

**A Position Paper on the Essential Nature of the Church as the Missional People of God  
as Reflected in Pentecostal Self-Understanding**

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## **A Perspective on a Pentecostal Missional Ecclesiology**

Pentecostals have been frequently criticized for lacking a proper ecclesiology.<sup>1</sup> This criticism is often based on criteria that define ecclesiology along organizational-denominational lines, which have to do with liturgy, church polity and structure. The essence of Pentecostal ecclesiology sees the Church as a Spirit-infused living organism, the agent of God's Kingdom on earth. The plan of God for the restoration of the world is fulfilled in the Kingdom mission of Jesus, the Spirit of Pentecost and the emergence of communities of Christ-followers. This essential understanding of the Church, seen in both the experience of the earliest disciples (Luke) and the spread of the Church (Acts) is, likewise, true of every authentic Spirit-inspired movement ever since, and the modern Pentecostal movement is no exception.

### **Pentecostal Understanding of the Relationship between Ecclesiology and Discipleship**

#### **The Church in Pentecostal Perspective**

Pentecostals have never lacked a commitment to the Church, but their experience of the Holy Spirit has tended to shape their distinctive understanding of the Church as primarily a dynamic, missional community where God dwells by his Spirit. They have been reticent to define themselves according to form and structure due to their genuine anxiety that form and structure would stifle the life of the Spirit, leading to spiritual stagnation and a Church that ceases to function effectively in her God ordained role as the agent of God's restorative plan for the world.

Two thousand years of church history tend to validate Pentecostal misgivings regarding structure and organization. In the tension between form and freedom, ritual and charisma, organization and movement, it seems as though the Spirit of revival, who brings change and new life, is inevitably absorbed into the ritual and formality that structure tends to impose upon the life of the church--and the ultimate casualty is always mission.

One of the results of the Pentecostal ambivalence toward organization is the lack of a standard ecclesiastical structure within global Pentecostalism. The Pentecostal Movement

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<sup>1</sup> For instance the provocative sub-title 'Pentecostal Ecclesiology: Is there any?' in Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives* [IVP, 2002] is illustrative of this tendency. If Pentecostalism is a movement, is it useful to talk about ecclesiology at all? What does ecclesiology mean to a Pentecostal? "It appears that the study of Pentecostal ecclesiology has been more descriptive than proscriptive, and more experiential than exegetical" in Irving A. Whitt, "The Nature and Mission of the Postmodern Church – a Response" (August 26), 2010.

consists of multifarious streams and a wide variety of rich and diverse local expressions. A Pentecostal church can function effectively in settings as diverse as a small village hamlet, upper class neighborhood living room, a shack in an urban slum, a five-star hotel ballroom or a traditional cathedral. The single most distinguishing feature of Pentecostal churches and movements is the central place ascribed to the immediate transforming presence of God the Holy Spirit. This emphasis on the presence of the Spirit shapes the various expressions of discipleship and ecclesial life in Pentecostal communities all over the globe. The common elements include an emphasis on experiential spirituality, the exercise of spiritual gifts, fervent worship and prayer, a high view of the Bible, conservative morality, vocational empowerment and the participation of all believers in ministry and mission. There are, however, two essential features in the Pentecostal understanding and expression of the Church: the Church as the community of the Spirit and the Church as the agent of God's mission.

### *The Church as the Community of the Spirit*

The New Testament church was initiated by the calling of the first disciples of Jesus and empowered to continue his work on the day of Pentecost. The Church was instituted by Jesus, formed by the Spirit, and is comprised of the people of God who share a common experience of renewal and transformation by the Spirit. In Pentecostal ecclesiology, the role of the Spirit is crucial to the being and inner life of the Church. It describes the Church's basic identity as the community of people among whom God dwells by his Spirit, defines the Church in terms of God's family comprised of all those who share a common life in the Spirit, and emphasizes the essential character of the Church as the mystical Body of Christ, an organic extension of his life and mission among us.

It is the presence of the Spirit that makes the Church, the gathered community of believers, God's temple--the dwelling place of God [1Cor. 3:16-17; Eph. 2:19-22]. Pentecostals pursue after and believe they actually experience the real presence of God in their worship [John 4:23-24], and their experience of the Holy Spirit's presence shapes their identity as the holy people of God. Through the Spirit's empowering presence the community of God's people lives out the type of ethical behavior that reflects the character of God to the world. The Spirit's presence is, likewise, manifested in power through the spiritual gifts he bestows on every believer for the building up of the Church, and it is the Holy Spirit who enables her expansion through the powerful proclamation of the good news, which is often witnessed to by miracles--the signs of the Kingdom's presence on the earth. The Pentecostal experience of the Spirit's presence is what the New Testament calls the

*koinonia* [fellowship] of the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts describes the expression of this *koinonia* in the early church [Acts2:44-47]: not just an abstract spiritual ideal, but a concrete, lived-out experience of real community. While the specific local expressions of *koinonia* will vary as individual churches respond appropriately to the particular complex of socio-economic and cultural factors affecting them, this principle of shared life in the Holy Spirit may be observed in Pentecostal ecclesial communities all over the world

In his instructions to the Corinthians concerning the proper exercise of spiritual gifts, Paul teaches that when the Church comes together for worship, God's presence must be so evident the unbeliever who walks in will experience conviction: "...the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, God is really among you!" [1Cor. 14:25]. This is the heart of Pentecostal ecclesiology - a real and vibrant experience of God's presence in the church, the community of God's Spirit, which attracts a watching world and convinces unbelievers God is real and the gospel is true and has the power to save. It is this same vibrant sense of God's presence that causes Pentecostal ecclesial communities to be sending agents for God's Kingdom.

### *The Church as the Agent of God's Kingdom-mission*

Pentecostals have always viewed the Church as being at the center of God's missionary purpose. In the introduction to his widely influential book about a Pentecostal theology of missions, *A Theology of the Church and its Mission*, Melvin Hodges makes this point clearly and succinctly:

*Missions...does not begin with the missionary or evangelist. The missionary is only the instrument. Moreover, he does not stand alone - he is a member of the Church and its representative. Hence, the importance of the study of ecclesiology in the study of missions...The study of missions then becomes the study of the Church. A weak theology of the Church will produce a weak sense of mission.*<sup>2</sup>

Pentecostals derive their self-understanding as a missional community by interpreting their story as a continuation of the narrative found in Luke/Acts. Jesus' mission consisted essentially in the proclamation of the good news of the arrival of the Kingdom of God and the manifestation of its presence through the miracles he performed. In his hometown synagogue in Nazareth Jesus declared the power of the Holy Spirit was upon him to proclaim the arrival of the Kingdom (Luke 4.17-21). The proclamation itself was in the power of the Spirit (Luke 4.18-19), as were the miracles he did (Luke 4.1,14). The wonders performed gave witness

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<sup>2</sup> Melvin Hodges, *A Theology of the Church and its Mission* (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1977), 10.

to the truth of the proclamation of the Kingdom. It was to be a Kingdom where the poor, the ones on the margins, would be targeted by God's favor. His proclamation was that salvation had come--God's restoring power unleashed into the world.

He sent out the 12 with his power and authority to preach and perform the miraculous (Luke 9), and then the 72 (Luke 10). The work of the disciples, the work of the Church, had begun. It is in Acts 2 that Luke describes for us the empowering of a wider Christian community, the 120 who were waiting in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit. As Jesus was empowered by the Spirit to proclaim the Kingdom, so the first thing that the 120 freshly filled believers did was to proclaim the glory of God (Acts 2.11). And it is no surprise that Peter, now filled with the Spirit, stood up and preached a sermon so empowered by the Spirit that the response increased the number of believers by 3000 that day. The Pentecost event represented a broadening of those who received the Spirit, not just numerically, but categorically. Peter's quotation of Joel's prophecy--that a day was coming when the pouring out of the Spirit would include women as well as men, young as well as old, and even servants--has formed the Pentecostal vision that the Spirit is for all, without regard for gender, age or social barrier.

The Church exists in the world not for its own sake but to announce the Kingdom of God and demonstrate its reality. God so loved this world that He gave Jesus (John 3.16) to initiate the salvation of the world. What Christ began and what He will finish, the Church continues until the day when he returns (Acts 1.8). As there was conflict when the Kingdom arrived with Christ, there was conflict as the mission continued after the ascension of Jesus and the pouring out of the Spirit. A demonstration of the reality of the arriving Kingdom produces conflict with the powers already resident in the present world. As the presence of the Spirit among the community of believers exerts pressure on the Kingdom of this world to give way and make room for the King, the world resists by putting constant pressure on God's people to conform to its standards.

Sadly, history bears testimony to the fact that the Church frequently fails to evidence effectively the reality of the Kingdom through its life and witness. However, whenever God's people have turned to him in repentance, the breath of God's Spirit has renewed the Church, restoring it to its original biblical calling and purpose.

The Holy Spirit's principal function in the Church today is to authenticate the Church's claim that the Kingdom has arrived, both by reproducing the values and virtues of the Kingdom in the church, such as righteousness, peace, love, joy, healing and reconciliation, and by performing signs and wonders so that others will glimpse the power

of God. Pentecostalism emerged out of conviction that God was intending to restore His Kingdom priorities through them. The Holy Spirit thus enables the Church to fulfill its role as a *sign* – providing evidence that the Kingdom has already arrived in the first coming of Christ, and a *signpost* – pointing to the future coming of the Kingdom in its fullness at the second coming of Christ.

In mission, God continues His restorative work in the world by transforming the hearts of men and women and the communities they live in, but He seeks to do this through the Church. Hence Emil Brunner’s famous assertion: “The Church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning.”<sup>3</sup> A truly Pentecostal ecclesiology, then, always views the Church as the Church-in-mission, since the Church and mission are organically related as root to the fruit. Hence, all aspects of Church life—its worship, discipleship and church growth, salt and light living, evangelism, church planting, and cross-cultural missions—are intentionally directed towards extending the Kingdom of God on the earth.<sup>4</sup> The Spirit-empowered Church is, thus, the Church-in-Mission, as the Holy Spirit orients and directs every activity of the Church towards the extension of the Kingdom. In other words, Pentecostals draw no line between what happens when they gather in community and when they depart. Out of the experienced presence of God comes the directive for Spirit-empowered witness.

### The Interaction between Missiology and Ecclesiology

There is no greater evidence of Pentecostal theology in action than a missiology that produces godly churches whose first priority is to respond to Jesus’ directive to be witnesses (Acts 1.8). This connection between the mission mandate and local church should form the bedrock of all Pentecostal ministries. From the beginning, Pentecostals have recognized that a response to the urgency of the times meant participation by all in witness. Individuals testified both in church and in their communities about the power of God they experienced, and some even went beyond their communities, or even to other continents, to be witnesses. Before missions became departmentalized, it was what the whole Church did together.

How the missiology-ecclesiology interchange is defined carries enormous implications for life and ministry. Practical areas such as local church mission budgets, personal

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<sup>3</sup> A point stressed in, quoted in Wilbert R. Shenk, *Write the Vision* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1995), 87.

<sup>4</sup> A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin, and Gary B. McGee, *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 77-79.

integrity, or an organization's missionary deployment articulate the operational meanings of Church and mission. Methods and objectives are the product of how each generation interprets the Church's ethos. Along the lines of this discussion, two key questions need to be considered. First, is the Church's primary reason for existence to glorify God by proclaiming Christ's gospel to all people groups, or is the mission just one purpose among many other equals for the Church? And second, what are the biblical and historical models in Luke/Acts to shape a "missional ecclesiology" in the Pentecostal Church today?

### ***Luke/Acts as a Paradigm for a Missional Ecclesiology***

It has been argued convincingly that the only biblical account of the early Church in Acts was constructed around the Acts 1:8 missiological matrix.<sup>5</sup> The Acts narrative is a compilation of chronological events that accentuate the geographical and ethnic expansion ignited on the Day of Pentecost. Therefore, the construction of Acts itself argues that, "[the gift of the Spirit] is for witness and service".<sup>6</sup> Luke's emphasis on geographical expansion of the Kingdom by the power of the Spirit began in the gospel he wrote. In Luke, Jesus' proclamation moves from the north, Galilee (the periphery of Israel), southward to the center of the Jewish world in Jerusalem. In Acts, the proclamation expands outward from Jerusalem, until it finally reaches the center of the Roman Empire, Rome itself. When we chart the progress of the mission in Luke/Acts, we discover that each respective threshold is crossed *after* an intervention of the Spirit.

\* Jesus is anointed by the Spirit in Luke 3 (becoming the Christ, the Anointed One), and then begins his ministry in Galilee (Luke 4-9.51) before journeying to Jerusalem to face his death (Luke 9.52-24.53).

\* Jerusalem and Judea are impacted by the initial outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 2).<sup>7</sup> Peter is baptized and immediately preaches, resulting in dramatic church growth.

\* Samaria is first touched by the Spirit-led deacon Philip (Acts 8) who himself is catapulted into mission by the martyrdom (i.e., which is the same word in the Greek as is the one translated "witness" in Acts 1:8) of Stephen, a man "full of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:55).

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<sup>5</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Introduction*, (Eerdmans, 1961), 230; Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Westminster Press, 1971), 15f, 94.

<sup>6</sup> Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1977), 62.

<sup>7</sup> Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*, 49; Howard Clark Kee, *To Every Nation Under Heaven: The Acts of the Apostles*, (Trinity Press International, 1997), 44.

\* The Gentile mission begins in Acts 10:47 with Spirit Baptism of house of Cornelius, (subsequent to the vision given to Peter of unclean animals and the Spirit's insistence that Peter go with them).

\* The ends of the earth are targeted by the Antioch mission effort as the Spirit calls for the sending of Barnabas and Saul during a time of worship and fasting by the believers there (13:2) -- the only time in Luke/Acts we see a church sending out missionaries).

We take particular note of the strategic shift in the direction of the mission that occurred in Acts 10. The Holy Spirit, after the visionary experiences of Peter, directs him to accompany the delegation sent from Cornelius. Peter complied and journeyed to a Gentile home. Now this account is more than an illustration of the early church's openness to Gentile converts; it represents a new missional paradigm. The OT expectation, which it appears the Apostles shared, was that the Gentiles would come to the Jews, to Jerusalem, when they came to their spiritual senses. The confirmation to Peter and his team for crossing a socio-religious boundary came when the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius. It was this event that caused the Jerusalem delegation's astonishment-- the "gift of the Spirit" had been bestowed on the uncircumcised (10:45).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, this moment would form the core of Peter's polemic for Gentile inclusion as equal brethren at the Jerusalem council (15:7-8).<sup>9</sup> Once more, we see the connection between an encounter with the Holy Spirit and the advancement of mission through the crossing of a threshold.

There are other examples of the Spirit directing the mission. The decision of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, convened to discuss the future parameters of a mission among the Gentiles, was rendered with these words "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and us..." This illustrates the precedence they gave to the Spirit in terms of their mission. The Gentile initiative was not the result of enlightened human reason but a divine act of the sovereign Spirit.

Thus, the Acts narrative underscores how the early believers' experience in the Spirit led to missiological precedence in all their initiatives. More precisely, the first steps toward an ecclesiastical structure for the Church take shape as a reaction to theological and organizational needs arising from the Spirit's insistence on mission. To cite an architectural

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<sup>8</sup> Cf., F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on The Book of Acts*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 230, and Stanley Horton, *The Book of Acts*, (Springfield, MO.: Gospel Publishing House, 1981), 157; Simon Kistemaker, *Acts*, (Baker, 1990), 300.

<sup>9</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, (Intervarsity Press, 1991), 197.

maxim, form follows function. Apostolic authorities are presented as reacting to expansion (8:14; 10:45; 11:22; 13:2; 15:2) rather than facilitating it. The Church's evolution is more ad hoc and circumstantial under the Holy Spirit's guidance.

### *20<sup>th</sup> Century Corollaries*

Accounts of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century outpouring portray a zealous response toward mission similar to that in Acts. Those baptized brought an eschatological urgency to their task, which meant that many departed for the mission field with limited formal training.<sup>10</sup> There was no luxury of time for language training and instruction in cross-cultural ministry. The early apocalyptic sensibility of the early Pentecostals, that the last days were upon them and the return of Jesus was near, recaptured the eschatological outlook of the early church. The belief in the soon return of Jesus shaped the early church, and the Pentecostals who identified with them. Other movements have appeared globally since Pentecostalism emerged in the early 1900s that emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit, e.g., the Charismatic Movement of post-WWII, but what continues to distinguish the first Pentecostals was their urgency to act before the soon coming *Parousia*. It was natural, then, for Pentecostals to work out their spirituality in missional directions, and with haste.

When the Lord did not return as soon as expected by the first Pentecostals, missiological methods, linguistics and anthropological training were added as needs dictated a modification in the sending model. However, pursuant to limited funding and their belief in the Spirit empowerment of converts, Pentecostal practice quickly gravitated towards implementing indigenous principles,<sup>11</sup> which led to greater lay participation and gender inclusion in the composition of the early missionary force.

Much of the early mobilization was also characterized by zeal and personal autonomy indicative of the revivalist roots from which Pentecostalism arose. Several early pioneers, already on overseas assignment, encountered Spirit baptism and joined fledgling Pentecostal efforts. The confluence of spontaneous mission thrusts from called individuals with minimal organization helped form a Church model that is still prevalent in many Pentecostal and Charismatic groups.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Gary McGee. "Early Pentecostal Missionaries: They Went Everywhere Preaching the Gospel" in M.A. Dempster, B.D. Klaus & D. Petersen (eds.) 1991, 35.

<sup>11</sup> DeLonn Rance. "Defining Terms and Principles of Indigenous Church Philosophy: Toward a Renewed Surrender to a Spirit-Driven Missiology and Praxis," 3, <http://worldagfellowship.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Delonn.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Gary McGee, "Pentecostals and their Various Strategies for Global Mission," *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991).

Over time, the 20<sup>th</sup> Century enterprise became increasingly liberated from its Western modalities and what emerged was a deep reliance on the Spirit to lead minimally trained local leaders. The sheer size and missional capacity of these younger churches quickly surpassed those of the original sending bases much like what occurred in the NT era.

### ***Implications for Pentecostal Missiology***

1. *The Pentecostal experience is inextricably attached to the mandate of Acts 1:8.* Jesus defines Spirit baptism as power for worldwide proclamation. Therefore, whenever a Church defines its primary goal as something other than gospel proclamation to the world, it ceases to be Pentecostal in the strictest sense of historical NT patterns. For our predecessors, mission was “the premier task...the only real assignment”.<sup>13</sup>
2. *Spiritual gifts exist as part of the missionary witness.* Healings and other miracles open doors for the gospel (Acts 4:29f; 5:12; 6:8). Even the gift of tongues in a Christian gathering may be a witness to the presence of God (1 Cor. 14:22). When modern Pentecostals pursue the gifts solely for individual or institutional benefit, they are ignoring the preeminence of apostolic signs and wonders as proclamation of Christ’s redemption to others.
3. *Spirit-led missiology is often characterized by structural improvisation as God’s people react to the Spirit’s moving.* Human or institutional rigidity is repeatedly confronted whenever missional thresholds are crossed. As modern methods expand to incorporate new ministries not operational in the NT, contemporary missiology must wisely resist this urge to become too attached to particular methods and traditions that foster an entrenched institutionalism foreign to the Acts paradigm.
4. *Spirit empowerment is the grounds on which believers move into mission.* The practice of being in the presence of God is missional in itself. As Barnabas and Paul were chosen and sent out in Acts 13.2, so many have gone out of Pentecostal services with a similar conviction of having been chosen and sent out because of the Holy Spirit’s activity. There is a vital connection between ecclesiology and mission. To be “Pentecostal” is to accept the commission of Christ as obligatory and achievable through the Spirit. This is why Pentecostalism quickly elevates lay leaders, women, and indigenous churches to fulfill the mandate.<sup>14</sup> It is also why the Pentecostal worldview

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<sup>13</sup> Everett A. Wilson, *Strategy of the Spirit*, (UK: Paternoster Press, 1997), 78.

<sup>14</sup> Gary McGee, “Pentecostals and their Various Strategies for Global Mission: A Historical Assessment.” In *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*. Dempster Murray, Klaus Byron, Petersen Douglas, eds (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), 201-224.

offers fertile soil for racial and gender equality in the Church.<sup>15</sup>

### Luke/Acts as a Paradigm for a Church-based Missiology

Realizing that the Spirit's primary objective according to Luke/Acts is worldwide proclamation might cause some to deemphasize ecclesiastical concerns. Such a conclusion would not only lack biblical support, but also, jeopardize the integrity of the mission itself.

In Luke, Jesus takes the proclamation of the Kingdom to Jerusalem; in Acts, Peter and especially Paul take it beyond Jerusalem. The Acts narrative is dominated by two great personalities, Peter and Paul, representing the mission to Jews and the mission to Gentiles, respectively. While Peter crosses the threshold into Gentile territory, it is Paul who becomes the apostle to the Gentiles.

When we consider the apostolic work of Paul (Acts 11 and following), it is no surprise that the Church plays a central role, both as a sending body for missionaries from established churches, and as the primary result of the success of the mission as new churches were begun. And at the heart of the Church was the leading and empowering of the Spirit. He who had received the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17-18) furthered the mission in the power of the Spirit. In one of his final letters, addressed to the Roman house churches, he tells them that his ministry had been carried out in Spirit empowered proclamation, with signs and wonders (Romans 15:18-19).

In the missionary journeys described in Acts, churches resembling the Jerusalem model are planted and leaders are quickly raised up for spiritual service. As the Jerusalem Church adopted and adapted the model of worship used in the synagogue (praise, prayer, instruction), so undoubtedly, the Jerusalem model is adopted and adapted to local conditions as the gospel moves into new areas. Every indication is that Paul's primary objective is to plant churches filled with disciples hungry for God's glory. Their spirituality is a constant motif in the Pauline epistles and the apostle consistently models pastoral ministry. Paul both planted and pastored (missiology and ecclesiology).

Unquestionably, early missionary teams benefited greatly from the linguistic and political homogeneity of the Roman Empire. These factors significantly minimized contextualization issues. For example, the NT, though written primarily by Jews, was written in

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<sup>15</sup> Allen Anderson and Ma, Wonsuk, "Full Circle Mission; A possibility of Pentecostal Missiology," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 8 (2005): 6.

Greek, the official language of the empire. To mention a political example, Paul was able to use his Roman citizenship to be transferred from prison in Caesarea to Rome rather than back to Jerusalem (Acts 25). The great barrier was cultural, the wall dividing Jew and Gentile. Paul adapted Jewish theological ideas for Greek-speaking congregations, and championed a moderated Jewish ethical as the standard for Gentile congregations. This sensitivity to the social context of his addressees was more than a result of his familiarity with the wider world to which his upbringing in Tarsus had exposed him. It was his trust in the Spirit, who would make the will of the Father known and conformity to the Son possible. We see this illustrated by the rapidity of Paul's transition to local leadership due to his confidence in the Spirit's ability to grow the fledging congregations into deeper godliness while he obeys the mission mandate through redeployment.<sup>16</sup>

Another integral part of the Acts model is the team philosophy exemplified by the apostolic band. Operating in groups not only follows the model set out by Jesus (the 72 were sent out in two's, Luke 10:1), and continued by Paul, who travelled in a team rather than alone (with leaders like Barnabas, Silas, and Mark), but reminds us of the corporate nature of the early Church: they were taught together, they broke bread and prayed together, they sold what they had so they could share together. They not only met in homes, but they gathered in the Temple, where they could witness. And when their witness was threatened, they prayed together. When Peter and John returned from being questioned and threatened by the Jewish leadership for preaching the resurrection, they returned to their community of believers, and took the matter to prayer. "And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31, KJV).

The team philosophy of the apostles was the philosophy Paul had for the entire church: the members of the Body of Christ are dependent on Christ as the Head and interdependent on each other. The metaphor of the church as the Body of Christ is a vivid reminder of how the Kingdom of God is lived out in community (Rom. 12, 1Cor. 12, Eph 4). Whenever Paul discusses the gifts of the Spirit, he uses the metaphor of the Body of Christ to stress that the gifts are given for the sake of others, for the sake of the Kingdom (Rom. 12, 1 Cor. 12, Eph. 4).

Therefore, what begins as mission culminates in local congregations with their own giftings, distinct authority structures, ministry objectives and sense of mission. As Paul makes

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<sup>16</sup> Dean S. Gilliland, *Pauline Theology and Missionary Practice*, (Tryfam Printers Ltd, 1983), 10-11.

clear in 1Cor 9.1-2, the fact that churches like the one in Corinth existed is proof of his apostleship. In other words, his faithfulness to use his spiritual gifts was seen in church planting, the advancement of the Kingdom. Acts demonstrates that the mission of the Kingdom, or what in Matthew's record of the Great Commission is the call to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28.19-20), is expressed not on an individual basis but in the establishment of faith communities.

### *20<sup>th</sup> Century Corollaries*

When post-colonialism witnessed an increasingly exhausted sending base in the western Church, Pentecostal missions, through its emphasis on Spirit-empowered indigenous local churches, became a dynamic force in the global missionary movement. The Pauline model of reliance on the Spirit to raise young workers for quick transition to leadership became emblematic over time of the new movement's missiology.<sup>17</sup> Except in limited cases of institutional ministry, prolonged foreign governance was rejected as a guiding principle.<sup>18</sup>

Early missionaries exported North American and European Church models. Their congregational and denominational philosophies, along with Bible School training, dominated the era's missiological methods. What this created was a measure of structural continuity even though later modifications by local leadership would become necessary. Today, the pioneers' blueprint still exists in more contextualized forms.

Arguably, the most dominant feature of early 20<sup>th</sup> Century church plants was an insistence on experiencing both the Spirit's gifts and fruit. Bible training that accentuated practical reflections and the revivalists' emphasis on encountering the transforming presence of God at the altar as a focal point of ministry formed the early definition of discipleship within Pentecostal spirituality.

The advent of the new millennium brings a reappraisal by emerging missions who desire to contribute their own theological reflection. Competing ecclesiastical models are commonplace on most fields as new sending bases export their own definitions of Church and mission. This mosaic represents the global maturation of indigenous principles.

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<sup>17</sup> Melvin Hodges, *The Indigenous Church*, (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1953), 132.

<sup>18</sup> Wilson, *Strategy of the Spirit*, 51-54.

## ***Implications for Pentecostal Ecclesiology***

1. *A Pentecostal missiology must hold to church planting as its primary objective or it ceases to follow the pattern of Acts.*<sup>19</sup> Evangelism becomes sterile seed without an ecclesiastical legacy. Holism becomes humanistic without the insistence on spiritual transformation in community. Church growth becomes self-serving whenever sending missionaries (e.g., Antioch) ceases to be at the core of the Church's ethos. Short-term platforms become counterproductive if the goal of establishing congregations does not guide all decision-making. To understand Pentecostal ecclesiology is to appreciate the organic connection between their gathering together and their going out. Their shared experience of the Spirit who enables witness fueled their passion and energized them to proclaim the Kingdom. Thus, Pentecostal ecclesiology is not reduced to the missiological, but missions is the primary response to worship.
2. *Timely redeployment is a key indicator of a Spirit-led mission.* The relentless push of the Pauline cohort is a motif in Acts, yet it is always balanced with ongoing pastoral care. Young churches are committed to the care of the Holy Spirit thereby liberating the apostolic team to penetrate new areas. The team's length of stay varies with each location according to their discernment of the situation. Pentecostalism is by its very nature expansionistic. Thus, missionary deployment must place priority on crossing new thresholds, yet a rush to lay new foundations cannot come at the expense of establishing existing ones. Paul must go and Timothy must stay. Discipleship is vital. Experience with the Holy Spirit must be pastored so that these experiences are not treated as personal benefits, but as part of the mission of the Church to represent the Kingdom of God.
3. *Teams are the preferred means to achieve the mandate.* The apostolic band provides the prototype for discipleship and brotherhood in the NT. They are the embodiment of the Church when they arrive in a new location. By living in community, a team becomes God's witness to the world of life together in the Spirit.
4. *Spirit empowerment is the primary vehicle for leadership development.* While academic and institutional formation play a crucial role in leadership development, Pentecostalism is essentially built around the belief that the Spirit raises up whomever He pleases. This understanding creates informal and dynamic systems of mobilization that some describe

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<sup>19</sup> Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998,) 301.

as “creative chaos”<sup>20</sup> dating all the way back to the early years, e.g., Topeka.<sup>21</sup>

Centralized control is to be equilibrated as the Church acquiesces to the sovereign Spirit’s leading. For Pentecostals it is in the corporate experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit that the love of God and the presence of Jesus is made real. When Pentecostals come together, they experience something of the Kingdom of God. The koinonia, fellowship of the Spirit, is what creates their sense of being in church. This shared experience of a taste of the Kingdom reinforces the conviction that the fullness of the Kingdom is at hand.

5. *Pentecostal ministry operates through an eschatological reality.* Peter’s words in Acts 2:17 become prototypical for the movement as it works with this urgency. The awareness of Christ’s soon return helps define individual and Church priorities. The expectation of the imminent return of Jesus mobilized the first generation of Pentecostals.

#### Conclusions on the Interaction of Pentecostal Missiology and Ecclesiology

When, for example, the founders of the Assemblies of God (USA) committed themselves to Christ “for the greatest evangelism the world has ever seen,” they had little knowledge of missiological principles. Their confidence arose from a fresh encounter with God’s empowering presence. The same can be said for other international efforts.

Missiology is the heartbeat of the Church and the Church is the primary earthly expression of missiology.<sup>22</sup> Whenever we combine God’s purpose (mission) with God’s means (the Church) we stand within His redemptive plan. Our predecessors believed that the goal of mission was not Pentecostal ministry but Pentecostal churches. All other ministries must take secondary importance to that of proclamation and establishing churches for God’s glory. This objective must be done with an eschatological urgency.

Whenever mission is perceived as an internal department or a church growth strategy, we have misunderstood the meaning of Acts 1:8. Anytime we attempt to control the expanse of God’s Church through excessive institutionalism or human instrumentality we have

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<sup>20</sup> Anderson, "Full Circle Mission", 1.

<sup>21</sup> Reference to Parham and his school in Topeka, Kansas found in Martin Mittelstadt, *Reading Luke-Acts in the Pentecostal Tradition*) refers to Parham’s *Everlasting Gospel* 1911, 55.

<sup>22</sup> Anderson, “Full Circle Mission”, 6.

misunderstood the sovereign reign of the Holy Spirit. Any mobilization that arises from worthy causes or human emotion is lacking the key catalyst of the NT Church. Our going is not based on human need but is the natural consequence of Spirit Baptism. We respond in God's power to go and plant reproducing churches for His glory. This perspective marks the Pentecostal experience throughout history.

## **A Perspective on Missionary Practices in the Global Pentecostal Village**

### **How Do Missiological and Ecclesiological Beliefs Impact Methodology?**

Methods are the by-products of a ministry's operational theology. For this reason, to discern the values and priorities of a missionary enterprise we need to analyze the models it employs to achieve stated goals.

It was noted above how the Pauline model was built around a reliance on the Spirit to save, baptize (i.e., empower), sanctify and propel the Church into God's redemptive plan. Missiological and pastoral concerns converged together in the Apostle's labors as an indication of how the doctrines of the Church and mission are inextricably linked.

When 20<sup>th</sup> Century pioneers arrived on new fields, they imported known ecclesiastical structures. These were influenced by Western Pentecostal paradigms including formal training in Bible Institutes, Church architecture, preaching techniques, musical styles, dress codes and organizational designs.

It was the emergence of indigenous principles that helped local congregations in missionary receiving countries take ownership of their witness to the nations. As these churches became burgeoning movements that gained international footing, the modern missiological scene became a richer mosaic of competing ideas and strategies.

Historically, variations in Pentecostal mission were limited since the dominant influences in church methodology resided in a small group of pioneer missions and the respective national churches they established. Over time the number of partnering organizations expanded, national churches became more global in their thinking and the result was a move towards redefining Spirit-led ministry to reflect the Church's global nature.

All these factors have brought us to a point where today's missiological discussions are multi-layered with a distinctly decentralized authority structure. Providing adequate articulation to our 21<sup>st</sup> century missiology and ecclesiology will require historical and cultural

comprehension, as well as open-mindedness to new approaches. We turn now to some of the issues emerging from the fact that mission is no longer unidirectional, from the West to the rest of the world.

### **Leading Issues Informing the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Pentecostal Mission**

1. *Integration of new mission forces into established national churches will require dialogue.* Emerging missions bring a well-needed infusion of energy to the mission mandate. Their efforts are impacted by the ability to integrate the distinctive methodologies and structural particulars of their models with those of the receiving teams and churches. Unlike the 20<sup>th</sup> Century pioneers, those going to labor in nations with existing national churches and the ones who send them will have to enter into constructive dialogue to determine their role within the authority structure of the national churches. For example, sending church models are highly effective yet face unique challenges when crossing cultural and ecclesiastical barriers that can prove disruptive if they do not adapt to local realities.
2. *Theological changes in western sending churches will bring new emphases that clash with the traditional Pentecostal positions of receiving churches.* Distinct trends in American (and previously European) societies are impacting key areas of their respective theologies. Examples of contentious doctrinal shifts are found in the recent de-emphasis on missiological precedence in ministry, redefinition of moral categories (e.g., abortion, homosexuality and proscriptive preaching), a focus on ministries that lack gospel proclamation, an embracing of pragmatic missiology (e.g., exclusive short-term models) that undermines deployment of long-term teams among unreached people groups and a business model of missions that pursues financial efficiency more than sacrificial obedience to the Spirit's calling. Additionally, a theological erosion in the West on the exclusivity of Christ's redemption or the claims of Scripture has caused a decline in the missionary zeal of many Western sending bases and an exportation of Pentecostal spirituality that is disavowed by receiving churches. Now we see a full revolution of the missional circle with emerging missions being sent out to evangelize original sending cultures through the power of the Holy Spirit.
3. *International teams will present a Christian witness to the global community.* No ideology or political philosophy can create a unified community like that of the Spirit-led Church. The Pauline model of team becomes richer in texture as multi-national, multi-lingual groups are formed as a witness to our fragmented world. Recent efforts at international collaboration between sending and receiving agencies hold great potential for future impact.

4. *Emerging missions bring a holistic model as an extension of their ecclesiology.*  
Potentially, the most fertile sources for a Pentecostal paradigm of social engagement may come from the theological reflections of emerging churches. Their understanding of Church ministry to the poor and needy has been hewn out in the matrix of suffering societies. Their capacity to synthesize compassion ministry with the missiological precedence to plant Spirit-filled churches has evolved over time. These missions bring a wealth of hermeneutical understanding and proven methods that can guide the Pentecostal movement towards a Christ-centered approach.
5. *Indigenous principles and the national church-centric paradigm face modifications in the new era of global mission.* Practical issues of supporting local pastors, partnering with national church leaders and answering to sending church leaders have provoked lively missiological discussions. How a local mission interacts with church leaders becomes paradigmatic for young laborers who are more sensitive to international alliances. Historically, methodology was devised by consultation between indigenous leaders and a small group of missionaries. With the advent of easy travel, Internet communication and short-term missions, many local laborers are exposed to new models of financial collaboration and ministry accountability. This has caused some to become more locally independent in their work as they seek new partnerships that are not developed within traditional national church parameters. The original goal of a national church experiencing God's provision from within their own context is no longer a common objective across the globe and new forms of dependency have emerged.
6. *Partnership is being redefined by current missiological and ecclesiological changes.*  
Planning, conflict and collaboration were previously achieved through intimate dialogue on the field. As the meanings of church and mission modify, many sending agencies are now seeking greater latitude in their methodology while national churches are attempting to establish forums for regional and international dialogue. Local leaders expect an international audience that is not exclusively tied to the local mission team in their country. Missionary practitioners are exploring more flexible models of church and mission that give them a greater voice in deployment and strategic decision-making. The circle of communication is now much broader making communication skills of optimum importance.
7. *The Pentecostal fervency of maturing national churches provides a vital corrective to older churches and missions.* Arguably, the greatest single contribution new missions can

make to the global cause is a ministry model of church and mission that is closer to that of the New Testament. Reliance on the Holy Spirit to empower, to perform signs and wonders and to mature new leaders is critical if the mission mandate is to be completed in our time. While older sending bases are mired in theological changes, the potential antidote to this can be found in the younger movements that model the Spirit-filled life. Like the churches in Macedonia and Achaia that ministered to the church in Jerusalem at their time of need (Rom. 15.26), Western churches need the valued contributions of their Spirit-led colleagues from the East and South.

8. *A renewed call to the unfinished task is forging new partnership paradigms.* The early 20<sup>th</sup> century pioneers' mission was marked by eschatological urgency. Their goal was to take the gospel to the remote corners of the globe, thereby fulfilling the Great Commission. These workers came from vibrant church planting movements in the West and they replicated those models on new fields. As the century unfolded, the majority of these missionaries became closely tied to key institutional ministries on established fields. A form of passivity developed that inadvertently caused unreached people groups to be deemphasized. Recent calls for redeployment of Western personnel are now seeking to address this imbalance and complete Christ's end-time mandate. This has led to a dynamic redefining of some partnership arrangements where mission teams are more assertive in their pursuit of Spirit-led initiatives among the unreached while still attempting to work alongside national churches leaders with their own equally important (and sometimes competing) lists of priorities.

The continuum of theological reflection and redefining always provides the Church with a potential to compromise or to be revived. To understand Pentecostalism requires a reaching back not just to the mere history of those pioneers, but also to that glorious model of Spirit-led mission we find in Luke/Acts. No advancement in mission can take place apart from an absolute determination to return to those basic New Testament principles that enlightened and empowered the apostles. After all, if the mission is Spirit-initiated and Spirit-empowered, how can anyone claim a capacity to finish the task without the Holy Spirit who makes us able and willing?

### **Historical and Future Ecclesiological Perspectives**

In an earlier section, Pentecostal ecclesiology was defined as an organic, missional community, which attempts to restore the early church model as presented in Luke/Acts. Our

interest at this point is with the concrete aspects of ecclesiology that comes to define “church” as it is located historically in particular places and times.<sup>23</sup> What was organic in essence begins to take on various shapes in the story of the Pentecostal movement. In terms of the parameters of ecclesiology, at minimum we are interested in the social structures that organize churches and, further, in the cultures (values and ideas) that predominate and are informed and directed by doctrine. That is to say, the church is not just its organizational structures but is, more fundamentally, the meanings and actions that are its *raison d'être*. To define Pentecostal ecclesiology in terms of organizational shape is an impossible task, because the ecclesiologies (plural) that constitute the Pentecostal story are so thoroughly variegated that they cannot be comprehended in a summative paper of this type. What we can do, however, is identify some common approaches and overarching trends.

Pentecostalism emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as a complex coalescing of various streams of voluntaristic Christianity. It did not begin in a particular place or time but derived its initial impetus from a series of revivals that occurred in North America, Australia, Britain, Chile, China, India, Korea, Nigeria and many other places, crossing ethnic and national boundaries.

As Allan Anderson has shown, “Pentecostal origins are complex and varied, polycentric, and diffused.”<sup>24</sup> Because this is so, there is no institutional or denominational vision, or fixed ecclesiology, which establishes the movement. Instead, in all their diversity, those groups that came to be known as Pentecostal shared an emphasis on the experience and empowerment of the Spirit (linked to the gift of tongues and revival), along with a worldview informed by the urgency of pre-millennial, imminent return of Christ. The consequent pessimistic assessment of global events was met by a focus on Jesus as savior, whose power was made manifest in healing miracles (among other things). Taken altogether, these emphases constitute the fourfold gospel: Jesus saves, heals, baptizes in the Spirit, and is coming again.<sup>25</sup>

In the initial revivals, Pentecostals hailed from a wide range of church backgrounds, and many had no desire to leave their churches. Indeed, in taking their self-understanding from Acts 2, the work of the Spirit was intended to bring a new unity to people of every gender,

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<sup>23</sup> N.M. Healy, *Church, World, and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 26. See also Shane Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition: Analysing the Developing Ecclesiology of the Assemblies of God in Australia*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 8.

<sup>24</sup> Allan Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity*, (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 36.

<sup>25</sup> Donald Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow, 1987).

nation, culture, and church. In practice, this ecumenical ideal was rarely realized. On the one hand, Pentecostals were increasingly ostracized by mainline denominations and,<sup>26</sup> on the other, hard-nosed individualist leaders tended to go their own way--a fact that was subsequently born out in the divisiveness that often came to categorize Pentecostalism itself.<sup>27</sup>

The early congregations that formed out of the global revival, such as the one on Azusa Street, initially identified themselves not as churches but as faith missions – focused not on building churches but saving souls for the end-times harvest. They tended to decry the formalism and creedal orientation of mainline churches in pursuit of a spiritual unity that transcended structure and doctrine. It was often said that the body of Christ was “an organism, not an organization,”<sup>28</sup> or that Pentecostalism was an “apostolic movement” and not a church.<sup>29</sup>

It was not long, however, before it became apparent that ecclesial structure was needed to serve the Pentecostal mission; to help clarify belief and counter division, to organize for mission, to establish leadership structures, et cetera. As the prominent British Pentecostal, Donald Gee, was to observe:

They (the Apostles in the book of Acts) insured the continuance of the revival by “government.” If I said that in some places they would want to drive me out. But God has opened our eyes to the fact that there is nothing in divine governing to quench the Spirit. God has blessed this movement, as we have recognised the importance of “governments.” 1Cor. 12:28. I was brought up on the thought that all organisation, all government, is fleshy and carnal. I am so glad that God has opened my eyes to see things better than that.<sup>30</sup>

As has already been noted, the precise nature of that governance varied from place to place and group to group. The tendency among those churches that came to be associated with the Assemblies of God was to adopt a Free Church, Congregationalist structure. That is to say, modeling themselves on the denominations from which many of them had come (and drawing from the structures of Western democracies), their approach to ecclesiology was

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<sup>26</sup> Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 50.

<sup>27</sup> Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 177.

<sup>28</sup> Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition*, 66.

<sup>29</sup> Wolfgang Vondey, *Beyond Pentecostalism: The Crisis of Global Christianity and the Renewal of the Theological Agenda*, *Pentecostal Manifestos* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 165.

<sup>30</sup> Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition*, 71.

democratic and bottom-up. This is best understood by way of comparison. In the Catholic Church, for example, authority structures begin with the Pope, as the Bishop of Christ, and proceed downwards to cardinals, bishops, and priests, who have responsibility for the Eucharist that constitutes the parish. This is a hierarchical vision of church, identified as One, Holy, and Catholic Church under the apostolic authority of the office of Peter. In contrast, Assemblies of God churches (and others like it) vested responsibility for the church in Spirit-empowered congregations, who appointed pastors and elders. Beyond the local church, denominations (a term that was largely rejected as being institutional and sectarian) formed as cooperative fellowships of self-contained and self-governed churches. In contrast to a hierarchical model, this is a grassroots, bottom-up ecclesiology, prioritizing local churches.<sup>31</sup>

Of course, congregational, democratic church and denominational structures are not unique to Pentecostalism. What makes a church “Pentecostal” are its beliefs, values and practices. We have already identified the importance of the fourfold gospel for early Pentecostalism, and these beliefs were generally codified in church doctrinal statements. Of particular importance was the “Pentecostal distinctive” doctrine of baptism in the Holy Spirit, which typically identified an experience of the Spirit subsequent to salvation and “evidenced” by the gift of tongues. The priority given to Spirit empowerment framed other elements of Pentecostal ecclesiology. Where sacramental conceptions of the church locate spiritual authority in the ordained priesthood, Pentecostals envisaged a “priesthood of all believers.” Because this is so, formal processes of ordination carried less weight (if they existed at all), and arose largely for practical purposes, to endorse a leadership function that had already been established by the gifting of the Spirit.

Since the gifts of the Spirit were not restricted by gender, neither was leadership in the church. Indeed, women played a prominent part as church planters, missionaries, and pastors in most places that Pentecostalism gained a foothold (Pandita Ramabai in India, Aimee Semple MacPherson in America, Ellen Hebden in Canada, Sarah Jane Lancaster in Australia, and Jasil Choi in Korea, to name but a few as representatives of the many), more so than in any other form of Christianity.<sup>32</sup> Women did not merely exercise leadership; they were formally recognized for their gifting and were ordained as ministers.

Similarly, leadership was not restricted by ‘race’. This is apparent not only in revivals such as occurred in Azusa Street, but in the independence and indigenization of

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<sup>31</sup> Shane Clifton, "Ecumenism from the Bottom up: A Pentecostal Perspective," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 47, no. 4 (Fall 2012): 576 – 592.

<sup>32</sup> Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth*.

Pentecostalism globally. The movement did not begin in North America, and even when Western missionaries travelled with the gospel to “foreign” places, local people soon took up the responsibilities of pastoring local assemblies, evangelism and church planting. It is this approach to church leadership that accounts for the astonishing capacity of Pentecostal churches to adapt their shape and message to nearly every country and culture in the world.

This fluidity has also meant that Pentecostal ecclesiology is a moving feast. One example can be seen in the rise of the mega-church that is a by-product of the staggering growth of Pentecostalism in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The largest Assemblies of God church in the world, David Yonggi Cho’s Yoido Full Gospel, implemented cell church networks to cope with their growth and, at the same time, developed a more hierarchical, centralized form of day-to-day organization and formal governance.<sup>33</sup> For largely practical reasons (although sometimes justified biblically by reference to concepts such as apostolic authority), many Pentecostal mega-churches (as well as smaller churches copying their model) have moved away from congregational government, vesting authority in the hands of senior pastors and church boards. In some cases, these churches establish subordinate congregations that remain under the authority of the central organization and (normally) charismatic senior pastor.<sup>34</sup> It is sometimes argued that in dispensing with congregational structures, mega-churches can no longer be said to be Pentecostal, but that is to mistake polity for identity, and to lose sight of the fact that Pentecostalism is a complex and variegated movement.

How do we make sense of Pentecostal ecclesiology in the midst of this overwhelming diversity? Perhaps the way forward is to move from the concrete to the theological, and again there are various suggestions. Simon Chan finds a starting point with the doctrine of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, which is often conceived of in terms of individual empowerment when, in fact, “the primary focus of Spirit-Baptism is to actualize our communal life.”<sup>35</sup> Frank Macchia builds on this idea, noting that, “the church exists in the outpouring of the Spirit,”<sup>36</sup> a theological concept that is emphasized in Pentecostal spirituality:

The Spirit baptism metaphor is ... connected to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit directed to all flesh (Acts 2.17), the inauguration and fulfillment of the eschatological reign of God on the earth (1.3–5), the incorporation of believers into Christ (1 Cor. 12.13), the

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<sup>33</sup> Young-hoon Lee, "The Life and Ministry of David Yonggi Cho and the Yoido Full Gospel Church," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 7, no. 1 (January 2004): 3–20.

<sup>34</sup> e.g. Hillsong Church. See Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition*, 162.

<sup>35</sup> Simon Chan, "Mother Church: Toward a Pentecostal Ecclesiology", *Pneuma* 22, no. 2 (2000): 180.

<sup>36</sup> Frank D. Macchia, "The Spirit-Baptised Church," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 11, no. 4 (October 2011): 266.

purification of their hearts by faith (Acts 15.9), and the life of powerful witness to Christ in the world among the nations (Acts 1.8). The metaphor of Spirit baptism is fluid, expansive, and complex.<sup>37</sup>

What this means is that Pentecostal ecclesiology is charismatic in its orientation (generating its tendency to ebullient praise and worship), directed by a missionary impulse, and testifies to the good news of the gospel. Macchia also identifies the triune relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit that is the necessary corollary to Spirit Baptism. Because this is so, the “Spirit poured forth from the Father through the Son proliferates and diversifies the presence of Jesus in the world among communities of faith in many different and changing contexts over time.”<sup>38</sup>

The theology of a Spirit empowered Trinitarian ecclesiology is explored in more detail by Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen. A long term participant in the Pentecostal – Roman Catholic dialogues, Kärkkäinen emphasizes terms such as “*koinonia*” and “fellowship” as central ecclesial symbols.<sup>39</sup> Since “the Pentecostal church is a charismatic fellowship, a *koinonia* of persons in the body of Christ,”<sup>40</sup> priority is given to the local assembly, which is the place where God is manifest in the *charismata* - tongues healing and the like. Of particular importance is that gifts of the Spirit are given to all believers, so that a Pentecostal *koinonia* focuses on interpersonal rather than structural, institutional or sacramental understandings of the church, and so prioritizes the local fellowship (a term that is preferred to church). It also resists any hierarchical structure that prevents universal participation in its life and ministry.

In addition to the ecclesiological significance of Spirit Baptism and Trinitarian theology, other theologians have drawn on eschatological themes, as well as emphasizing missional conceptions of church, which exists as an agent and icon of the good news of the Kingdom of God. The point of all of this is to locate the theological identity markers that are common to Pentecostal churches globally, in all their indigenous manifestations. These symbols are not only descriptive, but also stand as a challenge to Pentecostal churches, which have never yet accomplished their ideals.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>39</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "The Church as Fellowship of Persons: An Emerging Pentecostal Ecclesiology of *Koinonia*," *PentecoStudies* 6, no. 1 (2007): 1–15.

<sup>40</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "Pentecostal Ecclesiology – Does It Exist?," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* (October 2011): 251.

In bringing this brief summary to a close, we are cognizant of the fact that much more can and should be said; that Pentecostal ecclesiology is so much more than we have been able to establish in this document. However, this failure is itself indicative of the principal point we have tried to make. Pentecostalism is not a church but a movement of churches, filled with the Spirit, that embrace diversity and change. To insist upon a fixed ecclesiology, to tie our understanding of the Pentecostal church to a static theological culture and a singular structure of governance, is to lose sight of the creativity and openness of the Spirit. As Wolfgang Vondey observes, Pentecostals have understood themselves as “becoming church ... its present existence was considered transitory and expected to be surpassed by the continuing outpouring of the Spirit and the resulting transformation of Christianity.”<sup>41</sup>

What this means is that the future of Pentecostal ecclesiology cannot be predicted. If, however, there is a theme running through this narrative, it is of an ecumenical trajectory. Notwithstanding the divisiveness that has too often distorted its proclamation of the “full gospel,” the priority that the movement gives to baptism in the Spirit sets forth an ecumenical vision that transcends the constraints of particular churches and denominations, that embraces spiritual unity in the midst of creative diversity. Because this is so, Pentecostal ecclesiology may well be self-transcending, moving beyond labels and ‘distinctives.’

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<sup>41</sup> Vondey, *Beyond Pentecostalism*, 155.

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