Pentecostalism Re-imagined: Reconfiguring Pentecostalism in Twenty-First Century New Zealand

Joseph C. McAuley
joseph@stlukeschurch.org.nz

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/dmin
Part of the Missions and World Christianity Commons, and the Practical Theology Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/dmin/354
Fall 9-17-2018

PENTECOSTALISM RE-IMAGINED: RECONFIGURING PENTECOSTALISM IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY NEW ZEALAND

Joseph McAuley

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/dmin
Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

PENTECOSTALISM RE-IMAGINED:
RECONFIGURING PENTECOSTALISM IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY NEW ZEALAND

Written by

JOSEPH C. MCAULEY

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary
upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:

Graham Buxton

Kurt Fredrickson

Date Received: September 17, 2018
PENTECOSTALISM RE-IMAGINED:
RECONFIGURING PENTECOSTALISM
IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY NEW ZEALAND

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

JOSEPH C. MCAULEY
AUGUST 2018
ABSTRACT

Pentecostalism Re-Imagined: Reconfiguring Pentecostalism in Twenty-first Century New Zealand
Joseph McAuley
Doctor of Ministry
School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary
2018

The goal of this ministry-focused paper is to outline a leadership development process through which Assemblies of God pastors in New Zealand might engage in critical reflection regarding the nature of Pentecostalism. With Pentecostalism increasingly understood as a contemporary methodology of church, this project seeks to instead define Pentecostalism via six markers consistent within the Pentecostal movement over the last one hundred years – theological simplicity, pragmatic methodologies, missional energy, pneumatic expectation, ontological enchantment and relational tribalism. Each marker is deemed to be adjustable, and this project encourages a re-imagining of Pentecostalism with adjustments made to Pentecostalism’s normative settings. It is hoped that this will preserve the strengths, while mitigating the weaknesses, inherent in Pentecostal ministry.

The paper begins with an historical overview of Pentecostalism, exploring the evolution of the movement. A brief history of the Assemblies of God in New Zealand is provided, as well as a series of contextual considerations. A theological reflection is then offered in relation to the six defining markers of Pentecostalism, with suggestions made regarding the adjusting of each.

The final section of this paper explores a leadership development project in which a group of pastors formed a learning cohort designed to explore Pentecostalism and ways in which it might be re-imagined. This cohort engaged in a process of reflection via an online forum, theorization in a seminar setting, ministry experimentation in their own local church contexts, and then further reflection to assess the impact of the experimentation phase of the learning process.

The desired outcome of this initiative was that pastors would be provided with critical tools while being encouraged and equipped in their ministry roles, with a re-imagining of Pentecostalism opening the door to effective modes of ministry beyond that of a contemporary methodology of church.

Content Reader: Reverend Dr Graham Buxton, PhD

Words: 293
DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to those who along The Way have found themselves stalled, stifled and suspicious that things might have gone a little skew-whiff. To those who have been brave enough to re-imagine what could be and should be. And to those who have done so in faithfulness to the Holy Spirit as An Geadh Glas – whose call is strong, challenging and unnerving; to Christ as The Untamed Lion – who isn’t safe but is oh so good; and to God as Our Father – who is loving kindness.

Especially, this project is dedicated to the church community I have the honor to be a part of – St Luke’s. You embody the above and, with sharp minds and soft hearts, have embraced the adventure of following Jesus in all sorts of surprising ways. Thank you.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No journey is a solo enterprise – along the way people contribute in ways small and large. Some walk a mile with you, some the entire journey, others offer wisdom at the right time, others just love you – perhaps the greatest contribution of all. I have many people to thank who have made this journey possible. Firstly, the pastors and leaders who have shaped my life over the years. To those of you who believed in me and personally championed me as a young leader, thank you. More recently, access to the work of Eugene Peterson, Rob Bell and Brian Zahnd has helped me to re-imagine in all sorts of exciting directions. Thank you as well.

Secondly, I have many friends who have supported me in this project. Special acknowledgment needs to be offered to: the leaders and trustees of St Luke’s who have championed this journey in its entirety; the ‘Sanity Club’ who have offered comradery in the good times and the insane ones; the ‘Rotorua Crew’ with whom an annual holiday has become one of life’s highlights; and Andrew Killick for his friendship, wisdom, encouragement and tireless work as editor and provocateur of clarity.
Finally, it is a delight to acknowledge my family. Whether a McAuley, Weeks or Wyper you are loved. In turn, your love and encouragement means the world to me. Annamari, Romeo and Lochlan, Dad loves you to infinity and is going to turn his computer off now. Lisa, thanks for being my best friend and the love of my life – your faithfulness, encouragement and support – in everything – makes all the difference! Thank you. I love you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS  iv

PART ONE: MINISTRY CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION  2

Chapter 1.  MINISTRY CONTEXT  14

PART TWO: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Chapter 2.  LITERATURE REVIEW  35

Chapter 3.  PENTECOSTALISM RE-IMAGINED – PART A  61

Chapter 4.  PENTECOSTALISM RE-IMAGINED – PART B  90

PART THREE: MINISTRY PRACTICE

Chapter 5.  MINISTRY PLAN  119

Chapter 6.  IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS  133

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION  152

APPENDICES  159

BIBLIOGRAPHY  173
PART ONE
MINISTRY CONTEXT
INTRODUCTION

The late Irish poet and philosopher John O'Donohue once stated, “It is essential for somebody who wants to have a mature, adult, open-ended, good-hearted critical faith, to conduct the most vigorous and relentless conversation that [they] can with [their] own tradition.”¹ This project is an attempt to engage in such a conversation with my tradition(s) – Pentecostalism and the Assemblies of God movement in New Zealand. It is not a project of criticism – nothing life-giving or transformative is achieved by throwing stones. Rather, the aim is a critical-reflection – a careful and prayerful analysis of Pentecostalism in my twenty-first century context. It is an attempt to offer fresh perspectives on Pentecostal ministry that would assist Assemblies of God pastors throughout New Zealand to minister, with increasing fruitfulness, the life of Christ in a postmodern world.

Specifically, the intent of this project is to design a leadership development process through which a small group of Assemblies of God pastors can engage as a cohort in an exploration of Pentecostalism and Pentecostal ministry in the twenty-first century. In this exploration, consideration will be given to the ever-evolving nature of Pentecostalism and to six defining markers, consistent within Pentecostalism since its inception, that may need re-imagining in today’s current socio-historical context. Given Pentecostalism’s tendency towards non-critical triumphalism vis-à-vis deeper critical-

analysis, this project has the potential to be an uncomfortable process for some pastors but may simultaneously be a catalyst for personal growth – “iron sharpening iron” (Proverbs 27:17).

That said, any sense of personal discomfort should be weighed against three realities within a twenty-first century context that necessitate a process of critical reflection. Firstly, “ministry today takes place in a world that is rapidly changing and extraordinarily multifaceted;”

globalization, the information-age, and the progresses of science have awakened in the world a growing appreciation of the complexities inherent to every aspect of human life. This reality demands that the church exhibits a faith that is not only numinous but also rational and intellectual. This does not have to mean academic, nor does it have to be a capitulation to modernist ideals of logical positivism, scientism or some sort of biblical-rationalism. It does, however, ask that while Pentecostalism holds onto the mystery of faith – that God is unknowable in an empirical sense and is fundamentally ineffable – that it also attempts to speak of faith in a manner that is well considered, well formed and well argued. “The world cannot be ignored and isolation – intellectually, physically and spiritually – is not a viable option.”

2 David J. Courey, What has Wittenberg to do with Azusa?: Luther’s Theology of the Cross and Pentecostal Triumphalism (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 5-6.

3 All Scripture quoted is from the New International Version Bible, unless otherwise noted.


5 Ibid., 59.

movement towards a more theologically nuanced faith could prove something of a challenge for a form of Christianity that tends to offer simplistic solutions to multifaceted issues.⁷ Pentecostalism has often been characterized by the use of slogans, formulas, three-point-sermons and one-liners. The theological simplicity inherent in these methodologies, despite the intention of accessibility, is at odds with the complexities of twenty-first century life. The disconnect is illustrated in the work of New Zealand author Alan Jamieson.

In his book *A Churchless Faith*, Jamieson states that people who leave the church have, on average, been congregants for sixteen years; 94 percent have been leaders and 36 percent have completed theological training of some form.⁸ These people are not slackers who leave because they have been offended; rather they leave because of metagrumbles – deep rooted questions about the foundations of faith itself which are not being addressed.⁹ In light of this insight, a critical reflection of Pentecostalism needs to examine whether popular Pentecostalism is theologically robust enough to provide a plausible, coherent, and sustainable faith that will continue to invigorate current congregants and draw disenfranchised Christians back to church. The Pentecostal church, like all communities of faith, needs to be a place where deep-rooted questions relating to the foundations of faith can be wrestled with.

---

⁷ Courey, *What has Wittenberg to do with Azusa?*, 8.


⁹ Ibid., 61.
The second issue calling for a process of critical reflection is the pragmatism within Pentecostalism that supposes – in line with a twenty-first century world enamored by whatever appears to be the biggest, brightest or boldest – that the larger a church is, the more successful it is. Richard Foster notes that, “it is sad to say that much of modern Christianity is captivated by the religion of the ‘big deal.’ Big churches, big budgets, big names – certainly this is the sign of things important.” Foster finds a rebuke of this kind approach in the lives and writings of historical contemplatives (in this instance the eighteenth century Jesuit priest Jean-Pierre de Caussade) who would have seen “big deal religion” as a form of idolatry. All too often though, the large church is held up as the exemplar for all. With success often defined as whatever is the largest or is growing, increasing attendance at church gatherings is assumed to be a sure sign of a ministry worth emulating. Thus, twenty-first century Pentecostalism tends to be enamored with the success of the contemporary mega-church and its methodologies.

Every pastor at every church conference knows that, during the morning break, lukewarm filter-coffee in hand, they will be asked, “How is your church going?” One always hopes to be able to respond with the right answer: “We’re really growing!” But these assumptions about size and growth are not necessarily healthy or correct. In Renovation of the Church, pastors Kent Carlson and Mike Lueken bravely admit to building an enthusiastic, energetic and growing church that was failing to see people’s

---

lives transformed into the image of Christ.\textsuperscript{11} They argue that making disciples is
excruciatingly more difficult than growing a church, with discipleship being a
“wonderfully inefficient process that does not often lend itself to mass production.”\textsuperscript{12}
The distraction of numerical growth can mask deeper issues that are more pertinent to an
accurate analysis of the true health and condition of a church. Consideration should be
given to whether the contemporary Pentecostal mega-church should be the primary
model of Pentecostalism in New Zealand.

New Zealand is a small country, with only four cities exceeding a population of
140,000. Half of all New Zealanders live in small towns (consisting of less than 50,000
people) and small cities (with an average population of 75,000).\textsuperscript{13} Thus, Assemblies of
God pastors often minister in provincial contexts rather than cities.\textsuperscript{14} In light of this, the
mega-church model of ministry offered by the two most influential Pentecostal churches
in the New Zealand context – \textit{Hillsong} and \textit{LIFE} – is not necessarily the most
appropriate.\textsuperscript{15} \textit{LIFE} is situated in a city of 1.4 million people and \textit{Hillsong} pastors

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{11} Ken Carlson and Mike Lueken, \textit{Renovation of the Church; What Happens When a Seeker
Church Discovers Spiritual Formation} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 40-41.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 85.
\textsuperscript{13} Government statistics, Sub-national Population Estimates,
2017).
\textsuperscript{14} Aside from Auckland (1,400,000 people), New Zealand has only three cities with a population
over 140,000 people; Wellington (400,000), Christchurch (390,000), and Hamilton (230,000).
\textsuperscript{15} These two Pentecostal mega-churches are the most influential in relation to the Assemblies of
God in New Zealand. \textit{Hillsong} (while a global phenomenon) is an Assemblies of God (Australian Christian
Churches) in Sydney, Australia. \textit{LIFE} is an independent mega-church in Auckland, New Zealand (though
originally planted out of the Assemblies of God in Australia). Both have roots tracing back to the
Assemblies of God in New Zealand and its General Superintendent Frank Houston (December 1965 – June
\end{flushleft}
(around the world) minister in cities, that on average, have a population base of 1.1 million people. A critical-reflection of Pentecostalism needs to consider the model and methodologies of the contemporary mega-church and whether they are an appropriate exemplar for a country like New Zealand. Other potentially viable expressions of Pentecostalism more suited to a New Zealand context should be considered.

The third factor prompting the need for a critical reflection in regard to the theological constructs and ecclesial expressions of Pentecostalism concerns the nature of Pentecostalism and what, in the first place, makes a church Pentecostal. As a younger generation of Assemblies of God pastors are ordained for ministry, appreciation should be given to the fact that they will likely enter ministry with a natural postmodern disposition that will implicitly include a tendency towards deconstruction, institutional suspicion and an incredulity regarding meta-narratives. Whether their points of view are appreciated by older Pentecostal ministers or not, this new generation of pastors is likely to conduct their own evaluations of Pentecostalism and the Assemblies of God as a twenty-first century expression of the Church. Rather than ignore or try and shutdown these postmodern sensibilities, this paper will attempt to create the space required for an honest process of both deconstruction and reconstruction – with the latter being an effort often overlooked in postmodernism. Thus, with Pentecostalism moving into its second century, a critical analysis will consider what should be preserved and what should be

---

16 Hillsong has churches in fifty cities across eighteen countries. With the exception of very few cities (Noosa, Konstanz, and a handful of cities in Norway), the average populations of the cities in which Hillsong ministers is actually 2,250,000 people. Taking the exceptionally large cities out of the equation (São Paulo, Moscow, New York and London) the average population is still 1,100,000 people. A list of Hillsong churches can be found online, Hillsong Church Fact Sheet, https://hillsong.com/media/ (accessed August 29, 2017). Statistics regarding the populations of various cities are also sourced online
discarded; in the first instance, to use the metaphor of 1 Corinthians 3:12, preserving the gold, silver and costly stones of Pentecost and, in the second instance, leaving behind that which might be referred to as the wood, hay and straw of the various Pentecostalisms that have unfolded over time.

This project is of specific interest to me as I am a next-generation Assemblies of God pastor leading a local church. In 2011, having spent my formative years and early ministry within the Assemblies of God movement, as an ordained minister I, along with a small team, initiated a church start-up in Tauranga, New Zealand – St Luke’s.\footnote{See “Our Church” of St Luke’s Church website, \url{http://www.stlukeschurch.org.nz/our-church} (accessed November 14, 2017).} This initiative presented several options for denominational association: it could be a non-denominational church; it could be affiliated with a different denomination or movement (such as Vineyard); or it could have a continued association with the Assemblies of God. We opted to continue our association with the Assemblies of God and remain a part of this Pentecostal fellowship.

However, church planting gave us the opportunity to reconsider Pentecostal praxis in a postmodern context. We were able to mix things up and embrace various modes of operation with intentionality rather than with any sense of perceived obligation to a set of normative denominational praxes. This gave rise to a consideration of the exact nature of Pentecostalism and to asking whether there was a need to prioritize Pentecostalism as some sort of methodology – both of these issues proved catalytic to this paper. When a fellow pastor asked recently how I would describe a “truly faithful Pentecostal church,” I found myself inclined to think that a notion of being faithfully...
Pentecostal must surely be a secondary issue to making an honest attempt to be a faithful expression of the Church in the socio-historical situation particular to one’s community. All in all, the nature of Pentecostalism needs to be explored and two vital questions answered: is Pentecostalism a help or a hindrance to the mission of the church in twenty-first century New Zealand, and to what degree is a re-imagined Pentecostalism required?

The following paper will be broken into three parts. Part One will focus on the specific ministry context of St Luke’s, and will seek to introduce both Pentecostalism and the Assemblies of God in New Zealand. Pentecostal origins and a series of distinct evolutions will be explored. In light of these evolutions, six characteristics consistent throughout the history of Pentecostalism will be introduced as the defining markers of this style of Christianity. These markers are: theological simplicity (a tendency towards literal and fundamental readings of the biblical text), pragmatic methodologies (a preference for ministry practices that are attractive and exciting), missional energy (a passion to see people respond to the gospel of Jesus), pneumatic expectations (a hunger for, and a belief that God will work supernaturally in one’s life), ontological enchantment (a perspective that appreciates there is more to the world we live in than our physical dimension), and relational tribalism (a tendency to predominantly relate and network in like-minded circles). A discussion of the strengths and weaknesses – framed as fruit and consequences – inherent to each marker will be postponed in order to allow for an extended process of theological reflection later in the paper. Consideration will be given to the notion of contemporary Pentecostalism – not simply Pentecostalism as it manifests itself today – but rather the heuristically appreciated Pentecostalism manifest in the contemporary Pentecostal mega-church. The possibilities and limitations of this
particular ecclesial form in today’s postmodern and consumer-driven context will be discussed. Consideration will be given to consumer appeal and to the potential for a conditioning of congregants in relation to their spirituality within this mode of church. General demographics of the Assemblies of God in New Zealand will be offered in an attempt to provide a snapshot of the movement as it existed in 2017.

Part Two will initiate a process of theological reflection. A literature review will explore five texts that offer something of a bird’s eye perspective on differing elements of this project. This review will then lead to a focused, more in-depth, theological reflection of the six defining markers of Pentecostalism – the main focus of this paper. The fruit inherent in each marker will be identified – outcomes that should be valued, developed and celebrated – and negative consequences will also be explored. Finally, the six defining markers will be visually depicted as a series of adjustable dials that can be tuned to different frequencies – away from the standard tunings of contemporary Pentecostalism if necessary.

Part Three of this paper will focus on the design, implementation and assessment of a ministry initiative intended to engage Assemblies of God pastors in a process of critical-reflection in relation to Pentecostalism. This initiative will seek to facilitate the gathering of twelve to fourteen pastors as a leadership development cohort to explore the continually evolving nature of Pentecostalism, the strengths and weaknesses inherent in Pentecostalism, and future Pentecostal possibilities for the Assemblies of God in New Zealand. The intent is also to allow participants to critically reflect on, develop and re-imagine their own Pentecostal ministry praxis. Participants will predominantly be
Assemblies of God pastors, but space will be made for several pastors from outside the movement who can offer wider perspectives to the discussion.

This project of critical reflection will be outworked in four phases, allowing pastors the opportunity to work through a learning cycle of reflection, theorization, action and then further reflection. In the first phase of the process, pastors will participate in an online discussion forum geared towards sharing and interacting with one another’s current perspectives, experiences and understandings of Pentecostalism. This forum will be informal in nature, though each week, for a total of six weeks, subject matter and discussion points will be offered to participants in an attempt to prompt discussion and reflection. Reading material will also be provided to participants as a further invitation to engage in a reflective process.

The second phase of the project will be a three-day seminar offering participants the opportunity to come together in a learning process that explores the aforementioned theological reflections of this paper in relation to Pentecostalism. The six defining markers of Pentecostalism will be examined, along with a discussion about the typical settings of these dials within contemporary Pentecostalism. Thought will be given to the possibilities that could be afforded to Pentecostalism and the Assemblies of God if pastors should choose to set the dials in ways that differ from what is often seen as normative. A brief discussion of logistical details in regard to this seminar will also be offered in the relevant section of this paper.

---

18 This is a basic adaptation of the model offered by Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martinez as a cycle of naming and describing; analyzing; studying and reflecting; recalling and discussing; discerning and shaping. Mark Lau Branson & Juan F. Martinez, Churches, Cultures and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities (Downer Groves, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 42-45.
The third phase will largely be in the hands of the individual course participants. It will involve enacting some kind of change or new initiative within their own ministry contexts as a result of the critical reflection process in which they have engaged. During the three-day seminar retreat, time will be given to consider ways of enacting aspects of the content that has been explored.

In the fourth and final phase of the project written and verbal feedback will be sought from course participants in regard to their experiences in this project and of Pentecostal experimentation in their own ministry contexts. The intent in seeking this feedback is to gain insight in relation to the fruit and consequences of new initiatives that may have been outworked as phase three of the learning process. Feedback gathering will also provide an opportunity to further discuss the nature of the overall learning process and the possibility of it being an enterprise worth repeating with another cohort of pastors in the future.

The ultimate hope of this paper and project is that the New Zealand Assemblies of God, its pastors and churches, will flourish in the twenty-first century. On the original day of Pentecost, some 2000 years ago, those filled with the Spirit of God were likened to drunkards. Those original Pentecostals had tasted the Spirit and been caught up in a new era of God at work in the world – it was as if water had been turned to wine. The best red wine is known for its complexity – never its simplicity – as different elements come together in harmony. For the last one hundred years, Pentecostalism has been caricatured as a simplistic form of the Christian faith, but perhaps the future of Pentecostalism can be more nuanced. Perhaps twenty-first century Pentecostalism can move beyond stereotypes anchored in experientialism and in fresh ways join forces with
tradition, reason and Scripture – each balancing and enhancing the other like the components that make up a complex Syrah. It is hoped that this paper might aid Pentecostalism in evolving not only as a movement overflowing with the new wine of the Spirit, but also as a theologically robust, ecumenically engaged, missionally astute and historically anchored faith that overflows with the love of God, the life of Christ and fruit of the Spirit.
CHAPTER 1

PENTECOSTALISM AND THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD IN NEW ZEALAND

Pentecostal Evolutions¹

The Pentecostal church traces its roots to a move of the Spirit at the turn of the nineteenth century and the attempts of those impacted to respond faithfully to what they perceived as the latter rain foretold of in the Bible.² Traditionally the origins of this move of God are associated with Charles Fox Parham’s Bible school in Topeka, Kansas, and subsequently the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, led by William Seymour, in the early twentieth century. However, more sophisticated accounts of Pentecostal history

¹ Portions of this section and the idea of Pentecostal evolutions; pre-Pentecostalism (voluntaristic piety) late 1800s; emerging Pentecostalism (faith missions) 1900-1930; traditional Pentecostalism (the establishment of churches) 1920-1970; charismatic Pentecostalism (culturally savvy churches) 1960-2000; and contemporary Pentecostalism (methodology in medium and message) 2000-today, were argued for in a previous Doctorate of Ministry paper, Evolutions of Pentecostalism, submitted for the course Movements of the Spirit in World Christianity, Dr Amos Yong, August 2016. This paper suggested the six defining markers of Pentecostalism that this paper will explore, though a detailed exploration of each was not previously offered. The rest of this paper moves beyond Evolutions of Pentecostalism and is new content.

reveal the particularity of God’s Spirit moving in the late 1800s and early 1900s to be that of a common shared experience, rather than of a single geographic location.

Mark Hutchinson observes that Pentecostalism was never “one thing spreading out, but many mutually-recognizable things coalescing.”

God’s Spirit was moving in similar ways but in locations as geographically diverse as Finland (the “Awakened” movement in the Finnish Lutheran Church from at least 1796), Australia (amongst the tongues-speaking “Sounders” as early as the 1870s), Southern India (the “Mukti revival” of 1905-1907) and New Zealand (under the ministry of John A.D. Adams in 1906). Mutually recognizable in these various locations was a shared experience of what was referred to as baptism in the Spirit, as well as a distinctive accompanying ecstatic religious phenomenon – speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*). What became known as Pentecostalism found its impetus as Christians attempted to live in faithful witness to their experiences of the Holy Spirit.

Emerging Pentecostals were reluctant to form churches or organize themselves in a formal manner. For these Pentecostals, the move of God they were experiencing was a last days out-pouring of the Spirit and a sure sign of the end-times. It was thought that the

---


4 Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 86.


world did not need more institutions or denominations but rather a movement of Christians committed to global evangelism via various faith missions. Emerging Pentecostalism focused on a proliferation of evangelistic crusades, revival meetings and missions work. It was organized around a shared experience of speaking in tongues, a fourfold gospel (Jesus as savior, sanctifier, healer and soon-coming king), revival passion, evangelistic fervor and an expectation of signs and wonders – particularly of healing “in the atonement.”

Both the ministry of healing and Pentecostalism’s expectation of Christ’s imminent return were attractive ideologies for those within lower socio-economic sections of society as they provided a means of coping with the challenges of everyday life. The idea that Jesus would soon return as King and that Christians would be rescued from the broken realities of a sinful world, and from the possibility of on-going torment in the hereafter, was a compelling source of comfort and hope. Accordingly, emerging Pentecostalism has been characterized as an “escapist millenarian movement, emphasizing ecstatic experience in their spirituality, and prioritizing the rescue of souls from hell in their mission.”

---


Pentecostal theology also carried an appealing simplicity as an ideology embedded in testimonies, ecstatic speech and bodily movement, rather than carefully formulated doctrines. Parham himself never received any formal religious or theological training. He proudly deemed himself an amateur, at one stage referring to the established creeds of traditional Christianity as “nothing but the sawdust of men’s opinions.” This is not to suggest that emerging Pentecostalism was non-theological, in the sense of being ambivalent to any sort of biblical grounding, but it does point to a degree of theological naivety. As “people of the book,” emerging Pentecostals, rather than looking to established theology, were inclined to “exegete their own experience and then look to the Bible to support it.” Within emerging Pentecostalism, baptism in the Spirit was, after all, primarily an experiential encounter; doctrine was a secondary consideration. Throughout the early twentieth century, Pentecostalism continued to expand and, with the expected return of Christ seemingly delayed, soon found itself engaged in a process of institutionalization. This gave rise to Pentecostal churches and denominations (though these were referred to as movements), and often included

---


ministers from existing denominations who, having embraced Pentecostal beliefs and practices, were forced to abandon their previous affiliations.\textsuperscript{17}

Thus, emerging Pentecostalism (approx. 1900-1920), evolved into what can be referred to as traditional Pentecostalism (approx. 1920-1970).\textsuperscript{18} This period included a transition from Pentecostal faith missions to Pentecostal churches and required a new emphasis on leadership – something that had been a relatively minor priority within emerging Pentecostalism. Theoretically, this new emphasis should not have impinged on the encouragement and freedom of non-ordained congregants to minister in the gifts of the Spirit, however pastors soon came to be perceived as central figures who would mediate the Spirit to their congregations.\textsuperscript{19}

Pastoral ministry was seen as the merging of two specific functions, both deemed to flow from a place of unique Holy Spirit enabling: firstly, ministry via the gifts of the Spirit; and secondly, ministry by way of leadership as a spiritual gift. It was a combination of both the primitive, in terms of spiritual gifts (and Pentecostalism’s re-awakening of early church realities), and the pragmatic, in terms of organizational abilities aligned with best practice principles (though championed as a gift of the Spirit, Romans 12:8). As Grant Wacker notes, “the genius of the Pentecostal movement lay in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Clifton, \textit{Pentecostal Churches in Transition}, 56-57.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Emerging Pentecostalism need not be confused with the concept of the “emerging church” in today’s post-Christian world. See, Dan Kimball, \textit{The Emerging Church}, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2003), 13-17.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Clifton, \textit{Pentecostal Churches in Transition}, 130.
\end{itemize}
its ability to hold two seemingly incompatible impulses in productive tension; the primitive and the pragmatic.”

Along with this focus on leadership, the institutionalization of Pentecostalism also required the establishment of doctrinal statements and constitutions. It was thus not uncommon throughout the mid-twentieth century for various denominational conferences to be places of debate, robust discussion and, at times, significant disagreement. Though the extent of the points of difference was to dissipate in the years that followed, discussion, disagreement and ongoing reflection helped establish traditional Pentecostalism.

In the 1970s, with the onset of what would come to be known as the charismatic renewal, Pentecostalism further evolved into what can be referred to as charismatic Pentecostalism (approx. 1970-2000). This evolution of Pentecostalism included: a

---


22 The dates offered for the various “Pentecostalisms” are indicative generalizations. Arguments have been made in support of differing schemata equally suited to telling the story of Pentecostalism, see, Shane Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Publishing, 2009). Clifton, in accounting for the evolution of the Australian Assemblies of God (now Australian Christian Churches), argues for: a pre-narrative of voluntaristic piety, faith missions and then churches – 1800s to 1930s; followed by the formation of national fellowships – 1930s to 1960s; and then finally, charismatic revival, controversy and revolution – 1960s to present. Alternatively, see Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Inc, 1997). Hollenweger articulates four, roughly twenty-five-year phases of ecumenical development: the breaking down of ecumenical barriers, locally organized congregations, highly clericalized new denominations, and then ecumenical dialogue (which he sees as having dissolved into the separatism of Charismatic and Third Wave churches). In this paper the author’s five “evolutions” of Pentecostalism are preferable as they succinctly explain the Assemblies of God in New Zealand’s story as experienced by pastors within the movement, without the need to explore the wider issues of charismatic, mainline, independent or third wave churches.
softening of traditional Pentecostal doctrine in relationship to Spirit baptism; the rise of charismatic leaders (in the sense of personality types) who embodied the idea of the man of God in the church; an increasing focus on church growth and management principles; and the contemporizing of traditional Pentecostal churches into more culturally savvy churches that were event orientated, musically proficient and prosperity driven. Some churches began to experience significant numerical growth. In the Australasian context, the first mega-churches emerged under the leadership of Australian pastors Andrew Evans, David Cartledge, Reginald Klimionok and Phillip Hills, and New Zealand pastors Jim Williams, Neville Johnson and Frank Houston. Throughout the 1970s, these pastors led churches that had weekly attendances numbering more than 1000 people and, in some cases, over 2000. After the turn of the millennium, Pentecostalism began to experience a further evolution with the rise of contemporary Pentecostalism (approx. 2000-today). Here it must be acknowledged that any sense of evolution is likely to be something understood heuristically. As Joseph Komonchak explains in *Foundations in Ecclesiology*, a heuristic understanding of the church is essentially one derived from one’s experiences of church. That is, an understanding drawn from engagement with the symbols, words, judgments, statements, actions and relationships that distinguish a specific style of church or family of churches.

In this framework, contemporary Pentecostalism is the sense one has of the Pentecostal church in the twenty-first century operating in line with certain

23 Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition*, 141-146.

methodologies. Namely: a professionalism in contemporary praise and worship, with music being the primary medium through which one expects to encounter God; state-of-the-art facilities; set programs and the use of technology; image management that favors the young and chic, especially in regard to those who appear in front of the congregation; relentless positivity in terms of the preaching and the individual’s call to expectant faith in God; and an ultimate drive towards prosperity and triumphalism. Contemporary Pentecostalism creates its own genre or franchise of church easily recognizable wherever it might be located.25

Given the ongoing evolution of Pentecostalism, a doctrinally-informed definition that covers the history of the Pentecostal phenomenon difficult to formulate. Distinctive doctrines, such as the idea that glossolalia is the initial evidence of Spirit baptism, have been prominent during some periods of Pentecostalism but less so in others. However, at the other end of the scale, to simply refer to Pentecostalism as an experience of the Spirit is too open-ended. The early tenets of Pentecostalism still ring true – such as the identity of Jesus as savior, sanctifier, healer and soon-coming king – but these are not ideas unique to Pentecostalism.

That said, it is possible to identify certain characteristics embedded within Pentecostalism that are consistent throughout each phase of its evolution. Six specific characteristics of family resemblance stand out as defining markers of Pentecostalism: (1) theological simplicity, (2) pragmatic methodologies, (3) pneumatic expectation, (4)

25 Here it should be noted that this understanding of Pentecostalism focuses largely on Pentecostalism within the New Zealand and Australian context rather than Pentecostal developments throughout Asia, Latin America and Africa.
relational tribalism, (5) ontological enchantment, and (6) missional energy. These will be explored further throughout this paper.

The Assemblies of God in New Zealand

Pentecostalism in New Zealand traces its origins to the ministry of English evangelist Smith Wigglesworth and his evangelistic crusades of 1922 and 1923. Although other Spirit-filled pastors had ministered in New Zealand as early as 1863, and Dunedin lawyer John A.D. Adams had spent time with William J. Seymour of the Azusa Street revival in 1907, it was Wigglesworth’s ministry that genuinely established the movement in this country. His meetings in Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, Auckland, Palmerston North and Blenheim attracted thousands of people, with reports that hundreds received salvation, were miraculously healed, were baptized in water, and experienced baptism in the Holy Spirit as evidenced by speaking in other tongues.

When Wigglesworth departed New Zealand in 1923, the ad-hoc committee of volunteers responsible for overseeing the arrangements relating to his campaigns disbanded, leaving no one officially responsible to follow-up the work that had begun. However, one member of the Wigglesworth committee, Harry Roberts, formed the Wellington City

---

26 Ministers of the Catholic Apostolic Church travelled from Australia to Wellington as early as 1863. Ian Clarke, Pentecost at the Ends of the Earth; The History of the Assemblies of God in New Zealand (1927-2003) (Blenheim, NZ: Christian Road Ministries, 2007), 15.

27 Knowles, Transforming Pentecostalism, xvii.

28 Clarke, Pentecost at the Ends of the Earth, 18-19.
Mission in an attempt to conserve the fruit of Smith Wigglesworth’s ministry. In 1925 the mission opened New Zealand’s first Pentecostal church building. Provisions were made for other branches of the City Mission to be established in towns and cities throughout New Zealand, and the organization changed its name to the New Zealand Evangelical Mission before becoming The Pentecostal Church of New Zealand.

By 1926, however, significant differences of opinion arose among Pentecostal leaders regarding the governance of local churches. A number of pastors left The Pentecostal Church of New Zealand hoping to organize themselves as a movement of relationally-connected autonomous churches. In 1927 A.C. Valdez, an American evangelist and popular Pentecostal minister who had resigned from The Pentecostal Church of New Zealand, contacted the Assemblies of God in the United States on behalf of these pastors asking to form a cooperative fellowship in New Zealand. This request was approved and, in March 1927, the Assemblies of God in New Zealand was formally inaugurated with seven assemblies. A further four assemblies had joined by the end of that year.

Over the next twenty years, growth within the Assemblies of God in New Zealand was slow. In 1945, after the conclusion of World War Two, government census figures showed only 361 people identifying as Assemblies of God affiliated Christians, compared

29 Clarke, Pentecost at the Ends of the Earth, 21.
30 Ibid., 23-25.
31 Knowles, Transforming Pentecostalism, 30-31.
32 Ibid., 31.
to 389 in 1936. But by 1976, census figures showed that the number of Assemblies of God congregants had grown to over 5,500. By 2017, the Assemblies of God in New Zealand consisted of approximately 229 churches, with 645 ordained ministers, and 26,000 constituents (the average church size being 113 people). Notably, of these 229 churches, half identified as non-European in ethnicity – these were predominantly Samoan, but also Tongan, Fijian, Indian and Korean.

**Contextual Considerations**

Aside from ethnic diversity as a contextual consideration for the New Zealand Assemblies of God, several other factors should be noted. Some of these considerations arise either as a result of, or are illustrated by, a recent survey of Assemblies of God pastors conducted for this paper entitled “Pentecostal Perspectives 2017.”

---

33 Clarke, *Pentecost at the Ends of the Earth*, 65.

34 Ibid., 162.

35 These statistics were obtained in conversation with the General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God in New Zealand in 2017. The Assemblies of God in New Zealand has not kept detailed records in relation to individual church attendance and related statistics such as baptisms per year. In a survey of Assemblies of God churches distributed by the author of this paper, forty-two responses in regard to average Sunday church attendance figures, indicate an average attendance of 118 people. Churches ranged in size from seventeen – 400 people in attendance. There are some A/G churches known by the author to be larger than this.

36 While ethnic diversity is a major contextual consideration within the Assemblies of God in New Zealand, an in depth cultural analysis and exploration of Pentecostalism re-imagined within a Samoan or Tongan context (for example) is beyond the scope of this paper. It will be left to others more equipped than this author to discern the relevance or irrelevance of this paper’s arguments within the ethnic fellowships with the New Zealand A/G.

37 See appendix A for a list or survey questions. Given that this paper is not a research project no formal research methodology was incorporated into this survey. The survey, offered to Assemblies of God pastors in both English and a Samoan language format, was simply intended to capture some basic data in relation to A/G NZ where very little is available. That said, with results representing forty-two out of 229 churches the margin of error is statistically low.
pastors completed the survey, representing just over 20 percent of the Assemblies of God churches in New Zealand. Respondents included pastors of churches that identify as European, Samoan, Maori, Indian and multi-cultural. The youngest respondent was twenty-five years old and the oldest eighty-two. The average age of pastors was fifty-six, with half the respondents being younger and half older.

Church Size

There are no Assemblies of God churches in New Zealand that would qualify as mega-churches – that is, 2000 or more people in weekly attendance. In fact, there are no churches with a weekly attendance of over 1000 people. The largest Assemblies of God churches that have emerged over the years have either collapsed due to the moral failings of pastors or have seceded from the movement. Those seceding from the movement include Gateway Church, Hamilton; Harbor Side Church, Auckland; and Church Unlimited, Auckland – each of these have well over 1000 members. While there are a handful of churches with an average weekly attendance of over 400, the average size of an Assemblies of God New Zealand church, including children, is 118 people. 64 percent of churches have attendance numbering less than one hundred, and 24 percent less than sixty people in total.


39 Survey results from Pentecostal Perspectives 2017 survey as distributed by author.
Theological Training

In terms of theological training, 33 percent of Assemblies of God pastors surveyed have a bachelor’s degree qualification or higher. More common is a Diploma of Christian Ministry, with 42 percent holding this or an equivalent qualification. Partly, this is due to Alphacrucis College New Zealand (the New Zealand and Australia Assemblies of God Bible College) organizing a series of three-day diploma seminars where prior experience, the seminar itself and several assessment requirements, provide this qualification as a fast-track learning option for pastors. The remaining 25 percent of pastors are likely to have no formal theological training at all. While the level of theological training among Assemblies of God pastors is greater than anticipated, the fact that only one third of pastors hold a degree qualification (or higher) is significant. In contrast, a degree qualification is a minimum requirement for ordination in other denominations, such as the Catholic, Anglican and Presbyterian churches of New Zealand. In the early days of the Azusa Street Mission, theology was deemed suspect and seen as “a potential block to the free flow of Pentecostal faith” or “something to be overcome rather than embraced.” It is possible that a similar perspective exists today,

---

40 Survey results from Pentecostal Perspectives 2017 survey as distributed by author.

41 The Pentecostal Perspectives 2017 survey indicated that a very small percentage have a training certificate of some sort.


43 Jacobson, Thinking in the Spirit, 66.
even amidst a slowly developing appreciation of theological training within Pentecostalism.

Contemporary Role Models

While Assemblies of God in New Zealand churches tend to be small, most of the survey respondents indicated that they look to larger contemporary Pentecostal mega-churches (whether those in New Zealand or overseas) as an exemplar of successful ministry. 72 percent of Assemblies of God pastors responding to the question, “What pastors, churches or authors do you look up to as examples, role models or successes in Christian ministry?” cited contemporary Pentecostal mega-church pastors and their churches. Given the pragmatic tendencies embedded within Pentecostalism this is not a surprising outcome – bigger is generally regarded as being better. Problematic in this, however, is the challenge of contextualizing the ministries and methodologies of pastoral ministry in very large churches in very large cities to very small churches in very small provincial towns. As well, the consumer appeal and praxis of the mega-church model is not necessarily a practice worth emulating – a topic that will be discussed further.

The Contemporary Mega-Church as Exemplar

Within New Zealand, Pentecostalism is largely evolving into what may be referred to as contemporary Pentecostalism, not simply current-Pentecostalism, but rather the embracing of (or at least the attempt to embrace) the methodology of church as exemplified in the mega-church phenomenon. As previously noted, for many, this form of church is seen as the exemplar of successful twenty-first century ministry. Questions
relating to the suitability of this model of church in provincial or small-town contexts notwithstanding, other issues arise in relation to the gospel message and liturgical methodologies embedded within this model of church. Of primary concern is the tendency for these churches to function in a manner that appeals to Western consumerism. Globally, the most prominent example of this approach is Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, pastored by Joel Osteen.44 Embedded within Osteen’s articulation of the gospel is “the idea that God desires people to prosper materially, rewards faithful followers with wealth, and that material blessings are a sign of God’s favor.”45 In a consumer culture, this is an appealing ideology that promotes Christianity as a pragmatic addition to one’s way of life. God is promoted as a “more than enough God,” with money and the ability to engage in a lifestyle of ever-increasing consumption essential to fulfilling God’s vision for the individual’s life.46

Though not all contemporary Pentecostal mega-churches explicitly espouse this ideology to the degree that Osteen does, the prosperity gospel is a consistent theme that serves to attract many to these kinds of churches in New Zealand and around the world.47 This approach offers a highly problematic perspective on material wealth and fails to

44 Though Joel Osteen’s “What We Believe” statement consists of only seven simple bullet points, the seventh is the belief that “as children of God, we are overcomers, and more than conquerors, and God intends for each of us to experience the abundant life he has in store for us.” See the “What We Believe” section of Osteen’s website, https://www.joelosteen.com/Pages/WhatWeBelieve.aspx (accessed November 6, 2017).


46 Ibid., 318-341.

align with Jesus’ clear instructions that anyone who wishes to be his disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross daily and lose their life to save it (Luke 9:21-26).

As well as a tendency towards a consumer-driven gospel message, the mega-church model also offers a range of consumer-friendly events and programs that are designed to cater to the needs of Christians at various ages and stages. Well-staffed programs and state-of-the-art facilities allow attendees to pick and choose from offerings specifically aligned to their individualized tastes, desires and felt-needs. When this occurs, Sunday services all too easily become a product that is consumed, rather than a community in which one participates. The kind of conditioning that arises from this approach creates program-dependent Christians and is inconsistent with Pentecostalism’s original sense of Spirit empowerment that sends Christians into all the world as representatives of God (Mark 16:15).

Ecumenical Hesitancy

While Pentecostalism originally existed as a protest movement outside of evangelicalism, unhappy with what were perceived as the social and moral compromises of other denominations,48 Pentecostal pastors within the Assemblies of God in New Zealand are open to more ecumenical perspectives. 59 percent of pastors indicated that they attend their city or local town’s ministers’ fraternal. Further, 14 percent of Assemblies of God pastors have had a Catholic, Anglican, Baptist or Presbyterian minister preach in their church in the last twelve months, with another 41 percent open to

the idea of this occurring. On the other hand, the remaining 45 percent of pastors surveyed would be hesitant to allow this to occur, with many offering various comments that highlight a sense of reticence. For example, “Certainly not a Catholic,” or “Evidence of God at work in their life would need to be seen first,” or “We would want to meet first and ‘suss’ them out,” or “If they were saved,” or “If it would serve our vision.”

Therefore, despite evidence for a shift in perspective, there remains a degree of ecumenical hesitancy and suspicion within the Assemblies of God in New Zealand.

**Orientations Within Pentecostalism**

A further contextual consideration relates to the orientation of Pentecostalism in terms of various pathways of Christian spirituality. In *The 3 Colors of Your Spirituality*, Christian Schwarz suggests nine differing pathways via which Christians tend to experience God. A typical Pentecostal orientation tends to relate to God primarily through a coalescence of the Holy Spirit and the Bible, largely the bottom half of Schwarz’ circle – mystical through to scripture-driven.

---

49 Comments provided in survey, Pentecostal Perspectives 2017.

Pentecostals are less inclined to approach God via sacramental (traditional-style liturgy), sensory (bells and smells), rational (apologetics focused) or doctrinal pathways (well-constructed theology).\textsuperscript{52} One problematic issue with the scripture-driven sharing tendency of Pentecostalism is that it can too easily be dismissed in today’s current market-place of ideas. In a post-Christendom context, the Bible is not perceived as authoritative in any sense. Simultaneously, while mysticism (unmediated inner experiences of Christ within)\textsuperscript{53} and enthusiasm (a focus on God moving supernaturally)\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{51} Schwarz, \textit{The 3 Colors of Your Spirituality}, 27.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 52.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 134.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 52.
will be respected, from a postmodern perspective, as someone else’s lived experience, they are unlikely to be appreciated by modernists and offer little that might be deemed credible to a modern scientific and rationalist perspective.

In an effort to negate this supposed irrelevance, and promote a spirituality relevant to twenty-first century Westernism, the response of the Pentecostal mega-church and its contemporary version of Pentecostalism, has been to take asceticism (the freedom from worldly things, and sacrificial living), and turn it upside-down. Instead of asceticism, materialism and consumerism are championed in either soft or hard forms of the prosperity gospel. Osteen exemplifies this by “blending secularly-ascetic puritan principles of hard work and discipline with hedonist principles of indulgence and pleasure, although he tends to emphasize the latter over the former.” This spirituality of consumerism and materialism is a pathway via which to develop a relationship with God that needs consideration as one begins to re-imagine Pentecostalism. Rather than inverting asceticism as a point of engagement with the world, a re-imagined Pentecostalism might consider what it means to become more sacramental, sensory, rational and doctrinal in regard to one’s spirituality.


56 Hard prosperity judges people’s faith by their immediate circumstances, while soft prosperity appraises believers with a gentler, more roundabout, assessment. Bowler, *Blessed*, 7-8.

Summary

Over the last one hundred years, Pentecostalism has morphed and evolved as it has attempted to contextualize itself in changing socio-historical situations. It is indeed a movement. With history continuing to move forward, the Assemblies of God in New Zealand is afforded the opportunity to consider God’s divine telos and re-calibrate various modes of praxis as required. Given the contextual considerations outlined in this paper so far, the strong opinion of the author is that a re-imagining of Pentecostalism is an important and vital process. Self-reflection, and reconfiguration in light of changing cultural contexts, is becoming a standard modus operandi across a variety of Church traditions and Pentecostalism would do well to embrace the reformed tradition’s commitment to ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda (the church reformed and always reforming). In doing so, courage can be found in the words of theologian Jurgen Moltmann:

For me, theology was, and still is, an adventure of ideas. It is an open, inviting path. Right down to the present day, it has continued to fascinate my mental and spiritual curiosity. My theological methods therefore grew up as I came to have a perception of the objects of theological thought. The road emerged only as I walked it… I have no wish to be a disciple of the great theological masters of past generations. Nor have I any desire to found a new theological school. My whole concern has been, and still is, to stimulate other people to discover theology for themselves – to have their own theological ideas, and to set out along their own paths.\footnote{Jurgen Moltmann, Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), xv.}
PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

From the outset, this paper has been stirred, provoked, informed and encouraged by the work of numerous authors. With the scope of this paper only allowing the ability to review five specific books, the intent of this section is to provide a bird’s eye perspective on key elements that the ministry project embedded in this paper will address. Each book has therefore been reviewed in light of the big ideas they contribute to the critique and re-imagining of Pentecostalism. Nigel Willis’ *The Pentecostal Movement, its Challenges and Potential*, offers a current overview of Pentecostalism as understood by four of the movement’s most notable scholars. John MacArthur’s *Strange Fire* provides a critical, and at times scathing, analysis of Pentecostalism. In *Evangelical, Sacramental and Pentecostal*, Gordon T. Smith suggests the need for the Church to be multifaceted. James K. A. Smith’s *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?* is a helpful aid in appreciating postmodern perspectives relevant to a twenty-first century context. And finally, Carlson and Lueken’s *Renovation of the Church* argues that the way in which
consumerism tends to be fostered and leveraged in the contemporary mega-church is ultimately counterproductive to Christian discipleship.

**Pentecostal Perspectives**

In *The Pentecostal Movement, its Challenges and Potential* Nigel Paul Willis\(^1\) explores the insights of four of Pentecostalism’s most highly regarded scholars and authors; namely, historian Grant Wacker, sociologist Margaret Poloma and theologians Frank Macchia and Amos Yong.\(^2\) His synthesis of a wide corpus of work and his highlighting of the various attributes of Pentecostalism have proven to be a helpful resource for this paper.

Willis commences his exploration by engaging with Wacker, a professor of church history. Wacker argues that the pulling power of Pentecostalism is found in the movement’s leanings towards biblical literalism and religious fundamentalism. Due to being uniformly Biblically literalist in approach,\(^3\) theological training within early Pentecostalism focused solely on the Bible as its only text book and centers of learning were called Bible Institutes.\(^4\) Early Pentecostals believed that the only thing necessary

---

\(^1\) Willis was the Chairman of Board of Trustees for the Anglican Diocese of Johannesburg, South Africa. He is currently a judge of the Supreme Court of Appeal in South Africa. This book is his dissertation successfully submitted as a doctoral theses at the Karl-Ruprechts Universitat in Heidelberg, Germany. Nigel Paul Willis, *The Pentecostal Movement, its Challenges and Potential* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH, 2013).

\(^2\) Ibid., 16.

\(^3\) Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 70-73

\(^4\) Ibid., 71.
for the understanding of truth was the gospel as set out in scripture. This, Wacker suggests, has allowed Pentecostal truth to remain “unaffected by the prevailing winds of intellectual thought that have blown across the world since the Enlightenment.”\(^5\) He therefore concludes that the genius of Pentecostalism is its ability to hold an “experience of other-worldly power in productive tension with this-worldly practicality”\(^6\) – a fusion of the “primitive and the pragmatic.”\(^7\) Pentecostalism is pragmatic in its ability to adapt to socio-historical contexts, and primitive in its refusal to bow to scientific rationalism – instead maintaining an affirmation of the universe formed and sustained by God.

Wacker’s work points towards some of the concepts that this current paper identifies as defining markers of Pentecostalism – namely, theological simplicity, ontological enchantment and pragmatic methodologies.

Willis’s exploration next moves to a discussion of the work of sociologist Margaret Poloma. Poloma has equated fundamentalism with biblical literalism,\(^8\) and sees this approach to the biblical text, along with the wariness regarding debate with other religious affiliations that is found in Pentecostalism, as ultimately finding its foundation in a fear that received truth might be compromised.\(^9\) Though, in Poloma’s view, the


\(^{6}\) Ibid., 22.


\(^{9}\) Willis, *The Pentecostal Movement, its Challenges and Potential*, 53-54.
“pragmatism with the Assemblies of God church as well as its rational leadership would [eventually] erode its commitment to biblical literalism.”\textsuperscript{10} Simultaneously, she identifies a concern among Pentecostals to maintain their distinct identity that acts as a roadblock to ecumenical perspectives and robust engagement in the sort of theological dialogue that might shift the nature of Pentecostalism.\textsuperscript{11} Poloma’s observations give a sense of the interplay of theological simplicity and relational tribalism within Pentecostalism.

Poloma’s perspective is that “intense, personal, religious experiences affect human social behavior,”\textsuperscript{12} and that one of the explanations for the growth of Pentecostalism is “found in what may be described as the otherworldly or spiritual experience” that Pentecostalism offers as empowerment in life.\textsuperscript{13} These observations fall into the category of pneumatic expectation, and Poloma convincingly contends that Pentecostalism cannot be understood without an awareness of Spirit baptism.\textsuperscript{14}

Willis’s next point of focus is the work of theologian Frank Macchia. Macchia highlights the reality that “there is much more to Pentecostal distinctiveness than either (1) Spirit baptism as a concept that occurs subsequent to conversion or (2) speaking in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{10} Poloma, \textit{The Assemblies of God at a Crossroads}, 66 and 87.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Willis, \textit{The Pentecostal Movement, its Challenges and Potential}, 54-55.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 59.
\end{itemize}
tongues as seen as evidence of Spirit baptism.”

Macchia sees Spirit baptism as the “latter rain of the Spirit” and as “charismatic and missionary empowerment given in preparation for Christ’s imminent return.”

In keeping with that insight, this current paper proposes missional energy as one of pentecostalism’s defining markers. For Macchia, Spirit baptism is a Biblical metaphor that is not only doctrinal in scope, but also a pneumatological emphasis that is experiential, charismatic and eschatological. Macchia approvingly quotes Walter Hollenweger’s observation that Pentecostalism is not a doctrine but a religious experience. Or, in the terminology of this current paper, there is a coalescence of pneumatic expectation, ontological enchantment and missional energy.

Macchia is aware of Pentecostalism’s tendency towards relational tribalism and its resistance to ecumenical dialogue, but nonetheless advocates for the importance of robust conversations across denominational lines. As Willis asserts, “Aligning himself with Moltmann on the Trinitarian doctrine, Macchia brings Pentecostal theology abreast of the most intellectually advanced to be found in Christianity today. In doing so, he


19 Ibid., 61.
opens doors for ecumenical conversations to take places between Pentecostalism and other Christian denominations.”

The second theologian and final Pentecostal scholar that Willis discusses is Amos Yong. Yong’s work identifies numerous challenges that await Christian theology as a whole, and thus Pentecostal theology by default; in particular: “the transition from modernity and its aftermath to postmodernism, increasing awareness of religious pluralism around the globe, and scientific progress and discovery.”

In keeping with Wacker, Poloma and Macchia, Yong accepts that Pentecostalism has traditionally shown little enthusiasm for ecumenical dialogue – let alone interfaith dialogue. However, he advocates for both. Yong asserts the need for “conversations with non-Christian faiths and with those who have no religious faith at all,” as well as with the wider church community. This advocacy is fueled by a Pentecostal perspective that the outpouring of the Spirit compels an individual to reach out to others, and by the conviction that a pneumatological theology will seek to discern the work of the Spirit in all places and people. “Yong emphasizes that Christians need to recognize that the Spirit may be present and actively at work in other religious traditions and they also need

---


21 Ibid., 95. See, Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh; Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Backer Academic, 2005), 17.

22 Ibid., 113.


24 Ibid.
to remember that the universal presence and activity of the Spirit proclaims the universality of truth.”25 Here Yong moves in an alternate direction to that of theological simplicity and relational tribalism, via another of Pentecostalism’s defining markers – ontological enchantment.

Regarding pneumatic expectation, Yong’s understanding is that Pentecostalism is animated by the conviction that the Luke-Acts accounts of the Spirit in action are an invitation to the church to participate in the Spirit’s ongoing work in the world.26 He highlights the need to frame Pentecostal spirituality as a “dynamic experience of the Holy Spirit” that results in positively transformed lives.27 For Yong, this transformation of lives – and of communities in the here and now – is a core element of the attraction of Pentecostalism. Another attractive element is Pentecostalism’s “facility for accommodation, acculturation and assimilation”28 – its ability to morph in different contexts – or, in the terminology of this paper, its tendency toward pragmatic methodologies. Both language and liturgy can be adapted to suit particular cultures and subcultures.


28 Yong, Discerning the Spirit(s), 154-155. And also, Yong, The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh, 145.
As well as offering a helpful overview of four of Pentecostalism’s most notable scholars, Willis makes several summarizing points that are worth noting for the purpose of this paper. Firstly, the intense, personal, religious experiences claimed by Pentecostals consistently rise above all other factors in the search to explain the growth of Pentecostalism around the world. Secondly, regarding relational tribalism, Pentecostals are often a “breed apart” or “separated brothers and sisters.” Willis argues that Pentecostalism’s adherence to biblical literalism and the “reinforcing sense of identity” that comes with this literalism is ultimately isolating and unhelpful in developing the theology needed to address globalization, a shared sense of humanity and twenty-first century ecological challenges. Nevertheless, he is optimistic in noting, thirdly, that there is potential for a “regeneration within the Pentecostal movement, in which a number of its theological positions undergo re-examination.”

**Pentecostalism as a Fraudulent Deception**

In contrast to Nigel Paul Willis, John MacArthur takes a more negative view of Pentecostalism and is probably Pentecostalism’s most outspoken published critic. His

---


30 Ibid., 147.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., 154-155.

33 Ibid., 168.

34 MacArthur is a graduate of Talbot Theological Seminary and the pastor of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, as well as an author, conference speaker and president
books *Charismatic Chaos* and *Strange Fire* are both scathing in their criticism of Pentecostalism as a scandalous form of spiritual chicanery. His arguments are broad, sweeping and dismissive:

> It is a sad twist of irony that those who claim to be most focused on the Holy Spirit are in actuality the ones doing the most to abuse, grieve, insult, misrepresent, quench and dishonor Him. How do they do that? By attributing to Him words He did not say, deeds He did not do, phenomena He did not produce, and experiences that have nothing to do with Him.^^37^^

Ultimately, MacArthur’s cessationist position leads him to entirely reject Pentecostal and charismatic movements as a false religion far removed from biblical Christianity.^^38^^ The perspective of this paper is that MacArthur’s conclusions are a failure of both theological reflection and Christian charity. Rather than considering grassroots Pentecostalism, his criticism focuses on extreme elements within the movement.^^39^^ That said, though his conclusions go too far and are overly damning, he raises certain salient issues that should be acknowledged.

---


^^37^^ Ibid., xiii.


^^39^^ A rebuttal of MacArthur’s work is beyond the scope of this paper, lengthy responses have been published by others. See, Michael L. Brown, *Authentic Fire; a Response to John MacArthur’s Strange Fire* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 2015).
Given that Pentecostalism sees itself as a move of God, MacArthur employees five questions through which to assess the Pentecostal/charismatic movement as an authentic work of the Holy Spirit.\(^\text{40}\) (1) Does the work exalt Christ? (2) Does the work oppose worldliness? (3) Does it point people to the Scriptures? (4) Does it elevate the truth? and (5) Does it produce love for God and others?\(^\text{41}\) While it is debatable whether these questions offer of the best framework for assessing Pentecostalism, they serve as a useful way to summarize MacArthur’s critique.

Responding to the first question, MacArthur finds Pentecostalism’s infatuation with supposed experiences of the Holy Spirit to be a distraction that fails to exalt Christ. Recognizing that “in the Pentecostal potpourri only one thing is the same for all: the passion they have to experience the presence and power of the Holy Spirit,”\(^\text{42}\) MacArthur objects to the movement’s preoccupation with alleged spiritual gifts, encounters and manifestations.\(^\text{43}\) He sees the primary role of the Holy Spirit to be the exaltation of Jesus Christ, rather than the experientialism of signs and wonders promoted by Pentecostal pastors and televangelists (whom he describes as “spiritual swindlers, con men, crooks and charlatans”).\(^\text{44}\) MacArthur’s objections and rhetoric are “gung-ho” in their lack of


\(^{41}\) Ibid., 39.


\(^{43}\) Ibid., 35.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., xiii.
subtlety and nuance, but his core point is worth consideration: in its pursuit of the Holy Spirit, at times Pentecostalism has become a movement of experientialism rather than a Christo-centric expression of the Church.

MacArthur next questions whether the spirit promoted within Pentecostalism aids believers in their stand against worldliness. MacArthur’s strongly asserted conclusion is again no: “the movement that claims to be most in tune with the Holy Spirit, is simultaneously the least concerned about personal holiness and purity.”45 In support of this perspective, MacArthur highlights the prosperity gospel streams within Pentecostalism, with their focus on worldly priorities and fleshly pursuits, as distortions of the gospel that are bound up in greed.46 He also presents a long list of Pentecostal leaders who have experienced a moral failing of one sort or another. This list includes a formerly prominent pastor within the New Zealand Assemblies of God, Neville Johnson.47 Johnson repeatedly engaged in acts of adultery in the 1970s, after supposedly receiving a revelation from the Holy Spirit that his wife would soon pass away and that he had been granted a “special grace allowing him to participate in extra marital affairs.”48 Though MacArthur’s list, and Johnson’s case, are worrying evidence of moral failure, such failure is found across the denominational spectrum. It is uncharitable of

---

46 Ibid., 57.
47 Ibid., 59-64.
48 Ibid., 61.
MacArthur to isolate Pentecostalism in this regard, and to imply that moral failure is somehow typical of Pentecostal leadership.

MacArthur’s third and fourth questions focus on the work of the Holy Spirit as it points people towards the Word of God. Here he passes judgment on Pentecostalism’s use of the Scriptures. Though Pentecostals may claim to be people of the book, MacArthur argues that they concoct their own version of the Holy Spirit, then arrive at their own conclusions in regard to what the Spirit reveals to them as the meaning of God’s Word.\(^{49}\) He notes that in many charismatic circles, a disciplined study of the Bible is seen as something likely to limit or thwart the work of the Spirit.\(^{50}\) Thus MacArthur concludes “the sad fact to be, that biblical truth has never been a hallmark of the [Pentecostal] movement, where spiritual experience is continually elevated above sound doctrine.”\(^{51}\) Again, this is a sweeping dismissal – Pentecostal scholarship has advanced considerably and, albeit slowly, this scholarship is beginning to filter into the Pentecostal church as a wider community. That being said, it must be acknowledged, as this current paper does, that Pentecostalism has often failed to engage in a developed and disciplined process of hermeneutical reflection.

MacArthur’s final critique examines whether the Pentecostal move of the Spirit produces “a sober-minded adoration and love for God and others.”\(^{52}\) Unsurprisingly, he

\(^{49}\) McArthur, *Strange Fire*, 68.

\(^{50}\) Ibid.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 71.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 75.
concludes that it does not. Regarding a love for God, MacArthur describes Pentecostal worship as nothing more than unrestrained emotionalism.\textsuperscript{53} He also concludes that there is little evidence of a love for others within Pentecostalism, given its focus on self-edification in tongues rather than the edification of others.

**Ecumenical Fusion**

In *Evangelical, Sacramental and Pentecostal*, Gordon T. Smith argues that a local church should be committed to a modus operandi that is evangelical, sacramental and Pentecostal.\textsuperscript{54} Smith builds upon Lesslie Newbigin’s concept of the church as Protestant (referring to evangelicalism’s focus on Scripture), Catholic (referring to the sacramental nature of religious life), and Pentecostal (celebrating the experienced effects of God at work), and seeks to weave these perspectives together.\textsuperscript{55} Smith suggests that it is “imperative that we not choose [a specific characteristic] but actually embrace and engage each as the necessary counterpart of the other.”\textsuperscript{56} Smith views the Christian life as a reality defined first and foremost by union with Christ – a mysterious relationship that can be likened to the communion of Father, Son and Spirit.\textsuperscript{57} In light of this, it is not

\textsuperscript{53} McArthur, *Strange Fire*, 77.

\textsuperscript{54} Gordon T. Smith is the president of Ambrose University and Seminary in Alberta, Canada, where he serves as a professor of systematic and spiritual theology. Gordon T. Smith, *Evangelical, Sacrament, and Pentecostal* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2017).

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 3.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 4.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 12.
doctrines, principles or understandings of Scripture that transform us, but rather Christ who “in real time dwells in our midst and in our lives.” By being crucified, Christ has not only enacted something on our behalf, but has also called us to “abide in him as he abides in us” (John 15:4). However, this calling raises questions regarding how one abides. How is this union of relationship possible given the ascended nature of Christ, the divide between the realms of heaven and earth, and the ontology of God in contrast to that of humanity? “How is the grace – gained, one might say, on and in the cross – effected in our lives?” The answer to these questions, Smith says, is found in embracing the evangelical, sacramental and Pentecostal as an indivisible set.

The evangelical strengths highlighted by Smith are straightforward: “Christ abides in us through the Word of God, most notably through the Scriptures read, studied, preached, and mediated upon.” The Word transcends the realms of heaven and earth, and draws us into fellowship with the triune God through Christ: “When the Scriptures are proclaimed, Christ is proclaimed. Even more, Christ is doing the proclaiming.”

58 Smith, Evangelical, Sacrament, and Pentecostal, 12.
59 Ibid., 13.
60 Ibid., 14.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., 58. It could be argued that this is Smith’s weakest point and that he is really articulating a sacramental perspective on the Bible (which he alludes to later). This would be more in keeping with the rest of Smith’s arguments in relation to “abiding” being a pneumatological phenomenon in relation to Pentecostalism and a mystical phenomenon in relation to the sacraments. For the purposes of this paper, a simple affirmation of the church to be evangelically passionate regarding one’s engagement with the Bible, while also Pentecostal and sacramental, would have been sufficient. The genius of and/both/all.
Smith’s call to sacramental Christianity springs forth in light of the incarnation: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Here heaven and earth are linked dynamically and functionally with the grace of God responding to the crisis and fragmentation of the created order.\(^6^3\) God clothes himself in human (material) flesh and humans are now able to clothe themselves (relationally) in Jesus Christ (Romans 13:14). The tangible and physical realities of life are infused with sacramental possibility, and the material (bread, wine and water) are the means through which we are drawn into the life of God and rebirthed (John 3:5).\(^6^4\) This idea will be explored further in this paper’s discussion of ontological enchantment and Pentecostalism’s potential pneumatological ability to see all of life sacramentally.

Smith’s argument regarding Pentecostalism recognizes the vital role of the Holy Spirit as the presence of God mediating the life of Christ in both Word and sacrament. Here the central event is the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit upon one and all as the means through which the grace of God is known.\(^6^5\) An individual receives the Spirit, is born from above through the Spirit, is led into truth by the Spirit, and finds the ability to abide in Christ while Christ abides within the individual through relationship with the Holy Spirit.\(^6^6\)

\(^6^3\) Smith, _Evangelical, Sacrament, and Pentecostal_, 17.

\(^6^4\) Ibid., 17.

\(^6^5\) Ibid., 19.

\(^6^6\) Ibid., 20.
Smith makes an insightful observation in describing Pentecostalism as a movement focusing on a felt awareness of God, positioning the contemporary Pentecostal and charismatic movements “in direct continuity with the mystical traditions in the history of the church.”67 He sees a “consistent thread in the history of the church that has stressed the potential of immediacy with God – indeed not only the potential but the priority.”68 This view opens many possibilities for Pentecostalism to engage in ecumenical dialogue with the various streams of the Christian faith whose mystics have been celebrated through the ages.

The Postmodern Condition

In *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?*, James K.A. Smith unpacks the nature of postmodernism and addresses what he argues are misconceptions regarding three of its best-known catchphrases.69 First he considers Jacques Derrida’s idea that there is “nothing outside the text;” secondly, he examines the postmodern axiom that “power is knowledge” in the work of Michel Foucault; and thirdly, he discusses Jean-François Lyotard’s postmodern “incredulity towards metanarratives.”70

---


68 Ibid., 103.

69 Smith is professor of philosophy at Calvin College, where he holds the Gary and Henrietta Byker Chair in Applied Reformed Theology and Worldview. Trained as a philosopher with a focus on contemporary French thought, Smith has expanded on that scholarly platform to become an engaged public intellectual and cultural critic. See, “About” section of James K.A. Smiths personal website, http://jameskasmith.com/about/ (accessed September 11, 2017).

In unpacking Derrida’s notion that there is nothing outside the text, Smith argues that rather than this assertion being some sort of irrational denial of material existence, it is in fact a perspective contra to early modern thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau in relation to language. Rousseau deemed language to be an obstacle that prevents a genuine and unmediated experience of life – a lens of distortion to be avoided. Derrida’s postmodern perspective, however, holds that there is no experience of the world outside of language. There is thus no natural state of existence in which interpretation is not required. For Derrida, to say that there is nothing outside the text is to declare everything to be text and in need of interpretation at two levels.

These two levels of interpretation are illustrated when one considers the discipline of reading. In the first instance, interpretation requires knowledge of the author’s context and literary method – some form of historical-literary analysis in relation to an ancient text (such as the Bible) and a degree of general-knowledge in relation to a modern text (such as a local newspaper). In the second instance, interpretation requires readers to be aware of their own lenses and agendas in interpreting a text. Derrida believed that most readers miss this level of interpretation. Too often people wrongly assume that, with a little cultural context or general knowledge in place, they are no longer “interpreting” but reading and understanding the text in a simple and straightforward manner. Derrida highlights the inevitable interpretive lenses that one’s experiences of life bring to the text. Put simply, it

---

71 Smith, Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?, 36.
impossible for an individual to step outside his or her own skin and engage in any sort of unbiased or objective process of interpretation – an individual is never “just reading.”

This postmodern perspective gives rise to a certain degree of suspicion – especially in regard to institutions and personalities that hold positions of power and authority. There are two main areas of concern. Firstly, can the methods of interpretation (the hermeneutical processes) employed by these institutions and personalities be trusted? And, in interpreting, are these institutions and personalities aware of the experiences, biases, agendas and vested interests they possess as interpreters that may lead to self-serving conclusions? These questions certainly come to life when postmodernism engages with Pentecostalism.

The Pentecostal self-understanding is one of biblical Christianity lived in the power of the Spirit. Embedded in this perspective is a common expectation that, when reading the Bible as people of the book, the Holy Spirit will bring the plain and clear meaning of the text alive in the hearts of the readers. However, the inevitable act of personal interpretation is often overlooked.

There is thus a tendency to skip the due diligence of historical-literary analysis and assume that one’s understanding of the text (whether established in the moment of reading or inherited from the culture) is entirely accurate. Viewed from a postmodern perspective, this kind of uncensored interpretive

---

72 Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?*, 37.

73 Clifton, “Pentecostal Hermeneutics,” *eOikonomia*, 1.

74 Early Pentecostal, Charles Parham, considered his lack of formal theological training to be advantageous as at allowed him to interpret the Bible without any bias. He mused that, “his naive ability to read the Bible fairly and accurately without any warped preconceptions had helped him weather the theological gales that had driven so many into error.” Jacobson, *Thinking in the Spirit*, 20-21.

52
process warrants a degree of suspicion and skepticism when assessing the claims and constructs of Pentecostalism. This suspicion is further accentuated by the second postmodern axiom that Smith addresses: “power is knowledge.”

According to Smith, philosopher Michel Foucault asserted that no truth claim or piece of knowledge is innocent. Foucault argued that just below the surface of what people often suppose are self-evident or obvious truths, lie the machinations of power.\textsuperscript{75} Thus to claim that power is knowledge is to make a claim about the power of institutions, personalities and/or religions to promote ideas that produce reality.\textsuperscript{76} Foucault does not posit this as either positive or negative, but simply the way things work – there is a nexus of power/knowledge that controls.\textsuperscript{77} Knowledge shapes ideas that serve to normalize reality, then gives rise to judges whose function it is to ensure people are adhering accordingly. Within church contexts (Pentecostal or otherwise), normality may be composed of a collection of doctrines, the expressed values of the church, or a series of unwritten rules that inform the beliefs and behaviors required of members in order that they may belong. Whatever the source, and though often biblically based, these rules are nevertheless an interpretation of Scripture and are thus knowledge inevitably wielded as power in a way that serves behavioral and organizational ends.

Within Pentecostalism (as within all streams of the Christian church), one would hope that these ends will be the development of Christlike character evidenced in the

\textsuperscript{75} Smith, \textit{Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?} 86.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 91.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 86.
fruit of the Spirit, and an ever-developing love for God and neighbor. Concurrently, one would also hope that the means towards these ends will be God honoring and humanizing. Either way, postmodernism, already suspicious of the interpretive processes embedded in Pentecostalism, will question the ways in which knowledge and power are exercised within the Pentecostal church.\(^78\) This brings us to the third issue in relation to postmodernism: an incredulity towards metanarratives.

Many argue that the postmodernism condition is not merely a suspicion of metanarratives, but rather, the rejection of metanarratives. At first glance, an incredulity towards metanarratives seems to be in direct contradiction of the Christian worldview framed by the biblical narrative (or big story) of God’s loving engagement with the world as creator, sustainer, redeemer and ultimate restorer of all things. However, Smith points out that philosopher Jean-François Lyotard’s perspective is more nuanced than a straight-out rejection of metanarratives. Rather than rejecting framing stories in and of themselves, Lyotard rejected the idea that a framing story can be “proven by appeal to universal reason.”\(^79\) Recognizing the suspect nature of interpretation, postmodernism is suspicious of any interpretation of reality that claims to be absolute, objective or rationally true. Thus, the stories about reality told by modern rationalism, scientific

\(^{78}\) During the institutionalization of Pentecostalism, from around 1920 onwards, the establishment of churches and of pastoral leadership was slow and careful to ensure a “biblically based” mandate for leadership amongst a constituency wary of church structures and hierarchical leadership. Despite this, one hundred years on, church structures and hierarchical leadership is normative within Pentecostalism and in the contemporary context quite authoritarian. Joseph McAuley, *Evolutions of Pentecostalism*, paper submitted for course *Movements of the Spirit in World Christianity*, Dr Amos Yong, August 2016, 20.

\(^{79}\) Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?* 65.
naturalism, or sociobiology, which declare themselves demonstrable by reason alone, should be challenged. For the postmodern, scientists themselves are believers and should accordingly own up to the way in which they themselves are people of faith. Likewise, the biblical narrative should be shown to be a matter of faith rather being portrayed as a narrative that can be rationally or scientifically proven. The incredulity directed towards metanarratives is that they do not own up to their mythic ground – all require faith.

Ultimately, this postmodern perspective places all framing stories on a level playing field – all are legitimate. The challenge though, in a pluralistic context, is to find a means to adjudicate between competing stories that offer their own versions of existential reality, morality and the common good. Lesslie Newbigin asked, “How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross?” And then answers, not by suggesting renewed apologetic endeavors, but rather, “The only way to explain the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it. No amount of brilliant argument can make it sound reasonable to the inhabitants of the reigning plausibility structure.” Herein lie both challenges and possibilities for the Pentecostal church in a postmodern context.

---

80 Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?*, 65.
81 Ibid., 69.
82 Ibid.
Church Reconfigured

In *Renovation of the Church*, co-senior pastors of Oak Hills Church, Kent Carlson and Mike Lueken, tell the story of their journey of transition from a seeker-friendly contemporary church to a community focused on spiritual formation. Their central purpose in writing is to highlight that the consumer driven dynamics of a large attractional congregation, widely viewed as successful, can ultimately end up “working against the invitation of Christ to experience his authentic transformation.” In their opinion, the mega-church, bigger-is-better, culture of North America has a limited understanding of the gospel of the kingdom of God and promotes an unhealthy focus on outward success. Though some see “the rise of the megachurch and other external successes as indicators of a robust Christianity on the move,” they “respectfully disagree.”

Oak Hills Church was founded in 1984 and grew slowly. In 1990 however, Carlson attended a Willow Creek Conference and, under the ministry of Pastor Bill Hybels, was inspired to embrace a seeker-friendly model of church. Practically


85 Ibid., 35.

86 Ibid., 25.

87 Ibid., 15.

speaking, this entailed initiating a Saturday night service organized around a professionalized “hour-long theatrical production.” Carlson describes this move as “pragmatic genius” with the focus being “great music, intriguing dramatic sketches, engaging testimonies and sermons that – as it often said in [their] brochures and periodic community postcards – wouldn’t put you to sleep.” They adopted the slogan, “Oakland Hills – You’ll Be Surprised!” This Saturday service format was soon replicated in their Sunday services and, over the next ten years, the church grew to an average weekly attendance of 1700 people.

Despite this numerical growth, Carlson writes that “in the midst of the outward success we were experiencing, we had a troubling sense that all the external activity was not entirely beneficial for our spiritual formation. When we had the space in our lives to attend to this, we found ourselves hungering for a life with God that had more substance, more depth, more reality.” This hunger led Carlson and Lueken to authors such as Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, Richard Foster, Eugene Peterson and Dallas Willard. In due course, Lueken attended a two-week Doctor of Ministry class with Willard and came away profoundly unsettled, noting that “the contrast between the transformative power of

89 Carlson and Lueken, Renovation of the Church, 21.
90 Ibid., 21.
91 Ibid., 45.
92 Ibid., 31.
the kingdom of God and the high-pressure, frenetic, crazy-paced life of the entrepreneurial, attractional model of church can hardly be overstated.”

Carlson and Lueken came to the troubling but challenging conclusion that they were exploiting consumer orientated urges in order to bring people to church and that “attracting people to church based on their consumer demands is in direct and irredeemable conflict with inviting people, in Jesus’ words, to lose their lives in order to find them.” The very method of attracting people to church was forming those people in ways contrary to that the way of Christ. This realization gave birth to a deep desire and passionate commitment to walk a path of renovation that would re-orientate Oak Hills Church away from consumerism and towards the Way of Jesus. Carlson and Lueken needed a “new foundation.” For them, Eugene Peterson articulated the heart of the issue:

If Christ is King, everything, quite literally, every thing and every one, has to be re-imagined, re-configured, re-orientated to a way of life that consists in an obedient following of Jesus. This is not easy. It is not accomplished by participating in a prayer meeting or two, or signing up for a seven-step course in discipleship at school or church, or attending an annual prayer breakfast. A total renovation of our imagination, our way of looking at things – what Jesus commanded in his no-nonsense imperative, “Repent!” – is required.

---

94 Ibid., 35.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid., 39.
Over the course of the next ten years, this perspective set Carlson, Lueken and Oak Hills Church on a journey of renovation and re-orientation. Their seeker services became less about performance and production, and were lengthened to allow for extended times of worship and preaching that focused on spiritual formation.\textsuperscript{98} Rather than professionalized church meetings being understood as a key to transformation, congregants were encouraged to spend time in silence and solitude, memorize Scripture and to consider the hurts and scars of the past, opening themselves to God in order to find healing and restoration.\textsuperscript{99} The reaction and response from congregants was immediate. Some felt that the church had lost its groove, was going backwards and was falling apart – numbers declined to an attendance of around 750 per week – a net loss of approximately 1000 people.\textsuperscript{100}

Throughout the renovation and re-orientation journey, Carlson and Lueken learned numerous lessons. There was a recognition that, in communicating the gospel, the means are often understood to be the message – i.e. the large, professional, stage based, entertainment focused, self-help services they were running made it appear that Jesus was merely a positive value addition to one’s life, rather than the one for whom an individual would lay down her or his life.\textsuperscript{101} They also note that non-discipleship Christianity remains normative, whereby people tend to accept Jesus but do not trust him

\textsuperscript{98} Carlson and Lueken, \textit{Renovation of the Church}, 42.

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 43.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 45.

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 56-58.
for much beyond the forgiveness of their sins – character, values, relationships and daily life often remain unaltered.\textsuperscript{102} As well, they perceived a general reluctance from many to see the church as an alternative kind of community in the world. The consumer-focused nature of the contemporary church sought to accommodate and come alongside culture rather than subvert culture. They observed that many Christians seemed to prefer to be a composite of suburban, consumeristic and Christian – blending in, rather than shining like a light or flavoring as salt (Matthew 5:13-16).\textsuperscript{103}

\textbf{Literature Review Summary}

The books represented in this brief literature review raise numerous issues related to a re-imagining of Pentecostalism. Willis’s \textit{The Pentecostal Movement, its Challenges and Potential} helps to illustrate the defining markers of Pentecostalism that will be discussed in greater detail. MacArthur’s \textit{Strange Fire}, though conducting an unbalanced negative critique, nevertheless highlights some of the extremes of Pentecostalism that may need to be addressed in a re-imagining. Gordon Smith’s \textit{Evangelical, Sacramental and Pentecostal} offers a basic encouragement for the work of re-imagining and the integration of different Christian traditions, and James K.A, Smith’s \textit{Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?} explores aspects of the current socio-historical context conducive to such a re-imagining. Carlson and Lueken’s \textit{Renovation of the Church} provides insights with regard to the necessity and impact of a re-imagining within a local church context.

\textsuperscript{102} Carlson and Lueken, \textit{Renovation of the Church}, 58.

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 142.
CHAPTER 3
PENTECOSTALISM RE-IMAGINED – PART A

Reconfiguring Pentecostalism

A re-imagining of Pentecostalism need not be seen as a rejection of Pentecostalism but rather a reconfiguration. The intent of this chapter is to reflect theologially on each of Pentecostalism’s six defining markers with reference made to possible fruits as well as negative consequences embedded within each.¹ Suggestions relating to a re-imagining of each marker will then be offered in an attempt to explore alternatives to contemporary Pentecostalism as the popular and assumed model of Pentecostalism today.

The term re-imagining is used as an invitation to consider a reconfiguration of Pentecostalism in partnership with the Holy Spirit – it need not be a process that is perceived as little more than human initiated brainstorming or strategic planning.²

¹ See appendix B – Fruit and Consequences in John 6 for a further discussion of fruit and consequences.

² This comment is not intended to promote an unnecessary dualism that would see strategic planning as a human enterprise in which the Holy Spirit is necessarily absent, far from it, rather it is made
Graham Buxton proposes the use of one’s imagination in relation to the elements of human faith that elude human comprehension, inviting the individual to engage in “a mode of seeing that has to do with the imagination and implies paying attention to ‘what is’ in a way that takes us beyond observation and into participation.” He goes on to explain that being imaginative does not come easily to everyone, “to those who are locked into an ‘either-or’ paradigm. But imagination – which is one of God’s great gifts to humanity – enables us to experience realities which cannot be accessed through either reason of logic.”

Further to Buxton’s perspectives on the imagination, Amos Yong advocates for the development of pneumatic imagination given that “the Holy Spirit is the divine mind that illuminates the rationality of the world to human minds,” also noting that the imagination is pneumatological in terms of its being illuminated by one’s experiences of the Spirit while simultaneously serving to illuminate these experiences.

With these two perspectives in mind, it is hoped that the re-imagining of Pentecostalism for which this paper advocates would be a pneumatological process that is enlightened by the Holy Spirit. It is also hoped that this re-imagining would take us beyond what is normative within Pentecostalism and into a process of participatory experimentation with praxes traditionally belonging to other Christian traditions with the in order to specifically encourage an and/both perspective – it seemed good to us and the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28).


4 Ibid., 65.

illuminating light of the Holy Spirit guiding in that process. The intent is to resist either-or dichotomies and explore the genius of both-and.

While engaging in a re-imagining of Pentecostalism, it is important to be mindful of the way in which the six defining markers of Pentecostalism are coalescent in nature. While none of the six defining markers explored are exclusive to Pentecostalism in and of themselves, what is unique to Pentecostalism is the way each marker shapes and is shaped by the others, and how they coalesce as Pentecostalism. An adjustment or re-imagining of one marker will affect the other markers and the nature of Pentecostalism as a whole.

**Theological Simplicity**

The first defining marker of Pentecostalism to be examined and re-imagined is theological simplicity. From its beginning, Pentecostalism has been characterized by simplistic approaches to theology. With the experience of Spirit baptism being a phenomenon poured out on all flesh – educated or otherwise – from the outset theological training was deemed unnecessary. In fact, early Pentecostal leaders Charles Parham and William Seymour both considered theological training to be a distraction more likely to quench the Holy Spirit and effective Christian witness than to aid a person in ministry. Parham, who received no formal religious or theological training, considered the established creeds of traditional Christianity to be “nothing but the sawdust of men’s opinions.”

without any warped preconceptions had helped him “weather the theological gales that had driven so many into error.”

For Seymour, and the other leaders of the Azusa Street revival, theology was considered suspect – “a potential block to the free flow of Pentecostal faith” and “something to be overcome rather than embraced.”

For Pentecostal pastors who did engage in a form of theological training, biblical interpretation tended to be a straightforward process of literalism. Scripture passages and verses with similar themes or the same word would be grouped together. “The texts would [then] be assembled and harmonized to produce easily understood propositions. The good student learned the supporting texts and was able, for instance, to fit a doctrine of baptism with other doctrines, assembled in the same way, such as those concerning the work of Christ or the nature of the church.”

In this sense Pentecostal pastors have tended to be ministers deeply embedded in the biblical text, though not necessarily participants in a solid hermeneutical practice.

The Fruit and Consequences of Theological Simplicity

Over the years theological simplicity has proven to be a fruitful characteristic in the development of Pentecostalism as an accessible, experiential and pragmatic form of faith and spirituality rather than a systematized form of theological reflection only accessible to educated intellectuals. The theological simplicity of Pentecostal spirituality

---

8 Ibid., 66.
has emphasized a straightforward faith that is focused on Jesus as Lord and Savior, sanctifier, healer, soon coming King, and as the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit and empowers a person to live the Christian life. At its simplest, Pentecostalism presents a faith to which a person can entrust her or his life and then adhere to with a basic belief that God is for the individual (Romans 8:31), that the God who is in the individual is greater than the one that is in the world (1 John 4:4), that the Holy Spirit will teach and guide the individual in all things (John 14:26), and that a childlike approach is a requirement of faith in God (Matthew 18:3). These tenets are combined with a belief that Jesus is God’s Son, sent to save the world and serve as the entry point to salvation and the kingdom of God (John 3:16). Thus, generally speaking, the colloquial phrase, “the Bible says it, I believe it, and that settles it,” is a relevant summation of Pentecostal spirituality, with many adherents reluctant to complicate matters further than that. As Michael Frost points out, simplistic and experiential spirituality has pervaded “all aspects of Pentecostalism including worship, prayer, preaching and reading of Scripture; all are moments to encounter God in a personal and transformative way.”

While this simplified perspective on theology has allowed Pentecostalism to evolve as an accessible form of Christian spirituality, it is not without negative consequences. Over the last one hundred years, Pentecostalism has exhibited a tendency to be side-tracked by unorthodox and fringe perspectives on faith and practice across a multiplicity of issues, such as the Later Rain Movement (kingdom now and

---

10 Frost, Pentecostal Theology of Social Engagement, 22.
dominionism), Word of Faith (prosperity, health and wealth), and the Shepherding Movement (being under authority and under a covering).”

A more theologically developed perspective would have placed Pentecostals in a position better suited to discern the life-giving work of the Spirit and steer away from unorthodox or outlandish practices and perspectives. A deeper commitment to systematic theological training could have helped Pentecostal pastors to more firmly hold onto the trustworthy message of the gospel as it has been taught (in Scripture), so that they might encourage others with sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it (Titus 1:9), rather than being blown around by every new wind of doctrine (Ephesians 4:14). In terms of a re-imagined Pentecostalism, the suggestion of this paper regarding theological simplicity is two-fold: that pastors embrace their vocation as being primarily theological in nature, and that congregants are encouraged to embrace a “slow-Bible” reading methodology in their personal devotions.

A Theological Vocation

In a re-imagined form of Pentecostalism, it is essential that pastors no longer view theology with suspicion or as a sideline aspect of pastoral ministry. As Kevin H. Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan point out in The Pastor as Public Theologian, theology is, at its simplest, “to speak about Jesus Christ.”

Or, alternatively, as Stanley J. Grenz and

---

11 Robby McAlpine, Post-Charismatic 2.0: Rekindle the Smoldering Wick, (Canada: Robby McAlpine, 2013), 22.

Roger E. Olson states in *Who Needs Theology?*, theology is any kind of thinking, reflecting or contemplating in relation to God.\(^\text{13}\) In both cases, these definitions align with the assertion that theological reflection sits at the heart of pastoral ministry. As those who speak of God, Pentecostal pastors must embrace the fact that, like it or not, they are theologians – full-time theologians in many instances. Given the preaching, teaching, leading, pastoral care, and leadership of church communities that pastors undertake in the light of the biblical witness, theology is the primary activity in which they engage. Acknowledged or not, at every turn, pastors are the architects of an ongoing conversation about God – whether or not God is mentioned and whether they see church as an institution to be managed or a community to be cared for. Ultimately, the question is not whether pastors are theologians, but rather whether or not they are competent in that role.

**Illustration 2:** Spectrum of theological reflection.\(^\text{14}\)

Grenz and Olson argue for a spectrum of theological reflection (Illustration 2) that ranges from folk theology at one end through to academic theology at the other. In


defining folk theology, they describe “a kind of theology that rejects critical reflection and enthusiastically embraces simplistic acceptance of an informal tradition of beliefs and practices composed mainly of clichés and legends.”\textsuperscript{15} It would be a step too far to reduce Pentecostal theology to clichés and legends, but Grenz and Olson also define folk theology as “intensely experiential and pragmatic – that is, the criteria of true belief are feelings and results.”\textsuperscript{16} These latter characteristics are often true of Pentecostalism and highlight the danger of theological simplicity producing a form of “folk religion relegated to the realms of sheer subjectivity and emptied of pubic credibility, unless lay Christians and ministers can catch the vision for an intellectually satisfying Christian belief system.”\textsuperscript{17}

This is a challenge that contemporary Pentecostal pastors should carefully consider. If not a folk religion per se, contemporary Pentecostalism runs the risk of becoming a pseudo-religion focused on self-help, pop-psychology and promises of prosperity, rather than being centered on the historical Christian faith and the costly discipleship that comes with taking up one’s cross and following Jesus. As Vanhoozer and Strachan put it, pastors are all too often “exchanging their vocational birthright for a bowl of lentil stew (Genesis 25:29-34, Hebrews 12:16): management skills, strategic plans, leadership courses, therapeutic techniques, and so forth.” Rather, pastors should

\textsuperscript{15} Grenz and Olsen, \textit{Who Needs Theology?}, 27.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 10.
embrace their call (or vocational birthright) as public theologians – those who open up
the Scriptures to help people understand God, the world and the human condition in a
manner that causes the hearts of congregants to “burn within” (Luke 24:32).\(^\text{18}\)

A re-imagined Pentecostalism would focus on the need for pastors to cultivate the
theological nous necessary to preach and teach the grand-narrative of Scripture in a
manner that is not only energizing and engaging, but which also carries the kind of
theological acumen that brings the truth of the text alive to the contextual realities of life.
This perspective should be appreciated as a necessity born out of a desire to be faithful to
the Bible as God’s Word, and out of respect for those who gather as the Body of Christ
desiring to live in a manner faithful to the way, the truth and the life of Christ among the
complexities of twenty-first century life.

Practically speaking, and appreciating that theology is not an optional extra (like
leather trim) but rather a standard operating feature (like a steering wheel) of the
pastorate,\(^\text{19}\) in a re-imagining of theological simplicity it is vital that pastors intentionally
engage with theology. In the first instance, this re-imagining is not likely to result in
Pentecostal pastors enrolling en masse for formal theological study. Smaller steps are
first required. Among denominational leaders, a paradigm shift could begin with the
consideration of appropriate theologians, not just mega-church pastors, to be guest
speakers at national and regional conferences. At a pastorate level, pastors should be
encouraged to read works of theology – general works as well as works focusing on

\(^{18}\) Vanhoozer and Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian*, 1.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 27.
particular issues. Pastors should develop a library of commentaries and implement a due
diligence process to ensure that any Scripture used in sermons has been considered
contextually as a part of faithful preparation. This methodology may feel uncomfortable
at first, but the practice can be learned. Historically, pastors were scholar saints –
ministers who were “as comfortable with books and learning as with the aches of the
soul.”20 With a re-imagining, over time, and with consideration given to structured or
formal training, Pentecostal pastors would move across Grenz and Olson’s theological
spectrum from the realms of folk theology, through lay theology and into their calling as
ministerial theologians with a working knowledge of biblical languages, the history of
theological development, and the ability to navigate lexicons, journals and in-depth
biblical commentaries.

Slow-Bible

Just as pastors need to move beyond theological simplicity, so too Pentecostal
congregants. Thus, in contrast to the Bible-in-a-year reading programs that are popular
among many people, a re-imagining of theological simplicity would encourage a “slow-
Bible” movement. This concept takes its cues from the slow-food movement, a counter
response to the modern phenomenon of fast-food. The movement favors healthy eating
through regional, seasonal, sustainable and nutritional produce cooked at home, over and
against microwave meals, takeaways and mass-produced processed foods.

In a similar manner, a slow-Bible movement seeks to contrast the speed reading processes inherent in Bible-in-a-year programs with a slower process of engagement. In part this approach recognizes that the Bible is a collection of ancient manuscripts written in foreign languages and various historical contexts far removed from our own, so is not best understood via a fast and individualized reading process. It also recognizes how easily personal Bible reading can turn into a regimented tick-box routine rather than a genuine learning process and an encounter with God in the text. Within a reading community, a slow-Bible approach has the potential to invite the individual reader into a deeper understanding of the text in context and its implications for twenty-first century Christ followers.

A slow-Bible reading community would include four specific elements: (1) the biblical text as God’s Word; (2) the invited presence and aid of the Holy Spirit; (3) a cohort of readers (between two and six people); and (4) a recognized expert who provides a commentary on the text and a deeper understanding to the reading community. In most cases the recognized expert would be present via their writings, i.e. a published commentary. The type of commentary selected for a slow-Bible reading community would be tailored to the needs and theological reading level of the cohort.21 The reading community would individually read the biblical text and appropriate commentary, then

---

gather on a weekly or fortnightly basis for group discussion. Clearly this methodology makes the Bible-in-a-year approach untenable. A deeper and more considered reading of two to three books of the Bible each year is a more realistic and fruitful goal.\textsuperscript{22} Over time, participants would become proficient lay theologians with a depth of theological understanding that can be a genuine blessing to themselves and others in the journey of following Jesus.

Reason with Respect

The Apostle Peter, writing to Christians scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, encourages them to revere Christ as Lord and to be prepared to explain the reason for the hope they have, doing so with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). The implication of this directive is that Christians would view requests to explain their hope as seriously as they would the requirement to answer formal charges in a court of law.\textsuperscript{23} Theological simplicity can neglect reasoned explanations of faith and disrespect the inquirer by failing to provide a well-considered explanation. It is remiss of pastors to by-pass theological training when congregants in similar professional roles of responsibility have completed years of formal training in relation to their vocations. While this is not to suggest that pastors without theological training need to immediately resign their roles and enter into full-time seminary study, it

---

\textsuperscript{22} Between ten and fifteen books of the Bible would be covered every five years, and the whole Bible in approximately twenty to thirty years.

is vital that Pentecostalism be re-imagined and enacted in a way that moves towards a greater degree of theological competency.

**Pragmatic Methodologies**

A reconfiguration of theological simplicity, with pastors embracing theology as the central practice of their vocation, will naturally influence each of Pentecostalism’s other defining markers; nevertheless a conscious re-imagining of each marker is still required. As a result-orientated form of Christian spirituality, Pentecostalism’s tendency towards pragmatic methodologies needs to be critiqued. While theological simplicity focuses on the accessibility of Pentecostal faith, pragmatic methodologies focus on the usefulness and effectiveness of this faith as practiced. Pentecostals are committed to ensuring a practical workability results from their beliefs, worship, programs, events, preaching and spiritual disciplines. These aspects of church life should result in people being saved, God being exalted, the presence of the Holy Spirit being experienced, and lives being transformed. Ultimately, there is a double consciousness at work: an ecstatic expectation and experience of otherworldly power fused to everyday practicality.\(^{24}\) Pentecostals are committed to a faith that can be experienced supernaturally while also being effective in cultivating an “over-coming” life.\(^{25}\) This teleological juxtaposition is a key factor in the evolution of Pentecostalism over the years.

\(^{24}\) Willis, *The Pentecostal Movement, its Challenges and Potential*, 22.

\(^{25}\) This will be discussed further in Chapter 4’s exploration of Pneumatic Expectation.
The Fruit and Consequences of Pragmatic Methodologies

Over the years, the pragmatism inherent in Pentecostalism has allowed the movement to contextualize and morph in step with ever-evolving circumstances. In an attempt to be “as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves” and to “become all things to all people that by all means possible we might win some” (Matthew 10:19, 1 Corinthians 9:22), pragmatism has set the sails and charted the course for the Pentecostal church. During the charismatic renewal of the 1970s, one Australian Assemblies of God church re-branded itself as the “Charismatic Renewal Center” and thereby attracted large numbers of mainline Christians who were looking to experience more of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, Pentecostal pragmatism can be seen in the ever-evolving nature of Pentecostal worship – a shift that is sometimes referred to as the “musification” of Pentecostalism.26

In Australasia, and now globally, Hillsong Music is a prime example of this contemporary mode of worship, with various styles and genres existing under the Hillsong label. This musification has fostered a continuing pursuit of professionalism within Pentecostalism and has generated a look and feel within contemporary worship services more reminiscent of stadium concerts than traditional congregational settings. In many churches, the cumulative result is the Sunday gathering as a stage-based event, with platform ministry largely reserved as the domain of charismatic pastors, dynamic guest speakers and highly skilled and accomplished musicians.27

26 Amos Yong, “Movements of the Spirit in World Christianity,” lecture, (Fuller Theological Seminary, 2016).

27 In some churches, including some known to the author of this paper, this has even meant imposing an age restriction on who can be involved in platform ministry. A desire to keep worship trendy and engaging has excluded those over forty from taking a lead role on the stage.
In this manner, Pentecostalism’s leaning towards pragmatic methodologies has been fruitful in contextualizing the church across a variety of cultures and in fostering programs intended to meet felt needs in the lives of congregants. As Graham Buxton rightly notes in *Dancing in the Dark*, “pragmatism has value precisely because it invites us to think clearly about practical consequences.”28 Aware of this, contemporary Pentecostalism has excelled in tailoring church towards congregants who desire a polished experience of church experience that is produced with excellence, is state-of-the-art and feels like a trendy “third place” in which to congregate.29 However there are negative consequences to an over-emphasis on pragmatism which also need to be considered. Some of these will now be examined – in particular, a misguided belief that bigger is better, and the potential for the church to become a McDonaldized organization rather than a unique community of people.

**Bigger Is Not Better**

The Pentecostal infatuation with the idea that “bigger is better” has already been addressed in the introduction of this paper, with the suggestion made that the contemporary Pentecostal mega-church model is not necessarily appropriate to the provincial towns and small cities of New Zealand. However, a further illustrative

---


29 Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, (New York: Marlowe and Company, 1997). Third places are a social necessity and anchors for community life. They are gathering spaces that facilitate and foster broader, more creative interaction, with one’s “first place” being home and “second place” being work.
comment, as it relates to pragmatism, is warranted. The annual pastors’ conferences of movements such as the Assemblies of God in New Zealand are generally perceived as an opportunity to provide encouragement to delegates who attend. Host churches (either one large church or a collaboration of smaller churches) see these conferences as an opportunity to rally volunteers, develop teams and work hard to provide (among other things) a worship experience of excellence. Inevitably, the chosen model imitates the worship methodology of the contemporary mega-church. This professionalized mega-church-style worship is used in pursuit of a particular end: the blessing, strengthening and inspiring of local church pastors.  

The initial conference experience, and feedback from delegates, will seem to point towards a successful outcome in this regard. Pastors appear to be reinvigorated and encouraged across the board. However, the possibility that negative consequences will develop when a pastor returns to his or her local church is very real.

70 percent of New Zealand Assemblies of God pastors will return to churches with less than 110 attendees, and a third of these will have less than sixty. Though these pastors may have felt personally inspired while attending the conference, the ability to replicate the worship methodology that was modeled at the event is limited in their local church. Rather than being inspired, the net result can be a sense of deflation; worship in their own church never quite seems to live up to the supposed ideal model of the

---

30 And perhaps the personal satisfaction of host church(es) in pulling off that which is supposedly the ideal model of worship in a contemporary context.

31 Pentecostal Perspectives 2017 survey.
contemporary mega-church. Here Pentecostal pragmatism, with its assumption that bigger is better and the only possible option, proves to be counter-productive.

It need not be this way. Even at a conference with thousands of delegates, there is no reason why authentic, God-honoring and competent worship cannot be modeled and experienced in a manner that is replicable in small churches. For example, two able singers with acoustic guitars, supported by a single cajón-style box drum could lead worship admirably. Likewise, twelve to fourteen singers around a piano could do a wonderful job. Even though these scenarios may be different to what, over the years, conference delegates have come to expect, or sub-consciously perceive to be the ultimate model of worship in our twenty-first century context, this kind of approach has the potential to be a fruitful mode of worship and a realistic model of worship for attendees. A basic level of proficiency need not be compromised and, simultaneously, an attainable and realistic model of worship can be offered to churches of all sizes.\footnote{In this conference scenario, it might be ideal to model multiple means by which worship teams can be arranged and worship engaged in. One essential factor would be to avoid having a large professional-style band taking all of the worship slots at the evening or main morning meetings, and therefore avoid implying that alternatives to that model are second-rate options for smaller break-outs or elective sessions.}

The McDonaldization of the Church

Another potentially negative consequence of pragmatism is the way in which this marker tends to push the local church towards an unhealthy process of “McDonaldization”. This term, first coined by sociologist George Ritzer, refers to “the
process by which the principles of the fast food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world.”

Ritzer critiques the way in which organizations search for optimum efficiency in their pursuit of given ends, and examines the rules, regulations, procedures and bureaucratic systems that are fostered by the search for optimization.

Pastor and theologian John Drane explores Ritzer’s concept and four key characteristics inherent to it – efficiency, calculability, predictability and control – in relation to the local church. In his book *The McDonaldization of the Church*, Drane comments that while “some aspects of rationalization are beneficial, the thoroughgoing way in which rationalization has been pursued seems to carry along with it other aspects that are less than satisfying, precisely because they are mechanical, and therefore dehumanizing.” Staff and congregants are too easily seen as resource or cogs in a machine. Herein lies the danger for Pentecostal pragmatism and its methodological approach: the pursuit of efficiency, calculability, predictability and control, while in some respects institutionally beneficial, also exists as a dehumanizing reality within the local church. Rather than organizing around routinization, an alternative framework is required.

---


35 Ibid., 29.
The Liturgical Calendar

Accepting, therefore, that there are negative consequences inherent in a reliance on pragmatic methodologies, an alternative organizing framework would seek to be humanizing rather than dehumanizing and would recognize that following the way of Jesus is not ultimately a path of efficiency, calculability, predictability or control. After all, the call to take up one’s cross and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23), to walk the extra mile (Matthew 5:41), to lay down one’s life (1 John 3:16) and to walk a narrow path (Matthew 7:14) is anything but pragmatic. Celtic spirituality reminds us of this truth in its metaphorical description of the Holy Spirit as *An Geadh Glas* – “the wild goose” – which cannot be tamed or domesticated, and whose honking call is strong, challenging and unnerving.36 C.S. Lewis offers a similar sentiment in his popular fictional work *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in which the lion Aslan serves as a type of Christ. Lewis has one of his main characters, Susan, inquire into the nature of Aslan in her conversation with Mr and Mrs Beaver:

“Ooh!” said Susan, “I’d thought he was a man. Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.” “That you will, dearie, and no mistake,” said Mrs Beaver; “if there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.” “Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy. “Safe?” said Mr Beaver; “don’t you hear what Mrs Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”37


While a re-imagining of Pentecostalism’s tendency towards pragmatic methodologies will not disregard pragmatism altogether, it will seek an organizing principle that is less utilitarian and more of an invitation to walk in step with Jesus – wherever that journey might lead. In this regard, a re-engagement with the Church’s liturgical calendar may offer fresh possibilities for Pentecostalism. Although the predictability and routine of a set liturgical calendar may in itself run the risk of becoming an alternative form of efficiency, predictability, calculability and control, combined with Pentecostalism’s strong sense of pneumatic expectation it should be allowed to instead serve as an anchor point from which congregants are invited into the radical adventure of cruciform living as led by the Holy Spirit.38

While pragmatism may tempt a contemporary Pentecostal church to arrange its own calendar of events with a careful eye towards creating organizational momentum and an excited sense of buy-in from the congregation, the liturgical calendar (based, as it is, on an entirely different set of priorities) tempers this methodology. Before consideration is given to guest speakers, church camps or conferences, the major feasts, fasts and seasons of the liturgical year are given primacy. Each period of the calendar tells the story of Jesus and serves as an invitation to first and foremost walk through the year in step with the life of Christ,39 providing opportunities to consider the theology, gospel

38 This will be discussed further in chapter four’s exploration of Pneumatic Expectation.

39 The calendar begins with Advent and anticipation for the arrival of the Messiah. It then moves through the life and ministry of Jesus with Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and Ordinary Time, before concluding with Christ the King Sunday as a celebration that Christ is, and will be ultimately recognized as, King of kings and Lord of lords.
narrative, work of the Spirit and appropriate responses of Christ followers to each season of Christ’s life. “[The liturgical calendar] proposes, year after year, to immerse us over and over again into the sense and substance of the Christian life until, eventually, we become what we say we are – followers of Jesus all the way to the heart of God.”

It invites participants into the full experience of the life, death and resurrection of Christ – irrespective of convenience or consumer appeal.

Through a re-engagement with the liturgical calendar, contemporary Pentecostalism can find the means to balance pragmatism. Rather than being a dehumanizing process (as is often the case with routinization) this mode of spiritual formation and participation can be seen as an opportunity to experience increasing measures of human flourishing as congregants are invited to contemplate the glory of Christ and to be continually transformed into his likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18). Pragmatic methodologies should give way to the beautiful inconvenience of Christ-shaped living.

**Missional Energy**

From its inception, Pentecostalism has been a movement committed to God’s great commission to go into all the world, making disciples of all nations, preaching the gospel and baptizing people in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Spirit baptism was understood to be God’s empowerment for this mission, with an eschatological view towards a large end-time harvest that would usher in

---

the return of Christ.41 With this telos in mind, Pentecostals have been consistent in their passionate desire to see people saved. While Pentecostalism is certainly not the only church tradition with a passion to see the gospel of Jesus spread throughout the earth, missional energy nevertheless serves as a defining marker of Pentecostalism – it has been an admirable quality within Pentecostalism for more than a century and one of the movement’s greatest strengths.

The Fruit and Consequences of Missional Energy

The fruitful outcomes of missional energy within Pentecostalism are evidenced in the movement’s growth over the last one hundred years. From its humble beginnings at the turn of the nineteenth century, it has grown into a global movement with more than 500 million adherents around the world.42 Throughout the various stages of its evolution, Pentecostalism has remained passionate in its mission focus as an evangelistic movement empowered by the Holy Spirit to extend God’s kingdom to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). In light of these outcomes, it may seem disingenuous to critique Pentecostalism’s obvious missional energy. However, one must acknowledge that the current growth of Pentecostalism is a phenomenon largely unfolding in Asia, Africa and Latin America,43 and that the desire of this paper is to consider a re-imagining of


42 Amos Yong, The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 19.

43 Ibid., 19.
Pentecostalism primarily as it relates to contemporary Pentecostalism in Western contexts – specifically New Zealand.

In New Zealand, a large contemporary Pentecostal mega-church (over 2000 members) recently celebrated “more than twenty-thousand decisions for Christ” since its establishment. In a similar vein, a more recent church plant (with just over one hundred members) has publicly spoken of seeing “over 800 people saved” since the church was launched. These assertions invite a certain level of critique. The significant discrepancy between the numerical size of each church versus the number of recorded salvations may indicate a disparity between responses to salvation altar calls and what it means to become a new creation in Christ Jesus. It is too simplistic to equate an altar call response with salvation (though one does not want to entirely dismiss this process).

It appears that, at times, theological simplicity fused with pragmatism and missional energy creates a context in which contemporary Pentecostalism can be found guilty of an overemphasis on immediate evangelistic results in a way that ignores longer-term consequences. Altar calls, during which congregants are invited to receive salvation, are often an example of this short-term focus – especially when they are used as an addendum to sermons that are not necessarily exploring the nature of the gospel. While this methodology allows churches to celebrate and tally decisions made for Christ, it is unclear whether a respondent has made a genuine and informed decision of faith and repentance. When a truncated gospel message is offered to congregants, in a manner that seeks immediate response, this message tends to skew in one of two directions: either

44 Both statements were made by the respective churches on their social media platforms.
towards an over-emphasis on some form of abundant and prosperous living or, alternatively, towards a fear-based call to avoid dire consequence in the after-life. Neither extreme serves as a clear invitation into the way, truth and life of Christ as a new mode of being in the world. Despite what may appear to be immediate success in terms of the numbers of people who respond, there is a real potential for more negative consequences to arise.

For some who respond, an intentional discipleship process will help them make sense of the gospel despite an initially distorted understanding, and perhaps one could declare that no harm has been done. Others, however, will move away from the Christian faith feeling that it was something they explored that wasn’t ultimately for them, or that it did not deliver on what they perceived to have been promised. It is possible, though, that the real reason for disenchantment or disappointment is that the gospel and the life-giving way of Jesus was never accurately presented nor clearly grasped. Tragically, these respondents may now have become inoculated to the gospel. Others may continue in a faith that is either fear-based or perceived to be some sort of life-upgrade, leading to a strong potential for an existential crisis later in their journey.45 A re-imagining of missional energy is therefore required.

________________________

45 Though this should ultimately be understood as a theological crisis resulting from poor theological understanding at the outset of their Christian journey.
Faith as Allegiance

In his book *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*, Matthew Bates explores the idea that we are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). He is careful, however, to ensure that faith is understood as more than just a sense of believing. Instead, he argues for an understanding of faith that is closely aligned to the concept of allegiance. In this sense, faith (pistis) is a matter of allegiance to Christ as king, and is a multi-faceted reality that includes “intellectual agreement with the gospel, declared allegiance, and embodied loyalty.” In other words, there is a gospel story to be declared, understood and believed in, which is a matter of intellectual assent; there is a way of living in the world as a response to the gospel story, which entails embodied fidelity to the King and the kingdom; and there is the act of committing our lives to the King at the center of the gospel story, which involves existential trust. To live in faith, therefore, is to fulfill the greatest commandment as declared by Jesus in Luke 10:27: “Love the Lord with all your heart and soul [existential trust], your mind [intellectual ascent], and strength [embodied fidelity].” Biblical faith should be understood as the full integration of these three concepts.

This multifaceted understanding of faith is highlighted by James when he writes that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:17) or, to use the current phraseology of this paper: an existential trust in Jesus that does not also bring about an embodied fidelity to

---


47 Ibid., 77-84.

48 Ibid., 188.
the way of Jesus is not faith at all. Existential trust will also compel an individual to entrust her or his life to the way of Jesus as a lived expression of faith. Similarly, though, it is not possible to have existential trust without having embraced some degree of intellectual assent in relation to the gospel. As the Apostle Paul asks rhetorically; how can a person call on the name of the Lord and believe in Jesus if he or she has not heard of Jesus? (Romans 10:14). The gospel narrative of Jesus Christ must be told in order that belief might follow.

While churches work in different ways to bring congregants into an understanding and appreciation of these three elements of faith, contemporary Pentecostalism’s great strength seems to be the ability to bring people into a moment of existential trust where the individual’s heart is “strangely stirred” (Luke 24:32), causing him or her to say “yes” to Jesus. At their best, the attractional methodologies, the invitational commitment of congregants who bring un-churched friends to various church meetings, the professional and moving fervor of those on the stage, and, of course, the drawing love and presence of the Holy Spirit combine to result in moments when individuals are stirred towards an affirmative response to the salvation altar call.49 As already mentioned, however, even in deeply genuine moments of saying yes, respondents do not always have a full awareness of what they are saying yes to. Utilizing the same metaphors Jesus used, the soil of their lives could be better prepared with a more detailed explanation of the gospel story and its call to embodied fidelity. This approach has the potential to reduce the risk of the seed of

49 Some, such as John MacArthur, would likely see this as emotionalism and manipulation, but on the basis of firsthand experience of many Pentecostal church meetings, it is the perspective of the author of this paper that this kind of dismissiveness is unwarranted. The Holy Spirit seems to be present in very human endeavors.
the gospel falling on rocky and thorny ground (Luke 8:4-15). Thus, while the ability to create moments in which people are stirred towards an existential trust in Jesus is a strength of Pentecostalism, an appreciation of the larger story of the gospel to which one gives intellectual assent, and to the realities of what embodied fidelity might entail, is required. Here is where a re-imagining of missional energy could prove particularly fruitful for Pentecostalism.

The Gospel Story and Intellectual Assent

In explaining the gospel of Jesus, it is critical to note that the good news is far more than a truncated proposition regarding the death of Jesus with accompanying atonement metaphor and a particular prayer that guarantees salvation. The early Christians understood the gospel to be the story of Jesus as articulated in Matthew, Mark, Luke-Acts and John, and even then, not a story in isolation but one that continues the narrative of Israel.\(^50\) As N.T. Wright highlights, “the gospel is the story of Jesus of Nazareth told as the climax of the long story of Israel, which in turn is the story of how the one true God is rescuing the world.”\(^51\) While traditional Pentecostalism’s fourfold understanding of the gospel (Jesus as savior, sanctifier, healer and soon-coming king) is preferable to contemporary Pentecostalism’s tendency to offer the gospel as a sermon afterword, even this understanding needs to be expanded and contextualized.\(^52\) To declare

---

\(^50\) N.T. Wright in the foreword of Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel; the Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 12

\(^51\) McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*, 12.

\(^52\) Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*, 22.
Jesus as savior, sanctifier and healer presupposes an understanding of what humanity is being saved from and of the ways in which humanity is sick and in need of healing and sanctification. An existing understanding of how the gospel addresses these kinds of issues cannot be taken for granted in a twenty-first century context.

To announce and declare the good news of Jesus accurately, it must be contextualized within Scripture as a grand narrative, with the life and euangelion of Jesus at the center. This bigger story begins with creation and ends in consummation. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to retell the gospel narrative in full here, a re-imagined Pentecostalism will commit to this process. Given that it is not usually possible to convey the entire grand narrative of Scripture, with all its subplots and nuances, in one telling, a subtle but significant shift in relation to salvation altar calls will be required. Rather than calling people into salvation, such an invitation should be focused on calling people into an intentional journey of discovery that provides opportunities for an unfolding exploration of the way, the truth and the life of Christ. This will create a context in which to explore intellectual assent, embodied fidelity and existential trust in Christ as king – giving due consideration to all three facets of Christian faith.

---


54 See appendix C – A Gospel Narrative.
The Way of Jesus and Embodied Fidelity

A re-imagining of missional energy within Pentecostalism will not only require a fresh exploration of the gospel story, it will also involve a renewed effort to consider the nature of embodied fidelity in the context of everyday life. Of central interest will be a fresh appreciation of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), as well as the Apostle James’s call to faithful works (James 2:14-26). James invites Christians into the faithful living that Jesus described in the Sermon on the Mount.55 This is a perspective that was also shared by the patristic fathers who understood the Sermon on the Mount to be “paradigmatic and foundational to understanding Christianity itself, coming as it does as the first teaching in the First Gospel, in the fourfold Gospel book that served as the primary focus of understanding of the faith.”56 While the scope of the sermon is broad, the heart of it is a call to cruciform (cross shaped) living57 – a concept to be further explored in this paper’s forthcoming discussion of pneumatic expectation.


Pneumatic Expectation

While Pentecostalism’s missional energy reveals a gospel-focused evangelistic thrust, the movement is most famously known for its focus on the Holy Spirit. James K. A. Smith describes pneumatic expectation as “a position of radical openness to God, an openness to the continuing (and sometimes surprising) operations of the Spirit in the church and the world, and the continued ministry of the Spirit in our lives.” While this should certainly be understood as an openness to the charismatic gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12) and speaking in tongues (Acts 2:4), the Pentecostal perspective also includes a generalized expectation in regard to the knowability of God and God’s supernatural movement in the individual’s life. In this sense, Pentecostalism’s focus is not on well-articulated doctrines but actual interactive experiences of the divine. As Clarke Pinnock points out, “knowing the Spirit is experiential, and the topic is orientated

---

towards transformation more than information.” Pneumatic expectation appreciates that, as the Apostle Paul puts it, the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power (1 Corinthians 4:20) – specifically, the power of the Holy Spirit to transform lives.\(^2\) Pentecostalism thus champions an awareness of the Holy Spirit that is both supernatural and commonplace in the life of the believer. God must be reckoned with in direct encounter.\(^4\) The accessibility of God is seen as part-and-parcel of the empowerment of Spirit baptism and includes God’s enabling in relation to sanctification, mission, spiritual gifts and guidance – all of which result in an overcoming life.

The Fruit and Consequences of Pneumatic Expectation

In terms of fruitfulness, pneumatic expectation engenders a passion and belief within Pentecostalism that the supernatural encounters described in the Bible have the potential to be experienced and lived out in the lives of believers today. Pentecostals give full credence to the words of Jesus when he says that whoever believes in him will do his works and even greater things (John 14:12). In this way, the movement has long resisted


\(^3\) Though Pentecostals would do well to appreciate the nature of power in this context as referring neither to something manipulative nor miraculous (in the sense of some sort of demonstrative manifestation of the Holy Spirit). Rather, power here derives its meaning in contrast to talk, as “the ability to carry a deed through effectively, and as an issue of efficacy” and of the Holy Spirit to bring about transformation in people’s lives. Anthony C. Thiselton, “The First Epistle to the Corinthians” in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2000), 222 and 376-377.

“the prejudice of Western antisupernaturalist readings of the Gospels and Acts” and instead embraced the biblical witness as normative for all Christians.  

Within Pentecostalism, this perspective has fostered and preserved an appreciation of the mystical aspects of the Christian faith – that one can have a direct experience of God – and has promoted a hunger for God, an openness to experiential faith, and a desire to allow the Holy Spirit to minister in and through the individual’s life.

When it comes to negative consequences stemming from pneumatic expectation, the main issue lies with Pentecostalism’s tendency to promote an exaggerated sense of what is normative in relation to what is – paradoxically – supernatural. This exaggerated expectation fosters experientialism, triumphalism and a prosperity-focused form of spirituality in which God is a supernatural dispenser of blessing and a positive consumer choice.  

Here the theological simplicity inherent in Pentecostalism fails to safeguard pneumatic expectation – it does not equip believers to navigate heartache and loss in situations where they were expecting a miracle but did not receive it, and neglects the possibility of “dark nights of the soul” – seasons in which God seems distant and unknowable.

---


6 Here experientialism is used to denote an over-emphasis on the need to experience various manifestations of the Spirit in one’s life in order to know God and the idea that ongoing manifestations of the Spirit should be the normal everyday experience of a Christ follower.

Consumer Expectation

When pneumatic expectation is not grounded in sound theological reflection, it can all too easily distort into a form of consumer expectation. The now-but-not-yet dynamic of the kingdom of God\(^8\) is overlooked and techniques are offered by various pastors, authors and speakers that supposedly offer the means through which the supernatural work of God might be activated in the individual’s life.\(^9\) Certainly MacArthur pulls no punches in declaring that these kinds of promises make old-fashioned snake-oil sellers appear tame,\(^10\) and that these supposedly sure-fire methods are nothing less than an insult to the true person and work of the Holy Spirit.\(^11\)

The pragmatic nature of Pentecostalism further distorts pneumatic expectation. While pragmatism fosters ideals in relation to the look and feel of a church building, worship, branding and the general ethos of the church, combined with a consumer perspective on the Holy Spirit it also fosters damaging ideologies about how one might know and experience God – in particular, an exaggerated triumphalism which anticipates that God will consistently answer prayers, work miracles, enable individual prosperity and provide regular experiences of intimacy, spiritual awareness and numinosity. In this sense, the Holy Spirit becomes a value-addition to the individual’s life and a utilitarian consumer product. The Latin phrase *incurvatus in se* hints at this tendency in the way it


\(^11\) Ibid., 18.
describes an inward life lived for one’s self rather than outward for God and others. The individual’s life curves in on itself in the same sense that an ingrown toe nail does. Martin Luther expands on this idea in his commentary on the book of Romans when he writes, “Our nature, by the corruption of the first sin, is so deeply curved in on itself that it not only bends the best gifts of God towards itself and enjoys them, even using God himself in order to attain these gifts, but it also fails to realize that it so wickedly, curvedly, and viciously seeks all things, even God, for its own sake.”

The Fat, Son and Holy Spirit become a consumer product to be experienced in spectacular ways, but ultimately, for personal self-gratification.

Cruciform Living

Regarding the primary role of the Holy Spirit, John’s gospel offers a clear description of the Spirit as the one who comes to exalt Christ. Jesus declares that the Holy Spirit will speak of him when the Spirit comes (John 15:26), and will guide people into all truth – namely, the truth Jesus lived, preached and embodied on the cross (John 16:12-15):

12“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.”

---

Thus, as John Michael Ramsey notes, the primary role of the Holy Spirit is to point people towards Jesus with, “all truth [being] Jesus’ truth, or the truth about Jesus – the only truth that matters.”

MacArthur makes a similar point, commenting that “the focus of [the Holy Spirit’s] ministry is the Lord Jesus, and those who are Spirit-led and Spirit-filled will likewise be Christ-centered.

In describing a Christ-centered life, Michael Gorman notes the Apostle Paul’s emphasis on Christ crucified as the centerpiece of the gospel narrative: “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ – that is, Jesus Christ crucified.” (1 Corinthians 2:2). Gorman uses the term “cruciformity” to describe the central call for Christians to live a life of conformity to the crucified Christ. This call is made by the Apostle Paul with his mission in life being to “order the lives of Christian congregations by pulling everything into the tremendous gravitational field of the cross.” The call to cruciformity first originates with Jesus himself when he challenges his disciples to deny themselves, take up their crosses and follow him (Matthew 16:24).

In re-imagining Pentecostalism’s pneumatic expectation then, the focus must be on moving away from a perception of the Holy Spirit as a personal value addition or a consumer product. Instead of seeing the Holy Spirit as a source of ever-novel and unique

---


14 MacArthur, Stranger Fire, 181.

15 Gorman, Cruciformity, 4.

16 Ibid., 4-5.

experiences of God (experientialism), ongoing victory in all things (triumphalism) and an abundance of material wealth and possessions (prosperity), the focus will be on the Holy Spirit as the one who empowers believers to live the life of Christ. That is, to live out the faithfulness of Jesus as seen in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11), to embody fidelity to the teachings of Jesus as offered in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-7:29), and to lay down one’s life in co-suffering, self-emptying, forgiving love as modeled in the Passion of Jesus – a cruciform life.

While this call might not appeal to contemporary culture’s infatuation with the exceptional or live up to the level of expectation that some faith-focused ministries promote, it is in keeping with the life and teaching of Jesus. Though Jesus’ ministry was punctuated with miraculous healings and clear evidence of God at work in supernatural ways, he consistently worked to ensure that these events did not become the central focus of his work as Messiah. Throughout the gospel of Mark, Jesus is consistent in his attempts to keep the miraculous on the down-low – a secret that he asks the recipients not to share. Rowan Williams notes this as one of the “most puzzling and most frequently discussed aspects of the Gospel… this book is about proclamation, dedicated to announcing something; yet, again and again, the Jesus of St Mark underlines the need for secrecy.”

For Jesus, the signs, wonders and miracles are not the crux of his ministry nor the thing on which he wishes to base his authority. In Mark 8, Jesus refuses to offer a sign or evidence that he is Messiah: “He sighed deeply and said, ‘Why does this generation ask

---


19 Ibid., 28.
for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it’” (Mark 8:12). Matthew records Jesus’ words even more sternly, noting that it is a “wicked and perverse generation” that asks for a sign (Matthew 16:4).

The axis on which Jesus’ entire life and ministry revolves is the cross. This is the event that defeats sin and death, and ushers in the kingdom of God. It is not some argument that coerces belief and clinches all arguments – rather, it will often be perceived as foolish or offensive. It is not a power-play, it is a grand move of subversion. It appears that death has swallowed Christ and that the principalities and powers have won, but instead Jesus has entered into death, destroyed it, and opened the way to new life. Referencing the sign of Jonah, Jesus’ own death, burial and resurrection was the one sign he was prepared to offer as evidence of his role as Messiah (Matthew 12:38-42).

A re-imagined sense of pneumatic expectation need not discount the possibility of supernatural encounters, wondrous miracles and blessing in the individual’s life thanks to the Holy Spirit. It will, however, guard against any ideology that supposes the Holy Spirit to be some sort of means to an end or that aligns with consumerism, personal prosperity or a notion of never-ending victory in life. Instead the Holy Spirit will be appreciated as the third person of the Trinity who comes alongside believers in order to help them face the temptations of self-preservation and self-glorification, to live the alternative way of Jesus in the world, and to learn how they may constantly lay down their lives as faithful image bearers and representatives of God in the world, committed to God’s way of love, even unto death. Not a designer life filled with good feelings, but a cruciform life that honors God in all things.
Ontological Enchantment

Pentecostalism has consistently exhibited an awareness that the nature of our being, indeed of the world we live in, includes but also goes beyond that which can be seen, measured or explained in the language of scientific rationalism. While this perspective of ontological enchantment is not unique to Pentecostalism, it is nevertheless a distinguishing feature. As theologian and scholar Grant Wacker points out, “Pentecostalism has always been a movement focused on this world practicality in relation to other world sensibility.”20 In other words, Pentecostals have consistently attempted to live out a form of Christian spirituality that is in tune with heaven while simultaneously being grounded in the everyday realities of life on earth. That said, Pentecostalism has tended to navigate its sense of ontological enchantment via a dualistic perspective of Spirit and matter, rather than a synthesis of the two; a re-imagining is required.

The Fruit and Consequences and Ontological Enchantment

Fruitful within Pentecostalism’s sense of ontological enchantment is the way in which Pentecostals take seriously the concept of principalities and powers as forces with which to be reckoned. This perspective promotes a commitment to stand firm in faith, a passion for prayer and intercession, and a focus on God’s Word as the ultimate truth in life (Ephesians 6:10-18). Intertwined with pneumatic expectation, ontological enchantment cultivates a faith that stretches beyond human means and lives in

dependence on God’s ability to move sovereignly in an individual’s life. In this regard, Pentecostals rightly appreciate that God is not an ideology but rather the Creator of the universe in whom all things live and move and have their being (Acts 2:17), that Christ sits as the head of all things (Colossians 1:15-16), and that the Spirit of God is indeed a form of empowerment from on high (Luke 24:49). Christians have received the authority to “trample on snakes” and overcome all the power of the enemy (Luke 10:19).

Ontological enchantment opens the door to human participation in the divine ministry of “what God is already doing in Christ in the power of the Spirit” throughout the world.21 However, Pentecostalism is also in many ways ontologically confused. Rather than making an attempt at a synthesis of spirit and matter – the realm of heaven and the realm of earth – Pentecostalism tends to promote dualistic thinking. The visible and the invisible realities of life are thought of as being separate rather than overlapping. As Amos Yong highlights, “Pentecostal spirituality and piety, buttressed by a complex cosmology of spirits, principalities, and powers, has been applied dualistically in naive ways, resulting not only in ‘politically incorrect’ practices, but in theologically heretical ideas and practically dangerous agendas.”22 Yong proposes that Pentecostals would be better served by appreciating principalities and powers not as independent ontological realities but rather as a “perversion of the goodness of the orders of creation.”23 Viewed

21 Buxton, Dancing in the Dark, 14.

22 Yong, In the Days of Caesar, 134.

23 Ibid., 162-163. Here Yong argues that the powers become a reality that is “irreducible to the sum of its constituent parts” and therefore “seemingly personal and intentional in their destructive capacities.” For a more extended discussion on this, see Yong, The Spirit of Creation, 196-225.
in this way, principalities and powers emerge as objective realities that ultimately appear to be more than what they really are.24

This perspective is consistent with that of N.T. Wright who highlights the way in which human sin is an abdication of covenant vocation and a means through which nondivine and nonhuman forces are empowered to inappropriate positions of authority in the world, where they run rampant, spoiling lives and ravaging creation.25 “Some of these ‘forces’ are familiar (money, sex, power). Some are less familiar in the popular mind, not least the sense of a dark, accusing ‘power’ standing behind all the rest.”26 In light of this perspective, a re-imagining of Pentecostalism’s ontological enchantment will aim to promote a sense of sacramental awareness rather than a secular and sacred divide.

Sacramental Awareness

While the establishment of a systematic theology in relation to the ontological nature of creation is beyond the scope of this paper, it should be noted that the re-imagining of theological simplicity which this paper advocates will help mitigate ontological confusion. As pastors embrace the theological primacy of their vocation, they will begin to find the skills and resources necessary to think though questions that relate to a biblically grounded ontology of creation, humanity, principalities and powers. More immediately, this paper would challenge a re-imagined Pentecostalism to think


26 Ibid., 77.
sacramentally rather than in terms of a dualism between the sacred and the secular.

Howard A. Snyder offers a succinct description of his own journey in relation to this issue:

Looking back over a lifetime in church, I have gained new insight into the journey I travelled. It has not been a journey from ‘mater’ to ‘spirit’ – from materiality to spirituality – as I initially imagined. No, it has been a pilgrimage toward the union of matter and spirit, the marriage of heaven and earth – toward an understanding of salvation that includes creation. Spirit and matter are not two different worlds. They are interlaced dimensions of the one world God created in its entirety and intends to redeem, save, liberate, and heal in its entirety.27

Henri Nouwen expands on the idea of interlaced dimensions in light of the incarnation of Christ:

When God took on flesh in Jesus Christ, the uncreated and the created, the eternal and the temporal, the divine and the human, become united. This unity means that all that is mortal now points to the immortal, all this is finite now points to the infinite. In and through Jesus all creation has become like a splendid veil, through which the face of God is revealed to us. This is called the sacramental quality of the created order. All that is is sacred because all that is speaks of God’s redeeming love.28

Given an enhanced perspective of the interlaced reality of spirit and matter, a re-imagined Pentecostalism will seek to appreciate the potential for any aspect of creation to serve as a sacramental sign-post that points to God rather than just being a thing that exists as an object in the world. In this sense, sacramental awareness resists a low symbolic hedge and advocates the need to cultivate the ability to perceive, as Elizabeth


28 It could be argued that the incarnation does not make creation sacramental but ultimately reveals the already sacramental nature of creation, though this is beyond the scope of this paper. Henri Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Publishing, 1997), September 22.
Barrett Browning puts it, that “Earth’s crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God.” Or to view it another way, utilizing the lens of Lewis’s fantastical account of creation in *The Magician’s Nephew*, Aslan’s “song beyond comparison” that called the world into existence is still being sung today and can be heard by any who take the time to listen.

This sacramental awareness is, in part, humanity stepping back into its covenant vocation to take dominion over creation, caring for and stewarding the earth (Genesis 1:26-28). Sacramental awareness refuses to worship creation itself or aspects of creation – be that trees and animals or money and sex – but simultaneously refuses to dismiss the realities of the material world as inconsequential. A reality such as money is not to be worshiped nor placed in a position of lordship where it can mutate into a principality and power, but at the same time, it is not to be dismissed as only a means through which to buy and sell. Properly stewarded, money can function sacramentally. It can serve as a reminder of the truth that all of life’s provision is ultimately God’s provision and an extension of God’s love to us. In the way it is stewarded, it can provide an opportunity to embody the love of God and love for neighbor. In this manner, sacramental awareness provides an invitation to appropriate the work of Jesus on the cross – the disarming of all

---


31 Here sacramental appreciation has the ability to counter prosperity ideology that proposes wealth to be a reflection of God’s favor, as well as any perspective that would suggest a lack of money might suggest one is not loved by God. Sacramentally it serves as a signpost to God’s truth, not to whatever we want it to point to.
principalities and powers (Colossians 2:15) – in one’s own life, as creation is re-ordered as God intends rather than being allowed to function in disorder.

While an atheistic worldview may not tolerate the idea that a deeper meaning is infused into each element of life, a sacramental perspective is more consistent with our actual lived experience. While secularism would like to define a meal as necessary fuel, a sunset as planetary rotation and sex as little more than a biological pleasure, a sacramental awareness imbues each with far more significance. Though as believers we often miss the sacramental nature of things, we become acutely aware of God’s grace at work when we consider the person who may have looked on their last sunset, the person dying of malnutrition, or the person whose spouse has engaged in an affair. In light of this deeper awareness, a sunset is seen as a wonder of God’s creation, a meal is consumed with grace-filled appreciation, and the intimacy of sex is seen as the sacred gift that it is.32

A sacramental appreciation of life opens a person’s eyes to the presence of God in all things and brings to the fore a deep sense of aliveness. The human heart is not only beating with the life of flesh and blood but also with the life of God. One awakens to the animating and sustaining presence of God. A song beyond comparison sings throughout the universe, but it also sings within the individual’s life – the overflowing love, grace, mercy, forgiveness, hope, possibility and presence of God. Appreciating this, Christ followers can begin to live as connoisseurs of life rather than consumers; not as those looking for a good deal, a bargain or an experience, but as those deeply embedded in the

unfolding of a bigger story – of God at work in all things. Rather than resulting in
dualistic thinking or a withdrawal from the world, with sacramental awareness Christ
followers can learn to live in the world, but not be of the world, taking the things of the
world far more seriously that those who consider themselves worldly – knowing that God
is ultimately renewing all things (Revelation 21:5).

New Creation

Sacramental awareness appreciates all of God’s creation as ultimately good,
though corrupt and in need of, and crying out for, restoration (Romans 8:19-20). Though
sensitive to a distinction between that which is material and that which not material,
between that which is visible and that which is invisible, between that which is heavenly
(of the realm, will and way of God) and that which is worldly (of the will and ways of
sinful and corrupt principalities and powers), sacramental awareness will not allow a
dualism to set heaven and earth apart. Instead, it recognizes heaven and earth as God’s
good creation and celebrates God’s desire to bring heaven and earth together as one.
Ultimately, John’s vision in Revelation 21 is of a re-unification and restored heaven and
earth, and of God once again dwelling with humanity.33 Sacramental awareness combined
with a robust, rather than simplistic, process of theological reflection, has the potential to
assist a re-imagined Pentecostalism to better engage in the discernment of spirits, wrestle
with the ontological make-up of humans and deal with theological questions relating to

33 Richard Bauckham, The Theology of the Book of Revelation (New York: Cambridge University
Press, 1993), 129-130.
ecology, creation care and social justice – issues which take on fresh prominence as Christ followers learn to fuse heaven with earth. An enlivened sense of sacramental appreciation will also help cultivate a life orientated toward a healthy materialism (appreciating and stewarding matter over the long-term) rather than an unhealthy consumerism (that seeks pleasure in the brevity of consumption), and will invite Pentecostalism into the all-encompassing mission of God to redeem and restore all things. Instead of salvation being seen as God’s rescue away from creation and into some sort of disembodied eternity, it will be appreciated as God’s loving rescue of all creation in line with God’s promise of resurrection life (1 Corinthians 15:14-28).

**Relational Tribalism**

The final defining marker of Pentecostalism that this project seeks to re-imagine is relational tribalism. Functioning as a protest movement outside of Protestantism, rather than as a subset of Protestantism, from its genesis Pentecostalism has seen itself as a movement separate from the established denominations of church history. Meanwhile, those outside Pentecostalism have tended to view Pentecostal spirituality, and the sensationalism, subjectivism and experientialism inherent to it, with suspicion. In light of this difference and disconnect, Pentecostalism has traditionally functioned as an insular movement interrelating with like-minded cohorts rather than interacting across the ecumenical spectrum, with the result being a type of tribalism.

---


35 See MacArthur, *Strange Fire*.
The Fruit and Consequences of Relational Tribalism

In the early days of Pentecostalism, relational tribalism was enacted via the voluntary association of faith missions and outreach projects – breakaways from established church structures and traditions. In the current contemporary context, tribalism is evidenced in the voluntary association of various leadership networks that associate around shared cultural values, modes of worship and methodologies of church – creating further insular subsets within and across Pentecostal denominational structures. It is not uncommon for pastors and churches to prefer participation in network events run by the mega-church ministries they aspire to become like, rather than gatherings organized by the official denomination or movement to which they belong.

In terms of fruitfulness, the tendency towards relational tribalism served to strengthen Pentecostal conviction and focus as the movement emerged and institutionalized in the first half of the twentieth century. Where other traditions viewed Pentecostalism with suspicion, like-minded cohorts allowed Pentecostalism to develop in its own identity while hedging against contrary voices. In a sense relational tribalism allowed Pentecostalism to find its sense of identity.

It must also be acknowledged, however, that relational tribalism is a strong contributing factor to the negative consequences of each of the other defining markers discussed in this paper. A greater degree of ecumenical association and engagement with the varying perspectives of other Christian traditions in matters of theology and doxology throughout Pentecostalism’s history may have tempered or mitigated these negative outcomes. Foremost among the undesirable characteristics of relational tribalism is a
narrow and even insular perspective on matters of faith and praxis that can lead to both arrogance and ignorance.

Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles

In his essay *Escape the Echo Chamber*, philosopher C. Thi Nguyen suggests two specific ways in which communities wrap themselves within impenetrable networks of intellectual like-mindedness that are ultimately unhealthy: the creation of epistemic bubbles and the creation of echo chambers.³⁶ Nguyen defines epistemic bubbles as “informational network[s] from which relevant voices have been excluded by omission.”³⁷ Within Pentecostalism, relational tribalism fosters an epistemic bubble in which discussions of theology, doxology, ecclesiology, and the like, tend to exclude other relevant and wise voices. Broadly speaking, the theological simplicity inherent in Pentecostalism excludes such conversation partners as the theological academy, evolving historical perspectives of church history and varied ecumenical points of view. More specifically, within the relational networks of contemporary Pentecostalism, there tends to be a singular set of voices guiding conversations pertinent to faith and practice – that of the various mega-church pastors who lead these networks and speak at each other’s conferences, seminars, retreats and events.³⁸

---


³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ This tendency is seen in the work of contemporary Pentecostal pastor Paul de Yong, the pastor of LIFE church in Auckland, New Zealand. His latest book, *God, Money and Me*, includes ten
More insidious than epistemic bubbles, echo chambers are formed when, in addition to relevant voices being disregarded, other conversation partners are actively discredited: “where an epistemic bubble merely omits contrary views, an echo chamber brings its members to actively distrust outsiders.” In their book *Echo Chamber*, Kathleen Jamieson and Joseph Cappella describe an echo chamber as cult-like, with members isolated from outside voices that are labeled as malignant and untrustworthy, with the framework of trust being narrowed to exclusively insider voices. While Pentecostalism has at times given rise to cult-like movements, it is not the intention of this paper to portray contemporary Pentecostalism as a cult. It should be noted however that, given the need for control embedded within pragmatic methodologies, the general lack of deeper reflection that comes with a bent toward theological simplicity and the propensity towards epistemic bubbles found in relational tribalism, Pentecostalism should be aware of the potential of echo chambers developing and the dangers inherent to such chambers. When the perspective of the mega-church pastor begins to function as the voice shaping faith and practice within contemporary Pentecostalism, it is only a matter of endorsements of the book, its aims, perspectives, and conclusions. However, they all come from fellow mega-church pastors who are regular speakers at de Yong’s conferences (and him at theirs). There are no endorsements of support from recognized theologians or economists. See; Paul de Yong, *God, Money and Me*, (Auckland, NZ: Life Resource International, 2017), 3-6.


of time before other voices begin to be disempowered and discredited to the detriment of Pentecostalism.

When this shift to a narrow set of voices occurs, the church ceases to function as a genuine sub-community (an expression of the Kingdom of God) within the wider society. Rather than existing as “a community of peculiar discourse with practices of memory, hope, and pain that keep healthy human life available in the face of all the ‘virtual reality’ now on offer in dominant culture,”\textsuperscript{41} the church runs the risk of becoming a separated sphere of existence with its own dominant culture, set of beliefs and behaviors that members must submit to in order to belong.

In \textit{The Prophetic Imagination}, Walter Brueggemann likens this establishment of a dominant culture requiring submission, to Israel’s movement away from the radically alternate way of being in the world that had been established under Moses and as a return to the pre-Mosaic imperial paradigm, as reinstated under the kings of Israel.\textsuperscript{42} This shift began under David but is more clearly evidenced in the life of Solomon: “the entire program of Solomon now appears to have been a self-serving achievement with the sole purpose being the self-securing of the king and dynasty… a program of state-sponsored syncretism, which if course means the steady abandonment of the radicalness of the Mosaic vision.”\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{41} Walter Brueggemann, \textit{The Prophetic Imagination} (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), xvii.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 24-25.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 23.
Brueggemann refers to this embrace of syncretism as the paganization of Israel, though in the context of a discussion about contemporary Pentecostalism, the metaphor serves to describe the potential for a secularization of the church.\textsuperscript{44} In this instance, the size, reach and affluence of a large contemporary church, the culture and routinization of the church (which congregants are expected to buy into),\textsuperscript{45} and the manner in which senior leaders are seen as God’s elected officials, serve to create a “controlled static religion in which God and his temple have become part of the royal landscape, in which the sovereignty of God is fully subordinated to the purpose of the king.”\textsuperscript{46} The church thus becomes its own empire rather than a subversion of empire and a prophetic sub-community of alternative consciousness.

When the church becomes an empire, the less desirable traits inherent in relational tribalism tend to surface and flourish: theological errancy, ignorance, deception, blind-spots, self-righteousness, over-demanding expectations within the church, defensiveness, divisiveness, and a suspicion of any other opinion of, or expression within, the Body of Christ. All-in-all this amounts to a failure to reflect Christ’s wish in John 17 that his followers would be known by their love for one another. Thus, a re-imagined Pentecostalism needs to be mindful of the paradox that the church is called to difference – to be a peculiar people – at the macro level (i.e. in relation to the empire and the systems of the world) but not to tribalism at the micro level (i.e. within the Body of Christ).

\textsuperscript{44} Brueggemann, \textit{The Prophetic Imagination}, 24.

\textsuperscript{45} See discussion in chapter three, Pragmatic Methodologies, in relation to this.

\textsuperscript{46} Brueggemann, \textit{The Prophetic Imagination}, 28.
The Wonder of God in Languages Not Our Own

Contemporary Pentecostalism would do well to reflect afresh on the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, and specifically the wonder of God declared in the variety of languages that were understood and appreciated by the diverse crowd that gathered (Acts 2:5-11). This passage – which provides much of the impetus for Pentecostalism’s focus on Spirit baptism, speaking in tongues, empowerment for witness and a last-days outpouring of the Holy Spirit – should be considered in relation to the primeval Tower of Babel narrative of Genesis 11.47

In Genesis 11, God acts supernaturally to confuse the unified language shared by the people of Babel, who are attempting to build a “tower that reaches to the heavens, so that [they] might make a name for [themselves]” (Genesis 11:4). As Joel Green explains, “The wickedness of this idolatrous plan is betrayed in the opening of the Babel story, with its reference to ‘one language’ – a metaphor in the ancient Near East for the subjugation and assimilation of conquered peoples by a dominant nation.”48 God disrupts this empire-building project by confusing the language being spoken – the multiplicity and intelligibility of tongues makes the project of Babel an impossibility. In the narrative of the Bible, the next occasion on which God acts supernaturally in relation to language is Pentecost. Here God once again subverts the imperial unification of the one dominant


language and, in a celebration of every tribe and tongue, offers a new oneness for humanity under the Lordship of Christ expressed in a diversity of languages.

The new unification of Pentecost is found in God’s promised out-pouring of the Holy Spirit on all flesh as a continuation of the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 2:22-42 and Joel 2). There is a new King in Jesus and a new kingdom unfolding, with Pentecost being an invitation for people of every tribe and tongue to participate. However, this Pentecostal invitation does not require linguistic domination to be wielded as a weapon of subjugation – a reality easily understood by the participants in the story, who were living in the wake of Alexander the Great’s world conquest and subsequent creation of a single Greek-speaking world. Instead, the wonder of God, the truth of Jesus Christ and the good news of the Gospel were demonstrated to be a reality that can be appreciated and spoken about in every language. In contrast to the confusion of language that brought division at Babel, at Pentecost unity is experienced within the Kingdom of God across a multiplicity of tongues as the Holy Spirit empowers all.

It is this unity across language established at Pentecost that contemporary Pentecostalism would do well to re-discover. Varied languages should be appreciated not only in terms of ethnic diversity but also with regard to the diversity of language found in the many traditions and denominations that make up the Body of Christ today and in history. Each stream, in their own tongue, declares something of the wonder of God.

---


50 This focus on the languages of the varied church traditions need not distract from the varied languages of the different ethnicities and cultures that also make up the Body of Christ. Each ethnicity is also uniquely placed to express and reflect facets of God’s kingdom and God’s glory. Multicultural appreciation should feed into ecumenical appreciation and vice versa.
Too often, however, the diverse languages of the various Christian traditions are perceived with Babel-like confusion rather than appreciated as enlightening and revelatory declarations of God’s wonder. A fresh appreciation within contemporary Pentecostalism of the ways in which other Christian traditions speak of God, of worship, of faith and mission in the world, and of what it means to be the church, has the potential to invigorate, enliven and enrich Pentecostal praxis. Even as iron sharpens iron (Proverbs 27:17) so too a growing ecumenical appreciation has the potential to enhance the worship and ministry of the various parts of the wider church.

The Language of the Great Traditions

Where contemporary Pentecostalism has worked hard to speak in a language beyond its own, the effort has largely been directed towards learning the language of secularism and pragmatism rather than of other Christian traditions. Thus, while fluent in the language of business management, strategic planning, event organization and the kinds of terms relevant to these approaches, learning to speak in relation to the Great Traditions of the Christian church has largely been a neglected endeavor.

A re-imagined Pentecostalism would seek to learn how to speak, at least in a basic manner, the rich theological languages of Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Celtic Christianity, Anglicanism, etc., albeit with a Pentecostal accent. In this way, the negative consequences of Pentecostalism’s various defining markers could be countered with the vitality, wisdom and perspective of the wider Church Body. The best scholarly minds of evangelicalism can help Pentecostalism address theological simplicity. The resources of
the Anglican tradition can help Pentecostalism to understand and appreciate the depth and possibilities embedded within the liturgical calendar as a counter to pragmatic methodologies. The centrality of the Sermon on the Mount in Anabaptist spirituality can help enrich Pentecostalism’s missional energy and understanding of embodied fidelity. Catholic mysticism has the potential to foster pneumatic expectation while also tempering unrealistic expectations and ensuring Christ is the central focus in all things. Orthodox sacramentalism can aid Pentecostalism in dealing with the artificial dualisms that often come with a simplistic sense of ontological enchantment. Thus a re-imagined Pentecostalism would steer away from relational tribalism and choose instead to embrace a new sense of ecumenical engagement and humility. Not only receiving from others, but also, when the opportunity arises, providing its own gifts as a blessing to the Body of Christ.

**Contemporary Alternatives, Turning the Dials**

While a re-imagining of Pentecostalism’s six defining markers has in part been an attempt to preserve the fruit of each while simultaneously dealing with the potentially negative consequences embedded within them, the hope is also to suggest viable alternatives to the contemporary form of Pentecostalism often perceived as the only model for Pentecostalism in twenty-first century New Zealand. That said, it is not necessarily possible, nor desirable, to prescribe or clearly articulate a precise picture of what a viable alternative might look like. When given the freedom to adjust the dials of Pentecostalism, pastors and leadership teams may discover a dormant or under-developed
inclination toward spiritual pathways they have not explored within the life of the church and, as a result, identify a leaning towards the turning of a specific dial.\textsuperscript{51} Thus from one church to another, and from one context to another, a re-imagining will produce different results.

Illustration 3: Generalized settings of contemporary Pentecostalism.\textsuperscript{52}

Putting aside the coalescent nature of the defining markers for a moment, it is possible to imagine where the attempted turning of a single dial may take a church community. For example, to adjust theological simplicity and embrace a more developed, nuanced and systematic form of theology may create a church that leans towards teaching and intellectual understanding. Conversely to re-imagine pragmatic methodologies and resist attempts to curate a church that is attractional and consumer focused, will likely

\textsuperscript{51} See chapter one’s discussion of Orientations within Pentecostalism, where Pentecostalism’s leanings towards enthusiasm, sharing and the ascetic flipped towards attractional are discussed. Other possible orientations include: mystical, sacramental, sensory, rational, doctrinal and scripture-driven.

\textsuperscript{52} Original illustration by author.
result in a church that pays greater attention to spiritual formation and the development of authentic community within the life of the church – the congregation will be encouraged to embrace church as a participatory community rather than a stage-based event. To focus exclusively on missional energy may result in a church community that is both seeker-sensitive and committed to well-articulated presentations of the gospel as embedded within the larger narrative of Scripture, while also focusing on faith as intellectual assent, embodied fidelity and existential trust. A church that primarily attempts to adjust the pneumatic expectation dial may begin to resist exaggerated triumphalism, while continuing to foster a passion for the gifts of the Spirit as well as the aid of the Spirit in learning to live cruciform lives within the framework of a fresh sense of Christological focus. An exploration of ontological enchantment may result in a genuinely sacramental appreciation of all elements of life in a way that takes the things of the world more seriously than those who consider themselves worldly; this church may begin to find fresh ways of connecting with God outside of church meetings. To turn the dial of relational tribalism may result in a deepening relationship with pastors, leaders and Christians from other traditions.

In reality though, and despite the descriptions above, it is not possible to adjust one of Pentecostalism’s six defining markers without creating a flow-on effect that impacts the other dials. Each adjustment will cause the other markers to begin to recalibrate in different, and sometimes unexpected, ways. As stated earlier, the most influential dial is likely to be that of theological simplicity – the greater the degree that this dial is turned, the more immediate the influence on the other settings is likely to be.
That said, it may not be the most accessible dial nor the one to which pastors are immediately drawn. Exploring the liturgical calendar in relation to pragmatic methodologies, or cruciform living in relation to pneumatic expectation, for example, may be more appealing avenues of exploration. Either way, in each instance, the initial movement will be experienced and understood by individuals and congregations in differing ways. It may be perceived as energizing and exhilarating or as a negative move away from long-held values – in some cases it may feel like both at the same time. For example, an exploration and critique of pneumatic expectation may be perceived by some as an abandonment of trust in the power and person of the Holy Spirit. It is therefore important for leaders to foster an understanding within their congregations that the re-imagining process is not an abandonment of Pentecostalism but rather an attempt to address the negative consequences embedded within the movement, while at the same time opening the door to new, fresh and life-giving possibilities for Pentecostal ministry in our twenty-first century context.

All in all, turning the dials on the defining markers of Pentecostalism has the potential to be an exciting adventure for pastors, leaders and churches who are willing to engage in a process of re-imagining in partnership with the Holy Spirit. Over time this process has the potential to cultivate beautiful and varied expressions of Pentecostalism, with early adopters leading the way in establishing a variety of church exemplars suited to both the cities and provincial settings of New Zealand. And possibly, establishing other viable models of Pentecostalism that later adopters to a re-imagining process may find compelling and inviting.
PART THREE

MINISTRY PRACTICE
CHAPTER 5
MINISTRY PLAN

Critical Reflection

From the outset, the aim of this project has been to design a ministry initiative through which Assemblies of God pastors might engage in a process of critical reflection in relation to Pentecostalism and their local context. The intent being that such a process would open the door to fresh perspectives and new possibilities for Pentecostal ministry in twenty-first century New Zealand. It is hoped that this project will ultimately prove to be a positive and life-giving enterprise – even if critical reflection may initially seem to be a difficult and intimidating process for some pastors. The ministry imitative proposed will seek to orchestrate a leadership development cohort consisting of a small group of pastors open to an exploration and reconfiguring of Pentecostal ministry in New Zealand (a more in-depth discussion of this project will follow shortly).
Pentecostal Positivity

A potential road block to orchestrating a process of critical reflection among Pentecostal pastors relates to Pentecostalism’s tendency to pursue unwavering positivity in the face of even the direst of circumstances. In this regard, and though commenting specifically in reference to the Assemblies of God in Australia (Australian Christian Churches), theologian Shane Clifton articulates a sentiment that is mirrored in the New Zealand context:

Pentecostal culture has a reputation (deserved or otherwise) for its reluctance to engage in the task of critical reflection, and this reluctance is particularly acute in Australia. One aspect of the present mood within Australian Pentecostal assemblies is the critique of criticism itself, associated with an insistence on positive thinking. This culture, derived from the fundamentalist response to the liberal takeover of institutions of higher learning, and expressed in “word of faith” and “prosperity” doctrines, presumes that negativity and criticism are antithetical to a flourishing life. There is no doubt that negative thinking can be self-perpetuating, as can a positive attitude, but the greater danger occurs when a particular culture confuses “negativity” with “criticism,” and rejects critical thinking altogether. What is needed is the valuing of what might be termed “faithful criticism” (or, rather, “faithful critique”).¹

With this in mind, the ministry component of this project will look to engage in a re-imagining of Pentecostalism and a critique of Pentecostalism within the framework suggested by Clifton – faithful criticism. The intention is in no way to undermine or discourage individuals, ministries or churches, nor to engage in deconstruction without the possibility of reconstruction. Rather, this project is intended to be an honest, careful and prayer-filled analysis that will invite a process of positive re-imagining. When it comes to the recruitment of participants for this project, this perspective will be

¹ Shane Clifton, Pentecostal Churches in Transition, 5.
communicated clearly in an attempt to alleviate any fear that the project process will involve any unnecessary or negative criticism of others.

Reformed and Always Reforming

In looking to alleviate any reservations pastors may have in relation to a process of critical reflection, encouragement is offered via Roger Olson’s advocacy for a strong commitment to theology in process. Olson states that, “theology examines doctrines (beliefs about God) and produces doctrines, often by reaffirming, restating, or revising older ones.”\(^2\) In this sense, where a critical reflection may begin to encroach on issues of doctrine and/or long-held theological perspectives that are deemed immutable, it should be remembered that God alone is unchangeable (Malachi 3:6, Hebrews 13:8), while our theology is an ongoing work in process. This is not to suggest that we should not hold firmly to our theological perspectives, doctrines and beliefs but that, rather than grasping tightly with a closed fist, we should look to carry our convictions securely in an open palm. This secure open-handedness means that we need not be afraid of losing our beliefs and can remain open to examining and exploring our positions of faith from different perspectives. Certain aspects of our beliefs can be retained, removed or refined as necessary.

In relation to our theological convictions, it is important to make distinctions between faith and certitude, and also doubt and unbelief. Faith, in this instance, is about holding fast to our core beliefs while simultaneously accepting that the process of faith

requires an epistemological leap of trust – we see through a glass dimly (1 Corinthians 13:12). In this sense, a hermeneutic of humility is required – one that recognizes we are not infallible interpreters of Scripture who can to table certitudes – that is, infallible perspectives on God. Thus, we are people of faith rather than of certitude. In one sense, the pursuit of certitude rather than a reliance on faith can be understood as an attempt to eliminate the need for trust via the pursuit of unequivocal knowing and is often grounded in a fear of the unknown. Peter Enns goes as far as to describe the pursuit of certitude as sin, “because it works off of fear and limits God to our mental images. And God does not like being boxed in. By definition, God can’t be.”

This critique of the pursuit of certitude need not open the door to unbelief or a fear that a lack of certainty will inevitably lead to atheism. Rather, it acknowledges that doubt is a natural part of the human experience of faith. In this sense, doubt can be understood as a signifier of the unknown dimension through which a leap of faith must travel. Thus, like the father who brings his possessed son to Jesus in the hope that Jesus will heal and set the child free (Mark 9:24), we are to recognize the need for faith as well as our need for God to help us in our lack of faith. Or, put another way, doubt can be appreciated as the space in which we encounter the limits of our human understanding, beyond which we run into the unknowable and incomprehensible mystery of God – not a mystery that inhibits faith but inhabits faith.

---


An appreciation of theology in process, a hermeneutic of humility and the embracing of faith and doubt (over and against certitude and unbelief), highlights the need for Pentecostalism to function in a way that honors the reformed tradition’s ideology of being reformed and always reforming. Given the limits of human knowing, and given ever-changing cultural conditions, every tradition must be open to doctrinal and methodological reconsideration and revision. An attitude of respect and deference to orthodox and historical perspectives is required, but not slavish adherence. Rather than functioning as an unfettered theological experiment, it is hoped that this perspective will situate the proposed re-imagining project in step with Pentecostalism as the ever-evolving movement that it is – committed to Scripture and open to a rediscovery of the width and depth of the Great Tradition of Christian belief.

Reflective Discernment

More than simply rethinking certain theological perspectives, this project will also be focused on a wider range of re-imagining that includes contextualized ministry practices. The project will therefore seek to embed all critical reflection within a broader process of reflection intended to help pastors “gain competencies and capacities that are specific to [their] own time and place.” In *Churches, Cultures and Leadership*, authors

---

5 Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming*, 45.

6 Branson & Martinez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership*, 45.

7 Ibid., 39.
Mark Branson and Juan F. Martinez highlight the need for pastors to gain skills in theological reflection that are developed through a continuous practice of reflective discernment rooted in the environmental context and experiences of a local church. The praxis that Branson and Martinez advocate is a “continual movement from experience to reflection and study, and then on to new actions and experiences.” The aim of this project is to invite pastors into that kind of learning cycle.

A four-phase process of reflection, theorization, action, and then further reflection will be utilized as the learning framework for this project. The hope is to avoid what Brazilian educator Paulo Freire describes as a banking approach to education, “in which the teacher simply pours information into the student, and the student’s role is to receive the information and act on it or pass it on to another person.” In this sense, “education is passive and only perpetuates the cultural norms of those who determine what is to be passed on.” Freire envisages that learners will become “culture-creators – persons who shape their own culture and context – by gaining, through praxis a more thorough and more meaningful relationship with the world.” In the same way, it is hoped that pastors participating in this re-imaging of Pentecostalism will develop an ability to become culture-creators able to contextualize the results of this project as appropriate to their local ministries.

---

8 Branson & Martinez, Churches, Cultures and Leadership, 39

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 40-41.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.
Pilot Project

In light of Pentecostal positivity and a potential aversion to critical reflection, alongside the need to be ever reforming and the necessity of a process of reflective discernment, the ministry project that this paper proposes will be designed to explore the practical possibility of a re-imagined Pentecostalism. This project will involve the participation of a range of people involved in pastoral ministry. Given that potential participants will already be engaged in a variety of ministry activities, the project will seek to build on their current experiences. It will invite them into the previously mentioned four-phase process of reflection, theorization, action and then further reflection. The project will be entitled *Pentecostalism Re-Imagined: Reconfiguring Pentecostalism in Twenty-first Century New Zealand* and will seek to, as already mentioned, orchestrate a leadership development cohort open to an exploration and reconfiguring of Pentecostal ministry in New Zealand.

Reflection – An Online Forum

Upon recruiting participants for the cohort, the first phase of *Pentecostalism Re-Imagined* will be participation in an online forum. A closed Facebook group will be set up with all participants given the opportunity to introduce themselves and tell a little of their story in relation to Pentecostal ministry. Over seven weeks, various conversation starters, small articles and reflections will be posted with the intent of initiating personal
and group reflection regarding a range of topics in line with the objectives of the project as outlined below.\(^\text{13}\)

Participants will be given the opportunity to: explain their current ministry, and articulate questions they have in relation to Pentecostalism, church culture and ministry in the twenty-first century. They will be provided with resources intended to promote a process of reflection in relation to Pentecostalism and their own ministry perspectives and practices. These resources will include: an exploration of the development of salvation altar calls as explained by Vanhoozer and Strachan in *The Pastor as Public Theologian*;\(^\text{14}\) a British Psychological Society article exploring whether religious people are less intelligent than atheists;\(^\text{15}\) and an exploration of identity foreclosure, questions, doubts and postmodernism.\(^\text{16}\) Also provided for reflection will be statistics from Jamieson’s *A Churchless Faith* examining the reasons people leave church in New Zealand;\(^\text{17}\) a questionnaire from Schwarz’s *Three Colors of Your Spirituality* designed to

---

\(^\text{13}\) See Chapter 5 on Ministry Project Objectives.


\(^\text{17}\) Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith*, 11-16
help individuals identify their preferred pathway for Christian spirituality;\textsuperscript{18} and a series of questions pertaining to Pentecostalism specifically.\textsuperscript{19}

Finally, in furthering this first phase of ministry reflection and in addition to resources intended to serve as a catalyst for reflection online, participants in the ministry project will each be given a copy of Carlson and Lueken’s \textit{Renovation of the Church} to read and reflect on prior to the next phase of the project: the \textit{Pentecostalism Re-Imagined} seminar.\textsuperscript{20} Carlson and Lueken deal with numerous issues pertinent to the ministry initiative, as outlined in the literature review section of this paper. Opportunity will be given at the seminar for a group discussion that explores the content of the book.

\textbf{Theorization – A Leadership Seminar}

The theorization process and second phase of \textit{Pentecostalism Re-Imagined} will take place via a three-day leadership seminar. It is intended that the leadership development cohort that has formed will be brought together in a retreat-like context that will offer the opportunity for fellowship and extended conversation in a dinner-party-like setting. This environment will be achieved by hosting the seminar in a private home,

\textsuperscript{18} Schwarz, \textit{Three Colors of Your Spirituality}, 64-70.

\textsuperscript{19} What does it mean for someone to be a Pentecostal? What does it mean to be a Christian but not a Pentecostal? What makes a church a Pentecostal or a non-Pentecostal church?

\textsuperscript{20} Carlson and Lueken, \textit{Renovation of the Church}. 

127
with such facilities as a large summer deck and swimming pool being available during break times, and complimentary catering of food and beverages.\footnote{In the pilot program that eventuated, this was made possible through generous sponsorship from St Luke’s church, the home church of this paper’s author and project facilitator, as a part of their commitment to invest in other pastors and leaders ministering throughout New Zealand.}

Nine sessions will be presented between the opening Monday night of the seminar and the close on Wednesday evening. Each session will involve a facilitator presentation followed by group discussion. The topics covered in these sessions will be: (1) Evolutions of Pentecostalism and an Introduction to Defining Markers; (2) Theological Simplicity; (3) Pragmatic Methodologies; (4) Pentecostal Orientations; (5) A Renovation of the Church and Consumerism; (6) Missional Energy; (7) Pneumatic Expectation; (8) Ontological Enchantment; and (9) Relational Tribalism and Adjusting the Dials.

Action – Contextualized Experiments

The third phase of the \textit{Pentecostalism Re-Imagined} ministry initiative will largely be in the hands of the cohort participants. Essentially, this phase will involve experimentation by the participants in their own local ministry contexts, in light of the theorization completed at the leadership development seminar. While it is beyond the ability of the course facilitator to mandate or ensure any action is taken, space will be given during the seminar for participants to consider and identify possible lines of experimentation that will aid the re-imagination of Pentecostalism in their own ministries.
Suggestions for such experiments will include: a church-wide engagement with a
liturgical feast or liturgical season; the establishment of a slow-Bible reading group as a
small-group option; engagement by the pastor in an exegetical or theological sermon
series that requires a level of research beyond his or her normal practice; the
development of new and intentional relationships with pastors across the ecumenical
spectrum; and intentional reading and research in relation to specific topics such as the
gospel narrative or sacramental living, with the recommendation of works by Scot
McKnight,22 N.T. Wright,23 or Hans Boersma.24

Re-Reflection – Feedback and Response

Having engaged in a process of reflection, theorization and experimental action,
the last phase of this project (though not a concluding phase as the ministry praxis
advocated for in this learning process is cyclic and life-long) will be the opportunity for
re-reflection in relation to any action or experimentation undertaken as a result of the
Pentecostalism Re-Imagined ministry initiative. It is hoped that this second phase of
reflection can be orchestrated through a combination of both written feedback and direct
conversation with the project facilitator. Feedback forms will be distributed to
participants six to eight weeks after the conclusion of the leadership development
seminar, and follow-up phone calls or visits will be made by the course facilitator.

22 McKnight, The King Jesus Gospel.
23 N.T. Wright, The Day the Revolution Began or N.T. Wright, Surprised by Hope: Rethinking
24 Hans Boersma, Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry (Grand
Ministry Project Objectives

Ultimately, the ministry objectives of the project, beyond it being a process of critical reflection, theorization, action and further reflection, center on the equipping of local church pastors. It is hoped that this project will bring about a heightened awareness among pastors regarding: the nature of Pentecostalism; the fruit and consequences inherent to Pentecostalism; ministry models beyond contemporary Pentecostalism; and the ways in which pastors may be able to re-orientate their Pentecostal practice in a fruitful and life-giving manner suited to their own contexts and passions. While the breadth of topics to be explored is wide, it is nevertheless hoped that a robust exploration of each can be offered.

The Nature of Pentecostalism

The first objective of the project is to achieve greater awareness among participants regarding the nature of Pentecostalism. Though it is an untested assumption, it is anticipated that, for many Pentecostal pastors, what it means to be Pentecostal is not something that has received serious reflection. For many, Pentecostalism will likely be understood as a mixture of the following: the stream within the Christian church in which they came to faith, a style or format of church, the ministry context they have always known, comfortable familiarity, and an openness to and personal experience of Spirit baptism. The six defining markers of Pentecostalism explored in this paper – theological simplicity, pragmatic methodologies, missional energy, pneumatic
expectation, ontological enchantment and missional energy – will likely be a new way of understanding Pentecostalism.

Fruit and Consequences within Pentecostalism

The second intended objective of this project is that participants will come to appreciate both the fruit and the negative consequences inherent in each of Pentecostalism’s markers. By appreciating the fruitful outcomes of each marker within Christian ministry, it is intended that the various markers can be celebrated and promoted in the participant’s local ministry context. Simultaneously, though, an exploration of the negative consequences of each marker will hopefully enable pastors to appreciate the importance of a re-imagining in relation to some of the core elements of Pentecostalism. To revisit 1 Corinthians 3:12 and a metaphor previously mentioned in this paper, it is hoped that the gold, silver and costly stones of Pentecost can be preserved, with the wood, hay and straw of various aspects of Pentecostalism left behind.

Adjusting the Dials

From the outset of this project, the concept of dials, like those of an old radio tuned to particular settings, will be used to illustrate what tends to be the normative settings of contemporary Pentecostalism; for example, for pragmatic methodologies the dial is shown as being turned to maximum, while ontological enchantment has a middle setting. The third objective of the project relates directly to these dials and the negative consequences inherent in each of Pentecostalism’s defining markers. It is hoped that the
project will open up the possibility of ways and means through which each dial can be adjusted in an attempt to mitigate these negative consequences. Rather than calling for the dials to be tuned to a new set of specified settings, however, the intention is that participants will be encouraged to adjust settings in a manner appropriate to their own ministry contexts, passions and interests through contextualized experimentation.

Contextualized Experiments

The final objective of the project relates to contextualized experimentation. The project will seek to encourage those participating in the *Pentecostalism Re-Imagined* leadership development cohort to engage in practices outside the usual framework and methodology of their ministry context, as experiments in re-imagining Pentecostalism. While the course facilitator will provide input for the process of formulating experiments, it is hoped that participants will be able to recognize unique needs within their own ministry context, while considering the pathways of Christian spirituality to which they are personally drawn\(^ {25} \) and creative ways in which to minister the life and love of Christ outside of the normative settings of contemporary Pentecostalism. It is also hoped that participants will be able to imagine meaningful ways of engaging in Christian ministry beyond that which is modeled within the context of the contemporary Pentecostal mega-church, instead exploring practices that are home-grown and more suited to their local context.

\(^ {25} \) See chapter one’s Orientations within Pentecostalism.
CHAPTER 6
MINISTRY IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW

Having introduced the Assemblies of God movement in New Zealand and having offered an historical overview of Pentecostalism and its various evolutions, this paper suggested six defining markers that serve to describe Pentecostalism. These markers – theological simplicity, pragmatic methodologies, missional energy, pneumatic expectation, ontological enchantment and missional energy – were described as being both fruitful and consequential in their effect. The fruit of each marker was appreciated as strengths within Pentecostalism, while the consequential elements were framed as weaknesses. In light of the defining markers and their potential effects, a proposed ministry project, *Pentecostalism Re-Imagined: Reconfiguring Pentecostalism in Twenty-first Century New Zealand*, was outlined. The final chapter of this paper will now explore the implementation of the pilot project version of *Pentecostalism Re-Imagined* as it unfolded in March 2018 and will review its effectiveness.
Recruitment of Participants

In designing this leadership development project, it was hoped that between twelve and fourteen pastors could be recruited as a learning cohort. Given that the project is situated within the context of the Assemblies of God (A/G) in New Zealand, the aim was to ensure that most of the participating pastors were A/G ministers, but it was also hoped that some participants would come from other ministry backgrounds and thereby contribute outsider perspectives to group discussions. The intent of limiting numbers to between twelve and fourteen participants was to ensure that the seminar element of the ministry project could incorporate inclusive discussion and ongoing conversations over shared meals in a relaxed, living-room context.

Promotion

An invitation to participate was sent by the project facilitator (the author of this paper) to seven members of the Assemblies of God in New Zealand executive leadership team, as well as to a further ten A/G pastors known to the facilitator as people who might be open to participating in such a project. Six other pastors – a mixture of non-denominational Pentecostal pastors and Presbyterian ministers known to be interested in the project – were also invited to participate. The covering e-mail outlined the nature of the project as a critical reflection on Pentecostalism that was intended to be a life-giving process (as opposed to any attempt to criticize individuals or ministries). The e-mail explained the four-phase process of the project: reflection, theorization, experimentation, then further reflection.
Respondents

The response from invited participants was positive across the board. Though not all had the time to participate, nor necessarily the inclination, four members of the Assemblies of God executive team indicated a desire to attend, as did five other A/G pastors. Four independent pastors registered an interest, as did two Presbyterian ministers and a Salvation Army officer. Some of those invited also requested the opportunity to invite fellow pastors who they thought might also be interested. The final total of pastors registered for the pilot project was twenty. These twenty pastors engaged and participated in the first phase of this project – the online reflection forum – and

---

1 Author’s own original illustration.
fourteen gathered for the second phase of the project, the three-day leadership seminar, and the remainder of the learning process.²

This final fourteen comprised of eleven Assemblies of God pastors, two non-denominational pastors and one Presbyterian minister. Ten were senior pastors, while four were team pastors. Seven participants were female and seven male. Twelve of those attending were of European descent and two were of Maori descent. The churches represented by the cohort varied in weekly congregational attendance from thirty to around 300. Four of the participants held master’s degrees in either theology or ministry, three held bachelor’s degrees in the same, while seven had certificates of ministry or no formal theological training.

Project Implementation

In the initial phase of the project (conducted via an online forum), all participants were active, introducing themselves and keeping up-to-date with forum postings and content. A high level of genuine engagement was evident when pre-seminar content was discussed during the Pentecostalism Re-Imagined seminar, with all participants contributing to those discussions in an informed and reflective manner. All participants read the provided pre-seminar text Renovation of the Church, and it was clear during discussions that participants had found the book to be an engaging mix of encouragement and provocation.

² Those who pulled out of the seminar did so due to illness in four cases, the unexpected death of a congregant in another, and a pastoral crisis in the final instance.
Nevertheless, while course participants read each of the pre-seminar postings, a greater degree of interaction with each post, as well as with the comments and feedback that other project participants offered, would have been appreciated. Participants engaged in formal academic study are generally required to offer a response to each online posting in a Facebook or Moodle style forum, as well as to engage with the feedback offered by at least one other student. It was hoped that the pre-seminar element of this project would engender a similar amount of interaction. That said, a set level of participation was not a stated requirement, instead those involved in the project were simply invited to engage as they felt able. This more relaxed approach was ultimately intended to ensure that potential recruits were not put off by a project that appeared to be over-demanding or too rigorous.

Phase two of the project, theorization via a three-day seminar, was an enjoyable opportunity to reflect, converse and explore Pentecostalism with a group of pastors who seemed enthusiastic and energized to do the same. Further reflections on the content of the seminar component will be provided in due course, but in terms of the logistics and feel, the seminar was a success. All participants expressed their enjoyment and were highly complementary of the gathering, with one stating, “Your hospitality was outstanding, in addition to giving me thoughts and ideas to re-frame much of what we are engaged with here at church. I really would like the slides and a copy of your gospel summary. I would like to take time to review both. I appreciated your hard work, meeting others and hearing their journey.” Another participant expressed her thanks noting, “Thanks for the invitation to come to this Joseph, and again for your and Lisa’s
wonderful hospitality. It was a great forum for thinking through Pentecostalism.”

Overall, the aim of providing a context that was part retreat, part seminar and part dinner party seemed very successful – an outcome no-doubt aided by the quality catering and ready availability of food and beverages, the summer setting, and the chance to spend extended time conversing over meals, relaxing by the pool or sitting in the sun between seminar sessions.

Phase three of the project, action and contextualized experimentation, will be discussed later in this chapter, as will the final phase of the project, re-reflection. All in all, with the exception of six project participants needing to pull out prior to the leadership seminar, every aspect of the Pentecostalism Re-Imagined project ran smoothly and according to plan. However, the primary aim of the project was to help participants re-imagine Pentecostalism in such a way that would have a positive outcome in their ministry praxis. The effectiveness of the project in that regard will be assessed in relation to the project feedback offered by participants.

**Project Feedback**

In order to collect feedback on the impact of the Pentecostalism Re-Imagined project, during the last session of the seminar participants were given an opportunity to speak about the elements of the project that had stood out to them as significant, challenging and helpful, as well as any elements with which they specifically disagreed. In addition, seven weeks after the completion of the seminar, participants were e-mailed a questionnaire to gather further feedback and provide a context for reflecting on the
theorization aspect of the seminar and the unfolding of their own experiments in ‘turning
the dials.’ This questionnaire offered a minimal reminder of the content of the
theorization – the six defining markers of Pentecostalism were listed – beyond that,
participants were encouraged to reflect on that which had stuck with them as meaningful
or transformative seven weeks on from the leadership seminar. Some participants were
also contacted by the course facilitator in order to engage in a further process of one-on-
one follow-up and reflection.

Defining Pentecostalism

The first element of requested feedback related to the theorization aspect of
_Pentecostalism Re-Imagined_, with consideration given to the content explored during the
three-day seminar. Participants were asked how accurately (or inaccurately) they felt the
six defining markers of Pentecostalism functioned as a working definition of
Pentecostalism. There was unanimous agreement that these markers provided an
accurate definition of Pentecostalism as experienced by the participants. One participant
summarized the general perspective of the cohort stating, “Yes, [this definition is
accurate]. It throws a blanket over our core beliefs and practices. I can’t think of
anything that is excluded from this summary.”

Further comments made during one-on-one interviews in relation to this
definition included: “everything I’ve experienced within Pentecostalism can be found in
these markers, nothing is missing.” The definition also met with approval because it did
not single out Pentecostalism as “some sort of special power that Pentecostals had that
nobody else did,” and included “the strengths and weaknesses of Pentecostalism.” It was also noted that this definition of Pentecostalism worked well in articulating the human contribution to forming Pentecostalism as a movement rather than assuming Pentecostalism to be a “move of God devoid of any human component.”

The Need for a Re-imagining

In relation to a need for a re-imagining of Pentecostalism, feedback varied. A number of participants indicated an absolute and unequivocal belief that Pentecostalism needed go through a process of re-configuration. However, others preferred to focus on certain aspects of Pentecostalism being re-imagined rather than critiquing the tradition as a whole. Either way, those who were strong advocates for a re-imagining process were united in expressing one particular caveat: the need to ensure that any re-imagining is a carefully considered process in which the “experiential side of Pentecostalism is preserved,” especially given that, as another participant commented, “the Spirit [is] somehow under constant threat, even within Sunday services where the schedule can be allowed to dominate the agenda.”

It should also be noted that one participant was particularly unconvinced in regard to any re-imagining of Pentecostalism. She was unsure whether it is our role, as humans, to re-imagine Pentecostalism. “Pentecostalism is not something we can tame –

---

3 This comment seems to reflect an experienced tension between pragmatic methodologies (run sheets and schedules for Sunday services) and pneumatic expectation (allowing the Holy Spirit to lead and coordinate the church’s corporate gathering and flow). In this instance the course participant appears in favour of pneumatic expectation over pragmatic methodologies.
like you read, ‘God is not a tame lion.’ And as we read in the book of Acts – the moving of the Spirit just happened, it was God moving, as the disciples were in the right place at the right time.’

It is interesting to note here the inference that Pentecostalism can be understood as a God-orchestrated phenomenon that takes its cues from the Holy Spirit, rather than as something that has been framed, organized, modeled and codified by human leaders and participants. Or, even more bluntly, it appears that this participant equates Pentecostalism with the Holy Spirit – that the work and moving of the Holy Spirit is one and the same with the work and moving of Pentecostalism and to tinker with Pentecostalism is in fact an attempt to control the Holy Spirit. However, despite this isolated point of view, and the caveat regarding the desire to preserve an openness to the Holy Spirit, participants were very receptive to a re-imagining process. As a collective, the cohort recognized a need for some sort of re-imagining in light of the theorization offered in relation to the negative consequences of Pentecostalism’s defining markers but, more than that, in light of the lived experiences of participants in relation to those consequences.

Markers to Re-imagine

While the acknowledgment of a need to re-imagine Pentecostalism was nearly unanimous across the cohort, opinion varied greatly in relation to which defining marker

4 In regard to “a tame lion,” the respondent refers to a quote shared by the course facilitator from C.S. Lewis’s description of Aslan in our discussion of Pragmatic Methodologies and the need to resist the predictability, efficiency, calculability and control inherent in a process of McDonaldization. C.S. Lewis, *The Complete Chronicles of Narnia*, “The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,” (UK: Collins Publishing, 2000), 99.
should be re-imagined first. Some participants felt that certain markers were in desperate need of re-imagining, while other markers needed far less attention (or needed no attention at all, in some cases). Each marker was identified by at least one participant as the marker most in need of re-configuration, though the most votes (by one) went to missional energy. However, no one put theological simplicity or pragmatic methodologies in the category of needing no re-imagining. In other words, every participant felt that a re-imagining of these two markers was necessary to some degree, while other markers might be fine if left as they are.

Where participants agreed on which defining marker needed the most attention, the reasons given varied. In relation to missional energy, for example, one participant felt that a re-imagining “would leverage one of Pentecostalism’s strengths; taking the great commission seriously,” and added that “if the Pentecostal church can grasp a hold of the much larger story that the biblical narrative offers – much larger than salvation from sin – and then ‘go into all the world and preach’ that larger gospel, the way is opened for the other five key markers to play their role.” Another participant commented, “I believe that Missional Energy, or lack of it, needs to be re-imagined. There has been cross-contamination from triumphalism and could I say an unfounded view that God will just do it and we will magically see the masses imported to the kingdom.”

Those who highlighted theological simplicity as most in need of re-imagination, identified that process as a potential catalyst for re-imagining the other markers. As well, this marker was noted as having the potential for a greater number of negative consequences than the others. All too often poor theology leads to misconceptions about
God, wrong expectations in relation to what it means to be a Christian, disappointment, and even to various crises of faith.

For others, pragmatic methodologies stood out as the marker most in need of attention, with one participant commenting that “our liturgy shapes us,” before going on to cite Alexander Schmemann: “For it is precisely in and through her liturgy … that the Church is informed of her cosmical and eschatological vocation, receives the power to fulfill it and thus becomes ‘what she is’: the sacrament, in Christ, of the new creation; the sacrament, in Christ, of the Kingdom.” During discussions during the seminar regarding pragmatic methodologies, there was a general consensus that the consumer focuses embedded in pragmatism, and by extension contemporary Pentecostalism, were issues to which any re-imagining would need to pay attention.

Another participant singled out pneumatic expectation and the unbridled triumphalism inherent in Pentecostalism, stating that “Pentecostals have unconsciously believed that we are somehow exempt from the normal trials and vagaries of life. It has not been grounded in the whole of scripture, but on certain verses, usually taken out of context and emphasized over the whole story of scripture.” In this instance there was an expressed desire to re-imagine pneumatic expectations in order to help people navigate life as it is genuinely lived and experienced, with both joy and suffering being a reality in the journey.

In relation to the markers least requiring re-imagining, and in contradiction of the viewpoint of other participants, some singled out missional energy. One seminar

\footnote{5 Alexander Schmemann, “Liturgy and Theology,” \textit{The Greek Orthodox Theological Review} 17 (1972): 86-100.}
participant commented that “a more holistic view of what is required in mission – it’s more than just seeing ‘souls saved’ – is already developing,” while another simply highlighted missional energy as a “strength already.” Nevertheless, all participants indicated an appreciation of the broader discussion of the gospel in relation to the Bible as a grand-narrative as explored in the discussion of missional energy, with several requesting an e-mail copy of the seminar notes on this topic.⁶

Relational tribalism stood out to others as the marker least in need of attention – though again for quite different reasons. One participant commented that relational tribalism was no longer an issue because “baby boomers and flagship ‘super pastors’ are aging and with it there has been a decline in the isolationist mentality that many have preached. Perhaps it is a glimpse of their own mortality? I would say that there is a wider acceptance of the ‘ancient paths.’ Those that are riding the cultural wave see the younger members of their congregation (those that are honest with their searching questions) opting for a broader understand and acceptance of faith.” In contrast though, another participant made the comment that, while a re-imagining of relational tribalism was a possibility, it need not be a high priority as Pentecostals should not be, “losing our relationships ‘at home.’ We need to have strong relationships within our movement – this is who we are. I have always been keen to have an ecumenical perspective, but consider we need wisdom concerning ecumenical unity.” Another participant felt paying attention to relational tribalism was not a priority for a third reason: “Though I am all for a complete re-imagining of ‘Relational Tribalism,’ and I believe the embrace of the

⁶ See, Appendix C, A Gospel Narrative.
Great Traditions is a must, I list it as least urgent simply because in most pockets of New Zealand, at this time, ecumenical engagement may actually be a complete discouragement.”

Those who were inclined to suggest pneumatic expectation as least in need of re-imagining did so because they were keen to preserve Pentecostalism’s experiential focus on encounters with the Holy Spirit. And, in relation to ontological enchantment, some felt this was least in need of attention because, in one participant’s words, most people “recognize the sacredness of the ordinary/everyday, although our eyes can always be opened wider to the glory and goodness of God all around us.” This diversity of perspectives in relation to each marker made for enjoyable discussion during the leadership seminar.

Experimentation and Reflection

The third and fourth phases of the Pentecostalism Re-Imagined project involved participants engaging in their own contextualized experimentation. Though this process was discussed during the three-day seminar, and suggestions were made in relation to possible experiments, the intention was for participants to creatively engage in formulating their own initiatives. Some members of the cohort embraced this challenge and made conscious choices in regard to ministry experimentation; others were not so proactive.

The most common form of experimentation centered around the use of the liturgical calendar, in response to pragmatic methodologies. Easter provided an
opportunity for this exercise not long after the Pentecostalism Re-Imagined seminar. While an engagement with Easter is not something new to Pentecostalism, those participants who experimented in this area worked hard to appreciate the larger journey of Holy Week through to Resurrection Sunday, researching how different church traditions participate in this season. One pastor commented, “I have researched wider within the church calendar, used prayers from Anglican sources and symbolism with candles etc. Some interesting responses… mostly positive.” Another invited congregants to use the Stations of the Cross as a series of prayer stations.

Other pastors decided to pay greater attention to ecumenical relationships, in response to relational tribalism. For some, this initiative included a renewed effort to develop connections at interdenominational pastors’ lunches that were already being held in their respective town and cities. Others began reading books by authors outside of Pentecostalism, which they would have otherwise been less inclined to read. One pastor used United Methodist Church minister James Bryan Smith’s books The Good and Beautiful God and The Good and Beautiful Life as a launchpad for a preaching series.

One participant engaged in further research of Pentecostalism and reported that this activity has “led to a more passionate confidence in Pentecostalism.” Another pastor, responding to pragmatic methodologies and theological simplicity, decided to make the Lord’s Table the central feature of her Sunday gathering. This initiative has included

---

7 James Bryan Smith, The Good and Beautiful God (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

placing the communion table in the center of the church auditorium and arranging the seating in a semi-circle around it. This pastor commented, “The symbolism behind it is that we are all participants, we have come to the table, not just those ministering ‘from the front’ (from the fourth side of the table), there is interaction because we have to look across at one another rather than just looking at each other’s backs. It takes away the assumption that those at the front ‘perform’ for the rest.” She also provided feedback on the response of the congregation: “There have been mixed responses, mostly positive. Some people don’t like looking across at others (they find it distracting) but we don’t necessarily think that’s a negative, rather we feel it’s good to be made aware of our connectedness and that it is ‘ok’ to be a little uncomfortable.”

In engaging with a deeper level of reflection regarding the impact of these experiments in specific ministry contexts, participants either noted that it was too early to tell or did not respond at all. In light of the lack of feedback in this regard, both the experimentation and re-reflection elements of the Pentecostalism Re-Imagined project need reconsideration if future iterations are to unfold. Further comments relating to these outcomes will be offered in the Facilitator Perspectives section of this chapter.

Future Projects

When asked for feedback on the Pentecostalism Re-Imagined project as a whole, all participants expressed genuine appreciation for the experience, seeing it as worthwhile, enjoyable, enlightening, challenging, engaging and refreshing. One participant commented that the process had helped him feel hopeful: “There is hope.
Perhaps it was the diversity of those present, perhaps it was the common desire to see change in the traditional Pentecostal approach and beliefs. Yes, hold fast to the good but embrace change.” Another pastor expressed a palpable sense of relief that there were options for her and her church beyond the model of contemporary Pentecostalism that she felt simply did not fit: “Over the course of the seminar I felt the weight of trying to conform to a model of Pentecostalism life. This model doesn’t make sense to me and seems paper thin. I found that very grounding and refreshing.”

The consistent recommendation for how the project could be improved, however, revolved around an even greater opportunity for discussion and dialogue over the course of the seminar. There was no shortage of opportunity to talk during meal times, but participants felt that allowing for extended (even more so) discussions in each session of theorization would have been beneficial. This perspective is also shared by the course facilitator.

**Facilitator Perspectives**

From a facilitator’s point of view, the pilot project of *Pentecostalism Re-Imagined* provided several valuable insights regarding Pentecostalism in general, as well as in relation to the practical aspects of facilitating future leadership development cohorts. Some of these practical insights related specifically to the content of the theorization phase, outworked through the project seminar, while others related to phases three and four – the experimentation and re-reflection element of the project. The content embedded in the seminar will be considered here first.
As a ministry initiative, *Pentecostalism Re-imagined* was not light on content. To present an historic overview of Pentecostalism – as foundational to a definition of Pentecostalism through the six defining markers – followed by an exploration of the complexities inherent in each marker was an exhaustive undertaking. The scope of information was then further widened, and deepened, by a consideration of how each marker might be re-imagined and reconfigured. Despite the intent of this project to ensure that the learning process was not simply a passive downloading of information, in practice, there was a lot of information for participants to absorb. Though group discussion helped mitigate this effect, overall the seminar was skewed towards the teaching component. A greater level of group discussion should have been incorporated.

In hindsight then, less time could have been spent on the historic overview of Pentecostalism. In one sense this content turned out to be superfluous given that definition of Pentecostalism as the coalescent interplay of theological simplicity, pragmatic methodologies, missional energy, pneumatic expectation, ontological enchantment and relational tribalism was quickly met with unanimous acceptance. The historic explanation defending the choice of the markers as a definition of Pentecostalism was not required. Participants readily embraced the defining markers as a definition of Pentecostalism in light of their life experiences within the Pentecostal church. All participants were animated in telling their own stories and sharing examples from their own Christian journeys or ministry contexts of each marker and the fruit and consequences embedded within. Given the level of understanding and insight that
participants brought to the subject, it would have been ideal to extend this interactive element further, at the expense of a detailed historic overview.

While no assumptions can be made about how readily future learning cohorts will be convinced by the definitions of Pentecostalism that are offered, the experience of working with the pilot group opens up the possibility of greatly reducing the need to defend and argue for the core propositions of the project. Accordingly, over the course of the seminar, more time could be assigned to group discussion and a greater focus given to the ways and means in which each of the defining markers could be adjusted and tweaked in contextualized ministry. These enhanced discussions could be highly fruitful. For example, ministers who are already familiar with the use of the Church calendar could be invited to facilitate a discussion and field questions in relation to liturgical rhythms and seasons. Or, the learning cohort could participate in a slow-Bible reading exercise, then discuss how a similar approach could be introduced into church life. In this way, the presentational and teaching element of the seminar could be reduced in favor of enhancing the collaborative learning and discussion element.

Providing more space for discussion and interaction may assist participants in the process of identifying ways in which experimentation could occur in their own contexts. Cohort participants seeking to re-imagine a particular defining marker could be placed together in a break-out group and given the chance to compare notes and swap ideas, encouraging creative collaboration. Cohort members could embrace the same experimentation as a group exercise applied to different contexts. A future gathering, or a re-engagement with the online-forum, could then allow for more clearly articulated
reflections in relation to each participant’s experiences. This kind of approach would strengthen the experimentation and re-reflection phases of the project and may prove to be critical to an engaged process of reflective discernment.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper, inclusive of the *Pentecostalism Re-Imagined* learning project outlined within, is a response to the encouragement of John O’Donohue to pursue an ever-maturing faith through an open-ended, good-hearted, and vigorous conversation with one’s faith tradition.¹ In that spirit, the overall aim of this paper has been to engage in a process of critical-reflection and a careful and prayerful analysis of Pentecostalism in twenty-first century New Zealand. Specifically, this paper has set out to explore the possibility of alternatives to the contemporary Pentecostalism, modeled by today’s mega-churches, that is often deemed to be the exemplar of success. Given that the contemporary mega-church is a phenomenon predominantly found in large cities, while New Zealand is a country of either small cities or provincial townships, the desire has been to explore alternative expressions of Pentecostalism that may be more accessible to pastors in varying New Zealand contexts.

However, this examination of Pentecostalism should not be understood simply as an exercise of pragmatism in response to issues solely related to demographics. Three other factors have also present themselves as catalysts for the fresh exploration of Pentecostalism. Firstly, as a faith tradition often rightly perceived as simplistic, this paper has attempted to re-imagine Pentecostalism in a manner that might allow for the development of a Pentecostal spirituality that is numinosus as well as rational and intellectual. This re-imagining encourages pastors to embrace the theological

responsibilities inherent in their ministry role, but does not necessitate a pursuit of intellectualism. Instead, Pentecostal pastors should seek to nurture an appreciation of theological study and of Pentecostal experience that is neither rational nor irrational, but rather one that exists as transrational – a thoughtful and grounded openness to the mystery and transcendence of God. It is hoped that this perspective might move Pentecostalism beyond its leanings toward folk theology and into a position more suited to ministering the life of Christ in a manner alert to both the modern and post-modern sensibilities of the world in which we live.

Secondly, this exploration of Pentecostalism has been motivated by an attempt to define the movement in a context where firm definitions are difficult to achieve. With the emergence of a new generation of Pentecostal pastors within the Assemblies of God in New Zealand, it is hoped that this paper and project may help define a fresh sense of Pentecostal identity, beyond that of speaking in tongues or a general openness to the work of the Holy Spirit, that would provide pastors with a clear sense of the Pentecostal tradition and the fruit and consequences inherent in that tradition. In light of that motivation, this paper has explored the evolution of Pentecostalism in New Zealand and the possibility for further evolution, while establishing a definition of Pentecostalism framed around the coalescent interplay of theological simplicity, pragmatic methodologies, missional energy, pneumatic expectation, ontological enchantment, and relational tribalism.

The third catalyst for a re-imagined Pentecostalism has been found in the aforementioned definition of Pentecostalism. Embedded within each of these six
defining markers are fruit to be championed and negative consequences of which to be mindful. Theological simplicity, while attempting to make the Christian faith accessible, can lead an individual astray in their beliefs and function as a catalyst to various forms of faith crises. Pragmatic methodologies, in an attempt to appeal to convenience and the materialistic consumer-driven appetites of the twenty-first century context, tend to promote church as an event rather than celebrate the Church as an alternative community in the world. Missional energy, eager to see people come into a saving relationship with Christ, often fails to articulate a well-rounded response to the gospel in terms of intellectual assent, embodied fidelity and existential trust. Pneumatic expectation, while championing God as active and present in the individual’s life, also tends to promote an exaggerated sense of triumphalism. Ontological enchantment, in its awareness of dimensions beyond the immediate realm of the physical, often fails to integrate these dimensions and promotes an unnecessary and distorting dualism. Relational tribalism, while cultivating a strong sense of Pentecostal identity, isolates Pentecostals and prevents Pentecostalism from receiving the kind of ecumenical input that may serve to temper the negative elements of each marker.

With these factors in mind, this paper has suggested that each of Pentecostalism’s defining markers can be likened to the dials used to tune a radio – that they are adjustable and can be set to different frequencies. Rather than replicating the typical frequencies of the contemporary Pentecostal mega-church, a re-imagining allows pastors to adjust the dials as appropriate to their local church community and/or their own passions or strengths. For some pastors this process will entail a keener interest in
theology and formal theological training, while for others it will be an invitation to resist pragmatism and explore alternative methods of organizing church life (such as the traditional liturgical calendar). Some pastors may focus on a deeper and broader understanding of ontological enchantment and the possibility that all of life has the sacramental potential to point humanity towards the love and life of God. Some may determine to intentionally foster a Pentecostal appreciation of the Holy Spirit but with a renewed focus on the Spirit’s work in pointing people toward Jesus and empowering believers to live the life of Christ as modeled by Jesus and taught in the Sermon on the Mount. Meanwhile, some may determine to engage more closely with other traditions within the wider Church and pursue a deeper level of ecumenical relationship and understanding.

Though pastors or churches may focus on particular markers within Pentecostalism, it has also been noted that the inherently coalescent nature of these markers will result in inevitable, and sometimes automatic, adjustments across the board. Ultimately, to adjust one dial will be to adjust them all. With this in mind, and despite the intent of this paper to find alternative models of Pentecostalism, it has been beyond the scope of this paper to prescribe new models; instead future possibilities have been hinted at. Alternative models will develop as pastors and churches begin to engage in a process of re-imagining, but it is too early to attempt to categorize these alternatives. Some versions of a re-imagined Pentecostalism may emerge as more intellectual or theological, others more ancient in terms of a re-connection with elements of the Great Church Tradition, and still others may be more experimental as fresh emphasis is given
to the Sermon on the Mount or ways and means of articulating the gospel. For now, it is sufficient to anticipate a multiplicity of alternatives that will entail unique, and perhaps unexpected, fruit and consequences. The door is wide-open in terms of an invitation to re-imagine and experiment with Pentecostalism, one that embraces sound theology, Scripture, wisdom and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The ministry project element of this paper took proactive steps towards a practical process of re-imagining and experimentation. The project, *Pentecostalism Re-Imagined: Reconfiguring Pentecostalism in Twenty-first Century New Zealand*, provided an opportunity to road test the theory explored in this paper. As a leadership development cohort engaged in a four-phase learning process of reflection, theorization, experimentation and re-reflection, pastors explored the nature of Pentecostalism, the fruit and consequences of Pentecostalism’s defining markers, and possibilities for re-imagination.

Within the cohort, the general consensus was that a re-imagining of Pentecostalism can be a worthwhile, life-giving and transformative endeavor that has the potential to offer pathways and possibilities beyond those modeled within contemporary Pentecostalism. That said, while all participants were given the opportunity to turn the dials of Pentecostalism in their own church contexts and offer feedback on the results of their re-imagining and experimentation, only some have engaged in that process so far. Those who have, reported positive results and a fresh sense of focus in the particular area of church life they were attempting to reconfigure. However, the pragmatic nature of Pentecostalism will almost certainly require early adopters to pioneer a fruitful course of
re-imagined Pentecostalism, before others will take up the challenge and follow in their stead.

Nevertheless, there appears to be an accepted need for, and an excitement about, the possibility of re-imagining Pentecostalism in twenty-first century New Zealand. As a new generation becomes influential – a generation less enamored by the bright lights of big ministry and more attune to localized, organic and artisan expressions of the church (like a farmers’ market rather than a shopping mall) – it seems probable that the explorations of this paper, a re-engagement of Pentecostalism with the traditions of the Christian Church, and various expressions of a re-imagined Pentecostalism will find resonance with pastors and congregants alike.

At St Luke’s (the local church context of this paper’s author), a re-imagining of Pentecostalism through re-engagement with the spirituality, theology, doxology and liturgy of different Church traditions has resulted in significant fruit. In particular, a significant number of disenfranchised Christians have returned to church. They, along with other congregants, have been re-invigorated by the exploration of what it means to follow Jesus in the twenty-first century, unencumbered by some of the perspectives of traditional Pentecostalism and the ambitions of contemporary Pentecostalism that, in a mega-church, or quasi-mega-church, context, too easily lead to empire-building projects. It appears that a Pentecostal church, open to engagement with the Church’s liturgical calendar, comfortable with deep-rooted questions about the foundations of faith, celebratory of both sharp minds and soft hearts, committed to a slow journey together rather than attempting to be another fast-track in life, and open to the riches found in the
Great Tradition of the Church, has the potential to bring faith alive for people who have
found themselves becalmed or disenchanted with other forms of Christianity.

Thus, while resisting any attempt to prescribe future imaginings of
Pentecostalism and preferring instead to simply hint at certain possibilities, it is perhaps
not too presumptuous to describe St Luke’s as a particular type of evolution –
Pentecostalism in the Great Tradition of the Church. Pentecostalism has long considered
that other established Christian traditions are in desperate need of renewal. Perhaps
though, what is most needed for Pentecostalism, is a humble, open and Spirit led
exploration of the various treasures of the Christian faith as stewarded by the Catholic,
Anglican, Eastern Orthodox, Celtic, Anabaptist and Evangelical traditions of the Church.
These traditions have the potential, as the old and ancient to spark new life into the here
and now. Will this be the next renewal and evolution of Pentecostalism? Time will tell.
APPENDIX A

PENTECOSTAL PERSPECTIVES SURVEY 2017

Name: _______________________

Church: _______________________

Part 1/5

1. What year were you born?

2. What is the population (approx.) of your town or city?

3. How many (approx.) children attend your church each Sunday (ages 0 – 12)?

4. How many (approx.) youth attend your church each Sunday (ages 13 – 17)?

5. How many (approx.) adults attend your church each Sunday (ages 18+)?

6. What is your church’s (approx.) general income from tithes and offerings each year (not including special offerings etc.)?

7. What is the primary ethnicity of your church?

Part 2/5

8. In terms of theological or ministry training qualifications, please circle any that apply to you: Certificate. Diploma. Bachelor degree. Master’s degree. Doctorate. None of the above.

9. In terms of other industry qualifications (such as teaching, accountancy, engineering etc.), please circle any that apply to you: Certificate. Diploma. Bachelor degree. Master’s degree. Doctorate. None of the above.

10. What practices or disciplines do you think are most likely to help Christians to grow in their faith in the 21st Century?

__________________________________________________________
11. What two or three characteristics of your church do you think attendees are most drawn to?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

12. What does it mean for humans to be God’s “image bearers?”
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

13. What would best describe the perspective (most common) of your congregants in regard to personal evangelism? (please circle one)

Uninterested and likely overwhelmed.
Would likely become interested if equipped to engage effectively.
Passionate but unsure how to engage effectively.
Passionate and actively engaged.
All sits in the “too hard” basket.
I’m not sure.

Part 3/5

14. How true is this statement for your church? “A passion and pursuit of revival is a core value in our church.” (please circle one)

Not at all.
Somewhat.
Reasonably true.
Absolutely.

15. What should the Pentecostal church of the 21st Century prioritize in order to ensure it is relevant to peoples’ lives today?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

16. How many books would you read in regard to “theology” in the last 12 months?

0
1-3
4-9
10+

17. What programs, ministries, or methods have been effective in your church in terms of reaching unchurched people with the message of Jesus?
________________________________________________________________________
18. How true is this statement in regard to your church culture? “We have a passionate expectation in regard to signs, wonders, and miracles, and pray towards that end.” (Please circle one)

Not at all.
Somewhat.
Reasonably true.
Absolutely.

19. What do you think the most theologically challenging topics are for the Pentecostal church of New Zealand in the 21st Century?

________________________________________________________

Part 4/5

20. How many books have you read in regard to “leadership” in the last 12 months?

0
1-3
4-9
10+

21. What do you think is most likely putting secular Kiwis off attending church in 21st Century New Zealand?

________________________________________________________

22. What does it mean to be a Pentecostal?

________________________________________________________

23. What does it mean to be a Pentecostal church?

________________________________________________________

24. How likely would you be to have a Baptist, Presbyterian, Anglican or Catholic pastor preach in a Sunday service at your church? (please circle one)

That’s not something we would do.
We’d be somewhat open to the idea.
We think that would be a great idea.
Not only would it be a great idea, we’ve had one of these ministers preach at a Sunday service in the last 12 months.

161
25. How do you mainly hear God’s voice in your life?

______________________________________________________________________

Part 5/5

26. What pastors, churches, authors (anywhere in the world) do you mainly look up to as examples / role models / successes in Christian ministry?

______________________________________________________________________

27. Which perspective would you hold to be most important in appreciating the nature of human beings? (please circle one)

- Humans are both a soul and a body; the body is important but the soul is the main priority.
- Humans are immortal souls that live in a temporary body.
- Humans are fully embodied beings and should be ministered to accordingly.
- Humans are spirits, that have a soul, and live in a body.

28. How many books about “Christian spirituality” have you read in the last 12 months?

0 1-3 4-9 10+

29. What networks, pastors’ associations or ministry events such as conferences do you connect with and/or attend regularly? (circle any that apply)

A/G Regional Fellowship.
A/G National Conference.
Regular informal catch ups with A/G pastors.
Alphacrucis [A/G Bible College] events or block courses.
Local town/city cross-denominational ministers fraternal
LIFE events or conference (Paul de Jong)
HILLSONG events or conference (Brian Houston)
MANIFEST PRESENCE events or conference (Martin Steel)
ARISE events or conference (John Cameron)
OTHER ______________________________

30. How many books on church ministry or church life have you read in the last 12 months?
APPENDIX B

FRUIT AND CONSEQUENCES IN JOHN 6

In chapter six of John’s gospel, after preaching, Jesus, with almost no food on hand, gives thanks to God for five loaves of bread and two fish offered by a young boy. Jesus then proceeds to distribute this meager supply of food to the gathered crowd – no one goes hungry and twelve baskets of food are left over. However, this miraculous act of God produces both fruit (to be viewed positively) and consequences (negative outcomes) for Jesus’ ministry. In terms of fruit, God is honored as the source of provision and sustenance; Jesus is esteemed as one sent from God, metaphorically demonstrating that he is the Bread of Life; and twelve baskets of food are left over – a symbol that can be interpreted as demonstrating God’s intention that no human being should be lost. But there are less desirable outcomes that stem from the miracle. The next day, crowds gather around Jesus – not in order to receive him as the Bread of Life, but instead looking for another free lunch (John 6:25-35). The crowd also now intends to take Jesus and make him king by force (John 6:15) – a course of action contrary to Jesus’ mission, requiring him to withdraw from the crowd. In a similar way, Pentecostal ministry is a praxis of both fruit and consequence. Here we should appreciate the pragmatism of Pentecostalism as an invitation to think clearly about practical consequences.


2 Buxton, Dancing in the Dark, 252.
APPENDIX C

A GOSPEL NARRATIVE

In the beginning is the Word, and the Word is with God, and the Word is God, one God – Father, Spirit, Son (John 1:1). As love, and over-flowing with love, this triune God joyfully decides to bring forth new-life and calls the world into being.¹ All of God’s creation is invited to participate in God’s love with the entire cosmos existing as an object within that love. God is not an object within creation, but rather all creation lives and moves and has its being in God (Acts 17:28). At the same time however, God chooses to dwell within creation – creation is God’s great temple – the heavens are God’s throne and the earth God’s footstool and resting place (Isaiah 66:1-2). This resting place is not a rest of inactivity. Rather, the seventh-day rest of God (Genesis 2:1-3) is that of right and proper activity in a properly ordered creation.² It is the fruitful, creative and delightful living of shalom – right relationship between God and humanity, between humans, and between humanity and the created order.³

Unique within creation, humans were created as God’s image bearers – a total subversion of more common perceptions in the ancient Near East that carved statues could reflect the image of various gods, and a subversion of the practices involved in the

¹ Pinnock, Flame of Love, 23.


³ Snyder, Salvation Means Creation Healed, 66.
formation of graven images. In the temple cults of the ancient world, artisans would carve images of the gods in wood or stone, which would then be breathed upon in sacred garden ceremonies and supposedly animated with the life of the god. Finally, these objects would be installed in the temple as idols – the very image of the gods.\(^4\) God’s revelation to Israel, however, subverts this paradigm. All of creation is God’s temple and it is humanity that serves as God’s image bearers – not statues but human-beings. The imagery in Genesis 2:7-8 is that of God forming humanity, breathing life in the sacred Garden of Eden, and then installing and charging humanity to serve as image bearers on the earth. Installed in God’s cosmic temple, humans are called to a priestly vocation – to faithfully represent God in the world and to bring the worship of creation to God. Rather than shaping false gods and installing them in man-made temples, humans are themselves intended to represent the one true God throughout all the earth.

Given dominion over creation, the true priestly vocation of humankind is to represent the character, community and conduct of God in the world. They are to reflect in word and deed the wisdom, love, righteousness and justice of God in their care and cultivation of creation. They are to bring to God all honor, glory and power, praise, thanks and faithful worship in all situations – loving God with all their minds, hearts, souls and strength (Luke 10:27).

Unfortunately, humankind falls short in their call to the priestly vocation and misses the mark – Adam and Eve fail to represent and worship God faithfully. They

decide to self-rule and follow their own way – a supposed fast-track to godly wisdom rather than submission to God’s authority and way of living.\(^5\) Genesis 3 describes this initial failure of vocation through the account of Adam and Eve eating fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of God and Evil. This falling short and missing the mark as image bearers is what the Bible calls sin – a failure of worship and/or representation, usually both.

Humanity begins to drift away from Eden – away from God’s delightful *shalom* and into an increasingly depraved way of being in the world. Cain further exacerbates his parents’ errors by killing his brother Abel. As the narrative of Genesis unfolds, it appears that sin is multiplying exponentially. In Genesis 11, humanity is engaged in the empire-building project of Babel. Rather than representing God in the world and bringing the worship of the world to God – humanity’s priestly vocation – humankind are attempting to bring glory to themselves.

But God is faithful, calling Abram and his descendants (the nation of Israel) to be a new line of priestly people. God will be their God and they will be God’s people. Their faith will be in God alone – “Hear O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Coupled with that existential trust will be an embodied fidelity to the Law of Torah. As the people of Israel are established as a nation under the rule of God, they will make intellectual assent to the story of God in their journey – a commitment to remember the faithfulness of God in their history as a people. Despite

God’s faithfulness, however, Israel struggles to remain faithful in their representation and worship of God in the world. Sin and death continue to dominate their story. Israel – as a nation and as individuals – behaves in ways contrary to the character of God and offers worship and allegiance to entities within creation. In this sense, sin is far more than a failure to live up to a moral code, it becomes the means through which humanity fails to take dominion over creation, abdicates its role of stewardship, and empowers these entities into places of authority they were never intended to have.

Here the issue is not gods made of wood or stone but the way in which greed, for example, leads an individual to worship money and thereby ultimately empowers money as a false god – an idol in the individual’s life. More insidious again, though, is the way in which as humanity collectively worships false gods these gods become enthroned as principalities and powers that are exalted against the knowledge of God. While God created humanity, humanity’s unfaithfulness creates false gods that rule and reign in creation, with the satan, as an accuser, standing behind them. These false gods ran riot in Israel and wreak havoc in families and communities today – ravaging God’s good creation and destroying the shalom of God. Sin is thus a collective and systemic problem, as well as an individual issue. It is a damaging force in the world in which we live, as well as a reality to which individuals are guilty of contributing – all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

For Israel, various national leaders, judges, kings and prophets sometimes help to guide moves of national repentance that lead back towards existential trust, faithfulness to Torah, and a strong awareness of the nation’s history and God’s faithfulness. On other
occasions, people in authority lead Israel further astray. Eventually, Israel finds itself under God’s judgment, exiled and enslaved first by the Assyrian Empire and then later the Babylonian Empire. But by the first century AD, a remnant of Israel is still to be found in the Promised Land. Despite moments of rescue and fleeting instances of autonomy, their history of subjugation at the hands of empire continues – the latest incarnation of this is the Roman Empire – a personification of sin and death.

Israel is a land, but the land is occupied by foreign invaders and dominated by political power-plays – certainly not a garden of delight or a place of rest. The system of worship has been defiled by corrupt alliances between religious officials and Rome. The king of Israel is a client king, and not of the line of David. Meanwhile, Caesar, not God, is supposedly lord of all. The dominant discourse – the “gospel” or euangelion proclaimed by the empire – is that Caesar is the king of kings, the prince of peace, the bringer of the pax romana, and the son of the gods.

The people of Israel find themselves alienated (from their land despite living there, each other, God and creation), enslaved (trapped and powerless under the Roman Empire), and condemned (in that their unfaithfulness to God has been a factor leading to these circumstances). Israel’s situation is the same condition as every human-being. All are under the domination of sin and death, and the principalities and powers that idol worship has established in the world. All are alienated, enslaved and condemned. Israel, and humankind, are desperate for a savior – a Messiah raised up by God to rescue, redeem, restore and deliver them from the powers that have subjugated them. It has been
400 years since the prophets last declared a word from the Lord, but rumor has it that a new king of the Jews has been born. Selah.

While this introductory element to the gospel story may seem long-winded, it sets the scene through which to properly make sense of the story of Jesus as the solution to Israel’s dilemma and the larger dilemma facing all of humanity. It allows the truly subversive nature of the gospel to be seen, as well as making clear the grand and all-encompassing nature of salvation. The scene is set for a new king, a new representative of God, a faithful image bearer who never fails to represent what God is like nor to bring faithful worship to God.

Indeed, a new king of the Jews has been born, though not only the king of the Jews – Jesus, as the Son of God and the Word made flesh, is king over all of creation. In his life, his teaching, his death and his resurrection he offers an alternative way of being in the world. He offers himself as the way, the truth and the life – the only path by which to be reconciled with God. Tempted in all things, as all humans are, Jesus never falls short or misses the mark as a representative of God or as one called to the faithful worship of God (Hebrews 4:15). Faithful and obedient, even unto death on the cross, Jesus shows what it is to be truly human as the new Adam and what it is to be the people of God as the faithful personification of Israel.

In his teaching, Jesus offers good news and glad tidings as he lives out the truth of the angelic announcement that accompanied his birth (Luke 2:10) and the messianic foretellings of Israel’s prophets. He proclaims the year of the Lord’s favor, declaring freedom for captives, recovery of sight for the blind, and victory from oppression (Luke
4:18-19). He teaches an alternate way of being in the world – the way of the kingdom of God – declaring that “You have heard it said, but I say unto you…” (Matthew 5:21-48). This way of living is that of discipleship – a counter-move to the way of corruption. It is a call for humanity to walk the extra mile, turn the other cheek, love their neighbors as themselves, to love their enemies, to forgive those who sin against them, to welcome strangers and to offer hospitality and assistance to the poor – it is a narrow way. Jesus lives out this alternative way. During his temptations in the wilderness, his life of ministry and the passion of the cross, he embodies total fidelity to everything he taught in the Sermon on the Mount. This embodied fidelity is an extension of the existential trust Jesus has in God his Father. Jesus commits himself to this trust throughout his journey to the cross: “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39).

While Israel was hoping for a Messiah who would bring freedom from the captivity and oppression of the Roman Empire, and while it looked like the execution of Jesus at the hands of the Empire would be the end of the story – something far deeper is about to unfold. On the cross, Jesus comes under the full weight of the principalities and powers that systemic sin enthrones as agents of destruction that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God, personified in the violence and death-dealing of the Roman Empire.

But on the third day Jesus rises from the dead, defeating sin and death, and exposing the false principalities and powers as impostors not fit to be worshiped or followed. Jesus is fully vindicated by God as the righteous and sinless Son of God.

170
Everything Jesus taught is confirmed as the true story in which we are to live our own stories. Everything Jesus lived is shown to be The Way – a model of the embodied fidelity that we are called to live. The very life of Christ is endorsed as true faithfulness, with resurrection life defeating sin and death. The principalities and powers are exposed and humanity is freed from the grip of idolatry, reconciled to God and made whole. The righteousness of Christ is now reckoned to all who through faith and repentance would entrust their lives to him.

The final outcome is not that we might receive some sort of ticket to eternal life away in heaven, but rather that we might be restored to be the image bearers we were created to be and restored to our priestly vocation as God’s representatives and faithful worshipers on earth – in this age and in the age to come. Christ followers become, as the Apostle Peter describes it in 1 Peter 2:9, a chosen people, a royal priesthood, God’s special possession (representatives), declaring the praises of him who called us out of darkness and into his wonderful light (worshipers). The book of Revelation states that Jesus Christ is “the faithful witness [the faithful image bearer], the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth” and offers up praises to him “who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests [the original vocation of humanity] to serve his God and Father...” (Revelation 1:5-6). Or as the elders and creatures of heaven sing to Christ the lamb, “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made
them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth” 
(Revelation 5:9-10).

Sins are forgiven, humanity is healed, and the principalities and powers are exposed and disarmed; every idol is triumphed over. Rescued from an alienated, depraved, condemned and enslaved state, humans are restored to their priestly vocation as new creations in Christ Jesus – image bearers living under the rule of Christ as king and as citizens of the kingdom of God. This kingdom is breaking out within and among us now, and will be realized in full at Christ’s return, when the heavens and earth are renewed. Once again the dwelling place of God will be with humanity and true rest will be possible – not a rest of inactivity but of participation in shalom and the adventure of eternal life.


