to protecting the commoners against the oppression of otherwise all-powerful chiefs.¹⁴ But it was more: it was also a practical key to Hawaii maintaining its political independence in a nineteenth-century colonial world where, unfortunately, Western nations only conceded political recognition and independence according to that state’s perceived “standard of civilization,” written constitutions serving as one evidence of that.¹⁵

The Holy Spirit’s Role in the Positives

The Holy Spirit’s role was key in all these advances, as is evident from the very timing of the missionaries’ arrival in Hawaii. That is, after centuries of absolute adherence to idol-worship with its own strict taboos (kapu in Hawaiian)—“where men and women, even husband and wives, were not allowed to eat together, where commoners must prostrate themselves before high chiefs and where even the shadow of a commoner must not fall upon the high chief,” all with death as the penalty for transgression¹⁶—suddenly, before a single missionary had arrived (indeed, in the middle of the missionaries’ six-
month sea voyage from New England around Cape Horn) and without any awareness that they were coming, the Hawaiians overnight abandoned their idolatry. A shock rippled through the nation when, violating long-held kapu, King Liholiho publicly ate together with the Queen Mother Keōpūolani and his chief counselor Kaʻahumanu. The result was a spiritual vacuum that the gospel filled readily.

The Holy Spirit’s work was also evident in the individual human drama that triggered the 1820 mission to Hawaii: Obookiah’s story. In 1809 a desperate seventeen-year-old Obookiah, having lost his family through Hawai‘i’s constant warfare and having seen his aunt thrown to her death for violating a kapu, sought escape. He signed up on a New York whaler under Captain Brintnall. After a long voyage, the ship returned to New York, with Captain Brintnall then taking Obookiah on with him home to New Haven. That Obookiah signed with a New Haven native who furthermore wanted to take him home with him was surely of God. After all, New Haven, with its Yale University under the presidency of the Reverend Timothy Dwight, played a key role in the Second Great Awakening then freshly breaking out, with Dwight also being a founding member of the very ABCFM that eleven years later sent out the Hawaii mission. Obookiah was swept up in all this—even lodging for several months with President Timothy Dwight’s family—devoting himself to six years of training in preparation for returning to Hawaii, only to die of typhus fever in 1818. But rather than end the mission, his inspirational life and death only lit a spark in the revival-struck Northeast, rousing others to sign up for the mission. Within one-and-one-half years of his death, a mission had been recruited and sent off to Hawaii.

And, of course, the Holy Spirit’s role was not only central in the timing of the mission, in the human drama triggering the mission, but also in the very prosecution of the mission. That is, the brand of missionaries who went to Hawaii were very revivalistic. Their revivalistic Holy Spirit outlook is evidenced by their language, as with Hiram Bingham, the group’s leader, who peppers his memoirs with remarks like, “The outpouring of the Spirit of God upon the islands in 1824 and 1825 . . . brought hundreds at first, and thousands at length, into praying circles or societies.” Elias Bond would commonly begin even his negative annual reports to the ABCFM with comments along the lines of, “During this period of two years . . . neither prosperous or adverse . . . He has not vouchsafed to us in any extraordinary measure the converting operation of His Holy Spirit.” These individuals were no fringe outliers or special enthusiasts in the mission; they were typical representatives.
What Happened: The Negatives

Tragically, Hawaii’s mission story is not one of unmitigated success. Among the disappointments are the following:

- The indigenous population plummeted alarmingly, from approximately 300,000 when Cook arrived in 1778, to 134,750 in 1823 shortly after the missionaries’ arrival, to 71,015 in 1853 shortly before the ABCFM pronounced Hawaii evangelized, to 37,656 in 1890, three years before Queen Liliuokalani was overthrown. Multiple nineteenth-century Hawaiian kings identified this as their number one concern, but never were able to reverse it.

- The land reform of 1848 (the Mahele), strongly urged by the missionaries as a means to give commoners an interest in entrepreneurial business, failed to extend land ownership to most commoners; they ended up with only one percent of the land.

- Church growth and vitality, so encouraging in the first half of the nineteenth century, seemed to stall in its second half; and at the same time, the tension between the white missionary administrators and local, native Hawaiian church pastors escalated.

- Economic development—eagerly embraced by all levels of Hawaiians intended to better the lot of common Hawaiians, seemed, especially after 1860, to pass by most of them. The indigenous Hawaiians fell behind. We read that by 1880, “of the six hundred business houses in Honolulu not one is conducted by a native, while two hundred are controlled by the Chinese.”

- Largely driven by a split in power between native Hawaiians holding significant political power and an Anglo-Saxon minority (not all of whom were “foreigners,” as many were Hawaiian-born) wielding economic power, the political scene exploded in 1893. The chiefly Anglo-Saxon oligarchy—though not primarily “Big Sugar”—overthrew the native Queen Liliuokalani, followed five years later by the loss of Hawaiian political independence, when annexed by the United States. Contrary to the wishes of previous generations of indigenous Hawaiians, foreign-born Hawaiians, and missionaries, Hawaii was no longer a sovereign nation.

- An increasingly bitter opposition between the white administrators of the Hawaiian Evangelical Alliance and its rank-and-file indigenous Hawaiian pastors developed in the 1880s, and especially from 1893 onwards, when Queen Liliuokalani was dethroned by the largely white oligarchy. Sadly, racial tensions increased in a society where previously there had been little.
Additionally, deep splits opened up between pro- and anti-annexationist, indigenous pastors in the church.\textsuperscript{35}

Though cheered by the earlier-listed positives, these negative developments would have been deeply saddening to the early generations of both chiefs and missionaries. Their bright hopes for the nation had been large, broad, and holistic, as captured in Hiram Bingham’s recollection of those early days:

The next day, with several chiefs, he [the king] visited our families; and, on being assured anew of our unvarying intention to do him good, and not evil, to elevate the nation, and promote their prosperity and salvation, he confirmed the original permission granted us, to remain and labor as missionaries, . . . and requested us to aid him in building a palace three stories high; the upper story of which, he said, should be devoted to the worship of Jehovah.\textsuperscript{36}

Clearly, some of these hopes were dashed by the end of the century.

**The Holy Spirit and the Might Have Beens**

Hawaii’s ups and downs have been examined from various perspectives. The first half of the twentieth century focused far more on the positives of Hawaii’s assimilation into the United States. By contrast, since the 1960s, a darker focus on Hawaii as “dispossessed” predominates in academic circles. Within this focus are three broad schools: a “traditional” bemoaning “foreign imposition and assimilation,” a “recent variation” emphasizing Hawaiians’ heroic “resistance” to foreign imposition, and a “new” explanation in which the “‘élites’ assimilate for their own self-interests, while the commoners ‘resist’ assimilation and don’t benefit from the change.”\textsuperscript{37} Then, most recently, a number of native Hawaiian scholars have diverted altogether by fundamentally challenging this “dispossession” theme. They portray native Hawaiians as authors of their fate, not its victims. They were not imposed upon; rather, as independent agents, they intelligently chose and adapted foreigners’ ways for their own use, as they crafted constitutions, introduced the Great Mahele of 1848, and subsequently developed political structures. This new school of Hawaiian scholarship suggests that the real dispossession problems only arose much later in the nineteenth century, not with the Great Mahele of 1848 but with events such as the business community’s (not all but many) armed resistance to King Kalakaua in 1887, the
coerced overthrow of Queen Liliuokalani in 1893, and America’s annexation in 1898 against the popular will of ethnic Hawaiians.\textsuperscript{38}

The remainder of this article will not explore any of these perspectives; rather it targets the particular question of “how might a better access to the Holy Spirit have helped avoid some of the negative developments in Hawaii?” It will suggest two practices as potentially key: Holy Spirit supernaturalism (especially from the missionaries) and Holy Spirit listening (both on the side of the missionaries and on the side of the native Hawaiians) in the face of cultural habits.

\textbf{A Fuller Gospel of Supernaturalism}

Observers of the native Hawaiian church continually reported the revival of kahunaism—their spiritistic healing practices—a syncretistic kahunaism diluting a pure commitment to Christ.\textsuperscript{39} This was part of the reported decline in Christian enthusiasm in the second half of the nineteenth century. I suggest that one reason for this was a lack of sufficient full gospel “supernaturalism” in the missionaries’ worldview.

Their worldview was marked by a sort of typically nineteenth-century rationalism that dismissed supernatural activities—for curses, for healings—as rank “superstition.”\textsuperscript{40} They were viewed as unrealities in which only the unsophisticated believed. Typical of this nineteenth-century mindset was pioneering Presbyterian missionary to China, John Nevius, who—faced with forty years of experience in China (1853–1893)—wrote a book on his about-face concerning demonic possession. He could no longer deny its reality. His book’s very first paragraph reveals his typically nineteenth-century mindset:

\begin{quote}
I brought with me to China a strong conviction that a belief in demons, and communications with spiritual beings, belongs exclusively to a barbarous and superstitious age, and at present can consist only with mental weakness and want of culture.\textsuperscript{41}
\end{quote}

This sort of missionary rationalism created a real disconnect between missionaries and native Hawaiian Christians, not in every area, but in important areas. They should have known these things to be real. So, when exhorted to give up their belief in the \textit{aumakua}s (spirits) by the missionaries, the Hawaiians would simply answer, “How can I, when I see all about me so many signs of their presence?” They would point out the actual, physical manifestations of spiritistic practices and then ask the missionaries, “How do you haoles explain that?”\textsuperscript{42}

The impression they had gained from the missionaries was that, regarding healing, “Jehovah cares only for the soul, and does not hear prayer for physical ills.”\textsuperscript{43}
Unintentionally, the missionaries had made the Christian God almost irrelevant in one area of their people’s lives. Traditional kahuna practice filled the void left. In one sense, they were almost driven in that direction by the missionaries’ blind spot on this point. More Holy Spirit supernaturalism was the answer.

**Holy Spirit Listening—Acts 10**

Listening to God is always important, but it seems particularly important whenever the church seeks breakthrough in cross-cultural, pioneering situations. Certainly this was the case in the Christian church’s first-century pioneering breakthrough when it moved from simply being a sect within Judaism to being “Christians” equally at home in the Gentile world. This breakthrough went through three steps: Peter’s encounter with the centurion Cornelius (Acts 10), Paul and Barnabas with the Jewish-Gentile converts in Antioch (Acts 11), and finally the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) where this extension of identity became official.

The whole three-part process started with listening: first Cornelius (Acts 10:1–6) and then, crucially, Peter (10:9–23). It never would have happened without this listening. Why? Because Peter’s ingrained, habitual course of action—reinforced not only by centuries of Jewish tradition but even by the example and principle of his own master, who had rebuffed the Canaanite woman saying, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel” (Matt 15:24)—made it actually impossible. On his own, even as a devout disciple, he would never have gone to the Gentiles with the gospel. Indeed, when faced with this new course of action by a direct command of the Lord, Peter’s knee-jerk reaction was an absolute refusal: “Surely not, Lord” (Acts 10:14). And he explained his refusal, saying, “I have never [done it that way].” It was simply not within his customary range of action. It was only listening to the Holy Spirit that made him consider a new way, thus beginning a revolutionary new development in the Christian church.

Applying this to the Hawaiian mission, it certainly seems that listening to God was a key to their initial launch. From the providential occurrences (Obookiah’s extraordinary life, Hawaiians’ abandonment of their ancient religion three months before the missionaries’ arrival) triggering the mission, the Spirit’s leadings are clear. They started well. But did the missionary fathers continue in this way? Did the later mission disappointments arise from the stony ground or rather from the sowers’ faulty seed? I suggest that two areas may have raised barriers to good listening on their part: their New England education emphasis and their Western “civilization” emphasis. Peter had his customary practices and the New England missionaries had theirs.
Listening and the Education Emphasis

“Your greatest strength is likely to also be your greatest weakness.” It is a phrase often heard from management consultants. And it is a phrase probably true of the New England missionaries in Hawaii, especially their educational emphasis. The great majority of them were university graduates, at a time when even in the mainland United States only a tiny percentage graduated from college. Indeed, many of nineteenth-century Hawaii’s most prominent foreign-born, non-missionary citizens had no such education. Charles Reed Bishop—Hawaii’s first banker and eventually privy councilor to kings—would have been typical, with his eighth-grade education.

This educational emphasis produced, as Yale’s Timothy Dwight put it, “the decorum and the dignity, which are indispensable in the desk”—a blessing to many, but also a source of offense to, and then division with, the rough-and-ready converts of the Western frontier swept into the Kingdom during the Second Great Awakening.

If this educational emphasis created a division within the American church, how much more so within the Hawaiian church. The Hawaiians, only just brought out of illiteracy, were never going to attain to university credentials so quickly, and yet one suspects this level was what the missionaries expected in their leadership model.

When Richard Ellis, the London Missionary Society missionary in Tahiti, traveled through Hawaii in 1822, he suggested to the American missionaries that for a native church leader Christian character, a zealous heart, communication skills, and some practical mechanical skills were the most important qualifications. Regarding a “liberal education” (i.e., university) he said, “we do not think it necessary for all.” Bingham, the leader of the American group, politely but firmly disagreed, saying, “But their standard of a missionary preacher, and their views of employing lay laborers, were somewhat different from those of our mission.”

It could well be that these particular educational expectations were one reason that relatively few native Hawaiians became pastors. In 1863, the very year Hawaii was declared by the ABCFM to be a “Christian nation,” there were only four to be found in the entire nation. By 1890 there were still only fifty-one native pastors.

Perhaps here a Holy Spirit emphasis would have helped the leadership blockage, even as in Acts 4:8, 13 we see the fisherman-leader Peter speaking with such effect that the rulers and elders react with, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.”

Early Hawaiian Christianity had its own model of just such simply educated but capable leaders and teachers in “Bartimeus.” A blind and illiterate early convert, we read of him in Richard Armstrong’s 1837 journal:
In my opinion, the most eloquent speaker in the nation. His knowledge of the Scriptures as well as of general subjects, is remarkable, considering his inability to read. No missionary among us can command Scripture more copiously and appositely, in an off-hand effort, than he. Even the parts that have not been printed in the native language seem to be familiar to him, from merely hearing them quoted in the pulpit and Bible class. But his mind, and especially his memory, possess power of the very first order. On moral subjects he often evinces astonishing powers of discrimination in comparison with most other natives. He is a short man and rather corpulent, very inferior in appearance when sitting, but when he rises to speak, he looks well—stands erect, gesticulates with freedom, and pours forth, as he becomes animated, words in torrents. He is perfectly familiar with the former as well as the present religion, customs, modes of thinking, and in fact the whole history of the islanders, which enables him often to draw comparisons, make allusions, and direct appeals, with a power which no foreigner will ever possess. 

Hawaii was capable of producing such leaders, leaders for whom a “liberal education” was neither a benefit or a necessity.

Listening and the Civilization Emphasis

To their credit, the missionaries to Hawaii were very holistic. As Hiram Bingham wrote, “To save their souls was the main object, but that object was not to be singly and constantly pressed on the attention of such a people.” Unfortunately, however, this holism was cached in terms of “civilizing”:

We longed to see them move and live, and stand up, an army to praise God, a civilized and Christian nation. . . . Their uncouth and disgusting manners were to be corrected, their modes of dress and living to be improved, their grossness, destitution, and wretchedness, if possible, removed; and taste, refinement, and comfort, substituted.

This was problematic. It is one thing properly to prize identifiable features of one’s own culture as superior to another culture’s specific features (or vice versa); it is another thing completely to dismiss the entirety of another culture as “uncivilized.” The problem here is tactical—that this made respectful communication more difficult and, consequently, a respectful reception of the transcendent gospel more difficult; the problem here is also fundamentally theological—it tends wrongly to identify one’s local and imminent culture with the universal and transcendent gospel. The best missionaries sought to avoid this sense of cultural superiority. But with “civilization” as a central
element to one’s mission, it was difficult to see how this sense of cultural superiority could be avoided.

Many critiques of missionaries have referenced the “demoralizing effect” of their nineteenth-century focus on a “civilizing mission,” which inescapably implied their “civilized” state against the Hawaiians’ “uncivilized.”54 Some have suggested that this demoralization, when taken to heart by the Hawaiians, may even have contributed to their depopulation, affecting Hawaiians’ will to live, and suppressing the birth rate.55

This civilization emphasis worked another detriment: it induced deafness in the missionaries. That is, it seemed to disable the missionaries’ ability to take seriously some of the concerns and values of their “uncivilized” Hawaiian brothers and sisters. This may have contributed hugely to the ugly split between the white administrators of the Hawaiian Evangelical Alliance (AEH) and its native members when Queen Liliuokalani was overthrown in 1893. While most native Hawaiian pastors and church members stood passionately with their queen,56 most of the white leaders of the AEH had thrown their support behind the Provisional Government replacing her. But these white leaders never seemed to take seriously the native Hawaiians’ view, and conflict resulted:

Rev. Oliver P. Emerson warned . . . “It is an actual state of war.” Dramatic battles played out that witnessed the expulsion of pastors from their pulpits, the boarding up of churches, the excommunication of near-entire congregations, heated land battles, the arrest of church trustees, and much more.

Native AEH congregations throughout every island actively contested attempts to dismiss their authority as leaders and Christians. . . . In one letter to the American Board, Rev. Hyde wrote about the numerous pastors who faced outraged congregations because of the pastors’ support for annexation, and mentioned that he himself had recently been told that one of his former students, now a pastor on Kau‘i, was praying that God would “wipe out the missionaries who had dethroned the Queen, robbed the people, etc., etc.”57

What is striking here is that the white AEH leaders never even seemed to consider the option of sitting down with their native Hawaiian brothers, hearing their concerns, and then discussing options. Rather it was a “my way or the highway” approach. Supporting the Provisional Government was insisted upon as “the Christian way,” and the native Hawaiian alternative views on the matter were simply dismissed.

But listening to the Holy Spirit inevitably means listening to people. So it was with Peter in Acts 10. He did not start his Gentile encounter with a pronouncement but
with a question: “May I ask why you sent for me?” (v. 22) He first wanted to listen to them. And he listened so well that he actually “heard” them, learning something new and important in the process: “I now realize” (v. 34) he said. This sort of listening ear would have served the AEH administrators well, perhaps enabling them to learn something new and important in the process, and ending up peacemakers in a time of turmoil. But it was not to be.

**Holy Spirit Listening on Hawaii’s Side**

Listening to the Spirit was important not only for the missionaries and white administrators of AEH; it was also important for the native Hawaiian church. Equally, even as the missionaries may have been deaf in certain areas, so too may have been the Hawaiians. Two particularly important areas are depopulation and economics. These are highly sensitive areas and one must strive to avoid the presumptuous stance of the “prescriptive outside analyst, who can see more clearly” than the locals; nevertheless they are simply too important to avoid.

**Depopulation**

O. Bushnell, emeritus professor of medical microbiology and medical history at the University of Hawaii, observed that, “Two sets of factors led to a decrease in population: the first, those that provoked an actual loss of people from any cause; the second, those that induced a lowered birth rate.” Pernicious epidemics, annihilating thousands, were a killer. Against these the Hawaiians could do little to protect themselves. But then we are faced not simply with the question of, “Why was Hawaii so severely depopulated on multiple occasions?” (the epidemics) but, “Why did it not recover and increase in between those epidemics? Why did its population even in the in-between times continually plummet?” The lowered birth rate—which was clearly drastic, in some instances only two to six children being born to one hundred married women—had a number of causes tied to avoidable Hawaiian behavior: venereal disease and family implosion.

It is widely conceded that venereal diseases, specifically gonorrhea, caused sterility in much of the populace. Venereal disease—evilly introduced by the ever-increasing waves of Western seamen who came through Hawaii after 1788—was spread by the sexual practices of Hawaiians that have been described, by secular, non-missionary sources, as a “vividly sexualized society.” Unrestrained sexual practice is a behavior pattern that can be changed, but there was repeated testimony that even with the church, this was the “national sin.” Clearly, greater Holy Spirit restraint in this area would have aided the depopulation scourge.
Additionally, Kirch and Sahlins see the “structural implosion of the family” occasioned by certain Hawaiian cultural practices and values as having “encouraged a low rate of reproduction” and thus Hawaii’s “demographic disaster.” They write:

What was true of the kingdom applied as well to the humbler domestic realm of the people: constant fluctuation of household arrangements and membership, due in good measure to shifting sentiments and attachments . . . . Above all, a prolonged period of mobility among younger adults devoted to the pursuit of pleasure. Great value was attached to *uʻi,* “vigorous, youthful beauty.” Young women were reluctant to settle down and rear children because of the adverse effects on their figures. . . . Certain it is that infants were often left for the grandparents to rear while the mother went on her ways.

To the degree this is accurate, Hawaii’s depopulation problem may have been changed by native Hawaiian family practices more in line with Holy Spirit values.

**Economics**

Economics is important to Hawaii’s story. After all, it was the native Hawaiians’ falling behind—and the resultant gulf between native Hawaiians and the business community—that was a key factor contributing both to Queen Liliuokalani’s 1893 overthrow and to Hawaii’s 1898 annexation.

But if one grants that this economic gulf was important, and therefore that bridging that gulf would have been hugely helpful, still the question remains: How could the Holy Spirit have played any sort of role in this; and more specifically, how might the Hawaiians’ better listening to him have helped?

My argument here is not a straight-line one that argues a) for the modern capitalist economics encouraged by the missionaries as “more Christian” than Hawaiians’ traditional subsistence system, such that b) listening to the Holy Spirit would automatically have led to its embrace. Rather, my argument is: a) increasingly, starting well before the missionaries came, Hawaii’s leaders had opted for change and the embrace of Western ways; b) for that change to be successful, the adoption of certain values and practices was necessary; and c) the changes required were precisely the sort that the Holy Spirit nurtured, such that listening to the Holy Spirit on these points would have been important for economic enabling. The three steps in this argument are followed below.

First, it is clear that Hawaiians, from Kamehameha the Conqueror’s first meeting with Cook in 1778 onwards, voluntarily adopted Western values. Kamehameha’s
embrace of foreign advisors, Western weapons, and ships—by 1810 he had forty-two western sloops and schooners and many muskets and cannons—was key to his being the first Hawaiian to conquer and unite all the Hawaiian islands under one king.

Looking Westwards politically, he also ceded his kingdom to Great Britain in 1794 in return for a guarantee of protection. And before one missionary had set foot on Hawaii, visitors observed Hawaiians in full Western dress and their important officials even having adopted foreign names: Billy Pitt, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, etc. Later, Kamehameha III (reigned 1825–1854) and his advisors, in order to protect Hawaii’s independence against foreign trouble-makers within and colonizers without, slowly began adopting a more Western way of governing (constitutional restraints on the monarchy, etc.).

On the economic front, the king and chiefs sent a letter in 1836 to American friends of Hawaii requesting “additional teachers, like the teachers who dwell in your own country . . . agriculturists skilled in raising sugar-cane, cotton, . . . and in making sugar, . . . makers of machinery to work on a large scale [etc.]” None of this was forced on the Hawaiians; they saw it to be the best hope for their future.

To succeed in this push toward Western-style economic development, a stress on three qualities would be important: hard work, saving, and work as a calling. However, all of these fit only uncomfortably within the Hawaiian scale of values. First, as early visitors, prior to the coming of the missionaries, to Hawaii observed, leisure was valued over hard work. Anthropologists recognize this as typical for what Miguel Basáñez calls “cultures of dignity” as opposed to Anglo-Saxon “cultures of achievement.”

Second, saving for future investment also contrasted with Hawaiian cultural values, two in particular. First, it contrasted with a traditional “production for use” value—aiming at subsistence—in contrast to the foreigners’ “production for exchange” value aiming at surplus. Second, it ran headlong into the “Polynesian political economy of grandeur” that devalued saving as community-neglecting “stinginess.” Hawaiians showed their greatness of soul and mana by their grandeur and generosity.

This cultural clash is perfectly illustrated in John Tamatoa Baker (1852–1921), an anti-annexationist politician, businessman, and rancher of Hawaiian-Tahitian-English extraction. Paradoxically, his success was due to the very economic values for which his own fellow Hawaiians criticized him. What he regarded as “making savings” and a businesslike hard-headed cost/benefit analysis was dismissed as “stinginess”:

In Baker’s case his role as a pseudo-ali‘i meant that other Native Hawaiians had certain expectations of him, particularly regarding his generosity. The openhanded generosity of the ali‘i, however, conflicted with the attitude
required to develop wealth in a capitalist society. . . . Baker, however, embraced his reputation for “stinginess,” which he cited as the secret to his success.79

Because of this values clash, Hawaiians stayed away from the very sort of wealth-producing activities that would have been so helpful to them in avoiding poverty. As Cook says:

Unlike the Chinese, Japanese, and haole, Native Hawaiians tended to stay away from mercantile operations, in part because of the lack of capital and in part because of a lack of interest in shop keeping.80

It was not merely external but internal checks—sheer lack of interest—that blocked their economic progress. This seems clear from the fact that many nineteenth-century Chinese, despite prejudice and lack of English language mastery, prospered, even as millionaires.81

Hawaii’s native leadership in both government and the church, having opted for a Westernized, profit-oriented economic system, could have succeeded better in it had they accessed relevant Holy Spirit values: hard work, thrift, and a concept of work and wealth creation as a “Christian calling.” Each of these is actually a biblical value, as even the sketchiest overview shows us:

• God’s command of a work/leisure ratio of 6:1 in Exod 34:21 and 35:2 is suggestive of the need to elevate the value of work vis-à-vis leisure, even as it is highlighted in God’s command to Adam in Gen 2:15 to work the garden for his sustenance.
• Thrift is repeatedly mandated in the book of Proverbs.
• “Work as a calling” flows from our being in the image of a God who not only valued “spiritual” things, but instead called everything in creation “good” (Genesis 1); it also is rooted in Col 3:23–24: “Whatever you do, work at it . . . as working for the Lord.”82

With the widespread adoption of these perspectives, perhaps then things would have been different in Hawaii.
Success Story: Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop

Things were different for some, for Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop (1831–1884), great-granddaughter of Kamehameha I certainly. She embodied the original holistic vision of early chiefs and missionaries, and as a result made a multi-generational impact for good. Educated by missionaries in the Royal School, she managed to hold on to her Hawaiian identity while recognizing the importance of wealth creation based on the values of hard work, thrift, and work as a calling. She wanted these very things to be passed on to her people. So, at her death she put her vast resources—she owned nine percent of Hawaii’s land acreage, making her its largest landholder—into a trust dedicated solely to the betterment and education of native Hawaiians. Her will showed what she had in mind:

> I desire my trustees to provide first and chiefly a good education in the common English branches, and also instruction in morals and in such useful knowledge as may tend to make good and industrious men and women. I also direct that the teachers of said schools shall forever be persons of the Protestant religion.\(^8\)

The result is that today, through the efforts and vision of this one woman, the Kamehameha Schools graduate annually 700 indigenous high school seniors with a quality education.\(^4\)

Her trust, the Kamehameha Schools, which enables all this, is valued at $11.5 billion, making it the ninth largest in the USA when ranked with all university endowments.\(^5\) It exemplifies the insight of the princess and of the early Hawaiian chiefs in embracing the wealth-producing economics introduced by outsiders. That is, the income that supports the schools comes not from the vast acreage of Hawaiian land held by the trust, but rather from the one percent of commercial real estate in Hawaii along with its varied financial assets.\(^6\) It is hard-headed economics, but with a big heart for Hawaii’s good. And it is working today.

**Conclusion**

This article, then, has explored the positives and negatives in Hawaii’s nineteenth-century development, suggesting how the positives were driven by an appropriation of the Holy Spirit’s work and values, while the negatives by a lack of such appropriation. In both ways the Holy Spirit was central. Because of the Holy Spirit’s involvement and because he is inescapably the God of hope (“May . . . you may overflow with hope by
the power of the Holy Spirit” [Rom 15:13]), we can have hope for Hawaii; he is not finished with her yet!

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Notes

2 Bingham, A Residence, 4389, 4604.
3 Bingham, A Residence, 6491, 6544.
10 Bingham, A Residence, 10721, 10762
12 Kirch and Sahlins, Anahulu, 9.


30 Kuykendall, Kingdom: 1874-1893, 277–78.

31 Helena Allen observes, contrary to popular opinion, that, “Most of the planters [as late as 1892] were opposed to annexation, as were many of the commercial and businessmen.” (H. Allen, The Betrayal of Liliuokalani [Glendale, CA: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1982], 269); Haley concurs saying “sugar was not the reason.” (J. Haley, Captive Paradise: A History of Hawaii [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2014], Kindle Electronic Location: 5771–73, 5987–88).

32 Gerrit Judd (1803–73), early missionary doctor and then cabinet minister, was typical in both working hard for and rejoicing in Hawaii’s political independence (see Judd to Rev. David Greene, Jan. 25, 1845, in Letters of Dr. Gerrit P. Judd, 1827-1872 [Fragments II], 170–74, cited in Kuykendall Kingdom: 1778-1854, 238). Even revolutionary firebrands Lorrin Thurston and Sereno Bishop only turned pro-annexationist late in their lives (see Kuykendall, Kingdom: 1874-1893, 509–10, 565).


36 Bingham, A Residence, 2924–30.


38 See Preza, “Empirical,” 19, 109; M. Perkins, “Kuleana: A Genealogy of Native Tenant Rights,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Hawai’i at Mānoa, 2013), 7; R. Stauffer, Kahana: How the Land Was Lost (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 2. Mark ‘Umi Perkins is one of these “third wave” historians who completely overturns the negative conception held by the “second wave” historians concerning the Western-influenced land division (the Great Mahele) of 1848 as a “dispossession.” That is, he actually views it as a positive benefit to Hawaiians, observing, “My research . . . suggests that the land tenure system embedded Hawaiian rights in land rather than alienation [sic] Hawaiians from it.” (M. Perkins, “The Ten Most Pervasive Myths about Hawaiian History,” the universe, 13 March 2015, n.p., 199-200).
https://theumiverse.wordpress.com/2015/03/13/the-ten-most-pervasive-myths-about-hawaiian-history/ [8 February 2019]). His Ph.D. thesis explains:

The 1850 Kuleana Act was a continuation of the process begun with the 1848 Māhele, which I contend was misconstrued by twentieth-century scholars. . . . I focus on kuleana, or native tenant rights—embedded rights to land for . . . commoners . . . that could be “divided out.” . . . All land titles originating from that process [the Māhele] (which constitute the vast majority of lands in Hawai‘i) contain the stipulation “ua k eke kuleana o na kanaka.” This phrase was translated on land titles as “reserving the rights of native tenants” . . . [which] were to a fee-simple title to land in which they could claim a hereditary interest. . . . It could therefore be argued that native tenant rights continue to exist for Hawaiians today. . . . (Perkins, “Kuleana,” vi, 3, 5–6).

Perkins is quite radical not only in contending that much of the past research on the Māhele has been “misconstrued” but also in suggesting that the native tenant right granted by the Māhele continues to exist, therefore essentially creating a cloud of title on most current land ownership in Hawaii! Hawaiians have a claim on them even today, he suggests. He goes on to write:

It is commonly cited that the final result of this process [the Māhele] was the maka‘āinana [commoners] receiving less than one percent of the lands. . . . An emerging view suggests that, in fact, the Māhele and Kuleana Act processes were beneficial to Hawaiians . . ., who, from 1850 until 1874, possessed most of the desirable land in Hawai‘i. . . . The Māhele and Kuleana Acts were not the travesties that scholars would have us think. . . . [I]t was the economics of their [native Hawaiians] situation and the processes of erasure and forgetting that led to alienation, rather than the design of the Māhele process itself (Perkins, “Kuleana,” 6–7).

Another important contributor to the new wave in Hawaiian research is Donovan Preza, Instructor in Political Science at Kapiolani Community College and Ph.D. student in Geography at the University of Hawaii. The very subtitle of his master’s thesis makes clear the direct challenge he presents to second wave “dispossession” themes: “The Empirical Writes Back: Re-Examining Hawaiian Dispossession Resulting from the Māhele of 1848.” Preza writes:

This research examines the transition of land tenure in Hawai‘i to a system of private property. Known as the Māhele, this transition was believed to have been the cause of dispossession of Hawaiians from land. This thesis questions presumptions identifying the Māhele as a sufficient condition for dispossession. . . . Analysis of these [land] sales revealed an alternate explanation for dispossession in Hawai‘i: the loss of governance. Ultimately this is a story of dispossession, how it has been understood, misunderstood. . . .Institutions of private property and law were not the critical dismemberment of Hawaiians; the overthrow and occupation of Hawai‘i by the United States resulting in the loss of governance and control over those institutions and law-making ability were (Preza, “Empirical,” v, 165).
Preza believes firmly in a Hawaiian “dispossession,” but he categorically rejects it having occurred in the 1848 Māhele, where the second wave of historians place it. In other words, it was not Hawaiians’ careful adapting of Western laws and land systems that was their problem; it was Westerners’ later disregard for these systems and their coercive political overthrow that caused dispossession. It was the illegality of the overthrow, in Preza’s mind, that ought to merit current challenge, not the Māhele.


R. C. Wyllie, Answers to Questions Posed by His Excellency (Honolulu: Government Printer, 1848), 59–60.


Hatch, Democratization, 19, 30–46.

Bingham, A Residence, 3638, 3650–63.


Rev. O. P. Emerson, The Friend, July 1890, 55.

“Journal of Mr. Armstrong on the Island of Maui,” Missionary Herald, July 1838, 244 (entry of 26 July 1837), https://hmha.missionhouses.org/files/original/52ce8e3fb08c2b56333adade6a9b54f0.pdf (8 February 2019).

56 Williams, “Claiming,” 114, 123.
57 Williams, “Claiming,” 120–21, 114, 123.
62 See comments on Hawaii’s “vividly sexualized society” (Haley, *Captive*, 2196); “chastity was unknown among the Polynesians” (Bushnell, *Gifts*,138); for Hawaiians, with their “preoccupation with sex. . . . Sex was everything.” (M. Sahlins, *Islands of History* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1987], 10, 26). Hawaii’s pre-contact worldview peculiarly elevated free sexual practice, as Lilikala Kame’eleihiwa explains: “The object, then, was to elevate one’s mana in the eyes of the people and escape the pit of commonality. . . . There were two ways mana could be obtained: through sexual means and through violence.” (L. Kame’eleihiwa, *Native Land and Foreign Desires: Pehea La E Pono Ai? How Shall We Live in Harmony?* [Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 2012], Kindle Electronic Location: 1180).
66 Many native Hawaiian commentators today criticize this decision. See Haunani-Kay Trask, “Natives and Anthropologists: The Colonial Struggle,” in *Voyaging through the
The irony of these critiques, coming as they do from Hawaiian champions of “insiders”—i.e., of native, indigenous Hawaiians—is that they themselves are chronological “outsiders”: they are twentieth-century moderns who cannot fully “sit in the skin” of these early nineteenth-century Hawaiians.


Some native historians argue that early Hawaiian leaders were fooled or pressured into mistakenly trusting missionary advice on these points (Osorio, *Dismembering*, 49; L. G. Dening, L. Kame’eleihiwa, and A. Anderson, “Book Review: *Anahulu, The Anthropology of History,*” *The Contemporary Pacific* [Spring 1994], 218.) Other native historians such as Donovan Preza and Mark ‘Umi Perkins believe otherwise.


Spiritual power.

Cook, “Kahiki,” 330–31. From this disapproval of stinginess, native Hawaiian historian Lilikala Kame’eleihiwa draws out a systemic conclusion: “Hawaiian generosity was thus diametrically opposed to the basic tenets of capitalism” (Kame'eleihiwa, *Native Land*, 487). But her conclusion seems directly contradicted by English adventurer Gilbert Mathison’s observations of actual Hawaiian behavior already in 1822 (so, well before the ABCFM mission was truly established). That is, his *Narrative* describes in some detail the eager, indeed effortless, adoption of money-based, profit-getting trading—and their facility for driving a hard bargain—by every level of society: king, chiefs, and commoners (see G. F.
Mathison, *Narrative of a Visit to Brazil, Chile, Peru and the Sandwich Islands During the Years 1821 and 1822* [London: Charles Knight, 1825], 395–96, 408–9, 455).


**Fundamentalism, Marginalization, and Eschatology**

**Historical, Socio-Economic, and Theological Factors Influencing Early Pentecostal Theological Education**

Daniel Topf

**Keywords** history of Pentecostalism, theological education, marginalization in early Pentecostalism, fundamentalism, dispensationalism

**Abstract**

Pentecostalism is recognized and appreciated, for instance, for its fervent evangelism and vibrant worship but generally not well-known for its contributions to scholarship and formal theological education. Why is that the case? Rather than simply pointing to an anti-intellectual attitude within Pentecostalism, this article emphasizes there are complex historical, socioeconomic, and theological factors to be considered when describing the development of early Pentecostal theological education in the United States. From a historical perspective, early Pentecostalism had to come to terms with its nineteenth-century roots, which included the fundamentalist movement. Regarding socio-economic factors, many early Pentecostal leaders came from the margins of society and did therefore not have the means to invest in high-quality education. Theologically speaking, early Pentecostals were often influenced by dispensationalism and its pessimistic eschatology, which hindered them from developing a long-term vision for their theological institutions. By addressing some of these challenges from the past, Pentecostals in the twenty-first century will be able to envision a new kind of theological education that makes relevant contributions to current conversations in both the body of Christ and society as a whole.
Introduction

Particularly in the United States, Bible schools have played a key role in the history of early Pentecostalism. After all, it was at a Bible school in Topeka, Kansas, at Bethel Bible College, that Agnes N. Ozman (1870–1937) first spoke in tongues in 1901, which became a pivotal event in the development of the Pentecostal movement.1 Besides Charles F. Parham (1873–1929), the founder of Bethel Bible College, many other Pentecostal leaders considered preparing people for ministry a priority as well. Aimee Semple McPherson (1890–1944), for example, opened the first Foursquare church (Angelus Temple) in 1923, and that same year she also started the first Foursquare Bible institute.2

However, despite these investments in ministerial preparation, Pentecostalism has been widely perceived as having an anti-intellectual bias.3 At least traditionally, Pentecostals have been known for their enthusiastic activism but have been less recognized for their scholarly contributions. This tension leads to the question: Why has Pentecostalism, despite its many impressive strengths, struggled to build up a reputation in the area of formal theological education? One would be hard-pressed to identify a single factor responsible for this situation. My argument is that one needs to consider a complex array of historical, socio-economic, and theological factors in describing the relationship between early Pentecostalism and theological education.

In the following, I discuss these factors from a historical perspective, focusing on early Pentecostalism in the United States between 1901 (the year when Agnes Ozman spoke in tongues) and 1936, when, because of economic hardship, the Azusa Street Mission building had to be given up. For the purposes of this article, I define theological education in broad terms, including both ministerial preparation (as offered through Bible institutes and Bible schools) and the more formal kind of education obtainable through accredited colleges and seminaries. As I demonstrate in the following, early Pentecostalism was strong in the former but reluctant to embrace the latter.

Historical Factors: A Twentieth-Century Movement with a Nineteenth-Century Legacy

Pentecostalism is often described as a twentieth-century phenomenon, but it really is a development of trends that dominated the religious landscape in the nineteenth century.4 One of these influences was the holiness movement, which grew out of American Methodism in the nineteenth century.5 Methodism is, of course, a
phenomenon with roots in the eighteenth century started by the Englishman John Wesley (1703–1791), but the holiness movement became especially influential in the United States, particularly through the Second Great Awakening (c. 1790–1840). Similarly, the Keswick movement, which began in England in the late nineteenth century, also influenced Pentecostalism by emphasizing sanctification and a second experience after conversion to empower the saints for service.⁶

Among the characteristics of the Second Great Awakening were revival events and camp meetings at which people were encouraged to undergo a personal and radical conversion experience. As a result of such a conversion or renewal experience, it was expected that believers would henceforth live lives of complete consecration to God and separation from the world. Emphasizing separation from the world in such a way often led to a strict set of rules to be followed. This kind of legalism was also characteristic of the early Pentecostal movement; consequently, rules prohibiting wearing make-up, playing cards, drinking Coca Cola, going to the movies, etc., were seen as essential elements of living out the faith as a Pentecostal.⁷

Another influence from nineteenth-century revivalism was an emphasis on the emotional and the ecstatic. At the camp meetings of the Second Great Awakening, manifestations of the Spirit, like shaking, shouting, weeping, and speaking in tongues, were reported, phenomena also common in Pentecostalism.⁸ These kinds of religious experiences had a positive impact on people, enabling them to relate to God in ways that included their emotions. However, the emphasis on emotions also created a downside: less weight was given to the life of the mind as it seemed unnecessary to invest in learning and education in order to experience a deeper relationship with God. A passion for the sanctified mind has been part of other Christian traditions, such as among Roman Catholic Jesuits and within the Presbyterian church, and both Jesuits and Presbyterians are known for establishing excellent institutions of education.⁹ By contrast, Pentecostals tended to invest in education based on a pragmatic approach, to prepare people quickly for the task of ministry, but not necessarily for advancing the frontiers of knowledge and discovery.

Fundamentalism was another crucial development in the religious landscape of the nineteenth century.¹⁰ Feeling threatened by the increasing influence of the modern sciences, many evangelicals in the United States developed a corral mentality and proposed a version of the Christian faith in which they largely retreated from society. This led to a certain degree of narrowmindedness when it came to addressing academic and intellectual issues, especially when related to the theory of evolution and higher criticism of the Bible.¹¹ In addition, fundamentalism also led to a worldview separating the natural from the spiritual realm. Consequently, and in contrast to previous

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reformers like William Wilberforce (1759–1833), evangelicals now exclusively emphasized the preaching of the gospel and the conversion of individuals, thereby neglecting public theology and social concerns.

Since, according to Robert Mapes Anderson, “the Pentecostal movement should be regarded as part of the Fundamentalist movement,” many challenges and issues characterizing fundamentalism apply to Pentecostalism as well. Consequently, Pentecostal theological education was, from its start, affected by the shortcomings of fundamentalism. The first Pentecostal Bible schools were short-term training centers with a narrow focus. For instance, Parham’s school in Houston, Texas, “provided ten weeks of intensive Pentecostal indoctrination,” as Larry Martin puts it. Early Pentecostal schools were not only small and short-term in focus but also characterized by a limited outlook. At Parham’s school, “the Bible was the only textbook”; in fact, “virtually all pentecostal educational programs used the Bible as the sole textbook.” Unfortunately, by focusing exclusively on spirituality and knowing the Bible, Pentecostal educators neglected other areas, such as preparing their students for a complex world in which a variety of theological opinions and philosophical viewpoints compete with each other in the marketplace of ideas.

Paul W. Lewis, himself a Pentecostal educator, recognizes some of these historical shortcomings in Pentecostal theological education when he writes,

Following the Bible school movement, the Pentecostal Bible schools tended to emphasize short-term training anywhere up to 2 years (partially for eschatological reasons), and like the Bible schools [sic] movement, tended to emphasize pastoral (including church planting and evangelism) and missionary skills with Pentecostal spiritual life. The tendency was to establish many smaller schools, rather than a few key schools. Noteworthy was that after a short period of time many of these schools were closed or merged with others. The training tended to be basic Pentecostal indoctrination, and ministerial training, personal formation and education were collapsed into each other. Further, from the strong influence of fundamentalism, the textbooks tended to be non-Pentecostal or even anti-Pentecostal, such as the use of Reformed Henry Thiessen’s Lectures in Systematic Theology as a textbook.

Some early Pentecostals were generally skeptical toward academics, but others did value education, if it was “of the right kind.” Training institutes to prepare people for ministry were launched by every major Pentecostal denomination “within months or years of their founding. By 1914 ten were up and running, by 1930 at least twenty
flourished.”

Granted, much was accomplished within a relatively brief time. However, it also needs to be highlighted that early Pentecostal theological education remained, by and large, rudimentary. Interest in offering a broader education by building liberal arts colleges only began around World War II, and it took the Assemblies of God until 1955 to open Evangel College in Springfield, Missouri, “as a denominationally sponsored liberal arts college.” It took Pentecostals even longer to recognize graduate level education as a priority; accredited seminaries were only set up in the 1960s, and the first Pentecostal/Charismatic university, Oral Roberts University, was opened in 1965.

To summarize, early Pentecostalism was influenced by streams of religious expressions leaning toward legalism, emotionalism, and fundamentalism. These elements all have something in common: they discourage the life of the mind and consequently limit the development of the kind of theological education that dares to ask questions and explores fresh approaches. Some Pentecostals were skeptical about theological education in general, while others supported it. However, even those supporting theological education saw it primarily as a tool to train future leaders for concrete roles, such as being an evangelist, pastor, or missionary. Consequently, the theological institutions of early Pentecostalism were primarily training institutes and Bible schools. Only decades later did Pentecostals have the vision (and the means) to build seminaries, liberal arts colleges, and universities.

**Socio-Economic Factors: A Faith Movement on the Margins**

To understand why early Pentecostal theological education developed in the way it did, it is crucial to consider the socio-economic realities of the movement. Typically, Pentecostalism is not a religion that attracts the rich and powerful but is more known for embracing the downtrodden and marginalized. The poor, women, people of color—these were the kind of people who shaped Pentecostalism in its early days (and still shape Pentecostalism in the Majority World today).

Even the leaders of the early Pentecostal movement came from the margins of society. William J. Seymour (1870–1922), for instance, the leading preacher of the Azusa Street Revival, was an African American, a man born to former slaves who grew up under extremely challenging circumstances. In addition, “a severe case of smallpox left Seymour blind in his left eye. His face was so scarred by the disease that he wore a beard through the remainder of his life.”

Arthur G. Osterberg, an eyewitness, acknowledged Seymour as “meek and plain spoken and no orator. He spoke the common language of the uneducated class.” As James L. Tyson, himself an African
American, recognizes when describing the history of Pentecostalism, “It is amazing to witness the unfolding of God’s mind and purpose in men and women the world would deem either unfit or unqualified.”

Women were another marginalized group playing a significant role in early Pentecostalism; various observers who witnessed the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles noticed how the Holy Spirit was at work through and in women. At times, not even the names of these women have been recorded, as also the following example shows: “One foreign-born reporter from a Los Angeles newspaper came on assignment to report on the ‘circus-like’ meeting in the Azusa Street ‘stable.’ While there, an ignorant woman rose to her feet, looked straight at him and spoke in his native tongue, telling him secrets that only he could have known. He left convinced of the authenticity of the ‘tongues’ experience.”

The most prominent and influential woman in early Pentecostalism was probably Aimee McPherson. Even before women in the United States received the right to vote (which only happened in 1920), McPherson already had an active ministry as a travelling evangelist. Not only that, but she also became a prominent radio personality, preached regularly in front of thousands of people, and started her own denomination. No wonder Matthew A. Sutton, a historian at Washington State University, describes McPherson as “the most famous minister in America during the interwar years.”

The historical circumstances in which McPherson rose to fame are also important: “With rapid urbanization, the discovery of new technologies, the perfecting of powerful forms of mass media, the rise of the modern university system, and the growth of a celebrity-centered culture, many Americans in the early twentieth century predicted the extinction of classic evangelicalism.” In the midst of this climate gravitating toward modernization and secularization, McPherson and other Pentecostals proved people were still hungry for religious experiences.

Being part of a highly missional movement, Pentecostals early on sought to provide opportunities for ministerial training, in order to prepare the next generation of leaders for their rapidly growing churches. It was through Parham’s Bible schools that the Pentecostal doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Spirit (accompanied by the speaking in tongues) first spread throughout the United States. Parham’s most influential student was probably William Seymour, who first listened to Parham’s teachings in 1905, at his Bible school in Houston, Texas. However, since the infamous Jim Crow laws were still governing the southern United States, Seymour had to study while sitting on a chair outside the classroom. Unfortunately, Christian communities such as Parham’s were tainted by the same racism as was prevalent in American society during that time.
Belonging to a racial minority, Seymour had experienced discrimination and marginalization throughout this life. His father died in 1891, when Seymour was twenty-one years old, leaving his mother Phillis behind as a widow who now had to take care of three children under the age of sixteen. Their family farm had an assessed value of only one hundred dollars, and in 1894 the family’s economic condition was so desperate Phillis sold half of the farm for just thirty dollars so her family could survive.  

Seymour left home and in the following years worked as a porter, a driver, a waiter, and later as a travelling salesman.  

Seymour rose to fame during the Azusa Street Revival and had an extensive traveling ministry within the United States at some point, but he “lived and died in near poverty.” A few years after the revival, Seymour had to reduce the activity at Azusa Mission; by then it only consisted of one weekly meeting and not many people attended anymore. Finances were tight, so much so that Seymour’s wife Jennie Evans Moore Seymour (1874–1936) had to look for a secular job to make ends meet. After Seymour died in 1922, the widowed Mrs. Seymour, hard-pressed by financial difficulties, “sold the mortgage on the Azusa Street property to a Los Angeles bank and also mortgaged her home.” In 1936, the bank foreclosed on the property, and two years later the once famous mission site was turned into a parking lot.  

As this example of William Seymour shows, the economic and social realities of early Pentecostals were often extremely challenging. Among other things, this also meant Pentecostals frequently simply did not have the necessary means to build up the kind of theological institutions needed to engage in academic endeavors. By contrast, other Christian denominations that came before Pentecostalism quickly made a move toward building well-established institutions to train their ministers. One example Rick M. Nañez highlights in his book Full Gospel, Fractured Minds? are the Puritans, who were among the first Protestant settlers to arrive in North America. The Puritans founded Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630 and only six years later, in 1636, they instituted Harvard College (which later became Harvard University). According to a contemporary witness, this is how and why Harvard College came into being:

After God had carried us safe to New-England, and wee had builded our houses, provided necessaries for our livelihood, rear’d convenient places for Gods worship, and settled the Civile Government: One of the next things we longed for, and looked after, was to advance Learning and perpetuate it to Posterity; dreading to leave an illiterate Ministery to the Churches, when our present Ministers shall lie in the dust. And as wee were thinking and consulting how to effect this great work; it pleased God to stir up the heart of one Mr. Harvard (a godly gentleman, and a lover of learning, there living
amongst us) to give the one halfe of his estate (it being in all about £1,700.) towards the erecting of a Colledge, and all his Library; after him, another gave 300£ others after them cast in more, and the publique hand of the State added the rest; the Colledge was, by common consent, appointed to be at Cambridge (a place very pleasant and accommodate), and is called (according to the name of the first founder) Harvard Colledge.\(^{39}\)

Harvard College was founded in particular historical circumstances in which the Puritans saw the need for an institution providing “high, broad and rigid intellectual training” for their ministers and magistrates.\(^{40}\) Why was the development of early Pentecostal theological education so different from what the Puritans envisioned, for example? One crucial factor has to do with the availability of the necessary financial means (or lack thereof). As already indicated in this article, Pentecostalism often attracted the poor and uneducated. According to Anderson, the rise of early Pentecostalism needs to be understood within the context of socio-economic developments the increasing industrialization and urbanization of the United States brought about. These developments left behind entire groups of people in problematic living conditions, be it as impoverished farmers or as an urban proletariat.\(^{41}\)

In contrast, John Harvard (1607–1638), growing up in England, obtained a bachelor’s (BA) as well as a master’s (MA) degree from the University of Cambridge and later in life “inherited considerable property.”\(^{42}\) How different was his upbringing from the life experience of William Seymour, who was mostly self-taught and lived in poverty his entire life. Granted, the life story of Seymour is unique and cannot necessarily be taken as a general standard of what circumstances were like for early Pentecostal leaders in general. However, in studying the lives of forty-five early Pentecostal leaders, Anderson concludes most of them came from a farming or blue-collar background, and several among them “were victims of abject poverty” growing up.\(^{43}\) Among other things, this means these leaders did not have much access to formal education. Some did go to Bible school but attending Moody Bible Institute (MBI) or the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (Biola) in those days did not mean the same as it would today. In the early twentieth century, these Bible schools “did not require graduation from high school or even grade school, before admission” and the education offered “was little more than a program of indoctrination in the Holiness ideology by rote memorization of scriptural proof-texts.”\(^{44}\)

Admittedly, becoming ministers within the Pentecostal movement potentially placed them in a higher social class than their parents had been able to enjoy. However, for many Pentecostal ministers, their economic situation continued to be precarious, and they had to turn to secular employments such as farming or factory work to make a
In short, their status as Pentecostal ministers could not be compared to the prestige a man of the cloth in an established denomination could attain. For Pentecostal preachers, “The class character of their congregations, the emotionalism of their services, their meager education, and their employment in secular occupations, often of menial character—all denied them the status accorded other ministers.” Consequently, Pentecostal pastors (and even denominational leaders) “lay in a sort of limbo between working and middle class. Never quite one nor the other, they were marginal men and women.”

Similar to the leaders of the Pentecostal movement, “The Pentecostal faithful everywhere were drawn from the humbler orders of society.” These included various ethnic groups, with substantial growth taking place among African Americans and Hispanics (mostly of Mexican descent) as well as among Native Americans and several groups of European ancestry, such as Scandinavians, Germans, and Italians. If establishing theological institutions of higher learning proved to be difficult for white Pentecostal denominations, it was surely even more challenging for Pentecostals belonging to marginalized minorities.

Hispanic Pentecostals, for example, operated mostly on the margins, especially in the area of theological education, as the following incident demonstrates. The Mexican immigrant Francisco Olazábal (1886–1937) had been ordained with the Assemblies of God in 1917 and had a successful ministry as a healing evangelist and composer of Pentecostal hymns, exercising particular influence in California and in Texas. Olazábal saw the need for a Bible school but, as Daniel Ramírez explains, Olazábal’s “pedagogical aspirations foundered on the shoals of white paternalism.” In 1922, it was decided Olazábal “would stick to evangelism” while the responsibility for ministerial training for Hispanics was entrusted to two white missionaries to Mexicans: Henry C. Ball (1896–1989) and Alice E. Luce (1873–1955).

In 1926 plans were made for Ball to lead the Latin American Bible Institute (LABI) in Texas, while Luce would be in charge of the Berean Bible Institute in San Diego, California. In understandable frustration, Ramírez comments on this situation as follows: “The conspicuous absence of one of early Latino Pentecostalism’s most notable leaders from the Texas LABI first faculty roster was partially compensated by the inclusion of Ramon Lopez as music instructor. Theological pedagogy would remain the province of missionaries, while converts would be encouraged to develop their virtuosity in musical performance.”

As these instances illustrate, issues of race, financial capabilities, and social status loom large when describing the dynamics within early Pentecostalism, and especially so when one zooms in on the training of its leaders and their limited access to degree-
granting institutions of theological education. Nonetheless, historical and socio-economic factors are not sufficient to explain why early Pentecostals did not place more emphasis on academic endeavors. To a large extent, early Pentecostals made certain choices based on their theological convictions, and among these convictions their eschatological views proved to be especially influential.

**Theological Factors: A Movement with Limited Interest in Academics**

The significance of eschatology in early Pentecostalism and the impact it had on the development of the movement can hardly be exaggerated. As David W. Faupel explains, “American Pentecostalism can best be understood as the emergence of a millenarian belief system that resulted from a paradigm-shift which took place within nineteenth-century Perfectionism.” Consequently, “the second coming of Jesus was the central concern of the initial Pentecostal message.” Many Pentecostals were convinced they were living in the end times, a conviction that was a principal element in providing the urgency and motivation to spread the gospel, both at home and abroad. This theological conviction that Jesus was about to return soon was nurtured through several sources. To begin with, early Pentecostals not only spoke in tongues but also uttered prophecies, and a common theme in these ecstatic utterances was the immediacy of the Second Coming. Many of these prophecies and visions were communicated by women, such as the following by Anna Hall who testified,

I heard the beautiful warbling of a bird, and thought it was a mocking bird which one might hear there [at her daughter’s house where Hall was staying that night]. But now, it seemed away down in my soul. And as that beautiful bird began to sing, I saw a little infant face right before my eyes. And as the song of the bird began to ripple, it began to sound like water running over pebbles. It increased till it sounded like many waters, and the face enlarged till it was a full grown face. I said, “Surely this is a messenger from the holy country.” The voice answered. “Yes and I have come to tell you that Jesus is coming. Go forward in My name, preach the Gospel of the Kingdom, for the King’s business demands haste.” . . . I said, “Lord, reveal unto me what this means, the singing of the bird and rippling of the waters.” And God spoke to me, “The singing of the beautiful bird and the baby face was the proclamation of the first coming into the world; and the voice of many waters is the proclamation of Jesus Christ that is soon coming.”

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At times, prophetic insights included apocalyptic dimensions, such as in the case of Mary Galmond, who expected “future earthquakes disassembling Chicago and tossing Pasadena into the ocean.”58 Such prophecies and teachings were extremely prevalent, which is why Anderson asserts that, especially in its early years, Pentecostalism “was first and foremost a millenarian movement.”59

This eschatology highlighting the imminent return of Jesus was not only communicated through ecstatic utterances but also through the doctrines the leaders of early Pentecostalism taught. Influenced by dispensationalism, Pentecostal preachers promoted an eschatology that emphasized premillennialism and the secret rapture. For instance, in the January 1907 issue of The Apostolic Faith, Seymour wrote about the parable of the ten virgins, teaching that those “not ready at the rapture will be left to go through the awful tribulation that is coming upon the earth,” and subsequent issues also stressed the significance of the rapture in articles like “Type of the Coming of Jesus” and “Notes on the Coming of Jesus.”60

However, similar to dispensationalists, Pentecostals not only turned to the Bible but also to current world events in order to interpret the times. They discerned an alarming prevalence of earthquakes, wars, and famines, and one particular concern was the growth of Islam as it “had swept Sudan and threatened to overwhelm western societies with its mosques.”61 The year 1917 was one in which “prophetic pundits everywhere were stirred when British foreign secretary Lord Balfour committed his country to establishing a Jewish home in Palestine.”62 In view of these historical developments, the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee) pastor Sam Perry wrote in the Church of God Evangel, “From many indications it seems that the time is very near when Israel is to be a nation again.”63 Pentecostal authors also addressed the potential danger of a one-world government (therefore criticizing the League of Nations) and attempted to identify the antichrist, with Benito Mussolini (1883–1945) becoming a prime candidate.64

The emphasis on premillennialism and the secret rapture were not Pentecostal in origin but were adopted as part of the pessimistic worldview that had developed within the dispensational theology of fundamentalism.65 That Pentecostalism was so strongly influenced by these eschatological views is as astonishing as it is unfortunate. It is unfortunate because the pessimism of dispensational premillennialism led to escapism since, in a world doomed to destruction, Pentecostals became short-term oriented in their ministerial approach.66 Consequently, as Pentecostals were passionate about evangelism and church planting, they started short-term ministry schools to train workers for these specific tasks.67 However, early Pentecostals did not have the kind of
long-term vision necessary for building up degree-granting institutions of higher education.\textsuperscript{68}

Furthermore, it is astonishing fundamentalism and dispensationalism exercised such a strong influence over early Pentecostalism considering fundamentalists and Pentecostals vehemently disagreed on topics such as tongues and divine healing.\textsuperscript{69} The dispensational framework claiming the sign gifts ceased to be operational with the age of the apostles was obviously completely at odds with some of the most treasured beliefs and practices of the Pentecostal movement. As the Pentecostal scholar Frank D. Macchia states so well, “Pentecostals tried hard to graft a dispensationalist eschatology onto an incompatible theological tree, creating an ‘uneasy relationship’ with fundamentalist theology fraught with theological inconsistencies and problems.”\textsuperscript{70} This makes one wonder: Why did Pentecostalism rely so heavily on a theological construct that, in promoting cessationism, contradicted important elements of Pentecostal thought and practice?

As a young movement emphasizing the life of the Spirit rather than the life of the mind, early Pentecostalism did not have its own fully developed theological frameworks yet, and it also failed to cultivate its own scholars and literature. That is why Pentecostals “devoured fundamentalist literature and adopted its theology as a framework for their own beliefs.”\textsuperscript{71} Pentecostalism’s theological education also suffered from the lack of genuinely Pentecostal foundations. Consequently, Pentecostal schools “were patterned after familiar fundamentalist institutions like MBI, Biola and Nyack. The textbooks most congenial to their needs were fundamentalist in nature, and Scofield enjoyed a prominent place in the education of AG clergy.”\textsuperscript{72} Despite the marked differences between the two movements, Pentecostalism depended on fundamentalism because “a robust pentecostal literature did not yet exist”; consequently, “the most trusted source for conservative, evangelical theology came from fundamentalist pens.”\textsuperscript{73}

Fundamentalist theological frameworks had a dulling effect on early Pentecostal theological education, but certain theological convictions of Pentecostal leaders played a decisive role as well. Smith Wigglesworth (1859–1947), for instance, had an amazing ministry as a preacher and healing evangelist, so much so he is considered “a legend” and a truly “pentecostal phenomenon” among Pentecostals.\textsuperscript{74} Wigglesworth accomplished all this in spite of (or, considering God’s preferential option for the poor, maybe because of?) an extremely humble upbringing in which he was subjected to child labor and therefore received only the most basic education.\textsuperscript{75} Wigglesworth, however, did not see this as a disadvantage—quite the contrary, his “proud boast was that he had never read a book other than the Bible.”\textsuperscript{76}
Another example of a Pentecostal leader expressing skepticism toward formal theological education is Frank Bartleman (1871–1936) who exclaimed: “We need no more theology or theory! Away with such foolish bondage! Follow your heart! Believe in your own heart’s hunger, and go ahead for God.” Early Pentecostalism placed a high value on the ecstatic, on speaking in tongues, on visions and prophecies as well as on miraculous healings and deliverance from evil spirits. Pentecostalism did have theological frameworks for facilitating these experiences, particularly a strong pneumatology that invited divine intervention in the lives of individuals. But pursuing the kind of theological education that would encourage addressing complex questions and engaging in the reformation of society was, unfortunately, not part of early Pentecostalism.

Pentecostal theological education was cultivated in a less than ideal environment as the movement developed in the early twentieth century. These early developments did not only influence Pentecostal theological education in the United States but in other parts of the world as well. Now, in the twenty-first century, Pentecostal Bible schools and seminaries have the opportunity to leave behind some of the historical baggage brought about by fundamentalism and to develop their own theological frameworks instead. In particular, a paradigm shift from a pessimistic eschatology (rooted in dispensationalism) toward a more hopeful eschatology of continuity has the potential to provide Pentecostals with the necessary long-term vision to bring about transformation in all areas of society.

Conclusion

From its humble beginnings, Pentecostalism grew into a global movement that became the most dynamic missions force of the twentieth century. Both in numerical and qualitative terms, it is astonishing how much early Pentecostals accomplished, and how the movement they started has shaped Christianity in both the West and the Majority World. Pentecostals from the very beginning believed God would use them to bring in a mighty end-time harvest, and in their eagerness to spread the gospel they approached theological education in a pragmatic way. Consequently, early Pentecostals primarily built up short-term training institutes and Bible schools, but it took them several decades to invest in seminaries, liberal arts colleges, and universities as well.

However, one would be misguided simply to criticize early Pentecostals for having an anti-intellectual bias, for not being willing to engage with academic and intellectual questions. Rather, the reasons why Pentecostals demonstrated a limited engagement in the academic realm are complex and manifold. To begin with, there were historical
reasons: early Pentecostalism was heavily influenced by the holiness movement of the nineteenth century and the fundamentalism that developed in the United States in the early twentieth century. Besides their positive contributions, these movements were characterized by tendencies like emotionalism, legalism, and narrowmindedness—propensities that weakened early Pentecostal theological education from its inception. In addition, early Pentecostals struggled with socio-economic constraints; most of them came from the lower classes and had never enjoyed a high-quality education themselves, therefore lacking the necessary funds to engage in the costly endeavor of founding seminaries and universities.

Perhaps most importantly, however, Pentecostals lacked the necessary theological frameworks for building up accredited and degree-granting institutions of theological education. Influenced by dispensational premillennialism, Pentecostals developed a pessimistic and escapist worldview that, at least initially, hindered them from making long-term investments in theological education. In addition, early Pentecostals tended to be generally skeptical about theological education, especially on the graduate level. Their focus was short-term, not long-term, and their theological priorities emphasized the power of the Spirit rather than the capabilities of the human mind to ask questions, solve problems, and expand the frontiers of knowledge.

Why is this lack of involvement in formal theological education important? Has not the rapid growth of early Pentecostalism proven to the world that formal theological education may be less essential than many established denominations have hitherto believed? Granted, it seems quite possible to evangelize and to plant churches by simply training people in short-term ministry schools and Bible institutes. However, in order to participate in the wider theological and societal conversation, a Christian movement also needs seminaries, academic journals, and publishing houses. Such elements enable a movement to mature and to enrich others as well by making relevant academic contributions.\(^{81}\) In addition, Pentecostal liberal arts colleges and universities need trained theologians who will help these institutions to maintain their theological distinctives. For these reasons, the quest to prioritize Pentecostal theological education continues—even in our time.

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Notes


9 “Presbyterians have a had a long and strong commitment to education. From the beginnings of the church in America, Presbyterians planted schools and colleges wherever they lived, continuing a tradition that was already well established among Reformed

10 King differentiates between protofundamentalists like Dwight L. Moody (1837–1899), A. T. Pierson (1837–1911), and R. A. Torrey (1856–1928), who were already active in the nineteenth century and the fundamentalist movement of the early twentieth century, which began with the World Christian Fundamentals Conference held in Philadelphia (in 1919), leading to the World’s Christian Fundamentals Association (WCFA). King, Disfellowshipped, 13, 94.


13 Cf. Anderson, To the Ends of the Earth, 132.


16 These two elements were sometimes directly combined in Pentecostal theological education, as “Bible instructors encouraged both tongues and interpretations of tongues to confirm the veracity of their teaching.” Wacker, Heaven Below, 83.


18 Wacker, Heaven Below, 152.

19 Wacker, Heaven Below, 152.


22 Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 144.


41 Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited*, 240. Anderson writes from a secular/ Marxist perspective; I disagree with his overall perspective on Pentecostalism but refer to him several times in this article because I find his socio-economic analysis insightful. Additionally, the prominent scholar on Pentecostalism, Walter J. Hollenweger, also highlights how people on the margins respond to Pentecostalism, e.g., in *The Pentecostals* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), 457–64. For a critical review of Anderson’s work see, for example, Yong, *Spirit of Creation*, 49–50.
49 In telling the history of Pentecostalism, Latino Pentecostals have often been neglected. This includes their participation in the Azusa Street Revival as this “has long been overshadowed by an emphasis on the black and white origins of Pentecostalism.” Gastón Espinosa, *Latino Pentecostals in America: Faith and Politics in Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 23.
52 Confusingly, that Bible school in San Diego was subsequently also called Latin American Bible Institute (http://www.labi.edu/). LABI later moved to La Puente, California, where it continues to this day—often offering theological education to Hispanics on the margins, as also described by Arlene M. Sánchez Walsh, *Latino Pentecostal Identity*.

53 Ramirez, Migrating Faith, 46.


57 Quoted in Alexander, Women of Azusa Street, 130–31.

58 King, Disfellowshiped, 61.


61 King, Disfellowshiped, 88.

62 King, Disfellowshiped, 91.

63 King, Disfellowshiped, 88.

64 King, Disfellowshiped, 117–19, 148–49.

Cf. Amos Yong who recognizes Pentecostalism’s “escapist and futurist tendencies” due to the strong influence of dispensationalism. *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 317, cf. 324.


71 King, *Disfellowshiped*, 201.

72 King, *Disfellowshiped*, 120.

73 King, *Disfellowshiped*, 96.


76 Wilson, “Bible Institutes, Colleges, Universities,” 374.


78 See also Hollenweger: “The fact that the attention and concern of Pentecostal believers is directed towards the event of Christ’s second coming makes them indifferent to the political and social problems of the world.” Over time, this dynamic changes, influencing theological education as well: “As social conditions improve the fervent expectation of the imminent second coming disappears. It is still taught in theory, but is no longer a matter of experience. Pension funds are set up for pastors, and building and training programs which take years to complete are carried out.” Hollenweger, *Pentecostals*, 417.

79 As Allan Anderson points out when critiquing the export of a certain kind of Pentecostal theological education to the Majority World: “The result is that western conservatism and
premillennial eschatological pessimism become ‘orthodoxy’ in Pentecostal institutions throughout the world.” Anderson, Introduction to Pentecostalism, 243.


81 Such contributions are particularly important coming from the Majority World where many of the most dynamic centers of Pentecostalism are found today. As the Nigerian scholar Babatunde Adedibu notes, “The shift in the centre of gravity of Christianity to the majority of the world has overlapped with the global rise of Pentecostalism characterized by its emphasis on mission.” Babatunde Adedibu, “Mission from Africa: A Call to Re-imagine Mission in African-led Pentecostal Churches in Britain,” Missio Africanus: Journal of African Missiology 1:1 (April 2015), 40. It is a real challenge of our time that the numerical center of Christianity has gravitated toward the relatively poor Global South, while most of the world’s theological resources remain in the affluent North—but what these dynamics signify for Pentecostal expressions in Asia, Africa, and Latin America is a discussion that goes beyond the scope of this article.
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Keywords Pentecostalism, Pentecostal, Charismatic, sociopolitical engagement, development, economics

Abstract

This article traces the global impact of Pentecostalism with reference to its definition, varieties, and statistics. It also discusses the subject of development from a theological perspective, considering how development applies to Pentecostalism. The first part considers the ambivalence involved in Pentecostal sociopolitical engagement, and then in the second part, discusses how Pentecostalism and development relate to each other. It gives examples throughout the article of how Pentecostals are involved in development projects and sociopolitical activities worldwide.

Pentecostalism’s Global Impact

It now a well-known fact that Pentecostalism has spread across the world to such an extent that it is found in almost every country and has affected every denomination worldwide. This has happened in a remarkably short space of time, beginning in the early twentieth century but with most of it occurring in the past fifty years. There are many different movements accepted by scholars as “Pentecostalism” but among these movements there is absolutely no uniformity. There is no single form of Pentecostalism, nor clear-cut theological criteria by which it can be defined.¹ They can be divided historically into four very broad, often overlapping groups. First there are:

(1) “Classical” Pentecostals with origins near the beginning of the twentieth century; and
(2) Independent Pentecostal churches from the same era, especially those in Africa and Asia.

But in the statistics so frequently quoted the term also includes:

(3) “Charismatics” in older churches from the 1960s onwards, of which Roman Catholic Charismatics are as numerous as classical Pentecostals.

Pentecostalism also includes what is probably the fastest growing sector:

(4) Independent Charismatic megachurches and “Neocharismatics” that commenced in the mid-1970s, often promote the “prosperity gospel,” and are the most controversial globally. Some of these prominent megachurches have been hit by financial and sexual scandals. But many of these churches also have a significant role to play in the social development of their members and their communities.

In this article, “Pentecostalism” and “Pentecostal” will refer to all these different types, with the exception of the older church Charismatics. Facts and figures on the growth of any global religious movement are notoriously difficult to come by. The most frequently quoted ones are those annual figures of Todd Johnson and his team, who estimated that Pentecostalism had some 644 million adherents in 2020, about a quarter of the world’s Christians, a figure predicted to rise to over a billion by 2050. This number was placed at only fifty-eight million in 1970, so remarkable growth has occurred since then.²

But it is not just the numbers that are so significant. Pentecostals outside Europe and North America are usually a grassroots movement appealing especially to the disadvantaged and underprivileged. They thrive in developing countries. Many, if not most, of the rapidly growing Christian churches in these countries are Pentecostal and operate independently of Western Pentecostalism. Even though some American-founded classical Pentecostal denominations like the Assemblies of God are rapidly growing in many parts of the world, the vast majority of their international membership (around eighty percent) is in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. The Global South has indeed seen a remarkable expansion of Pentecostalism in the last half-century, an expansion that has altered global religious demographics considerably. This is an important religious and social phenomenon that has enormous implications for “development,” which is used here in its academic, narrow sense of sociopolitical and economic progress in “developing” (in contrast to “developed”) countries. The
discipline of “development studies” is interdisciplinary, and this article will also discuss the subject of development from a theological perspective. It considers how development applies to Pentecostalism. It will first consider Pentecostal sociopolitical engagement, and then discuss how Pentecostalism and development relate to each other, giving examples throughout of how Pentecostals are involved in development projects and sociopolitical activities worldwide.

**Pentecostalism and Sociopolitical Engagement**

Involvement in social change is not a subject with which many Pentecostals are familiar. They have not always felt comfortable with relating to wider society, but this is something that is gradually changing. For many years, Pentecostals in the Western world have struggled with issues of social involvement as opposed to what they see as the priority of evangelism, and have usually considered this and social development to be mutually exclusive strategies. Furthermore, there has not been a clearly articulated theological foundation for social ministry. Although some Pentecostals more recently have been involved in social issues like race, class, or gender equality, others have often failed to take a stand and have simply reflected the discrimination that prevails in the wider society. They have been accused of an otherworldly spirituality that avoids involvement in “worldly” issues like politics and the struggle for liberation and justice. They have sometimes been justifiably charged with proclaiming a gospel that either spiritualizes or individualizes social problems. The result has been a tendency either to accept present oppressive social conditions or to promote a “prosperity gospel” that makes material gain a spiritual virtue. In particular, Pentecostals have traditionally been opposed to political involvement even when they have operated social services. Douglas Petersen, in his account of social welfare activities of the Assemblies of God in Latin America, suggests that the reason for Pentecostal aversion to political action is that “they have had little hope that a revolutionary change of government would necessarily bring change to the social structures.” As a result, Pentecostals have preferred to be involved in various charitable activities rather than direct political engagement. However, a lack of political involvement does not necessarily indicate insensitivity to matters of social justice. Petersen argues that Pentecostals construct “alternative instruments of social justice,” and that “political involvement is only one alternative among several options of social action to institute social change.”

Actually, Pentecostals in many parts of the world do not separate sociopolitical engagement from evangelism. They engage with society because of their conversion and the liberation brought about by their experience of and empowerment by the Holy
Spirit. Petersen suggests that Pentecostals are committed to social transformation and that Pentecostals need to “provide viable alternatives that will affect significant change in the social structures.” There is an increasing awareness of the potential of Pentecostalism for a politically and socially relevant engagement, particularly because of its tendency to attract marginalized and working-class people. This awareness is particularly strong in some parts of the Global South. The founder of the Brazilian Pentecostal denomination Brasil Para Cristo, Manoel de Mello, typified the change in approach saying, “The gospel cannot be proclaimed fully without denouncing injustices committed by the powerful.” These significant changes are to be welcomed. Many Pentecostal leaders, however, especially in the Western world, may not yet be entirely convinced of the need to be more involved in social engagement, which might deflect them from their central “spiritual” focus. Murray Dempster observes:

Current engagement in social ministry among Pentecostals seems to depend more on the individual conscience of influential leaders and the time-bound exigencies of politics and culture than on broadly-shared theological agreements concerning the nature of the church and its moral mission in society. The Pentecostal community is still sorely in need of a social ethic to inspire, direct and validate its ministry of promoting and instituting social justice.

Dempster observes that Pentecostalism is “capable of integrating programs of evangelism and social concern into a unified effort in fulfilling the church’s global mission.” He argues that “the rapidly changing social face of Pentecostalism intensifies the need for a theology” that can “inspire and direct the church’s moral engagement with the society without diminishing the church’s historic commitment to evangelism.” Accordingly, any kind of transformation in this life, whether through evangelism or social action, can be seen as the work of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostal empowerment has the potential to equip people towards liberation, whether personal or collective. Pentecostals do not always separate the spiritual from the physical, but integrate them holistically, leading to involvement in social issues and politics.

When it comes to involvement in sociopolitical structures, there is some ambivalence among Pentecostals. Their aspirations for political office show themselves in different and contrasting ways. Even when obvious support for oppressive structures is absent, Pentecostals have only seldom been politically involved—except that they have sometimes shown support for political causes that have later been shown to be those of the wrong kind. But political structures are often seen as part of the “evil world” with which Pentecostals are exhorted to have nothing to do. This belief has an
eschatological dimension, as a feature of Pentecostalism throughout its relatively short history is that current political events are taken as negative signs of the times, proof that the Lord is coming back soon. However, Pentecostal origins in the socially-active revivalist and holiness movements of the nineteenth century resulted in a commitment by some early Pentecostals to the struggle for social transformation. Most early Pentecostal missions had philanthropic and educational activities, especially in the creation of orphanages, schools, and rescue centers—Albert Norton’s work in India, Mok Lai Chi’s in Hong Kong, and Lillian Trasher’s in Egypt being prime examples. Norton wrote disapprovingly of those missionaries who fraternized with European colonialists in their sports and amusements “to ignore and deny the existence of the sufferings of the poor.”

The evangelism of the earliest Pentecostals did not therefore obliterate all other concerns, although it must be said that all other activities were usually seen as subservient to the primary task of getting individuals “saved” and filled with the Spirit.

But, at least in the USA, the social commitment of Pentecostals soon changed. In the words of Robert Anderson, although Pentecostalism was “born of radical social discontent,” as it became institutionalized it gradually withdrew from the social struggle. A movement designed to protest against the social system that marginalized and oppressed its members soon “functioned in a way that perpetuated that very system.”

Harvey Cox lists several characteristics of what he calls “very unattractive political and theological currents” running through American Pentecostalism. He discusses their participation in right-wing politics, by which Pentecostalism might “lose touch completely with its humble origins and become the righteous spiritual ideology of an affluent middle class.” Most American Pentecostals supported the “religious right” during the Reagan years. Pat Robertson, a Charismatic Baptist and founder of CBN and Regent University in Virginia Beach, was a leading contender for the right-wing Republican presidential nomination in 1988. He has made many public statements to articulate his extreme views. He called for the assassination of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez by American operatives in August 2005. For this he later apologized, while at the same time likening his call to that of Bonhoeffer supporting the assassination of Hitler. Robertson and the vast majority of white American evangelicals have been conspicuous in their support of Donald Trump since the 2016 presidential elections. In Guatemala, Rios Montt, president of the country from 1982–83 and leader of an oppressive military dictatorship, was a member of an independent Charismatic church and leader of a conservative political party. There have also been serious criticisms of the “prosperity gospel” propagated by certain sections of
Pentecostalism, and the so-called “Americanization” of global Christianity, where it is claimed that the Bible was being used to further the USA’s economic and political ends.

These criticisms may suggest that Pentecostalism has in many cases changed from being an “apolitical” and “otherworldly” movement to becoming a supporter of reactionary politics, not only in the USA, but in countries like Guatemala, Chile, and South Africa. The reasons for this are complex and some of them can only be summarized here. Pentecostals sometimes cloud the differences between “moral” issues like abortion and sexuality, and political ones. The result is that right-wing politicians who promote these issues as a political agenda to win votes are seen as having “Christian values”—without regard to other policies and practices that are antithetical to Christian ethics. A connected reason for this about-turn may be wily politicians who court the Pentecostal vote being conscious of their significance. There can be no doubt that this was the strategy of Donald Trump, and he successfully gained a huge portion of white American Pentecostal support. Pentecostals have also been influenced by a premillennial eschatology that saw Communism (and now, radical Islam) as anti-Christian; so they believed that support for the state of Israel (and opposition for Palestine) was a biblical duty. Unfortunately, these views have tended to be shared mostly by figures like Trump representing the wealthy middle class and political right, which has sat uncomfortably with those Pentecostals of more humble status. Pentecostals have also been accused of being representatives of colonialism and obstacles to liberation. In general, they are seen as “apolitical” and otherworldly. These examples might certainly give support to these views.

But the Pentecostal approach to sociopolitical causes is actually more nuanced than these stereotypes suggest, especially outside the Western world. Pentecostalism has the potential to transform oppressive structures, as the following examples will illustrate. Latin American Pentecostals are playing an increasingly important political role and becoming a force for social transformation throughout this region. In Chile, the majority of Pentecostal members represented the lower, working classes and supported the popular, socialist politics of Salvador Allende before his overthrow and death in a military coup in 1973. However, some Pentecostal leaders in the largest Chilean evangelical denomination actively supported the oppressive regime of military dictator Augusto Pinochet. Questions were raised about the leaders of the Iglesia Metodista Pentecostal’s friendly relationship with the Pinochet government, as Pinochet’s presence at Pentecostal functions in the face of Catholic opposition seemed to legitimize his oppressive regime. But there were some Pentecostals who resisted Pinochet’s regime and were harassed, tortured, and even killed.17
Pentecostals have been an important part of the ruling president’s support base in Latin American countries like Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Brazil, and in African countries like Nigeria, Ghana, and Benin. They have played an active role in Zambian politics since the rise of “born again” President Frederick Chiluba in 1991, who declared Zambia a “Christian nation,” and Nevers Mumba, Vice President from 2003–04 and unsuccessful presidential nominee in the 2008 election, is a well-known Pentecostal preacher in that country. In South Africa during the transition to democracy in the 1980s and early 1990s, most white Pentecostals were still supporters of the oppressive apartheid structures, while the majority of African Pentecostals sympathized with the liberation movements and the African National Congress of Nelson Mandela. Some Pentecostal leaders like Frank Chikane were practically involved in the liberation struggle. In the Philippines, Eddie Villanueva, founder of the largest Pentecostal church there, Jesus Is Lord Church Worldwide, has been immersed in political activities. He stood unsuccessfully as a presidential candidate in the 2004 and 2010 elections, and was a strong opponent of the Gloria Arroyo government—leading a petition for her impeachment. He remains a strong proponent for justice in the Philippines and has not hesitated to call out and demand an apology from President Duterte, whom Villanueva recently charged with “insulting God.”

Pentecostalism and Development

The 2014 conference of the interdisciplinary European Research Network on Global Pentecostalism (GloPent) was held at SOAS University of London on the theme of Pentecostalism and development. Some of its papers were published later in the journal PentecoStudies. The keynote was provided by Australian development practitioner and academic Matthew Clarke, who looked for common ground between development and Pentecostalism. The first point Clarke makes is that the rapid growth of Pentecostalism in the developing world means that there are development opportunities in these communities. Development theorists and practitioners have often seen religion as hindering development. Marx saw religion as the opium of the people. Pentecostalism in particular was seen to be so heavenly minded that it was no earthly good. As one development practitioner put it, “Religion and faith were regarded as inherently contentious and a barrier to development.” Adogame points out “the contradictory, complex and cross-cutting relationships religion has with development goals and values.” Ter Haar and Ellis noted that religion “seemed irrelevant to the processes they were analysing other than, perhaps, as an obstacle to modernisation.” Thankfully, things have now changed, and religion is now seen as having great potential
for development. Clarke argues that religion does not stand apart from the development process, but “religion and religious groups are potent tools for change in a range of spheres, including the social, economic, ideological and political.”

How does Pentecostalism relate to development? To address this question, Clarke discusses what “common ground” might exist between Pentecostalism and development, and begins by looking at Pentecostal theology. What is often picked up by social scientists as a feature of many forms of global Pentecostalism often misses the theological dimension, usually the prime reason for involvement in society, and therefore in its development. Although Pentecostals may not yet have a fully articulated theology to promote the transformation of society, this theology can be discerned in their practices and teachings. Adogame reminds us that this may also be applied to the relationship between theology and development, as we “define, critique, conceptualise and theologise development, human progress and flourishing not only through abstract, metaphysical and canonical expressions, but also in concrete, prosaic, lived experiences.” Clarke finds three theological emphases that connect with development. First, the Pentecostal belief in the immanence of God means that “God will move in the affairs of the world and answer prayers.” Because God is ever present and near, Pentecostals believe as a consequence that God wants all humans to have “spiritual redemption, social wellbeing and physical prosperity.” To elaborate on this idea, ter Haar and Ellis point out that for many peoples in the developing world:

. . . the invisible world is an integral part of the world, which can not be reduced to its visible or material form only. For them, the material world is linked to the spirit world. . . . In such a holistic perception of the world, it follows that people’s social relations extend into the invisible sphere. In the same way as they try and maintain good relations with their relatives, neighbours and friends for their own benefit, individuals and communities invest in their relations with spiritual entities so as to enhance the quality of their lives. Thus, people all over the world enter into various forms of active communication with a spirit world in such a way as to derive information or other resources from it with a view to furthering their material welfare or interests.

This is of course especially true for Pentecostals, who see the spiritual world everywhere, affecting all aspects of their lives. Whether it is the omnipresence of God or the working of evil spirit forces, this world impinges on everything that happens. As I have written elsewhere: “In Pentecostalism the all-encompassing Spirit is involved in every aspect of life—everything in individual, community, city or national life has
‘spiritual’ meaning.” Furthermore, in Africa at least, “there is a direct connection between the spirit world and human flourishing.”

Second, Clarke suggests that Pentecostal beliefs in being “Spirit-filled” result in receiving power to be involved in God’s mission for the world. This empowerment includes bringing solutions to the world’s problems, whether these solutions are “spiritual salvation or social justice, or both.” The spiritual and physical aspects of life cannot be separated from each other in this perspective. It is also true that Pentecostals believe that inner transformation is an essential priority for the transformation (or development) of society. Third, Pentecostals believe in “sacrificial service,” meaning every Pentecostal believer is supposed to be involved in serving God in some way, including serving the wider community. This is the radical outworking of the Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, where every member is to be involved in some form of ministry or service. Social scientists would call this “voluntary association.” The active involvement of a community in a project is an essential part of development theory and sustainable development practice. Pentecostals are very good at maintaining energetic community life. What Clarke correctly notices is that social engagement in development opportunities is part of what it essentially means to be Pentecostal. It is part of their very identity.

Unlike the situation in the Western world, global Pentecostalism is usually a grassroots movement among the poor. It might be said that Pentecostals practice their own system of development that could be termed “development from below” rather than and in contrast to that “development from above” that results from government and international development agencies. It must also be recognized that most countries depicted as “underdeveloped” still suffer the consequences of “colonialism and the economics of unequal exchange.” Yet Pentecostals have been successful in accommodating ordinary people’s “everyday lived experiences” in both the spiritual and physical dimensions as an integrated whole. This has made them particularly effective in development when it has been initiated by them, though not without challenges. Although Pentecostals have not often been involved in overt sociopolitical activity in the wider society, in their own communities there is abundant evidence of social concern in the structures created for the welfare of members. The result of their beliefs about the nearness of God, the empowerment of the Spirit, and the involvement of every member in ministry means that they have a holistic approach to all of life, whether spiritual (which usually takes priority), physical, or social.

This has been the point of more recent research. Sociologists Miller and Yamamori regard Pentecostalism as “the new face of Christian social engagement.” They point out that “Pentecostals are not trying to reform social structures or challenge government.
policies so much as they are attempting to build from the ground up an alternative social reality.” They write that “Pentecostalism has the potential to be an agent of social transformation,” and they identify three ways in which this occurs. First, it has the “potential to blunt the pain of poverty and human rights violations by promising people a better life in the hereafter.” Second, Pentecostalism has “an incremental impact on people’s social welfare,” as there is “substantial evidence for the ‘social uplift’ associated with Pentecostalism.” They have a “competitive economic advantage over their neighbors because of their moral prescriptions against alcohol, drugs, gambling and womanizing.” Third, Pentecostalism focuses on human rights and believes that everyone is created in the image of God, and so “all people have equal value in God’s sight.” Pentecostalism is undoubtedly “a religion of the people,” as every member has “the right to interpret the scripture themselves,” everybody has equal access to God without the need of a mediator, and everybody can receive the Spirit baptism and other Charismatic gifts of the Spirit without any reservation. This last point confirms the theological reasons above as motivation for the involvement of Pentecostals in social engagement.

Miller and Yamamori term Pentecostals engaged in various forms of social ministry “Progressive Pentecostals” who have moved beyond acts of individual charity to actual social transformation through development-oriented ministries. A British development practitioner makes a case for the role of “faith groups” in development:

They make an important contribution to poverty reduction through
providing services and humanitarian assistance, promoting empowerment and
accountability, changing beliefs and behaviours, building support for
development and building peaceful states and societies.

Richard Shaull, who studied Brazilian Pentecostalism, pointed out that while Pentecostals “have not made many efforts to develop a theology of social responsibility clearly integrating the personal and the social, a number of things are happening in their communities in which this integration is a reality.” As a result, they are “emerging as an important force for social transformation, especially among poor and marginal people.” For Pentecostals in different parts of the world, “freedom in the Spirit” allows them to formulate, often unconsciously, a social theology that has meaning for people in different life situations. This is one of the most important features of Pentecostal theology that is often overlooked. Theology is far more than written, academic theology—it is also to be found in the preaching, worship, and social activities of churches that have contextualized Christianity in such a way as to make it really meaningful to ordinary people and very helpful to those who are poor and needy.
This is a feature of Pentecostalism all over the world. As Clarke puts it, “. . . acts of service to the poor or marginalised are perceived as evidence of changed lives, not an attempt to transform society. The end result of a transformed society, however, is that which brings Pentecostalism and development back together on common ground.”

There are many examples of this common ground and the ways that Pentecostals more recently have made the transition from an almost exclusive focus on spiritual needs (with many exceptions) to catering for the whole person. Clarke gives examples of Pentecostal efforts in providing healthcare and education, and the finance that flows from migrant Pentecostal communities in developed countries back to their countries of origin in the developing world. It might be mentioned also that in the UK these migrant Pentecostal communities also register as charities and engage in all sorts of activities in their communities. Adogame describes the work of a Nigerian Pentecostal denomination, the Redeemed Christian Church of God, in the UK:

They take up charitable initiatives and actively promote civic engagement through micro-finance programmes, supporting thrift shops, providing soup kitchens, warm clothing and blankets to the vulnerable during winter season, language classes and tutoring for children and youth. They also provide training geared towards self-employment and poverty alleviation, youth and women empowerment and making contributions to the welfare of their constituency through a multiplicity of spiritual and social resources.

Throughout their book, Miller and Yamamori give examples of Pentecostals involved in social work in their wider communities, and write of the “upward social mobility” that comes to people after their Pentecostal conversion to a life committed to hard work and moral discipline, “updating the Protestant ethic thesis” of Max Weber. In more than twenty countries I have visited in Africa, Asia, and Latin America I have personally seen examples of schools at all levels, universities, healthcare and welfare centers, medical facilities, and self-help small businesses founded and operated by Pentecostals. One recent example of the latter are the entrepreneurial businesses operated by members of the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa, and based on Jesus’ parable of the talents—well known by its Shona word matarenda. In our interdisciplinary research in 2017 into this phenomenon we examined seven case studies of these enterprises, six in Zimbabwe and one in the UK. This church claims that its faith-based entrepreneurship model has a positive impact on the lives of poor Zimbabweans, both locally and internationally, and we saw evidence that this claim was not an exaggeration.
In an earlier article, I discussed the multiple activities of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea, one of many examples of Pentecostal and Charismatic “megachurches” with extensive development and social care projects. I wrote about the implicit “social theology” of its founder Yonggi Cho, upon which the social, educational, and health activities of his church are based. The social activities of the Yoido church are extensive and obvious, even to a casual observer. They include disaster relief efforts, an orphanage, medical center, home for senior citizens, slum relief, paper recycling, a leprosarium, and support for low-income households, among other ventures. These many activities are not only intended for the people of South Korea, but include ventures in North Korea and elsewhere in Asia and Africa through the church’s international missionary network. The “social theology” of Cho is based on his concept of the love of God that fills the life of Christians through the Holy Spirit, and enables them to share this love with others. Thereby Christians meet Jesus in daily life through serving poor and disadvantaged people in the immediate society as well as in other countries. As Cho put it, it was the church’s “time to share love.” The church’s ministry among the poor, the opportunities given to women leaders, and the social activities based on a theology of love demonstrate the potential within Pentecostalism to be a force for social transformation. A similar motivation was expressed by a Nigerian Pentecostal leader, who said that central to his church’s approach to development was “obedience to Jesus’ command to love our neighbour and provide for the less privileged.” Pentecostals, he said, would see “their efforts as the enlargement of the kingdom of God on earth.” Again we see the connection made between the theological beliefs of Pentecostals and their engagement with development.

Dena Freeman writes that Pentecostal churches are often more effective in bringing about social and economic development than Western, secular NGOs are. Research at the University of Birmingham conducted by Richard Burgess and Naar M’fundisi in Nigeria and Zambia respectively considered how African Pentecostals initiate organizations within their communities to train and empower members to tackle poverty, HIV/AIDS, unemployment, and violence, thus improving the quality of life in their communities. In both cases, these initiatives were totally supported by the African churches without any outside funding. These examples could be multiplied all over the world.

It is not altogether positive, however. Development practitioners and NGO agents from the Western world have had some challenges with Pentecostal churches in their development practices. One described their “track record” as “patchy—a mixture of spectacular success, dreadful failure, and a lot of mediocre work in between.” Another challenge may be the disparate nature of Pentecostal approaches to development.
Haustein and Rakodi observed “that it may not be possible to associate Pentecostalism with a specific approach to development policy or practice.” 50 As a result, it is not always possible to formulate formulae or principles that would satisfy an academic discourse on development. However, for effective cooperation with Pentecostal communities it is necessary for development practitioners and agencies “to take people’s own understanding of the world as a point of departure.” 51

Conclusion

This article has approached the subject of Pentecostalism and development, recognizing that little academic writing has addressed this in any detail. Pentecostalism is so diverse that it is virtually impossible to come up with a theory or policy that applies to all its forms, and the context of a specific development situation must always be considered. Having said that, however, Pentecostals across the world, and especially in the Global South, have increasingly become involved in various projects aimed at the betterment of the lives of both their own members and the wider community. There are strong theological reasons for this based on the love of God for all humanity and God’s support for those who are less privileged. Pentecostal belief in the involvement of God in everyday life, the power of the Spirit, and the need for every believer to minister, provide strong motivations for development. Because of this Pentecostals are involved in social and (sometimes) political activities and various projects that bring about a better society and a better life for those around them. It can no longer be said that religion is irrelevant or a hindrance to development. Pentecostal efforts in development are an example of the need to take religious groups seriously and for secular development agencies to engage with them in their mutual desire to improve human wellbeing.

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Notes


5 Petersen, Not by Might, 141.

6 Petersen, Not by Might, 146.


8 Dempster, “Pentecostal Social Concern,” 129.


Clarke, “Friend or Foe?”, 161.


Clarke, “Friend or Foe?”, 163–64.


Clarke, “Friend or Foe?”, 164.

Clarke, “Friend or Foe?”, 168.


Clarke, “Friend or Foe?”, 166.

Clarke, “Friend or Foe?”, 170–72.


51 Ter Haar and Ellis, “The Role of Religion,” 356.
Creation Care as Caring for Human Beings
An Environmental Justice Case Study

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Keywords creation care, mercury, environmental justice, ecology, healing

Abstract

Caring for God’s creation is a burgeoning area of interest among Christians in recent decades. In many Christian circles, however, caring for creation is not given high priority in rankings of the duties of Christian disciples in the world. This article will argue that caring for creation is a biblically mandated call for God’s people in the world and derives from the role of human beings as caretakers of creation, creation’s status as a recipient of God’s salvation in Christ, and the connection between human beings and the other-than-human creation. If creation care is understood as an act of healing creation, then given the relationship between human beings and the rest of creation, healing creation will frequently result in healing human beings. The case study of mercury emissions from coal-fueled power plants and the health of fetuses will provide a point of entry into this discussion.

Introduction

Joined in marriage, a young couple discovers after years of patiently waiting in God’s timing, that they are expecting. Through the months of preparation both mentally and physically, both parents cannot help but anticipate all of the memories that will be made with the new baby. Days will be spent walking in the park with a stroller in one hand while holding hands. The discovery of the pregnancy was a God-given miracle in itself. The doctors informed the couple that the chances were unlikely, but
they persevered in faith. Living in a small town in New Hampshire, family and friends quickly heard about the news. The community celebrated together throughout the duration of the pregnancy until baby Steven’s premature arrival. An emergency procedure was conducted, and Steven was born weighing under four pounds, an unhealthy weight for a newborn. With the whole hospital room in anticipation, the family waited for Steven to cry, but the baby was in complete silence, a sign of under-development in the brain. While the emergency response team urgently placed him in a 24/7 care unit, the couple asked themselves what could have caused this.

Unbeknown to them, the coal-fired power plant nearby has been releasing hundreds of harmful chemicals for decades. One in particular is the culprit, mercury.

This hypothetical situation leads to the theological question of Christian duty. Is it a Christ-follower’s job to do something about the release of these anthropogenic pollutants? Has God called us to protect mothers by protecting the earth? Asked another way, are healing for human beings and healing for creation connected? This article argues that Christians should be concerned for creation because doing so is obeying God’s command to serve and protect creation, acting on behalf of human suffering brings God glory, and ultimately, because caring for creation is inherently caring for people. The article will use a particular environmental issue to frame the discussion: the effects of mercury on the human fetus and the responsibility of Christians to respond to this crisis.

Mercury and the Unborn

A study conducted by Mothers and Children’s Environmental Health measured the levels of mercury in the blood of hundreds of pregnant mothers because of their concern with the potential consequences of mercury. During this study, an association between high levels of mercury in the blood and low birth weight following a pregnancy was discovered. Other studies have indicated that as many as one of every six babies born in the United States has unhealthy levels of mercury in their bloodstreams.

Mercury is a toxic metal that is a public health concern due to its tendency to accumulate in organs and its harmful effects on the human body. One specific type is organic mercury, which is released from electric power, manufacturing, and industrial plants. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) warns expecting and fertile mothers that mercury exposure must be kept to a minimum. When mercury is released in the atmosphere, methylmercury is the actual chemical absorbed in the bloodstream, and due to its fat solubility, it can diffuse into the placenta and negatively affect fetus health, triggering early delivery and causing low birth weight.
Further, exposure to mercury largely impacts the nervous system and developing brain growth of fetuses. Regular exposure to mercury increases the risk of such maladies. Take, for example, populations exposed through high levels of mercury in fish, where, “Among selected subsistence fishing populations, between 1.5/1000 and 17/1000 children showed cognitive impairment (mild mental retardation) caused by the consumption of fish containing mercury.” Negative health effects of mercury extend beyond the unborn.

Neurological and behavioral disorders may be observed after inhalation, ingestion or dermal exposure of different mercury compounds. Symptoms include tremors, insomnia, memory loss, neuromuscular effects, headaches and cognitive and motor dysfunction. Mild, subclinical signs of central nervous system toxicity can be seen in workers exposed to an elemental mercury level in the air of 20 μg/m³ or more for several years. Kidney effects have been reported, ranging from increased protein in the urine to kidney failure.

The primary mechanism through which human beings are exposed to mercury is called biomagnification. When mercury is released into the atmosphere naturally, through volcanos or evaporating water, or by human activity, through burning fossil fuels and municipal waste, it is transported by rain and wind into the ocean. It is then ingested by small aquatic organisms and is stored in their fat tissue. The toxicity levels are magnified as top predators such as sea-birds, bald eagles, seals, and eventually humans ingest this toxic chemical by eating organisms lower in the food chain. The resulting methylmercury poisoning damages the central nervous system, impairs kidney and cardiovascular function, causes developmental disorders, and even causes death.

Attempts to address the matter of mercury emissions from coal-powered electric generating units (EGUs) have a complex history, one that involves participation from Christians in their implementation. In 1990, Congress authorized the USEPA to establish standards to limit the emission of mercury and other pollutants (e.g., arsenic, nickel, dioxins and furans, acid gases, and SO₂) into the air under Section 112 of the Clean Air Act (CAA). In December 2000, the USEPA issued a finding stating that it was appropriate for the agency to issue regulations for EGUs pursuant to Section 112 of the CAA. However, industry groups immediately filed lawsuits challenging the USEPA’s authority to take this action. In March 2005, the USEPA revised its 2000 finding, delisting EGUs from its 2000 finding on the grounds that it was not appropriate for the USEPA to regulate EGUs under Section 112 of the CAA. Various environmental groups and other entities filed a lawsuit to challenge this action, and in
February 2008 the Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit vacated the 2005 action. In December of 2008, these interests filed a complaint with the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia arguing that the USEPA had neglected its regulatory responsibilities by not establishing emissions limits mandated by Congress in 1990. The USEPA settled that litigation, and agreed to sign a notice of rulemaking by March 16, 2011, and a notice of final rulemaking by December 16, 2011. On December 16, 2011, the USEPA released these standards in the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards (MATS). This document, known as the Mercury Rule, was published in the Federal Register on February 16, 2012. The USEPA estimated that approximately 1,100 coal burning EGUs would be affected by MATS. The MATS standards target a ninety percent reduction in mercury emissions by 2016.

The adoption of MATS in 2012, however, was not the end of the story. Immediately after the adoption of the rule, there were challenges raised to halt implementation of the Mercury Rule, notably by Oklahoma Senator James Inhofe, then-ranking Republican on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. Senator Inhofe introduced a Senate resolution to block the implementation of the Mercury Rule. Though this effort to halt implementation failed, in large part due to the testimony before the Senate of Mitch Hescox, president and CEO of the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN), who framed the issue as a pro-life matter due to the effects of mercury on the unborn, this did not dissuade opponents of MATS to work for its overturn. In 2015, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that the USEPA did not properly consider industry costs as it wrote MATS, though it allowed the rule to stand while the USEPA went back to consider this. In the same year, fifteen states joined EGUs and coal companies to challenge the rule in the U.S. Court for the District of Columbia. Dramatic political shifts, however, dealt a serious blow to MATS. Since adoption of MATS, Republicans gained control of both the Senate and House of Representatives, and Donald Trump was elected president in 2016. Within months of his inauguration, the Trump administration asked that oral arguments scheduled as a result of the 2015 filing in the U.S. Court for the District of Columbia be delayed. It was a curious series of circumstances, for the USEPA was charged in 2015 with defending MATS, but with the election of Trump, the USEPA was restaffed and positioned to work for the overturn of MATS. However, in December 2018, the Trump administration decided to maintain the Obama-era mercury regulations, largely in response to utilities that had already complied with MATS, though there were stipulations implemented that would limit how health gains and the calculation of benefits from such regulations would occur, making future regulation more difficult. With Trump’s appointment of Andrew Wheeler, an attorney and former coal industry
lobbyist, to head the USEPA in 2019, renewed efforts to nullify MATS have occurred. With this appointment EEN president Mitchell Hescox has redoubled his efforts to argue for the continuation of MATS on the basis of a pro-life argument.\textsuperscript{15}

The battle around MATS illustrates a key component of Christian care for creation. It shows that, among other things, it is concerned with healing, for the health and wellbeing of human beings. However, as also illustrated by this case study, the health of human beings is connected with care for the environment. So to care for human beings in many cases entails caring for the environment in which they live. This is certainly a pragmatic consideration, but is it one integral to Christian faith? Asked another way, is the care of creation, which we might describe as the healing of creation, something that Scripture calls for us to do? To this we now turn our attention.

**Care for and the Redemption of Creation**

So God created humankind in his image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
man and woman he created them.  
God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” (Gen 1:27–28).\textsuperscript{16}

God has given responsibility for creation to humankind. The progression in Genesis is simple. Contrary to other ancient Near Eastern cultures that view human beings as an “afterthought” of the gods that were intended to be slave labor, the ancient Israelite view of humankind is an elevated view where human beings are the “centerpiece of [God’s] creation.”\textsuperscript{17} In Genesis, the creation of humanity is the climax of the creation story.\textsuperscript{18} Human beings are created in God’s image, meaning that they are “symbols of [God’s] presence” and “his representatives as they are in relationship to him.”\textsuperscript{19} As they represent God and his dominion on the earth, humanity is given authority over creation and Adam and Eve are made rulers of every plant and animal on earth. The following generations are quick to embrace this calling. By the second generation, we see some form of farming and ranching, as shown in the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4). Human ability to manipulate the environment, shaping it to our needs, is an innate, God given mandate. This raises the question of what it means to be the rulers of the earth, especially in light of the fall of human beings (cf. Genesis 3). Why have we been given this gift, and what are we to do with it?
When discussing God as a creator and the role of human beings as those who “tend” and “protect” creation, it is important to note that creation was not a one-time event. Colossians 1:15–18 reads:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.

Creation is an ongoing process as God in Christ continues to “hold together” the world. Christ is “the Mediator of creation” and the “sphere within which the work of creation takes place.” Jesus is the “starting-point of the new creation,” and the one who sustains the world. Verse 17 “proclaims his guardianship over all things” and proves “the cosmos (and all who inhabit it) owes its existence, coherence, and continuance to Christ.” Thus, since Christ is so intricately tied to creation in its origin and its sustenance, it stands to reason that human beings should honor creation as they honor Christ.

This creation, however, is itself suffering from corruption resulting from the effects of human sin. This point is made in Rom 8:18–23, which reads:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

God is continually investing in and holding together a world that needs redemption and is suffering. As Paul suggests, the fall was not limited to human beings, and neither is redemption. God’s redemption is meant for the whole of creation, and everything anticipates it. In this passage “Paul presents [a] cosmic outworking of salvation in strong Adam terms, as the final reversal of [humanity]’s failure and climax of [its] restoration.” Just as God has redeemed humanity he longs to redeem creation.
Therefore, human beings stand in unity with creation when they call upon the Lord’s salvation. Further, “the glorious future that awaits the children of God accords with the superior place given humanity in the creation.”

The calling of humanity, as set forth in God’s call to care for the earth in Genesis, is to bring all of creation to redemption. Humanity is involved in the redemption of creation, as argued by John Chrysostom: “Where [humanity] leads the creation will follow, since it was made for [human beings].”

It is the role of humanity to lead creation into redemption.

However, the corruption of creation is not the mere presence of death. The corruption of creation is evidenced by an environment that is toxic to life. In a world where children die in their mothers’ wombs because the world around them has poisoned them, the corruption is not just present in the death of the child but rather it is rooted in the fact that the very creation that God appointed to serve humanity now fights it. When this occurs, creation is working contrary to its intended purpose as its intended caretakers fail to lead it into redemption. The corruption of the earth is a corruption of its purpose. Thus, denying the redemption and protection of the earth is to deny God’s own will. By ignoring creation, we steal its right to experience the redemption of Christ and to serve humanity.

**Caring for Creation as Caring for People**

In addition to caring for creation because creation is included in God’s plan for redemption, Christians should also protect the environment because by doing so they act to address human suffering and bring God glory. Jeffrey S. Lamp has argued that reading the Bible through the lens of environmental justice enables readers of the Bible to empathize with the plight of creation so adversely affected by environmental degradation by identifying with human beings who also suffer from the effects of environmental degradation. This is a tactical move that seeks to motivate care for creation because addressing current ecological crises has a benefit for human beings.

Indeed, the substance behind this tactical move is found in the Bible itself. The gospels show Jesus commissioning his people to protect, advocate for, and serve one another (Matt 22:39). In the Old Testament, at the first act of human violence in Genesis 4, the connection between nature and humanity is further demonstrated. The text reads,

And the LORD said, “What have you done? Listen; your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground! And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.
When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.” (Gen 4:10–12)

Cain’s failure to honor God resulted in jealousy, which ultimately became the excuse for his slaughtering of Abel, who honored God with the first of that over which he had been declared a caretaker. This failure to exercise proper dominion and to honor God in the natural world is the result of Adam’s curse with respect to tending to the land. These two issues are tied together, as the first murder is met with abhorrence from the Lord. More importantly for our purposes, creation itself cries out to the LORD in this passage. Just as creation groans “for the revealing of the children of God” in Romans 8, it also cries out against injustice in Genesis 4. Further, Cain’s punishment later “became a metaphor of divine judgment for the authors of the prophetic literature.” In Isaiah 26, the people are similarly promised that the earth will reveal the blood that has been shed upon the ground. Once again, creation is affected by injustice and testifies to the injustice of human beings. It reveals the sins of the people.

While this passage creates a connection between murder and the earth, it also introduces the first act of injustice of one human against another and is the basis for the commandment in Exod 20:13, “you shall not murder.” Is refraining from murder the only command from God in reference to others? This is clearly not the case, as Ps 82:3–4 reads, “Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.” The call to care for and to defend the Lord’s people is a clear command that is common in the Old Testament. The responsibility of Christians to rescue the afflicted and weak is ultimately an invitation to be like God and to care for those for whom the Lord cares. In Proverbs, the sage says, “Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered” (21:13). The word “poor” in this verse is translated from the Hebrew word דַּל, which speaks of the “helpless” or “powerless.” To ignore the oppressed is to disqualify oneself from divine response; to respond to injustice and deliver the abused is to partner with the Lord in his quest for redemption. Just as creation protests injustice and even cries out to the Lord on the behalf of the oppressed, Christians should also care for the poor and the disenfranchised. Further, if creation is being manipulated in such a way that it is harming people, such as we have demonstrated in this article with the mercury case study, Christians should act quickly to care for creation so that people will also benefit. If Christians do not act, then we ignore the commands of the Psalmist and the wisdom writer.

Further, the Hebrew prophets have much to say about persistent oppression. Amos boldly declares, in a portion of the book referred to as the “book of woes,” that the
apostate people suffer judgement because they “trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain” (5:11). The cry of this prophet expresses the innermost thoughts of the Lord, and reveals that he despises the festivals of the people, their offerings, and their songs. Instead of ritual, the desire of the Lord is portrayed in this eloquent prophetic declaration: “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (5:24). Just as sin and idolatry stand contrary to covenantal fidelity, injustice is equally as devastating. The failure to enact the justice of God on the earth disqualified the chosen people from enjoying the blessings of the covenant. To tolerate injustice is to breach covenant; to breach covenant is to embrace apostasy. Today, to ignore the environmental problems (such as anthropogenic mercury poisoning) is to ignore people; to ignore people is to ignore God.

Is the connection between creation, injustice, and murder only in the Old Testament, or does the New Testament comment on these matters? Again today, is failure to address environmental problems that are killing people and harming fetuses in some sense analogous to murder? Though the statement above may be strong, it carries weight. Christians who ignore problems that we have discussed allow for children of God to be harmed, and in many cases, killed.

Though many modern Christians show little interest in the responsibility of believers to care for creation, the problem of mercury poisoning should be important to all Christians because the New Testament is adamantly clear about the mission of Christians on this earth. Both Jesus and Paul emphasize this truth. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus performs a miracle in which he brings calm to the sea (Matt 8:23–27//Mark 4:35–41//Luke 8:22–25). Ecological interpreters of the Bible have seen in this episode an instance in which Jesus brings healing to an aspect of the other-than-human creation that at the moment is threatening the wellbeing of the disciples in the boat with Jesus. In bringing healing to creation, here depicted as experiencing the effects of a fallen world order, Jesus also ministers to the human beings experiencing the ravages of a corrupted world. Viewing Jesus as an exemplar here, Christians, of all people, should work for the wellbeing of creation, for in doing so, they are also caring for human beings. In this way, Christians reflect the concerns of God who cares for creation, human and other-than-human alike.

Recognizing that the heart of the Father is to care for his children in the world he created, humanity’s role in this process is evident in scripture. In Luke, Jesus says, “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Luke 6:31). Additionally, in Matthew, Jesus calls his followers to care for others who cannot care for themselves. He warns concerning the end times, “And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me’”
(Matt 25:40). This statement is a stern warning for many Christians who have ignored and abandoned the children of God, subjecting them to preventable states of destitution. John echoes Jesus’ sentiment when he writes, “How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?” (1 John 3:17). And indeed, how can God’s love abide in those who acknowledge a source of harm that it is in their power to remove, yet continue to allow pain, death, and harm? Surely, this was the mindset of God in sending Jesus to die in the first place. As he recognized the ultimate pain of sin and sacrifice, the Father chose to intervene as opposed to stand by and watch his children suffer corruption and death.

**Call To Action**

In the modern world, the great temptation of the church is to separate the physical and spiritual realms in such a way that it disregards physical circumstances and only seeks to bring spiritual reconciliation. The oppressed masses are ignored in the name of a spiritual assignment. In the midst of our spiritual conquests, we forget that “God so loved the world,” meaning “the sum total of everything here and now, the orderly universe,” and that caring for creation is caring for people. Our case study of mercury has demonstrated that human activity is harming both the unborn and the born. Will Christians recognize their role as caretakers over the earth and the importance of caring for people? If so, what will they do about the injustice that is taking place in our day through degradation of the environment?

The book of James makes it clear that faith without action is not faith at all. In James 2, “James appears to be combatting some form of misunderstanding that has developed in the church.” Namely, can one have faith without works as evidence? In verses 15–17, James states: “If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.” Commenting on this verse, Hilary of Arles beautifully notes that “true love has two sides to it—help for the body and help for the soul.” Martin Dibelius refers to these verses in James as a “parable” to illustrate the author’s point that faith without action is vain. Just as James uses this example of those “who wish the poor well and do nothing to help them” to describe those with illegitimate faith, this same principle applies to Christians today who ignore the oppressed. The words “go in peace” function “as a religious cover for the failure to act.” Similarly, to hear of the effects of environmental harm on human beings and refuse action is to exercise false faith. To share the gospel without responding to crisis is to fulfill religious duty but to ignore religious cause. To protest abortion and show no concern for the influence of mercury on the human fetus
is inconsistent. Rather than turning a blind eye to environmental problems, let Christians respond with urgency to the aid of those affected by this crisis. Maybe then, when the Christian faith becomes a religion of action, the world will once again know us by our love.

**Notes**

1 This article originated as a student paper for an Honors Program course at Oral Roberts University, Science and Global Sustainability, in the Spring 2019 semester, co-taught by John Korstad and Jeffrey S. Lamp. The bulk of the paper’s substance and organization is that of the students in the course, Kathryn Moder, Megan Munhofen, Cade Rich, and Nathan Von Atzigen.
Atzigen, with editorial oversight and some additional content, mostly regarding the regulatory situation, provided by Jeffrey S. Lamp.

2 This situation was inspired by the events that occurred in Japan in the 1950s regarding mercury emissions and birth defects. See Takashi Yorifuji, Shigeru Takaoka, and Philippe Grandjean, “Accelerated Functional Losses in Ageing Congenital Minamata Disease Patients,” Neurotoxicology and Teratology 69 (September 2018), 49–53.


6 Mohsen Vigehe et. al., “Prenatal Mercury Exposure and Birth Weight,” Reproductive Toxicology 76 (March 2018), 78–83.


10 New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, “Mercury,” 2–3.


12 Interestingly, at the same time that the USEPA argued that it was not appropriate to regulate EGUs, it also issued the Clean Air Mercury Rule to reduce emissions from EGUs, making the U.S. the first country in the world to regulate mercury emissions. The rule, part of the Bush administration’s goal to improve air quality across the U.S., would hold current and future EGUs accountable for the amount of mercury they emitted into the air. EGUs would be required to acquire wet scrubbers to remove the harmful pollutants out of the steam generated by EGUs. For discussion, see Ravi K. Srivastava et al., “Control of Mercury Emissions from Coal-Fired Electric Utility Boilers,” Environmental Science and Technology, 2006, 1385–93, https://pubs.acs.org/doi/pdf/10.1021/es062639u (25 August 2019); and USEPA, “Fact Sheet—EPA’s Clean Air Mercury Rule,” n.p.


16 All scripture citations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New Revised Standard Version.


27 Jeffrey S. Lamp, Reading Green: Tactical Considerations for Reading the Bible Ecologically (New York: Peter Lang, 2017), 35–38.


29 Derek Kidner observes, “Scripture, from the flood story onwards, shows the patience of God orientated to perfecting salvation, not towards condoning the corruption which


32 The phrase translated “trample on the poor” is a *hapax legomenon*. It is even suggested that a viable translation could be “to plunder the poor.” In either case, the language here is strong and “describes the reversal of one’s expectations. Because the upper class has enlarged its property and wealth at the expense of the poor, its very own possessions will be taken from it.” Shalom M. Paul, *Amos*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 172–73.


C. Douglas Weaver, Professor of Baptist Studies at Baylor University, has provided the definitive historical account of the relation of Baptists to the Holiness-Pentecostal-Charismatic movements. He has filled a gap that has surprisingly existed in the studies of these movements for over a century. Weaver’s volume of more than 500 pages takes its place alongside similar landmark works such as Vinson Synan’s *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Eerdmans, 1997) and David Edwin Harrell, Jr.’s *All Things Are Possible: The Healing and Charismatic Revivals in Modern America* (Indiana University Press, 1975). Influenced by Harrell, Weaver’s history evinces the same meticulous scholarship combined with a lucid and engaging narrative that one finds in Harrell’s history as well as his authoritative biography, *Oral Roberts: An American Life* (Indiana University Press, 1985).

Weaver first published in this arena of study an exploration of the ministry of one of the pioneers in Pentecostal healing evangelism: *The Healer-Prophet, William Marrion Branham: A Study of the Prophetic in American Pentecostalism* (Mercer University Press, 1987). Since both Baptists and Pentecostals are participants in restorationist movements, Weaver became intrigued with the question of the interfacing of these movements and their resultant pneumatologies and spiritualities. His extensive research revealed a strong Baptist resistance to these Spirit-movements (Holiness, Pentecostal, Charismatic) as well as to their influence on the Baptist movement, since Baptists themselves—contrary to mistaken assumptions on the part of many—have always possessed their own understanding and experience of the Spirit. Since the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have witnessed both the evangelicalization of pentecostalism and the pentecostalization of evangelicalism, one should not be surprised to discover many bapticostals (a label Weaver’s book may be establishing as official scholarly nomenclature!) as well as a demonstrable influence of the Charismatic Movement upon the worship and spirituality of Baptist churches.

The book launches the reader on a fascinating journey through the history of modern American religion (nineteenth and twentieth century), detailing the surprising developments of revivalism and renewal movements impacting the leading evangelical churches of the day,
Methodists and Baptists. Focusing specifically on Baptist interaction with these movements, Weaver uncovers much new material largely overlooked by students of American religious history. Reliving the stories of these movements and their leaders and adherents is like bingeing on a televised miniseries on modern religious developments. Weaver provides engaging, relevant, and thought-provoking analysis that could only enhance the church’s self-awareness while, at the same time, nudging her on to greater maturity and unity. Readers will find themselves captivated by the story and prompted to reflection upon our common spiritual hungers. What more could one ask of a historical study?

An additional strength of Weaver’s study is his factoring in key race, gender, and socioeconomic issues. There is a subtle, yet distinct, prophetic flavor to the author’s presentation. In effect, he holds up an ethical mirror for all the movements surveyed here, encouraging honest appraisal and soul-searching. Ultimately, Weaver concludes that all God’s people have the Spirit—but does the Spirit have them? That is, can such a historical analysis actually promote our learning and growing up—together?

Weaver concludes that there has been abundant interaction between Baptists and the Holiness-Pentecostal-Charismatic traditions and significant mutual influence. Considering the demonstrable Arminianizing of grassroots Baptist theology, the obvious renewal of emphasis on the person and work of the Holy Spirit, and the emergent teaching on spiritual gifts, this spiritual and theological cross-pollination needed to be highlighted and documented. Weaver has done so masterfully. He helpfully describes how Baptist experience-oriented faith has variously embraced holiness, Keswick, and Pentecostal-Charismatic emphases. And even though Baptists and these Spirit-movements have continued to chart their own independent courses, more recent developments seem to indicate that this fascinating story is far from over.

With the inclusion of national leader Greg Laurie and his church in the Southern Baptist Convention, and the election of young pastors and scholars, known to be charismatic (tongues-speaking) in their personal spiritual lives, to leadership roles in the convention, the SBC could already be characterized as evincing “Pentecostal-Charismatic” proclivities. Add to this the spirited worship in many Baptist churches today: Should one, while surfing the web, come across the dynamic worship service of a church like Prestonwood Baptist in Plano, Texas, he or she might assume at the outset that they have simply tuned in the telecast of a Charismatic megachurch. Perhaps this combining of Baptist Word-emphasis with Pentecostal Spirit-emphasis was what God had in mind all along. I can even hear the Reformers uttering a hearty Amen here!

Additionally, Weaver’s fascinating history often raises significant theological issues that could be further investigated. Years ago, Baptist theologian Chad Owen Brand published Perspectives on Spirit Baptism: Five Views (Broadman & Holman [the
Southern Baptist publishing house], 2004), providing substantive interaction between representatives of Catholic, Wesleyan, Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Reformed traditions. A follow-up volume on speaking in tongues was considered but ultimately abandoned. The Spirit-baptism volume has circulated widely in Baptist circles, indicating continued interest in these theological issues. If current surveys are correct in reporting that fully half of Southern Baptist pastors believe that all the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament, including the gift of tongues, are still available today (in contrast to the ubiquitous cessationism one most often associates with Baptists), then there is considerable rationale for further theological investigation.

Finally, Weaver might want to take into account the emerging influence of what is now being called “network Christianity” (see Brad Christerson’s and Richard Flory’s The Rise of Network Christianity [Oxford University Press, 2017]). Individualistic Americans, now more than ever, seem to be charting their own spiritual voyage! Just as Charismatics originally established their own networks of interaction and influence, with the explosion of cyber-space, there is even greater opportunity of cross-pollination among the various ecclesial traditions and pneumatic movements of Christendom.

A careful combing through of any historical work will inevitably discover “blemishes,” especially if that reader has known firsthand some of the persons and events covered in the text. For example, New Testament scholar Craig Keener is not an African American, even though he is a member of an African American denomination. Even some of my own personal history, as portrayed in the book, needs minor tweaking for precision. But overall Weaver’s narrative and analysis exemplify historical investigation and presentation at its best.

Although Weaver’s book is voluminous and pricey, it is well worth the indulgence of those who value surveying and analyzing the riches of this intriguing swath of American Christianity. Baptists and the Holy Spirit will now take its place in the libraries of Baptist, Pentecostal, and Wesleyan schools as the standard resource on the subject. Much gratitude is owed to the author for his faithful historical labors.

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Wolfgang Vondey, Reader in Contemporary Christianity and Pentecostal Studies and Director of the Center for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies at the University of
Birmingham, UK, home of the so-called Hollenweger school, is a prolific author, prominent among current Pentecostal scholars. In this, the inaugural volume of the Systematic Pentecostal and Charismatic Theology series, Vondey identifies Pentecost as the core theological symbol of the Pentecostal movement. His academic and writing expertise has enabled him to engage successfully in the difficult task of formulating a systematic Pentecostal theology. Considering the heterogeneous nature of global Pentecostalism, writing such a theology is a complex task, but Vondey—who self-identifies as a Pentecostal—responds successfully to the challenge, with the expressed hope that the global character of the Pentecostal community will speak through the book (xi).

In the introduction, Vondey clearly delineates the background, structure, and central agenda of the book as well as summarizes its hypothesis: “Pentecost is the core theological symbol of Pentecostal theology and its theological narrative is the full gospel” (1). The central argument of the book then is that Pentecost is the primary symbol of Pentecostal theology, the full gospel is the expression of the theological narrative of this symbol, and the altar is the liturgical heart of this narrative where Pentecost reaches deep into the hearts of Pentecostals.

The prolegomena to Pentecostal doctrine contained in the first chapter precede the two main parts of the book, each of which contains five chapters. Each of the chapters always returns to the central claim of the book that Pentecost is the wellspring of the Pentecostal movement and its theology (10). Pentecostal theology, as the title suggests, can be characterized as a form of living the fullness of the gospel. The first part provides the theological narrative of the Pentecostal full gospel placed under the symbol of Pentecost and emerging from practices at the altar. The five chapters in the first part outline this narrative along the themes of salvation, sanctification, Spirit-baptism, divine healing, and the coming kingdom.

In the second chapter, the author asserts that “a narrative account of Pentecostal theology begins with soteriology,” and, indeed, that the full gospel is soteriological from beginning to end. Accordingly, Vondey presents salvation as a primary metaphor for Pentecostal thought and as a dominant Pentecostal theme. In chapter 3, Vondey explores the motif of Jesus Christ as sanctifier. In the context of the soteriological practice of the altar call, sanctification identifies both the call of God to holiness and the desire of the believer for holiness (59). In chapter 4, Vondey treats the role of Spirit-baptism in the full gospel narrative. Pentecostals have looked consistently to the day of Pentecost as the root symbol for understanding Spirit-baptism.

In the fifth chapter, Vondey presents Jesus as the healer, and traces the theological contours of divine healing, the fourth motif of the full gospel, through the metaphor of
the altar. In chapter 6, the discussion centers on the eschatological emphasis the full gospel places on Jesus as the coming King. An apocalyptic emphasis on the imminent return of Christ always projects Pentecostal theology back on itself in critical reflection: eschatology not only draws Pentecostals from the altar to the ends of the earth but urges them to return to the altar for the signs and wonders of salvation, sanctification, Spirit-baptism, and divine healing. Pentecostal eschatology culminates with the apocalyptic mandate to go and seek the lost, proclaim the kingdom of God, and bring the world to the altar (133).

The second part of Vondey’s systematic theology is a mirror extension of the first including its themes. In this way, the second part demonstrates the return of constructive and systematic Pentecostal theology to its root symbol of Pentecost. Rooted in the wide-ranging soteriology of the full gospel, in this second part Vondey envisions a larger theological narrative by means of expanding the lens of the full gospel to the dominant theological conversations on creation, humanity, society, church, and God. The five chapters in the second part move from the macro to the micro, from the cosmos to the local church, before returning eventually to a theological vision at the altar at which the full gospel originates (155). In chapter 7, Vondey applies the fivefold pattern articulated in the first part to the constructive concerns of a theology of creation. Given the centrality of the altar for Pentecostal practices, the author argues that creation be seen as the economy of salvation, as it were, the cosmic altar of redemption, sanctification, empowerment, transformation, and eschatological mission. In chapter 8, Vondey then proposes that in the context of creation, identified previously as the cosmic altar of redemption, humankind is created to embody the image of God to the world through the reception of the Holy Spirit.

In chapter 9, Vondey continues to explore the contributions of the full gospel to the wider theological conversation by probing the concrete, intertwined, and complex realities of the public social, cultural, and political spheres underlying the theology of creation and theological anthropology. The author then argues that the full gospel offers a comprehensive proposal for a genuinely Pentecostal ecclesiology because it draws from Pentecost as the unifying theological symbol of the movement (ch. 10). In the closing chapter (ch. 11), the author picks up his initial argument that the full gospel points to the worship of God as the beginning and end of Pentecostal theology. He brings the doxology implicit throughout the book into conversation with the doctrine of God. This final chapter highlights that the goal of any doxology is not primarily epistemological but ontological and soteriological, reminding his readers that worship brings about transformation. The chief conclusion is that Pentecostal theology represents a liturgical tradition oriented around the altar.
Considering the diverse nature of global Pentecostalism, writing Pentecostal theology is not an easy enterprise, but clearly the author has accomplished his task meticulously. The work is a unique attempt to frame a Pentecostal theology on the foundation of Pentecost and its narrative of the full gospel, without dwelling on the usual discussion of whether the center of Pentecostal theology is christology or pneumatology. The metaphor of the altar adopted throughout the book specifies the significance of worship in Pentecostal life and doctrine in terms of a spiritual movement towards and mystical encounter with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit that empowers and transforms the world. The book culminates in the conclusion that Pentecostal theology at heart is a liturgical theology, which Vondey establishes as a foundation upon which systematic and constructive Pentecostal theology can be further developed. In his own words, “The further development of Pentecostal theology, systematically and contextually, practically and methodologically, depends on a deeper understanding of the liturgical qualities of Pentecostalism as a religio-cultural tradition.” Elaborating on Pentecost, full-gospel narratives, and the metaphor of altar, Vondey presents his ideas consistently and coherently. Reading the book is an amazing experience, widening one’s horizon of understanding of Pentecostal theology and spirituality. I would recommend this volume as required reading for any undergraduate or graduate course on Pentecostal theology. The author has presented the profound theological ideas without overusing theological jargon, making the book appealing to and readable for the non-academic audience as well. The target audience of the book is nothing less than Pentecostals worldwide, Global South or North, scholars or laypeople.

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Lalsangkima Pachuau, Professor of Christian Mission and Dean of Advanced Research Programs at Asbury Seminary, was ordained in the Presbyterian Church of India and received his PhD from Princeton Theological Seminary. Originally from northeast India, Pachuau has served as itinerant evangelist in his home state and among Hindu communities in India and the United States as well as lectured in various venues in the United Kingdom, Asia, and Africa. A member of the Center of Theological Inquiry
(Princeton, NJ), Pachuau has published both books and journal articles and served as editor of *Mission Studies: Journal of the International Association for Mission Studies*. Describing himself as an academician from the Majority World trained in the West (21), Pachuau’s global experience puts him in a unique position to talk about how non-Western Christianity is reshaping Christianity globally.

Pachuau seeks to characterize World Christianity from historical and theological viewpoints (19). The first chapter of his book serves as an introduction to this venture. Pachuau sees “Global Christianity” and “World Christianity” as interchangeable terms, with the former carrying with it negative socioeconomic and political connotations (2). He observes that the first millennium belonged to the Eastern church, the second to the Western, and the third to the Southern continents (7). He uses the term “Majority World” to describe everything that is non-Western, as he sees it as a less offensive term than “third-world” (18).

In chapter 2, Pachuau discusses the Western precedence of Christianity and explains the point of departure he is taking for his discussion on World Christianity (20). He begins with the concept of “the West and the Rest,” which, despite its negative connotations, is the framework this book uses (24). He continues with an overview of the Enlightenment and its effect on theology. In the second part of the chapter, the author narrates the story of the modern missionary movement—with the crises of the changing course of missions—and how it led to the emerging Majority World Christianity in the twentieth century (30).

In the third chapter, Pachuau provides an overview of the cultural, theological, and historical features of Christianity within Africa and Latin America (42), while commenting on how various parts of the world experienced European colonialism differently. For instance, Pachuau observes that Africans “seem to have a more positive image of colonists than some people in Asian nations” (42). In chapter 4, Pachuau discusses the new Christian movements of the post-colonial period and presents the story of Christianity in Asia and the Pacific (20). Because in many areas of this part of the world, Christianity is a contested minority religion (63), the author concentrates on areas where Christianity is experiencing momentum and growth (65).

In chapter 5 Pachuau explains how contextual theology has globally reshaped the theological discipline (20). Historically, Christians have always practiced unity through diversity (91), with the call to experience God’s transforming grace being the unifying factor (91). He argues that history shows that Christianity maintains authenticity by being adapted, indigenized, and contextualized (92). The author goes on to discuss contextual theology, which he defines as the act of theologizing in context (100), in contrast to contextualization, which deals with the cultural dynamics involved in the
reception of the gospel (94) and is therefore a cross-cultural communication method (97).

Chapter 6 focuses on the three major Southern continents and the core theological works in these contexts. The author asserts that one cannot miss the massive shift in the focus and orientation of Christian missions theologically and historically. However, he notes that in these areas of growth, there is a tension between the established forms of Christianity and the emerging kinds (20). He reiterates that the contextual theologies are constructed in response to contextual realities (111) and discusses those realities by typifying three macro-theologies common to the people of Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific Islands. The macro-theologies are the people’s religiosity, poverty and inequality, and tensional existence (111).

In chapter 7 Pachuau speaks about modern missions, which is followed by the rising world mission movement and the dynamics of Christianity that have helped to redefine the meaning and practice of Christian mission. He highlights the conceptual changes and then looks at the development of mission in the Majority World, especially among Pentecostals. He underlines the developments of Christianity in regions where developments are apparent and provides a few case studies (143).

In his conclusion, Pachuau focuses on the demographic changes that have occurred during the rise of World Christianity, specifically how the center of gravity moved from the West to the non-West (177–78). With this rise a tension between Western and Western Christianity has developed, with the West at one end of the theological spectrum and the East at the other (180–81). While this tension may disappear over time as Western Christianity and emerging Christianity converge, for the present, the author considers it a suitable framework (24).

This book has many strengths, one of which is the summary of the theologians and missiologists who have contributed to the establishment of World Christianity as an academic discipline. Pachuau mentions, in particular, Walbert Buhlmann and Andrew Walls from the 1970s and 80s and describes their contributions as well as those of more recent contributors (712). Another strength is Pachuau’s overview of contextual theology and the distinction he makes between it and contextualization.

Pachuau’s writing style is an engaging blend of scholarly thoroughness and easy reading, ideal for the new scholar approaching the topic. The book provides an overview of the subject as well as stimulating discussion that sparks questions. However, outside the context of a classroom setting where the book is supplemented by lecture and other readings, the reviewer thinks that this book may be too advanced for casual readers. For serious students, however, World Christianity will prove an insightful and
useful tool that will help them understand how to theologize within the conceptual framework of “the West and the Rest.”

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By ecumenically forwarding an erudite apologetic for the Classical Pentecostal experience of Spirit-baptism albeit through the theological method of one of Roman Catholicism’s (RC) most innovative twentieth-century theologians, Australian Pentecostal theologian David Perry presents a seminally groundbreaking approach to understanding theologically the Pentecostal “experience” of Spirit-baptism. Hence, Perry’s 2017 monograph proffers a pioneering analysis, potentially fertile to related projects within the domains of Pentecostal studies, theological methodology, and ecumenical dialogue.

Perry is certainly not the first within Pentecostal studies to explore how in Pentecostalism, experience functions as a viable source of theology and doctrine. That has been—and I suspect will continue—as a requisite mainstay of Pentecostal theological reflection for years to come. Yet what Perry offers are new cutting-edge ways of apologetically framing, clarifying, and assessing this basic premise within Pentecostal spirituality. He achieves this by using RC Bernard Lonergan’s theological method for analyzing relations between experience and meaning, which posits a “cognitive theory” (56) that appreciates experience or “subjectivity” as a knowledge source, contra a past Protestant tendency to subordinate experience as a dubious category within “the hierarchy of knowledge sources” (54).

Perry thus effectively elaborates how *experience* functions as an important scientific source for arriving at knowledge, understanding, and meaning, particularly in Christian doctrine (56–72). Hence, at the heart of Lonergan’s method is his cognitional theory that through four processes of cognitive comprehension—experiencing, understanding, judging, deciding (73–74)—leads to four “functions of meaning,” namely, (1) cognitive, (2) effective, (3) constitutive, and (4) communicative functions (75–78). Before proceeding then, I would urge readers to familiarize themselves with Lonergan’s highly readable book, *Method in Theology* (1972), which succinctly summarizes these concepts.
that Perry appropriates to his theological investigation into the Pentecostal experience of Spirit-baptism.

Therefore, as earlier alluded, Perry’s purpose for this book is “to undertake a critical analysis of Pentecostal Spirit baptism based on [Lonergan’s] methodology,” which effectively allows “focus particularly on the meaning embodied in the Pentecostal experience of Spirit baptism[,] to . . . explore how Spirit baptism functions cognitively, effectively, constitutively, and communicatively within Pentecostalism” (3; see also 219). Hence, Perry’s “overall aim is to gain a clearer understanding” of how the notion of Spirit-baptism functions within Pentecostalism, and thereby suggests ways it may be revitalized and continue to function theologically toward the fostering of twenty-first-century Pentecostal identity worldwide (3–4).

What Perry’s book thus primarily offers is a phenomenological analysis of the grassroots experience itself that has generated the Pentecostal doctrine of Spirit-baptism. More pertinently, as I understand Perry’s aim, his primary intent is not foremost toward developing a Christian theology of Spirit-baptism, but, more narrowly, to elucidate how the notion of Spirit-baptism is “experienced,” and thereafter, “described, explained, and doctrinalized” within Pentecostalism (6). Then, from this analysis, his purpose is to reflect theologically (24) and suggest how Pentecostals might best doctrinally conceive (231–35) their historic experience and the notion of Spirit-baptism in light of twenty-first-century challenges toward the tradition’s ongoing testimony to the renewing “lived reality” (235) of this “transformative encounter with the Holy Spirit” (xi, 235).

In chapter 1 (“How Did We Get Here?”) Perry critically surveys how Pentecostal scholarship has historically engaged its doctrine of Spirit-baptism and suggests the need for a “methodological turn” via Lonergan’s four “functions of meaning,” to analyze closely the grassroots experience Pentecostals have historically identified as Spirit-baptism (45). While Pentecostal scholars have long effectively argued for the privileging of experience as a source for theological reflection and doctrinal formation, in chapter 2 (“Experience and Meaning”), Perry brings fresh clarity to the discussion by substantially addressing the Protestant tendency to divide subjective from objective knowledge, by recognizing that all knowing comes from “pre-conceptual experience” (54–73). In doing so, Perry establishes how Lonergan’s four functions of meaning provide apt methodological categories for analyzing the “necessarily subjective nature” of the Pentecostal Spirit-baptism experience (73–83).

Through an ecumenically informed investigation, engaging the RC notion of sanctifying grace, into historic grassroots Pentecostal testimony and current Pentecostal scholarship, Perry suggests in chapter 3 (“Spirit Baptism and Cognitive Meaning”) that the Pentecostal experience of Spirit-baptism be cognitively understood as “an experience
of the Holy Spirit” (118), yet one that, first and foremost, comprises an encounter with God’s love by which recipients are profoundly drawn into participation in the Triune mission of God to all creation (148–49).

In chapter 4 (“Spirit Baptism and Effective Meaning”) Perry notes that historically, Pentecostal Spirit-baptism experience has been an effectual cause of Pentecostal holistic mission and evangelistic endeavor worldwide, albeit largely within the framework of their presumed “eschatological expectation” of the imminent return of Christ (176). Yet, given recent shifts in eschatological understanding, Perry suggests that we can far more robustly perceive the effective meaning of Spirit-baptism within another concept, namely, the love of God poured out on the believer through Spirit-baptism; hence, it is this experience of God’s love that effects and thus empowers Pentecostals’ involvement in mission, presuming they recognize the Trinitarian role of the Spirit in mediating God’s love towards creation (176).

In chapter 5 (“Spirit Baptism and Constitutive Meaning”), Perry posits that while for early Pentecostals Spirit-baptism constituted a common ecclesial identity through a shared experience, this earlier meaning is now challenged by contemporary shifting understandings within grassroots Pentecostalism regarding how Spirit-baptism is presently being experienced (181–88, 203). Perry cites recent statistics that suggest decreasing numbers of Spirit-baptism experiences that conform to the traditional Pentecostal understanding of Spirit-baptism, coupled with a decreasing practice of glossolalia, despite Classical Pentecostal credal statements continuing to affirm a close link between Spirit-baptism and glossolalia, particularly via the older evidentialist language (183–88). Perry therefore suggests that the ongoing constitutive function of Spirit-baptism within Pentecostalism requires a shift from the historic Pentecostal “narrow construal of the experience” demarked by evidentialist language for describing the links between Spirit-baptism and tongues speech, to a broader construal that describes Spirit-baptism as a transformative experience with God’s love (202). As such, Spirit-baptism is better described “as a baptism into divine love” (232).

In his concluding sixth chapter (“Spirit Baptism and Communicative Meaning”) Perry first evaluates how Pentecostals have historically communicated their perceived meaning to their experience of Spirit-baptism, through appropriating Lonergan’s insight that people may communicate meaning through a variety of mediums (e.g., artistic, symbolic, intersubjective, linguistic, or incarnational) with each medium expressing a unique nuance (204–5). Perry concludes that given Classical Pentecostalism’s historically “close phenomenological association” with Spirit-baptism (206–7), Pentecostals must recognize glossolalia as a historically important medium towards identifying the “pre-
conceptual” (or “elemental”) meaning of Spirit-baptism in Pentecostal experience (206–7, 214).

Even though Perry acknowledges the research that indicates a present decline in tongues speech worldwide (210), given the phenomenological link earlier mentioned, he suggests Pentecostals identify glossolalia in such a way as to communicate elementally something about “the divine love of God” (212–13), which he earlier identified in chapter 5 as the constitutive meaning of Spirit-baptism. Building on this suggestion, he then shifts attention to recent ecumenical dialogues on Pentecostal Spirit-baptism as a “case study” illustrating these observed connections between God’s love and Spirit-baptism (219–30).

In conclusion, Perry proposes two major re-wordings to common Pentecostal doctrinal statements about Spirit-baptism (230–35). First, he proposes its definition as a “transformative encounter with the Holy Spirit that unites Pentecostal believers . . . towards empowered witness . . . through an outpouring of the divine love and God.” Second, he proposes that the “essence of this encounter . . . may be communicated through . . . speaking in tongues” (234).

I shall now make some important confirmations to Perry’s work within Pentecostal theological scholarship, coupled with some critical concerns. First, as Perry himself occasionally points out, closely substantiating his conclusions (x, 7, 33–36) is Frank Macchia’s earlier monograph titled Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology (Zondervan, 2006). There, Macchia similarly argues the same close link between Spirit-baptism and God’s love. Incidentally, through a multi-disciplinary approach, Amos Yong argues the same conclusion in his book, Spirit of Love: A Trinitarian Theology of Grace (Baylor University Press, 2012).

Though both Macchia and Perry have reached these similar understandings albeit through two different methodological procedures (36), Perry critiques Macchia’s theology of the Spirit-baptism metaphor that posits a comprehensive understanding of Spirit-baptism encompassing the whole narrative of Christian salvation (33–34), as “too far removed” from actual grassroots Pentecostal understanding or experience (36). While this may be true, I would prompt Perry to recognize that their respective aims are quite different. Perry has indeed narrowly focused on investigating the actual way Pentecostals have historically described and doctrinally conceived their experience of Spirit-baptism (2–3), whereas as his book title infers, Macchia has rather striven towards an ecumenically expansive theology of Spirit-baptism, albeit one informed by Pentecostal orientations.

Meanwhile, let me reiterate that I deeply appreciate Perry’s singular focus on how Pentecostals have traditionally experienced Spirit-baptism. For this reason, yet also
keeping in mind that the Spirit-baptism metaphor comprises polyvalent meanings both within the New Testament and across Christian traditions, I have long felt that Pentecostals might better refer to their unique understanding as the “Pentecostal experience” of Spirit-baptism. Doing so thus differentiates this experience from how Christians might differently experience God through the Holy Spirit within other Christian traditions, historically and contemporarily.

This approach thus recognizes the cultural-linguistic power of a lived setting within a specific tradition to shape human experience. Hence, Pentecostals need to assess how their culture has historically fostered expectation towards phenomena Pentecostals have historically associated with Spirit-baptism. Hence, notwithstanding that George Lindbeck’s cultural-linguistic theology of doctrine can mistakenly limit recognition of transcultural realities (80–81), his approach helps foster a critical rather than naive realism towards one’s own lived tradition.

A final concern pertains to the fresh clarity Perry brings to the implicit Pentecostal privileging of experience as a source for theological reflection and doctrinal formation. This is really nothing new, but a premise running throughout the broader Christian tradition exemplified in the ancient dictum that the “rule of prayer shapes the rule of belief.” Yet one fresh way Perry helps is by addressing a wrong tendency within much of Protestantism toward dividing subjective from objective knowing, since all knowing comes from “pre-conceptual experience,” and all experience is subjective (54–62).

A potential problem arises, however, from Perry’s reliance on Lonergan’s cognitional theory that posits distinctions between experiencing “corporeal” and “non-corporeal” realities, or between experiences that are presumed as internal rather than external to the human body (56). Now Perry is helpfully arguing the legitimacy of non-corporeal experience as a knowledge source. I would affirm this. Yet I think we may need to update Lonergan’s basic cognition theory, given it is based on assumptions about the mind and body that are now more than fifty years old. For example, we should perhaps factor into Lonergan’s methodology the growing shift within the humanities today from linguistic-centered hermeneutics (the earlier “linguistic turn”) to a “turn towards the body,” that recognizes the body and mind as thoroughly integrated. Hence, given this recognition, I wonder if we can any longer say that any experience is internal apart from corporeality. Or, might we now say that our bodies mediate all experience to us? In other words, might we rather say that for embodied humans, all experience is indeed corporeal. To sum up, I believe these are discussions that current philosophical and scientific research obliges us to consider as we further strive towards appreciating the Pentecostal insight into the role of experience as a genuine source of knowledge within theological formation.
Yet to reiterate, I find Perry’s monograph a profound, highly original watershed contribution that is necessary to ongoing discussions about the Pentecostal experience of Spirit-baptism and Pentecostal theology. For this reason, it is a must addition to theological libraries worldwide. It also required reading for scholarly research not only on the topic of Pentecostal Spirit-baptism, but toward broadening our repertoire of apt theological methods for investigating the role of experience within Pentecostal life and theology. Moreover, I would add that by way of Lonergan’s theological methods, Perry’s work proffers ecumenical import towards analyzing the experience of Spirit-baptism within other Christian traditions as well.

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The ever-prolific Dr. Craig Keener has written not one but two commentaries on this Pauline letter, released hardly a year apart. The relation between them Keener notes in the front matter of each: the much briefer Galatians for the New Cambridge Bible Commentary (NCBC) was written first but with the writing of the much longer, stand-alone Galatians for Baker Academic in view. Editors for both editions permitted this close relation between the two. Such a relation suggests, rightly, the two agree about introductory matters, interpretation of most-debated texts, and theology elicited from the letter. By the numbers, the NCBC version fills 294 pages with commentary, accompanied by 1,447 notes, while the Baker version fills 588 pages with 4,626 notes. Often over half a page in either edition is filled with citations of ancient primary sources and an encyclopedic spectrum of secondary sources spanning Christian history, making either version valuable for guiding students to worthwhile sources for research beyond Keener’s excellent commentary. The commentary of the Baker version differs from the NCBC only in its greater length and detail, but both express the high quality of scholarship we have come to expect from Dr. Keener. New Testament scholar Michael
F. Bird’s endorsement in the Baker edition fits both editions: Keener expresses “an erudition and thoroughness that is simply unmatched,” an “encyclopedic knowledge of the ancient world,” and “sharp exegetical insights and sensitivity to the theological texture of Scripture” (back cover).

Both editions deliver results from a mix of study methods we find satisfying: first, a traditional grammatical-historical-linguistic reading set deeply in the contexts of Second Temple and Greco-Roman sources cited with a proficiency one would expect from a specialist other than a New Testament scholar. (As quantitative evidence of this depth, abbreviations to extrabiblical and secondary sources fill twenty-five pages in the NCBC. In the Baker, similar abbreviations fill twenty-five pages in much smaller type. The NCBC’s Ancient Sources Index in two columns fills thirty pages, while a similar index in the Baker fills seventy-one pages set in four columns. The Baker edition’s bibliography is 124 pages set in two columns of small type.) This reading is then enriched with insights from social-scientific, rhetorical, narrative, and other developing methods. Keener synthesizes these to help readers imagine in an informed way how Paul’s first recipients would have likely understood this most polemical of his letters and how Galatians fits within Paul’s works and contributes to Pauline theology. Unlike some commentaries that exposit a range of interpretations but leave readers unsure of the author’s view, after fair exposition of important differing views, Keener expresses his well-grounded judgment clearly. Then, especially through the six “Bridging [the] Horizons” features throughout both commentaries, Keener suggests plausible applications for today.

Along with those gestures toward responsible application, these works offer several features in addition to commentary. The Baker edition introduces Galatians in forty-six pages, tracing its interpretation especially since Luther and addressing other traditional topics, including date, provenance, genre, themes, audience, and the identity of Paul’s Galatian opponents. This edition attends to how ancient epistolary and rhetorical conventions, including polemic, pertain to interpreting Galatians more than the NCBC does, including the question of whether Paul’s letter was effective. Yet the NCBC edition introduces commentary with largely the same topics discussed more briefly and with a feature unique to it that favors students at beginning and intermediate levels of academic biblical study: six full pages of “Select Suggested Readings” on Galatians, which would help nearly any student begin research for course papers effectively. While the NCBC uses the NRSV, the Baker version rests on Keener’s translation of Galatians, which appears twice: once for the whole of Galatians in the front matter and then again, verse by verse, throughout the commentary.
Commentary proceeds in the NCBC edition section by section, while the lengthier commentary in the Baker edition is presented verse by verse. Interspersed within the commentary in both editions are brief features titled “A Closer Look” that are like mini-articles from works like *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* on various topics, including these that occur in both editions: “Did Jews Eat with Gentiles?” “Christ-Faith,” “Law-Works,” “Pathos,” “Baptism’s Meaning in Its Ancient Context,” and “Adoption.” The NCBC has twenty-five of these, while the Baker has all of those, usually expanded slightly, plus an additional nine unique to it, including topics such as “Early Jewish Soteriology,” “The New Perspective on Paul,” “Magic,” and “Castration and Eunuchs” (the last of which shows Keener’s legendary thoroughness: slightly less than two pages of exposition are accompanied by twenty-three notes to chiefly primary ancient sources). Both editions divide the epistle into twenty-two units, but the Baker edition subsumes these under headings that disclose their epistolary-rhetorical function and reveal the value Keener finds in reading Galatians rhetorically—he seeks continuously to disclose what the text seeks to do (although not with the tour-de-force imposition of the forensic species Hans Dieter Betz attempted in his groundbreaking 1979 commentary).

A sampling of Keener’s judgment on controverted matters follows:

- South Galatia is Paul’s audience.
- “Christ-faith” (Gal 2:16; 3:22; *pistis Christou*) is objective: our faith in Christ; not subjective: Christ’s faithful obedience unto death that saves us, a truth that *pistis* in this context nonetheless cannot express.
- Regarding “law-works” (Gal 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10), Paul “rejects . . . as a means of justification as opposed to faith in Christ” “any of the law,” including “boundary markers,” with emphasis in Galatians on circumcision.
- Regarding the New Perspective on Paul (NPP), Keener agrees that “the older Christian depiction of Judaism as graceless is incorrect,” observes that the New Perspective is hardly monolithic, and finds in some version of it “an important and fuller corrective of older approaches that viewed Paul as leading a new religion,” without endorsing NPP without qualification.

We think Keener’s heart for the outworking of the gospel in life today may be expressed most clearly in his “Bridging [the] Horizons” feature titled “Unity and/or Equality in Principle Only or Also in Practice?” in the NCBC edition. It isuntitled in the Baker edition but over twice the length of the same feature in the NCBC. Keener discusses the application of Gal 3:28 to gender equality. Confessedly egalitarian, Keener nonetheless surveys hermeneutical options and insists “one can hardly say that Gal. 3:28
addresses ‘only’ salvation as if salvation itself lacks transformative implications for relationships” (291) while stopping short of insisting that the proper interpretation of this crux interpretum demands a thoroughgoing egalitarianism in marriage or church ministry. Not controverted but appreciated is Keener’s comments about the Galatians’ experience of receiving the Spirit and the force of that reception as receiving Abraham’s blessing, as giving a foretaste of the coming world, and as “the nonnegotiable mark of true followers of Jesus.” His commentary emphasizes the importance of the Spirit and of believers’ experience of him to Paul’s argument against his opponents and to believers’ ethical life.

The publishers may wish to consider these suggestions for future printings or a revision. We wonder why the Keener translation in the Baker edition of the whole of Galatians indents each verse as if beginning a new paragraph rather than gathering verses in paragraphs to disclose the flow of thought better. For both editions, we suggest locating the titles of the features in the Contents pages among the titles of the units into which Keener has divided Galatians. We think displaying the features titles (“A Closer Look” and “Bridging [the] Horizons”) in the Contents where they occur among comments on Scripture units promotes readers’ relating them to the texts that anchor them. For the NCBC, we suggest revising the page design so each feature ends with line spacing sufficient to separate the end of the feature from the resumption of the commentary proper. It seems pages were composed (or formatted) inattentively, such that the copy marking “****” has been left at the end of most of the features without line spacing sufficient to separate feature from commentary (e.g., 69, 72, 85, 91). Lack of separation challenges readers to know where the feature ends and the commentary resumes. The twelve blank pages at the back of the book would be more than enough to absorb any shifting of text to a later page that correcting the page composition would cause. And for the NCBC, could the designer enlarge the tiny font of note numerals so they are more legible?

The Baker edition is now available in the USA in hardcover discounted for about $40US, as an e-book for about $35US, and as a Logos.com title for more. The NCBC edition is available in the USA both as hardcover (about $78US) and softcover (about $30US) as well as a Cambridge University Press DRM-free e-book ($215US).

We recommend both editions for overlapping but distinct uses: both for libraries and the Baker for Galatians scholars, while the briefer NCBC, which presumes no knowledge of Greek, can serve as a primary text for most undergraduate, seminary, and even church Bible classes (with serious lay students) on Galatians. The Baker version belongs in all library reference collections and promotes intensive study at a higher level for students who know some Greek (many Greek words and phrases
occur, along with transliteration) but do not require commentary on primarily the Greek.

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Vinson Synan’s life story tells how a faithful son of a Pentecostal Holiness bishop—Joseph Alexander Synan—came to hold a place of distinction in the global Spirit-empowered movement, his influence far exceeding the bounds of his own denomination. The book begins with a preface written by one of Synan’s former students, A. D. (“Doug”) Beacham, Jr., followed by the author’s introduction. Then comes over 200 pages (fourteen chapters) of the main body of the text, followed by a bibliography of the author’s publications and an index.

In the preface, Beacham extols the distinction Synan had of “being both maker and chronicler of history” (7). In addition to pointing out Synan’s contribution to the Pentecostal church in the United States as its historian-in-chief, Beacham enumerates the many other roles Synan played throughout his lifetime including “professor, church planter, musician, academic dean, writer, denominational executive, organizer, preacher, and networker,” as well as mentor and truth-speaker (7). At the risk of making this review hagiographical in tone, I must add that, for those privileged to have known him personally, Synan was also a warm friend and compelling exemplar of positivity and gentleness. (I write this only a day after the passing of this modern-day Pentecostal saint on March 15, 2020, at the age of 85.)

In his introduction to Where He Leads Me, Synan traces his family back not to Scotch-Irish Protestants, as some had thought, but to a Catholic Irish family who from the twelfth century were land- and castle-owners in southern Ireland. After Cromwell invaded in the mid-1600s, the Catholic family was forced to sell their 12,000-acre estate to a Protestant family for a pittance of 300 pounds. Two centuries later, one of Synan’s ancestors came to America as a cabin boy and, stranded as a result of the War of 1812, later married and settled in Virginia. Though he remained Catholic, some of his descendants became Baptists, although Vinson’s father was a Methodist who became Pentecostal Holiness, which explains how it was that Synan was born into a Pentecostal
family. Synan humorously admits that as a young man he was “more afraid of Catholics than of communists or rattlesnakes” (90). In the latter part of his introduction, Synan ties his early Catholic ancestral ties to his first encounter with Catholic Charismatics on the Notre Dame University campus in 1972. When he first heard the voices of some 8,000 Roman Catholics singing in the Spirit, he wept as he realized that “the circle was now complete. My deep Irish Catholic roots were now connecting with my Pentecostal faith in a marvelous way” (14). Synan tells that part of his story in greater detail in chapter 6.

While this first experience with Catholic Charismatics would transform Synan’s understanding of the move of the Spirit and lead him to devote much of his life to promoting that movement across denominational lines and around the world, he always remained true to his Pentecostal-Holiness faith and vigilant against any compromise of his beliefs. No doubt, his being a historian rather than a theologian was why Synan said he found it difficult to understand the Catholic view of Spirit-baptism as an “‘actualization’ of what was received at baptism and confirmation,” as Fr. Kilian McDonnell—one of the first Catholic scholars of the Charismatic renewal—had described it; nevertheless, Synan believed “that this approach was the only one that would allow the movement to continue and grow in the Catholic system” (92). As Synan recounts in the rest of his memoir, he would have many opportunities to encounter Catholic Charismatics throughout his life, not least having audiences with Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis as well as speaking to 35,000 Catholics gathered at the Circus Maximus in Rome for “the Golden Jubilee of the Catholic Charismatic renewal in Rome” as recently as 2017 (209–10).

Synan’s memoir covers the major events of his life including his Pentecostal upbringing; his marriage to Carol Lee Fuqua and the birth of their four children; his education including his doctoral work at the University of Georgia; his publications including his dissertation, The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States, as well as over two dozen other volumes; his leadership in the Pentecostal Holiness Church including overseeing the trial of a bishop; and his work as organizer of numerous Pentecostal-Charismatic conferences, the highlight being undoubtedly the 1977 Kansas City conference with an attendance of some 50,000. He also treats his academic work including an early point in his career when he taught history at Emmanuel College in Franklin Springs, Georgia, and then later working as Dean of the School of Divinity at Regent University, Virginia Beach, Virginia, where he worked diligently to enable Regent to become the first university to gain ATS accreditation for an online PhD-in-theology program. He also covers his two tenures at Oral Roberts University, Tulsa,
Oklahoma, the first as director of the Holy Spirit Research Center and the second as Interim Dean of the College of Theology and Ministry.

Synan also briefly tells the story of how he, along with William Menzies and Horace Ward, conceived the idea of a professional society dedicated to Pentecostal studies, which would allow Pentecostal scholarship to develop far beyond anything that would have been imagined in the early decades of Pentecostalism when its adherents were largely uneducated. The society became known as the Society for Pentecostal Studies (SPS), which was to have convened its 49th meeting in March 2020 but was postponed until 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Having organized national Pentecostal and Charismatic conferences throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Synan began working with Billy Wilson who—prior to becoming president of ORU—had been selected organizer of the Azusa Street Centennial celebration. After Synan’s successful participation in that event in 2006, Wilson asked him to accompany him on trips to various cities around the world, which Synan did despite enduring significant health issues. Greatly impressed by Wilson’s organizational skills, Synan then worked with him on Empowered21, including—with Amos Yong—editing four volumes on the global Spirit-empowered movements.

Wilson then asked Synan to serve as Interim Dean of ORU’s College of Theology and Ministry following Thomson Mathew’s resignation, which Synan did, in his memoir praising then Associate Dean, Cheryl Iverson, for her invaluable assistance during that transitional time. After Wonsuk Ma accepted the deanship, Synan was invited to remain at ORU as Scholar in Residence. Synan worked with Ma and Eric Newberg, one of his former Regent PhD students, to establish ORU’s PhD in Theology, which offered its first courses in the Fall 2019. Synan would live until shortly after ORU’s first PhD residency (Spring 2020).

As Synan explains, his autobiography borrows heavily, with the publisher’s permission, from his earlier book, An Eyewitness Remembers the Century of the Holy Spirit (Chosen Books, 2010). The memoir accents the highlights of the life of the author, who played a key role in the global advancement of the Pentecostal and the Charismatic Movement, now called the Spirit-empowered movement. In Where He Leads Me, Synan also updates the account of his life and work since 2010.

I highly recommend the Vinson Synan autobiography to any student or teacher of church history—especially Pentecostal history—because the story of the Spirit-empowered movement in the United States and beyond cannot be fully understood without understanding Synan’s key role in it.

Furthermore, virtually any reader of Synan’s book will want to supplement it with Daniel Isgrigg’s twelve-hour interview of Synan, Where the Spirit Leads Me: An Oral
History of the Life and Ministry of Vinson Synan, Ph.D. (2019), which is freely available on ORU’s Digital Showcase at https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/synan/. The interview is well organized, evenly paced, and well worth every minute it takes to listen, with Synan, as always, his animated, compelling storyteller self.

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In Is It of God? A Biblical Guidebook for Spiritual Discernment, Paul King states his thesis early and straightforwardly: the necessity that believers acquire the ability to discern whether “an unusual teaching, practice or manifestation is from God” (xii). In the first chapter, the author pursues his thesis by asking and answering a series of questions beginning with the foundational question, “Why do we need discernment?” In answer, he posits that both the Old and New Testaments call for the skill of discernment in the community of God. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *bin* is used to exhort the people to turn their minds upon and to understand, while the New Testament community is encouraged by the use of the Greek verb *krino* to “judge” and by the noun *krisis* to practice sound and godly judgment.

In the second chapter, King offers twelve practical, biblical responses to the earlier posed “why” question. With accompanying scriptural references, the author establishes a broad biblical context for discernment among God’s faith community throughout the ages. Discernment is deemed necessary because (1) God is pleased with believers’ desire to discern, (2) not all spirits are from God, (3) not all that is supernatural is from God, (4) not all angels of light are from “The Light,” (5) believers can be deceived, (6) even the innocent can be deceived, (7) believers are commanded to examine all supernatural things carefully, (8) Scripture can be mishandled and misused, (9) believers can mishear the voice of God, (10) it is important to distinguish spirit from flesh as well as (11) the fleshly from the demonic, and, finally, because (12) the natural mind is insufficiently discerning.

Having established the need for discernment by exhaustively answering the “why” question, King addresses the “what” question by offering what he calls the seven “main biblical foundation blocks” (15) as the basis for “true” discernment, which must be (1) God-given, (2) Christ-centered, (3) Spirit-guided, (4) prayer-saturated, (5) scripturally
based, (6) corporately confirmed, and (7) divinely balanced. To be effective, the principles of the practice of discernment that King proposes in chapter 3 must be based on this foundation.

In the third chapter, King presents basic principles to be regularly practiced in the effort to truly discern, rightly hear, and aptly respond to God’s voice and will. The author offers these principles of discernment as a template for both individuals and communities. When an issue demanding discernment presents itself, King suggests the following process—based on the acronym DISCERNS—Discover a biblical precedent, Investigate the scriptural harmony, Scrutinize for sound doctrine, Confirm with experience, Examine the fruit, Receive supernatural discernment, Note examples and lessons from the past, and Sift and weigh for divine equilibrium. With these foundational blocks in place and the principles functioning as a guide, King proposes that true discernment is not only possible, but probable.

The next twelve chapters (4–15) deal with various issues and questions concerning discernment. The issues range from nuances pertaining to discernment (ch. 4), limitations of discernment (ch. 5), unbiblical v. non-biblical issues related to discernment (ch. 6), discernment v. judgment (ch. 7), questionable claims of discernment (ch. 9), discerning true and false use of Scripture (ch. 10), and discerning true and counterfeit revival (ch. 14). The questions include whether all discernment is from God (ch. 8), whether cessationism or continuism is of God (chs. 11–12), whether miracles are always from God (ch. 13), and, lastly, why revival is so messy (ch. 15).

While chapters 4–15 offer much valuable information, the next four (chs. 16–19) are even more helpful in that they offer instruction as to how to apply practically the foundational principles established in the first four chapters. In chapter 16, King offers a method to exercise discernment in respect to true and false manifestations. Some particularly helpful strategic tools King offers at this point are eight identifying marks of a counterfeit as well as seventeen qualifying questions. In chapter 17, King focuses on the ability to discern between the Spirit, the flesh, and the demonic by supplying scriptural definitions and examples for each of these realms as well as a chart outlining the spectrum of what he calls the “ten levels of demonic degression” (295–96), which illustrate how one might go from wrong thoughts in the first level to demonic control in the tenth. King uses Ananias and Sapphira, Simon Magus, and Judas Iscariot as compelling examples of how individuals can regress towards the lowest level of spiritual “degression.”

Chapter 19—the final overtly instructional chapter—is a succinct “how-to” approach towards the development of spiritual discernment. King entitles it, “How to Develop Spiritual Discernment” (314). As described, Is It of God? offers a myriad of
questions and issues along with related charts, graphs, and templates. Finally, however, King boils it down to four steps that must be taken to establish a rhythmic lifestyle of true discernment: (1) pray, (2) be humble, (3) know who the enemy is, and, finally, (4) train one’s spiritual eyes and ears.

*Is It of God?* provides a wealth of information on the topic of spiritual discernment. Stylistically, it is both academic and practical, providing ample in-text linguistic insights and helpful endnotes, while remaining palatable and attainable for the layperson. Historically broad, theologically sound, and practically applicable in numerous contexts, the book will serve as a unique resource that focuses not only on Spirit-empowered orthodoxy but also on orthopraxy. Works of this genre tend to focus on one of these elements or the other, but here King has endeavored to do both and has done so successfully, making this a helpful resource for the parish, the classroom, and the prayer closet. For pastors, it is readily useable for expounding the need for “true” spiritual discernment. For teachers, it will provide substantive information for classroom presentations; and for laypeople, it will serve as a companion in their daily quest to hear the voice of God in their own hearts and homes.

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