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In my now eight years of serving as lead editor of *Spiritus*, I have had opportunity to consider articles submitted by Spirit-empowered scholars that cover a broad spectrum of topics. Many times, these articles appear in the pages of the journal; others are not accepted, but still demonstrate the breadth of interests among these scholars. In the past year, Oral Roberts University (ORU), the institutional home of *Spiritus*, has undergone an organizational reordering that has resulted in the formation of the Center for Spirit-empowered Research (C4SER). Under the direction of Wonsuk Ma, the C4SER is tasked with facilitating the university’s scholarly efforts to serve the worldwide Spirit-empowered Movement through efforts to support faculty, students, and friends of the university in their scholarly work. *Spiritus* and other publishing activities are often the fruits of such scholarly enquiry. My role as editor of this journal has occasioned me to consider with increasing frequency just what we mean by “Spirit-empowered research.” Is it research that focuses only on topics of interest to the Spirit-empowered Movement? Certainly it includes this focus, but is the term sufficiently expansive to include topics that may be of interest to Spirit-empowered believers and communities, but may also be of interest to those who would not self-identify as Spirit-empowered believers? It often appears that “Spirit-empowered” is simply a synonym for “Pentecostal” or “Charismatic.” But does the term “Spirit-empowered” also lend itself to an understanding that it applies to the totality of the work of the Holy Spirit that does not exclusively entail the experiences typical of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity? Surely traditions that appeal to the work of the Spirit apart from *charismata* are covered under the heading “Spirit-empowered,” aren’t they?

Of course, there is nothing inappropriate about an entity that seeks to focus on what might be described as the purview of believers who would identify as Pentecostal or Charismatic. Scholarship undertaken from this specific orientation is a relatively recent phenomenon, embodied, though not exclusively, by the formation of the Society for Pentecostal Studies (SPS). It is reasonable that scholars in this group would conduct research into biblical, theological, and historical topics that are of particular interest to Pentecostal-Charismatic believers. For the first several decades following the Azusa Street revival, it appears that more generic evangelical scholarship provided the scholarly
context for Pentecostal-Charismatic believers as they focused on their missional efforts viewed largely as evangelism. As the movement has matured, it has grown to view scholarship as an appropriate expression of its faith. And I have been privileged to contribute to this effort in my role as editor of Spiritus.

What I often bristle at is the implication, conscious or not, that the only audience that may be labeled “Spirit-empowered” is one that self-identifies with church communities that are of more traditional Pentecostal-Charismatic stripes. In 1980 I became a Christian through the efforts of adherents of the Word of Faith Movement. I owe the beginnings of my spiritual journey to this particular Charismatic tradition. I spent the first three or so years of my journey in such churches. I eventually moved to the United Methodist Church (UMC), particularly to a church in Tulsa that was formed by ORU seminary professors who sought to form a community that held to the best of Wesleyan and Charismatic spirituality, and I pursued ordination in the UMC while I attended the seminary at ORU during the time it was an accepted institution for the training of UMC ministerial candidates. Over the course of my time in the UMC, which consisted of nine years of pastoral ministry and many years on faculty at ORU, I self-identified as a “charismatic,” lower-case “c,” United Methodist. And for the past almost nine years, I have identified confessionally as an Eastern Orthodox Christian. I still include those original moorings of my Christian walk in Charismatic Christianity as part of my spirituality to this day. I consider myself charismatic. But I have often encountered the charge that I am not “Spirit-empowered” due to this identification. As an aside, I am more convinced now that Eastern Orthodox and Pentecostal expressions of Christianity have much in common and that this may serve as an impetus for these two strands of Christianity to engage in dialogue. I have often participated in SPS conferences, and in the present I have been invited by many traditional Pentecostal-Charismatic scholars to contribute to studies concerning Pentecostalism and popular culture and ecological engagement. Certainly this community of “Spirit-empowered” believers considers me one of their own. I fear that the moniker “Spirit-empowered” may become rather parochial, when it actually opens this movement to see itself as a vital contributor to the larger Christian community as it also serves its own constituency. If I recall correctly the history of the Pentecostal Movement I learned as a seminary student at ORU, this is how the earliest Pentecostals saw themselves.

This issue consists of seven articles that explore a broad range of topics, and in a couple of instances, it explores topics that extend beyond a narrow definition of “Spirit-empowered.” The issue opens with a rather serendipitous study by Daniel Bunn of Oral Roberts’ use of a scholarly biblical commentary. As he was giving his students a tour of

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the library at ORU, he happened across a commentary on Exodus by Israeli scholar Umberto Cassuto that had previously been owned by Roberts in which he underlined and wrote margin notes on various passages in the commentary. Bunn places Roberts’ reading of the commentary in the tumultuous period of Roberts’ life in which he owned and studied the commentary. He explores Roberts’ engagement with the commentary in order to discern how Roberts’ own reading habits of this work were later incorporated into a sermon published in the periodical Abundant Life in 1985. The resulting study is a revealing insight into how one of the giants of twentieth-century Spirit-empowered Christianity availed himself of the insights of biblical scholarship.

Lora Angeline E. Timenia follows with a hermeneutical proposal for Asian Pentecostal hermeneutics that builds upon the triadic models developed by Kenneth Archer and Amos Yong. The result is a quadrilectic model that she argues is more appropriate for Asian hermeneutical contexts, adding consideration of the Asian context to the triad of Spirit, Scripture, and tradition. Clyde Glandon contributes a study of the work of Charismatic Roman Catholic Abbot David Geraets in bringing together the Pentecostal practice of glossolalia with the Eastern Orthodox Jesus Prayer. Geraets argued that glossolalia and the Jesus Prayer mutually enhance the practice of these two modes of prayer. Glandon argues that this often overlooked figure provides a crucial contribution that would greatly benefit the spiritual lives of Spirit-empowered believers who seek a deeper experience of prayer. Ivan Hartsfield contributes a study that examines the concept of holiness as wholeness in Afro-Pentecostal tradition, drawing on the example of the Church of God in Christ (COGIC). Drawing on the thought of C. H. Mason, Hartsfield argues that the COGIC understands holiness as entailing the “human flourishing of the total person,” resulting in an experience of holiness that is available to all people, not just those considered “saints.”

The issue concludes with three studies that focus on African Christianity. First, Rebecca Attah, Christine Avortri, Emmanuel Appah, and Alexander Preko present the findings of a qualitative research study that examined the responses of religious persons following the financial sector clean-up efforts by governmental agencies in Ghana designed to alleviate corruption in the country’s financial system. The results of this effort caused significant distress to individuals. The study addresses two religious responses to the suffering experienced by people—“faith” and “leave it to God”—coping mechanisms that customers employ to address circumstances that lay outside their ability to influence directly. The authors suggest that these two responses, largely ignored by financial management literature, may be profitably considered in future studies. Though not explicitly focused on Spirit-empowered believers, the study is an example of how Spirit-empowered researchers may contribute to research on topics that involve Spirit-empowered believers in the larger social context. Fred Cudjoe Adadey and Barnabas Yisa follow with a study of the contribution that African Pentecostals may
make in the area of development in Western Africa. Drawing on research conducted in two large churches—the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Nigeria, and the Church of Pentecost, Ghana—the authors demonstrate how these Pentecostal groups contribute to the social and political landscape in light of the growing sense that Pentecostal mission entails engagement in social arenas. In the final article, Justice A. Arthur and Lydia Andoh-Quainoo examine how the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced church attendance in Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in Ghana. Employing the concept of religious economy, the authors employ a survey of church leaders and attendees to gauge the attitudes and practices regarding church attendance in terms that view church leaders as marketers of religious products and attendees as consumers of these products. The study looks at how participants in the survey viewed church attendance in the pre-COVID-19, COVID-19, and post-COVID-19 periods, observing how the pandemic has affected church attendance behaviors, both in negative and positive ways.

Four book reviews close out the issue.

The scope of these articles demonstrates the breadth of topics available for research for Spirit-empowered scholars. Many times the topics are specific to the Spirit-empowered Movement; other times they exemplify how these scholars might participate in studies that address concerns of the larger Christian community. In each case, the results are fruitful contributions to Spirit-empowered scholarship.

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Having happened upon what was previously Oral Roberts’ personal copy of the commentary on Exodus by Umberto Cassuto, I observed his active interaction with the volume by way of notes and underlines. I determined to analyze his interaction with it. This essay shares the results of the analysis of that book. It begins with a brief overview of his personal life during the time in which he possessed the commentary. Then, it makes observations about his interaction, showing specific examples. Finally, it will look more intently at a sermon in which his use of the commentary is made explicit.

Introduction

On a biennial basis, I teach a class on the book of Exodus. The culmination of this class is an analytical paper on a selected passage from the book. In preparing the students for that process, I often take them to the library to acquaint them with some of the most valuable resources. This usually involves pointing out the many exemplary commentaries that have been written over the centuries on this momentous book of the Bible.

On one such occasion, I opened for them the distinguished volume written by the late Umberto Cassuto, Professor of Bible at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The volume—a translation of the original Hebrew in which he wrote it—is a staple in close investigation of the book of Exodus. As I flipped open the cover to show the students, I was surprised by the signature of a familiar figure: Oral Roberts. This particular volume was at one time a part of his personal library. As I flipped further, I was surprised to see detailed notes, underlining, and other markings throughout the book. As someone who has been significantly shaped by the life and ministry of Oral Roberts, I sensed that I was peering through the window to see Oral himself, at work in his study. I decided to sit with this volume in order to see what might emerge from it.
In this article, I wish to share some of the results of that process. I will begin by considering the timeframe in which Oral Roberts possessed the volume so as to situate his engagement with the text within his own life’s context. I will then synthesize observations made about his interaction with the commentary, looking at examples along the way. Finally, I will consider in depth a sermon in which his use of this commentary is made explicit, thereby exploring some of the ways in which he moved from study to sermon.

**A Tumultuous Decade**

When did Oral Roberts possess and use this commentary? Being able to situate the volume chronologically might help us to plumb its significance for him. As I moved further into my investigation, I observed two key pieces of data in this regard. First, below Roberts’ signature inside the cover, he included a date: “1–78.” This, then, is the *terminus a quo*—January 1978.

![Figure 1](image)

Also on the cover is a stamped sticker with the following: Presented to Oral Roberts University Library/Theology Library by President Roberts, April 6, 1990. That provides the *terminus ad quem*.
I want to consider what took place during this timeframe in the life of Oral Roberts. I want to proceed with caution, though. On the one hand, such an effort to situate the commentary within his life might help to offer further insight into the ways in which he was engaging the volume. On the other hand, the attempt could falsely lead to unsubstantiated conclusions about particular comments that he writes in the commentary and their possible connection to real-life events. I offer the summary of this time period in his life with the intent of staying closer to the former while avoiding the latter.

The beginning of this time period is enshrouded with heavy burdens. A consideration of this time period must begin with an event that took place nearly one year before Roberts received the book. On February 11, 1977, Roberts endured what no parent should: his eldest child, Rebecca Roberts Nash, 37, was tragically killed with five other people as their plane crashed in a storm over Kansas.¹

With that loss not even one year in behind him, another significant event happened in the life of Roberts, one that would cause ripples for years to come. On January 24, 1978—which also happened to be his sixtieth birthday—ground was broken for the City of Faith. Cathy Carothers of *Communiqué*—a publication for Oral Roberts University (ORU) alumni, at the time—captured Roberts’ statements at the event:

> “Today is dreary and overcast,” said President Roberts, as he celebrated his 60th birthday by breaking ground, “and that’s the condition that millions of people are in. They have depressed minds, sick bodies, spirits that are down, and they’re

looking for the sun to break through the clouds. And the Bible says, ‘The Son of Righteousness will rise with healing in His wings.’”

The years following this event would be marked by active efforts to see the project through to completion.

Famously, it was during this period that Roberts indicated that he had experienced a vision of Jesus. In the September 1980 issue of Abundant Life, he included a letter to donors that described the event. In a section entitled, “I’VE SEEN JESUS,” he says:

He came to me five times in a period of an hour and a half as I stood up close in front of the CITY OF FAITH structure, beginning at 7:00 p.m., May 25. The CITY OF FAITH is over 600 feet tall. I saw Jesus appear, and He looked like He stood at least 900 feet tall. I saw Him bend down and put His hands UNDER the unfinished CITY OF FAITH structure and lift it and say, “See how easy it is for Me to lift it?” (emphasis original)

His depiction of his experience would be the source of ridicule for decades to come. Certainly in the years immediately following, many were skeptical that his vision was an elaborate ruse to get the money needed to fund the building project.

The City of Faith was dedicated on November 1, 1981. In some ways, the event represented the hard-won victory of the dream Roberts had for this facility. Sue Smith, with The Oklahoman, reported that approximately 12,000 people filled the Mabee Center. Included among that number were “television evangelists Rex Humbard and Pat Robertson, Tulsa Mayor Jim Inhofe, Gov. George Nigh, Congressman Jim Jones, former football player and television performer Rosie Grier, country-western singer Barbara Mandrell [who sang the National Anthem] and a delegation from the government of Kenya.” The event brought national attention. At the ceremony, Congressman Jones read a letter of congratulations from an unnamed sender. At the conclusion of the letter, he announced the sender’s name: President Ronald Reagan.

What followed in subsequent years, however, casts a shadow back over the dedication festivity. Though not immediately related to the City of Faith project, tragedy again struck the Roberts family as their eldest son, Ronald, died by suicide in 1982. One knows that such a loss for anyone would be devastating. But in Oral Roberts’ case, it was compounded. First, as was mentioned above, he lost his daughter

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in 1977. Thus, the entire process from groundbreaking to dedication was bookended by
the tragic loss of two of his children. Second, the public scrutinized Ronald’s death—its
nature, his life leading up to it, and the reality that he was Oral Roberts’ son. For
example, Bob Bonebrake, reporting during the aftermath in The Oklahoman, said,
“Growing up, Ronald Roberts watched as thousands of the sick and desperate came
searching for help. . . . It might have surprised many of those searchers to know the
younger Roberts was also searching for something, something he apparently never
found.”6 Implied in this reporting is that Oral Roberts was able to help many, yet he
could not help his own son.

Insufficient funding for the City of Faith likewise complicated the celebration of
the dedication of the complex. Entire issues of Abundant Life would be dedicated to
pleading with donors to send in support in order to fund the remainder of the project.
The cover of the special issue from February 1982 includes a picture of Roberts
preaching over a yellow background.7 At the top, in large, red letters, it says,
“EMERGENCY.” Down the side, it says, “HELP KEEP THIS MINISTRY ALIVE.”
The issue indicates that at the time of the opening of the City of Faith, the interior of
the buildings still remained about 80% incomplete.8 Roberts expresses the direness of
the situation, from his perspective:

This is a very, very special sermon. I hurt as I write it. I am facing the worst crisis
I’ve faced in my 35 years in this ministry of God’s Word. THE DEVIL IS
TRYING TO DESTROY THIS ENTIRE MINISTRY. And, partner, I need you
to keep it alive. Unless we get a continuous miracle—a breakthrough from heaven
for your life and mine—this ministry is gone. The City of Faith, where thousands
are being healed through the merging of medicine and prayer, will be closed. The
4,200 young people at Oral Roberts University will have to go home. Our
 television and radio outreach . . . will end. If this ministry dies, your letters to me
will not be answered. There’ll be no more ABUNDANT LIFE. . . . The Prayer
Tower will close. Millions of hurting people will not be helped. We’re in that kind
of financial crisis, and I’m here to tell you about it.9

Readers can sense the desperation that Roberts felt at that moment.

This desperate situation culminated with another notorious moment, as Roberts
claimed that if he did not raise necessary funding, then his life would end. In the
January–February 1987 issue of Abundant Life, he opened with the following: “As I

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6 Bob Bonebrake, “Reasons Behind Suicide of Evangelist’s Troubled Son Are Still a Mystery,”


have shared with you since last March, God gave me a mandate at that time to turn the ORU medical school into a total missionary outreach to the nations. He gave me one year to do it. And he said if I didn’t do it, my work would be done and He would call me home.”10 As the end of March drew near, Roberts planned to enter and remain in the Prayer Tower, fasting and praying, until the remaining money had been raised. Spokeswoman Jan Dargatz, quoted in the Los Angeles Times, said, “When Oral does this, it’s almost like a marathon, but he has trained for it. He prays every day.”11 The event drew heavy criticism from those inside and outside the church.

Two years later, in September 1989, eleven years after ground was broken for the City of Faith, Roberts announced that it would be closing. Whereas the issues of Abundant Life during those eleven years were replete with updates about the City of Faith, those issues that arrived in the months leading up to the announcement were notably silent on the building complex. Focus shifted to other ministry efforts and the university. The publication, which by this time had moved to every other month rather than monthly, did not even produce what would have been a September–October issue in 1989. The last headline related to the City of Faith came in the January–February 1989 issue: “A Neurosurgeon Joins the Staff of Spirit-filled Physicians at the City of Faith.”12

After the events of the previous decade, Roberts unsurprisingly came under further scrutiny as he announced the closing of the City of Faith. Robby Trammell and Jim Killackey, in an article in The Oklahoman entitled, “Roberts Urged Not to Build City of Faith Hospital in ’78,” said:

Tulsa State and local authorities tried to tell evangelist Oral Roberts in 1978 that his proposed City of Faith hospital was not feasible, that it would be a monumental mistake. But nothing seemed capable of stopping the high-rolling national television minister’s ambitious plans. . . . A more humbled Roberts announced Wednesday that the financially plagued hospital where God’s miracle healing power would be combined with the wonders of modern medicine would close by Jan. 1, affecting 600 employees.13

Writing in the Washington Post, Arnold Hamilton quoted a medical student who was attending the medical school at the time that the closing was announced:

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Medical student Pat Rice, 30, . . . said he was not surprised by the decision . . . “I’ve been here two and a half years and kind of watched things fall apart,” Rice said. “I’ve watched doctors leave in droves. I’ve watched classmates leave in droves. . . . I frankly don’t have a lot of confidence in the leadership here from what I’ve seen and experienced. You get told one thing and other things happen.”

The general time period during which Roberts possessed the commentary that is the subject of this article, then, was marked by some of the most extreme experiences of his career and personal life. Personally, he experienced severe tragedies. Professionally, he pursued perhaps his most ambitious plan to date. Though he would see some success along the way with the City of Faith, on the whole, the plan did not end as he had hoped it would. By fall 1989, the project had come to an end. Within a few months of the closing, Roberts would donate the commentary to the university.

**Oral Roberts Reads Umberto Cassuto**

I now want to look at Roberts’ engagement with the commentary. As noted above, the volume is filled with personal notes and interaction with the text. Roberts regularly marks the text itself and writes notes in the margins. In this section, I will examine the specific ways in which Roberts interacts with the commentary. In particular, I will focus on the three main ways he interacts with it: he repeats points made in the commentary; he summarizes points, often doing so through his own theological framework; and he reflects on pastoral implications of the points. I will suggest that these three methods of engagement, when taken together, indicate Roberts’ posture as an active learner. I will focus on his interaction with Exodus 1–2.

He is especially keen on numbers in these chapters. He underlines and rewrites a comment about the number 70: “70/indicates perfection of a family blessed with offspring.” He draws attention to the commentary’s discussion of “Seven expressions of increase”; he calls them “7 phases of increase,” and he lists them out in order.


15 As the notes in the commentary are handwritten, they can be difficult to determine clearly at points. When the text is in doubt, I will not attempt to conjecture. Emphasis added by capitals and underlining are original.


highlighted the commentary’s observation of uses of seven in Exodus: “7 is found often in Exodus.” An example that stood out to him was the word child: “child — occurs 7 times.”

He also seems drawn to discussions of multiply/increase. He wrote out a phrase from the commentary, “multiplied exceedingly,” and added a parenthetical gloss: “an overflowing measure.” He focused on the aforementioned “7 phases of increase,” writing out the details provided by the commentary. In reflecting on the commentary’s note about the affliction imposed on the Israelites in Exodus 1, he adds, “Satanic in origin—to stop them from growing.” He writes out the note from the commentary that “the more the latter [the Israelites] continued to multiply,” and adds: “very important.” He writes out from the commentary, “and the people multiplied and grew very mighty despite efforts of enemies.”

He paid special attention to the commentary’s discussion of the birth of Moses, speaking of the “miracle” of this event and the “seeds” that had been planted through faithfulness. He is first drawn to the example of the midwives. Summarizing a point made in the commentary, Roberts says, “Midwives of Pharaoh feared King of the Universe, not King of Egypt.” Being regularly drawn to steps and patterns, he paid special attention to the midwives: “Midwives helped Hebrews and were blessed for it—and the people multiplied and grew very mighty despite efforts of enemies.”

Roberts is likewise drawn to the demonstration of the faith of Moses’ mother. He shares the note from the commentary that Moses’ mother had placed Moses’ sister in a position to watch what would happen with the baby once he was placed in the river. He comments: “She expected a miracle! ([. . .] of what she did—her seed planted).” He lists eight steps in the miracle of Moses, which involved Pharaoh’s daughter, Moses’ mother, Moses’ sister, and Moses’ own crying. All converged to enable the rescue. The results would be blessing beyond what would have previously been possible, as Moses’

19 Cassuto, Exodus, 17.
20 Cassuto, Exodus, 21.
21 Cassuto, Exodus, 9.
22 Cassuto, Exodus, 9.
23 Cassuto, Exodus, 10.
24 Cassuto, Exodus, 15.
25 Cassuto, Exodus, 14.
26 Cassuto, Exodus, 15.
27 Cassuto, Exodus, 19.
own mother will now raise him for pay. Roberts adds, “Get a Hebrew wet nurse FOR YOU (planted a seed here).” 28

The miracle, for Roberts, would continue into Moses’ adulthood. He asks of the text, “How did Moses know that Hebrews were his brethren?” 29 He follows with his hypothesis, “Jochebed.” Though neither the text of Exodus nor the commentary are explicit, Roberts sees in every one of the mother’s actions intentionality that flowed out of her trust in and relationship with God.

He observes the commentary’s description of what motivates the adult Moses. He states from the commentary, “He LOOKED on their burdens just as his mother and Pharaoh’s daughter took pity on him, so he felt compassion on his brethren—their burden.” 30 Roberts reflected also on the role of the cries in the people in motivating the Lord’s response. He underlined the text of the commentary that said, “And God remembered.” He elaborated: “Listen: Are you groaning inside for deliverance?/Are you crying to God/Are you asking him to help you.” 31 He rewrote the following as a summary of the commentary’s point: “1. God heard 2. God remembered 3. God saw 4. God remembered . . . stage by stage God’s response to the groaning of the Ch. of Isr. and finally He decides to intervene on their behalf.” 32

One can sense, based on what he has selected to write out from the commentary, his theological concerns. His concern with multiply/increase occurred throughout his ministry. The language of miracles and planting seeds also stood center stage for much of his life. 33 These dimensions of his own theological reflection came together concretely in his hope to see the funding for the City of Faith to come to fruition. One does not have to probe too deeply to consider that during these years of his life, Roberts found in the story of Moses—the faith demonstrated in the women surrounding him, the miraculous nature of his early life, God’s use of him to deliver the people, the blessing that follows seemingly insurmountable trials—a template for his own longed-for success with the vision he saw for the City of Faith. This connection will be demonstrated explicitly in what follows.

28 Cassuto, Exodus, 20.
29 Cassuto, Exodus, 22.
30 Cassuto, Exodus, 22.
31 Cassuto, Exodus, 28.
32 Cassuto, Exodus, 29.
Sermon on Exodus 3

During the research for this project, I sought a tangible demonstration of Roberts’ use of this commentary in his writings. I searched especially through the issues of *Abundant Life*, since this was one of Roberts’ main forms of regular, public communication during the time at which he possessed the commentary. In most issues, he opened with a sermon. As one might imagine, the sermons were often directed toward encouraging readers of the hope that God would bring the vision of the City of Faith to pass. To my joy, I eventually discovered an issue from 1985 that included a sermon on Exodus 3. In this section, I will explore the connections between that sermon and Roberts’ engagement with the commentary. In particular, I will seek to accomplish two goals: (1) I will show how the sermon is more generally based on notes from the commentary, and (2) I will demonstrate specific moments at which Roberts explicitly uses the commentary.

On the cover of the November–December 1985 issue of *Abundant Life* are a Christmas tree background and two family photos—one of Richard and Lindsay Roberts and their child and the other of Oral and Evelyn Roberts. The caption reads, “From Our Hearts to Yours . . . Merry Christmas!” The opening page states: “Nearly 2,000 years ago this Christmas, Jesus Christ—the LIGHT of the world—was born into the world. Throughout the centuries, those who have followed him have carried that LIGHT to countless generations. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ this holiday season, remember that through our personal relationship with Him . . . ,” followed by, “We Are a Lighted People”—which is the title of his sermon on Exodus 3.34

His sermon opens by setting the stage for discussing Moses as an example of someone being used by God. Summarizing Exodus 2, he says, “As a man, Moses was rejected by his people and forced to live a life of exile.”35 This note does not appear in the commentary; it appears to be Roberts’ own interpretation. Following this summary comment, he expresses the main thesis: “From that encounter with God, Moses became a LIGHTED person. Through his obedience to God, he carried that LIGHT to countless generations to follow . . . so that you and I today, as followers of Jesus Christ, can also be a LIGHTED people.”36 The emphasis on lighted comes from the commentary, as will be demonstrated below. Following this introduction, he shares the text of Exodus 3:1–15.37

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After sharing the Scripture, he aims to draw a parallel between readers and Moses, the elders of Israel, and what God had called them to do. The basis of this parallel he expresses as follows: “Because you and I, as Christians, are also a called people, a chosen people, a people who are sent out into this world with a mission of bringing those who are still in bondage today out of darkness into His marvelous LIGHT.”

He then returns to the opening chapters of Exodus and the factors leading up to the birth of Moses. He mentions the rise of a new Pharaoh who did not know Joseph and who “saw a fruitfulness among the Israelites that he was determined to stop.”

This statement appears to be based on a combination of two notes that Roberts had written in the commentary. First, he underlines the commentary and states from it, “They ‘multiplied exceedingly’ (in overflowing measure).” Second, as stated above, Roberts notes regarding the commentary’s mention of Pharaoh’s affliction of the people of Israel that it was “Satanic in origin—to stop them multiplying.”

He then reflects in his sermon further on the intentions of Pharaoh and the experience of the people of Israel. He states, “[Pharaoh] determined to lay heavy burdens upon the Israelites and to increase their burdens until he had reduced them to slave status in Egypt.” This sentence appears to derive from the commentary’s discussion of the Hebrew word for serve as well as the name Hebrew itself. The commentary notes that the word for serve and the word for rigor occur seven times in total in Exodus 1:14 in order to drive home the servitude of the people. Regarding the name Hebrew, the commentary says, “In the Bible the children of Israel . . . are called Hebrews particularly when the writer has in mind their relationship to the foreign environment in which they find themselves . . . , and more especially when they are in the position of slaves. . . .” Roberts wrote out notes on both of these points. He wrote on the first point, “toil that breaks/that crushes.” On the second, he wrote, “1. Called chil (sic) of Israel when not slaves 2. Called Hebrews when in position of slaves.”

The next sentence in Roberts’ sermon says, “Soon they felt the hammerlike blows of the king’s burdens laid upon them.”48 In the commentary, he has written the note, “Their work was like hammer blows.”49 This comment of his seems to be the basis of his statement in the sermon. This is interesting, though, in light of what the commentary actually says: “The words [related to the Hebrew word for serve] follow one another in these verses like hammer blows. . . .”50 The author of the commentary is not talking about the nature of the work, but rather the use of words related to serve. Perhaps Roberts found in that metaphor useful language for reflecting on the experience of servitude; possibly he misunderstood what the author was communicating. In either case, his note in the commentary seems to be the basis for his statement in the sermon.

In the following paragraph in the sermon, Roberts seems to blend two moments in the Exodus narrative and their corresponding discussion in the commentary. First, he looks at Exodus 2 when he says, “When [the people of Israel were burdened by Pharaoh], the children of Israel cried, the Bible says. They cried brokenheartedly to the Lord for deliverance.” The statement that “the children of Israel cried,” including emphasis, appears to derive from the following in the commentary: “[T]he children of Israel cry out from their place of bondage.”51 The statement, “They cried brokenheartedly,” seems to come from the following: “‘From their bondage’ . . . the children of Israel were groaning brokenheartedly and crying unto God. . . .”52

Second, he states from Exodus 1, “Yet they grew in their oppression. The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied their numbers.”53 This statement seems to come from the following, which Roberts has underlined and labeled as “very important” in the commentary: “The more they sought to persecute the Israelites and to weaken them, the more the latter continued to multiply in increasing measure, as Scripture narrates: But . . . the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied . . . and the more they spread abroad.”54

Later in his sermon, Roberts considers the act of Moses’ mother constructing the basket and putting it in the river. He says, “I find it very interesting that the Word says that she ‘placed’ it upon the river. Because to me that one word indicates that God operates by a divine plan. He knows precisely what He’s doing in this world . . . and in

49 Cassuto, Exodus, 12.
50 Cassuto, Exodus, 12.
51 Cassuto, Exodus, 29.
52 Cassuto, Exodus, 29.
54 Cassuto, Exodus, 11.
In the commentary, the author highlights the use of the word *place*. He says, “The repetition of the word *placed* appears to imply that the mother put the ark down very gently, with the same tender care with which she had put the child in the ark.” Alongside this point, Roberts notes, “placed the bassinet *carefully* in the water.”

This seems to be the basis of Roberts’ statement in the sermon here. Roberts saw in the commentator’s words not only the care and intentionality of Moses’ mother, but through her acts, the care and intentionality of God.

Next, Roberts considers in his sermon the coincidence of Pharaoh’s daughter coming to the exact spot where Moses’ mother had placed him. He says, “And while the princess was bathing, the baby cried. Now there’s something very important here. When you read the Bible, you must remember that there’s nothing *accidental* in it. It says, ‘. . . the baby cried.’ He could have kept from crying until the princess had left, but he *cried* and she *heard* it.” In considering the scene involving Pharaoh’s daughter, the commentary says, “The thing that immediately attracted her attention was his weeping. He is crying, therefore he is not dead, but is suffering and arouses compassion.” Roberts notes in the commentary, “Baby cried at precise moment to

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gain her attention . . . his crying got to her—was suffering, aroused her compassion.”

He next considers in his sermon what resulted from the encounter: Moses’ mother “not only got to nurse and raise her own baby—who would have been killed had she not listened to God—but she was paid to do it!” In the commentary, Roberts had written out the following: “Paid to raise her own child, who had been condemned to death. No more anxious for his life.”

After ending his consideration of Exodus 1–2, he connects what he has observed to his readers’ experiences. He asks, “Do you think that that was just an accident? Do you think your life today is just an accident? No . . . Somebody planted a seed, somebody went to battle.” As was noted above, the language of “planting a seed” is found in Roberts’ notes in the commentary at just this point.

Roberts then moves into the main focus of the sermon, Exodus 3. He begins, “A bush on fire was not an uncommon sight on the mountain where Moses had gone with his sheep. But this one was different, and Moses could not turn his eyes away. For this bush burned, but it was not consumed by the fire. Its flame came up out of itself and lighted the bush and made it flame and shine to give a man a vision of God.”

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59 Cassuto, Exodus, 19.
61 Cassuto, Exodus, 20.
appears to come from a note in the commentary: “Although the bush . . . is commonly found in steppe country, and it is no unusual phenomenon for a bush dried by the summer’s heat to catch fire, yet the bush that Moses saw was not consumed in the flame. . . .”64 Further, the commentary says, “On this mountain Moses was vouchsafed a vision of God,” a note which Roberts has underlined.65 In reflecting on the discourse between the Lord and Moses, Roberts states in his sermon, “It’s interesting to me that the first thing God wanted Moses to do was to tell the people his testimony.”66 In a note written in the commentary, Roberts says, “Moses’ personal testimony: God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has appeared to ME/the God of your father—has appeared to ME.”67

Next, he comes in his sermon to what is perhaps the most intriguing connection between the sermon and the commentary. He says:

I have more than fifty commentaries on the Old Testament written by Jewish rabbis. In one commentary I was reading recently, the author brought out a point that is very meaningful to us today. He said that THE LIGHT THAT WAS IN THE BUSH LIGHTED MOSES! That was part of Moses’ testimony. In coming down to the elders of Israel, Moses said, in effect, “I am LIGHTED. I’ve been LIGHTED BY GOD and I’m bringing that LIGHT to you. You are now LIGHTED. And as LIGHTED PEOPLE we will now go to Pharaoh and say, ‘Let God’s people go.’” As I read that commentary, I bawled like a baby.68

The commentary under discussion says the following:

Another point: Moses and the elders were to tell Pharaoh that God lighted . . . upon them (to be exact: upon one of them on behalf of all of them), that means, that He revealed Himself to them by chance; whereas in the narrative above (v. 2) the verb appeared . . . occurs; so, too, when Moses speaks to the elders (v. 16) he uses the term has appeared . . . Also in this distinction between “appeared” and “lighted” there is discernible the intention to adapt the language to the Gentiles’ way of thinking. For in the Canaanite tongue the verb [lighted] signified a theophany. . . . Consequently, the Bible also uses this verb in accounts of theophanies to non-Israelites. . . . The words and now introduce, as usual, the conclusion: since our God has lighted upon us, we request your permission to go forth. . . .69

Readers can see the obvious connection here. The commentary to which Roberts refers is the commentary under discussion. The commentary’s explication of lighted is the basis of Roberts’ sermon. Roberts finds in the language a combination of experiential encounter with God followed logically by testimony to it. Further, we can thus safely say that Roberts interacted with this commentary toward the end of 1985.

Afterward, Roberts considers implications for readers. He says: “Recently a member of the American Medical Association was here on campus. And he let me know that prayer is no longer an issue in hospitals across this country. It all can be traced right here to this little spot of ground in Tulsa, Oklahoma, that’s been LIGHTED with the LIGHT OF GOD . . . where the bush is still burning.”  

He ends by stating, “Just one little bush—this university or that City of Faith, your church or your Christian school—is burning with the flame that comes up out of its own flame, out of God who has engulfed us, and WE ARE LIGHTED.”

He seeks to utilize Moses’ experience to motivate his readers to acknowledge their similar experience and their vocation to extend that light into the world.

Roberts’ sermon on Exodus 3 provided a unique opportunity to see how his thoughts could move from the latent state during his interaction with the Casuto commentary to the actualized form found in that sermon. Often, he demonstrates his reliance on the expertise of the commentator. He even allows himself to be vulnerable in sharing how a section of the commentary moved him emotionally as he read it. Overall, he implicitly reveals his posture as an active learner. But he does not merely repeat what he has read there; he also engages it and interacts with it, plumbing its depths for pastoral implications.

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Conclusion

In this essay, I have sought to reflect on Oral Roberts’ use of the commentary on Exodus written by Umberto Cassuto. The impetus for this was my happenstance discovery of what was previously his personal copy of this commentary, filled with notes and interaction. I began by sketching important events from the time period during which he possessed this volume. I then made some broad-brush comments about the types of interaction found within the volume. Finally, I moved to a more substantial comparison and analysis of the commentary itself, his interaction within the commentary, and his sermon on Exodus 3.

As someone who has been deeply influenced by the life and ministry of Oral Roberts as well as someone who studies the Old Testament, I have benefited tremendously from this exercise. One does not often have the opportunity to access such a personal, intimate item from someone who lived such a public life. I have attempted to walk lightly into the journey. The result has been a deeper appreciation for the intentionality with which Oral Roberts studied Scripture. Throughout, he positions himself as someone who is willing and eager to learn from others. Especially crucial in that regard was witnessing the journey of his note in the commentary on God “lighting” on Moses to its presence in his sermon. It is apparent that this portion of the commentary truly moved him—academically and spiritually. My hope is that this essay can contribute, in some small way, to a deeper appreciation for Oral Roberts, a man whose life and testimony have influenced many.

In retrospect, we might consider the City of Faith a failed project. That story of Roberts’ ministry did not end as he had expected. But from another vantage point, we might admire the vision Roberts had. At a time when many other pastors might have pushed for the separation of medicine and faith, Roberts insisted that medicine was a good gift from God for the healing of those who hurt. Likewise, his willingness to take up and read the commentary by Cassuto testifies to his belief that such resources can be gifts from God, and that we honor God and grow in our faith as whole people—spirit, body, and mind.

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A Proposed Pentecostal Quadrilectic

Explorations for Asian Pentecostal Hermeneutics

Lora Angeline E. Timenia

Keywords Asian, Pentecostal, hermeneutics, quadrilectic, dialectic exegesis, contextual, contextualization, pneumatological lens

Abstract

Developing a general framework for Asian Pentecostal hermeneutics is necessary for a continent where the Holy Bible is “Scripture among scriptures.” Although Pentecostal Christianity in Asia is growing, interpreting Scripture in a manner relevant to local contextual realities is necessary to propagate grassroots theologies. As such, the current Pentecostal hermeneutical triad of Spirit-Scripture-Community (Archer) or Spirit-Word-Community (Yong) needs further articulations of a reader’s tradition and cultural/ethnic contexts. The concept of an interpretive “Pentecostal community” needs clarification in the Asian setting where multiple interpretative communities exist. This study proposes a framework that recognizes the dialectical role of the text’s context and the reader’s context in biblical interpretation. The offered framework is a quadrilectic—a dialectic of Spirit-Scripture-Tradition-Context. Modifying Yung Suk Kim’s critical contextual biblical interpretation with the pneumatological lens of Craig Keener’s Spirit hermeneutics, the author suggests that Asian readers (in this study, Filipino Pentecostals) use a pneumatological lens (ala Keener) in their critical contextual biblical interpretation.

Introduction

The development of identity hermeneutics, in this case, Asian Pentecostal hermeneutics, owes its aegis to the prevailing realization that biblical interpretation is contextual and that no construal occurs without a reader’s method or judgment. In his book, Biblical Interpretation: Theory, Process, Criteria, Yung Suk Kim writes, “Interpretation means explaining a text from a wide array of perspectives.” He does not mean that perspective trumps all in exegesis; perspective, in the form of contextual lenses, plays a vital role in the negotiation of meaning. Kim explains, “Biblical

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interpretation involves three layers of difficulties (the text, translation, and
interpretation) and three elements of interpretation (the text, the reader, and the
theological lens).” Accordingly, biblical interpretation must be both critical and
contextual in that both the historical-literary context of the text and the fluid contexts
of the actual or intended readers must be in a mutual dialogue.

Critical contextual interpretation is nothing new. The apostles in the New
Testament practiced critical contextualization of Scripture as they entered new cultures
in the propagation of the gospel. Andrew Walls explained it well:

Theological activity arises out of Christian mission and Christian living, from the
need for Christians to make Christian choices and to think in a Christian way.
This compulsion to think in a Christian way becomes more powerful and more
urgent whenever the gospel crosses a cultural frontier since the process of crossing
cultural frontiers almost inevitably creates situations not previously encountered by
Christians, and a different climate of thought poses intellectual questions not
considered before.3

For example, in Acts 11:19–21, in the endeavor to introduce Jesus to the Gentiles in
Antioch, evangelists used the word *kyrios* (Lord), a word customarily attributed to cultic
deities, instead of the Jewish word, *messiah*.4 Yet, *Kyrios Iesous* (Lord Jesus) effectively
translated the Jewish concept and served its purpose in introducing the identity of Jesus
to the Gentiles. History proved it to be effective as Acts 11:21 records, “The Lord’s
hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.”5

As Christianity spread in the first century, Jesus’ followers had to wrestle with how
to live the Christian life amid a pluralistic and Hellenistic society; they wrestled with the
tensions of the Jewish tradition, Jesus’ Way, and grassroots realities. The Apostle to the
Gentiles, Paul, spent much of his ministry responding to these interpretative issues,
writing occasional and pastoral epistles to the toddling New Testament church. No
wonder Jesus promised the empowerment of the Holy Spirit before the commencement
of his disciples’ witness (Acts 1:8), and glossolalia (speaking in other tongues) became
the demonstrable sign of such empowerment (Acts 2:4). I propose that this promised
pneumatic empowerment was crucial in the communication of Jesus’ message and way
of living to a world of diverse languages and contexts.

This point brings us back to the issue of developing an Asian Pentecostal
hermeneutic. As Christianity advances with its sacred Scripture, the Bible, Christians in

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5 Unless otherwise noted, Scriptural verses are taken from the New International Version, 2011.
Asia face multitudinous contextual issues and competing interpretative communities. Early Christians’ questions still bother Christians in Asia today: how does one contend for the faith in different contextual milieus? How does one live a Spirit-empowered life amid competing religious spirits? In the face of these queries, how an Asian Pentecostal interprets Scripture matters.

This article no longer concerns itself with answering the questions of necessity and significance. The fact that Christianity in Asia is still a minority and that Christian Scripture is one of the sacred texts in the continent provides the impetus for delving into critical contextual biblical interpretation. Perhaps a more appropriate question is: what elements are needed to develop an Asian Pentecostal hermeneutic?

At the outset, this article proposes that an Asian Pentecostal hermeneutic comprises the quadrilectic elements of Scripture, Spirit, tradition, and context. That is to say, in the process of critical contextual biblical interpretation, the Asian Pentecostal hermeneut holds in dialectical tension the mediation of the Holy Spirit, the historical-literary context of Scripture, Pentecostal tradition, and the reader’s Asian context.

Delineating Concepts and Assumptions

Delineating Concepts

Loaded discussions and unclear definitions surround some of the terms or concepts used in this article. A few important terms will be delineated. The key terms to be defined here are Asian, Pentecostal, Asian Pentecostal, critical contextual biblical interpretation, and context.

**Asian**

The word “Asian” is a descriptive term that refers to people, languages, customs, religions, and cultures native to the Asian continent. Asia is vast and diverse as the world’s largest and most populous continent. It comprises five geopolitical identities: Western Asia, Central Asia, South Asia, Eastern Asia, and Southeastern Asia. Because of its diversity, Asia cannot be viewed in monolithic terms; instead, it is a continent composed of polyvocal and plural civilizations.

Nevertheless, many scholars use the general term “Asia” about works with an Asian orientation. R. S. Sugirtharajah explains, “In a sense, the current usage of ‘Asia’ as

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a continental unity is a combination of two factors—the Western habit of naming the ‘other’ and the Asian strategy of invoking Asian values to withstand Western materialism.”

Asian values and shared traits have also been used to develop theologies or hermeneutics. Some traits shared by the Asian community include collectivism or group-oriented cultures, honor-shame practices, patron-client systems, ritual purity, suffering and persecution, the embeddedness of religion in culture, spiritual worldviews (or folk religiosity), preference for stories or storytelling, and the non-dichotomization of the sacred and the secular. These traits, values, and socio-religious realities allow for the development of pan-Asian Christian theologies.

**Pentecostal**

“Pentecostal” describes a believer belonging to the fourth major Christian tradition in World Christianity: Pentecostalism. Pentecostals owe their name to the Pentecostal outpouring in Acts 2. Classically, a Christian believer who affirms a pneumatic (Holy Spirit) experience akin to that of the disciples at Pentecost and identifies oneself as belonging to a family of believers who espouse the continuity of a Pentecostal outpouring in prophetic and missiological terms were called Pentecostals. However, this definition has become less espoused today since Pentecostalism has widened its streams to include Charismatics, Neocharismatics, and other Pentecostal-like groups. Allan Anderson argues that there cannot be exact definitions of “Pentecostal” and “Pentecostalism” because it is a diverse global movement emphasizing “experience and spirituality rather than in formal theology or doctrine.”

The difficulty in defining exact terms is understandable. However, for this article, “Pentecostal” will be defined in both broad and narrow terms. Broadly, Pentecostals refer to believers who belong to the world Christian tradition of Pentecostalism, which

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shares the core tenet, “God is still active in the world through the Holy Spirit, so that miracles and spiritual gifts are an expected component of the Christian life.”

Narrowly, Pentecostals affirm the classical doctrine of post-conversion Spirit baptism as pneumatic empowerment for prophecy and mission. This study holds broad and narrow definitions in tension because the particular (or local) stream does not occur in a vacuum; it is best understood as part of a whole. Hence, the current study narrows the term to thoroughly understand one form in the cacophony of other forms within its global family.

Critical Contextual Biblical Interpretation

As explained by Yung Suk Kim in his book *Biblical Interpretation*, critical contextual biblical interpretation is an interpretative method that dialectically engages the reader, the text, and the contextuality of the text and the reader. In his footnote, Kim explained that critical meant “examining biblical writings from a diversity of interpretive perspectives,” while contextual meant “considering life contexts of the text and the readers alike.”

Adapting Daniel Patte’s elements of interpretation, Kim illustrates his three-element method as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WE</th>
<th>Are READING</th>
<th>THE BIBLE</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Reader</td>
<td>The Theological Lens</td>
<td>The Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual/relational choice</td>
<td>Theological/hermeneutical choice</td>
<td>Analytical/textual choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do we read?</td>
<td>What do we read?</td>
<td>How do we read?</td>
</tr>
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</table>

First, Kim highlights the importance of the reader of the Bible, who reads from various social locations and diverse life settings. He echoes Hans George Gadamer’s

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14 Yung, *Biblical Interpretation*, 34
dialectic when he points out that “understanding is participation with the text.” Accordingly, Kim writes, “The view of the participatory reader is possible because God is not known only through the Bible. God is known through us too, and vice versa.”

Second, Kim recognizes that readers read from a theological lens or make choices concerning their theological view of the text. This second element “has to do with a viewing angle among many choices of theological interpretation.” Accepting that every reader makes interpretive choices, predominantly from their theological view of the text, is crucial.

Third, Kim points to the Bible as the written text. The Bible has a double character: historical writing and sacred text. As a historical writing, it holds records of ancient cultures and religious experiences. Therefore, it calls for the need for critical textual methods. As a sacred text, the Bible is Scripture, and it affects its readers’ faith and praxis. Affirming the Bible’s double character enables readers to make proper choices concerning textual methods.

Using Kim’s critical contextual biblical interpretation as one of the dialogue partners of this study is apt because his theory combines both critical and contextual approaches to the interpretative process. It also recognizes that understanding divine revelation comes with the dialectic of two horizons: the text’s and the reader’s horizons. This theory offers Asian Pentecostals the opportunity to interpret biblical texts from a critical textual angle and in conversation with their reading lens and their life contexts.

Context

Finally, the word “context,” which is often used in this article, is defined as the complex combination of experience (either personal, communal, or contemporary-collective), culture (a system of inherited conceptions), social location, and social change. Stephen Bevans explains that all theologies are contextual since they are products of their authors’ contexts; the Bible itself is a collection of books written in/for particular contexts.

The two contexts of the Bible assumed in this article are cultural-historical and literary contexts. Cultural-historical context refers to “the placement of a text against the

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19 Yung, Biblical Interpretation, 39.
20 Yung, Biblical Interpretation, 37.
21 Yung, Biblical Interpretation, 15.
23 Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology, 7.
cultural and historical background of its author and its first readers.”24 Literary context refers to the relationship of a word, phrase, sentence, or passage in the larger biblical literature that contributes to the meaning of a text. It can also be generally defined as information that elucidates the contextual meaning of a text.25

Delineating Assumptions

Using the three questions Kim asked in his three-element-interpretative process, this article delineates the following assumptions.

Why Do We Read?

The first assumption is that readers (whether real or implied) are situated in a cultural and theological context. They come to the text with their theological lenses and read it for a reason. Some read for reflection, some read to teach, while others read to answer questions. Kim writes, “To critically, faithfully engage the ancient readers, we must know who we are as real readers.”26 Hence, readers should know their history, culture, theological affirmation, and life contexts because these influence the critical contextual interpretative process.

As such, the reader of this study is an Asian Pentecostal, specifically Filipino Pentecostal. Filipino Pentecostal theological identity, as argued in a journal article entitled “Bridging the Distance: A Microcosm of Filipino Classical Pentecostal Identity,” is a spiral construct of the Filipino Christian consciousness with the classical Pentecostal theology of Spirit empowerment.27 Moreover, the Filipino Pentecostal identity amalgamates many socio-religious factors: indigenous religious consciousness, Hispanic Roman Catholicism, Western Protestantism, and North American classical Pentecostalism. A Filipino Pentecostal reads the Bible to know God and to draw closer to him; in the process, the reader receives a restoration of identity, hope, dignity, and empowerment for participation in the ongoing story.28

26 Yung, Biblical Interpretation, 39.
28 A proposed Filipino Pentecostal gospel was presented in the paper, “Bridging the Distance.” In said proposal, the Bible becomes the means for Filipino Pentecostals to genuinely know God, his work in the world, and his participatory purposes for his people. Timenia, “Bridging the Distance,” 125–28.
What Do We Read?

Second, this article assumes the double nature of the Bible as both historical writing and sacred text. As historical literature, the Bible includes genres written during different historical and cultural milieus. Although many scholars have argued that it is impossible to reconstruct de facto histories surrounding biblical texts, the truth remains that information and themes passed on and later transcribed are based on actual events, people, or situations. Hence, efforts should be made to understand biblical texts in their historical moorings.

Craig Keener points out that there is a concreteness to the settings in biblical writings, and these settings explain “the particularities in the shape of such writings.” 29 For example, there was an apostle named Paul who wrote an occasional letter to the Christian community in Rome. Moreover, there was a historical Jesus whose life, message, and ministry were witnessed and passed on by devout followers.

The Bible, though, is not just historical literature. It is also a sacred text. Jürgen Habermas defined the Bible evocatively as “the linguistification of the sacred.” 30 In most of Asia, there is no struggle to accept such linguistification. The Christian Scripture is one of the many scriptures in Asia. In explaining this “Scripture among scriptures” purview, Havilah Dharamraj outlines the features of Scripture as follows: “(1) Authoritative oral or written text; (2) often believed to be of divine origin and, therefore, considered sacred and powerful; (3) canonical and normative for a certain community of faith; (4) appropriated and perpetuated as teaching to the point that it becomes an ‘obligatory touchstone for religious thinking.’” 31 In Asia, these scriptures could come in the form of the Hindu Vēdas, Islam’s Qur’an, China’s Confucian classics, or perhaps Sikhism’s Gūrū Grānth. For Christians, Scripture is known as the Holy Bible. It is authoritative because it is God’s revelation mediated by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3:16). It stands out among other scriptures because it is uniquely relational, especially in the form of Jesus, who is not just God incarnate and the “Word made flesh” but also the fullness of divine revelation.

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**How Do We Read?**

Lastly, this article assumes that in the interpretative process, meaning is mediated by the Holy Spirit in both the text and the reader. Kim affirms the double character of the Bible as sacred text and historical writing. However, like other reader-oriented interpreters, Kim attributes meaning to the reader; for him, the reader decides the final meaning of the text.32

Contra Kim, this study prefers Keener’s position in *Spirit Hermeneutics*, whereby meaning is generated by the Holy Spirit both in the text and in the reader.33 Keener writes:

> The Spirit already generated meaning through the inspired human agents writing in their language and setting. The Spirit’s role of illumination thus focuses on the text’s perlocution, i.e., “the successful conclusion of the speech act:” normally understanding and response... Perlocution is what identifies the expected response to a speech act. If the illocution is a command, the perlocution would be obedience... The Holy Spirit is largely involved at the perlocutionary level as we are enabled to understand the truthfulness of the text, recognize what it requires from us and then actually take the appropriate steps to actualize the intentions that the Holy Spirit initially delivered to the human instrument.34

On the one hand, there is meaning as intended by the Holy Spirit in the first context. On the other hand, there is contemporary meaningfulness that the same Holy Spirit mediates to readers in their respective contexts. When conversing in dialectical conversation, these two contextual horizons (text and reader) can produce a critical contextual biblical interpretation that is both faithful to the first context and relevant to the current reader’s context.35

Spirit-mediated interpretation is contextual (especially as biblical messages continue to be interpreted globally), but not to the extent of disregarding what the text originally meant to communicate. Keener explains, “Part of our transcultural goal should be listening honestly to the texts. The more effectively we hear texts in their first contexts, the greater our confidence to recontextualize the principles for other settings. The greater our shared basis for dialoguing about what the texts say to us today.”36

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33 Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics*, 12.
34 Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics*, 12.
35 Oliverio notes that Keener’s dialectic of two horizons attends to the “critical both-and” in hermeneutical theory; it is a kind of hermeneutical realism that does not subsume either categories. L. William Jr. Oliverio, *Pentecostal Hermeneutics in the Late Modern World: Essays on the Condition of Our Interpretation* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2022), 226.
Keener correctly states that the Bible comes to readers already contextualized and offers exemplars for ongoing critical contextual interpretations.

**A Proposed Asian Pentecostal Quadrilectic**

Having already clarified concepts and assumptions, it is right to discuss the proposed elements that make up an Asian Pentecostal hermeneutic. Unlike the *triadic* Pentecostal hermeneutics,37 like Kenneth Archer’s Spirit-Scripture-Community,38 or Amos Yong’s Spirit-Word-Community,39 this hermeneutic offers a *quadrilectic*, or a dialectic of four elements, Spirit-Scripture-Tradition-Context, in the interpretative process.

This study proposes that in the process of critical contextual biblical interpretation, the Asian (Filipino) Pentecostal hermeneut submits to the mediation of the Holy Spirit both in the text and in the reader’s context by holding in dialectical tension the historical-literary meaning of Scripture, Pentecostal tradition’s theology of Spirit empowerment, and the reader’s socio-religious history and cultural context.

Theoretically, this *quadrilectic* is like Archer’s and Yong’s *triad* in that all three consider Scripture and the Holy Spirit essential in the interpretative process. Yet it differs from the two because the word “community” is articulated as “tradition” (Pentecostal Christianity) and “context” (Asian/Filipino) to delineate the role and contribution of a reader’s theological affirmation and cultural/ethnic lens in the interpretative process. This delineation is conducive to a multicultural and polyvocal continent like Asia. Asian (Indian) Pentecostal, Rojí Thomas George comments:

Despite the best intention of such [*triadic*] interpretive exercises, they only recognize voices emerging from many corners without acknowledging the visible marks of their unique accents, styles, and valid cultural expressions of the Spirit illuminated biblical insights. Merely lived experience of fissured migrant identity, sociocultural vulnerability, oppression, etc., as spaces of constructing contextual Pentecostal hermeneutics will be shallow and not beneficial to the native Pentecostals’ theological reflection. Such a weakness is enormously experienced in a pluralistic context like India, where cultural discourses are soaked in religious and secular literary traditions. Without such an incarnation of Pentecostal

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37 A concise discussion on contextual Pentecostal hermeneutics can be read in Oliverio, *Pentecostal Hermeneutics in the Late Modern World*, 52–53.


hermeneutical practice in the native tongue and color, it will be estranged from developing a robust local shape and appearance.40

Indeed, there must be a critical dialectic with the reader’s sociocultural context for Pentecostal hermeneutics to serve Asian constituents better. I suggest that a hermeneut clarifies which element of context is being dialogued with to avoid abstractions. In this study, for instance, the context dialogued with is the experience of Pentecostal outpouring (Spirit baptism) in the backdrop of a Filipino Christian’s socio-religious history and culture.41

Including the reader’s context in the hermeneutical process is a recognition of what Oliverio calls a “hermeneutical turn” or the reader’s “traditioned and enculturated second nature” in interpreting the text.42 Whether aware or not, human interpretations are contextual. A reader’s religious experience, theological tradition, culture, and social location will, amid efforts of objectivity, affect interpretative choices. On a positive note, it also has the potential to facilitate the negotiation of meaning and meaningfulness.

Asian scholars have successfully pointed out that the Asian lens can be beneficial in interpreting biblical texts because the Bible is a product of West Asia and share many cultural and societal values with most of the continent. For example, one of the texts that causes significant discomfort among Asian Christians is Matthew 10:37, when Jesus said, “Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.” The call to follow Jesus amid parental disagreement, as laid out in this verse, is a high price to pay for Asians. The virtue of filial piety in Taoism or Confucianism demands that children continue the tradition of ancestral worship.43 Rejecting ancestral worship due to Christian conversion may result in being kicked out of the family or being shamefully labeled as “unfilial.” In the Filipino context, dishonoring parents may result in one being labeled as “walang utang na loob” (ungrateful) or “walang hiya” (shameless).

So, an Asian Christian who follows Jesus in the face of being labeled unfilial, ungrateful, or shameless understands what it means to “count the cost.” This interpretation is a prime example of how shared cultural values (or experiences) enrich exegetical processes and connect the current reader to the struggles of Jesus’ followers in the first century. Hence, the quadrilectic proposed with its Spirit-Scripture-Tradition-Context offers opportunities for developing not just a Pentecostal hermeneutic but also

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41 For a microcosm of a Filipino Pentecostal’s socioreligious history and culture, see Timenia, “Bridging the Distance,” 111–30.
42 Oliverio, *Pentecostal Hermeneutics in the Late Modern World*, 226.
an Asian Pentecostal hermeneutic that takes into consideration the reader’s socio-religious and cultural milieu.

**Spirit-mediated Interpretative Process**

The proposed interpretative system is an adaptation of Kim’s three-element-interpretative process but modified based on Keener’s Spirit hermeneutics. The table below illustrates the process as follows:

**Table 2. Spirit-mediated Interpretation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Are READING Theological/hermeneutical choice</th>
<th>The TEXT Analytical/textual choice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>WE Contextual/relational choice</strong></td>
<td>Asian (Filipino) Pentecostal</td>
<td>Pneumatological Lens</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Context:** Filipino Pentecostal identity is a construct of the Filipino religious consciousness with the Pentecostal experience of Spirit empowerment. | 1. The Holy Spirit generates meaning in the original text through inspiration, inscripturation, and traditioning.  
2. The Holy Spirit mediates meaning to the reader through illumination, experience, and perlocution. | 1. First context: historical-literary criticism of the text to determine its nearest original meaning.  
2. Second context: sociocultural exegesis to draw out elements from the reader’s context that can bridge the first context to the second context.  
3. Dialectical analysis: dialogue between the text’s contextual meaning and the reader’s cultural exegesis to arrive at contemporary contextual meaningfulness. |

The table above outlines the interpretative process of this proposed Asian Pentecostal hermeneutic. The Asian context in this study is Filipino, and the Pentecostal tradition is
narrowed down to classical Pentecostalism. The theological view of Scripture highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in interpretation (ala Keener’s Spirit hermeneutics). At the same time, the analytical process is a dialectical-contextual exegesis of both the text and the reader’s context.

**WE (the Reader)**

First, for this article, the reader is identified as a Filipino Pentecostal. A fuller description of the Filipino Pentecostal theological identity is available in the *Pentecostal Education Journal*, entitled “Bridging the Distance: A Microcosm of Filipino Classical Pentecostal Identity.”\(^{44}\) Due to space constraints, the current author describes the reader’s socio-religious background as an amalgamation of indigenous religious consciousness, Hispanic Catholicism, Western Protestantism, and classical Pentecostalism. The reader affirms a personal experience of Spirit baptism, speaking in tongues, prophecy, and manifestation of signs and wonders. Overall, the current reader identifies with both the Filipino identity (with its colonial history) and Pentecostal spirituality (with its affirmation of Spirit empowerment).

**Are READING (Theological Lens)**

Second, the theological lens used to view the text is a pneumatological one. Keener is affirmed here in his recognition of the role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretative process in both the first context (the ancient sacred text) and the second context (the modern reader).\(^{45}\) The Holy Spirit generates meaning in the text through inspiration (the Spirit synergistically enabled human communicators), inscripturation (the Spirit guided the production of the written form), and traditioning (the Spirit superintended the preservation and transmission of the text from generation to generation).

The Holy Spirit also mediates meaningfulness to contemporary readers of the ancient sacred text through exegesis (the Spirit guides the reader’s cognitive functions in studying a text), illumination (the Spirit enlightens human understanding), experience (the Spirit facilitates pneumatic actualities like charismatic revelation or prophecy), and perlocution (the Spirit guides readers into appropriate response or application of the message).

**The TEXT (Analytical Process)**

Finally, the analytical procedure to be used in interpreting the text is a proposed process of dialectical-contextual exegesis. The process begins with historical-literary criticism,
where the text’s historical and literary contexts are reconstructed as best as possible. Keener explains:

Of course, we cannot perfectly reconstruct the original meaning. We have access neither to everything the authors thought nor to the full original contexts that they assumed their ideal audiences shared, the information needed to fill lacunae in secondary communication. But whatever else a biblical text might mean, it usually means at least what it meant to the inspired author, who understood his own language, idioms, and cultural allusions better than we do. Offering historical reconstructions as responsibly as possible (given the limits of evidence and our own horizons) is a reasonable objective that need not be discounted simply because it cannot be perfectly achieved. 46

Although historical-literary reconstruction cannot be perfectly achieved, it does not mean one should not try. As previously explained, the text is both historical writing (written in an original historical and cultural milieu) and sacred text. Efforts should be made to exegete what it was meant to say or mean in its original context. This endeavor protects readers from misinterpreting the meaning of the text.

After historical-literary criticism, the reader proceeds to cultural exegesis; that is, they must draw out elements in their culture that can serve as bridges between the first and the readers’ contexts. Readers can use some elements of culture like language, norms, values, symbols, and artifacts to facilitate dialectical communication of meaning and help express the Spirit-mediated meaning of the text in “a robust local shape and appearance.” 47 For example, in the recent offering of the Langham Global Library, Filipino theologians interpreted the Lord’s Prayer by first translating it as “Ama Namin” (the Filipino translation of “Our Father”). Entitling it “Ama Namin (Our Father)” instead of “The Lord’s Prayer” highlights the role of both the native tongue and Asian family values in facilitating the meaning of a text to a local context. 48

One should also note that both horizons can potentially help exegete the other in this dialectic of two contexts. This does not mean that the reader’s context determines the meaning of the text. It only means that the text can help enlighten readers of their culture (whether good or bad). At the same time, elements in the reader’s culture can also help clarify what the author/speaker was trying to communicate (as seen in the example above about how Asians interpret the cost of following Jesus).

Throughout the interpretative process, one must endeavor to hold the proposed quadrilectic elements of Spirit, Scripture, tradition, and context in dialectical tension.

46 Keener, Spirit Hermeneutics, 141.
47 George, “Interpretive Communities of the Spirit in Multicultural Context,” 92.
Such a hermeneutic is to interpret meaning bearing into account both horizons of text and reader in submission to the mediation of the Holy Spirit.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the proposed Asian Pentecostal hermeneutics offers a system of interpretation that takes into consideration the role of the Holy Spirit, the historical-literary context of Scripture, the theological spirituality of Pentecostal tradition, and the reader’s context (which includes religious experience, culture, social location, and social change). The *quadrilectic* of Spirit-Scripture-Tradition-Context allows for a dialectical analysis of two horizons—text and reader. In this manner, meaning is mediated by the Holy Spirit as the two horizons dialectically interact to arrive at the text’s original meaning and its contemporary meaningfulness.

The process adapts critical contextual biblical interpretation after all concepts and assumptions are clarified. Illustrated as WE are READING the TEXT, the reader is identified (at least for this article) as a Filipino Pentecostal, reading a pneumatological view of Scripture and interpretation and using a proposed dialectical-contextual exegesis.

**Recommendation**

As a recommendation for further study, an Asian Pentecostal hermeneut can use the hypothesis of an Asian Pentecostal hermeneutic with its *quadrilectic* of Spirit-Scripture-Tradition-Context. A case study using such a proposal may demonstrate its feasibility and contribute to the growing body of global Pentecostal hermeneutical studies.

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Alex R. Mayfield

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THE PRAYER TONGUE AND THE JESUS PRAYER

THE WITNESS OF ABBOT DAVID GERAETS

CYLDE GLANDON

Keywords prayer tongue, Jesus Prayer, Pentecostal monastic community, Eastern Churches, spiritual direction, depth psychology, charismatic prayer meetings, spiritual journal, baptism of suffering, baptism in the Holy Spirit, contemplative prayer, Taboric light

Abstract

To my knowledge Abbot David Geraets (1935–2012) of the Pecos Benedictine Monastery has been the only Christian witness and writer, past or present, to join the practice of the ancient Jesus Prayer and the prayer tongue. He simply says that “repeating the name of Jesus can become a masterful art of glossolalia prayer.” Abbot David’s statement is not found as such in the centuries of Eastern Orthodox literature about the Jesus Prayer. Nor is such a joining found among classical Pentecostal Christians who, while fully familiar with the prayer tongue and with life and power in Jesus’ name, commonly have no particular awareness of the practice of the Jesus Prayer. Such a joining moves across the boundary between the ecclesiastical cultures that normally separates Eastern Christian communities and Western Pentecostal communities. It is a matter of spiritual practice.

Introduction

In this writing I am inviting readers who are Pentecostal Christians to consider a practice of prayer that may be new to many, the Jesus Prayer, especially as it may be related to one’s praying in tongues. My observation is that there are virtually no Pentecostal prayer meetings today in which participants may experience a community that prays the Jesus Prayer together in the context of prayer tongues and singing in tongues among the gifts.

In this sense, what is offered in this article has little to do with theological argumentation, and more to do with pondering examples and witnesses—especially from Abbot David Geraets—that might inspire and encourage prayer, new practice, and its effects. I invite the reader to approach the contents of this article as an exercise

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itself in devotional reading, reading that might lead to prayer. Abbot David’s personal witness in the excerpts included here, as well as the samples of classical teachers of the Jesus Prayer I include, come out of the experience of revelatory prayer. Ascetical theology is about prayer, arises from prayer, and is offered as a witness to inspire prayer. The Jesus Prayer tradition seeks to avoid scholastic theological intellectualism, but instead seeks to read, to pray, and to live with the mind in the heart. Pentecostal theology, if it remains Pentecostal, is not a scholastic exercise. Much theology, as David Geraets said repeatedly, becomes a “head trip.”

It probably goes without saying that many Christian communities that are neither Eastern Orthodox nor Pentecostal—i.e., those that have been referred to in the West as “mainline” denominations, as well as Evangelical traditions—have had no emphasis upon either the Jesus Prayer or the prayer tongue.

What follows is a presentation of Abbot David Geraets’ Pentecostal witness and ministry, and a brief introduction to the Jesus Prayer. I offer several excerpts from Abbot David’s witness about his interpretation and practice. I close with examples of discussions of prayer in the classic and modern ascetical literature of the Eastern Churches, which Abbot David’s integration may illumine. That is, I follow David Geraets in communicating, shall we say, a Pentecostal hermeneutic of the Jesus Prayer tradition as far back as the early writings in The Philokalia.

From my first exposure in 1981 to the Pentecostal community of the Pecos Benedictine Monastery, and since my co-founding of the ecumenical Fellowship of the Holy Name in 2010, I have been calling Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal Christians to see a ground for the “charismatic renewal”—the living contemporary experience of Pentecost—in the biblical and ascetical theology of the Desert and Christian East. This tradition lies deeply behind more recent movements that often are seen by some as new, and by others as simply passing. David Geraets discovered in his personal experience of the Jesus Prayer an unrecognized doorway to, and instance of, the prayer tongue. His contemporary George Maloney writes of the “baptism in the Holy Spirit” in introducing the fifth-century Macarian Homilies, as well as describing Christians who prayed the Jesus Prayer in that era as “charismatics.” Here grace is a perceptible energy of God, beyond a doctrinal tenet. “Grace” is, after all, a translation of the word charis.

The combination of teachings and practices at the Pecos Monastery in its charismatic era is a combination that, in this writer’s experience for over forty years, is unknown in practice, and one that deserves wider knowledge among Pentecostal

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Christians. David Geraets’ leadership offered a specific and distinctive path for discipleship in Pentecost among individuals and communities.

David Geraets

David Geraets made his monastic profession at the St. Benedict’s Abbey in Benet Lake, Wisconsin, in 1962. His doctoral thesis at Gregorian University in Rome was on music and catechetics. The charismatic renewal that had begun in Roman Catholicism in the United States in the late 1960s came to the community in Benet Lake and, as Abbot David says below, it split the community. He and his brothers who had come to know the baptism in the Holy Spirit moved to Pecos, New Mexico, to found Our Lady of Guadalupe Monastery as a charismatic monastery. He thus gave Pentecostal meaning, witness, and embodiment to the Benedictine vocation itself.

He served as abbot there from 1973 until 1992, when he and several brothers moved to a sister monastery, the Monastery of the Risen Christ, in San Luis Obispo, California, where he lived until his death. In 1974 he invited Morton Kelsey to begin the integration of the Catholic charismatic renewal with Jungian depth psychology. The year 1978 marked the community’s first school for charismatic spiritual directors. The Pecos community founded Dove Publications, which focused on Pentecostal subjects.

Abbot David’s writings are few. His primary book was Jesus Beads. A shorter piece is Baptism of Suffering. He wrote the foreword to George Maloney’s Man the Divine Icon and the preface to Exploring the Gift of Prophecy by Arthur Labonte. I transcribe below several excerpts from audiotapes of lectures he offered at the school for spiritual directors at Pecos, from my personal collection. I also include short transcriptions from Abbot David’s video interview with Bill O’Donnell in 2006 on the Roman Catholic television network EWTN.

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1 Morton Kelsey was an Episcopal clergyman and Jungian psychotherapist who wrote prolifically and taught for many years at Notre Dame. Among his writings are: Encounter with God; God, Dreams, and Revelation; Dreams: A Way to Listen to God; Discernment: A Study in Ecstasy and Evil; The Other Side of Silence: A Guide to Christian Meditation; Tongue Speaking; and Adventure Inward: Christian Growth Through Journal Writing.


8 Permission to use excerpts from Abbot David’s lectures in 1981 has been granted by Abbot Aiden Gore of the Pecos Monastery.
The Pecos Community

It is realistic to say that few have known of such a thing as a Pentecostal monastic community. I attended their fourth school for charismatic spiritual directors in 1981–82. The community’s life and mission combined the following elements: a Roman Catholic monastic community that included daily Eucharist and morning and evening community prayer with charismatic practice; a single residential community of celibate men and women, unique in Roman Catholicism; a ministry of charismatic retreats, with missions to many outside communities, including Tulsa, Oklahoma; a school for charismatic spiritual directors; the use of Jungian psychology and dream work in Christian spiritual direction and the life of sanctification; and the daily personal practice of the Jesus Prayer among its members.

Some Emphases

Prayer Meetings

Jesus Beads is David Geraets’ integration of the Jesus Prayer and charismatic manifestations. In this book and in his lectures and organization of participants at the Pecos schools, he makes a strong emphasis upon the charismatic prayer meeting as a primary arena, and relatively safe context, in which to experience and practice the gifts of the Holy Spirit. That is, in an ongoing community of relationships, practice, and accountability. At this writing, I have been aware that charismatic prayer meetings have not been emphasized or practiced in Christian congregations for a long number of years. I see this as a strategically missing arena in Pentecostal Christian formation, practice, life, and ministry, given that the Wesleys, Smith Wigglesworth, and Azuza Christians, among others, proactively formed and continued prayer meetings as basic to Pentecostal life and mission. It is fair to say that for David Geraets prayer is fully as vital as Holy Scripture is for Christian discipleship.

Practicing into the Charismatic Gifts

He taught quite specifically that Christians can and do practice into the gifts of the Holy Spirit, that we are in fact called, for our part, to act and participate in moving into the gifts.

Discipline in Pentecost

Abbot David spoke of the problems of the “Shepherding Movement” as part of his reasons for seeking to raise up a cadre of spiritual directors who included journaling and “inner work” as part of their responsible participation in and leadership of charismatic prayer communities. It was at Pecos that I first heard the term “stewardship of
consciousness,” most especially as it applies to many of the excesses of so-called “charismania,” as well as to personal misconduct among Christian leaders. In integrating Jungian depth psychology into charismatic Christian culture, he placed a strategic and well-developed psychology into the path of Christian sanctification. He placed spiritual direction, journaling, and dream work as defining elements of our participation in Pentecost. He said he would not continue to offer spiritual direction to anyone who did not take their spiritual life seriously enough to keep a journal.

The Three Baptisms

His writing on “the baptism of suffering” is in the context of his witness that there are three “small-b” baptisms in the one Christian baptism. That is, our conscious awakening to the risen Christ, our baptism in the Holy Spirit, and our baptism into the Father, or the laying down of our lives in a baptism of suffering, following Jesus, so that brothers and sisters may come to know the first two baptisms. As a Roman Catholic, he taught this from his view that sacramental infant baptism is theologically accurate, but often is not experientially or existentially dynamic in a maturing Christian’s actual consciousness of God’s perceptible life and activity.

A Sampler of David Geraets’ Incisive Statements

In my experience of forty years, for most of the short excerpts here—like David Geraets’ singular joining of the prayer tongue with the Jesus Prayer—I have not heard Pentecostal Christians, or other Christians, speak this way. That Jesus is the model charismatic. That charismatic renewal is a poor man’s mysticism, said positively. That love is higher than truth. That if contemplative practice only leads to non-response and silence, no one will turn to the God we proclaim. That our actions matter and play a part—putting our foot out—in miracles of the Kingdom.

Jesus is the model charismatic.9

I got filled with the Holy Spirit, which is a kind of way of saying that you know God’s love deeply. Charism means love, that you are filled with love, the overwhelming love of God’s presence, which brings charismatic gifts.10

Experience continues to teach us that this Divine Love is most effectively communicated through spontaneous shared prayer.11

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11 Geraets, Jesus Beads, 53.
[In regard to tongues] If you want to catch a squirrel, you have to climb up a tree and act like a nut.12

The Red Sea parted when someone put their foot out, and not before.13

Charismatic gifts must be present in a Christian community if it is to be a witness to the Divinity of Jesus, just as much as human compassion and social activity should evidently witness to His humanity.14

Love is higher than truth.15

Until our churches recapture this vision of the Holy Spirit’s manifestation of signs and wonders of the Kingdom and in God-given loving community in this world, there will be mediocrity in Christendom.16

The charism is lost if you put someone in office who doesn’t own the charism.17

If your God is deaf and dumb, who in the world is going to turn to Him?18

Shucks, when someone is healed, your evangelism is done for you.19

The charismatic renewal is a poor man’s mysticism.20

The Jesus Prayer

There is a rich bibliography on the Jesus Prayer. Those unfamiliar with the Jesus Prayer will find most helpful practical wisdom in the anthology edited by Igumen Chariton of Valamo, The Art of Prayer,21 and in Lev Gillet, On the Invocation of the Holy Name.22

The Art of Prayer consists primarily of the writings of Theophan the Recluse (19th C.). The first book on the Jesus Prayer to become widely known in the West was The Way of a Pilgrim, in various editions now. I first learned of the Jesus Prayer in Anthony Bloom’s

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14 Geraets, Jesus Beads, 51–52.
15 David Geraets, “Sexuality” (lecture, Benedictine Monastery, Pecos, NM, March 1, 1982).
19 Geraets, interview by Bill O’Donnell.
book *Beginning to Pray*. Authors in the volumes of *The Philokalia* discuss the Jesus Prayer, notably Hesychios and Diadochos. Classically, its form is “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me,” taken from the blind man’s cry from the side of the road in Mark 10:47–48. The practice is to pray this—or a shorter version, simply “Jesus”—repetitively, that is, as a way to pray without ceasing, to pray at all times in the Spirit, to make melody to God in our hearts, and to do everything in the name of Christ.

It is a prayer, not a mantra from the non-Christian East, but interestingly, many Westerners who are familiar with the mantra from Hinduism come home to the Jesus Prayer for the experience of Jesus’ and Paul’s teachings about our life in Christ. That is, Christ being formed in us, having the mind of Christ, God making God’s home in us, opening the door of our hearts, our bodies being filled with light, what Jesus says his followers will do in his name, and the Holy Spirit’s interceding for us with sighs too deep for words. Theophan especially offers counsel on the way of *descending with the mind into the heart*. In the language of Western Christian spirituality, this is a joining of mental with affective prayer. Theophan’s words below about the name of Jesus becoming like a quietly-flowing inner stream as well as fanning a spark to flame in our hearts are easily associated with the prayer tongue.

One of the Fellowship of the Holy Name’s mottos is: *The Name of Jesus brings Pentecost, inside and out.*

Excerpts from David Geraets’ Witness

**The Name of Jesus and Permeation in the Holy Spirit**

In this excerpt, the Jesus Prayer is linked with baptism in the Holy Spirit, and is identified as a form of glossolalia prayer. Inviting people into this prayer is itself a form of evangelism.

The immediate purpose of praying is to grow in communion with our Triune God.

. . . One manner of making “head” knowledge (i.e., God exists) also become “heart” knowledge (i.e., I personally know He lives in me) is to practice repetition. It is precisely this “heartfelt prayer of a good man which works very powerfully” (James 5:16, Jerusalem Bible).

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Speaking the name of Jesus repeatedly with love, humility, and reverence creates a vacuum within our hearts which evidently draws down the living Presence of God’s Spirit to permeate our entire being.\(^{24}\)

He who has not yet received a charismatic Gift from God need not feel abandoned or left out of the Pentecostal renewal. Repeating the name of Jesus can become a masterful art of glossolalia prayer, complete in itself.\(^{25}\)

Revelatory Vision, the Jesus Prayer, and Vocational Commitment

In this section, Abbot David combines his experience of vision and being filled with light—what he calls the Taboric experience—with his witness about the Jesus Prayer and tongues. He calls it “The Jesus Prayer of tongues.”

For some Christians, David Geraets’ description of the Jesus Prayer below is another way of describing contemplative prayer. Fr. Rusty Shaughnessy, a member of the Pecos community at the time, said that the prayer tongue is “voiced contemplation.” However, nearly all contemporary Western Christian teachers of contemplative prayer, in dozens of volumes—with the notable exception of Thomas Merton—do not discuss the Jesus Prayer. Merton says nothing of the prayer tongue, nor do they. Based in my experience a year after hearing this lecture—when I was again at Pecos and when, unlooked for, the light of the Holy Spirit filled me as I lay in bed at night—my witness is this: Baptism in the Holy Spirit is our participation in Jesus’ transfiguration. Is not contemplative prayer an immersion in the Holy Spirit’s revelation of Jesus the light of the world?

Abbot David says here he was “looking for a theological justification for tongues” and not finding it in the Western world. One might make the wry comment that, whether or not tongues are identified in Western theology, the New Testament itself might offer whatever justification Christians may seek.

The most important thing in the life of a Christian is that you get a vision, that you know who you are and where you’re going. I have a classical Pentecostal friend who says that there are three very important things in regard to the vision.

First, if you don’t have one for your life, pray that you get one. Everybody needs a burning bush like Moses. Needs a vocational call like Isaiah, or the wheels like Ezekiel, or some deep manifestation of God’s presence in your life. Call, vocation.

The second thing is that you move into that vision, once you’ve received it. I have known people who have had a call to move into Pentecost who didn’t have

\(^{24}\) Geraets, Jesus Beads, 6, 8–9, 14.

\(^{25}\) Geraets, Jesus Beads, 83.
enough guts to move into it. That’s the second stage. And that will cost you oftentimes.

And the third one is to last it out all the days of your life. That’s the dimension of commitment. Either we have commitments or we have affairs. It is going toward a goal, believing in a future, having a hope. People without a vision perish.

The main function of prophecy is to give people a view of the Kingdom. Two thirds of Jesus’ teaching is about the Kingdom.

And so: To move into the vision. That’s so important. You’re really going to have to have that reiterated many times in your life. Never lose your vision. Because then life is meaningless. Keeping the end in view. Jesus keeping his eyes on the cross and the resurrection.

When they began to move in charismatic circles in the abbey, the first thing it did was split the community right down the middle. Some went into the Baptism in the Spirit into the renewal, some couldn’t go into it. And that was the hardest thing I ever suffered in my whole life. My deepest revelations in life have come when I have experienced the deepest pain.

Now I could have written those people off, and said, those people, well, they’re just not Christian. That would have been pretty easy, but when you’ve lived with people and you know their sincerity and you know their practice, you can’t write them off, but your great pain, my great pain is—I’m something of a musician—it’s like trying to share my song with someone who can’t sing. That’s why, the experience for me, I try to share the experience of the Baptism in the Spirit with someone who can’t open up to it. And so I was wondering whether I was supposed to go into the renewal or not.

I went into a real crisis on that, and I remember—I don’t know if I would advise this, whether it would be prudent for your life—but I went on my knees and I said, Lord, I am not moving off my knees until you talk to me. I want to know whether I’m supposed to be in this thing or not.

And I remember the first evening, I don’t know if I was awake or was sleeping, I am waiting in prayer, and I saw the map of the United States at that time, and I never forget these visions as long as I live—the interpretation changes, but the vision never changes—I saw little fires breaking out, different geographical locations, becoming one big fire. And the Lord speaking, saying, that’s how I’m going to renew my people. I’m going to have these little fires breaking out, and they’ll become one big fire, and I watched it into England and continental Europe and I saw parts of Latin America. I didn’t see it in the Orient, parts where the Lord was going to take me later.

And the second night I was in prayer again, like that was not good enough, with the Lord saying that’s how I’m going to renew my church, you know I’m going to bring these people into one big bonfire, and then he showed me a large river. See, the background to your visions and dreams frequently are the
background of where you’re raised. I’m raised fifteen miles from the Mississippi River, and I see this big river going, and the Lord said, Do you see the river? and I said, Yes, Lord, I see the river. And he said: Now regarding the river, a person can do one of three of things. He can swim across it, ignore the current, he can swim with the current, or against the current, but that’s not going to stop the flow of the river. And then he went on to say, Now that’s how it’s going to be these days with this renewal. I’ll pour my Spirit out and some people will be like the one who chooses to ignore the current, swims across the current, and some will go against my Spirit, some will go with my Spirit, but, He said, they won’t stop the outpouring of my Spirit.

And that’s how it’s been, you know, these thirteen years. Beyond my fondest expectations I’ve seen this renewal when it wasn’t kosher to even have it in a house, if you were Catholic, I’ve seen it just spread all over the world. And do you realize, in what a short time? In the Catholic church especially. Goodness, you know in the first years, when something happens, we normally say it’s a heresy. Then after maybe about twenty-five years, we say, well, there’s maybe a few good things in it. Then after a hundred years, we say, well, that’s already in the writings of St Augustine! [laughter] But it’s happened a little faster this time.

One reason is probably because we don’t have that much time. I’m not talking end of times, but I’m talking the urgency of the gospel. Because without it, an awful lot of people are getting hurt, getting smashed up, aren’t they? That’s why I have an urgency to preach the gospel. I don’t come from a place that Jesus comes tomorrow, panic today. I hope he comes tomorrow because since he’s left, it hasn’t been too good. I’m working and praying for it. But I have an urgency to preach the gospel, because without it I see young people on dope, frying their brains, I see them smashing into the mountains out here beside us, I see marriages falling apart, I see good families shattered. And that’s the urgency for me to preach the gospel, because without that Word, God’s people perish. That’s why I’ll go across the country, I’ll go across the world, I told the Lord you can take me anywhere you want, because I sense the urgency of the gospel, because without it we don’t make it, we just don’t make it.

The third evening, as I was in prayer, I had no precedent for it, but I will never forget it as long as I live, and I’ve never had as powerful experience as this, maybe there’ll be one down the line, I hope so. Because, having experienced God’s light, there is nothing like it in this world, and I’d do anything to experience that light again, and I hope that isn’t just selfish. It came to me at 2 o’clock in the morning, with a bright light that went straight through my whole body. And it was peaceful and it was loving and it was ecstatic. He didn’t say much in words. I’ve never had the Lord be very verbose with me.

He didn’t waste words. He said Go, and I will be with you. He didn’t say very much, but He said everything, didn’t he? What more do you need?

And then I heard, but this wasn’t a voiceless voice. St Augustine talks about the voiceless voice, you hear down here, it’s almost like your own imagination, it goes around and around, and then other times it gets so loud I’m afraid that
somebody sitting beside me is going to listen in. And he said, *I want you within the church, and not outside the church.*

In those days it was very easy to get an invitation to speak outside the Catholic church settings. I couldn’t get many on the inside.

*And I want the witness in the core center where you are.*

Now that’s how I learned the Taboric experience. I went to my spiritual director, I went all over, I tried to find someone who could tell me what this light is. Went through all of them. They didn’t know what the light was. So I had to go back in my Scriptures. And I went back in the writings of the Fathers. And I searched out the whole Eastern Church. I learned about the Jesus Prayer because I was looking for a theological justification for tongues. I can’t find it in the Western world.

I found the best theological explanation of it in the Jesus Prayer. A prayer of abandonment. Where you don’t go to God with preconceived notions in your head, or preconceived notions in your heart, but you go empty, and you say, you put in my head what you want, you put in my heart what you want. That’s the essence of the Jesus Prayer of tongues, it’s a prayer of abandonment, it’s the apogee, the high point of abandonment, where you become totally feminine, totally receptive and you don’t program anything between you and God but you receive God on God’s own terms.

So I searched my Scriptures and I found some amazing things. I found Paul talking about that light that was on Moses’ face being the light now in the heart of a Christian. Do you know that the early fathers and the Christian and the patristic writers and the Scriptures, expected that the Christian would have the light within the heart as well as the love within the heart. *See how they love one another,* was the sign of a Christian but they also were to have the glow of the Spirit on their face. You would be able to tell if they were a Christian by the way they were lit up, if you want. Have you ever had an experience like that? That’s happened to me once. When I went to Japan for the first time, I came back through San Francisco, and I went up to the desk there to the man who was taking the tickets, and I looked at him, at his face, and I said, *Brother, are you baptized in the Holy Spirit?*—I’ve never done that before or since—and he said *Praise the Lord,* and here are all of these people around us. [laughter] And it’s not like me to do that.

But you should be able to walk down the street and see Christians. I’m not putting a judgment on others, but if there’s not something special about being a Christian, why would you want to be one? If it doesn’t show, a light on your face.

And I looked in II Peter, and this is a gem. Chapter 1:16. He’s talking about evangelization—*we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.* What we relate to you was an actual historical happening. *We ourselves heard this voice when we were with him on the sacred mountain. We have the word of prophecy made more certain. And you will do well to pay attention to it as a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your heart.* What’s he saying? You keep your eyes focused on the revelation, you keep believing, until you have an experience where
light comes into your heart. And that light will verify two things to you. The first one is that the gospel is real in a way that you never dreamt before.

And the second thing is, that you can lay your life down for it. I don’t think you can put your life on the line without that type of revelation. I think it was necessary in the life of Jesus and I think it is necessary in the life of every Christian if they’re to last out a commitment.26

The Jesus Prayer and Relationship with God

Abbot David speaks of our personal identity as grounded, and defined, in experiential knowledge of Jesus Christ. His witness is that the Jesus Prayer is a way into this relationship, in his experience and in the experience of others he has counseled. Again, living relationship with God is more vital than ideas about God.

Nobody knows who they are until they know who Jesus is. The only way I know to get a deep knowledge of Jesus, like John the Baptist at the Jordan and Peter’s Spirit-anointed recognition of Jesus, is to spend a lot of time with the Jesus Prayer. Until I can say the Name of Jesus 1,000 times without repeating myself, I think I’ll begin to know a little bit about prayer. We are talking about relationship and the quality of relationship. The Holy Spirit is like the finger of God. I send a lot of people out into the mountains to pray among the pinons, walking, doing the Jesus Prayer, and the Lord touches them.27

Realization of Christian Initiation, Prayer Community, the Word, and Charismatic Gifts in Prayer and Worship

Here Geraets talks about several subjects in a brief space, saying that Christian initiation, indeed evangelism, is to bring baptism in the Holy Spirit, as well as Christian community. Again, there is a key emphasis upon the charismatic prayer meeting for Christian leaders to form. The gifts of the Spirit are to be part of the experience of the gospel if, as he says, the word and worship are to be real and personal. Without elaborating, he states how easily non-charismatic worship actually makes for accidia, or no living sense of God’s activity among us.

Catechesis [Christian formation, i.e., in Christian education or preparation for Confirmation] isn’t complete until they know Jesus, until there’s baptism in the Holy Spirit, and until there is some kind of solid community, solid relationship.

I found myself when I was moving in that ministry, I went out to the various prayer groups—I get closer to those people in the prayer groups than I was to those in my own community.

I found myself saying: David, you’ve got to be real.

Either you get this type of spirituality in community or else you’re going to have to step outside that community where it is.

I think everyone is going to have to ask that question sooner or later.

If you don’t have a charismatic prayer meeting, you’ve got to form one.

I think a diocesan priest should be praying with his people, where we pray with one another. I mean daily, that’s what the Liturgy of the Hours is. There should be a charismatic prayer meeting there; if it isn’t, go form one.

Your own parish, your own neighborhood, I don’t care, no one can keep you from praying. No one has the authority to do that.

The Word is not broken open by someone getting up and proclaiming the Word. That’s one form, and I’m not putting that down. But the way the Word is really broken open, the way the powerful Word of God becomes personal, is when you have a movement of prophecy and tongues and inspiration in the assembly. That’s how it becomes personal. That’s why you need charismatic gifts.

Some people say, “Oh, what is the rationale for mumbling and tongues and prophecy, etc.?” That’s how the power, the Word of God, with its power in the assembly, becomes personal, and it’s not really worship until that happens.

The prayer meeting is the liturgy of the Word par excellence. It’s a preparation for Eucharist and flows out of Eucharist.

You can go through the choreography of religious life without praying. It’s called accidia. Holy indifference.28

**Practicing into the Charismatic Gifts**

Unlike some interpretations of Augustine in the Protestant Reformation, David Geraets does not believe that it is Pelagian to practice into the gifts of the Holy Spirit, that is, to put your foot out. That there is such a thing as a practicum in the gifts of the Spirit. It is striking that his counsel is not to let sin block us from aspiring to move in the gifts.

I know some people who didn’t fear to babble like an idiot, only to find Jesus in their heart, in a way they’d never dreamt of. You will never pray in tongues until you are willing to babble like an idiot. And you may need to babble like an idiot for maybe nine months before you get the gift of tongues. I don’t know how long I bounced it off the wall before a breakthrough came. And when we start out, there’s an awful lot of practice. When you start with tongues, I will wager that as high as 90% is not tongues. But it’s a practicum, or praxis, toward tongues. And only if I continue in the practice does the gift break in.

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28 Geraets, “The Charismatic Gift of Discernment.”
I share with you tonight, don’t let any sin ever block you from your ministry, and don’t let pride and deception block you from moving in and appropriating charismatic gifts, because an awful lot of people are doing that today, and what they really get hung up on is tongues. 

One Additional Reference in Christian Writing to the Prayer Tongue and the Jesus Prayer

I cite here Agnes Sanford in her book *The Healing Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, in her chapter “The Gift of Tongues and of Interpretation.” This chapter, in my view, is well worth revisiting, especially in her emphasis upon moving from tongues, or other inspirations, into active charismatic ministry for others. “This gift is one of the tools with which we do our bit in building the Kingdom of God on earth. A good builder need not say, ‘Look at my wonderful tools!’ One looks instead at that which he has built.”

This is in consonance with David Geraets’ chapter “The Kingdom of Heaven” in *Jesus Beads*. Repeating a statement found in his *Scripture and the Charismatic Renewal, Lecture 2*, that *Jesus is the model charismatic*, he writes:

It will happen something like this. As the gift of swimming is given in and during the simulated action of splashing of water, so the Kingdom of Heaven will come when all God’s people imitate the actions of their Master, Jesus. “The man who has faith in me will do the works that I do, and greater far than these” (John 14:12). Their doing these things will be the occasion if not the cause for Jesus to return physically and establish the Kingdom of Heaven in fullness. The effort can be fostered or frustrated by our free-will actions. No splashing, no gift of swimming; no charismatic action, no Kingdom. Therefore we pray and work eagerly that our Lord may return soon.

Here is a conversation Sanford records about the Jesus Prayer and tongues—in effect, an independent aspiration toward David Geraets’ experience, without ever knowing of him.

A very holy man, Abbot Lazarus of the Greek Orthodox Church, author of books on the mysticism of this church once said to me, “I wish very much that I had the gift of tongues.”

“Why, Abbot Lazarus?” I inquired, surprised beyond measure that this most erudite, British-educated scholar should desire such a gift.

“Because from my study in mysticism I have come to know that it would be a shortcut to contemplative prayer. We spend hours every day saying the Jesus

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31 Geraets, *Jesus Beads*, 82.
Prayer (‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me’) in an effort to make contact with God. If I could speak with tongues, this contact would be made instantly.”

Witnesses from the Eastern Churches

In the context of David Geraets’ reports above, I read the following traditional excerpts as witnesses from personal experience of the Spirit rather than as products of speculative theology. The reader is invited to come to know the relationship between the Jesus Prayer and the prayer tongue through his or her own personal practice as well as among other Christians praying together. Gregory of Sinai’s words in the fourteenth century are in resonance with the contemplative dynamics in contemporary charismatic worship. I interpret Hesychios’ term “intellections” to mean vision as well as words of prophecy, knowledge, and wisdom, when alone and among others.

Theophan the Recluse (19th C.)

What do we seek through the Jesus Prayer? We seek for the fire of grace to appear in our hearts, and we seek for the beginning of unceasing prayer which manifests a state of grace. When God’s spark falls into the heart, the Jesus Prayer fans it into flame... Try not to quench this fire, and it will become established in such a way that the prayer repeats itself; and then you will have within you a small murmuring stream... 

Diadochos of Photike (5th C.)

Knowledge: to lose awareness of oneself through going out to God in ecstasy.

Then the Lord awakens in the soul a great love for His glory; for when the intellect with fervor of heart maintains persistently its remembrance of the precious name, then that name implants in us a constant love for its goodness, since there is nothing now that stands in its way.


Gregory of Sinai (14th C.)

In others it is manifest as an unconquerable love and peace, shown toward all, or as a joyousness that the fathers have often called exultation—a spiritual force and an implosion of the living heart that is also described as a vibration and sighing of the Spirit who makes wordless intercession for us to God (Rom. 8:26). Isaiah has also called this the “waves” of God’s righteousness (cf. Isa. 48:18), while the great Ephrem calls it “spurring.” The Lord Himself describes it as “a spring of water welling up for eternal life” (John 4:14)—He refers to the Spirit as water—a source that leaps up in the heart and erupts through the ebullience of its power.

You should know that there are two kinds of exultation or joyousness: the calm variety (called vibration or sighing or intercession of the Spirit), and the great exultation of the heart—a leap, bound, or jump, the soaring flight of the living heart towards the sphere of the divine. . . . This is also known as a stirring of the spirit—that is to say, an eruption or impulsion. . . .

Divine awe is accompanied by a tremulous sense of jubilation arising from the prayer of fire that we offer when filled with awe.

The energy of grace is the power of spiritual fire that fills the heart with joy and gladness, stabilizes, warms, and purifies the soul, temporarily stills our provocative thoughts, and for a time suspends the body’s impulses. The signs and fruits that testify to its authenticity are tears, contrition, humility, self-control, silence, patience, self-effacement and similar qualities, all of which constitute undeniable evidence of its presence.36

Lev Gillet (20th C.)

To grow in the invocation of the Holy Name is to grow in the knowledge of the “Spirit of His Son” (Gal. 4:6).37

Hesychios the Priest (8th or 9th C.)

Truly blessed is the man whose mind and heart are so closely attached to the Jesus Prayer and to the ceaseless invocation of His name as air is to the body or flame to the wax. The sun rising over the earth creates the daylight; and the venerable and holy name of the Lord Jesus, shining continually in the mind, gives birth to countless intellections radiant as the sun.38

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37 Gillet, On the Invocation of the Holy Name, 83.  
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Thomas Merton (20th C.)

. . . the humble invocation of the Lord Jesus. . . . This simple practice is considered to be of crucial importance in the monastic prayer of the Eastern Church, since the sacramental power of the Name of Jesus is believed to bring the Holy Spirit into the heart of the praying monk.39

Conclusion

I have offered illustrations for a Pentecostal hermeneutic of the practice of the Jesus Prayer. That is, a grounding of Pentecostal renewal and ministry in the ancient practice of the Jesus Prayer. And David Geraets’ virtually unique contemporary joining of the Jesus Prayer with permeation in the Holy Spirit. Accompanied—as only briefly mentioned—by such practices as journaling, dream work, and spiritual direction. That charismatic prayer groups are practicums for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. That baptism in the Holy Spirit is in the context of a conscious awakening to Jesus and of a baptism into the Father, a baptism of suffering, to bring brothers and sisters to Jesus and the Spirit. It is my hope that there will be a renewed interest among Pentecostal Christians to cultivate charismatic prayer meetings, to become some of the fires that Pentecost brings to the world, little fires becoming one big fire.

The Spirit-anointed and revelatory utterance of wisdom, knowledge, prophecy, tongues, interpretation, evangelical proclamation and witness, spiritual song, and words that bring God’s healing, are all of a piece with the Spirit-anointed utterance, silently or out loud, of the name of Jesus. When Jesus and the Holy Spirit are active in prayer and worship and ministry, a God-altered state of consciousness, with perceptible effects among us, is set in motion. The name of Jesus brings Pentecost, inside and out. “O, that the Spirit of Pentecost would come and write within us the Name of Jesus in flame.”40

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40 Gillet, On the Invocation of the Holy Name, 80.
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Holiness as Wholeness in Afro-Pentecostal Tradition

A Theological Perspective

Ivan Hartsfield

Keywords COGIC, C. H. Mason, holiness, social justice, exile, wholeness, sanctification, Afro-Pentecostalism

Abstract

Using the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) as the exemplar, I explore the theological rationale that undergirds the COGIC priority of holiness as a prescription for human wholeness. By wholeness, I mean human flourishing of the total person. For the COGIC, “Salvation is a deliverance from dangers and enemies.” Through the democratization of what was historically reserved for spiritual heroes, namely the designation of “saint,” common people of little means were immediately uplifted. They grabbed ahold of this moniker, which redefined them and identified their new place of spiritual residence in Zion. By faith, they expected to experience a modicum of the blessing of Abraham, right now. Such personal and social uplift includes peace, provision, power, healing, deliverance, and victory over their natural and spiritual challenges and foes while in exile. As an exilic people, they created a way of being “in the world, but not of it.” This created a holy space where they were not despised outcasts, but “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Pet 2:9, KJV). By inhabiting this space, their lowly status was washed away in the blood.

Introduction

Using the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) as the exemplar, I explore the theological rationale that undergirds the COGIC priority of holiness as a prescription for human wholeness. By wholeness, I mean human flourishing of the total person through spiritual, mental, emotional, material, and social prosperity. Since for the COGIC, “Salvation is a deliverance from dangers and enemies,” immediate separation from the world, the flesh, and the devil is normalized COGIC soteriology.¹

¹ O. T. Jones and J. E. Bryant, Manual of the Church of God in Christ (Memphis, TN: Church of God in Christ, 1940), 12.
Through the democratization of what had been historically reserved for spiritual heroes, namely the designation of “saint,” common people of little means were immediately uplifted. They grabbed ahold of this moniker, which identified their new place of spiritual residence in Zion. As the saints persevere in holiness, they live in a “now, not-yet” tension. By faith, they expected to experience a modicum of the blessing of Abraham, right now. Such personal and social uplift includes peace, provision, power, healing, deliverance, and victory over their natural and spiritual challenges and foes while in exile. Despite Pentecostal distinctives, the COGIC is known, not as a Pentecostal church, but as the “sanctified church.” According to Cheryl J. Sanders, members of this movement

follow the holiness mandate in worship, in personal morality, and in society, based on a dialectical identity characteristic of the tradition: “in the world, but not of it.” This dialectical identity reflects the social aspect of exilic consciousness, as manifested in the saints’ awareness of alienation or separation from the dominant culture, based on racial differences and religious practices.2

As an exilic people, they created a way of being “in the world, but not of it” by employing holiness codes and prohibitions that rejected worldly pleasures and practices. This created an alternate world, a holy space where they were not despised outcasts, but “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Pet 2:9, KJV). By inhabiting this space, their lowly status was washed away in the blood.

To flesh out the notion of holiness as wholeness, I will review the historical development of holiness in the tradition as understood by the founder, C. H. Mason, as it relates to wholeness. Then, I will discuss how the complex historical distinctives and existential particularities of a marginalized people necessitated a quest for social resurrection. Next, I will engage Mason’s own theological understanding of holiness as wholeness. After that, I will engage and exegete aspects of the 1931/40 COGIC articles of religion, taught and practiced as lived religion up until 1973 for insights into this holiness/wholeness dynamic. Lastly, I will provide a theological summary of holiness as wholeness from this Afro-Pentecostal tradition and suggest ways in which the broader Christian community can benefit from this theological construction.

The Development of Holiness as Wholeness in C. H. Mason

In 1891 Mason married Alice Saxton. Unfortunately, Alice was opposed to Mason’s ministry pursuits and their marriage ended just two years later in 1893. The constant travel associated with the preaching lifestyle and lack of monetary gain were likely


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contributors to the divorce. This traumatic experience was so grievous to Mason that he contemplated suicide. Based on a 1994 interview of Mason’s daughter, Lelia Mason Byas, Mason separated from his first wife in 1893 due to his wife’s marital infidelity. According to Mason’s daughter, Julia, Mason explained that God sanctified him during the separation from his first wife and healed him of his mental and physical distress, which enabled him to overcome the separation. By his daughter Mary Mason’s account, the resistance of C. H. Mason’s first wife to his call to preach was the source of his problems as he moved further and further away from God. She compares C. H. Mason’s ordeal to that of Jonah and provides an insightful account. As a result of this transformative experience, Mason overcame moral compromise and felt revitalized for ministry. It was after this experience that he preached his first message on sanctification entitled, “Endure Hardness as a Good Soldier” (2 Tim 3:12–13). After developing a zeal for, and commitment to, the doctrine of sanctification broadly construed, through his own personal crisis, Mason believed that sanctification brought spiritual renewal and social liberation.

In November of 1893, Mason entered Arkansas Baptist College for the first time in search of help with his preaching. This was the first of two stints with Arkansas Baptist College. The second stint would be with the affiliated Minister’s Institute. However, according to Mason’s own testimony, during the first stint he was disillusioned with the school. Becoming suspicious of the curriculum, he believed that the institution had assimilated to the culture and its methods and would not be able to help him maintain the vitality of slave religion, albeit with the appropriate evangelical modifications:

I entered the Arkansas Baptist College November 1, 1893, and stayed about three months. I still entered the same so that an education would help me out in

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3 Calvin White, “In the Beginning, There Stood Two: Arkansas Roots of the Black Holiness Movement,” The Arkansas Historical Quarterly 68 (Spring 2009), 7.


6 “During slavery Mason’s parents adhered to a set of religious beliefs that emerged out of a blending of African Traditional Religions with white protestant [sic] Christianity. Slave religion was a set of spiritual and cultural beliefs created by the slaves. The sacred world views Africans brought to the Americas came from West and Central Africa, and included beliefs in a supreme god, spiritual energy, a hierarchy of good and evil spirits, witchcraft, life after death in an upper and lower world. They believed in a world of the living and a world for the dead. Slave religion appealed to enslaved Africans because it incorporated ‘Africanisms’ (the continual flow of African cultural beliefs) like spirit possession, adherence to herbal specialist and sacred funeral rites and rituals to honor the dead.” Weaver, “Mark the Perfect Man,” 38.
preaching. The Lord showed me that there was no salvation in schools and colleges; for the way they were conducted grieved my very soul. I packed my books, arose and bade them a final farewell to follow Jesus with the Bible as my sacred guide. I began to lift up Christ by word, example and precept [sic], in my ministry, the word drew the people from the streets, roadsides, and from the utmost part of the country. Very soon the word of God began to sanctify the people everywhere He sent me. Bless His holy name.7

According to Lelia Mason Byas, her father had very specific concerns. “My father did not like how blacks were mimicking whites, wanting to be like them, socially, politically, and religiously. He was searching for knowledge about the God who had liberated black Americans, the God of the slaves, and the God that healed the poor and afflicted. That God papa said was never mentioned.”8 From this episode, it seems clear that Mason was not so much in search of theological clarification, but spiritual manifestation sufficient to change the trajectory of his people.

Influence of William Christian

One of the most influential people in Mason’s understanding of holiness was previously enslaved ex-slave William Christian with his restorationist theology. Having a similar trajectory to that of Mason, Christian started off as a Baptist preacher, but received a revelation that he was preaching the human doctrine instead of Christ. This changed his theology and message. Being accused of deviating from the Baptist faith, he withdrew from the Baptists to establish the Church of the Living God.9 Mason’s initial exposure to, and subsequent affiliation with, Christian and the Black Restorationist Movement coincides well with his personal pursuit of clean or holy living.10 While definitive documented evidence is lacking, circumstantial evidence suggests that Mason’s understanding of clean living was initially influenced by this movement in general, and William Christian in particular.11 Importantly, Mason’s yearning from his early childhood for the uplift of his people and the power of slave religion would imply that

8 Weaver, “Mark the Perfect Man,” 63.
11 This assertion is based on Daniel’s commentary in “A More Excellent Way: The Theological Journey of Bishop Charles Harrison Mason in the Theological Formation of the Church of God in Christ,” in *With Signs Following: The Life and Ministry of Charles Harrison Mason*, ed. Raynard Smith (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2015), 114–15. Additional support for Christian’s influence upon Mason may possibly be found in the archives of the Church of God (Christian Workers for Fellowship). However, further confirmation is beyond the scope of this effort.
Mason had some personal sense of racial equality as a righteous pursuit. Christian’s polygenesis, appeal to Christianity, and love, certainly heightened Mason’s insights and would have provided some scriptural support for his thinking.

In this polygenesis (i.e., the theory that different races have different origins), the gentiles or Caucasian, Asians, and blacks, also referred to as Ethiopians or black Jews, all have different origins. Adam and Eve, patriarchs and prophets, even Christ and his family and certain apostles were black. Furthermore, the curse of Cain would have been an intra-black and not interracial issue, as was commonly taught. This subverted the popular Hamitic curse theory based on the subjugation of the black race. While Christian does not preach black superiority, according to his train of logic, with such a noble heritage, black folks need to open their eyes and recognize that they can be and are as good as any other people. Whether one is better than another is based upon how well one lives, as Christian explains: “No man on earth is better than I am, unless he beats me doing right and everybody in this world that beats me doing right is better than I am and nobody’s color or wealth makes them better than I am, and everybody in this world, regardless of their color or wealth, that I beat doing right, I am better than they are.” With holy living as the great equalizer, for Christian, social hierarchy was predicated upon how one lived before God, instead of economic or racial distinctives.

Although not a proponent of Christian’s polygenesis, Christian’s posture concerning his people resonated with Mason. Furthermore, Mason also preached and demonstrated a profound love for all people, as expressed in an account by his daughter, Mary Mason. While evidence reveals that Mason had a sense of racial parity and desire for social uplift before his exposure to the Black Restorationist Movement, it appears that William Christian’s impact upon Mason at least heightened Mason’s sensitivity to such matters, if not informed or taught him in some respects.

The Practical Theology of C. P. Jones

As practical theology for the social and political challenges of black people, holiness provided freedom from different types of bondage. This included not just immorality, but racism. Concerning the efficacy of the gospel for everyday life, C. P. Jones commented, “Mind that God did not teach Israel to have religion apart from a political hope. They were combined. Christ was to reign in their hearts and over their affairs.

And so it is yet to be.”\textsuperscript{16} The realization of a better future for African Americans required a life of virtue, which would bestow “dignity, nobility, beauty, grace, and wisdom.” The hindrance to this achievement was sin defined in relational, cause and effect terminology. For example, sin destroys reputations, and hamstringsl the wealthy and powerful through the production of shame; the vicious and arrogant have their lives shortened; vices create conspicuous consumption that hinders virtue, even infecting the innocent, producing death.\textsuperscript{17}

Although African Americans were plagued with profound socio-economic and political challenges, Jones was convinced that great opportunities were ahead. As a pan-Africanist (i.e., one who affirms the solidarity of people of African descent), Jones affirmed the historical contributions and nobility of African people.\textsuperscript{18} Believing that nobility was oftentimes bestowed upon the marginalized by God, African Americans should have hope in the future. For Jones, character could overcome these challenges. Character was inclusive of self-respect and other virtues. In fact, character was developed through salvation and the teaching of Scripture.

Character was salvific or the means through which God’s redemption manifested to save black people. In this respect, Jones proffered a list of virtues shaped by truth, courage, and compassion.\textsuperscript{19} Key to social uplift were, “faith, indomitable will, dauntless courage, serpent-like wisdom, and dove-like disposition.” In support of these virtues were the pursuit of “truth, knowledge, discretion, honesty, honor, integrity.” These were integral to God’s wishes to elevate, instruct, and guide his people for the spiritual and social salvation of others.\textsuperscript{20} Jones’ explication of holiness as liberation affected by character provided a theological foundation for Mason’s own effort to preserve slave religion with his own view of holiness as freedom, and his efforts towards social uplift rooted in personal and communal sanctification.

**Pentecostal Distinctives and Racial Diversity at Azusa**

Inspired by the Welsh Revival of 1904, William J. Seymour, a black Holiness preacher from Louisiana, led a group of 100 “prayer warriors” into a ten-day fast for revival on Bonnie Brae Street in Los Angeles, California. Within three days, participants were being baptized in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues, reminiscent of the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:4. This resulted in an unprecedented and

\textsuperscript{16} Daniels, “The Cultural Renewal of Slave Religion,” 201.
\textsuperscript{18} Daniels, “The Cultural Renewal of Slave Religion,” 217.
\textsuperscript{19} Daniels, “The Cultural Renewal of Slave Religion,” 217.
unimaginable display of Christian unity. The revival would grow to include as many as twenty different races and nationalities from a myriad of ecclesiastical backgrounds worshipping together. The work grew so quickly, and the worship was so loud and lively, that Seymour decided to move into the old Stevens African Methodist Episcopal Church on 312 Azusa Street. This abandoned building with sawdust floors was more like a barn than a church. In egalitarian worship and fellowship, blacks and whites prayed for each other; men and women participated freely and preached in the services. From 1906 to 1909, the ministry conducted three services a day. These were non-liturgical gatherings designed to be Spirit-led. As a result of this newfound freedom, meetings were filled with fervent prayers, songs, testimonies, preaching, conversions, Spirit baptism, exorcisms, and healings. Despite these miraculous effects, the violation of social conventions concerning race and gender, along with the raucous worship experience, evoked condemnation by the media and others. Undisturbed by the rigorous schedule or social convention, those desperate to experience Spirit baptism headed upstairs to the Upper Room, reminiscent of Acts 2. This multicultural, multi-ethnic melting pot of people included blacks, whites, immigrants, and Mexicans, who also played an early role in the revival, along with Swedish, Irish, English, Russian, Armenian, Chinese, and people of South Asian descent. These seekers would spend additional time, even days, in prayer and supplication for a divine touch.21

In 1907, at the request of C. P. Jones, Mason, D. J. Young, and J. A. Jeter, Mason went to the Azusa Street Revival to inquire into the new teaching on Spirit baptism.22 Initially, Mason was concerned about what he saw upon his visit. However, on the second night of his visit he received Spirit baptism, and later recalled the event with keen specificity.23 After this life changing experience, Mason stayed in Los Angeles to learn the doctrine taught by Seymour. After leaving Azusa, he did not go directly home, but visited Virginia where he preached the message of Pentecost and shared his testimony. He preached in churches and in the open air to crowds as large as 6,000, comprised of black and white supplicants who responded to his message of salvation, sanctification, and Spirit baptism. During this itinerant thrust, Mason even managed to


establish the C. H. Mason Memorial Church of God in Christ. It is this pneumatological experience that represents the final stage in Mason’s theological evolution—bringing together sanctification and power in a manner that produced spiritual and material deliverance. Mason’s Azusa Street experience had a profound impact on his ministry and theology.

According to Weaver, Seymour encouraged Mason and his team to experience a spiritual metamorphosis through Spirit baptism, and that tongues are a sign that follows the experience. Like Seymour, who was the son of slaves, so was Mason. Both experienced slave religion and were products of the Baptist church. In addition, Seymour believed that spiritually transformed African Americans would be supernaturally empowered to love their enemies and overcome racism. Mason also believed that this power would enable his people to overcome both racism and classism. Theologically, while C. P. Jones and the Holiness Movement envisioned the baptism of the Spirit as a “second blessing,” or a second work of grace, Seymour understood this experience as a third work of grace accompanied by glossolalia (i.e., speaking in tongues). What Seymour said publicly and in private counsel resonated with Mason. So impactful was the experience that Mason stayed at Azusa for five weeks to undoubtedly learn and absorb as much from Seymour and the revival as possible.

The Quest for Social Resurrection

Mason’s ministry began in 1893, after the optimistic Reconstruction (1867–1877) came to a grinding halt under the presidential administration of Rutherford B. Hayes. As a result, Southern revenge moved quickly to dismantle the political, economic, and social gains of former slaves and their progeny. The system of Jim Crow guaranteed that blacks would suffer persistently as a permanent underclass to be exploited and discarded. In this cultural milieu, slave religion offered Mason a framework through which to interpret the sweltering socio-economic violence perpetrated against his people without recourse. According to Raynard Smith, “In their desire to seek relief from their oppressive conditions, the slaves sought the comfort of their religion. Slave religion provided African Americans with the ability to interpret their world events from a liberationist perspective.”

Key to Mason’s strategy for spiritual uplift was the practice of slave religion. Emerging out of slavery, black Baptists in Mississippi began without ordained clergy,

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25 Weaver, “Mark the Perfect Man,” 124–34.
formal structures, or educational programming. This situation was complicated by conflicting religious culture, polity, and organization. For Mason and others, the goal was the transformation of slave religion by eliminating practices deemed heathen by evangelicals. In slave religion, the ring-shout captured the essence of the tradition. While there were various configurations, after the main service, the congregants would gather in a circle around several supplicants. Those who were encircled and those in the circle began clapping, singing, and praising God until the experience would heighten into a frenzy of praise, shouting, weeping, and laughing. The goal could be to convert supplicating sinners, while creating an atmosphere for an encounter with God. The essence of the ring-shout was reconstituted through more powerful charismatic, New Testament forms. From the early days of the COGIC, Elton Weaver notes this phenomenon:

Members who got physically sick but could not afford medical doctors were anointed with oil. Hands were placed on their bodies to heal them. Many who recovered testified that they had been healed by Mason’s touch. He used unconventional techniques like positive speaking to counter negative thinking, protest prayers, prophecy, laying on of hands, blessed oils and handkerchiefs, spiritual singing, praise music, dancing and shouting, speaking in tongues, and other cultural expressions as therapeutic release mechanisms. . . . Blacks who attended his church felt safe from danger, expressed themselves freely, and were always told they were important. Mason’s religions, techniques, and ideas of black progress and equality were a healing catharsis.

In the throes of social death, the Exodus became the paradigmatic narrative for black existence. Existential continuity and solidarity with the Israelites provided an interpretive lens through which to see God as Liberator. While embracing the liberation motif in Scripture, Mason was convinced that social equality was the divine intent. To complement a tempered social activism, Mason called for patient humility in prayer as a strategy of active non-violent resistance. He was convinced that through supplication, God would gradually, but certainly, ameliorate the situation. In effect, this provided the downtrodden with hope, while modulating black activism and the inevitable retaliation of angry whites. Mason’s sentiments are well represented in a piece published in the Truth, a paper produced earlier on during Mason’s affiliation and collaboration with C. P. Jones. The article was entitled, “A Message of Hope for the Black Man: How He May Get Thro [sic] This Awful Time.” While temperate on social activism, Mason holds out

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29 Weaver, “Mark the Perfect Man,” 142–43.
hope for divine intervention. At this juncture, despite the lived realities of his people, he maintained a remarkable confidence in God’s ability and willingness to act on behalf of oppressed people as they persist in prayer:

We must not tire in prayer. We must groan and bear, grin and endure, love our enemies, bless them that curse us, do good to them that hate us, make the best of everything and be all the while looking to God. . . . The colored people need to do this that [sic] now, neither ought there be delay. Nineveh did it. Are we better than they? . . . O if our leaders would humbly consider this! We could then change sentiment in America. God would do it.31

Since Mason was convinced from Scripture that everyone came from one blood and was therefore equal before God, he strove to embody this conviction. Despite Jim Crow, Mason routinely fellowshipped with white believers, and accepted invitations to preach in white churches. Not only were whites welcome to full participation in the COGIC, but they also held leadership roles and even had a conference of white churches within the denomination. Other white ministers were allowed to use the COGIC charter for ministry credentialing and savings on railroad travel. When a group of white clergy left to establish the Assemblies of God, Mason attended the meeting and blessed them, although he was not formally invited. Alas, the power of segregation was too formidable to resist. In the 1930s the conference of white churches was dissolved, as it was believed that the whites were attempting to start a separate denomination. So ended the vision of an inclusive community that had been initially birthed by William Seymour.32

Local Church Structure

At the local level, church polity was ordered like a family. The pastor modeled the role of a father, and the church mother, the role of a mother. The church mother operated as the church disciplinarian, teacher, and enforcer of COGIC standards of conduct. On the other hand, the church father or pastor legitimized the mother’s instructions, by officially endorsing and reinforcing the teachings based on his pastoral authority. While the pastor and church mother were not normally married to each other, together they modeled gender relationships to a bedraggled people surrounded by instability from social, economic, and racial disparities.33 Many church mothers were spiritual trailblazers who preached on street corners, conducted revivals, and laid the foundations for new church plants. At times, their spiritual authority and charismatic leadership

rivaled the authority of the male leadership in the church. With church mothers as the primary enforcers of the sanctified life, Anthea Butler argues that in this context, COGIC women became the exemplars or models for the sanctified life. As a result, the proliferation and expression of sanctification as the fundamental COGIC distinctive would not have been possible without the tireless, selfless, and oftentimes unheralded labors of both named and unnamed COGIC women.

### Early Church Growth

As a result of being surveilled by the government during World War I under suspicion of subverting the war efforts, Mason gained publicity as his name was bandied about in major newspapers. In the 1920s and 1930s his popularity grew as COGIC adherents who migrated from the South established COGIC churches in major urban centers. During these challenging economic times, Mason and his churches ministered to the needs of the poor by not only preaching the gospel, but by clothing, feeding, and healing them. Mason used his influence and holiness as a weapon of nonconformity to combat racial stereotypes and oppression. By the time of Mason’s death in 1961, holiness as a way of life had effectively challenged the religious status quo and dominant culture to carve out a vibrant, lived religious tradition, as the COGIC touted one million members worldwide. By reformulating and institutionalizing slave religion, Mason effectively radicalized and weaponized holiness as a lived religious form for higher spiritual, economic, and social development. Through the service, piety, morality, and modesty of COGIC women, sanctified living was effectively concretized as the religious distinctive of the movement.

### Social Context

As unlikely as Mason and the COGIC story may be, understanding the brutal social milieu within which both emerged exposes the remarkable resilience and persistence of both the man and the movement buoyed by an exilic vitality. The end of Reconstruction in 1877 brought the end of black political and social progress. Southern Democrats regained control of government and implemented a brutal social order of submission and exploitation of black people. Sharecropping replaced slavery as the next iteration of systemic oppression and economic servitude. Fearing the machinations of

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35 Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ*, 76.
36 Weaver, “Mark the Perfect Man,” 243–50.
37 Weaver, “Mark the Perfect Man,” 288.
black holiness worshippers, whites reacted violently to all-night services like the ones
promoted by Mason. Shootings and severe beatings were not unusual. Whites felt that
their laborers were unable to adequately perform their duties after such events. In
Holmes County, Mississippi, where Mason experienced much ministry success, blacks
represented the majority, but were confined to farm and domestic work. From 1870 to
1897, in Holmes County, the illiteracy rate among blacks was dismal, ranging from 35
to 41 percent. At the same time, upwardly mobile blacks, striving for racial uplift,
dismayed the emotional displays by ignorant, uneducated religious fanatics, like
Mason. In fact, the famous Ida B. Wells railed against uneducated and unseemly
ministers, advocating for an educated clergy poised to teach morals and values. Contra
Wells, according to Mason, it was this Baptist preoccupation with education, social, and
political empowerment that at the same time neglected the spiritual needs of the
people.

The confluence of these circumstances placed Mason’s followers in the social,
economic, political, and religious margins, helping to forge a distinctive exilic identity.
However, for these people, Mason’s ministry offered hope. Women could more readily
participate in services with unrestrained emotive worship and testimonies of God’s
grace. Uneducated men could gain respectability as spiritual leaders, despite being
dismissed by the outside world. Those in need of healthcare, but who had no means to
secure it, were attracted to Mason’s faith in God’s power to heal, which according to a
myriad of testimonials, produced both material and cathartic results. Birthed in the
Mississippi Delta, the COGIC was born in the crucible of lynch mobs, Klansman, and
withering white oppression. At the end of the nineteenth century, thousands of blacks,
men and women, had been lynched and burned. This helped to fuel the black
migration to the North and West. Between 1910 and 1960, more than 4 million blacks
fled the South in hopes of a better life. During this same time, the COGIC grew
nationally and missionally into many of the urban centers populated by blacks. As in
the South, the COGIC catered to the poor, which was part of its missional strategy and
genius to socially uplift through Christian holiness. Early in the movement, the church
enjoyed a strong contingent of white members. Initially known for its multicultural
appeal, over time, the pressures of social stratification, along with the rise of white-led

Pentecostal denominations, such as the Assemblies of God and the Foursquare Church, resulted in whites leaving the COGIC to attend predominantly white fellowships.43

**Church Culture**

Unlike other denominations at the time, the COGIC created a revolutionary ministry model and church culture that effectively leveraged the gifts, talents, resources, and passion of women to grow and sustain the church. Women were not only instrumental, but influential in helping to plant, build, and sustain ministry. Furthermore, the COGIC resisted acquiescing to white religious practices and standards. According to Clemmons, the confluence of a number of factors contributed to the work of women being essential to the organization.44 First, the holiness movement of which C. H. Mason had been a part featured women leading, preaching, and pastoring. This egalitarian spirit manifested at Azusa, carried over into the Pentecostal Movement, where both male and female leadership were common. Second, with the end of Reconstruction, blacks suffered intense economic exploitation with few paths for upward mobility. Recognizing education as the key to upward mobility, the black community focused on educating women. In turn, these women became catalysts for community activism and organizational support for the church. Third, during the women’s suffrage movement, African American men were more likely to support women having the right to vote than were white men. While these historical factors were crucial, Mason’s personal investment in female leadership was decisive.45

In slave tradition, there were two important principles that probably informed Mason’s commitment to women in ministry: (1) the spiritual equality of women, which promoted the use of their spiritual gifts; and (2) the shared responsibility of men and women in community and the field. While slave women functioned authoritatively in spiritual and civil spaces, they were still subject to male leadership. Furthermore, this model appears to be an adaptation of West African society, in which women wielded power in certain domains and had political representation. For example, in the “dual-sex” system, a man functioned as the overall head, while a woman was responsible for overseeing the concerns of the women. In Mason’s model, women could teach, but not hold the title of preacher or pastor. At the local level, the church mother was the head of women’s ministry under pastoral oversight. This model was perpetuated at the jurisdictional and national levels. The term “mother” was used for the head of women’s

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ministry and faithful senior women who comprised the mothers board. When the pastor was absent, the church mother was in charge. By harnessing the power of women, maintaining slave worship, and the preeminence of prayer, Mason was able to effectively preserve and translate the spiritual power and essence of slave religion into a vibrant religious tradition.46

Social Engagement

As he traveled throughout the South, Mason would preach to diverse crowds. On many of these occasions, he used his pulpit to comment on racial injustice. Due to his renunciation of racism, Mason called for a national boycott of bus companies that offered poor treatment of black customers. In 1931, through his Whole Truth newsletter, he lauded the railroad for hiring blacks and providing better service to the black community. He encouraged his followers to support the railroads because in doing so, they were protecting thousands of jobs for African American workers.47 Mason supported the National Council of Negro Women founded by the renowned Mary McLeod Bethune. Bethune’s affiliation with Lillian Brooks Coffey, the second national head of the COGIC Women’s Department, gave COGIC women greater influence and exposure.48 Anthea Butler makes important connections between the social engagement of COGIC women in civic matters, and the overall shift of the tradition from a more interior focus on sanctification, to taking sanctification to the world. She notes that political and social realities of the 1940s and 1950s brought this shift. The work was couched in sanctified language to normalize the work. External alliances and relationships were pursued with the intent to transform the world through a sanctified lifestyle. This brought civic, social, and political capital to the movement, enabling expansion beyond its more parochial roots.49

As Mason’s success grew in Memphis, Tennessee, so did his opposition. Progressive blacks strove to refine the black community to accommodate and win the approval of whites. Instead of refined liturgies and well-ordered services, Mason’s services were critiqued as fanatical and chaotic, unleashing uncouth “holy rollers.” Interpreting these events, progressive blacks saw Mason’s services, which catered to uncultured poor folks, as an impediment to social progress. Furthermore, it was believed that Mason’s other-worldly focus and message left him without a response to the pressing social issues of the day. Nevertheless, as oppressed people yearned for relief

46 Israel, “Mothers Roberson and Coffey,” 105–110.
from their existence, the COGIC provided a cathartic approach to faith that attracted many. Mason’s spiritual demonstrations, including exorcising demons and interpreting unknown tongues, convinced other poor blacks, steeped in slave religion, that Mason exercised control over the spirit realm.50

During the Great Depression, challenging social and economic conditions created a space for the organization to grow, as poor blacks left their rural surroundings and migrated to Memphis. Soaring unemployment and squalid living conditions bred outbreaks of diseases such as typhoid. While progressives perceived Mason’s message as ethereal, the poor flocked to Mason for the promise of divine healing. In fact, Mason’s revivals during this period were known as “emergency rooms of the soul.”51 Testimonials of God’s healing power were abundant. In addition to healing services, the church started to teach the poor about health and hygiene. As alcoholism and domestic problems exploded among both blacks and whites, the COGIC holiness stance prohibited its members from consuming alcohol, while providing support to men looking to abandon their families. Because of these priorities, COGIC members were sought out by employers for being a dependable labor pool. Mason garnered support among whites, as they perceived his message as a helpful social control for blacks.52

**Mason’s Vision of Holiness as Wholeness**

For Mason, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts meant to live a “clean life.”53 Thus, clean living, while made possible by God’s grace and not human effort, was the responsibility of the believer to pursue. This clean life included freedom from vices such as smoking, drugs, sexual immorality, and some alleviation of social oppression. As an adept folk theologian, Mason drew out implications relevant to the embodied reality of his own dispossessed people.

His is not a repudiation of culture *in toto*, but a much needed “higher development,” informed by an exilic, *non-Evangelical* 54 vision of holiness, as he never

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54 *Evangelical* (Evangelical faith + the priority of Americanism) is a term that I chose as it is readily confounded with the term *Evangelicals*, just as this belief system is often confused with true evangelical faith. *What is an Evangelical?* Following Mark Noll, evangelicalism is not a static construct, but a coalescing of movements, alliances, and influential individuals towards what has been discerned as “evangelical” trajectories or impulses stemming from the mid-eighteenth-century revivalism in Northern Europe and North America. According to historian David Bebbington, these include being born-again or a conversion experience, the ultimate authority of the Bible for faith and praxis, evangelism, activism, and the centrality of Christ’s work on the cross. Yet, these alone have not yielded a cohesive, well-defined sect of Christians (Mark Noll, *The Scandal*).
taught his followers to abandon culture or society. Instead, he taught that through Spirit baptism and holy pursuit, poor black folks could rise out of sin, poverty, relegation to the bottom of society, and lighten the scourge of racial injustice.\textsuperscript{55} Sanctification was the key for black folks to progress and gain strength as a people. To live holy in the context of this Holiness-Pentecostal context meant to overcome the things that hindered moral and natural progress. It divinely enabled self-control and moderation over passions and destructive patterns of behavior. Holy Spirit-empowered living would not only bring moral and material success but self-empowerment and self-reliance that were not dependent upon societal uplift.\textsuperscript{56}

In a message preached circa 1924, entitled, “God’s Oath,” Mason asserts the universality of sanctification and declared, “All are to be righteous.” His religious affections are circumscribed by holiness and sanctification. He references Isaiah 60:21, which states, “Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified.” In the context of Isaiah 60, the writer describes the future eschatological kingdom of God. During this time of enormous prosperity and spiritual transformation, those in Zion will all be holy and righteous. This will include all the nations of the world who have come to serve Yahweh. At this time, the promise to Abram, namely making him a great nation (Gen 12:2); the eternal bequeathing of the land to his descendants who will multiply as the dust of the earth (Gen 13:15–16); the multiplication of Abram’s descendants like the stars of heaven (Gen 15:5); the innumerable multiplication of

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of the Evangelical Mind [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1994], 8–9). A common, but controversial term used to describe this political phenomena is the term “Constantinianism.” This term, popularized by the late ethicist and theologian, John H. Yoder, refers to the rise of the church under the Roman emperor, Constantine, during the fourth century. In short, under his reign, Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire. As a result, the church enjoyed protections and privilege from the state, which resulted in its prophetic witness being compromised. In this new context, the church shared power with, and at the behest of, the empire, while offering no prophetic witness against the evils of empire (John H. Yoder, The Christian Witness to the State [Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 2002], 95–97). However, the implications and meaning of Constantine’s reign relative to this phenomenon have recently been contested by some scholars (D. Stephen Long, “Yoderian Constantinianism?,” in Constantine Revisited: Leithart, Yoder, and the Constantinian Debate, ed. John D. Roth [Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013], 100–23). As a result, I redefine this phenomena as Evangelicanism to sidestep this debate and avoid unnecessary distraction from the task at hand. For Mason, progress and “higher development” were both spiritual and material. This included the heart lifted to God and outreach to fellow African Americans and other marginalized groups. Beyond the Wesleyan and Keswickian higher life teachings, this was not purely spiritual, but holistic progress—mind, body, soul, and spirit. Mason used his own commitment to spiritual growth as an exemplar of God’s ability to overcome structural barriers of race and class. While a proponent of education and acquiring property, clean living was the bedrock for success in life (Daniels, “A More Excellent Way,” 111–28).
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\textsuperscript{55} Smith, “Seeking the Just Society,” 104–109.

\textsuperscript{56} Frederick L Ware, “Charles Harrison Mason as Sign Reader and Interpreter,” in With Signs Following: The Life and Ministry of Charles Harrison Mason, ed. Raynard Smith (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2015), 48–49.
Abram’s descendants (Gen 16:10); and the multiplication of his descendants as the sand of the sea with victory over their enemies (Gen 22:17), will all be completely and ultimately fulfilled. God’s oath to Abraham, referenced in Luke 1:73–75, will culminate in the eschatological kingdom where righteousness dwells. This end time reality is defined by the ethical righteousness and justice demanded by Yahweh but historically sporadic and elusive to the nation of Israel (cf. Isa 48:1–22; 59:1–21). In this passage, it is not just Israel, but the whole world that has embraced holiness and righteousness. Mason understands holiness as the path or highway to the fulfillment of God’s oath to Abraham and God’s redemptive purpose through Abraham.

Therefore, holiness and righteousness are the prerequisites for the fulfillment of God’s covenantal promises to Abraham. While this passage is eschatological, Mason effectively holds to a realized eschatology, where there is a clear “now and not yet” tension. As the saints await the eschaton, or the coming of the Lord, they enjoy a modicum of the blessing of Abraham, including peace, provision, power, healing, deliverance, and victory over natural and spiritual enemies. There is no strict promise/fulfillment hermeneutic established between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Mason’s canonical approach envisions all of Scripture as the inspired, infallible word of God and creates continuity between the testaments. While affirming material blessings, Mason’s sense of continuity emphasizes spiritual benefits, with both material and spiritual blessings being covenantal and conditional. In general, this promotes a cumulative effect where the New Testament revelation does not entirely supplant that of the Old Testament. The Old Testament themes regarding divine retribution upon the wicked, with material healing and prosperity for the righteous, are united with the spiritual blessings of the New Testament. This more capacious perspective makes ample room for both spiritual and material blessing and thereby provides a robust theological perspective suited for the situatedness and lived realities of Mason and his oppressed people. Scripture is not interpreted through some abstract philosophical lens, but in the context of their location and adopted in response to the complexity of their lived reality.

In this same sermon, it is significant that out of all the superlatives applied to believers in 1 Peter 2:9, Mason focuses on “holy nation.” In general, the focus of

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58 This notion is captured in COGIC hymnody. An example is the congregation song entitled, “There’s A Highway to Heaven.” The chorus is insightful: “It’s a highway to Heaven/None can walk up there but the pure in heart/It’s a highway to heaven/I am walking up the King’s highway.” Clemmons, Bishop C. H. Mason and the Roots of the Church of God in Christ, 164.

holiness is to create a community in which the character of God as exemplified by the people of God overflows in love for neighbor and alien residents as themselves. By covenantal observance, Israel was to be a community sanctified by God’s gracious righteousness. This was to enable their response to the divine call as a holy nation and as a kingdom of priests, set aside as agents of redemptive grace in the world. In living out their calling, not only did Mason and the COGIC create a distinct community and way of being in the world that undermined the religious, social, and cultural power structures of the day, but as noted, they created an alternate reality. In this alternate universe, those who were marginalized in their natural location and vocation were welcomed and invited to hold power, position, and prestige in their spiritual location and vocation. In Zion, they thrived as bishops, pastors, church mothers, missionaries (i.e., leading women), teachers, ministers, deacons, brothers, and sisters in a world structured around the place where God’s presence dwelt. Indeed, despite the downward pull of daily life, living this type of life created a self-understanding maintained by the saints as a “peculiar people” (KJV), “a people for his own” (NET), “God’s very own possession” (NLT), and “a people for his possession” (ESV).

**COGIC Articles of Religion on Holiness as Wholeness**

An example of the holistic dimensions of sanctification is demonstrated in the narrative of God’s deliverance of the Hebrew boys in Daniel 3. This text was included in the article of religion on salvation because it demonstrates God’s power and ability to deliver. “Salvation comes from God through Christ. He is our strong deliverance. Daniel 3:17: ‘If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, Oh, King. By grace are we saved through faith and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.’ Eph 2:8. ‘It comes to us...”

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60 Burgess and McGee, *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, 430.

61 In redemptive history, Zion develops as the dwelling place of God. Here, God is in the midst of his people. The Lord loved and chose Zion (Ps 78:68; 132:13) where his glorious presence rested (Ps 50:1, 2). His fire was in Zion, where he was enthroned (Ps 9:11; 99:1, 2) and ruled over the nations (Isa 24:23). Zion as the city of God is the object of all who thirst for the presence of God (Ps 42:1, 2; 63:1, 2). The Lord is the strength of Zion. Therefore, it will never fall (Ps 46:5). All who hate Zion will be put to shame (Ps 129:5) (“Zion, Daughter of,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, eds. Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, 2 vols. [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988], 2202–2204). For Mason and the COGIC, the Zion motif carried significant freight, and represented their affinity with the ancient people of God, and more importantly, being a dwelling place for the presence of God. An excerpt from an early COGIC publication concerning the annual convocation is instructive of their self-understanding: “Blow the Trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly. To sanctify means to set apart for God—a fast to consecrate ourselves for the work He has given us to do, to humble ourselves before God, and to repent of all sin and disobedience in our lives” (Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ*, 72).
through faith in God. According to Weaver, Mason indeed saw deliverance encompassing spiritual and social liberation. In this context, the marginalized could overcome both personal and social encumbrances. Mason even contended that his own experience of sanctification produced his religious transformation. This is true because the gospel not only removes corruption, but regenerates a person, making all things new. This regeneration impacts both the spiritual and social trajectory of a person. In fact, sanctification held the promise of transformation for both individuals and communities. While salvation and sanctification may be theologically distinct, in the lived theology of the “sanctified church,” sanctification is the goal of salvation. The terms are almost interchangeable.

It is noteworthy that deliverance is connected to Daniel 3:17. In the third chapter of Daniel, three young Hebrew exiles, under the threat of death, refuse to worship the graven image of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. While resisting the seduction of state induced idolatry, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are exposed to the overwhelming power of the state via the king. They refuse to bow down and are cast into a blazing furnace that is stoked to be seven times hotter to express the king’s anger at their perceived insolence. Not only does God miraculously deliver them from the fiery furnace, but they emerge completely unscathed, and are also promoted to positions of prominence in Babylon.

Most importantly, Yahweh is glorified. Laws are even changed to revere Yahweh as a unique and powerful god. In addition, both the king and the state are transformed as a result of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego’s sanctification and commitment to Yahweh. Clearly, this passage holds promise for both spiritual and social transformation, as personal faithfulness in the face of persecution can lead to radical individual, communal, and political change through the power of God. Not only were the young men delivered from the “enemy” of death, but also experienced social uplift by being promoted to positions of prominence in Babylon. The exilic consciousness or being “in Babylon, but not of Babylon” created space for them to live and even serve in Babylon, while not succumbing to the pagan and godless practices of the king or the state. Furthermore, the concept of salvation is couched in the language of liberation or being made free, as stated below:

Salvation comes when a man believes the truth of the Gospel. “Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.” St. John 8:32 . . . “Because it is written, Be ye holy: for I am holy.” 1st Peter 1:16. Salvation is deliverance from dangers and enemies. In its ordinary use, the word is used to denote deliverance from sin through faith in Christ by the Power of God. The Gospel of Jesus Christ through

62 Jones and Bryant, Manual of the Church of God in Christ, 7.
63 Weaver, “Mark the Perfect Man,” 60.

Salvation demands believing the truth of the gospel and imitating the holiness of God. Using the language of deliverance, salvation is deliverance from dangers, enemies, sin, shame, and disgrace through faith in Christ by the power of God. The biblical references in support of this position are also instructive. Exodus 14:13 states, “And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever.” According to theologian James Evans, African Americans read the Bible with “new eyes” informed by their oppression and desire for liberation. He argues that

The Exodus experience was an archetypal myth that, while drawn from Scripture, became the lens through which the Bible was read. . . . The Exodus account reflected in a striking way the experience of the slaves. It required no stretch of the imagination to see the trials of the Israelites as paralleling the trials of the slaves, Pharaoh and his army as oppressors, and Egyptland as the South. 

Following this train of thought, Raynard Smith contends that God as liberator emerged from the slaves’ reading of Exodus. This hermeneutic influenced Mason as he recognized that just as divine intervention ended slavery, the same would be required to bring racial justice and equality after slavery. Given this framework, for Mason and the COGIC, salvation expands beyond mere spiritual redemption and freedom from sin. It now includes social and political liberation and uplift. In Exodus 14:13, God will bring a permanent deliverance from every Pharaoh, the archetypal oppressor, and freedom from the associated shame and disgrace. In this context, oppression is inclusive of both material and spiritual encumbrances.

The last example comes from Luke 1:69, where the Scripture says, “And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.” This messianic reference to Jesus as “an horn of salvation” metaphorically speaks of his saving power, as horns in Scripture represent power (Ps 75:4–5, 10; 148:14; 2 Sam 22:3). So, the motifs of God’s salvific liberation and power are prominent themes in COGIC soteriology. The “new eyes” of Mason and the COGIC can see God’s liberating power not just in Exodus, but wherever it is to be found in Scripture, while manifesting in the lives of believers.

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64 Jones and Bryant, Manual of the Church of God in Christ, 12.
66 Smith, “Seeking the Just Society,” 100.
67 Smith, “Seeking the Just Society,” 100.
Theological Summary

Through affiliations with men such as William Christian, C. P. Jones, and William J. Seymour, Mason cultivated a theological basis for racial equality, political and social uplift. While resisting cultural assimilation, COGIC leaders and members fought to improve the opportunities and promote racial and social uplift in their communities. COGIC scholar, Raynard Smith, contends that God as liberator emerged from the slaves’ reading of Exodus. This hermeneutic influenced Mason and others as they recognized that just as divine intervention ended slavery, the same would be required to bring racial justice and equality after slavery. Nevertheless, in this quest for economic, social, and political justice, the holiness ethic was never lost to the fierce urgency of self-preservation. To the contrary, holiness was the catalyst to upward mobility and dogged self-determination in worship and the world.

Furthermore, as demonstrated through the existential realities of this renewal movement, exilic existence is fraught with many challenges related to social marginality, including poverty. During the Great Migration, the COGIC focused expansion on the large, poor urban centers in the North and West, beyond the Jim Crow South. The movement reached a cross-section of people with the gospel. However, understanding that the socially sick, not the socially whole, were in need of a physician, evangelizing the poor and marginalized was strategic and fundamental to COGIC existence. Daniel Smith-Christopher argues that to be exilic is to be missional, as influence is not based on the wielding of worldly, even violent, power, but spiritual integrity. He argues that Scripture has too often been misread to confine social marginality to spiritual matters. Instead, diasporic people present real material and social alternatives over against the dominant cultural mythologies and ideologies. To this point, Cone’s argument for liberation speaks of God’s preference for the poor:

If we take seriously the objective reality of divine liberation as a precondition for reconciliation, then it becomes clear that God’s salvation is intended for the poor and the helpless, and it is identical with their liberation from oppression. That is why salvation is defined in political terms in the Old Testament and why the prophets take their stand on the side of the poor within the community of Israel. As we have demonstrated, throughout the biblical story, God stands with the weak and against the strong. Thus fellowship with God is made possible by God’s righteous activity in the world to set right the conditions for reconciliation. God’s setting right the conditions for divine-human fellowship is liberation, without

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68 Smith, “Seeking the Just Society,” 100.
70 Smith-Christopher, A Biblical Theology of Exile, 201.
which fellowship would be impossible. To speak of reconciliation apart from God’s liberating activity is to ignore the divine basis of the divine-human fellowship.71

Consistent with what Cone advocates, Mason took his stance “with the weak and against the strong.” This was not white against black, but with the powerless against the powerful. As has been discussed earlier, Mason gave voice, place, and space to the poor. His movement was built on poor people consigned to the social margins of society. According to Clemmons, “Mason always held in tension and balance the dynamic of holiness, spiritual encounter and spiritual empowerment, and prophetic Christian social consciousness.”72 Mason’s prophetic witness was not confined to spiritual matters. He greatly helped to meet the spiritual, relational, and material needs of people. While feeding, healing, and clothing the poor, he affirmed the poor by telling them that God loved them but was against their oppressor. He instructed his hearers that God would use natural disaster to devour the rich.73 By offering creative strategies for spiritual renewal and social equality, Mason’s and the COGIC’s impact and imprint upon black religious life in America are indelible. I submit that the COGIC posture of radicalizing holiness as the path to wholeness offers a rationale and a calculus that values both spiritual and embodied existence and is thereby worthy of consideration by the broader Christian tradition.

Considerations for the Broader Church

To this point, social location matters in the interpretive process and the creation of meaning, especially theological meaning. Consequently, the world, the word, and worship are experienced through a different set of lenses for those in exile and on the margins. Due to human creatureliness and fallenness, our knowledge is partial, perspectival, finite, and thus fallible, but not altogether skeptical. Although we are all located in bodies with features and frailties that shape our cognitive capabilities, culturally and linguistically, we are all located with ingrained narratives, culturally shaped values, and biases.74 This understanding should not only encourage interpretive humility, but hopefully promote the active engagement of Afro-Pentecostal and other Christian diasporas and their exilic members as teachers of diasporic strategies for the church to survive and thrive. In the opinion of this author, critical to evangelical renewal is a level of humility that hears and recognizes that the oppressed and exilic communities have something important to say about their lived religious experience.

72 Clemmons, Bishop C. H. Mason and the Roots of the Church of God in Christ, 46.
73 Weaver, “Mark the Perfect Man,” 248–49.
74 Amos Yong, Spirit-Word-Community, 175–84.
Finally, the COGIC has demonstrated through a Pentecostal Holiness theology and a vibrant lived religion that holistic salvation is inclusive of every dimension of human existence. The testimony of Scripture is that salvation brings the *shalom* of God to every aspect of our lived experience (John 10:10). This is inclusive of the spiritual, socio-economic, emotional, and relational aspects of life. As discussed, these aspects of existence were not excluded from Mason’s or the COGIC’s pursuit of Christian holiness in every dimension of life.

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MANAGING FINANCIAL SECTOR CRISIS

DO “FAITH” AND “LEAVE IT TO GOD” MATTER?

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Keywords faith, leave it to God, financial sector clean-up customers, coping strategies, Ghana

Abstract

The purpose of this study is twofold: first, to elucidate the understanding of two religious concepts related to the financial sector clean-up among bank customers; and second, to explore how these concepts have been employed as strategies to mitigate the impact of financial sector clean-up shocks in Ghana. This qualitative research is anchored in the theory of belief and meaning-making theory, utilizing purposive and snowball sampling methods, with twenty-eight in-depth interviews for data gathering. The findings of this study revealed that financial sector clean-up customers understood religious faith as “aggressive faith,” “passive faith,” and “offensive faith,” which were found to be coping strategies. Additionally, the interviewees shared their thoughts about “leave it to God” as a concept referring to things that we, as human beings, have no control over or things beyond human imagination, such as death, destiny, and natural disasters. These findings could assist financial institutions, regulators, and customers facing financial crises in successfully using religious concepts as coping strategies during times of financial uncertainty. This study’s objectives address evident research gaps in financial management literature. This study made the first attempt to combine two theories that proved useful and complementary in explaining the stress and coping mechanisms of financial sector clean-up customers from a developing country perspective, which has been overlooked in early studies.

Introduction

The influence of religious beliefs, practices, and disclosures on financial behavior, including savings, investment, and spending habits, has been well-documented. This study underscored the importance of community relations disclosures in evaluating
corporate creditworthiness. Furthermore, a study conducted revealed a positive correlation between religiosity and financial literacy. Despite this, some scholars contend that integrating religious concepts into the analysis of financial behavior might lead to conflicts in financial decision-making. Within management literature, researchers have established a positive relationship between religious beliefs and effective stress management.

Recent bank collapses have occurred on a global scale, including notable institutions such as Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank in the US and Credit Suisse in Europe. Although the banking crisis has had worldwide implications, our primary focus will be on the unique circumstances in Ghana. Our investigation will explore the ways individuals in Ghana employ religious concepts to manage stress stemming from bank collapses. By examining this phenomenon within the Ghanaian context, we aim to develop a more profound understanding of religion’s role as a coping mechanism during periods of financial turmoil.

The purpose of this study is twofold: first, to elucidate the understanding of two religious concepts, “faith” and “leave it to God,” related to the financial sector clean-up among bank customers; and second, to explore how these concepts have been employed as strategies to mitigate the impact of financial sector clean-up shocks. Initiated in 2017, Ghana’s financial sector clean-up aimed to address pervasive issues such as corruption, inadequate governance, and mismanagement within the banking sector. However, this study has highlighted that an unintended consequence of policy is non-stationarity, and policy is constantly attempting to achieve conditions that will result in this consequence. This intervention inadvertently led to liquidity challenges for the

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remaining financial institutions. Consequently, loan demand persisted, withdrawals increased, and customer deposits declined.\(^8\) In this study, we conceptualized “faith” and “leave it to God” as referring to the idea of trusting in a higher power to provide for financial needs and taking a passive approach to managing finances. Despite the importance attributed to the concepts of “faith” and “leave it to God” in the literature, much scholarly attention in exploring how these concepts work with financial sector clean-up customers in the financial sector of a developing country has been overlooked, creating a knowledge gap. Molen et al. examined how people cope with the stress of poverty and found faith to be the main coping strategy.\(^9\) Additionally, some earlier studies discussed how people use the concept of “leave it to God” as a coping mechanism when faced with situations they cannot control.\(^10\) Although these earlier studies have documented the relevance of the concepts, no study has qualitatively (1) explored the understanding of these two religious concepts among financial sector clean-up customers, and (2) assessed how “faith” was used as a coping strategy in the minds of the customers during the waiting time when they were hoping their money would be paid to them. This study adopted belief theory and meaning-making theory to investigate the financial sector clean-up customers’ behavior. In the context of financial behavior literature, the theory of planned behavior suggests that beliefs and values can have a significant impact on attitudes toward money and financial decision-making.\(^11\) Additionally, we employed the “meaning-making of coping” concept to elucidate the strategies Ghanaians implemented to manage stress while awaiting the release of their funds during the financial sector clean-up. This theory posits that when confronted with difficult or ambiguous circumstances, individuals may endeavor to comprehend their experiences by constructing narratives or belief systems that enable them to discover meaning and purpose in their lives.\(^12\)

This study assumes that the customers rely on their religious faith as a coping strategy in making meaning while waiting for their savings to be repaid. Some


customers also make sense of the situation by leaving the “payment of their savings” to God to decide for them. Significantly, this study is valuable to various stakeholders, including policymakers, financial institutions, practitioners, and customers globally. Specifically, we have contributed to the extant literature in three ways. First, our study is among the few on the African continent that have attempted to extend the understanding of these religious concepts in the financial sector, with a focus on customers of financial institutions affected by the clean-up. This new insight will support the financial literacy agenda, which aids in educating individuals on how to earn, spend, save, borrow, and protect their money. Second, our findings have demonstrated the relevance of “faith” as a coping strategy during financial sector clean-ups. Third, we have made a contextual contribution by filling a knowledge gap through an investigation into the neglected field in the financial literature from the developing country perspective. The study is structured into three sections. Section one includes an introduction and literature review, while section two explains the methods used for the study. The last section deals with the discussion of results, conclusions, implications, and future research directions.

**Literature Review**

**Contextual Background**

The financial sector clean-up in Ghana was initiated by the Bank of Ghana in 2017, with the aim of improving the stability and reliability of the financial sector. The clean-up was a comprehensive exercise aimed at addressing various issues affecting the sector, including the poor financial health of some banks, weak corporate governance practices, and inadequate risk management systems. The Bank of Ghana took several measures to address these issues, such as revoking licenses of some banks, merging certain banks, and injecting capital into others. The financial sector clean-up was a significant event in the history of Ghana’s financial sector, as it had far-reaching implications for the financial sector, customers, and the economy as a whole. On August 16, 2019, the Bank of Ghana successfully concluded the restructuring of banking, specialized deposit-taking (SDI), and non-bank financial institutions (NBFI) sectors, an initiative that commenced in August 2017. This restructuring involved revoking the licenses of nine universal banks, 347 microfinance companies (with 155 already non-operational), thirty-nine microcredit companies/money lenders (ten non-operational), fifteen savings and loans companies, eight finance house companies, and

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two non-bank financial institutions that were no longer in operation.\textsuperscript{15} The clean-up was expected to improve the stability and reliability of the financial sector, which would, in turn, boost the confidence of depositors and investors in the sector.\textsuperscript{16} However, Affum’s study revealed the following effects: deposits remained consistently low while withdrawals surged substantially.

This trend was attributed to widespread fears of financial losses and diminished confidence within the banking community. In contrast, lending activities persisted undisturbed. Customers previously associated with defunct financial institutions redirected their loan applications to those still operational. However, certain institutions faced difficulties in fulfilling loan requests due to liquidity constraints stemming from limited cash deposits.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{Theoretical Underpinning}

The theory of beliefs and meaning-making theory are the two underlying theories deployed for this study within the financial sector clean-up literature in non-Western country contexts. First, the theory of beliefs was applied to explore insights into financial sector clean-up customers’ beliefs in the Supreme Being for repayment of their locked-up monies. The second theory was useful to explain how customers made meaning out of the situation: locked-up monies during the financial sector clean-up exercises.

\textbf{Theory of Belief}

The theory of belief is considered a general framework for reasoning with unforeseen events or uncertainty.\textsuperscript{18} Typically, beliefs are associated with cognition or the brain, representing how people make sense of something they are thinking about. For example, a person’s brain might anticipate how things should relate to each other. Early scholars established a connection between beliefs and faith, as faith involves belief in a spiritual force. The doxastic theory holds that belief is a cognitive attitude that involves accepting a proposition as true.\textsuperscript{19} For many around the world, religious belief centers


\textsuperscript{16} BOG, \textit{Bank of Ghana Financial Stability Report}.

\textsuperscript{17} Affum, “The Unintended Effects of Bank Of Ghana’s Clean-Up Exercise on Unaffected Financial Institutions.”


on an unseen realm that, though distinct, is intimately connected to the visible one.\(^{20}\) To these believers, the ethereal world is an essential component of existence, not just an abstract contrast to the physical realm.\(^{21}\) This theory suggests that beliefs are formed as a result of a combination of evidence, experience, and reasoning.

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) posits that human behavior is influenced by three key considerations: behavioral beliefs, which pertain to the anticipated consequences and experiences of the behavior; normative beliefs, which concern the expectations and behaviors deemed acceptable by significant others; and control beliefs, which relate to factors that might either aid or hinder the execution of the behavior.\(^{22}\) For our analysis, we will delve deeper into the concept of behavioral belief, exploring its relationship with faith and expectations. Belief is primarily aimed at guiding action rather than declaring absolute truth.\(^{23}\) Additionally, other scholars assert that the belief in God is the fundamental cornerstone of the Christian faith.\(^{24}\) They articulate that to believe in God means to trust him, align with his purposes, commit oneself to him, and live aware of his omnipresence. To believers, the entire world is a testament to God’s presence.\(^{25}\) An individual’s beliefs shape their perception and understanding of the world. In this study, the affected customers believed in the Supreme Being as a source of a repayment solution to their situation. This study assumes that faith begins with one’s belief and trust in the Supreme Being, that God will help in finding solutions to the repayment of their locked-up funds. With this assertion, we used the theory of belief to explore individual customers’ faith in retrieving their money from financial institutions. The importance of the theory to this study can be understood by expanding the frontiers of the theory within the domain of financial sector clean-up literature, a neglected but essential area in a developing country context.


\(^{24}\) Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, eds., Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God (Notre Dame/London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

\(^{25}\) Plantinga and Wolterstorff, eds., Faith and Rationality.
Meaning-Making Theory

Alternatively, the role of religion as a meaning system in coping with adversity was investigated by Park. Subsequently, the meaning-making theory was formulated, differentiating between global and situational meaning, as well as between “meaning-making efforts” and “meaning made.” The findings reveal that the connections between religion and adjustment fluctuate over time following a loss, with these associations being mediated by meaning-making coping strategies. Building upon this research, Davis et al. presented the theory of religious meaning-making and attachment within the context of disasters, underscoring the significance of religious meaning-making in managing adverse situations. By utilizing these two theoretical frameworks, we examined the methods Ghanaians employed to navigate stress and maintain hope of recovering their deposits during the financial sector clean-up. In particular, we investigated the ways in which their beliefs, attitudes, and perceived control shaped their behavior, as well as how they leveraged religion and meaning-making approaches to address the challenges they encountered. Overall, this study embraces the assumption that customers of the financial institutions hold on to their religious faith as a coping strategy in making meaning and getting their savings paid back.

Faith

The concept of faith has been a topic of discussion for centuries and has been explored from various perspectives, including religious, psychological, and philosophical. Faith is often associated with hope, optimism, and resilience, as it provides a foundation for individuals to cope with life’s challenges. The Bible verse, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1), is one of the most recognized definitions of faith. In this literature review, we will explore how faith influences coping strategies in different contexts.

Application of Faith as a Coping Tool for Stress Management

Fawns investigated the coping strategies of teachers in managing stress and found that faith-based practices such as prayer, meditation, and spiritual/mystical experiences, as well as beliefs, behaviors, feelings, and involvement in church communities, helped in coping with life challenges. The study revealed that teachers who regularly engaged in these practices had a more positive outlook on life, experienced less stress, and were better equipped to handle difficult situations.29

A study conducted by Molen et al. examined how people cope with the stress of poverty and engage with its causes and potential solutions.30 The study found that individuals who collaborated with God were more likely to utilize problem-focused coping strategies compared to those who did not. Collaborating with God involves trusting in a higher power and seeking guidance through prayer and religious practices. The study showed that individuals who collaborated with God were more likely to act to address the root causes of their poverty and were less likely to experience feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. This suggests that the way in which individuals approach their relationship with a higher power can impact their ability to manage stress and work towards improving their situation.

Similarly, a study by Pargament and Hahn examines how individuals use their faith to cope with major life stressors, including financial stress.31 The authors found that individuals who used positive religious coping strategies, such as prayer and seeking social support from their religious community, tended to have better financial well-being and outcomes. There has been extensive research on the concept of faith as a coping strategy when dealing with stressful events in the health sector compared to the financial sector. For example, Levine et al. studied breast cancer survivors and found the main themes as: (1) God as a comforting presence; (2) questioning faith; (3) anger at God; (4) spiritual transformation of self and attitude towards others/recognition of own mortality; (5) deepening of faith; (6) acceptance; and (7) prayer by self.32 Other scholars who also found faith as a key coping strategy when dealing with the uncertainty of their illnesses are Roh et al., McCoy, Carrion et al., and Park et al.33

Similarly, Donkor and Sandall studied Ghanaian women with infertility problems and concluded that their Christian faith helped them in coping with the stigma of childlessness.\textsuperscript{34}

Moreover, in a study by Bradshaw and Ellison, it was revealed that engagement in religious activities and maintaining a belief in an afterlife contributed to reducing the detrimental effects of financial hardship on both objective and subjective aspects of financial distress.\textsuperscript{35} Conversely, meditation was identified as an effective strategy for mitigating the negative impacts specifically on objective financial hardship. Overall, these studies suggest that faith can be a valuable resource for individuals dealing with stress and major life challenges.

**Leave It to God**

The use of “leave it to God” as a coping mechanism for unmet expectations has been widely studied in the literature. According to Dancel, this coping mechanism relies on the belief that the outcome of events and situations is in the hands of a higher power, rather than under human control.\textsuperscript{36} Religious coping has been described as a passive form of coping, a form of denial, a defense against anxiety, and the last resort for people in untenable situations.\textsuperscript{37}

Pargament et al. conducted a study on the role of various religious coping efforts in dealing with negative events among a sample of 586 members of Christian churches.\textsuperscript{38} The study found that beliefs in a just, benevolent God, the experience of God as a supportive partner in coping, involvement in religious rituals, and the search for support through religion were associated with more positive outcomes. Similarly, attributions to God’s will appear to represent a benign, external, alternative explanation for events.

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\textsuperscript{36} Dancel, “Utang na loob: A Philosophical Analysis.”


to chance attributions. Wilt et al. conducted a study on religious coping and perceived divine intervention in relation to managing life challenges and promoting spiritual growth. The study found that collaborative religious coping had the strongest positive relationship with spiritual growth and struggle resolution, followed by active religious surrender and passive religious deferral. Additionally, perceived divine intervention independently predicted spiritual growth and struggle resolution.

Other studies have explored the effectiveness of specific religious coping strategies, such as surrendering to God’s will. Wong-McDonald and Gorsuch found that surrendering to God’s will can be an effective coping strategy for managing stress and challenges and is associated with positive religious and spiritual outcomes. Finally, a study on the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI) and Religious Coping Activities Scale (RCAS) found that individuals with secure and preoccupied attachment styles used more Christian activities and ideas in coping, while those with a fearful attachment style showed greater anger and doubt toward God. Overall, the literature suggests that religious coping can be an effective way to manage stress and challenges, especially when combined with a collaborative approach and a belief in divine intervention. Different religious coping strategies may be more effective for different individuals depending on their attachment style and beliefs.

**Research Methodology**

To investigate the role of “faith” and “leave it to God” concepts in helping financial sector clean-up customers cope with the 2017–2019 financial crisis in Ghana, we employed a qualitative research approach with interpretative phenomenological design utilizing interview-based methods. This study focuses on the 2017–2019 financial sector clean-up period due to the significant number of bank collapses and the widespread loss of customers’ savings. The clean-up aimed to restore stability and integrity within the Ghanaian financial sector. We used the interpretative phenomenological design to explore how customers of the financial cleanup made sense of their experiences.

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of their personal and social worlds, anchored on their faith and their understanding of what the Supreme God can do to retrieve their monies.

Ghana presents a compelling case for examination in 2022 for several reasons. First, this study was conducted during a time of severe economic crisis in the country. For instance, the Ghanaian currency, the cedi, lost 57% of its value against the US dollar between January and October 2022,43 resulting in a substantial increase in Ghana’s debt from $7.5 billion in 2012 to $29.4 billion in October 2022.44 Second, Ghana experienced high inflation (40.4%) in October 2022,45 along with banking crises involving non-performing loans, government bond holder instability, treasury bill rates, and Ghana’s domestic debt exchange program (haircut), among other issues. Collectively, these challenges created a financial crisis reminiscent of the 2017–2019 period within the Ghanaian financial sector. This context provided the impetus for our research team to conduct the current study.

Subsequently, we used purposive sampling, snowballing, and convenience sampling approaches with the aim of reaching out only to financial sector clean-up customers who were ready, willing, and available to take the interview. This working population was adopted due to the aim of this paper. Purposive sampling was used to scan for only those affected by the financial sector clean-up.

Snowball sampling was useful in referrals, where some interviewees recommended their friends or relatives who had similar experiences to be interviewed. In addition, convenience sampling was utilized in gathering data from interviewees who were willing and available for the interview. We interviewed twenty-eight participants, which is in line with the recommendation for a qualitative sample size using an in-depth interview approach.46 Furthermore, we were guided by the rich (quality) and thick (quantitative) data collection strategy offered by Saunders and Lewis, keeping in mind the data saturation method to achieve the purpose of this study.47 The data saturation method was to halt the interview when no new information was discovered in the data gathering. This justified the appropriateness of the sample size used in this study. To avoid recall bias in this study, we were guided by the work of Moreno-Serra et al., where the interview

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questions were carefully designed to reflect the financial sector clean-up incidents in 2017–2019.48 We also welcomed the interviewees by first providing a short narrative of the clean-up incidents, which lasted for an average of three minutes, to warm-up the discussion (icebreaker) before the main questions were posed to the interviewees.

For this study, a comprehensive interview guide was developed in English, including probing questions that aimed to address the specific objectives of the research.

1. Which financial institution were you saving with before the financial sector clean-up? Do you have a particular financial institution that you will only save with now? Why?
2. How did you perceive the financial sector clean-up in your own ways?
3. What are the specific impacts of the clean-up on your saving habits?
4. How does the “faith” concept help you to cope with financial shock?
5. How does the “leave it to God” concept help you to cope with financial shock?
6. What will you look for when choosing a financial institution after the clean-up?

To ensure the quality of the interview guide, it was reviewed by four financial experts from industry and academia who provided feedback on “faith” and “leave it to God” related questions. The researchers carefully considered and incorporated the experts’ suggestions before conducting the final interviews from November 2022 to January 2023. The experts suggested rephrasing of questions 2 and 4 for clarity as these questions were considered as leading and double-barreled questions. Each interview, which lasted between 45 to 60 minutes, followed a predetermined format.

Before participating, the interviewees were informed of the purpose of the study and completed a consent form. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed to ensure ethical considerations were met. We adopted thematic analysis with the support of NVivo 12, using the “in vivo coding” method, which allows the researchers to use the actual words of the interviewees in the coding process. To achieve rigor in reliability, validity, and trustworthiness in the data analysis and reporting of findings, we followed the recommended steps offered by Nowell et al. in their study striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria.49 First, we individually read and familiarized ourselves with the transcriptions (data). This allowed the researchers to make follow-up phone calls for clarity on some of the points made by the interviewees. Second, we generated twenty-four initial codes from the data, which allowed the researchers to understand what was happening in the data. Third, during the coding process, we identified and collated all


potential texts into three themes. Fourth, we reviewed the themes to find out whether there was coherence between the coded data extracted and the themes. Fifth, we defined and named the themes as “faith as coping strategies,” “making meaning of leaving it to God,” and “faith understanding” in the financial sector clean-up context. We also defined and named three sub-themes as “passive faith,” “aggressive faith,” and “offensive faith.” Sixth, we presented concise, coherent, and logical findings of this study.

Findings

The data coding yielded mixed results. Some interviewees held a 50/50 belief that their money would be paid back, while others relied solely on their faith in a higher power or the intervention of a Supreme Being to receive their savings. In summary, the coding revealed coping strategies that emerged in relation to how the “faith” of the customers enabled them to cope with the situation.

Table 1: “Faith” as Coping Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coping Types (Themes)</th>
<th>Specific Coping Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theory of Beliefs</td>
<td>I know God’s hand is on me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>God will intervene on behalf.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biblical saying (axiom) of intervention</td>
<td>Pray to God to have mercy upon us to get our money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>God will restore all I lost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prayer meetings every Thursday (collective prayers).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pray on my own to God (individual prayers).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive Faith</td>
<td>Morning prayers and kept asking Him for a favor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>God will fight for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have handed everything to God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive Faith</td>
<td>God knows what is good for us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>God knows how we will survive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I request God’s intervention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offensive Faith</td>
<td>I give a seed of sacrifice regularly on the altar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>God was my only hope.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I called on him day and night.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>God is in control of everything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Our pastor preached to encourage us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I know I am not alone; God is there for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I was disappointed in my God for allowing this to happen to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning making theory</td>
<td>“If I get it fine and if I don’t fine.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"Leave it to God."

Based on the assumptions of the meaning-making theory, participants construed three varied understandings of the “leave it to God” concept. First, it can be used to understand things that we (human beings) have no control over or things beyond human imagination, such as death, destiny, and natural disasters. Second, some participants believed that in the field of business, there is no room for “leave it to God.” The fact that they have given their money, they need to get it back through all means. Third, the concept can be applied depending on one’s amount of money (savings); if it is a small amount of money, they can leave it to God.

“My money with the bank was small, so I left it to God.” (A Christian, Businessman, 24 years old)

“[…] ‘Life itself is full of breaks and things happen for a reason’. We live in this world without knowing what our God has for us.” (A Christian and Businessman, 36 years old)

“I will never save with any bank in my life. […] I lost a huge sum of money, and now I have decided to keep my money in my room or on my MoMo account (phone account with phone company).” (A Muslim Businesswoman, 39 years old)

“Meaning of Faith”

In this context, “faith” is understood as a deep-seated belief in a higher power, which provides individuals with the conviction that their efforts will be rewarded in the end. The interviewees expressed their faith in Supreme Beings and the actions they take to ensure the eventual return of their lost savings. Interestingly, it was evidenced that the interviewees made meaning from the financial crisis as “passive faith,” “aggressive faith,” and “offensive faith.” This signifies that the theory on meaning making was really relevant in supporting the forms of faith discovered in the analysis. The extractions from the data are shown in the Table 1.

For the Christian businesswoman, faith is demonstrated through regular offerings and sacrifices made at church to strengthen her relationship with God. She believes that these actions will help her recover her lost money. Similarly, the Muslim trader has faith that Allah will restore what she has lost, even if it does not happen immediately.
In both cases, faith serves as a source of hope and perseverance for these individuals, guiding them through challenging times and motivating them to continue taking actions that they believe will eventually lead to the recovery of their savings.

**Discussion of Results**

The study seeks to explore the understanding of two religious concepts related to the financial sector clean-up of customers, which are anchored on the belief and meaning-making theories. In all, the findings substantiate that customers made meaning of the situation by having beliefs in a Supreme Being as coping strategies in getting their money paid to them. These findings on “faith” and “leave it to God” supported the meaning-making theory and belief theory, strengthening the argument that one’s faith is about having the belief or feeling that something will happen one day. Empirically, it is evidenced in the study’s findings that customers believed in their faith that the Supreme God would intervene or assist them in having their money paid. This is regarded as one of the contributions of this study to finance literature from a developing country perspective.

Evidently, the findings of our study showcased that the faith of the affected customers played a significant role in managing the shocks and trauma they experienced. For example, the preaching and support by their religious leaders during the time of crisis brought comfort to them. Furthermore, this study has made the first attempt to contribute to finance literature by extending faith as a coping strategy to manage crises in the financial sector and regrouping “faith” as a coping strategy into “aggressive,” “passive,” and “offensive faith” dimensions, which differentiate our findings from earlier studies by Levine et al., Roh et al., McCoy, Carrion et al., Park et al., and Donkor and Sandall, in faith-related subjects.50 We operationalized aggressive faith as customers’ active engagement in religious activities such as daily prayers to God, placing money on the altar, sacrifices, fasting, regular prayer meetings, and engaging the support of their religious leaders. According to literature, those who were involved in these aggressive religious activities found more meaning in their situation and overcame their stress faster.51 “Passive Faith” is considered as customers who were more relaxed and trusted God as overseeing every situation. They, therefore, resorted to statements or

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words such as “God will fight for me; I have handed everything to God; Allah knows what is good for us; God knows how we will survive; God is in control of everything.” “Offensive faith,” also regarded as “blame-shifting” faith, is where customers were frustrated and disappointed in their Supreme God for allowing them to suffer from the financial institutions. They expressed their disappointment in this way: “I was disappointed in my God for allowing this to happen to me.” Importantly, all these findings strengthen the faith literature.

In line with the findings associated with “leave it to God,” this study explored the extent to which customers understood and adopted it as a coping strategy. “Leave it to God” was understood by customers in three formative ways. First, customers who believed that human beings have no control over uncertainty embraced the concept of “leave it to God” as a coping strategy, which gave them a sense of comfort and peace to overcome the shock within a short time. Second, it was understood that in the field of business, there is nothing like “leave it to God”; given that it is an institution that collected their money, they must do all that is requested to get it back. Third, the understanding of the concept also depended on the amount of money customers had in their accounts with the financial institution, influencing the use of “leave it to God” as a coping strategy. These revelations are important to current literature, as these varied understandings buttress the extant findings by Wong-McDonald et al. and Pargament et al., who also found that individuals who embraced the concept of “leave it to God” as a coping strategy in times of uncertainty often had a sense of comfort and peace to overcome the shock. In addition, the meanings constructed by customers in relation to “leave it to God” supported the assumption of the meaning-making theory, which posits that recovering from a stressful event involves reducing the discrepancy between its appraised meaning and global beliefs and goals. This signifies that coping with stressful situations like financial crises, where customers can engage or embrace the “leave it to God” concept, helps to reduce their discrepancies.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the study has highlighted the role of faith and the concept of “leave it to God” as coping strategies for managing shock during the financial sector clean-up in Ghana. The findings suggest that faith can be a significant source of comfort, hope, and meaning-making for affected customers. However, the effectiveness of faith as a coping strategy depends on the individual’s approach and operationalization of the two

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concepts (leave it to God, faith in God) in the context of their religious beliefs and practices.

Moreover, the study shows that the concept of “leave it to God” has varied meanings and implications for affected customers. While some find comfort in the idea of surrendering control to a higher power, others see it as incompatible with the pursuit of justice and restitution. The study also suggests that the amount of money individuals have at stake with the collapsed financial institutions can influence their coping strategies. Overall, this study sheds light on the complex interplay between two religious concepts (faith and leave it to God) as coping strategies and financial sector crises in Ghana, providing insights for further research and practical interventions. This study not only classified how people respond to and make meaning of faith, but also provided a comprehensive overview of religious practices and activities that demonstrate how they apply their faith during crises. We have also extended the financial literature by exploring varied understandings of the “leave it to God” concept in a financial context, from both global and emerging economy perspectives, which has been neglected in prior studies.

**Implications**

Theoretically, this study extends two psychological theories, belief and meaning-making theories, to understand how affected customers of collapsed financial institutions apply their faith and perceive the Supreme God as having authority over every occurrence. These theories imply that the level of meaning customers of financial institutions make of their faith and how they connect to God as a Supreme Being have a significant relationship to how easily they overcome shocks during financial sector crises. The practical implications of this study for stakeholders in the financial sector include the need to acknowledge the role of faith and “leaving it to God” in shaping customers’ responses to crises. Financial institutions could collaborate with religious leaders to provide emotional and spiritual support to affected customers. Moreover, policymakers (Bank of Ghana and Ministry of Finance in particular) could consider incorporating religious and cultural dimensions into their crisis management strategies to address the diverse coping strategies of affected customers.

**Limitations and Future Research Areas**

This study has its own limitations, which call for further research in the future. First, only two religious concepts were considered for this study. There might be other religious concepts that could be used for coping strategies by customers of the affected financial institutions. Second, the themes identified, as well as the coding, should be
tested quantitatively for a different perspective on coping strategies in the financial sector. Additionally, these themes should be tested in other sectors apart from the financial sector. This will ensure the relevance of the themes in other sectors and add to the literature. Third, future research should consider examining how the financial sector clean-up has affected the saving behaviors of customers.

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PENTECOSTALISM AND CURRENT DEVELOPMENT IN WEST AFRICA

REIMAGINING THE PENTECOSTAL LANDSCAPE, POLITICS, AND VISION

FRED CUDJOE ADADEY
BARNABAS YISA

Keywords African Pentecostals, progression, Pentecostal theology, development, politics, imaginary social space

Abstract

A growing body of literature on African Pentecostals in sub-Saharan Africa is highlighted in this article, highlighting a more defined contribution of African Pentecostals to the development landscape. Until recently, the African Pentecostal development landscape recorded little visibility at the national level, on the assumption that their experience only highlights cultural and theological relevance. However, this emerging visibility has identified, as a conceptual category, an imaginary social space with practical ramification. Based on a critical analytical review of literature, this article examines the shift from traditional Pentecostal theology to a more focused attention on the social transformation created by a post-colonial discourse on development in Africa. We argue that there is an imaginary social space occupied by Pentecostal theology, providing it, not just a voice of influence as a social movement, but a reconstructive identity of power in development that also integrates into political spheres. The cases of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Nigeria, and the Church of Pentecost, Ghana, exemplify this. Their social space has distinctive expressions that link a constructive integral aspect of Pentecostal theology to contribute to their social responsibility. This article suggests that such an understanding is better explained when considering African Pentecostal progression in this imaginary social space. We recommend that African Pentecostals and the development sector create awareness of this space through a dialogical approach.
Introduction

In recent years, Pentecostal social engagement in West Africa has led to many changes, especially in the community development landscape, accounting for the idea of secular transformation rather than the traditional Pentecostal theology of mission. An evaluation of the shift in theology from the first to the third response to Christianity to “set the captive free”¹ is crucial for understanding the contribution of African Pentecostals to community development. Despite the increasing literature on African Pentecostal development, the area of this “shift” remains insufficiently explained, suggesting a further analysis of this theological, social, and development landscape.

Terminologies such as “development,” “African Pentecostals,” and the “imaginary social space” employed here allowed us to make some inferences to understand them better. First, we adopt the term “African Pentecostals,” often described as Africa’s third response to Christianity, to identify their collective contribution, rather than their classification and categories.² By focusing on their progression and shift in theology, this article observes that they occupy a “space”³ that highlights their contribution. Second, development is a broad, complex concept. To map its interaction, we borrowed from Richard Burgess’ categories related to the intersecting landscape of politics, economics, human rights, and peacebuilding.⁴ Finally, some scholars have identified this “space” as an “emerging development practice” of the African Pentecostal social movement in sub-Saharan Africa.⁵ For instance, Johnson Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu

¹ See J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “Mission to ‘Set the Captives Free’: Healing, Deliverance, and Generational Curses in Ghanaian Pentecostalism,” International Review of Mission 93 (2004), 370–371, 389–406, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6631.2004.tb00468.x. According to the author, the catchphrase to “set the captive free” is associated with the phenomenon of “healing deliverance” linked with Africa’s new Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement and churches, serving as a restoration ministry that encompasses holistic pastoral care to their followers. At the heart of this movement is being freed to partake in the abundant provision of God through Christ. This also in a way de-identifies distinctly African Pentecostals with the emerging liberation theology that took shape in South America and elsewhere around 1968. Although it emerged under similar circumstances (poverty, hardship, deprivation) as the African Pentecostal movement, liberation theology focused more on the worsening social conditions created by dominant cultures. However, for the African Pentecostals, culture was crucial in their theological development. See also Kwame Bediako, “What is the Gospel?,” Transformation 14:1 (1997), 1–4. Like Badiako mentioned, taking control of one’s destiny (spiritual) within God’s providence (material) for humankind was their ultimate eschatological call. Hence the infusion of African theological thought into Christianity that allows the gospel to be relevant in all areas of life for human flourishing, setting the captive free.


³ A conceptual category we identify as imaginary social space with practical ramification.


⁵ Although we considered increasing literature on these various spaces and emerging development practices, we confined ourselves to the works of Burgess (Nigerian Pentecostalism and Development),
perceived this space in the Ghanaian context as created by Africa’s third response to Christianity based on contextual and cultural factors and its post-independence development challenges. Other researchers agree with this contention by noting sociological, contextual, and theological aspects. For instance, they explained that the introduction of neoliberal reforms, which led to the deterioration of the quality of life and an increased inequality gap in Nigeria, created this space. By leaning on these scholars, this article linked these thoughts and explored the definition of this “space” and likened it to an “imaginary social space.” The rationale is that this imaginary social space with practical ramification sits within Africa’s third response to Christianity with the realities of neoliberal reforms in context, giving room to African Pentecostalism to operate and experiment with its expression.

This study is divided into three sections. The first section introduces this imaginary social space by examining the African Pentecostal transition, vision, and social movement. Section two explains the post-independence and political landscape in this space, and with cases from the Church of Pentecost, Ghana, and the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Nigeria, it identifies the cause of the theological shift and the uniqueness of the imaginary social space. The last section concludes the article with a missiological implication, serving as an African Pentecostal contribution to occupying this imaginary social space and the need for dialogue.

The Imaginary Social Space

Scholars have yet to clarify whether Africa’s third response to Christianity among Pentecostals in sub-Saharan Africa distinctively responds to its features in engaging social conditions across many countries. Although this expression appears inclusive of a development language in economic, socio-political, and cultural landscapes, its growth is fast becoming the expression of faith in sub-Saharan Africa. While in some parts of West Africa, such as Ghana and Nigeria, this growing experience may be seen as

contributing to “church growth,” it has also unintentionally reintroduced theology into the development landscape. The reintroduction of theology into the development landscape seeks to create an identity for African Pentecostals. Thus, the revitalization of dual “epistemic theology” of the coexistence of the physical and the spirit worlds defines what it means to set the captive free.

Richard Burgess’ monograph provides a mapping of the “Pentecostal development” landscape that links failed neoliberal reforms and economic challenges in Nigeria to highlight the contribution of African Pentecostals in the imaginary social space. Although Burgess focuses on Nigerian Pentecostals in studying this “emerging development practice,” he extends the understanding of this development space, tracing it to the diaspora, particularly in Britain and the United States, to explain the relevance of its “contextual, sociological, and theological” factors. The emphasis is that this new form of Christianity brings together effects of “democratisation and neoliberal economic reforms” away from the state into the public sphere to construct their identity. This interfaces with Afe Adogame’s view on “African social responsibility.”

For Adogame, this identity is partly due to much of the attention given to the Pentecostal theology of social responsibility, which explains the theology of mission in context. This links Asamoah-Gyadu’s approach to what it means to set the captive free. Adogame’s context focuses on Europe and Africa, where African Pentecostals function as religious support networks and “registered main charities” in partnership with some development sectors to influence their community. Both Burgess and Adogame distinguished the essence of this theological identity within the competing imaginary social space. Although both scholars examined this emerging development from their different socio-cultural contexts, they converged because of their similar struggles for identity, giving visibility to this development landscape. Similarly, in the

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11 Burgess, Nigerian Pentecostalism and Development, ii, thus, connecting the “intersecting spheres of politics, economics, health, education, human rights, and peacebuilding.”
12 Burgess, Nigerian Pentecostalism and Development, 2.
13 Burgess, Nigerian Pentecostalism and Development, 3.
14 Adogame, “African Christianities,” 1–11. According to Adogame, such distinctive roles are visible because of the deteriorating government’s conventional approaches, which could no longer be sustained.
development space, others refer to the Pentecostal Movement, linking with the African transition from colonial to postcolonial development, giving Pentecostals an inclusive outlook. The assumption here is that this emerging development practice of African Pentecostals within the development space pays attention to theological and social factors to address moral ills and alleviate poverty in the local community.

Besides, Ogbu Kalu positions Pentecostals in context and discusses their progression, arguing that this new movement sought to find its identity and fill both the theological and social gaps within the African transition from colonial to a self-gratified identity. This identity merges with the inclusive perceived secular roles. Allan Anderson also concludes, “Pentecostals do not always separate the spiritual from the physical, but integrate them in a holistic whole, leading to involvement in social issues and politics.” The confluence and continuing emphasis on this space and African Pentecostal theology suggests that the quest to refine a Pentecostal theology that takes root within the African context draws the developmental deficit and a political twist to it.

Several alternative observations by scholars indicate the influence of Africa’s third response to social transformation and its impact in the West African context. Asamoah-Gyadu discussed the relevance of the response and its interface with the African Pentecostal transition, highlighting six thematic areas that identify the progression and idea of setting the captive free. According to Dena Freeman and Olufunke Adeboye, although the circumstances that gave rise to the fall of neoliberal thinking and aided the rise of Pentecostalism into this landscape in Africa are distinctively different, they serve a similar struggle for theological identity.

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22 Asamoah-Gyadu, “Spirit and Empowerment,” 34. According the author, the integration of charismatic renewal into expressions of Christianity brought a practical orientation towards salvation that created the theological space for rituals that accommodated real needs such as health, unemployment, marriage, and success in business; dynamic pneumatology in which the empowering presence of God was coveted not just for the manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit but also for various practical life concerns; the use of oral theology in liturgical expressions such as the use of locally composed choruses and the narrations of personal testimonies of salvation; and an innovative gender ideology in which space was created for women to exercise leadership based on their charismatic experiences rather than the stereotypes that excluded them from Christian leadership.

This third response gives visibility to a void we observed as the imaginary social space with practical ramification, highlighting a reconstructive Pentecostal theology. Other than one case of identity in this Pentecostal landscape, Asamoah-Gyadu’s approach evidenced various contextual and cultural issues that support the theological space because of the post-independence development challenges in sub-Saharan Africa. For John Gichimu and Atinuke Abdulsalami, the task of extrapolating prayers, church services, sermons, rituals, and songs from more normative Christian conventions to a contextual form of African theology, engaging its diaspora community experience, could only be a response to an identity that satisfies theological and social needs.24 As various scholars demonstrate, Pentecostals have transitioned over time into this imaginary social space, creating several platforms to evolve, contextualize, and extend their development practices. As such, the core argument is that the occupation of these multiple landscapes creates an imaginary social space yet with practical ramification within Africa’s three responses to Christianity into which the African Pentecostals sought to fit, reconstructing an identity that is gradual and broad, and intentionally or unintentionally draws into the African political landscape.

**African Pentecostal Vision and Pentecostal Transition**

Many scholars may not easily connect the African Pentecostal vision with its social movements such as religious, cultural, and social capital.25 The underlying assumption, as Gerrie ter Haar and Stephen Ellis mention, is that religion “seemed irrelevant to the processes they were analysing other than, perhaps, as an obstacle to modernisation.”26 This may be true, considering that African Pentecostals’ experience has always assumed and highlighted cultural and theological relevance, giving its social responsibility little visibility at the national level of the development landscape. However, there are various movements that scholars accept as part of the traditional African Pentecostal theology of mission that covers its vision to set the captive free, encompassing the community’s spiritual and social conditions. Crucial is the “prosperity gospel that makes material gain a spiritual virtue,” and the Pentecostal civil responsibility that stretches into the


political landscape. How these movements are interrelated is often obscured, due to the lack of a clear “articulated theological foundation for social ministry” and the operational approaches they employ, giving them less visibility to their contributions.

We argue that this African Pentecostal transition holds a crucial “shared-value experience” for Pentecostals, whose vision is to be the voice of the disadvantaged. As an actual course for African Pentecostals, this imaginary social space has thus optimized its vision and the reliability of the social movement within the increasing socioeconomic fragility of society.

Pentecostal progression has seen arguments of social movements linked to African Pentecostals and development. However, the non-reliability on external donors and distinctive features, such as cultural, social, and religious capital, set African Pentecostals as a point of departure from dependency. The rationale is demonstrated by David Korten’s fourth-generation development paradigm as “relief and welfare,” “community development,” “sustainable system development,” and “people centred,” giving clear evidence of their perceived closeness to community organizing experience.

For instance, Asamoah-Gyadu believes that the surge in the social movement and progression of Ghanaian Pentecostals connected mediating factors such as religious and cultural “capital.” Others contend that it has changed and shifted the community narratives and development dialogue as a point of departure from the neoliberal reforms in Nigeria, offering Pentecostals the voice of influence in the imaginary social space. However, the gap identified here is that although African Pentecostals have progressed

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27 Anderson, “Pentecostalism and Social, Political, and Economic Development,” 123.
into this space, there is little information on the cause of this shift in theology. Below, we attempt to identify the cause of the theological shift by drawing on the post-independence African Pentecostal and political landscapes. By identifying the cause of this shift, we hope to establish a case for the uniqueness of this imaginary social space.

**African Pentecostals, Post-independence, and the Political Landscape**

Some Pentecostal scholars recognized the 1940–1960s period as the first major wave of the Pentecostal Movement in West Africa. The “Pentecostal movement was, to an extent, defined by its eschatology of premillennialism and expectation of the imminent rapture.” They limit their liturgical emphasis and hermeneutical stance on the theology of holiness for eschatological preparation. By inference, this movement paid little attention to social development, as fundamentalists set their camp against modernism. However, from the 1960–1970s, particularly in Nigeria and Ghana, the second wave of the movement expanded modestly in membership, with greater contextualization of Africanism and Pentecostal vision to set the captive free.

The surge in Pentecostalism in the 1960s also witnessed a period of great expectation of post-independence euphoria on social and political development in the sub-region. Some leading political figures, for example, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana (1909–1972), rhetorically assured, “Seek ye first the political kingdom and all else shall be added unto you.” However, with the immediate post-independence political and social troubles in the 1960s, the expected socio-economic development in the sub-region was not realized.

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36 Nel, “Pentecostal Hermeneutical Considerations about Women in Ministry,” 6.


Rather than actualizing the dividends of political independence, the government could not fulfill its developmental responsibilities. This created room for non-governmental and non-profit agencies, including faith-based organizations, to gradually venture into the imaginary social space for social responsibilities in West Africa. As promising, Pentecostals position themselves to meet society’s needs. As Anderson argued, they appealed to underprivileged West African communities for membership. This marks the beginning of the gradual Pentecostal incursion into areas of theological, social, and developmental landscape of responsibility in West Africa.

The third generation, emerging in the 1980s with mega-churches and prosperity gospels, has been playing a significant role in the socio-economic and political development of their societies. With their mega-church philosophies, the Neo-Pentecostals tend to motivate “people to translate their salvation into practical everyday achievements in business, education, economics and family life.” Common to them in West Africa “is that God rewards faithful Christians with good health, financial success and material wealth, ‘according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.’” While this philosophy partly highlights the prosperity gospel, it does not sufficiently offer Pentecostals the theology of social responsibility for an incursion and shift in theology into the imaginary social space of development and political landscape. As such, we identify that this emerging Pentecostal visibility responded to theological, developmental, and social-political gaps for sociological, contextual, and cultural reasons to occupy this imaginary social space.

**African Pentecostal Leadership and Upward Mobility**

Here, we will examine how this imaginary social space with practical ramification interacts with the West African development narrative by considering the cases of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Nigeria, and the Church of Pentecost (CoP), Ghana, landscapes to understand the shift in theology. These cases connect the development, social, and theological landscapes, assuming their importance for four
reasons: (1) they share some resemblance in the mode of social engagement; (2) their emergence around the 1950s coincide; (3) they suggest the cause of the shift; and (4) they have become arguably the most influential transnational networking Pentecostal movement in the history of Africa’s third response to Christianity with a “missionary impulse.”

The Case of Ghana

In Ghana’s case, this section attempts to draw on the CoP’s experiences within this imaginary social space to situate Pentecostal leadership and upward mobility.

CoP and the Theological Space

The CoP is the largest Pentecostal denomination in Ghana, with a membership of about 9% of the population. The shift in its traditional Pentecostal theology identified space for community development and social transformation in almost every district they occupy.

Prior to the leadership transfer between 1950–1982, the CoP’s core mandate was primarily the emphasis on the theology of holiness and Holy Ghost baptism, with no attention to social or political participation, like the RCCG theological thinking around the same time. However, the second-generation transformation, as a theological shift, occurred in a way that necessitated some usefulness. First, the leadership transfer is contextual and culturally relevant today because it witnessed a theological shift that engaged a biblical interpretation that “God is interested in the communities,” addressing the local community’s need. Second, it served as a point of departure from the “foreign outlook” in its context. By inference, this oral culture exemplifies the vision that gives credence to the surge in the CoPs’ emerging development practices, while simultaneously reinvigorating theology into the development space. Although the CoP’s core receptor is “its oral cultural functions and social value,” it does not entirely

46 Burgess, “Pentecostals and Development,” 1.
49 Opoku Onyinah, “Distinguished Church Leader Essay: The Church of Pentecost and Its Role in Ghanaian Society,” in African Initiated Christianity and the Decolonisation of Development, 184. According to Onyinah, “The church has become an Indigenous church, with a good blend of Christianity and African cultural features,” such as “oral culture” filling the theological space created by its first-generational transformation.
underpin the shift. Instead, oral culture as a logical system emphasised the importance of the contextual and theological relevance with practical ramification of the CoP in this imaginary social space. For the CoP, this is evident in their leadership landscape.

We contend that although contextual culture played a crucial role and was intricately connected in highlighting the shift, it was not the trigger for the shift. Rather, we conclude that the core reason for the theological shift was leadership change, which impacted other areas. However, it is equally clear that the shift provided cultural recognition through effective identification, leading to various spaces. This gradual progression of expression has given visibility to the uniqueness of the imaginary social space for which the CoP has witnessed several transformations, covering social and development landscapes in the Ghanaian context and diaspora.

**CoP and the Social Space**

During Safo’s leadership, the church grew. The first social service established by Safo in 1982 was the Pentecost Social Service (PENTSOS). Although PENTSOS and its responsibility were apolitical, it served the political situation symmetrically by helping address some socio-economic challenges, such as deprivation, education, and healthcare. Thus, according to the “records” of PENTSOS, it served its usefulness.

On the international front, where African Pentecostals function as religious support networks and “registered main charities,” the 2018 “State of the Church Address” indicates the CoP’s strong presence, spiritual capital, and self-funding social...
movement in the diaspora, presenting an understanding of decreasing Western theological influence. While these development praxes cannot be said for other Neo-Pentecostal movements in Ghana, they have all come under constructive criticism to pay taxes that offer accountability and prevent economic exploitation.

Some scholars suggest that building on this social cohesion and the managerial skills of the CoP could serve as a “Pentecostal model” in political governance if such an idea is propagated with ethical and social development policy.57

**CoP and the Development Space**

The significance of the CoP’s development space that links Ghana’s political landscape can best be summed up in its leadership approach to institutional management. The CoP’s structure and governance are hierarchical with a “local-up” approach to leadership.58 Although the leadership structure is hierarchical in appearance and management, it has a democratic outlook where, after every five years (per their constitution), leadership and administration are elected and given the mandate to lead.

In this respect, Ghana has seen significant contributions of some Pentecostal leadership to peacebuilding, political discourse, and religious tolerance in various forms. While this was not the case in the late 1970–1980s, with several military coups d’état that saw most churches in the trenches with no prophetic voice, their recent activities, such as peacebuilding and national government policy negotiations, have implications for the political landscape. While some scholars have highlighted the contribution of Pentecostal leaders in the development space,59 others disagree in context.60 Increasingly, there are notable “political positions and civil society organisations” CoP leaders occupy.61

Similarly, recent developments in Ghana note that Ghana’s president appointed the immediate past chairperson of CoP, Opoku Onyinah, to chair the construction of “Ghana’s National Cathedral.”62 Whether political or religious influence exists is an issue of contestation. In the spirit of peace, one could only submit that these

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Germany, Canada, and Holland, respectively, marking territorial influence in social services and networking revenue generation.


60 See Gifford, *Christianity, Development, and Modernity in Africa*.

61 Onyinah, “The State of the Church Address,” 190. Such political and civil society positions include the Bank of Ghana, the Public Interest and Accountability Committee (PIAC), and significant state publications, making a case for the growing interest in inclusiveness in development.

62 There are solid dissenting views in opposition equal to those for the national cathedral. Regardless, the chairperson has encouraged the progression of the cathedral.
appointments have served as a gradual upward mobility of Pentecostal leaders into prominent political spaces that rally support for inter-denominational tolerance and a balance in absolute political power and development. Although, as Anderson explains, African Pentecostal theology has also avoided any political involvement that could be a potential drawback for its evangelistic appeal, some scholars hail this involvement as a democratic principle and gesture for inclusiveness rather than individualism. We contend that the Pentecostal leadership’s gradual mobility is crucial in this imaginary social space in Ghana, as it enables social cohesion against prevailing political conditions that descend into unnecessary deprivation and human suffering. In essence, the interplay between the shift and progression highlighted the significance of Africa’s third response to Christianity, the challenges of post-independence, and the CoP’s response, providing the imaginary social space visibility.

The Case of Nigeria

We take the RCCG not as representative, but to demonstrate the Pentecostal Movement’s incursion into the imaginary social space in Nigeria.

RCCG and the Social and Development Space

The RCCG, with wider membership globally, has seen three generations of Pentecostal transformation. Enouch Adejare, assuming Overseer’s responsibility, immediately curved the church’s renewed vision and reconstructive theological identity that propelled the church’s social development space. Scholars often give credence to the liturgical transformation between 1981 and 1989 that saw the re-engineering of the church’s operational framework, articulating its mission and vision.

The three generational transformations coincide with the trajectory of Pentecostal theological shift from an exclusive mission focus to one of inclusive social responsibility and political participation, proffering the theological foundation that “Corporate Social

63 Anderson, “Pentecostalism and Social, Political, and Economic Development,” 123.
65 See Okanlawon, “Churchpreneurship in the Nigerian Socio-economic Space,” 33. First, from 1952 to 1980, the church eschewed materialism but emphasized the theology of holiness and healing through fervent prayers. Second, the scenario changed in 1981 with Enoch Adejare Adeboye’s appointment as the successor General Overseer (GO) of the RCCG.
66 See, Adeboye, “‘Arrowhead’ of Nigerian Pentecostalism,” 38; Vaughan, Religion and the Making of Nigeria, 187. Thus (1) “to make heaven and take as many people with us” (Redeemed Christian Church of God [RCCG], “Corporate Social Responsibility,” 2021, https://www.rccg.org/rccg-csr), and (2) “to plant churches within five minutes walking distance in every city and town of developing countries and within five minutes driving distance in every city and town of developed countries.” Third, from 1990 the RCCG’s vision and mission in context entailed occupying the renewed theological and imaginary social space of service.
Responsibility”º⁶⁷ (CSR) “has its root in Christianity and the church is meant to be an example for the world to follow and not the other way around.”º⁶⁸

To fulfill its CSR, the RCCG identified eight sectors for its outreach and development projects: social, health, education, business, arts and culture, government, and sports.º⁶⁹ In the education sector, RCCG has established forty-four (primary and secondary) schools, one university, and one college,º⁷⁰ with scholarships to thousands of students nationwide.

Similarly, with fifty primary health centers, two modern hospitals, and one orphanage in the Redemption Camp, the RCCG connects national efforts against debilitating diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, COVID-19, cancer, and reproductive health care.º⁷¹ The RCCG’s unprecedented social sector efforts further provide 223,100 free meals daily on average to people in need.º⁷² Similarly, in the business sector, the RCCG implements programs that create and support cooperative societies, youth empowerment and employment, vocational and skills education, and charity shops, accounting for over 96,000 beneficiaries.º⁷³ Besides, with business networks nationwide, the RCCG’s social activities in ending hunger and recognizing widespread misery and suffering has seen leadership launch full-scale welfare and humanitarian services, with rehabilitation as its core function. For instance, with a center in Lagos, the Christ Against Drug Abuse Ministry (CADAM) rehabilitates drug abuse victims and occultists in the campuses of higher institutions. In 2021, the RCCG reported that over 60.9 million people have benefited from its social responsibility programs. We agree that Adeboye’s receptivity to novel ideas, within and outside the church, and the deployment of university graduates to high positions in the church structure, as well as female members’ upward mobility, are fundamental to the RCCG’s success, creating a niche for itself in the social space in Nigeria.º⁷⁴

º⁶⁷ See RCCG, “Corporate Social Responsibility,” n.p. Further, it served as a conscious avenue for Christians to make visible impact in various key areas of society. Where many view societal challenges and its scale all around the world we see an opportunity to take decisive effort to creating solutions as we work with people, communities, leaders, and governments worldwide.
º⁷¹ Okanlawon, “Churchpreneurship in the Nigerian Socio-economic Space,” 34.
RCCG and Political Space

Nigerian Pentecostals’ link to politics is often traced to the formation of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN). Although the RCCG is a significant member of the PFN, it did not bring transformative and expansive advantages to the political landscape before the 1990s.

Although initially the church leadership avoided direct partisan politics within the context of the reformed theology of service, they made it a duty for church members to pray for the unfolding political process in the country. The policy of the RCCG in the initial stages of the fourth republic in 1999 was to encourage the general congregation to exercise their civic rights by voting during elections. However, the church did not mobilize electoral support for politically inclined members. Instead, like the other Pentecostal churches under the PFN, in the fourth republic, the RCCG pursued a distinct political agenda suited to its mission and vision. As democratic governance evolved, under its CSR, the RCCG defined its political and governance policy to “actively participate in public engagements with government bodies on how governance and policies could improve society.”

By inference, with a formal policy on political participation, the RCCG encourages its members to directly participate in partisan politics. As such, Yemi Osinbajo was elected in 2015 as the Vice President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. RCCG leadership moved a step further in February 2022, transforming its program on politics to a full-fledged Office of Directorate of Politics and Governance, with similar offices at its zonal, area, and parish levels in Nigeria. The Directorate assists and mobilizes support for its members seeking elective political positions at all levels. We conclude that RCCG neo-political participation is evidence of what Burgess inferred, as faith-based organizations “seek to empower their members to pursue political goals in the public sphere.” By implication, the RCCG is expanding its occupation of the imaginary social space in Nigeria’s new political dispensation of democratic governance. Hence, considering the RCCG’s developmental and political activities, it demonstrated the Pentecostal shift in vision from initial holiness to social responsibility and currently to the political arena.

75 Vaughan, Religion and the Making of Nigeria, 151.
76 Adeboye, “‘Arrowhead’ of Nigerian Pentecostalism,” 54.
77 Vaughan, Religion and the Making of Nigeria, 150.
78 Adeboye, “‘Arrowhead’ of Nigerian Pentecostalism,” 54.
79 Vaughan, Religion and the Making of Nigeria, 151.
Missiological Implication for the Church

What lessons can the church learn from the thinking of secular development and the imaginary social space?

Missional Visibility

There are strong missiological and crucial reasons for the Pentecostals’ emerging development practice in West Africa. One such is theology. Pentecostal belief in the involvement of God in everyday life, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the need for every believer to minister provides strong motivations for development. There is also the necessity to bring to bear the power of the Spirit on the shared value experience, converging both the spiritual and the required material blessing for society at large. The imaginary social space can serve as a starting point in identifying common grounds for dialogue between the development sector and the church as a mission agent.

Politics

As evidenced and demonstrated elsewhere in this article, African Pentecostals’ indirect and/or direct involvement in social political development has given visibility to the thin line (middle ground) between the church’s mission and the political landscape. This visibility (middle ground) is what we argue as the imaginary social space with practical ramification, providing African Pentecostals the intentional and/or unintentional experience and the emerging development practice. The church’s aggressive and desperate development approach can serve as a model. Additionally, the awareness of this imaginary social space can allay the church’s fear and suspicion of engaging in secular debate, harnessing these tools accordingly. In contemporary development, however, although the church’s role in mission still assumes an apolitical position, its responsibilities most often stretch and align with the underlying “political development structures and goals,” enabling development that cannot be overlooked, evidenced in their leadership mobility.83

As true to practice, this emerging development practice within the imaginary social space of the CoP and the RCCG meets most of these development goals. However, as

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83 See also the SDG Acceleration Toolkit of the United Nations Development Group (no longer available on the United Nations Sustainable Development Group website, originally at https://undg.org/2030-agenda/sdg-acceleration-toolkit/guidance/). For instance, in July 2014, the UN General Assembly Open Working Group proposed a document containing seventeen goals to be put forward for the General Assembly’s approval in September 2015. This document sets the ground for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the global development agenda to span from 2015–2030, to which most African nations have subscribed in order to access funding. These goals are already part of African Pentecostals’ general vision and development scheme.
identified by Anderson, there are no “articulated theological foundations for social ministry” for Pentecostals that highlight their achievements at the national level. We contend that the CoP’s and the RCCG’s roles in the development landscape are symmetrical to the political development areas of the sustainability development goals (SDG). Hence, it would warrant a dialogical approach for sustainable development of local communities, where the church is actively a model. The imaginary social space now constitutes a component of the entire Pentecostal mission in West Africa.

Conclusion

In this article, we have shown and drawn a trajectory of mission and vision of Pentecostals’ shift from the traditional theology of mission to the theology of social transformation, conditional on Pentecostals moving into the imaginary social space and gradual extension into the partisan political landscape in West Africa. The shift we identified is triggered by a change in leadership in both cases, influencing the development landscape.

The failure of the governments to provide socio-economic development, increasing poverty and hopelessness, acute and rising unemployment, and governance failure combine to create an imaginary social space ready for non-governmental and faith-based organizations to provide alternative measures to set the captive free.

The critical recommendation in moving forward is that the church, especially the proliferated third-generation Pentecostals, creates awareness of this imaginary social space, which could serve as a mediating factor necessary for identity and as a contributing agent within the development sector that the church can no longer undermine in twenty-first-century West Africa.

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COVID-19 AND CHURCH ATTENDANCE BEHAVIOR TRENDS

EVIDENCE FROM GHANAIAN PENTECOSTAL-CHARISMATIC CHURCHES

JUSTICE A. ARTHUR
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Keywords consumer behavior, Pentecostalism, religious economies, COVID-19 pandemic, church attendance

Abstract

The concept of religious economy views churches as corporate entities, pastors as marketers offering a range of products, and church members as consumers whose preferences shape the goods and services provided by ministers. Within this framework, church members react quickly to changing economic, social, and cultural conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic has not only had an economic impact, with job losses and financial struggles, but has also brought about social and cultural changes that have affected consumer behavior in many areas of life worldwide. For instance, during the pandemic, church gatherings were restricted or prohibited, socializing was replaced with social distancing, air travel was disrupted, and conferences were canceled, postponed, or moved to virtual platforms. These changes have led to significant shifts in consumer habits regarding church attendance in Ghana. This article draws on ethnographic data from two Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in Ghana to explore the various changes and trends in consumer behavior exhibited by members due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It argues that the pandemic has had a profound impact on church attendance behavior, as it has disrupted many aspects of life.

Introduction

The world faced the severe COVID-19 pandemic for a few years, which changed many aspects of everyday life. During the peak of the pandemic, numerous measures were implemented by national governments and international organizations such as the World Health Organization. These measures entailed the replacement of all forms of
social gatherings with social distancing regulations, the grounding of all passenger flights as nations closed their air spaces to traffic, the cancellation or virtualization of conferences, and the enforcement of lockdown regulations that required people to stay at home. The pandemic has not only posed economic challenges to nations but has also brought about significant social changes.

In Ghana, the regulations were relaxed in August 2021 after the “third wave of infections.” Nevertheless, some of the changes occasioned by the pandemic were so drastic that many facets of life had not returned to pre-COVID-19 levels, including church attendance. The lockdown measures in the West African nation included closing churches, chapels, and mosques. These closures changed many aspects of church life, including how COVID-19 has affected people’s approach to church attendance. While African Christianity is diverse in its expressions, church attendance is an essential aspect of spiritual life that forms the basis of fellowship, worship, and discipleship in all its various forms. It is a fundamental practice that enables individuals to connect with their faith community, engage in meaningful worship, and grow in their spiritual journey. Whether it is attending regular services, participating in small group discussions, or joining in community events, attendance plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of belonging and deepening one’s relationship with God.¹

Some studies have suggested a link between church involvement (attendance and membership) and the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.² One reason for establishing this connection is that church members engage in culturally specific practices to communicate with God, such as attending church services. In Africa, Christianity is not solely a matter of belief systems, but rather a way of life that involves adhering to prescribed social and cultural practices.³ As such, attending church services is deemed essential for the spiritual development of church members.

This article aims to shed light on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on church attendance behavior in the Ghanaian Pentecostal-Charismatic context.⁴ It seeks


⁴ The churches described here belong to what Paul Gifford has referred to as “Ghana’s New Christianity.” For detailed reading see Paul Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indian University Press, 2004); Marleen
to provide new perspectives to a growing body of literature on religion and pandemics. The study examines changes in consumer behavior from the pre-pandemic period to August 2021, when the third wave in Ghana came to an end. The article is structured into four sections: a theoretical overview, the methodology employed, the findings and analysis, and the conclusion.

The Religious Market Model and Consumer Behavior

This article utilizes the religious market metaphor to elucidate the shifts and patterns in Pentecostal-Charismatic church attendance amidst the pandemic. The model views religious activity through an economic lens, positing that religious economies operate similarly to commercial economies, with a market and a set of organizations vying to cater to that market. As with any commercial economy, the level of regulation plays a crucial role in the functioning of a religious economy. It is founded on the principle of religion operating within an unregulated market, where followers have the freedom to select where and how they worship.

Within this framework, religious organizations function as businesses, and their followers are viewed as customers who have the freedom to explore various religious offerings. Likewise, religious figures such as pastors are seen as producers, marketers, and entrepreneurs who respond to the challenges and possibilities of the religious marketplace. The preferences of consumers play a significant role in shaping the goods and services offered by religious leaders. This freedom of choice directly influences the activities of religious producers as they strive to make their offerings appealing to potential customers. Given that consumers have a certain degree of autonomy, religious product producers must cater to their needs and preferences. The success of these


producers in this market environment is determined by how effectively they package and market their commodities to resonate with the consumers’ tastes.8

Moreover, consumers in this framework are highly responsive to economic, social, and cultural shifts. The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in late 2019, has caused significant financial strain on countries worldwide, resulting in job losses for many individuals. It has also led to social and cultural transformations that have impacted consumer behavior in various aspects of life, including attendance at religious services. Church members, as consumers, have adapted to these sociocultural changes brought about by the pandemic. Furthermore, the pandemic has influenced how pastors create and offer religious products and services, leading to a corresponding change in church attendance patterns.

Within the religious market framework, consumer behavior is influenced by external and internal factors such as the social environment, economic situation, and the customer’s personality.9 The social, economic, and personal changes that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacted have considerably changed how firms and consumers behave.10 Both firms and consumers are adapting quickly to the frequent transitions that are taking place.11 According to Mehta et al., during times of crisis, such as a pandemic outbreak, consumer behavior can be categorized into three approaches: economic, psychological, and sociological.12 The economic approach is based on consumers’ understanding of their basic needs within the micro economy. The psychological approach focuses on the connection between the consumer’s psyche and behavior. Lastly, the sociological approach is based on how consumers react in different situations or how social events impact their behavior. As a result, consumer interests are constantly being challenged and traded in the market.13 Consequently, during times of crisis, people’s reactions to negative economic or social impacts can vary greatly, leading to the emergence of new consumer habits. For instance, Lenka Svajdova has noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has already affected consumer behavior in the retail industry, resulting in a decrease in consumer confidence but an increase in average spending and

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8 Lee and Sinitiere, Holy Mavericks, 150; Stark and Finke, Acts of Faith, 27.
a decrease in purchase frequency.\textsuperscript{14} Similarly, Flatters and Wilmot have emphasized the critical impact of the 2008 global recession on consumer behavior and trends.\textsuperscript{15} Against this backdrop of changing consumer behavior during crisis periods, we became interested in investigating the trends in church attendance and behavior adjustments of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians in Ghana.

While the metaphor of religious markets offers us a valuable, even self-evident, lens to consider church members as consumers within the religious landscape, it has some apparent limitations, too. Foremost, it is based on the rational choice theory, which prioritizes cognitive and calculable factors and cannot fully account for non-rational influences that also impact economic behavior.\textsuperscript{16} Additionally, the use of the market metaphor in relation to Pentecostalism has, at times, created a negative portrayal of the movement as the “ideological agent” of American capitalism in the global south.\textsuperscript{17} Due to these weaknesses, our use of the religious economy metaphor is not to suggest that church attendance behavior can be comprehensively explained only in economic terms, though it is a significantly helpful lens to explore the lived experiences of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians in the African context.\textsuperscript{18}

Methodology

The study employed a combination of traditional and cyber ethnographic methods to investigate church attendance at two of Ghana’s leading Pentecostal-Charismatic churches: the Church of Pentecost (CoP)\textsuperscript{19} and the International Central Gospel

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\textsuperscript{17} Martin, “Pentecostal Conversion and the Limits of the Market Metaphor,” 67.


\textsuperscript{19} We selected two different strands of Pentecostal churches, being aware of the heterogenous nature of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity. The Church of Pentecost (CoP) is a classical Pentecostal church, part of the group of Pentecostal churches that evolved in Ghana because of the revivalist movement in the first two decades of the twentieth century. It has branch churches in all the districts of Ghana as well as international churches in Africa, Europe, North America, South America, Asia, and Australia.
It involved extensive observation and participant observation, as well as in-depth interviews with pastors and church members who produce and consume religious goods. Due to COVID-19 protocols, cyber ethnography was employed when the physical environment was not conducive to traditional methods.

Integrating data from both types of ethnography is crucial because one of the fundamental aspects of ethnography is observing a group of people in their natural environment, including online spaces. Cyber ethnography is particularly valuable in examining how online communities inform the study of physical communities, such as churches and their social interactions. This approach is especially relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the internet has become a primary setting for many people’s lived experiences. Additionally, cyber ethnography enables the identification of information-rich religious actors in digital spaces, which can then be followed up with traditional ethnography. Moreover, this method has proven useful in reaching adherents who may not be comfortable with face-to-face interviews due to the pandemic.

The traditional ethnographic study commenced in December 2020 and concluded on August 20, 2021. Additionally, structured interview guides were utilized to collect online data from June 6 to August 20, 2021. In both instances, the purposive sampling method was employed to select branch churches and respondents. This method was chosen to facilitate a comprehensive analysis of church attendance behavior among a homogeneous group of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians.

The cyber ethnography participants were reached through Google Form links sent via email and social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger. A total of fifty responses were gathered from both cyber sources and traditional ethnography. From these fifty respondents, twenty-five individuals were selected from each of the two Pentecostal-Charismatic churches, consisting of five clergy members and twenty church members. To ensure a balanced representation of consumer perspectives from both urban and rural areas, three city-based branches and three rural-based branches were chosen from both the CoP and the ICGC.

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20 The International Central Gospel Church (ICGC), founded by Mensa Otabil, is a Neo-Pentecostal church or what is usually referred to in Ghana as a Charismatic church. These churches began in the 1970s and 1980s through local initiatives. The ICGC could also be described as a megachurch with branches in many parts of Ghana and internationally in Africa, Europe, and North America.
Data Analysis and Results

This study sought to primarily investigate the various consumer behavioral patterns in relation to church attendance. It examines these trends under three different periods: the pre-COVID-19 era, the COVID-19 era, and the post-COVID-19-vaccine era.  

Pre-COVID-19 Church Attendance Behavior

To begin with, let us examine the church attendance rates in the pre-COVID-19 era in the CoP and the ICGC. The data indicates that attendance was not a major issue during this time, particularly on Sundays when churches recorded significant turnout. Some of the respondents opined that

“We had about 80–100 people attending church regularly before COVID-19. These members came out of their own volition. I was attending church about 5–6 times a week” (Resp. 21 L).

“We were attending church regularly; I could attend church service thrice a week” (Resp. 6 M).

“Church attendance was massive before the lockdown, and I could attend church at least twice a week” (Resp. 10 M).

Regarding church activities and church service experience in the pre-COVID-19 period, most churches were operating at peak levels. Adherents attested that they always had a fulfilling experience at church. They could interact freely with other members of the church community and participate in sacraments like communion. These are some of the responses:

“We could interact freely and share fellowship and love. We had a wonderful experience with God through fruitful worship” (Resp. 22 M).

“Our time in church was truly fulfilling, and we could engage in activities like praise and worship without looking over our shoulders” (Resp. 36 M).

“There was a great sense of fellowship as there were no restrictions on time and activities like the Lord’s Supper” (Resp. 21 L).

It could be inferred from the various responses that church attendance was a truly satisfying experience for many church members. Unfortunately, the global pandemic significantly changed church attendance behavior as churches resorted to a new norm of deploying virtual platforms to remain relevant and competitive in the religious

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21 The post-COVID-19-vaccine era is defined as the period between when mass vaccination began in Ghana to the end of the third wave—March 2 to August 10, 2021.

22 “L” signifies leaders’ voices while “M” indicates church members’ voices.
market.\(^{23}\) This also led to frequent disruptions and the absence of dynamic church activities, as consumers were primarily deprived of the emotional release prominent in Pentecostal-Charismatic church services in Ghana.

**Church Attendance Behavior during COVID-19**

COVID-19 affected church attendance behavior in several ways. Foremost, churches in Ghana were banned from physical meetings at the peak of the pandemic because of protocols implemented to prevent the spread of the disease. There was an unprecedented adaptation from church communities, including in places of worship, from pastors and their congregations. Many had to meet in smaller groups with social distancing protocols, while others resorted to virtual services, which were live-streamed or recorded, edited, and broadcasted as real-time experiences but also stored on digital platforms for open access. For some churches, the telemediated services were augmented with small group meetings. Evidence gathered from members indicates that in the era of COVID-19, people were very much interested in church activities. The digital platforms gave members who were in lockdown the opportunity to worship within the virtual community. Some respondents expressed the following views:

“\textbf{I always participated in organized online services}\” (Resp. 8 M).

“I could attend church services during the lockdown through online and television services” (Resp. 43 M).

“I was always willing to be in church, so I participated mostly in the online services” (Resp. 24 M).

While these responses give us an idea of church members’ interest in church attendance during the lockdown period, it is difficult to establish the veracity of these assertions.

**Disruption of Church Routine by the COVID-19 Protocols and Telemediated Services**

Next, due to the vast interest in church services even during the lockdown period, respondents were asked if they were aware of the protocols instituted by the state to control the spread of the virus. This was to gauge their knowledge of and adherence to the established guidelines. The majority of respondents confirmed their familiarity with all the protocols, including regular handwashing, use of hand sanitizers, social distancing, wearing of facemasks, temperature checks, and avoiding physical contact

such as handshakes and hugs, common in Pentecostal-Charismatic contexts. While some churches in urban areas were able to implement all COVID-19 protocols and ensure strict adherence, some local churches in rural settings faced challenges in acquiring critical equipment like thermometer guns and commercial handwashing buckets, making it difficult to comply with the guidelines. More significantly, the COVID-19 protocols were seen as disrupting the regular routines of the church, to which it took many attendees a considerable amount of time to adapt. At the same time, some never got used to it.

“The pandemic has reduced the liberty to dance, sing praises, and interact freely in church” (Resp. 4 L).

“The Pentecostal style of worship and activities such as crusades, rallies, and evangelism have all been put on hold. Dancing, clapping, and jumping have all been replaced with sobriety” (Resp. 8 L).

“For more than one year, we have never had any fundraiser in the church” (Resp. 36 L).

In addition, the implementation of protocols and subsequent adoption of telemaded worship services in churches raised concerns among consumers regarding the quality of their church experiences. Some members reported feeling disconnected due to issues with sound quality, while others expressed that their virtual worship experience did not compare to their in-person experience. This may be attributed to the lack of physical participation and interactions with fellow church members. Despite producers of religious goods and services adapting their strategies to meet consumer demands, it became apparent that many church members struggled to adjust to digital services. In fact, some respondents asserted that virtual church platforms compromised the quality of the worship experience. The following are sample responses:

“It felt like church was boring and dull” (Resp. 1 M).

“There was no sense of fellowship at all in online services though the word ministration [sermon] was powerful” (Resp. 16 M).

“Although the word of God did not change [during the COVID-19], I felt apprehensive about the experiences in church that if this is the way the church will be, it will be very problematic going forward” (Resp. 47 L).

“Church service was very challenging, and if you were not determined, you would not attend the services like you used to” (Resp. 6 M).

“Generally, the church was not interactive” (Resp. 27 M).

“Online service was not so inspiring. Something was lacking although I can’t put my finger on what that is. It was simply not the same” (Resp. 29 L).
The findings reveal the specific needs and preferences of different members of the church community, which were not fully satisfied by the implementation of telemediated worship services during the pandemic. As a result, some members expressed a degree of discontentment. It also suggests that certain individuals require a sense of release and excitement as an integral part of their worship experience, a need previously met by traditional church services before the COVID-19 outbreak.

**Loss of Fellowship**

Despite the challenges posed by the shift to online services and small group meetings, some church members remain convinced that the Holy Spirit’s presence was palpable. This is supported by various perspectives that suggest that as producers within the religious market, the church could only meet the demands of a segment of the consumers in a complex market altered by the pandemic:

- “The Holy Spirit was very much alive in our services during the COVID-19 period. However, the services were mostly limited to prayer meetings mainly. No musical instruments were deployed. Hence, church service differed from in-person fellowship” (Resp. 26 L).

- “Online service was good but not as enjoyable as in-person services. But the church leadership reacted quickly in transforming the worship style amid the pandemic” (Resp. 47 M).

- “The service experience was never the same, although the presence of God was felt, and the cell system provided a near pre-COVID-19 service experience. Word ministration [preaching] was also top-notch” (Resp. 16 L).

- “Members were not free to express themselves fully in dancing and worship. Many members yearned for the interactive aspects of fellowship” (Resp. 24 L).

These findings suggest that during the height of the pandemic, churches explored new ways of fostering fellowship, but not all individuals found online experiences to be fulfilling. While the platform for church services did not always meet market demands, members generally expressed satisfaction with the sermons delivered through online sources. However, some respondents noted that online church services lacked certain aspects that made Pentecostal-Charismatic church experiences truly fulfilling. Telemediated church services presented challenges for some consumers, particularly those who lacked computer skills or struggled to adapt to new ways of congregating as a church. Nevertheless, some responses indicated that certain church attendees enjoyed virtual services and found them to be more satisfying. Some even expressed appreciation for live-streamed or pre-recorded church services. Here are a few responses:

- “Digital service was fun for me. I was able to pay my tithes and enjoyed the preaching of God’s word” (Resp. 6 M).
“The virtual church gave me a new experience with the word of God. The word became so real to me than before” (Resp. 38 M).

Undoubtedly, one of the most significant obstacles faced by online services during this time was the increased demand for interpersonal connections. As per national guidelines, all forms of physical contact were prohibited in church settings, including hugging, handshakes, and close dancing, all of which are integral components of African Pentecostal-Charismatic congregational worship. Social distancing measures were implemented in lieu of physical interactions, leading to significant alterations in how members communicate. As a result, the pandemic and the accompanying protocols had a profound impact on fellowship within these communities.

“We could not interact as we used to do. We could only respond to people’s comments on church sessions. Physical counseling services with pastors could only be held online” (Resp. 15 L).

“The virtual service allowed for participation, but members missed being together” (Resp. 24 L).

“Close fellowship was missing” (Resp. 37 M).

Finally, there were some negative experiences during the lockdown, although people were in touch with the church through small groups and digital services. These were some responses of people’s feelings:

“I felt like a prisoner” (Resp. 24 M).

“Very boring and sad” (Resp. 13 M)

“I felt very disorganized and wished we could meet as a church” (Resp. 2 L).

“I felt very devastated and frightened. I had never experienced such a situation before” (Resp. 16 M).

“I felt very sad, especially when the aged were left out of online church services” (Resp. 28 L).

According to these findings, it appears that a significant number of Christians experienced negative emotions and feelings of sadness when they were unable to gather in person. If this situation had persisted, it is conceivable that a considerable number of Christians may have experienced depression. This underscores the importance of attending church services as a valuable resource for managing negative moods.

Deconstructing Traditional Notions of “Church” and Church Leadership

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted a reevaluation of some time-honored theological perspectives in African Pentecostalism, particularly regarding assumptions about the church and its leadership. One key area of discussion was the traditional understanding
of the church. In the African Pentecostal context, the term “church” typically refers to physical buildings, institutions/organizations, or groups of Christians. However, the pandemic has raised important questions about what it truly means to be a church without a physical place of worship. It has challenged the notion of the church as an institution defined by buildings, budgets, and offices and has demonstrated that a church can exist beyond the confines of a physical structure. The rise of virtual communities has necessitated a deconstruction of the church as a physical community, as people can now come together in shared experiences and time, even if they are not physically present in a church building.

Also, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, African Pentecostalism faced a significant challenge to its traditional understanding of church leadership. The outbreak of the virus prompted a reevaluation of the strict hierarchical structures that had been in place for years. It became evident that the presence of clergy was not always necessary for the thriving of churches, and this realization sparked a need for a new approach to church leadership. The following respondents affirm this notion:

“It’s been a period of reflection. COVID-19 is challenging some of our beliefs and doctrines. Women are administering the Lord’s supper (communion) because the pastors can not be there because of the restrictions. Yet in our church, women can’t be ordained as pastors” (Resp. 36 L).

“The pastor can preach to us virtually, but in terms of the sacraments, he cannot be in every home. Someone has to do them in our homes, including single-parent homes, where many of them are led by women. Does God oppose these women from administering sacraments? I don’t know. I think we have to come again on some of the teachings we have held so dear to” (Resp. 41 L).

The pandemic-induced closure of churches meant that in many homes, someone provided spiritual leadership and administered sacraments like communion to the family. In many instances, those who offered spiritual leadership were women, which will be a big challenge in some African Pentecostal churches such as the CoP. The reason is that many of these roles are reserved for ordained ministers who are strictly men. COVID-19, therefore, called for a rethink of some of the church’s long-held theological views and practices, particularly with regard to gender roles in church leadership.

**Post-COVID-19-Vaccine Church Attendance Behavior**

Following the lifting of the ban on church meetings, congregations were advised to gather for a maximum of two hours while adhering to all safety protocols. Despite members resuming their regular routines at work, markets, and other social events, churches faced a longer road to recovery. The post-COVID-vaccine church experienced
setbacks in areas such as low church attendance, loss of fellowship, welfare concerns, and reduced quality of service and activities.

**Low Church Attendance Levels**

Respondents were asked to describe the post-COVID-vaccine church behavior at the individual and organizational levels. At the individual level, three general responses were gathered from church members. Some revealed that their church attendance had not been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. These are some of the responses:

“It has not affected my church attendance” (Resp 12 M).

“I attend church regularly online and in person. There is no problem at all” (Resp 40 L).

“As a serious believer, attending church services is so important you shouldn’t allow anything to affect it. My church attendance has not been affected” (Resp. 47 L).

A second group believed that even though the COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted their church attendance behavior, they had been able to bounce back to church. A third group admitted that the COVID-19 pandemic had affected their church attendance behavior. These are excerpts from the responses:

“Personally, I feel sluggish to attend church sometimes after the pandemic” (Resp. 10 M).

“Many Christians have become relaxed in church attendance and must be supported to attend church” (Resp. 29 L).

“Church attendance has been reduced by as much as 35%. For example, 100 people used to attend weekday services, now it is only 65 people who attend regularly” (Resp. 38 L).

“After the Covid, attendance has reduced by 10%” (Resp. 12 L).

“Generally, the number of people who attend church service has reduced to about 70%. 30% of members are often absent from church. The general attendance has decreased by 10–15%” (Resp. 20 L).

The data indicate that attendance at the chosen churches decreased by 10% to 40% even after the vaccination drive had commenced. On the other hand, some participants attributed the decline in church attendance to factors other than vaccination:

“Many Christians are not committed to the things of God. Those who are not too willing to attend church services now have the perfect opportunity to stay away from church” (Resp. 27 M).

“Some people are just hiding behind the covid effects” (Resp. 15 M).
“Some have generally become lazy or watch services on television to compensate for in-person church service” (Resp. 2 M).

Alternatively, the decline in church attendance may be attributed to a gradual adaptation of church members to the current circumstances, a temporary lapse in spiritual commitment following an extended period of pandemic-related isolation, a greater emphasis on family bonding due to the pandemic, or primarily financial concerns and COVID-19-related stress.

Financial Stress and Welfare Issues

One of the main reasons for decreased church attendance is the economic impact of the pandemic. This has a ripple effect on the microeconomy of individual church members, ultimately affecting the church’s overall income. The respondents noted that a significant number of people have been laid off, lost their businesses, or have seen their businesses struggle due to the pandemic’s impact on the national economy. As a result, many individuals have been unable to fulfill their tithing and offering obligations; some have even had difficulty affording transportation to church. Additionally, some have had to prioritize their families’ basic needs over attending church and participating in related activities. Here are some responses:

“Some of my church members have lost their jobs, which has affected attendance and offerings” (Resp. 21 L).

“Money to even board public transport to church is difficult to come by for some of us” (Resp. 43 M).

“Some of us can’t even feed our family, let alone pay tithes and offerings. Things are difficult” (Resp. 6 M).

Financial stress on individuals has impacted church income as the primary sources of funding for the two churches are tithes, offerings, and other donations from members. Accordingly, this has stalled evangelistic activities and capital-intensive church projects. For instance, some respondents shared the following views:

“For more than one year, we have never had any fundraising in the church” (Resp. 21 L).

“Special services like anointing and mid-week services have all been put on hold, so the church is also suffering a lack of funds (Resp. 14 L).

“Some activities like prayer and offerings are done at the cell group level, which limits what is coming in” (Resp. 9 L).

“We have put our church building on hold because income flows are seriously affected” (Resp. 44 L).
Moreover, churches have been affected financially by COVID-19, which has caused them to delay projects and address welfare concerns. As a result, church members have begun to question the welfare strategies of their respective churches, and the churches themselves are reconsidering their approach to welfare issues. These are the views of some respondents:

“The church does not care about the members. It had no plan for some of us who desperately needed support during the lockdown” (Resp. 10 M).

“We can’t continue to give only for us to be abandoned at the time of our need” (Resp. 19 M).

“The executive council should consider how welfare issues are addressed in the local [assemblies]. At one point, we were using our money to solve some of the problems. How long can this continue?” (Resp. 37 M).

**COVID-19 Anxiety**

Another significant factor contributing to the decline in church attendance during the pandemic is the concern of contracting the virus in group settings. The interlocutors emphasized that anxiety over disease transmission, particularly among the elderly and those with underlying health conditions, is a crucial factor in the reduced attendance at church services. This fear was so intense that some individuals continue to avoid attending church even after receiving vaccination. The level of anxiety was particularly high among senior citizens and the elderly. The following feedback from respondents affirms this factor:

“Some people are afraid of contracting the COVID-19 disease, especially those with underlying health conditions” (Resp. 3 L).

“Some people have become too hygiene conscious because they fear COVID-19” (Resp. 7 M).

“Some members are still afraid of contracting COVID-19 in church” (Resp. 21 L).

While certain church members may harbor a general fear of pandemics, others hold a distinct apprehension. They maintain a belief that life is fragile and fleeting, and that death could come at any moment. This outlook has instilled a desire to live right with God.

“The pandemic has instilled fear in me towards the things of God. Hence, my desire to attend church has increased, although I attend only online services” (Resp. 8 M).

“The pandemic has shown that death is so close to us. It has also made me more willing to attend church services” (Resp. 20 M).
“People are very conscious of the disease, so it creates fear, anxiety, and insecurity” (Resp. 26 M).

Quality of Experience at Church

Pentecostal-Charismatic liturgy places great emphasis on the experience. However, due to the ongoing pandemic, numerous restrictions and regulations were implemented, forcing churches to adopt alternative strategies to maintain the quality of their services. These regulations impacted activities such as all-night prayer meetings, as churches were required to operate within a two-hour service period and adhere to social distancing guidelines for seating arrangements. These arrangements engendered time consciousness, often making churches rush through their liturgy. One respondent observed: “Church activities are conducted in a rush. It has affected singing and dancing such that people are not able to feel free and dance anymore” (Resp. 47 M). These activities mentioned by the respondent are significant in Pentecostal-Charismatic church worship experiences. It generates a sense of emotional and spiritual release among church attendees.

During the period when the vaccination had just begun in Ghana, the church experience was affected. Although some church members viewed the changes brought about by COVID-19 negatively, others believed that these changes enhanced their connection with God. Some respondents recounted their stories as follows:

“The pandemic has reduced the liberty to dance, sing praises, and interact freely in the church, but it opens the opportunity for us to do things differently” (Resp. 4 M).

“As soon as church resumed, people who had greatly missed congregational worship were so joyous. They avowed that worship was awesome as the presence of God was manifested greatly. Post-COVID-19 fellowship levels are generally low. The restrictions have also taken away full satisfaction. Many people, however, believe that half of a loaf is better than none” (Resp. 21 L).

“Church is not as lively as it used to be before the COVID-19—everything has changed now” (Resp. 35 M).

“The Pentecostal activities such as crusades, rallies, and evangelism have all been put on hold. Also dancing, clapping, and jumping have all been replaced with sobriety” (Resp. 8 L).

Generally, the church has been impacted in various ways due to the pandemic and its protocols. These include reduced church attendance, financial stress experienced by both individuals and the church as a whole, increased anxiety related to COVID-19, and a decline in the quality of church services.
Conclusion

Based on preceding discussions, it could be inferred that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, church attendance was generally satisfying for both members and clergy in the two churches. However, the pandemic disrupted in-person meetings and church routines, leading to the introduction of telemediated services and a loss of fellowship due to the sustained adoption of virtual services. This shift in consumer behavior forced churches to reconsider traditional theologies and practices, including finding new ways to be a church, recognizing gender dynamics in church leadership, and adapting liturgies to remain competitive and relevant. Unfortunately, the post-COVID-19-vaccine period was marked by low attendance, financial and welfare issues, COVID-19 anxiety, and a decline in the quality of church services.

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Emilio Alvarez, associate provost at Asbury Theological Seminary and archbishop of the Union of Charismatic Orthodox Churches, provides an academic yet intimately personal and pastoral work in *Pentecostal Orthodoxy*. As a scholar-practitioner within the movement he is describing, he credibly articulates Pentecostal orthodoxy as a movement within Pentecostalism that attempts to recover the Great Tradition of the church and blends the three historic streams of the church (sacramental/liturgical, evangelical, and Pentecostal/Charismatic). This blending or “amalgamation” is not designed to exclude or assert superiority over other traditions but to create an “ecumenism of the Spirit” (142). The “ecumenism of the Spirit” that is portrayed gives “segments of Pentecostalism” the “opportunity to recover the Great Tradition” (11). This recovery of the Great Tradition precipitates the first aim of the work, to show the shift of some North American Pentecostals from their fundamentalist roots to a more historic Christian faith (5). The second aim of the work is to show how this recovery of orthodoxy is not at odds with Pentecostalism (5). Finally, the work outlines “the theological and historical qualifications” for Pentecostal orthodoxy, noting in particular the contributions of Afro-Latino Pentecostals to this movement (5).

After a laudatory foreword from John Behr, Alvarez introduces his aims, relevant terms with their definitions, and the organization of the work. Chapter one outlines several historical movements within paleo-orthodoxy seeking to recover and blend the three historic streams of the church, covering evangelical orthodoxy, the convergence worship movement, the ancient-future movement, and Pentecostal orthodoxy in detail. Chapter two posits that Pentecostalism is not antithetical to orthodoxy by showing the continuity between Pentecostal orthodoxy and the Great Tradition, Christian monastic traditions, and Christian mystical traditions.

Chapter three proposes that Pentecostals need not abandon their tradition because of their theological retrieval of the Great Tradition (77). Alvarez then provides his journey of recovering the Great Tradition for himself and three other individuals’ stories, showing that he is not alone in his experience. Chapter four develops the case for a Pentecostal orthodoxy more by focusing on Afro-Latino Pentecostals doing this work and the pitfalls of the “politicization” and misuse of and ignorance concerning clerical garb, ranks, apostolic succession, and authority. In chapter five, Alvarez problematizes spiritual ecumenism and its focus on human action and prayer, proposing
instead an “ecumenism of the Spirit,” which provides the opportunity for “creating amalgamated ecclesial communities” (142). Finally, Alvarez finishes chapter five by proposing how Pentecostal dialogues with Catholics, Orthodox, and others could be strengthened by adopting Pentecostal orthodoxy.

Alvarez mostly meets his three aims. First, Alvarez fulfills the aim of showing the shift of some North American Pentecostals from fundamentalist evangelicalism to a more historically grounded faith via the recovery of the Great Tradition. This is done especially well in chapter one’s outline of various paleo-orthodox movements and chapter two’s linkage of Pentecostal orthodoxy with monasticism and mysticism. Second, Pentecostalism is shown not to be at odds with recovering the Great Tradition. This is shown through the traditioning of Pentecostal orthodoxy within the monastic and mystical Christian traditions (45). However, it is even more poignantly demonstrated via the personal stories provided in chapter three. Third, the work attempts to outline the theological and historical qualifications of Pentecostal orthodoxy and admirably shows the contributions of Afro-Latino Pentecostals to the movement. Alvarez does provide extensive quotations from the early church, which provide a theological base for his understanding of the church’s “classic consensual teaching” (21–22). Some fascinating historical moorings for Pentecostal orthodoxy are also included, including William Seymour’s surprising use of liturgical ordination rites and an episcopal polity (104). However, the brevity of the work inhibits the expansive theological and historical work that could be done to cover the movement more fully. Alvarez is to be commended for highlighting the presence and importance of Afro-Latino Pentecostals in their recovery of the Great Tradition and for recognizing the white-normative bias of many that can be seen within the scholarship as well as noted from Alvarez’s personal observation (101, 115).

Pentecostal Orthodoxy will prove useful for scholars in the fields of Pentecostalism, liturgical studies, ecumenical studies, and those studying doctrinal development. This work provides the first major exploration of the Pentecostal orthodoxy movement. More can be done to express the theological and historical underpinnings of Pentecostal orthodoxy. For instance, Alvarez emphasizes orthopathy in regard to Pentecostal orthodoxy, but the blend of orthopathy, orthodoxy, and orthopraxy can be observed within Pentecostalism and would be fruitfully commented on in further work. This work can be done within each stream of the historic church, but especially within Pentecostalism. In ecumenical studies, some of the hypothetical questions and possibilities that Alvarez posits in his final chapter could provide fruitful material for theological and historical exploration. For the pastor, this work provides the nascence of steps forward, particularly through the inclusion of personal stories, to retrieve the Great Tradition while remaining authentic to one’s tradition.
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Historically, Pentecostalism has displayed a reluctance to formulate comprehensive systematic theological proposals. This reluctance forces Pentecostals to borrow from the theological methodologies and linguistic underpinnings of Protestant and Evangelical traditions in the construction of their theological systems. Often conflicting with the ethos of Pentecostalism, these adopted theological systems are incapable of capturing the ethos of the Pentecostal tradition. *Tongues of Fire: A Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* by Frank Macchia attempts to remedy these incompatibilities by utilizing traditional theological categories to construct a comprehensive systematic theology centered upon Pentecost, the primary theological symbol of Pentecostal theology. Macchia’s work challenges Protestant and Evangelical traditions to explore Pentecostal sensibilities within traditional theological structures, by prioritizing the theological narrative of Pentecost as central to the construction of its systematic theology. Engaging the traditional loci of Christian theology from the vantage point of Pentecost, Macchia provides a voice for Pentecostal scholarship within traditional pursuits of systematic theology, without relinquishing the spirituality that shapes the theological expression of Pentecostal spirituality.

*Tongues of Fire* begins with a section devoted to the task of theology. The pneumatological influence of Pentecost is immediately felt by the assertion that the tongues of Pentecost are an essential facet in theological development. Macchia asserts that the tongues of Pentecost declare the wonders of God, making Pentecost an inherently theological event in which God reveals himself as a God who creates, redeems, and indwells. Building upon God’s self-revelation through the Pentecost narrative, Macchia promotes theology as a constructive discipline that focuses on doctrinal development, from the sacred text of Scripture to the systematic categories of theological product that have developed throughout the history of the church. Such a theological proposal is rooted in the salvific narrative of Scripture and is historically situated in the finite and socially conditioned language of the church’s witness.

Pursuing dogmatics through the lens of Pentecost affords Macchia the opportunity to construct a systematic theology in which christology and pneumatology are mutually informative. Macchia argues that the incarnation and atonement of the Divine Son prevailed as the orthodox position of the Christian faith at the expense of the Spirit. Christology in the West has tended to reduce the Spirit to the utilitarian purpose of bearing witness to Christ in the world. To avoid this tendency, Macchia argues for a Spirit-Christology, which views Christ’s incarnation, life, death, and resurrection as leading to Christ’s outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost.
Appropriately, Macchia engages three theological giants as dialogue partners to represent the broad classifications of modern Protestant theology. Friedrich Schleiermacher represents the liberal stream, with an emphasis on the enlightenment of human consciousness. Karl Barth represents the neo-orthodox stream, which reflects a shift away from the soul’s journey with God towards the self-revelation of God through his Son Jesus Christ as the authoritative revelation of the Christian faith. Paul Tillich represents the correlation stream, which was an intentional attempt to mediate the tensions between Schleiermacher’s emphasis on experience and Barth’s emphasis on the proclaimed Word of God. Macchia’s willingness to employ these three theological titans as interlocutors provides an opportunity for the dialectic encounter between the Pentecostal narrative and the traditional theological methods that are to come.

Having laid the foundation on which the narrative of Pentecost can interface with traditional theological systems, Macchia begins the heavy lifting of integrating the Pentecost narrative with the categories commonly utilized within the Protestant tradition. Using Pentecost, Macchia expands the epistemological horizons of the traditional categories of theology beyond propositional statements to encompass both the affective and embodied sensibilities of Pentecostal theology. This endeavor has the potential to aid in strengthening the cause of Pentecost in the Western world by providing opportunities to integrate traditional theological systems with the sensibilities found within Pentecostal spirituality. With Pentecost at the center, Macchia’s theological proposal can appeal to traditional Protestant theological systems without disregarding or abandoning the basic structures of those systems.

This undertaking by Macchia is not an easy task. The distinct epistemological and ontological views of Pentecostalism are difficult to integrate with Evangelical and Protestant theological systems. Many of Macchia’s colleagues, such as (but not limited to) Daniel Castelo and Ken Archer, argue that Pentecostal spirituality is incompatible with Protestant and Evangelical modes of theology. Nonetheless, Macchia presses forward with his attempt to use Pentecost as the filter for traditional theological categories. Adopting Pentecost as the primarily theological symbol to construct systematic theology, Macchia provides the scaffolding that Pentecostals can engage with traditional theological systems of theology without compromising the integrity of the theological narrative that undergirds the production of Pentecostal theology.

Macchia’s work serves to demonstrate the capability of Pentecostalism to incorporate itself into traditional Protestant theological structures. Macchia leaves little doubt that traditional Protestant theological development would benefit by assimilating the Pentecostal narrative into its theological systems. In a time when the growth of Pentecostalism significantly dwarfs that of Protestant and Evangelical traditions, Macchia’s work should be received as an opportunity for a reassessment of the theological systems employed by Protestant and Evangelical traditions through the
theological narrative of Pentecost. *Tongues of Fire*’s masterful incorporation of the Pentecostal narrative into traditional Protestant and Evangelical theological systems serves to display the constructive role Pentecostal scholarship can have in shaping and reforming Evangelical and Protestant theology.

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Rodolfo Galvan Estrada, III, is a New Testament scholar who currently serves at Vanguard University. His academic credentials include a PhD from Duke Divinity School. His expertise in New Testament and his experience as a Mexican-American provide the background for this ethnographic exploration in which he connects the work of the Spirit in the Gospel of John with a narrative of subversion in which the ethnic ideologies that could have affected the Johannine community are redefined in light of the Spirit’s renewal.

The first part of the book establishes the different nuances of Johannine pneumatology and the ethnic issues surrounding the original audience. The author describes how the pneumatology of John’s gospel differs from the Synoptics, unveiling perspectives that include an eschatological, polemical, and socio-scientific understanding. The main theme for Estrada is that the Spirit can be properly understood in the Fourth Gospel as the social context of the Johannine community (13). His thesis explores the implications of a pneumatic discourse that responds to “the ethnic ideologies of the Greco-Roman world” (23). To reach his objective, he employs the ethnocritical method to insert the ministry of the Spirit in a multiethnic reality that was present in the Greco-Roman world. Estrada’s pneumatology of race starts with the history of the socio-cultural ideologies of the Greeks and Romans, and their implications to the relationship with the Jewish community.

Part two explores the central argument of the author in light of the Spirit’s appearances in the discourses of Jesus. Estrada applies his thesis to instances in which Jesus interacts with people from different ethnic backgrounds and social statuses. For the author, the Spirit’s role in Jesus’ discourse has cultural implications for the Johannine communities. The author places the ethnocritical lens to conclude that the Spirit anoints Jesus to reach to all ethnicities, facilitates spiritual birth to non-Jews without the natural genealogies that created racial prejudice and superiority in Israel, calls for a unified corporate worship without mutual rejections, and warrants infilling for Jews and Greeks alike. In all of the chapters of this section, Estrada summarizes the pneumatological truths that would have deeply transformed the inter-ethnic relationships of the Johannine community. Within the overall argument of part two, there is a recurrent theme that emerges: the work of the Spirit throughout the narrative is both the ideal picture and the prophetic reality to heal the prejudices that could have affected members of the Johannine community.

Finally, in part three, the author explores the Spirit as paraclete in light of impending persecution for the disciples. The author grounds the Spirit-paraclete ministry in the
Farewell Discourses to walk with the disciples’ in their impending persecution. Estrada posits that the world is understood as an ethnic group that will persecute the disciples and the ethnic Johannine community. His argument closes by interpreting the Johannine Pentecost as an event that moves the Johannine community into a hostile world to proclaim their faith as true children of God. For the author, the ethnic ideologies that were imported from the Greco-Roman world provided the context to see the Spirit as the source of a pneumatoethnic identity for the Johannine community. Such ministry was prescriptive because the Johannine community had a solution against racial inequality and reconciliation. The implications of this “pneumatic solution” (298) carries out perpetually as believers today must learn to live in unity in a world that could be as ethnically oppressive as the Greco-Roman society in the New Testament.

The strongest arguments of the author relate to the understanding of the cultural background of the Greco-Roman world to which the audience belonged. His thorough research of historical documents and commentaries demonstrates how the ethnic complexities of the original audience galvanized a distinct pneumatology. His ethnographic approach nuanced widely accepted theological truths in Johannine literature. Likewise, the author’s approach presented theories that could solve problematic passage such as the flesh and Spirit discourse of John 6 (170) and the open-ended nature of the Johannine Pentecost (287).

The author also successfully handles a presumptive bias due to his ethnic identity. Despite proposing new, and occasionally ground-breaking, insights to Johannine scholarship, he is never off-tempo with other commentaries, nor does he impose an anachronistic lens to his study of the Fourth Gospel. He accomplishes this by exploring the layers of the multiethnic cultural context to cement his conclusion that it played a part in the pneumatology of the Johannine community. As the discussion moves to the Farewell Discourses, the author’s assumption that multiple ethnic ideologies necessitated a pneumatology of unity slightly fades to accommodate more traditional pneumatological theories, albeit with a focus on ethnic identity language.

Rodolfo Estrada has provided a vital addition to New Testament studies—one that is apropos with the current times of ethnic and racial differences affecting society. The contributions of this volume could further the discipline of contextual hermeneutics and popularize similar ethnographic studies in other portions of biblical literature. It could also serve as a scholarly demonstration of contextual theology on the biblical text emerging from a member of the Latino Diaspora in the United States.

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About twenty years ago, I was teaching a course in systematic theology at an interdenominational evangelical seminary in Toronto. The institution served many theological communities, including the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC), a historic and Trinitarian leaning denomination. In the class, a PAOC student articulated a position that was very close to Oneness theology. The encounter suggested that the separation between Trinitarian and Oneness Pentecostalism was not as definitive a break as has been claimed. The PAOC has a historical origin different from the Assemblies of God, as David Reed ably argues. Howard Goss, a Oneness Pentecostal and cosigner of the dominion charter, remained with the PAOC even after it embraced a Trinitarian position. For eighteen years, Goss pastored the very church my forementioned student attended. Reed’s historical reconstruction helps to make sense of this curious encounter.

The book is organized around the prominent themes of race and gender. Mexican Oneness Pentecostals were a significant cluster, the focus of chapters by Daniel Ramírez, Patricia Fortuny Loret de Molan, and Daniel Chiquete. Of particular interest was Ramírez’s claim that the Assemblies of God origins narrative of Hot Springs (1914) and St. Louis (1916) needs to be relativized as a number of pre-1914 Mexicans were already practicing Jesus’ name water baptism, such as Juan Navarro, Luis Lopez (1909), Francisco Llorente (1912), and Romana Valenzeula. Daniel Segraves’ reconstruction of Andrew D. Urshan’s theology is rooted in his Persian heritage, with Syrian and Nestorian Christian influences that provide much insight to be plumbed by theologians on both sides of the debate with implications for ecumenical dialogue. And there are excellent chapters by Rosa Sailes and Dara Colby Delgado on African American Oneness developments especially among women in which resistance to cultural racism provided an important lens for understanding the differences from other Oneness Christians.

Chapters by Sailes, Andrea Johnson, Delgado, and de Molan tackle the complex issue of gender in which Oneness Pentecostal women replicate the patriarchal attitudes and structures while also arguing how these women subvert expected norms as they fulfilled their religious calling. Geneva Brazier, an African American woman with a fundamentalist theology grounded in a strict Oneness and Holiness ethos, would subvert that ethos by decorating for Christmas and enjoying baseball and marbles, behaviors that violated Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (PAW) restrictions. Moreover, she was committed to social activism, civil rights, and justice in confronting the racism of her day. In a complementary manner, Delgado explores the gender politic
in the PAW in which men adopted a passive-aggressive approach in its progressive patriarchalism. Black women were entrepreneurial, innovative, and agents of activism as they resisted patriarchal norms, even while PAW men worked to limit women’s liberty to protect male authority. Johnson examines how women held some authority and as evangelists could perform marriages, funerals, baptisms, and communion but only in emergencies. The mission field offered more advantages as women were freer from gender challenges. Again, Oneness women challenged patriarchal norms while navigating within patriarchal structures. De Molan examines the norms and rules for women associated with the Luz del Munda Church, a Mexican church that combines Pentecostal theology and norms with regional Catholic culture. Women are denied access to the upper echelons of power and can only be in charge and work at the lower rung of the church hierarchy. However, de Molan adopts a Foucauldian analysis in that the deployment of power has both formal and informal arrangements, and Luz del Mundo women predominantly operate in informal settings. De Mola’s trans-generational analysis finds a considerable range of diversity that makes gender relations and forms of power highly paradoxical.

These chapters triangulate with contemporary scholarship investigating women and power in global Pentecostal settings. With years of gaining improvements and rights for women in both the secular and religious spheres, and the purported egalitarian values brought by ecstatic rituals such as glossolalia, why are Pentecostal women not more represented in the upper echelons of leadership? The answer resides in the “gender paradox” in which Pentecostal women were willing to negotiate (intentionally or unintentionally), giving up formal authority to men who embraced holiness codes that supported the family and the well-being of the marriage. In other words, male conversion placed restrictions around alcohol consumption, smoking, gambling, and womanizing that brought men back into the family system. Pentecostal women desired these holiness regulations and in order to maintain this newfound comportment, they were willing to divest of their religious power and allow men positions of formal authority (e.g., see Elizabeth E. Brusco, The Reformation of Machismo: Evangelical Conversion and Gender in Columbia [Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1995]).

An implicit theme is the role of migration in the development of the complex tapestry of Oneness Pentecostalism. Ramírez and Reed point to migration of both sides of the US border, in which Mexicans took their newfound faith down to Mexico (either voluntarily or through forced expulsion), and Europeans across the northern border. Lloyd Barba explores migration of Okies from the midwest and southern states to California, bringing with them a more bombastic and confrontational form of Pentecostalism, thereby transforming the more conciliatory and cosmopolitan Oneness Pentecostals that already existed on the west coast. Sailes contends that the migration of
Robert and Geneva Brazier from Alabama to Chicago, in which Geneva eventually pastored Oneness churches and founded a family legacy passed on to her children and grandchildren in which community action, social justice, and civil rights were exemplified to address the plight of impoverished African Americans.

How should one theorize about these migrations within the US and across borders? Ramirez suggests that Mexican migration was socio-political as well as faithful Pentecostals following their religious calling. Barba demonstrates a south and midwest to west migration that was in part due to the droughts and economic turmoil of the mid-twentieth century. The northern border was more porous as people crossed back and forth with relative ease. What were the mechanisms that spurred migration and how did they fit in the broader global flows?

*Oneness Pentecostalism* is an impressive contribution to Pentecostal studies. Although Pentecostal scholarship has exploded, there has been scant research produced on Oneness Pentecostalism, as the editors rightly note. The editors and contributors are to be commended for organizing and implementing this interdisciplinary volume. An edited volume is as strong as its weakest chapter. *Oneness Pentecostalism* does not have any weak chapters, and this is its strength. The book exposes a sector of global Pentecostalism that has been under-researched and provides a richer picture of the complex maze of a twentieth-century religious movement.

N.B. A longer version of this review was presented in the Manchester Wesley Research Centre/ Pentecostal Theological Seminary panel at the American Academy of Religion in San Antonio, Texas, 2023.

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