

PENTECOSTAL EDUCATION

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Aims and Scope

Pentecostal Education (formerly The Pentecostal Educator) semiannually e-publishes scholarly and practical articles related to theological education within the Pentecostal tradition to encourage the continuing maturation of Pentecostal theological education. It is intentionally practical, applied, and international.

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Editorial

It is with pleasure that I invite you to read the many and diverse articles included in this edition of *Pentecostal Education*. True to the mission of the World Alliance for Pentecostal Theological Education, this edition covers a variety of topics all of which should help both those responsible for educating as well as the wider constituency. I am delighted that we have been able to include the work of seasoned scholars as well as that of emerging scholar-practitioners.

During the first week of March the Board of Trustees of WAPTE met for their annual general meeting. The meeting was convened in London. It was most gratifying to have so many gather. The diversity both in Pentecostal fellowships represented as well as regions was excellent. Discussion was lively and there was an obvious enthusiasm for the mission and vision of our Association. Several meaningful partnerships were explored, our role within the Pentecostal World Fellowship was discussed as well. WAPTE assumed the role of the Theological Commission for PWF several years ago. Finding ways to give consistent and practical expression to this was carefully considered. Additionally, early work has begun on confirming standards and procedures for some form of global, Pentecostal endorsement agency. There is a well stated enthusiasm for closer theological education and training ties within our wider constituency and WAPTE is moving towards finding an expression for this. The circulation of this journal was also a matter for discussion and evaluation. Again, the reports were positive and the feedback encouraging.

One of the hopes in publishing this journal is that a growing sense of collegiality would develop across our vast and diverse constituency. Your participation either through sharing this journal, responding to articles, or even submitting work for publication would be greatly appreciated.

I continue to appreciate the work of our editorial team. Their efforts are bearing good fruit.

As always, my hope is for the great task of theologically educating and training emerging leaders will be enhanced by both this publication and the faith-filled communities that we all represent. May His Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

Paul R Alexander
Senior Editor, WAPTE Chair



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In This Issue: Editorial

Pentecostal Educator is a means of information that shares the thoughts of educators and leaders of Pentecostalism. We are very grateful for the favorable messages we have received and for the words of encouragement that our readers send us. In a certain way, this Journal has the opportunity to promote the development of Pentecostalism from different angles. In addition, it is a medium that publicizes the relevant activities that occur in the movement in different regions of the world.

In this volume we have the opportunity to study East Asian thought, which is represented by students and professors from Pentecostal institutions that interact with North American universities. Here the reader will realize the creativity and academic ability to manage current issues on the part of such students.

On the other hand, we are encouraged to know that this Journal is widely read, beyond Pentecostalism. In our work we thank the Holy Spirit for giving us the opportunity to represent voices that would not otherwise be heard. It is against this background that *Pentecostal Educator* continues to strive to represent readers as well as authors.

Once again, we are pleased to present to you a volume that attempts to expose the broad academic spectrum of thought of students, professors, and leaders of Pentecostalism operating in different educational institutions and ecclesial agencies. However, the opinions of the authors are personal and do not represent the institutions where they work. To these, we are very grateful for their contributions, hoping that the reading is to the liking of our readers.

Miguel Alvarez
Executive Editor

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What Was Jesus Modeling? The Purpose for Jesus' Encounter with the Canaanite Woman (Matthew 15:21-28)

Douglas P. Lowenberg

Abstract

The episode of Jesus encountering the Canaanite woman with a demonized daughter in Tyre and Sidon has created confusion for many interpreters. Jesus' response to her seems very inconsistent with his normal, compassionate nature. And his going to a foreign location outside of the land of Israel appears to contradict the view that, during his ministry on earth before his death and resurrection, he came almost exclusively for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. This article attempts to show the consistency of Matthew's Gospel message if one considers the larger literary context of the passage and notes what Matthew is teaching in this pericope from Jesus' example.

Keywords: Gospel, context, pericope, author's intent, model, either/or

Introduction

Much ink has been spilled writing articles regarding "the notoriously difficult passage"¹ which recounts Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman from Syrophoenicia. Many of these studies propose principles such as: 1) those who hold onto their faith when facing God-ordained tests and adversity will see their prayers answered; 2) Jesus' missional ministry prior to the resurrection focused almost exclusively on the people of Israel; and 3) the disciples of Jesus were taught lessons about themselves, Jesus, and his mission through this experience.

Oscillating between this pericope and Matthew's entire Gospel raises questions about the validity of the wide array of lessons generated from

¹ C. Richard Wells, "New Testament Interpretation and Preaching," in *New Testament Criticism & Interpretation* (ed. David A. Black and David S. Dockery; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 575.

the story when one considers the purpose for which the author crafted this account in his Gospel.² It could be that preconceived ideas have so affected the interpretations of the text that Matthew's intentionality has been skewed resulting in misunderstandings of why Jesus traveled to the region of Tyre and Sidon and encountered the Canaanite woman. The proposed motives for Jesus' words and actions with her could be quite misleading compared to what Matthew intended to communicate about the person, mission, and ministry methods of Jesus. A fresh examination of Matthew's account of Jesus' meeting with the Canaanite woman is merited to reconsider what the inspired author may have been saying to his first century audience.³

This study will examine each verse in the pericope commenting on issues that shape the overall meaning of the passage, consider the literary context of the story, discuss the importance of its historical and cultural setting, reflect on the possible location and composition of Matthew's original audience, and propose a meaning consistent with Matthew's intentions. Attention will be given to Jesus' ministry strategy based on this text and the contribution this pericope makes to Matthew's Gospel. Lessons learned by Matthew and his fellow disciples from this event will be proposed and evaluated.⁴

Verse 21 and the Literary Context

There seems to be continuity of thought with the previous pericope as Matthew advances his narrative from the preceding discussion on ritual

² Jeannine K. Brown advises, "During much of the exegetical process, the most important literary unit to attend to when reading a specific text is the entire book of the Bible in which it is found. For exegesis to stay true to what an author has communicated, the whole book must remain in view." Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 14.

³ David Hill sums up the traditional perspective on Matthew's overall intentions: "Matthew's Gospel is written from a Jewish Christian standpoint in order to defend Christianity, to make acceptable to Jewish-Christian readers, and to prove that Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews." David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NCBC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 40.

⁴ Bailey observes, "The training of the disciples is a prominent feature in all four Gospels" and this certainly is the case with this story. He adds, "Jesus is not simply dealing with the woman, he is also interacting on a profound level with the disciples." Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 217, 219.

cleanness (15:1-20) to the story of the Canaanite woman using the conjunction “and” (καὶ).⁵ Matthew is known for arranging his “ancient biography”⁶ around theological themes, and it appears that there is a thematic connection between the previous story and this one.⁷ Another indicator of continuation with the theme of “cleanness” for these two pericopes is Matthew’s reference to geographical locations. The previous discussion took place in Gennesaret (14:34). In 15:1, he reports that Jesus departed from there (ἐξελθὼν ἐκεῖθεν) and withdrew to the regions of Tyre and Sidon (τὰ μέρη Τύρου καὶ Σιδῶνος).⁸ The movement from one region to another is motivated by one persistent concern. Some scholars note that Jesus had a pattern of withdrawing from one location to another more secluded when controversies arose with the Pharisees and teachers of the law (12:15; 14:13). To avoid conflict with the

⁵ Hill states, “The question of clean and unclean (verses 1-20) is closely related to the matter of Jewish attitudes towards Gentiles . . . It is therefore likely that this pericope was employed for the guidance of the Matthean church in its relations with Gentiles.” Hill, *Gospel of Matthew*, 253.

⁶ Keener identifies the Gospels as ancient biographies. For discussion, see Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (2nd ed.; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 37-38.

⁷ Wright says that this story happens “in the wake of the dispute between Jesus and the Pharisees, and teachers of the law regarding clean and unclean food.” He observes, “The clean-unclean distinction in Israel was fundamentally symbolic of the distinction between Israel and the nations. Accordingly, if Jesus abolished the distinction in relation to food (the symbol) then he simultaneously abolished the distinction in relation to Jews and Gentiles (the reality that the symbol pointed to). This makes it all the more significant that both Matthew and Mark follow the dispute with two miracles for Gentiles for Gentiles (the woman of Tyre and the man in Decapolis) and probably a third (if the feeding of the four thousand took place on the Decapolis side of the lake).” Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 508-509. Also see Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 38, 155.

⁸ Rather than considering Tyre and Sidon as remote villages, and while the people were followers of the fertility god, Eshmun, Sidon was renowned as a center of philosophical learning and both cities continued to have maritime and economic influence. See Bastiaan Van Elderen, “Sidon” (in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 5; ed. Merrill C. Tenney; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 428; D. J. Wiseman, “Sidon” and “Tyre” (in *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed; ed. D.R.W. Wood; Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1996), 1099-1100, 1215-1216.

opposition, find rest for himself and his disciples from the demands of public ministry, and secure time for private discourse with the twelve, he retreated to remote places.⁹ However, in this story there is no mention of Jesus' motivation for withdrawing nor an explanation for his going an extreme distance to a foreign location. Instead, it appears that Jesus intentionally travelled to a ritually unclean region inhabited by impure, "pagan" people.¹⁰

Several observations from the preceding pericope, noting the importance of the literary context, help inform one's understanding of Matthew's intention for the inclusion of the Canaanite woman's story. In the preceding account, the Pharisees criticized Jesus for condoning his disciples' neglect of observing traditional, ritual washings before eating, thus disqualifying themselves from approaching God for worship and intercession and excluding themselves from table fellowship with those determined to be "clean."¹¹ Jesus responded to the Pharisees' challenge by criticizing their misleading emphasis on "the traditions of the elders" to the neglect of the "command of God" and "the word of God" (15:2-6 NIV).

⁹ Craig S. Keener comments that Jesus "needed a short vacation to rest with and teach his disciples." Craig S. Keener, *Matthew* (IVPNTCS; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 263. Myron S. Augsburger sees no reference to a respite but claims that Jesus traveled to the region of Tyre and Sidon "to provide opportunity for persons to hear and respond." Myron S. Augsburger, *Matthew* (CC; Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 195.

¹⁰ D.A. Carson, *Matthew: Chapters 13 Through 28* (EBC; Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan, 1995), 354. Jeremias holds the view that even in this distant region, Jesus moved among "the Jewish population." Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 35-36. Craig L. Blomberg believes that Jesus turned from those who rejected his message and ministry to those more receptive. "Jesus revealed himself as the Bread of life for Jews and Gentiles alike." Craig L. Blomberg, "Matthew" in *Holman Bible Handbook* (ed. David S. Dockery; Nashville, TN: Holman, 1992), 554.

¹¹ Moore explains that the Pharisees were committed to separation from anything, any person, situation, food, or conduct that compromised their separation unto God, his law, and his holiness. Their efforts were not to earn salvation but to keep them in the place where God's approval and blessings rested. George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (vol. 1; New York: Schocken, 1971), 59-62. Ablutions were intended to remove ceremonial defilement caused by contact with anything considered unclean. See Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 251.

Jesus, calling the crowd to come near and listen, drew attention to the Pharisees' hypocrisy (15:20) and explained what caused moral and spiritual defilement, which was far more important to God than ritual, external impurity.¹² The former brought God's disapproval and excluded people from receiving his blessings and answers to prayer. Jesus stated, "What comes *out of the mouth*, that is what makes him 'unclean'" (15:11). He repeated this same phrase a few moments later: "The things that come *out of the mouth* come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean'" (15:18). While explaining that the heart was the source for spiritually contaminating thoughts and actions, he twice mentioned the close association between one's heart and one's mouth: the words that proceeded out of the mouth originated in the heart. In his list of sins that flow from the heart and manifest themselves through one's mouth, he specifically itemized two aspects of speech: false testimony and slander (15:29). Jesus' instructions to his hearers about the matters that defile them before God called attention not only to inner motivations of the heart, but to the outer expressions of behavior and words. One's speech clearly revealed the state of the heart.

What seems to be overlooked by a number of commentators is the reaction of Jesus' disciples to their Master's criticism of the Pharisees' teaching. Upon Jesus exposing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees in the way they honored human tradition while nullifying God's law and erroneously emphasized external cleansing while ignoring the state of the heart, the Twelve disapproved of his censure: "Do you not know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?" (15:12). Even though it was Jesus' disciples who had triggered the critical judgment of the Pharisees, it was the Twelve who defended the Pharisees' theology and practice in terms of what was ritually clean.¹³ They criticized Jesus for his negative assessment of their religious leaders and endorsed the position of the Pharisees over and against Jesus' revelatory perspective on the state of the heart which was manifest through one's words and judgmental pronouncements. At this juncture in their spiritual development as future apostles of Jesus, they were more conformed to and in agreement with the beliefs and practices of the Pharisees than those of Jesus.

¹² For further discussion on the significance of Jesus' comments related to ritual versus moral defilement, see Carson, *Matthew 13-28*, 352.

¹³ Carson observes that their response shows that the disciples held the Pharisees in high regard. Carson, *Matthew 13-28*, 350.

Jesus asserted that what the Pharisees taught, which did not originate from his heavenly Father, would one day be destroyed (15:13). This statement was reminiscent of his former teaching concerning the enemy who covertly planted weeds among the wheat (13:24-30, 36-43). The final judgment in both stories was the same: that which did not originate from God would be uprooted and destroyed.

Based on the discussion between Jesus and his disciples, it appears that the Twelve were deeply influenced by Pharisaic teachings and had adopted their worldview.¹⁴ To correct his followers' perspective, which included the Pharisees' views on ritual cleanness, qualifications for table fellowship, the identity and purpose of the Messiah, and requirements for entrance into God's kingdom, Jesus commanded his disciples, "Leave them" (ἄφετε αὐτούς) (15:14). A mirror reading of this statement proposes that his disciples had not yet abandoned the beliefs and practices of this influential religious sect. Jesus continued with a warning to his followers: "They are blind guides; and if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a ditch" (Matt. 15:14 KJV). Jesus indicated that not only were the Pharisees blind, his own disciples were blind failing to grasp the truth he was revealing. If they continued following these religious leaders, they too would stumble and fall in their pursuit of God's will and kingdom. The disciples struggled to grasp the new perspective Jesus was introducing. Their confusion is further emphasized in Jesus' address to Peter who expressed his bewilderment over the parable (15:11). Jesus gave a collective assessment, "Are you [all] still so dull?" (15:16).

Later in Matthew's travel narrative, as Jesus continued to reshape the faith, values, and practices of his followers, the influence of the Pharisees' teaching arose again. He said, "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (16:6). Slowly the disciples were recognizing the deeply rooted influence the Pharisees had on their views. Matthew comments, "Then they understood that he was . . . telling them to guard against . . . the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (16:12).

If one considers the audience to whom Matthew wrote, this passage could serve as a strong warning to the New Testament church in the

¹⁴ Regarding the Pharisees, Harlow purports that "a key element of their social program was to extend the priestly regulations of ritual purity mandated in Leviticus to all Jews in all spheres of life." Daniel C. Harlow, "Jewish Context of the NT" in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 375.

latter half of the first century to be on guard and distance themselves from the persistent, misleading influence of Pharisaism, whether it came from Pharisaic Jews or Pharisaic Christians (see Acts 15:5). The conflicting worldview propagated by a Pharisaic perspective, which promoted adherence to the Mosaic law, circumcision, Sabbath Day observances, ritual cleansing, a restrictive diet, and exclusive table fellowship—practices that impeded the inclusion of Gentiles into God’s kingdom, destroyed the unity of the church and subverted salvation through faith in Jesus alone.

Returning to the issue of geographic location, Matthew reports that, following this confrontation with the Pharisees and his own disciples, Jesus went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. No details are given as to the precise location he visited. It is noteworthy to recognize the distance from Gennesaret to Tyre and Sidon and to identify the people living in that region. Gennesaret was located on the northwest shore of Lake Galilee, approximately 4 kilometers west of Capernaum. To travel from there to Tyre, the route required one to journey east approximately 8 kilometers to the Jordon River Valley, north 15 kilometers to Lake Huleh, then follow a circuitous northwestwardly route 50 to 55 kilometers through the North Galilee highlands to Tyre. The trip would have covered a distance of almost 80 kilometers. Based on Mark’s account of this same incident, after Jesus’ encounter with the Canaanite woman, he went further north to Sidon, an additional 40 kilometers (Mark 7:31). The overall expedition would have covered over 120 kilometers one way. Did Jesus travel this extreme distance simply to avoid further conflict with the Pharisees? Journeying to this region, Jesus left behind the province of Galilee and entered a foreign land dominated by Gentiles. Could it be that this journey was intended to expose his disciples to the global mission of God being fulfilled in his Son, the Messiah, which included the “unclean”?¹⁵

¹⁵ Keener reports that Matthew believed that “a call to missions work demands that disciples first abandon ethnic and cultural prejudice.” Yet Keener believes that this stage of Jesus’ ministry “was for Israel alone.” Keener, *Matthew*, 172, 263. Jeremias points out that Judaism considered itself a missional religion. But the premise of conversion of the Gentiles to faith in the one God, YHWH, was not dependent on the sending out of emissaries, but the presence of the Jewish Diaspora. Conversion required that Gentiles become religious and cultural Jews through the confession of one God, circumcision, observing the food laws, and keeping the Sabbath. Jeremias, *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations*, 12-17. In agreement with Jeremias’ understanding of the missionary nature of Judaism, McKnight

Verse 22

To emphasize the non-Jewish nature of the vicinity, Matthew recorded his surprise when Jesus was approached by a Canaanite woman (literally, “and behold a woman, a Canaanite”; καὶ ἰδοὺ γυνή Χαναναία). While Mark refers to her as “a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia” (Mark 7:26 NIV), Matthew described her with an old, anachronistic term that had fallen out of use by the first century—“Canaanite.”¹⁶ The Canaanites were an ancient, resistant enemy of Israel opposed to Israelite occupancy of the land. Canaanites had led the people of God into idolatry and immorality which brought God’s judgment on Israel. This Canaanite woman approached Jesus seeking help from him for her demon-possessed daughter. According to traditional Jewish and Pharisaic sensibilities, the woman represented the epitome of uncleanness and defilement: a woman, a Canaanite, the mother of a daughter rather than a son, and a child demonized (the demonization could have resulted from the idolatrous practices of the woman’s family and tribe).

From one perspective, she instigated the encounter with Jesus; she approached Jesus. This is the view taken by those who hold the opinion that Jesus did not actively engage Gentiles during his earthly ministry.¹⁷ And only on rare occasions did he tolerate the advance of a Gentile. Bosch claims, “Matthew never tells of Jesus actually taking the initiative and going out to Gentiles. *They* approach *him*, not he them.”¹⁸ Keener comments, “The Gentile mission was at most peripheral to Jesus’ earthly ministry: he did not actively seek out Gentiles for ministry, and both occasions on which he heals Gentiles he does so from a distance (8:13; 15:28).”¹⁹ From a different perspective, Jesus approached her; he traveled over 80 kilometers to place himself in her proximity. And unlike Mark, Matthew makes no reference to Jesus seeking anonymity by entering a house (Mark 7:24).²⁰ Jesus entered a public space where he was accessible.

writes, “Jews were essentially uninvolved in such a thing as ‘evangelism.’” Scot McKnight, *A Light among the Gentiles: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1991), 107. Also see J. Julius Scott, Jr., *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 343.

¹⁶ Blomberg states that this label was intended to “conjure up horrors of Israel’s enemies of old.” Blomberg, “Matthew,” 555.

¹⁷ Jeremias reports, “The initiative is not taken by Jesus” who “limited his activity to Israel.” Jeremias, *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations*, 31.

¹⁸ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), 60. Italics are Bosch’s.

¹⁹ Keener, *Matthew*, 171.

²⁰ Jeremias says that Jesus wished to remain in concealment. Jeremias, *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations*, 32.

Her appeal as a Gentile is surprising and yet corresponding with familiar words of appeal that come from the desperate: “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession” (NIV). What would she have known about Jesus that would cause her to employ such honorific titles? What did she believe about Jesus that emboldened her to approach him for help? What had she heard about Jesus that caused her to believe he had authority over demons? From Jesus’ earliest days of public ministry, news about him had spread throughout the provinces of Israel and beyond, as far as Syria, the region north of Syrophenicia (Matt. 4:24-25). Crowds with every type of sickness and spiritual condition came to him and were healed. As Jesus and his companions traveled north from Gennesaret, the report of their movements would have been noticed and broadcast. She heard of his coming, believed he had the power to deliver and heal, and came to him with her request for mercy.

The titles she used are found on the lips of others approaching Jesus for help. “Lord” was the title used by the leper seeking healing (Matt. 8:2) and the Gentile centurion interceding for his servant (Matt. 8:6). A father with a demonized son cried, “Lord, have mercy on my son” (Matt. 17:15). Two blind men desiring healing called out to Jesus, “Have mercy on us, Son of David” (Matt. 9:27). Two other blind men requesting healing from Jesus used the same, exact expression, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” (Matt. 20:31). In all these cases, Jesus was moved with compassion and was willing to heal.

The NIV translation changes the word order of her appeal. It reorders to the first place of her request the honorific titles she used, followed by her appeal for mercy, and concludes with her explanation for seeking his intervention. However, the Greek text begins with her request for mercy, followed by the titles, and concludes with the need; literally, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demonized” (Ἐλέησόν με, κύριε υἱὸς Δαυίδ· ἡ θυγάτηρ μου κακῶς δαιμονίζεται).²¹ Following the meaning of the word order of the Greek text, the woman first expressed her lowly, dependent status as she approached Jesus. She came to Jesus asking for mercy, for help she did not deserve. Then she uttered titles that expressed her view of his exalted state: “Lord, Son of David.” The term “Lord” (κύριε) could be understood as a statement of respect equivalent to “sir.” But coupled with the next epithet, “Son of David,” a common messianic title, her use

²¹ Ἐλέησόν is a second person singular aorist imperative indicating that her request for mercy was to Jesus alone.

of “Lord” should more aptly be interpreted as her declaration of his lordship and mastery over her and her situation. Her confession was that Jesus was Lord and that he was the Messiah. The reason for her request for mercy was the demonized condition of her daughter. As a loving parent, the needs of her daughter had become her own. In her humility, she did not ask Jesus to heal or deliver her daughter, she simply described the need and asked for mercy.

In a pagan culture, the normal response of the local people to demonization would have been to consult sorcerers to determine the cause and find the solution for the demonic assault, then pay the price exacted by the spiritual practitioner hoping for some degree of relief. One might assume this mother had exhausted her resources attempting to find a cure but experienced no deliverance. Having heard the reports of people who “brought to him . . . the demon-possessed, . . . and he healed them” (Matt. 4:24), and aware that he had journeyed all the way to her region, her faith in Jesus’ power,²² and her confidence in his compassion inspired her to come out from her home and address him. She ignored the cultural taboos for a woman to approach a man in public, a Gentile to make contact with a Jew, and for one steeped in idolatry to seek audience with an acclaimed Jewish prophet. She came humbly, but desperately, requesting his compassionate and powerful intervention. “Matthew views compassion as a primary motivation in Jesus’ acts of healing.”²³ “Clearly the woman has prior knowledge of Jesus and of his compassion for all, be they Jews or Gentiles, male or female.”²⁴

This Canaanite approached Jesus with expectations. While some scholars report that she was being manipulative, there is no indication in the text of any attitude other than desperation, humility, faith, and courage. Thus, Jesus’ response to her seems shocking and inconsistent with his normal compassionate actions.

²² Much like the leper who boldly approached Jesus for healing assured that he was able to heal his disease, his only question was if Jesus was willing (Matt. 8:2-3). The Canaanite woman seemed confident of both Christ’s power and his willingness. She overstepped all normal cultural prohibitions to approach him publicly driven by her faith in his ability and compassion.

²³ Keener, *Matthew*, 170.

²⁴ Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 220. Bailey further notes, “Thus far in his ministry Jesus’ compassion for all was constantly on display and the disciples could not have missed it” (223).

Verse 23

“But he [Jesus] did not answer her a word” (ὁ δὲ οὐκ ἀπεκρίθη αὐτῇ λόγον). Why the silence? At this juncture in the narrative, scholars provide a host of explanations for Jesus’ silence including: he was indifferent or reluctant to help her because she was a Gentile;²⁵ helping her ran contrary to his mission to the Jews; he was aghast at her sinful uncleanness; he was shocked by the aggressive attitude of a despised Canaanite; he was perplexed by her aggressive approach and did not know what to do; and he was testing her to see her level of faith and determination.²⁶ Matthew, however, reports that out of the deafening silence the first voices heard were those of the disciples. It is not until this moment in the narrative that Matthew mentions the presence of the disciples. Should Jesus’ silence be interpreted as indifference or rejection?

His disciples persistently urged Jesus to send her away. The reason for their dismissal, “She is crying out after us” (καὶ προσελθόντες οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ἠρώτουν αὐτὸν λέγοντες· Ἀπόλυσον αὐτήν, ὅτι κραζει ὀπισθεν ἡμῶν). According to Bailey, Jesus’ “indifference . . . was no doubt seen by the disciples as acting in an entirely appropriate manner.”²⁷ His silence allowed them to assert their views of her and her request. Is Matthew providing a concrete example of Jesus’ instructions recorded in the previous pericope: “The things that come *out of the mouth* come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean’” (15:18)? When

²⁵ Jeremias says that Jesus’ attitude towards her was “one of definite refusal”; he replied “extremely harshly”; his response was a “last revulsion.” Jeremias, *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations*, 26, 29, 32. France comments, “Jesus’ initial reluctance to respond is overcome by the faith of the suppliant which refuses to be put off and which . . . draws Jesus’ admiring comment.” R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 309. Keener indicates that “Jesus simply snubs her. . . . It is possible that he is testing her . . . but he is certainly reluctant to grant her request and is providing an obstacle for her faith.” Keener, *Matthew*, 263. Jusu comments that “for some unexplained reason, Jesus did not respond to her request immediately.” John Jusu, *Africa Study Bible* (ed.; Chicago, IL: Oasis International, 2016), 1404.

²⁶ Bailey asserts, “Jesus chooses to give her a critical test.” Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 220. Keener, referring to the centurion, the Canaanite woman, and the rich young ruler (chapters 8, 15, 19), claims that initial rejection like this was a common ploy for demanding greater commitment. Keener, *Matthew*, 173.

²⁷ Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 221.

touring a foreign region and facing an unclean Canaanite woman with a demonized daughter, did their request reveal the state of their hearts, their assessment of such people, and their readiness, or lack thereof, to minister to her need?²⁸

“Send her away” (Ἀπόλυσον αὐτήν). Scholars provide two different interpretations of the disciples’ request. Some view this request as one of utter rejection showing the contempt of Jewish men towards a Gentile woman.²⁹ Possibly they felt cultural discomfort because a foreign, pagan woman had publicly approached them which in their culture was completely inappropriate. This Gentile woman was obviously unclean; any contact with her would defile them and their esteemed rabbi.³⁰ Other scholars propose that the disciples were not so cruel-hearted but were asking Jesus to honor her request, heal her child, and then encourage her to leave them.³¹ This second perspective is dubious in light of the disciples previous request for Jesus to send the crowds away (ἀπόλυσον τοὺς ὄχλους) when faced with the impossible situation of providing food in a remote area for a vast multitude (Matt. 14:15). In the pericope immediately following the encounter with the Canaanite, which quite likely took place among Gentiles in the Decapolis (Matt. 15:29-39; Mark 7:31), to preempt the disciples from once again requesting Jesus to send the crowds away for similar reasons, Jesus said, “I have compassion for these people . . . I do not want to send them away hungry (Σπλαγχνίζομαι ἐπὶ τὸν ὄχλον . . . ἀπολῦσαι αὐτοὺς νήστες οὐ θέλω), or they may collapse on the way” (Matt. 15:32). When faced with impossible situations or “unclean” people, it seems the tendency of the disciples was to dismiss the needy without offering a solution for their physical or spiritual predicament, especially if helping them might come

²⁸ While Bailey does not note any connection between this pericope and the previous one, he does observe, “Jesus was voicing, and thereby exposing, deeply held prejudices buried in the minds of his disciples.”

Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 222.

²⁹ Hill asserts that this statement made by the quarrelsome, fault-finding disciples represents the Jewish Christian church who were opposed to the entry of Gentiles into the NT church. Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 254.

³⁰ As with the account of the leper, a Jewish teacher with a proper concern to maintain ritual purity would be expected to refuse to have anything to do with him. The same was assumed by the disciples for Jesus. See France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 307.

³¹ For discussion on the nuances of the disciples’ request, see Carson, *Matthew* 13-28, 354.

at a personal cost. Concerning the Canaanite, it is more probable that they simply wanted Jesus to dismiss her summarily.

Their request also revealed something about their self-centeredness. While her pleas for help were aimed solely at Jesus, they reported she was crying after “us” (ὅπισθεν ἡμῶν). When did the woman mention the disciples, acknowledge them, or appeal for their help? Their self-centered outlook and request were an attempt to preempt Jesus from responding to the woman and showed their callousness towards her dire predicament.

Verse 24

Since it was the disciples who just proposed the request to send her away, it seems that Jesus’ response was to their petition: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Οὐκ ἀπεστάλην εἰ μὴ εἰς τὰ πρόβατα τὰ ἀπολωλότα οἴκου Ἰσραὴλ). Most scholars view this assertion as Jesus’ affirmation of his earthly mission—to the lost sheep of the house of Israel—only and exclusively.³² They reinforce this statement with Jesus’ previous restriction given to the Twelve: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Εἰς ὁδὸν ἐθνῶν μὴ ἀπέλθῃτε καὶ εἰς πόλιν Σαμαριτῶν μὴ εἰσέλθῃτε· πορεύεσθε δὲ μᾶλλον πρὸς τὰ πρόβατα τὰ ἀπολωλότα οἴκου Ἰσραὴλ, Matt. 10:5-6).³³ Was Jesus declaring the

³² Stein observes that Matthew recorded Jesus’ journey outside the confines of Israel to predominantly Gentile territories to demonstrate to his Gentile readers that “even during his lifetime Jesus was concerned for them. He came to bring the good news not just to the children of Abraham but to Gentiles as well.” Robert H. Stein, *Jesus the Messiah: A Survey of the Life of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity 1996), 156. Wright reports, “The Gospels record that Jesus deliberately limited his itinerant ministry and that of his disciples for the most part to ‘the lost sheep of Israel.’ But they also show some significant engagements with Gentiles . . . it is simply false to say that Jesus had no interest in the world beyond his own Jewish people.” Wright, *The Mission of God*, 507. Carson states that Jesus “recognized that his own mission was to Israel” and that his target audience was all Israel who were “regarded as lost sheep.” Carson, Matthew 13-28, 355. Hill comments, “Jesus insisted that his call was to the children of Israel.” Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 253. Also see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (rev. ed.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 29.

³³ In Luke’s parallel account, Luke 9:1-6, there is no record of this restriction on the evangelistic commissioning of the Twelve. The absence of the

rationale for which the woman should be sent away—he had not come for Gentiles, at least not at this time in his earthly ministry? Given the context, one might assume the disciples were in hardy agreement with this statement.

With this assertion, what did Matthew intend to convey about Jesus, his ministry focus, and his attitude towards this marginalized woman with her desperate need?³⁴ With these words was Jesus delineating his ministry priorities which then dictated how he should respond to the woman's request? Or was he verbalizing the views the disciples had for his messianic ministry, much like Peter would do later when he told Jesus that the way of the cross was not acceptable (Matt. 16:22)? Did these words accurately represent Jesus' pre-resurrection, earthly ministry or did this statement articulate the perspective in the hearts of the Twelve for the ministry of the Messiah: he came exclusively to save the people of Israel and their nation? Bailey's insights are instructive: Jesus was "irritated by the disciples' attitude regarding women and Gentiles . . . He decide[d] to use the occasion to help her and challenge the deeply rooted prejudices in the hearts of his disciples . . . Jesus' approach to the education of his disciples [was] subtle and powerful."³⁵ Bailey rightly notes, "Jesus here gives concrete expression to the theology of his narrow-minded disciples."³⁶ Rather than reading these words as Jesus' declaration of the purpose for and priority of his earthly ministry, he was exposing the twisted and limiting expectations in the hearts of his disciples, influenced by self-centeredness, racism, and religious teaching. What was in the privacy of hearts, he exposed through words that expressed their attitudes.

For those who view Jesus' statement as his definitive mission statement, consideration should be given to the consistency of this

prohibition in Luke serves to highlight the unique agenda of Matthew as he includes these limits on the early ministry of the disciples. And Matthew does note in these same instructions that there would be a time when the disciples would stand before Gentiles to proclaim the gospel (Matt. 10:18). However, scholars like Jeremias interpret this statement meaning that "Jesus forbade his disciples during his lifetime to preach to non-Jews." Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations*, 19-25.

³⁴ Mark's Gospel account of this encounter does not include this saying (Mark 7:24-30). The reader must assume Matthew had a specific intent, distinct from the other Gospel writers, for recording Jesus' response to the disciples' request.

³⁵ Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 222.

³⁶ Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 223.

understanding with the entirety of Matthew's Gospel.³⁷ Does his Gospel confirm an exclusive focus of Jesus' messianic, compassionate, and saving ministry for the people of Israel alone?³⁸ Matthew began his Gospel portraying Jesus, the Messiah, as the son of David and the son of Abraham (Matt. 1:1). The reference to David reminded his readers of the promise God made to David, and later the prophets, that he would establish the house and kingdom of one of David's offspring forever and this kingdom would extend to the ends of the earth (2 Sam. 7:13-16, 29; Psalms 2:8; Isaiah 9:6-8; 42:1-6; 49:6). As the son of Abraham, Jesus the Christ came to fulfill God's promise to Abraham that one of his seed would bring blessings not only to Abraham's descendants but to all the peoples of the earth (Gen. 12:1-3; 26:4; 28:14).

Unlike Luke's Gospel and unique from most Jewish authors who recorded genealogies to legitimize one's lineage and legal authority, Matthew included four women—this step alone is a unique characteristic for a genealogical listing. In addition, the common characteristic of each of these four women is that they are non-Jews or married to a Gentile (Matt. 1:3-6; Tamar, a Canaanite [Gen. 38:18]; Rahab, a Canaanite from Jericho [Josh. 2:1]; Ruth, a Moabitess [Ruth 1:3]; and an unnamed woman who was the wife of Uriah, a Hittite [2 Sam. 11:3]). Perhaps Matthew wanted to demonstrate that Jesus the Messiah was the legal heir of David, whose throne would be established forever and whose realm would be unlimited; and that Christ fulfilled God's promises to Abraham, in spite of the mixed lineage, who came to bless all humankind including all nations and both women and men.

Matthew recorded the coming of the magi from the east, a group of foreigners who recognized the one born to be the "king of the Jews" (Matt. 2:1-11). Not only did they recognize his kingly sovereignty over the Jews, they identified a divine aspect to his nature over their own lives and worshipped him.³⁹ While King Herod, the priests, and teachers of

³⁷ Keener states that it is important to read a passage "in the context of the entire book in which it appears . . . Often the particular passage we are studying fits into an argument that runs through that entire book . . . viewed in light of how the book treats that theme elsewhere, the points in our passage become much clearer." See Craig Keener, *Biblical Interpretation* (Springfield, MO: Africa Theological Training Services, 2005), 45.

³⁸ Guthrie notes the universalistic, missional emphasis of Matthew's Gospel, "unbounded by the restricted environment out of which it emerged." See Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 30.

³⁹ Jusu comments that Matthew "shows clearly this King came not only for Jews but for everyone." Jusu, *Africa Study Bible*, 1375.

the law heard their testimony and confirmed from Scripture the location where the messianic child was to be born, only the foreigners sought to find and worship him.

When the rulers of his own people tried to murder him, God provided a safe haven in the foreign country of Egypt (Matt. 2:13). After returning to the land of Israel, Jesus chose to relocate from Nazareth to Capernaum to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy: "Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light" (Matt. 4:15-16). Matthew notes that the good news of his words and deeds circulated far beyond Israel's borders (Matt. 4:24). The crowds that came to hear his message and receive healing included Jews and Gentiles (Matt. 4:25).

Following the conclusion of the first of five teaching blocks recorded by Matthew (the Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 5-7), Jesus demonstrated his compassion and healing power for a diverse group of people—a Jewish leper,⁴⁰ a Gentile centurion, a Jewish mother,⁴¹ the demonized, and the sick (Matt. 8:1-16). Some scholars propose that the healing interaction with the Gentile centurion was one of the few exceptions of Jesus ministering to a non-Jew.⁴² Further, they suggest that Jesus was willing to heal the Gentile's because of his extraordinary faith; however, they claim that Jesus was not willing to go with the man and enter his defiled, Gentile residence. Some turn Jesus' response to the centurion's request for help into a question. While the text reads, "Jesus said, 'I will go and heal him'" (Εγὼ ἐλθὼν θεραπεύσω αὐτόν [Matt. 8:7]), some transform the assertion into a question: "Should I go and heal him?"⁴³

⁴⁰ France observes, "By recounting Jesus' response to the most feared and ostracized medical condition of his day, Matthew has thus laid an impressive foundation for this collection of stories which demonstrate both Jesus' unique healing power and his willingness to challenge the taboos of society in the interests of human compassion" France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 306. Hill states, "To touch a leper was considered a violation of the ceremonial law of uncleanness (Lev. 5:3)." Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 156.

⁴¹ Hill reports that Jesus' touching the woman was an action banned by Jewish legalism. Hill, *Gospel of Matthew*, 160.

⁴² Keener maintains this view. Yet he comments, "This narrative challenges prejudice in a number of ways . . . Jesus is not satisfied by our treating an enemy respectfully; he demands that we actually love that enemy." And he asserts that this incident endorsed the Gentile mission in advance. Keener, *Matthew*, 172, 174.

⁴³ This perspective is held by Keener, *Matthew*, 173; Hill, *Gospel of Matthew*, 158; and France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 313. While France notes that the I (*ego*) makes

This transposition seems to be motivated by the preunderstanding that Jesus came only to reveal himself and minister to the “house of Israel,” at least until after his resurrection. Rather than turning Jesus’ statement into a question, the Greek text could be read as an emphatic: “I, having gone, will heal him,” or “Having gone, I myself will heal him.” Instead of Jesus questioning whether he should go himself, or send someone else to bring the healing, Jesus wanted his audience to know that he, himself, was willing to go to the centurion’s house and heal his servant.⁴⁴ The implications of Jesus’ response to the centurion run countercultural to common Jewish and more extreme Pharisaic sensibilities—the same views that were currently held by his own disciples. This prejudiced outlook seemed to persist in Peter years later when he stated to another Gentile centurion: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him” (Acts 10:28).

Matthew described Jesus’ reaction to the centurion’s faith: “I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith” (Matt. 8:10). He reinforced his commendation of the Gentile’s faith by describing the future messianic banquet when people from the east and the west would feast with the patriarchs while “subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside” (Matt. 8:11-12).⁴⁵ This Matthean passage reveals that Jesus’ messianic banquet in the eschaton would include people from every part of the earth while some of those who descended from the Jewish patriarchs would be excluded. The depiction of those excluded from the banquet resonated with John the Baptist’s earlier warning to

Jesus’ statement emphatic so that it could read, I myself will come and heal him, he interprets the statement as a question of surprise: “You want *me* to come and heal him?” (*Italics his*).

⁴⁴ Wright comments that “a Gentile believed that the compassion and healing of Jesus could reach across the divide between Jew and Gentile.” Wright, *The Mission of God*, 507. Taking a different tact, Keener explains that the centurion, in offering for Jesus to not come under his roof but rather heal his servant from afar, was the Gentile’s concession to Jesus’ mission to Israel. He recognized that for Jesus to come under his roof would contradict the Messiah’s primary purpose for his earthly ministry. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 65.

⁴⁵ Keener suggests that the reference to the west would be the great power of Rome; the east was the region from which the Magi had come. These “pagans” would join the messianic banquet with “the patriarchs—the messianic banquet Israel expected for itself.” Keener, *Matthew*, 175.

Jews who assumed their descendancy guaranteed salvation: “Do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham” (Matt. 3:9). Race and nationality were no guarantee of entrance into God’s kingdom.⁴⁶

The deliverance story of the two demoniacs in the region of Gadarene, which resulted in the drowning of a herd of pigs, was a record of spiritual liberation for two Gentiles (Matt. 8:28-34). In the midst of his teaching and travel narratives, Matthew quoted from the Suffering Servant passages of Isaiah to describe the character and ministry focus of Jesus, God’s Messiah which twice mentions Gentiles: “He will proclaim justice to the nations (Gentiles, *κρίσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἀπαγγελεῖ*) . . . In his name the nations (Gentiles, *ἔθνη*) will put their hope” (Matt. 12:18-21; Isaiah 42:1-4).⁴⁷

Gentiles of Nineveh and Ethiopia were used by Jesus as examples of people demonstrating faith, repentance, and worship, in contrast to the people of Israel who refused to recognize their time of divine visitation (Matt. 12:38-45). In explaining the parable of the weeds sown in the field by an enemy, Jesus explained that the sower of the wheat was the “Son of man”; the field where he labored was the world (*kosmos*; Matt. 13:37-38). Sowing was not limited to the land where the lost sheep of the house of Israel dwelt. Jesus’ parable of the unfaithful tenants concluded with Jesus’ eschatological announcement: “The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit” (Matt. 21:23, 43). Before the eschaton would arrive, Jesus asserted the gospel had to be preached in all parts of the inhabited world as a witness to every nation (*ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ εἰς μαρτύριον πάντων τοῖς ἔθνεσιν*; Matt. 24:14). The Roman centurion supervising the crucifixion of Jesus, at the moment of his death, declared, “Surely he was the Son of God!” (Matt. 27:54). The conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel, which recorded the great commission but made no mention Christ’s ascension, was intended to leave Jesus’ command to disciple all the nations (*μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη*) reverberating in the ears of his followers on the mountain and those hearing the reading of Matthew’s Gospel (Matt. 28:18-20).

⁴⁶ Keener indicates that there were Jewish people who expected salvation based on their descent from Abraham. Keener, *Matthew*, 174.

⁴⁷ See Georg Bertram, “ἔθνος, ἔθνικός” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2; ed. by Gerhard Kittel; trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 364-369.

Rather than an exclusive focus on the lost sheep of the house of Israel, Matthew's Gospel described an intentional inclusiveness in Jesus' messianic ministry. His offer of good news to the Gentiles was prophetic fulfillment of the promise that Abraham's seed would bring blessings to all nations.⁴⁸ Surveying the introduction (1:1) and conclusion (28:19-20) of this Gospel, one can identify Matthew's grand *inclusio* emphasizing the missional thrust of Jesus' earthly ministry from beginning to end. Matthew's narrative recorded the story of the promised King and Savior who came to provide salvation for all people. Throughout his entire life on earth, Jesus lived out his divine purpose: he came as a light to the nations (Is. 49:6). He inaugurated his kingdom and provided access to any who would repent and believe. While the disciples persisted in their preconceived idea that Jesus came only for the lost sheep of the house of Israel, they gradually learned from Jesus' teaching and example⁴⁹ that he came offering salvation to the world.

Verse 25

The Canaanite woman had already identified Jesus as the "Son of David," the promised Messiah who came to rule over an eternal kingdom that extended beyond the cultural and geographical borders of Israel to the ends of the earth. At Jesus' assertion about what seemed to be the purpose of his coming, she seemed to grasp the irony of the statement. Following his words, she drew nearer to Jesus, rather than retreating, and worshipped him (ἡ δὲ ἐλθοῦσα προσεκύνει αὐτῷ). She repeated the title "Lord" with an abbreviated plea: "Lord, help me!" (Κύριε, βοήθει μοι). The verb worship (*proskuneō*, προσκυνέω) appears 12 times in Matthew. In eight of these occasions the word clearly means "worship." While the word can be translated "kneel down," it seems

⁴⁸ Jeremias interprets the Great Commission as "the eschatological hour has arrived. God no longer limits his saving grace to Israel, but turns in mercy to the whole Gentile world . . . the closing passage of the Matthaean gospel indirectly establish[es] the fact that the earthly ministry of Jesus has not yet embraced the Gentiles." Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations*, 39.

⁴⁹ Keener notes that the early church "naturally looked to accounts of Jesus' life for examples of ministry to the Gentiles," yet he holds the opinion that Jesus did not intentionally pursue ministry to Gentiles during his earthly ministry. Keener's perspective seems to be contradictory when he claims that Jesus' ministry avoided Gentiles except on rare occasions yet believes that Jesus provided an example for Gentile ministry for the NT church. Keener, *Matthew*, 171.

worship fits best in this context.⁵⁰ She acknowledged Jesus as both Lord and the Son of David. She was filled with faith in his ability. There was no hesitation on her part in approaching him for help. And there is no inference from the text that Jesus ignored, resisted, was hesitant, or rebuked her. Further, there is no evidence that he was testing her faith.

Verse 26

Jesus' statement recorded in this verse, even if it were a well-known proverb at the time, seems inconsistent with the way he has been presented throughout Matthew's Gospel. Matthew repeatedly described Jesus as moved with compassion, accessible to anyone who came to him, and one who reached out and touched the unclean and ate with tax gatherers and sinners. While the proverb declares the importance of children, the implications in this situation seem insulting and racist: "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." Jeremias comments, "The term 'dog' is the supreme insult."⁵¹ Dogs were viewed as unclean and dangerous scavengers who roamed the streets and alleys.⁵² Where a dog was used to guard property, they posed a threat of violent attacks to strangers. They did not foam freely as house pets. Comparing a person to a dog would be humiliating and insulting. While some scholars suggest that the term dogs (κυνῶντες) is the diminutive of dogs and best translates "little dogs," attempting to make the slur less abrasive, it still was an extremely derogatory comparison with a human being.

Some explain that this disdainful speech was Jesus' way of testing the commitment, persistence, and resilience of the woman in terms of her faith in Christ.⁵³ But one must ask if there is any other example of Jesus

⁵⁰ The verb form is imperfect emphasizing the continuous action of her adoration.

⁵¹ Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations*, 29. Kapolyo proposes that this term of abuse was somehow conveyed to the women from Jesus with humor. Joe Kapolyo, "Matthew," 1142.

⁵² Bailey reports that "dogs in the Middle Eastern traditional culture, Jewish and non-Jewish, are almost as despised as pigs. . . . Dogs are never pets." Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 224.

⁵³ Bailey claims that Jesus used this insulting term to test her grace towards haughty Jews and to discover if her resolve to see her daughter healed and her faith in Jesus' compassion and power would enable her to "absorb the insult and press on." Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 224. This perspective that Jesus intentionally insulted her yet expected her to show grace towards his

testing and insulting sincere seekers who humbly came to him for help? He tested the unbelieving disciples and resistant Pharisees, but there is no evidence of such treatment to one who was sincere and desperate.

Could there be another explanation for this language which provides clarification for what Matthew intended to convey to his readers? If one recalls the previous pericope and the stress on words that flowed from one's heart and are uttered by one's mouth, words revealed the state of the heart. If the assertion of Jesus about his mission was actually intended to objectify the misguided thoughts of the disciples about his mission, it would be consistent to view this statement as another step Jesus took to expose the prejudiced and racist attitudes of his Jewish disciples towards other peoples. From their Jewish, religious worldview, they regarded Gentiles and sinners as unclean and unworthy of the Messiah's intervention.⁵⁴ Jesus' statement that "it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs," was consistent with the general view of Jews, and especially Pharisees, towards Gentiles. Was Jesus again articulating the inner thoughts of his disciples and exposing their assessment of this woman and themselves? In terms of those who deserved of the food, they likely saw themselves as the children, descendants of the privileged family of Abraham, destined to receive Christ's provisions and join the messianic banquet. It was not right to give an unworthy Gentile bread let alone healing and salvation.

For those who view this statement as Jesus' way of challenging the woman's faith, belittling and insulting her, this seems cruel and inconsistent with the character of the divine Son of God who "had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt. 9:36). And if his statement accurately reflected his actual view towards her and all Gentiles during his earthly ministry, it would seem extremely difficult for Jesus to suddenly pivot after his death and resurrection, with his disciples following, from a mission focused exclusively on the house of Israel, and now include all nations.⁵⁵ Yet this view is held by scholars such as Bosch who pens, "In

humiliating utterance and maintain confidence in his love, compassion, and power seems contradictory to the caring nature of Jesus and run counter to the attitudes in the disciples that he was attempting to transform.

⁵⁴ Hill reports that "dogs" was a Jewish way of referring to Gentiles. Hill, *Gospel of Matthew*, 254.

⁵⁵ Keener comments that "it is unlikely that Christians would lightly attribute to Jesus a view they no longer held" to defend his view that Jesus was resisting her request because of her Gentile ethnicity. However, if one recognizes the lesson

[Matthew's] view the Gentile mission is, however, only possible after the death and resurrection of the Messiah of the Jews. Prior to those events it can be referred to only in the future tense (8:11; 24:14; 26:13)."⁵⁶ Not only would Jesus have to significantly change the content of his teaching about the kingdom during the 40 days between his resurrection and ascension, it would be extremely difficult to model an all-inclusive gospel to challenge and correct the narrow, racist opinions of his disciples which he previously condoned during his 3 ½ years of discipling.

While Jesus was born as a Jewish boy and grew up in a Jewish cultural milieu, was he so culturally and racially shaped by his society that he was no different from the Jewish people around him when it came to his worldview about all people, salvation, and God's plan for humankind? If he was inculcated with a traditional Jewish, male worldview, how could he prophetically speak throughout his lifetime against Jewish prejudices and misunderstandings regarding religious traditions, the mission of the Messiah, God's love for all people, and the way of salvation?⁵⁷ One must remember, concerning the identity of Jesus, that he was not simply a normal Jewish boy shaped by a Jewish culture and Jewish worldview. He was "Emmanuel, God with us"—the Lord of all creation and all people, who came to dwell among humankind and save "his people" from their sins (Matt. 1:21, 23).

Verse 27

The woman agreed with Jesus' proverb, "Yes, Lord" (Ναί, κύριε). One should not take bread given to children and toss it to dogs. But she added, "And even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table" (καὶ γὰρ τὰ κυνάρια ἐσθίει ἀπὸ τῶν ψιχίων τῶν πιπτόντων ἀπὸ τῆς τραπέζης τῶν κυρίων αὐτῶν).⁵⁸ Even despised and filthy dogs benefited

Matthew is teaching about Jesus' inclusiveness in the face of the disciples' racial narrowness and exclusiveness, Keener's comment could reflect the transformed perspective needed in the early church. Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 415.

⁵⁶ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 64.

⁵⁷ As E. P. Sanders notes, "The idea of a universal God of love is completely opposed to the views of Jesus' contemporaries." E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 213.

⁵⁸ For the argument that καὶ γὰρ should be translated as "and even" rather than with the adversative, "but even," (which is used in the NIV), see Carson, *Matthew 13-28*, 356 n 27.

from crumbs that involuntarily fell from the table where their masters were feasting. The implication was that there was an abundance of food on the table. Those at the table had plenty. The generous portions resulted in crumbs accidentally falling to the ground where they were consumed by the hungry dogs. Both the people at table and the dogs under the table were fed. Her response was filled with wisdom, wit, and faith.

The woman replaced Jesus' word "children" with "masters." Whether she was honoring the disciples by referring to them as masters, perhaps Jewish masters, or using sarcasm to refer indirectly to their harsh, superior attitudes towards her, one can only speculate. But noting her consistent humility in coming to Jesus and agreeing with Jesus' proverb, it seems she was graciously giving them honor as members of Jesus' discipleship team. And yet, she did not imply that they were the ones giving food to the dogs. She did not condone their condescending attitude towards her and her people. Crumbs were falling to the ground involuntarily and being consumed by the dogs. While the masters—the disciples—enjoyed the bread, the dogs were nurtured as well because there was an abundance. Both parties were supplied what was needed by the one providing both with bread, the master of masters, children, and dogs.⁵⁹

Her answer did not demand of Jesus an either/or mentality which would require Jesus to either minister to the disciples or to her; to the Jews or to the Gentiles. Her faith in Christ's abundant provision and mission to all enabled her to have a both/and mindset. She grasped that Jesus came for all, and there were no limits to his bounteous provisions. Jesus provided for both the children and those denied this privilege because of prejudice, racism, and gender bias. The Lord, the Son of David, had come to bless all and was true to his inclusive mission.

Some scholars hold to a different interpretation of the woman's response to Jesus' proverb. Their perspective is that Jesus demanded that she acknowledge that the disciples and the people of Israel deserved to be offered the gospel and blessings provided by the Messiah prior to any spiritual provisions coming to the Gentiles. They claim that Jesus was using the terms "children" and "dogs" to refer to Jews and Gentiles,

⁵⁹ The idea of Jesus miraculously providing an abundance of food for all those present while encircled by incredulous disciples is found on both sides of this pericope: Jesus' feeding of the 5000 men plus their families (Matt. 14:19-21); Jesus' feeding of the 4000 (Matt. 15:36).

respectively, for the purpose that the Canaanite woman would acknowledge the historic distinction between the two groups and accept that she was a “Gentile ‘dog,’” unworthy of “Israel’s covenanted mercies” and “divine election.”⁶⁰ If she accepted her inferior position, the “divinely ordained division between God’s people and Gentiles,” and the preferential ministry of Jesus to the people of Israel, Jesus would grant her request.⁶¹ This view seems to be based on a literal understanding of Jesus’ words as a truth assertion in verse 24, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” And it appears to overlook the metanarrative of Matthew’s Gospel that Jesus came in fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture as a universal king to provide saving blessings for all people and nations.

As has been shown in the discussion above, there does not seem to be evidence provided by Matthew himself that Jesus exclusively ministered to Israel. One cannot find support in Matthew’s Gospel for the view that Jesus expected non-Jewish believers to confess to their own racial-spiritual inferiority when compared to the Jews before they could receive help from him. It is possible that Matthew was arguing the very opposite for his readers who consisted of both Jews and Gentiles, and he was undermining the claim that either group had racial or spiritual superiority.⁶² Neither group had the right to assert spiritual or

⁶⁰ Carson, *Matthew 13-28*, 355. Jeremias explains, “Jesus does not grant her request until she has recognized the divinely ordained division between God’s people and the Gentiles.” Jeremias, *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations*, 30.

⁶¹ This view is advocated by Hill, *Gospel of Matthew*, 254; and Jeremias, *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations*, 29-30. Keener adds, “He is surely summoning her to recognize Israel’s priority in the divine plan.” Keener, *Matthew*, 264.

⁶² Manson advanced the idea that Jesus came to create a new community of faith rather than promulgate the religious ideals of Jews, a group of believers “set free from chauvinistic nationalism, from the ambition to impose Israelite ideals of faith and conduct on the rest of the world . . . men and women who learned in apprenticeship to Jesus how to accept the rule of God.” T. W. Manson, *Jesus and the Non-Jews* (London: Athlone Press, 1955), 18. Similar concerns are found in Paul’s epistle to the Roman church. Paul addresses Jewish arrogance in Romans 2:17-24 and Gentile superiority in Romans 11:18-20, 25-26; 12:3, 16. However, for a perspective that Matthew is certainly unPauline, see Benjamin L. White, “The Eschatological Conversion of ‘All the Nations’ in Matthew 28:19-20: (Mis)reading Matthew through Paul” *JSNT* 36 (2014): 353-382.

racial advantage over the other;⁶³ through the grace of Jesus all people were saved by faith in Jesus alone (Acts 15:11). Both groups needed to acknowledge their spiritual defilement, repent, and come by faith to the only one who could make them true children of Abraham (3:9). He alone provided entrance into his kingdom that included descendants of the patriarchs and those coming from the east and west (8:11).

Verse 28

While Jesus had not addressed the woman directly when she first approached him, he now spoke to her with an exclamation: “Oh woman, great is your faith! May it be to you as you desire”⁶⁴ (ὦ γύναι, μεγάλη σου ἡ πίστις· γενηθῆτω σοι ὡς θέλεις).⁶⁵ Even without a word of deliverance, the Canaanite’s demonized daughter was set free and made whole. Charette notes, “His exorcisms, effected as they are through the power of the Spirit of God, signify that the kingdom of God has come.”⁶⁶ Christ’s kingdom had come to Gentiles in Syro-Phoenicia (Matt. 12:28; 4:16).

She demonstrated great faith in him as a loving, powerful Messiah for all people. She approached him with confidence that he would do

⁶³ While Paul affirms that God established his covenant with Abraham and the people of Israel, and that Jesus came to Israel as a Jewish person to be their Messiah and fulfill God’s promises to the patriarchs and prophets—the promise that he would bless them with his unchanging love, his persistent offer of salvation, and his continuous plan to use them as instruments to bring salvation to all humankind—Christ came to be the Savior of all. There is no favoritism when it comes to his blessings and judgment (Romans 2:9, 11). Throughout Christ’s life, he fulfilled his mission to be the Savior of the world (John 4:4, 42; consider the implications of Jesus’ first public message; Luke 4:24-30). Matthew showed how difficult it was for Jesus’ Jewish disciples and Jewish Christians in the early church to grasp the fact that their descendancy provided no guarantee of salvation. Anyone who came to Christ with faith in his Lordship and saving purposes, whether it was during his earthly ministry, after the resurrection, or following the Day of Pentecost, experienced his welcome into his kingdom.

⁶⁴ My translation.

⁶⁵ Daniel B. Wallace comments, “Here the presence of the particle ὦ is used in contexts where deep emotion is to be found.” Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 68.

⁶⁶ Blaine Charette, *Restoring Presence: The Spirit in Matthew’s Gospel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 67.

something to help her tormented daughter. She was not distracted by the attitudes of Jesus' disciples. Throughout Jesus' indirect instructions aimed at the prejudices and misconceptions of his disciples, she continued to focus on and worship him.⁶⁷

Jesus' words to her sound extremely different from his statement to his disciples about their faith. To them he said, "Oh you of little faith" (Matt. 14:31; 17:20). The Lord commended her before their onlooking eyes, "You have great faith." As with the centurion, Jesus' assessment of her faith must have shocked his Jewish followers (Matt. 8:10; 15:28). Matthew did not indicate how the disciples reacted to Jesus' words to her when he said, "Your request is granted." They were ready to send her away. Instead, Jesus transformed her life and situation while using her presence and undistracted faith to expose the calloused, prejudiced hearts of his disciples. His acceptance of her and the healing of her daughter were steps in preparing them to eventually fulfill their role as apostles to all nations (28:19-20).

The fact that "her daughter was healed from that very hour" (καὶ ἰάθη ἡ θυγάτηρ αὐτῆς ἀπὸ τῆς ὥρας ἐκείνης) must have been verified by ensuing reports that came to Jesus and the Twelve as they moved onward in their journey. Perhaps Jesus and the disciples went to the woman's home and testified to the girl's deliverance and healing. One should suspect that this encounter had a profound impact on the disciples. While harboring prejudice, exclusiveness, and a self-centered perspective, their Master exposed their heart condition by taking them to a place and people they had previously despised. He modelled love, acceptance, and inclusiveness and displayed his transforming power to change her and them.

Matthew's Audience

There is evidence that Matthew penned his Gospel for the believers in Antioch, a church consisting of Jews and Gentiles, neither exclusively Jewish nor Gentile (Acts 11:19-21; 15:1).⁶⁸ There was racial and religious

⁶⁷ Each of the three time she addresses Jesus, it is as "Lord" (κύριε, the vocative of κύριος).

⁶⁸ Regarding the original recipients of Matthew's Gospel and the makeup of the church, Keener proposes, "The best (though far from certain) and most common case for provenance fits some urban center in Syro-Palestine (often thought to be Antioch) where Greek was spoken, which included a sizable Jewish community residentially segregated from Gentiles—Jews who perhaps

tension among these Christians which divided them and obscured the true message of the gospel to those outside the church. The Syrian church was struggling with the ongoing influence of Pharisaism.⁶⁹ Matthew's Gospel transparently exposed the struggle he and the other Jewish disciples experienced to acknowledge their skewed understanding of Jesus and his mission. It was not easy for their worldview to be transformed and for them to admit that that they should label no one unclean or defiled. Their views of others had to be supernaturally altered so they could fellowship at table with all people,⁷⁰ demonstrate the acceptance and unity required for all who were members of the body of Christ, and continue to advance the discipling of the nations. The same lesson Matthew learned about being a true disciple of Jesus, the New Testament churches he served had to learn.

Conclusion

If Jesus came not only for the lost sheep of the house of Israel but to offer salvation and healing to individuals from every tribe and nation, why did he limit his original commissioning of the disciples to the house of Israel (Matt. 10:5-6)? Jesus knew their racial and religious prejudices. If his emissaries brought the good news to Gentiles and Samaritans without love and compassion, without a desire for relationship, the message of the gospel would be tainted in the delivery (see Luke 9:54-

remained bitter about the recent massacres of 66-70 and remained in contact with theological issues in Judea." Keener, *Matthew*, 33. Also see Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 42-44. Guthrie views the original audience as a "mixed group" most likely in Antioch. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 38-39. France expresses doubts about the original audience being Antioch. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 15.

⁶⁹ Keener believes that Matthew was "engaged in polemic against Jewish authorities . . . the successors of Pharisaism, probably the founders of what became the rabbinic movement at Jamnia and those Jewish leaders throughout Syro-Palestine who may have been aligned with them." Keener, *Matthew*, 34. Guthrie notes a "strongly anti-Pharisaic tone to the gospel." Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 33. Harlow claims that in the decades after 70 CE, the Pharisees attained true predominance in their influence over the Jewish society. Daniel C. Harlow, "Jewish Context of the NT," 375.

⁷⁰ Wright comments that for the early Christians, "The importance of eating together as a sign of unity in Christ was highly visible and very significant. Such table fellowship within the early church cut right across both the Jew-Gentile and also the social divide of economic status." Wright, *The Mission of God*, 510.

55; Acts 10:28; 11:2-3).⁷¹ As a concession to their present, prejudiced state, his starting point for their evangelistic efforts was to order them not to go to the Gentile nations. He knew their attitudes would have to be significantly transformed before they could effectively make disciples among all nations. He did not condone their prejudices but recognized with time and through his own example, they would arrive at the place where he could commission them to move beyond their cultural comfort zone and disciple every nation under heaven. The uncleanness of their hearts and mouths expressed through prejudiced, racial slurs, religious pride, and intolerance for others required forgiveness, their own spiritual deliverance, transformation, and training which only Christ Jesus could provide.

To demonstrate the unilateral faithfulness of God to his covenant with Israel, Jesus came as a Jew to extend to the people of Israel the offer of forgiveness, reconciliation, and the privilege of knowing God as Savior and Lord. With the offer of this special relationship came the responsibility of serving God as a kingdom of priests, a holy nation (Exodus 19:6), who would mediate his grace to the nations of the world. While most members of the house of Israel struggled to accept their Messiah, particularly because he did not fulfill their expectations in the way he provided salvation and for whom he offered the gift of the kingdom, Jesus Christ continued with his saving plan of providing forgiveness, transformation, and personal relationship with any who approached him with humility and faith. In word and deed throughout his entire life of ministry on earth, Jesus modeled for his disciples and his church the content and methodology of the all-inclusive nature of his gospel.⁷² The Canaanite woman provided an outstanding example of

⁷¹ According to France, the social interaction of conservative, orthodox Jewish Christians with Gentiles of any faith persuasion, as demonstrated in Acts 10–11, shows “the repugnance felt by even a relatively open-minded Jew to such ‘defilement’; for a Jewish teacher in the public eye, it would be an even more defiant breach of taboo than even Jesus’ controversial mixing with ‘tax-collectors and sinners’ (Matt. 9:10–11).” France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 313. Yet Jesus set the example of breaking these restrictive taboos to bring the gospel to all people.

⁷² Stein states, “They would learn both from him and of him. They were uniquely chosen to witness his actions and deeds and to master his teachings. Only by remaining with him would they be able to observe who Jesus was and master the gospel teachings Jesus would entrust to them.” Stein, *Jesus the Messiah*, 119.

this truth which needed to be understood by the disciples of Christ and by his New Testament church.

In a day of divisiveness, anger, and intolerance, followers of Christ need to allow the Holy Spirit to examine their hearts and words when it comes to their thoughts, utterances, and deeds towards others from different racial, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Acceptance, understanding, love, and unity must begin in his church, flow outwardly to the immediate socio-cultural context of his body, and spread beyond to every tribe and nation bringing healing, hope, deliverance, and salvation through the love and power of Christ's gospel.

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Worship as Lifestyle: An Exegetical Study of Ephesians 5:15-20 with a Special Reference to Contemporary Worship Practice

Thang San Mung

Abstract

Worship is often mistaken as just a one-and-a-half-hour service routinely done on Sunday mornings. This article mainly critiques this common misconception about Christian worship from a biblical point of view. This article focuses on Paul's thinking of Christian worship, most evident in Ephesians 5:15-20, and provides an exegetical reading of this passage giving particular attention to what and how Paul defines Christian worship and discusses it for contemporary reflection. Moreover, some sporadic debates will occur on the famous "be filled" phrase of verse 18 to complement the discussion.

Keywords: Pentecostal worship, contemporary worship, Paul's theology of worship

Introduction

The so-called Genesis mandate, "to rule and multiply" (Genesis 1:28), has many times been exaggerated as the primary concern of God in creating human beings as the bearers of his own image.¹ However, there

¹ For major publications, see Christopher Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004); Jonathan Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society* (Oxford University Press, 2011), xxv, 527; Dick Tripp, *The Biblical Mandate for Caring for Creation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 7-157. For commentaries, consult with such as Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Interpretation; Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1982); Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (New International Commentary on OT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990). For articles, Andrew Schmutzer and Alice Mathews, "Genesis 1-11 and Work," Theology of Work Project (2013) at <http://www.theologyofwork.org/old-testament/genesis-1-11-and-work/#the-work-of-the-creation-mandate-genesis-128-215>, accessed on May 27, 2015; and others. Actually, this misinterpretation

is much more than this for careful readers of the Bible, as clearly narrated in the following passage, Genesis 2:15-17. One is to worship God by observing what he commanded, that is to trust and obey God. It is, of course, the true original creation-call of man and woman in the Garden. Worship, in the sense of faith and obedience to God, is indeed the very original creation-commission that God put on the shoulders of his image-bearers forever.

With the rise of the Pentecostal movement in the early twentieth century, the importance of this original call of worship has come to the church's front yard. The movement itself is sometimes even marked by it so far.² Of course, contemporary Pentecostal lively worship brings back the church to its biblical roots and helps find the true meaning of human existence—that is, to worship God. Moreover, in the late twentieth century, this free worship style was later met by the pop music culture on the horizon. Their matrix-combination has created a more exuberant worship environment, another benefit brought to church life.³

However, as a critic once said, not all forms of music are shaped for the purpose of Christian worship.⁴ Accordingly, the genuineness of such

of all comes from a careless study of the key verb of Genesis 1:28 “וַיְבָרֶךְ.” According to Genesis usages, this is not a divine command *leamor* לֵאמֹר, which was employed in 2:16, but divine wish or blessing rather. Therefore, in terms of vocation, the true Genesis or cultural mandate should be understood as more than this divine wish of 1:28, but as divine command of 2:16 instead. In that sense, to observe what the Creator God commanded is the original creation-call of all human being.

² Also noted by writers such as Ligon Duncan and others, *Perspectives on Christian Worship: 5 Views* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 12; further, commented that “Collectively Pentecostalism, the Charismatic, and Praise and Worship movements are grouped under the label Contemporary Worship” in Scott D. Harrison and Jessica O’Byran, eds., *Teaching Singing in the 21st Century* (New York: Springer, 2014), 323. See also an article by former General Superintendent of the AOG, G. Raymond Carlson, “The Priority of Pentecostal Worship,” at http://ag.org/top/church_workers/wrshp_gen_worship.cfm, accessed on May 27, 2015.

³ As observed by Donald E. Miller, in *Spirit and Power: The Growth and Global Impact of Pentecostalism* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 7; and Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostalism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 129.

⁴ See Ennis B. Edmonds and Michelle A. Gonzalez, *Caribbean Religious History: An Introduction* (New York University Press, 2010), 210-214. A writer also once

emotion created by the musical matrix in public worship should be tested without exception.⁵ Is it pure spiritual enrichment from the Holy Spirit for one's growth? Or is it just a simple human emotional reaction to the noise of music and no other meaning at all? More specifically, what benefits do such exciting moments in the good name of worship bring to one's spiritual growth? It becomes difficult to discern such an atmosphere where contemporary musical advancement and Christian worship are blended together. Accordingly, a firm biblical foundation for the proper practice of worship, whether public or private, is needed. Therefore, for this purpose, a passage from the Ephesian epistle has been chosen to complement what seems to be lacking in contemporary Pentecostal worship practices.

However, this article will not deal with every aspect of Christian worship in general. It will mainly focus on what the selected Bible passage teaches about worship so that one can view Christian worship from a biblical standpoint and draw fresh implications for the practice. To fellow Pentecostals, true worship is more than a weekly congregational gathering that we celebrate with ear-breaking music sounds. It is a lifestyle and a life instead.

A Text for Biblical Theology of Worship: Ephesians 5:15-20

Historically, Ephesians 5:15-20 might be one of the least debated Pauline passages among scholars,⁶ as the Ephesian epistle itself is a very confrontation-less and debate-silent letter compared to other Pauline

noted that music can be used for good or for bad too, cf., Charles T. Crabtree, "Pentecostal Music and the Pastor," *Enrichment Journal*, online version, at http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200001/076_music.cfm, accessed on May 30, 2015.

⁵ Cf., Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002, 2003), 37; also see the observation of Bob Bayles in R. Keith Whitt and French L. Arrington, eds., *Issues in Contemporary Pentecostalism* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway, 2012), 224.

⁶ This passage has not also been left alone from such debates in recent days, though said one of the least debated. Especially, in relation to the divine dative and its preceding overflowing verb, it still receives a very reasonable attention of modern scholars. For further reading, please, refer to Harold W. Hoener, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), on specific verses; and others.

epistles of the New Testament.⁷ Most commentators and scholars, and preachers alike, quoted this particular passage in an almost similar pose to figure out what was in Paul's mind concerning Christian living in the broader social context. However, all cannot bypass the last sentence of the passage that mainly concerns Christian worship (cf., vv. 19-20).⁸ No matter what discussions are made, the controlling thought lies with the last part of this worship-related *pericope*.

Structurally, the passage is in the central part of the second major section of the epistle, so it was a part of the practical living guide section (chapters 4-6), which marked the call to live a life “worthy of one’s calling” (4:1). However, a more in-depth reading indicates that living a life worthy of calling does not happen suddenly. It instead requires one “to walk” or live out several practical truths. These truths include walking or living in “unity” (4:1-16), in “holiness” (4:17-32), in “love” (5:1-6), in “light” (5:7-14), in spiritual “wisdom” (5:15-6:9), and then to stand firm in “warfare” which is Paul’s final appeal (6:10-20).⁹ In this light, the passage provides an introductory comment for the upcoming paragraph on “wisdom” living within the major section of living “worthy of one’s calling.”

However, to make a small distinction with the secular Hellenistic claim of wisdom, Paul arranges his thought flow in the passage. He orders all of his thoughts and words like a ladder that leads his audience higher step by step.¹⁰ For instance, his first exhortation to live (or walk) wisely (vv. 15-16) is not clear enough to distinguish what kind of wisdom he is talking about here. At the second step, he calls believers to find God’s purpose for life (v. 17) that clarifies what he meant at the

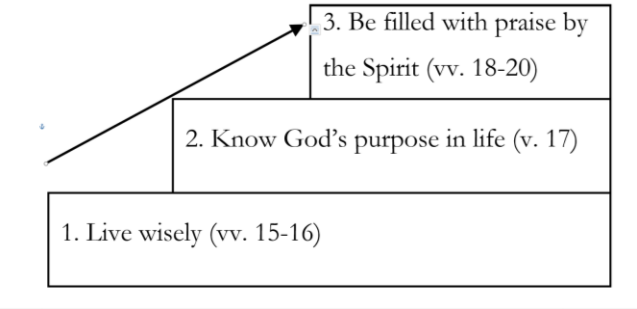
⁷ Ephesians has been, therefore, given several titular names by scholars, such as “crown of Paulinism” by C. H. Dodd and others, “quintessence of Paulinism” by H. Hoehner and some, and “queen of his (Paul’s) epistles” by Dan Wallace.

⁸ Wallace once even noted that, by including the succeeding verse 21, the Ephesian epistle is just an extension of this worship in Spirit passage, cf., Daniel B. Wallace, “Ephesians: Introduction, Argument, and Outline,” at <http://bible.org/seriespage/ephesians-introduction-argument-and-outline>, accessed on May 27, 2015.

⁹ This outline was directly taken from Hoehner, vii-viii; also see Wallace’s outline for comparison in Wallace, “Ephesians.”

¹⁰ This kind of climatic parallel arrangement of thoughts is one of the special features of Hebraic wisdom and poetic literature in the Old Testament, cf., Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994); E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Moody, 1898), 311; and others.

start. However, only in the last and final stage, the climax of his thought comes clear as he urges to live a life full of worship and praise through (or in) the Holy Spirit (vv. 18-20). It is indeed the highpoint of the whole scene that Paul tries to express to his audience. In this way, the wise living is appropriately defined in terms of a life lived to God’s praise and glory by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the passage is better called a worship passage indeed.



Furthermore, the “life in the Spirit” itself is a primary concern of the epistle in general.¹¹ Accordingly, there is a perceivable affinity between this climactic call to live a worshipful life in the Spirit (5:15-20) with the theme of living a life “worthy of one’s calling” found in the second section of the epistle (chapter 4-6). It is taken for granted, from this angle, that there is no need to question whether we have a life worthy of our calling in view of a life full of worship and praise in the Spirit.¹² It is safe to say that the passage, Ephesians 5:15-20, plays a significant role in the whole epistle. By pinpointing the Christian life in broader society

¹¹ There are no less than six times in the Ephesian epistle that mention about life in the Spirit. For instance, sealed with the Spirit in 1:13, inhabited by the Spirit in 2:22, revealed by the Spirit in 3:5, gifted by the Spirit in 4:8-12, filled with by the Holy Spirit in 5:19, be strong in the power of the Spirit in 3:16; 6:10.

¹² Please, refer to Wallace’s structural outline, in which he reads the “believers’ relation to the Spirit” as the central theme of this subsection, 5:15-6:9, and this relationship as the controlling force of believers’ social relationship in wider society, cf. Wallace. However, there are still several commentators who claim this *pneumati* πνεύματι as human spirit not the Spirit (i.e., Alford, Abbott, Westcott, Lenski, and others). In against though, Hoehner lately made a fine argument for divine dative (see Hoehner, 702-703).

and worshiping in the Spirit as defining each other correspondingly, this passage fulfills its crucial literary role in the whole epistle.

Worship is a Lifestyle: Thematic Study of Ephesian 5:15-20

One of our contemporary misconceptions regarding worship is that “everything is done in a one-and-a-half-hour service” on Sunday morning.¹³ However, the teaching of the Bible is totally in contrast to simply thinking of a single Sunday morning ceremony. The Bible is clear enough in saying that worship is a lifestyle.¹⁴ That means our daily lives and concerns require a lifelong commitment instead. This is what Ephesians 5:15-20 clearly says. For a general overview, this passage is a combination of three further subdivisions, as indicated by the three major imperatives: “be careful” (vv. 15-16), “comprehend” (v. 17), and “be filled with or full of” (vv. 19-20).¹⁵ However, as explained before, these three imperatives are not a separate idea but are chained together and build upon one another to bring a climactic call to action at last.

First call: walk wisely

The first and basic call is “to be careful how one walks” (βλέπετε...περιπατεῖτε, vv. 15-16). However, the verb to walk (περιπατεῖτε) comprises a sense of imaginary action more than a literal walk.¹⁶ Therefore, it might also mean the way one lives his or her daily

¹³ We have here an honest confession of a so-called worship leader as he said, “after being a pastor for 12 years . . . I began to see that my view of worship were focused almost entirely on the singing portion of Sunday mornings . . . [later] understand that our worship of God not only extends beyond singing, but involves every moment of every day,” cf., Bob Kauflin, “Defining Worship: Worship as Everyday Life,” at <http://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/defining-worship-worship-as-everyday-life-1223331.html>, accessed on May 27, 2015.

¹⁴ For instance, please, also refer to some Pauline passages such as Romans 12:1-2, Philippians 4:4-7, 2 Timothy 4:5-8, Hebrews 13:12-16 just for a few.

¹⁵ Best also comments the integral position of these three imperatives in E. Best, *Ephesians* (ICC; Edinburg, England: T& T Clark, 1998), 502; also see W. L. Liefeld, *Ephesians* (IVPNTC; Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1997), 131; and Hoehner, 689.

¹⁶ We have here at least three exegetical reasons to read this walking verb more as attitude or behavior in a sense of imagery. First, the verb is a customary present tense that indicates a habitual action. Second, the particle πῶς that is adverb of manner/behavior in this context affirms it (cf., Hoehner, 691;

life one step after another. Therefore, this walking is about one's habitual behavior that he or she consciously or unconsciously practices on a daily basis. Accordingly, at the bottom level of the ladder, Paul's exhortation to believers is to be careful how they live their daily lives and their need to choose to live wisely. This first imperative leads us to another question. What does it mean to live wisely? At this primary step, Paul does not give a clear answer nor define it yet. The reader must wait until he or she reaches the final cumulative thought of the discussion (v. 18).

Second call: know and do God's will

The second step in the ladder of Paul's thought is the call to comprehend God's will in one's life (συνιέντες, v. 17).¹⁷ Paul is clearer here in what he means by wise living than he was in the previous verse. What Paul means here by saying wise living is indeed more than what the secular Hellenistic culture would say regarding wisdom and being wise. It means knowing or becoming a well-informed person, knowing God's will for every detailed step of life that one takes. In other words, knowing God's will for every step of life is what Paul says wisdom living or walking wisely means. However, the next question that this second exhortation teases out is: "What is God's will or his good purpose for one's life, and how can we fulfill it at every step of our lives?"

Third call: be full of thanksgiving by the Spirit

The answer for the above consummative question is reserved for the succeeding verses (ἀλλὰ πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι, vv. 18-20). It is the third imperative, "to be full of the Spirit." To make it simple, to live a life of worship, full of praise and thanksgiving in everything, is precisely God's will and his good purpose for us to fulfill in our daily lives.

though Hoehner claims that this particle has the same equal use with ὅτι, he disagrees himself to translate this word in such a way but translated it as adverb of manner/mode instead). Third, the connecting particle ὥς...ὥς is an adverbial conjunction, commonly used to compare between contrastive or comparative manners or behaviors.

¹⁷ The prepositional conceptual pronoun διὰ τοῦτο here indicates logical connection of the first imperative of verses 15-16 and the second imperative of verse 17, cf., Best, 505-6 (however, Hoehner has here taken this prepositional phrase only as a simple conjunction, that actually diminishes the grammatical significance of the phrase instead, cf., Hoehner, 695).

However, in light of the prepositional divine dative, ἐν Πνεύματι, this praising and thanksgiving lifestyle can only be attained and maintained by the Spirit alone. Therefore, to remain passive under his infilling (or his total control) is undoubtedly the silent expectation that Paul does not need to detail anymore.¹⁸ Only by keeping oneself in the divine presence of the Spirit, can one fulfill God's will that is to praise and glorify him in every step of life. It is what Paul means when he says, "Live or walk wisely" (using the first person imperative; vv. 15-16).

Therefore, to live wisely is to know and fulfill God's will at every step of life. However, one can fulfill God's purpose only by the divine help of the Holy Spirit. To remain under His divine dictation is the only option for all of these imperatives to be done in one's daily life. This Spirit-directed-life will be expressed as the most joyous, cheerful, and jubilant lifestyle overall (cf., vv. 19-20). Accordingly, worship is not just a one-and-a-half-hour event. It is a lifestyle that always manifests itself in the form of praising, giving thanks, and glorifying God in the name of Jesus Christ through the invocation of the Spirit.

Worship or Mischief: Antithetical Comparisons in Ephesians 5:15-20

To live wise is none other than fulfilling God's will in one's life and living accordingly a life full of worship and praise in the Holy Spirit—a very positive posture of life—in every situation of life. However, not to live this way is just to make mischief instead. It is what Paul wants to make clear in this passage. Accordingly, a closer look at the passage shows some antithetical contrasts that Paul employs to emphasize what he means by saying live wisely. They are "wise" versus "foolish" (vv. 15-16), "meaningless" versus "meaningful" (v. 17), and an "excessive life"

¹⁸ Here are at least three exegetical notes that signify the importance of staying or remaining passive under the control of the Holy Spirit. First, the imperative πληροῦσθε refers to a customary repeated action that means that something is already being taken place continuously since sometime in the past (cf., Willard H. Taylor, *Ephesians*, vol. IX [Beacon; Kansas, MO: Beacon, 1965], 235; Ralph P. Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon: Interpretation* [Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1991], 67). Second, this overflowing verb indicates the fullness of Christ that one cannot attain by himself or herself but only by the mediatory work of the Spirit of God himself, cf., Liefeld, 136. Third, after all, this verb is in passive voice that refers to something that believers should allow in their lives.

by getting drunk versus “being filled with joy (or thankful life)” by the Spirit (vv. 18-20).

First comparison: living wise versus living unwise (foolishly)

As the first step of the ladder of thought, the first imperative “to walk” is provided with an optional choice by the first comparative parallel that is the unwise living versus the wise living (μὴ ὡς ἄσοφοι, ἀλλ’ ὡς σοφοί). The positive contrast is “wise” in the way one should pursue life as a daily habit; the negative parallel is “unwise” or uninformed; this option is to be avoided (vv. 15-16). Without any further explanation of what living wisely or what living unwise means, Paul gives the green light to why one should pursue living “wisely” rather than “unwisely.” The primary reason behind why one should choose “wise living” is that time is running out, and the present age is turning evil more than ever (οὔτι αἱ ἡμέραι πονηραὶ εἰσι, v. 7b).¹⁹ Therefore, the good people of God must make the most of every moment of life for a better and higher cause (ἐξαγοραζόμενοι τὸν καιρὸν, v. 17b).²⁰ This is the main reason why Christians should live wisely and make every moment profitable for a better cause. So then, what is that better cause for which we must make the best out of every single moment and live wisely? This question is what the second parallel answers as the next level of the ladder.

Second comparison: becoming an aimless fool versus learning to be meaningful

The second imperative “to comprehend” provides the positive contrast here. It contrasts the negative imperative: “do not become foolish” (μὴ γίνεσθε ἄφρονες, ἀλλὰ συνίετε τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ κυρίου, v. 17). Therefore, the contrasting parallel is not only between the two entities like in the first contrast but between the two imperatives “to comprehend” and

¹⁹ However, when one says the days are evil, it more likely refers to moral bankruptcy than social evil, which is actually the outset of moral failures instead, cf., A. S. Wood, *Ephesians* (EBC Vol 11; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 71; also in A. T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC Vol 42; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 342; and others.

²⁰ The participle “ἐξαγοραζόμενοι” is a language of marketplace, referring to buying for own possession or even marketing something for one’s own profit. In fact, this exhortation says that people of God have to do every effort making every single hour of a day worth living to glorying God.

“do not become.”²¹ Accordingly, the positive imperative “to comprehend” exhorts knowing God’s good will for one’s life, and the negative imperative is “to not become” foolish referring to meaningless, purposeless, aimless living.²² For not to know God’s will nor fulfill His purpose in one’s daily life is truly to live a very aimless and meaningless life after all. However, the one remaining step on the ladder of thought is the most practical answer for living a life wise and meaningful although the age is becoming very evil.

Third comparison: being excessive by drinking wine versus being worshipful by the Spirit

The third contrasting parallel is the climax to all the comparative contrasts of 5:15-20. It gives the final concluding statement to the two previous quests. Again, in this final comparative parallel, the primary interest of contrast is not between the two entities (the instrumental wine and the instrumental influence or agency of the Spirit (οἶνω . . . ἐν πνεύματι)) that many scholars and commentators have mistaken.²³ The contrastive value that Paul points out is certain behaviors or actions controlled by other forces than oneself. Namely, the excessive harmful behaviors (and even with a disastrous outcome) are caused by drunkenness (μεθύσαεσθε, v. 18a) as the negative contrast on the one hand. And on the other hand, the jubilant nature (customarily overflowing with joy and happiness) that comes by the Spirit (πληροῦσθε) which is the positive contrast (vv. 18b-20).²⁴ However, the

²¹ See former academic paper by Thang San Mung, “Walk not as Fool but as Wise: An Exegetical Study of Ephesians 5:15-20,” at Torch Trinity University, Seoul, Korea, 2005: 8.

²² Also, in Best, 506; Hoehner, 695.

²³ First to claim this is the unparalleled grammatical form of the two entities itself. For instance, the first entity, dative “οἶνω,” has no supportive preposition when the second entity, divine dative “ἐν πνεύματι,” has such in prefix. Further, the next reason to assume as such is the grammatical nature of the preceding genitive πληροῦσθε that does not need any prepositional suffix in all biblical occurrences as Hoener once pointed out, cf., Hoener, 703-4. In fact, the preposition “ἐν” must be undoubtedly the head of divine dative “πνεύματι,” that was likely a parenthetical note.

²⁴ Cf., Best, 506-7 (while agreeing with Best as a whole in this regard, however, in favor of the extended clauses of the contrast, Best would need to extend his honest use of the word “conditions” here or even change to a more specific word to clearly point out at the natural outcome or product of the two

prepositional divine dative *en pneumatikē* (ἐν πνεύματι) indicates a profound truth for this overflowing joyous life. Indeed, this overflowing life can only be attained and maintained (and can become one's customary lifestyle) by staying under the Holy Spirit's total control (or influence).

Therefore, to live wisely is to know and fulfill God's very purpose in our daily life. In other words, it is to make the best out of the worst at every single moment of life. Further, this kind of lifestyle can give us perfect happiness and complete satisfaction in life. Therefore, it is a life overflowing indeed. Further, this life of overflowing joy and happiness cannot be maintained only by controlling oneself but by remaining in the divine presence of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives. Accordingly, the joyous, jubilant, and even festive nature of Spirit-led Pentecostal worship should not be projected for a one-and-a-half-hour Sunday morning service. One's daily life should be kept in perspective. Therefore, this limited period of jubilation should be taken from the church to our homes, our workplaces, and even our schools. Worship in Spirit is indeed a lifestyle. Unless we pursue a life of worship, all other efforts we make will turn out to be an unwise choices, meaningless gain, and even foolish efforts like those of a drunkard.

Life of Worship: Exegetical Clues from Ephesians 5:15-20

Of course, what we call Spirit-led worship (or Spirit-inspired worship) is not meant only for Sunday, but it is also for the other days, Monday to Sunday. It is beneficial to explore how such Spirit-led worship and life should look as evidenced in the last sentence of Ephesians 5:15-20. In its original text, this passage is a single literary unit and a combination of two sentences. Verses 15-16 are the first and verses 17-20 are the second. Both sentences have some significant participles—one in the first sentence and three in the second. The first participle was already treated.²⁵ The later three participles will be discussed in this section. In brief, the three participles of the second sentence speak in the sense of singing for each other (λαλοῦντες ἑαυτοῖς ψαλμοῖς), singing and making merry in the sense of worshipping the Lord (ᾄδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες), and giving thanks to the Father in the sense of confessing Jesus Christ (εὐχαριστοῦντες πάντοτε).

exhilarative contrasts, namely 'wine-drunkness' and 'Spirit-controlled states [i.e., joyful worship]').

²⁵ See fn 20.

As stated, these three adverbial participles are in a single sentence. That means that they altogether bear a single concept by revolving around a single verb – to overflow (πληροῦσθε, v. 18). In other words, those participles stand subordinate to the main verb and support it. As discussed above,²⁶ this verb should primarily be treated as independent from its unusual succeeding preposition *in* (or *with* or *by*, ἐν). The preposition ἐν precedes the divine dative πνεύματι, Spirit. Therefore, the overflow verb must be identified in light of its three participial subordinate clauses. The next question comes: What is the content that is to fill the person (or to overflow) if the verb πληροῦσθε is treated separately from the succeeding prepositional divine dative ἐν πνεύματι?

In another sense, suppose one brackets the prepositional divine dative ἐν πνεύματι in parenthesis like a modern writing system. It will then be clear that the upcoming participles are in direct support to the main verb πληροῦσθε, be filled or overflow. Therefore, the content of what is to fill the believer is none other than what the subordinate participles are talking about consistently. They are, first, “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs”; second, “singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord”; and thirdly, “always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father” (5:19 NASB). Apparently, these stand in total contrast to the consequential excessive outcomes of the negative parallel of v. 18 indeed.²⁷

²⁶ The overflowing verb πληροῦσθε has never succeeding prepositional dative in all biblical occurrences (Cf., Hoehner) therefore there must be something else between this verb and the succeeding prepositional dative, or this prepositional phrase should be a parenthesis in modern term, cf., footnote #23.

²⁷ This final contrastive statements between “being drunk with wine” and “being filled with by the Spirit” have some parallel accounts. For instance, both can be similarly understood in terms of control (cf., Liefeld, 137). When one is getting drunk, he or she is under the total control of such intoxicative power as it is when a believer is filled with the Holy Spirit, he or she is under the total control of God’s power (also see, Wood, 72; Hoehner, 704). However, each of both has its own differences also. In case of being drunk, for example, intoxication with such drink ends up in excessive and even destructive outcomes, but infilling with by the Holy Spirit leads Christians to peaceful and joyful lifestyle therefore is worth to call wise (cf., Hodge, 302-3).

First participle: being full of speaking praises (λαλοῦντες ἑαυτοῖς ψαλμοῖς)

The first subordinate participial clause is all about an overflowing with words directly taken from canonical psalms, traditional hymns, and other additional songs as the Spirit is invoked by one's heart. In other words, it is all about the verbal expression of our joy and happiness to God both in public and private conversations.²⁸ It is the first content that Spirit-filled believers are supposed to be overflowing with always.

Second participle: being full of a joyful song in heart (ᾄδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες τῇ καρδίᾳ)

The second participle is a couplet of two jubilant words, “singing and making merry.” However, even this festive celebration type should be single focus that is toward the Lord. This second participial clause seems to be concerned primarily with our attitude.²⁹ It is indeed the next content with which Spirit-filled believers are expected to be full.

Third participle: being full of thanksgiving (εὐχαριστοῦντες πάντοτε ὑπὲρ πάντων)

The third participle is all about thanksgiving to God. Structurally, it is the climax of the whole concept of the first two participial clauses. This thanksgiving mainly concerns one's actions that reflect how much someone is genuinely thankful to God for His Son, Jesus Christ.³⁰ Therefore, this worshipful lifestyle—full of singing, making merry in one's heart, and thanking God—is actually the Spirit-inspired life that one can maintain in every situation of ups and downs by continually

²⁸ “λαλοῦντες” refers to verbal expression of what is in someone's heart and mind (consult with lexicons, such as Danker). More than this, as synonymous pronoun ἑαυτοῖς indicates, this verbal confession of our joy and thankfulness to God should be done in public “to each other.” In fact, it means even a praising conversation among believers after all.

²⁹ This couplet of participles should interpret each other. As “ᾄδοντες” itself is about singing verbally, “ψάλλοντες” concerns more about attitude. However, since we have the first participle λαλοῦντες that is more about verbal expression, it is reasonable that the author of the epistle does not need to repeat it here again. In fact, it is safe to read this couplet more as attitudinal rather.

³⁰ Being a combination of two Greek words εὐ and χαρις, “εὐχαριστοῦντες” refers to a kind of jubilant praise or even a joyous celebration in thankfulness to God. Besides, the frequency adverb πάντοτε and prepositional phrase ὑπὲρ πάντων, a reference to “every circumstance,” indicate this act as a continual and even one's way of life (cf., Hoehner, 714).

staying in His presence. This is what Paul wants to bring to the attention of his audience by invoking the Holy Spirit.

In general, a life overflowing with joy and happiness expresses itself in praising God by the Spirit's inspiration and stands in total contrast to the excessive and destructive, uncontrollable behavior caused by overdrinking wine. Therefore, to choose a life that stays under the influence of the Holy Spirit for believers is to overflow with joy and happiness. Despite whatever life brings, Spirit-filled believers will always be happy and thankful to the Lord. We can say that worship and praise is not just a one-and-a-half-hour service done on Sunday morning. It is a lifestyle—even a life that is always full of heavenly joy and happiness in the Lord – a worshipful life indeed!

Conclusion

Worship is the call of creation in the first place. No other greater job or commission was in the Garden than to trust God and obey Him—that means to worship and adore Him above everything. However, to worship in the Garden, the first man and woman did not need a chapel nor musical band. All that they did in their Garden home was to worship God by trusting Him and listening to what He says. This is what they called worship. Worship since the beginning is not just an hour-long ceremony but a lifelong commitment and a daily life.

If that was the case, how can we build this worshipful life again for this hopeless generation living and surviving in a broken society and in a fallen world? There is no other way except receiving Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior and Lord. Then, one must be filled with the Holy Spirit (and remain in that spiritual infilling continually) as it is the promise of God in Jesus' name. One can attain and maintain this original design of worshipful living only by the Holy Spirit, who is always at work in the name of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, for the Ephesians, a single encounter with the Spirit of Pentecost which came by Paul laying his hands on them and praying for them to receive the Spirit was not enough for a lifelong run (Acts 19:1ff). They needed to stay in that spiritual climate continually. This worshipful life will be a natural outflow from the bottom of their hearts, not just a single Sunday morning event. It was to include the whole day, the whole week, and their entire lives. As long as people stay in the presence of God, fraught with the Spirit of Pentecost, they will be strong enough to glorify God in all circumstances of life.

Worship is indeed more than a Sunday thing, more than a media advancement, and more than musical expertise; it is an everyday thing. It is a lifestyle full of singing praises, conversing with a joyful heart, and giving thanks to the Father. It is what God wills for His children to maintain daily, no matter what the day brings.

Accordingly, some discussion questions for personal reflection on such an important biblical theme and its modern practice are provided below.

- 1) How do you personally define worship? Do you use the word “worship and praise” in your church in general? What do you need to do in your church or community to develop a view that sees worship as a lifestyle?
- 2) If worship is a lifestyle, what is the meaning and purpose for gathering together at church once a week on Sunday morning? How much our two-hour Sunday morning service impacts our daily lives or lifestyles? How should the two be related to each other?
- 3) For what purposes do you use contemporary music during your worship service? Consider the following: a) to entertain youth, b) to show off musical talent, c) to wake up the tired people in the pews, d) to adapt oneself to contemporary culture, and others?
- 4) Find some ways of using contemporary music in your worship services which lead to experiencing meaningful worship in a two-hour service and provide spiritual nourishment, power, inspiration, and joy lasting for the entire week.

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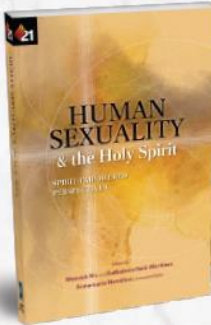
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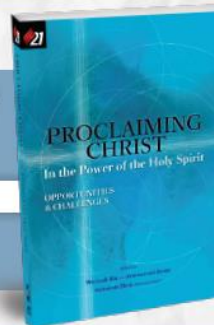
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The Case for Credobaptism: The Development of a Pentecostal Distinctive

Geoffrey Butler

Abstract

Though nearly every Christian tradition has a doctrine of baptism, a consensus on the proper understanding of it has proven elusive throughout church history. Pentecostals have traditionally held the credobaptist position, although sustained reflection on the doctrine has been relatively rare outside of early debates between Trinitarian and Oneness adherents. Given that every church must grapple with the issue of baptism and considering the emergence of sacramental theology as an interest of Pentecostal theologians, the movement would do well to consider afresh its historic support of credobaptism. This paper argues for this view on both historical and biblical grounds, considering several pastoral questions Pentecostal churches might be forced to consider when dealing with baptism, and how they might understand them in a distinctly Pentecostal light.

Keywords: baptism, Pentecostal, immersion, distinctive

Introduction

There are few Christian doctrines that have evoked more vigorous debate than water baptism. Whether the discussion revolves around administering it to infants or the meaning of passages linking baptism with salvation, it inevitably falls to the church to baptize those who seek to be faithful to the directives of Scripture. Little more than a century old, Pentecostalism became a latecomer to this debate though not without substantial internal dialogue. In its infancy, Pentecostalism was forced to consider its position not just in terms of who should be baptized, but whether a classic Trinitarian or alternative “Oneness” formula should be employed.¹ So heated was this dispute that some

¹ Douglas G. Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 195.

went so far as to claim the sacrament – or ordinance, depending on who one asks – s essential to salvation. While the Oneness-Trinitarian debate helped Pentecostals defend both justification by faith alone and the Trinitarianism of Orthodox Christianity, the precise meaning and purpose of baptism has remained somewhat unclear in many Pentecostal churches.

Nevertheless, in recent years the movement’s scholars have begun a concerted effort to recover what they see as an implicit sacramentalism within first-generation Pentecostalism through careful engagement with the primary literature. Chris Green argues that early Pentecostals “held a relatively ‘high’ view of the Eucharist”, but “a relatively ‘low’ view of water baptism.”² In his recently released monograph, *Washed in the Spirit*, Andrew Ray Williams draws upon “Pentecostal periodicals, constructive ecumenical resources, and engagement with key biblical texts”³ to propose a distinctive theology of baptism consistent with the impulses of the early movement. Contrary to most Pentecostals historically, however, Williams⁴ – alongside fellow Pentecostal scholars like Daniel Tomberlin⁵ – has demonstrated an increased openness to paedobaptism considering the ecumenical fruit such a shift might bear. While neither suggest that Pentecostals renounce their predominantly credobaptist practice, their work raises the question if parts of the movement might adopt either a dual or a paedobaptist practice in the future. While appreciating the ecumenical progress that might be made through this conversation, Pentecostals who are credobaptist by conviction would do well to articulate afresh their reasons why. This paper will seek to do so, while considering the pastoral questions it raises, and asking what implications the further development of a distinctly Pentecostal understanding of credobaptism might mean for ecumenical efforts. Given the longstanding differences between Oneness and Trinitarian Pentecostals concerning the relationship between baptism and justification, this study will concentrate on the latter branch of the movement.

² See Chris E. W. Green, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord’s Supper: Foretasting the Kingdom* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012), 328.

³ Andrew Ray Williams, *Washed in the Spirit: Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Water Baptism* (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2021), 8.

⁴ Williams, *Washed in the Spirit*, 267-68.

⁵ Daniel Tomberlin, “Believers’ Baptism in the Pentecostal Tradition,” *Ecumenical Review* 67:3 (2015), 431.

Believer's Baptism: The Historical Case

Because the merits of credo- versus infant baptism have scarcely been debated among Pentecostal theologians to date, a study such as this necessitates consulting scholarship from outside the movement. The most natural place is among fellow evangelicals who, like Pentecostals, reject baptismal regeneration⁶ and see tradition as a trustworthy conversation partner rather than authoritative. Thus, we will first consider how evangelicals have engaged the tradition, and how their understanding might inform Pentecostals.

One of the most potent claims of those who hold the paedobaptist position is its historic place in mainstream Christendom. Indeed, the late Presbyterian theologian, R.C. Sproul, while lamenting the overwhelming opposition in contemporary evangelicalism, points out that historically paedobaptists have held the majority. “Throughout church history, the practice of infant baptism has been far and away the majority report.”⁷ Though he grants there is no record of anyone clearly advocating for it until 150 A.D. – over a century after the apostolic era – this reference speaks as if paedobaptism was, at that time, a widespread practice within the church. “It would be a strange and astonishing thing,” he asserts, “if there had been a significant departure from the apostolic community that infected the entire Christian world by the middle of the second century without a word or concern of protest being raised.”⁸ Sproul is here indicative of the Reformed paedobaptist tradition; indeed, Calvin himself makes virtually the same argument in his *Institutes*,⁹ and Protestant paedobaptists have long claimed historical continuity over and against their credobaptist counterparts.

Yet, as Everett Ferguson points out, one looks in vain for clear affirmations of paedobaptism from patristic giants like Justin Martyr, Polycarp, and Clement of Alexandria. They all speak of believers who had been faithful since childhood without a word about infant baptism.¹⁰ Indeed, even as Reformed paedobaptists laud its longstanding

⁶ Williams, *Washed in the Spirit*, 82.

⁷ R.C. Sproul, *What Is Baptism?* (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2016), ch. 6, Kindle.

⁸ Sproul, *What Is Baptism?* ch. 6.

⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 14.16.30.

¹⁰ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 363.

practice, they still grant the point that it is not explicitly commanded in Scripture or in many early extrabiblical writings. Not only is it not affirmed but is explicitly rejected from multiple sources. Consider Tertullian of Carthage, for example, it is from his rejection of infant baptism that Sproul infers it was already widespread enough by the mid-second century to warrant protest. Yet, Tertullian never says that infant baptism was the consensus of his time.¹¹ He depicts the practice as an innovative one for which his contemporaries sought biblical justification.¹² Surely if paedobaptists could have cited extensive historical precedent, they would have done so. In addition, as some scholars have noted, Tertullian was quite conservative, demonstrating a deep respect for tradition. The fact that he so adamantly rejected paedobaptism would be out of character were the practice was firmly established.¹³ While he affirmed the place of children within the church and stressed the importance of training them to follow Christ, baptism was intended to follow their commitment – not their birth into a Christian household. His position suggests not that paedobaptism was the consensus in the apostolic era, but one that came to prominence a century later – and was quickly met with significant opposition.

Thomas Schreiner and Shawn Wright, both writing from within the Baptist tradition, further contend that prior to the 3rd century, one finds no explicit defence of paedobaptism; recorded instructions regarding how baptism ought to be administered assume the individual was a believer.¹⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus, for example, notes the biblical link between baptism and repentance,¹⁵ and the *Didache* speaks to the question of baptism extensively. Pertinent to debates within early Pentecostalism, the document mentions that a Trinitarian formula is to be employed – Father, Son, and Spirit. However, two details stand out that prove especially relevant to the doctrine of believer's baptism; first, the recipient must be immersed, and secondly, they must fast for a day or two before baptism is administered.¹⁶ These requirements, it seems,

¹¹ Tertullian, *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*, trans. Ernest Evans (London: S.P.C.K., 1964), 101.

¹² Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early*, 363-64.

¹³ Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early*, 363-64.

¹⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright. *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2006), 165-66.

¹⁵ Schreiner and Wright, *Believer's Baptism*, 169.

¹⁶ Schreiner and Wright, *Believer's Baptism*, 170.

would exclude infants. Some have made much of the concession that states if sufficient water is not available for immersion, baptism may be administered by pouring. But it seems the exception proves the rule; pouring was an emergency provision, which would not have been the case were paedobaptism a widespread practice. And, quite notably, there is an absence of any instruction on administering it to infants.

Moreover, when one considers other reasons some of the Fathers list for undergoing baptism, it becomes clear that the recipients they had in mind could not have been infants. In addition to such benefits as the reception of the Spirit and forgiveness of sins, Tertullian also lists identifying with the Body of Christ. Likewise, Justin Martyr explicitly refers to baptism as an act of individual choice symbolizing ones' decision to repent of sin and identify with Christ. In his *First Apology*, he states:

This is the reason, taught to us by the Apostles, why we baptize. . . . In order that we do not continue as children of necessity and ignorance, but of deliberate choice and knowledge, and in order to obtain in the water the forgiveness of past sins, there is invoked over the one who wishes to be regenerated, and who is repentant of his sins, the name of God, the Father and Lord of all; he who leads the person to be baptized to the laver calls him by this name only.¹⁷

The recipient is making a “deliberate” choice; baptism is for the repentant. In fact, within the very same passage, Martyr distinguishes the sacrament from natural birth, in which one has no choice. This parallel becomes incoherent if the paedobaptist position is taken. This does not necessarily exclude children *per se*. In *The Apology of Aristides*, another patristic source, Schreiner and Wright grant that it speaks directly to the baptism of believer's children.¹⁸ Yet these were not infants, but young people of sufficient age to make a profession of faith.¹⁹ Aristides clarifies that children of believers are only considered full members of the community when they accept the faith and are baptized. While he does not explicitly speak to infant baptism, he implicitly excludes it. No doubt some Christians did advocate infant baptism for those in danger of

¹⁷ Justin Martyr, *The First Apology, the Second Apology, Dialogue with Trypho, Exhortation to the Greeks, Discourse to the Greeks, the Monarchy or the Rule of God*, trans. Thomas B. Falls (Baltimore: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 99.

¹⁸ Schreiner and Wright, *Believer's Baptism*, 172.

¹⁹ Schreiner and Wright, *Believer's Baptism*, 164.

dying – an emergency baptism, as it were. But the mere mention of this suggests that paedobaptism was not normative. Why label it an “emergency” if infant baptism was already a standard ordinance?

Certainly, infant baptism did have a place within the primitive Church; the defenses of men such as Origen, Cyprian, and others demonstrate credobaptism was not the consensus, as Ferguson admirably documents.²⁰ It would be an either ill-informed or bad-faith argument, therefore, should credobaptists attempt to claim the entire patristic tradition. Nevertheless, the notion that paedobaptism dominated the patristic era is misguided as well; thus, credobaptists, far from shying away from the Fathers, should appeal to them more consistently in their defence. Pentecostals, who have made much of the apostolic label from their early days, might learn from fellow credobaptists that historical continuity with the primitive church is not strictly the domain of paedobaptists, as is often assumed.

Believer’s Baptism: The Biblical Case

The historical witness to credobaptism having been established, our attention turns to what the biblical authors – on whom the patristic theologians were dependent – said concerning baptism. This consideration undoubtedly holds greater weight for Pentecostals on the lay level, who have, from the beginning, opposed infant baptism first and foremost because they found no basis for it in the New Testament.²¹ Even many staunch proponents of paedobaptism grant that the biblical term for baptism indeed denotes immersion;²² Calvin simply admitted that such was the normative mode of baptism in the primitive church. Credobaptist scholars have contended that, when one analyzes the usage of the term in the Greek New Testament, the Septuagint, and extra biblical sources, it is used to describe submersion in water.²³ While some paedobaptists have countered that the term

²⁰ Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early*, 370-71.

²¹ See Caleb Courtney and Martin Mittelstadt, *Canadian Pentecostal Reader: The First Generation of Pentecostal Voices in Canada, 1907–1925* (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2021), 359.

²² See Tom J. Nettles, “Baptist View: Baptism as a Symbol of Christ’s Saving Work,” in *Understanding Four Views on Baptism*, John H. Armstrong and Paul E. Engle (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 26.

²³ Usage in classical sources, for example, demonstrate that the term is used to denote an individual drowning or a ship sinking. See Bruce A. Ware, “Believer’s

denotes being “overwhelmed” rather than immersed, it seems awkward at best if used to describe sprinkling or pouring.²⁴ In making their case, one of the key texts credobaptists turn to is the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20: baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit, which seems to assume the recipients of baptism will be disciples.²⁵ Likewise, in Acts 2:38-42, Peter’s call to “repent and be baptized” again assumes that baptism follows repentance and faith.²⁶ This presents a problem if members of believing households included children who had not made a profession of faith but could be baptized.²⁷ While paedobaptists concur that baptism should be administered to adults only after they have made a profession, such passages make no distinction based on age. Moreover, in Acts 8 when the Ethiopian eunuch asked Philip what could hinder him from baptism, he replied only that the eunuch must believe the gospel. Faith was the prerequisite for baptism – performed, again, by immersion.²⁸

It is also imperative to consider baptism within the 1st century Jewish context. Rabbinic tradition posited that Gentile converts be immersed in water to signify their change of heart. The convert would be given a new name, as their baptism signified a new birth – as if the individual was “born” into a Jewish family. This practice was known as “proselyte baptism” to be administered in the company of at least three witnesses.²⁹ Thus, when John the Baptist began baptizing in the Judean wilderness, his 1st century audience would have understood the parallel.³⁰ His declaration that the kingdom was at hand and his call to repent demonstrated that baptism was inextricably linked to turning from sin. Many paedobaptists, moreover, appeal to texts that speak of the members of a “household” being baptized as proof their practice is

Baptism View,” in David F. Wright et al, eds. *Baptism: Three Views* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 21.

²⁴ Sinclair Ferguson, “Infant Baptism Response,” in Wright et al, 52.

²⁵ Ware, “Believer’s Baptism View,” 19.

²⁶ Marlin Jeschke, *Believers Baptism for Children of the Church* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1983), 36.

²⁷ Nettles, “Baptist View,” 35-36. Ironically, Peter’s statement here about the promise of the Spirit being for “your children” is frequently employed by paedobaptists to defend their position as well.

²⁸ Philip and the Eunuch going down and coming up from the water make that clear. See Nettles, “Baptist View,” 30.

²⁹ Jeschke, *Believers Baptism*, 20-21.

³⁰ Jeschke, *Believers Baptism*, 23.

appropriate. The families of the Philippian jailer, Lydia, and Crispus the Synagogue ruler are typical cases from the book of Acts noted by its proponents.³¹ Yet, even in those cases where a household is said to be baptized, there is no reference to infants; indeed, it seems that the reason for the entire households being baptized is that entire households believed. In the case of the Philippian jailer, all within the household are baptized – indeed, all in the house also accepted the gospel. It is thus plausible at least to conclude that all within the household were of sufficient age to understand the message of Paul and Silas. Likewise, in the case of Crispus, the entire household was baptized, but his entire household also believed – hinting against the presence of infants in the family. Notably, there is no text wherein a household is baptized and infants are mentioned. Thus, even texts cited in an argument from silence do not offer sufficient evidence.

Finally, in defending believer's baptism on biblical grounds, Pentecostals must continue to maintain that baptism is not salvific – an especially vital consideration in ecumenical dialogue. Claims to baptismal regeneration, after all, are not unique to High Church contexts. Both the Church of Christ, who view baptism as the occasion of regeneration,³² and Oneness Pentecostals who split with Trinitarians in the movement's infancy, hold this view.³³ Water baptism, they argue, is an essential requirement for salvation, along with faith in Christ and baptism in the Spirit evidenced by speaking in tongues.³⁴ Trinitarian Pentecostals, nevertheless, hold that there is no justifying power in water baptism³⁵ and have always conceived of it as a sign – not a means – of regeneration.³⁶ While “water baptism,” Daniel Tomberlin explains, “should not be minimized, reception of the Spirit is by faith. Peter *commanded* Cornelius and his household to be baptized in water after they had received the Spirit.”³⁷ Thus, they were baptized on account of their regeneration, not to effect it. Baptism follows justification, not as a

³¹ Jeschke, *Believers Baptism*, 37.

³² Nettles, “Baptist View,” 129.

³³ Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit*, 195.

³⁴ Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit*, 195.

³⁵ Koo Dong Yun, “Water Baptism and Spirit Baptism: Pentecostals and Lutherans in Dialogue,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 43:4 (2004), 346.

³⁶ Yun, “Water Baptism and Spirit,” 350-51.

³⁷ Daniel Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments: Encountering God at the Altar* (Cleveland: Cherohala Press, 2015), 152.

component of saving faith. It is a visible testimony to it. Indeed, to insist otherwise seems to invalidate the very idea that it is a *believers'* baptism.

Believer's Baptism and the Local Church

While a local church may be able to afford considerable doctrinal flexibility on more theoretical matters, it is difficult to do so regarding baptism. Given the historical and biblical case for the credobaptist view, we now turn our attention to who may receive it, who can perform it, and whether rebaptism is ever appropriate – particularly in light of the ecumenical implications such a question poses. As one might quickly realize, attempting to answer such questions highlight the fact that many Pentecostals have yet to consider the implications of their credobaptism.

The first requirement, given overwhelming scriptural testimony, is that the candidate for baptism be truly repentant and capable of faith in Christ. In Acts, so linked are repentance and baptism that believers are baptized immediately after conversion; Paul, the Ethiopian eunuch, and the house of Cornelius stand out as examples. While Gregg Allison explains that this practice was altered after the legalization of Christianity, with baptismal classes and catechesis required of the candidate, Scripture itself gives no such instruction,³⁸ apparently leaving a precise timeframe to the wisdom of the church. The second requirement, intrinsically linked to the first, is that the recipient be old enough to personally understand the gospel; otherwise, the ordinance becomes little different from paedobaptism. Although Scripture does not prescribe an age, there is every indication one must be able to make a profession of faith. While the child's parents and church family will play a pivotal role in discerning the veracity of such a profession, the decision to undergo the ordinance lies with the individual. On a pastoral level, there is a definite tension; one would not want to discourage a child from following Jesus in this manner, nor is it reasonable to expect them to exhibit the maturity of an adult. Yet, it is also not a step to be taken lightly; a credobaptism in which the recipient does not understand seems indistinguishable, in many ways, from paedobaptism.

Then there is the question of who may administer baptism in a credobaptist context. Here the lack of a Pentecostal theology of ordination, at times, raises as many questions as it does answers. As part of the wider free-church tradition, Pentecostals have traditionally not recognized a sharp distinction between laity and clergy. Thus, there is no

³⁸ Gregg R. Allison and Wayne A. Grudem, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 615.

particular reason why ordinances such as baptism and communion cannot be administered by any believer under the doctrinal framework assumed by most Pentecostal denominations.

The question of rebaptism in the case of those who have fallen away from the faith and come back also presents a challenge. Few Pentecostal denominations have an official policy on this question, nor is there a consensus regarding those who have been baptized as children and remained faithful Christians all their lives. Should they too be immersed? Is their baptism as an infant sufficient? While Pentecostalism has no uniform formal theology to address this point, the movement's operative theology has often leaned toward rebaptism and a low/no view of ordination.³⁹ On the one hand, an association with the free-church tradition is largely the reason Pentecostals adopted the credobaptist position this study endorses in the first place. However, on the question of ordination, and more importantly rebaptism, might Pentecostals need to consciously consider what makes their conception of credobaptism unique if it is to make any worthwhile ecumenical contribution on this matter? It is to this question that we now turn.

Credobaptism: A Pentecostal Distinctive?

With rare exceptions, that Pentecostals hold to a credobaptist position is clear;⁴⁰ nevertheless, the question of whether the doctrine is a Pentecostal distinctive is much trickier. Believer's baptism is not unique to Pentecostalism; yet is there anything in the Pentecostal view of baptism that would distinguish it from a Baptist's understanding? If not, should there be? The answers hold considerable implications not only for ministry in a Pentecostal context, but for the movement's future relationship with the church at large.

Although speaking of a singular Pentecostal perspective on baptism is impossible,⁴¹ that immersion is the proper mode intended for believers remains the overwhelming consensus. What is not clear is how, or if, the Pentecostal view of baptism is distinct. Perhaps more may be gained by analyzing how non-Pentecostal credobaptists understand water baptism in relationship to Spirit baptism. Bruce Ware, of Southern

³⁹ Williams, *Washed in the Spirit*, 111.

⁴⁰ See Simon G.H. Tan, "Reassessing Believer's Baptism in Pentecostal Theology and Practice," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 6:2 (2003), 219-34 for a Pentecostal case against the conviction that infant baptism is unbiblical.

⁴¹ Tomberlin, "Believers' Baptism," 423.

Baptist Theological Seminary, argues that Paul sees water baptism as a parallel of Spirit baptism – which, in his view, occurs at conversion.⁴² He states that “Pauline texts shows the unmistakable link between water baptism and Spirit baptism, or between the baptism of a believer in water and the spiritual reality of conversion . . . that has occurred in the believer’s life.”⁴³ Yet, traditional Pentecostals have always held that Spirit baptism occurs subsequent to conversion, and thus differ from Ware and other Baptists who see Spirit baptism as concurrent with regeneration.

Perhaps given that Pentecostals have consistently spoken of Spirit baptism as an endowment of power for ministry, viewing the two as complementary experiences intended to help the believer grow in grace could be considered. Kenneth Archer, for example, helpfully claims that practices such as water baptism “aid us in our salvific journey because they give the Holy Spirit necessary opportunities to keep the community on the right path . . . (they) are effective means of grace when inspired by the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁴ Though not essential to our justification, they are a vital tool in sanctification, instrumental for the process of our salvation overall. Unlike most other credobaptists, Pentecostals hold an implicitly sacramental worldview, and a soteriology that sees subsequent works of grace in the believer’s life as normative. Numerous early Pentecostals, after all, reported being baptized in the Spirit during or immediately after their water baptisms, a parallel which might help Pentecostals recover a robust sacramentality.⁴⁵ If the tongues associated with Spirit baptism are indicative of an inward grace, why would the waters of baptism not also be considered a sign of an inward grace too? By asserting that baptism should be an integral part of *salvation*, yet not an essential part of *justification*, Pentecostals could offer the church a unique perspective that sees baptism as a means by which the Lord nourishes our souls, not necessarily the means that saves them.

The issue of rebaptism, specifically insofar as paedobaptism is concerned, is undoubtedly the largest challenge Pentecostals face in both facilitating dialogue with the tradition and staying true to their roots.

⁴² Ware, “Believer’s Baptism View,” 28.

⁴³ Ware, “Believer’s Baptism View,” 28.

⁴⁴ Kenneth J. Archer, “Nourishment for Our Journey: The Pentecostal *Via Salutis* and Sacramental Ordinances,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 13:1 (2004), 85.

⁴⁵ Courtney and Mittelstadt, *Canadian Pentecostal Reader*, 69.

William's suggestion that "Pentecostal churches . . . ought seriously to consider receiving believers baptized as infants into their fellowship, recognizing them as truly baptized 'Christians' even if credobaptism remains normative" might help advance the movement's ecumenical endeavors insofar as sacramental theology is concerned. Yet, his subsequent suggestion that Trinitarian Pentecostals recognize Oneness baptisms performed "in Jesus's name" as legitimate too threatens to undermine any progress made on that front.⁴⁶ Indeed Williams himself recognizes this potential barrier, hence he cautions that Trinitarian Pentecostals should not disregard their own usage of "Father, Son and Holy Spirit." It seems that several options belie the movement on this point. One is to insist on rebaptism, which would be consistent with much of the early movement, but it effectively eliminates any chance at dialogue with more sacramental traditions. Another would be to accept infant baptism just as they do credobaptism, which poses the opposite problem; there is little precedent for accepting infant baptism in early Pentecostalism with the exception of the International Pentecostal Holiness Church, which implicitly held a theology of dual practice.⁴⁷ While doing so would make ecumenical dialogue much smoother, it seems this would come at the cost of a cherished distinctive and likely doom any hypothetical efforts at reconciliation with Oneness churches.

Perhaps a third way, however, is for Pentecostals to adopt a relatively generous form of credobaptism that considers infant baptism inappropriate, but not ultimately invalid to the point of necessitating rebaptism. This resembles the position taken by the great Swiss theologian Karl Barth, who differed with his own Reformed tradition over the matter. He claimed that "baptism may have been administered in a way which is highly doubtful and questionable, because irregular. Nevertheless, one cannot say that it is invalid," a position that offers Pentecostals an attractive solution to this dilemma.⁴⁸ This is especially true given that, unlike much of historic Christendom, Pentecostals have long practiced an Open Table communion, which does not necessitate baptism prior to receiving the Lord's Supper.⁴⁹ Thus, the adoption of this accommodation within some Pentecostal churches would not necessarily damage close cooperation with those who insist on

⁴⁶ Williams, *Washed in the Spirit*, 224.

⁴⁷ See Williams, *Washed in the Spirit*, 129-130.

⁴⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/4, trans. G. W. Bromiley, ed. Thomas F. Torrance. 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 195.

⁴⁹ Green, *Pentecostal Theology*, 320.

rebaptism. It would also help it remain true to its credobaptist convictions without closing the door on convergence with paedobaptist communions.

The related question of ordination, noted in the previous section, is an open one that raises the need for a conscious articulation of a Pentecostal theology of ordination – even if the conclusion is to *reject* a formal theology of ordination insofar as the sacraments are concerned! Ecumenical theologians have long noted the importance of this question to healing the divides that currently exist between various churches. George Hunsinger, for example, confesses to be “at a loss when it comes to coordinating (his sacramental) proposals with . . . Pentecostal, charismatic, and parachurch movements. . . . Ecumenical convergence does not seem possible without affirming Nicene Christianity, a high view of the eucharist, and some sort of episcopal polity.”⁵⁰ Certainly, Hunsinger may be overstating his point. In any case, it is unreasonable to think that only the free churches, and not more sacramental traditions too, will have to grant considerable grace if ecclesial unity is to be reached. Yet his concern raises a valid point. Though there is no reason to question (Trinitarian) Pentecostalism’s allegiance to Nicene Orthodoxy nor its potential to highly regard the Eucharist, episcopal polity is another matter. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen notes that although “many Pentecostal denominations have bishops, the episcopacy is not needed” to administer the sacraments and thus, “Pentecostal ecclesiology is neither sacramental nor episcopal.”⁵¹ Certainly, upon further reflection, Pentecostals might well find that a formal theology of ordination is antithetical to their free church roots. They may conclude they are correct in not formally requiring those who baptize to be ordained. Nevertheless, such a conversation has yet to take place and therefore, for the sake of future dialogue with the wider church, presents a challenge for Pentecostal scholars to consider further.

Conclusion

Evidently, the lack of a distinct, well-articulated Pentecostal position on believer’s baptism highlights several areas for the movement to address both on a scholarly and pastoral level. For this, the movement is indebted to scholars such as Williams and Tomberlin for commencing

⁵⁰ George Hunsinger, *The Eucharist and Ecumenism: Let Us Keep the Feast* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 11.

⁵¹ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “The Pentecostal View,” in Gordon T. Smith, *The Lord’s Supper: Five Views* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 130.

the conversation. These questions will not only impact how Pentecostals administer baptism and how they teach on the related doctrine of Spirit baptism in the future, but also determine whether its potential for ecumenical dialogue will be realized or not. However, if the Pentecostal-Charismatic tradition's short existence has demonstrated anything, it is a remarkable degree of flexibility across various cultural and ecclesial contexts, an uncanny ability to adapt to emerging challenges. Through careful consideration of the movement's history, conversation with other Christian traditions, and renewed analysis of the biblical texts upon which Pentecostals have historically relied, sacramental theology may in time prove to be one more topic on which the movement offers the broader Christian church a fresh understanding of an ancient doctrine.

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Glimpses of the Work of the Spirit in an Online Learning Environment

Ee Lin Lam

Abstract

The Spirit is at work in the lives of students whether they study onsite or online. This paper presents glimpses of the work of the Spirit reflected in the online discussion posts of students studying online at a theological institution in Asia. Textual communication of participants in the learning management system of four online graduate courses was examined. In the process of interacting with content (including Scriptures) and with the learning community, students were observed to be engaging their mind, heart, and will. Such outcomes are not just the work of conscious participation by the individual students but also divine agency (as in the work of the Spirit). Three practices for online theological education are also recommended.

Keywords: online theological education, Holy Spirit, learning community

Introduction

Given the shift in education to an online environment for many institutions including Bible schools during the Covid-19 pandemic, I have chosen to highlight the work of the Holy Spirit in online theological education of an institution in Asia. TCA College School of Theology (English) in Singapore began experimenting with online instructional technology in 2012 in response to the changing trends of the global educational landscape. The college reaped the benefits of this early start when the pandemic drastically inhibited physical contact and restricted travel from 2020 to 2021 (travel restrictions lifted at different times for different countries). There were no major disruptions to learning at the college except for shifting onsite classes to a web-conferencing platform.

From a modest start to the launch of a fully online English graduate program in 2018, TCA has experienced the gracious leading of the Holy Spirit. This article highlights learning experiences of students expressed

in their online discussion forum posts. It rests on the conviction that such outcomes are both the work of conscious participation by the individual students as well as divine agency (as in the work of the Spirit). Data for this article is drawn from the author's dissertation research on the exploration of spiritual formation in four online graduate courses in 2018.¹

The Journey Online

Starting with a free software, EDU 2.0, faculty combined students' onsite learning with online content discussions. This led to exploring the use of Moodle to offer three fully online courses in English in 2016. In tandem with the use of new instructional technology, the whole college began to shift institution and student services online. A supportive board, leadership, and IT department paved the way for the acquiring of software and systems to expedite processes.

Faculty Development

Requiring faculty to adapt to a new way of instruction, one they have not been a student of, is no easy feat. In a sense, they become novices again to acquire online instructional expertise.² Face-to-face and online sessions were designed to familiarize and equip faculty for instruction online from October 2016 to July 2017. Furnishing trends and statistics on the move in global education, the leadership cast a strong vision on the imperative for TCA to move online. It was more than just following a trend; it was making theological education more accessible beyond physical barriers and boundaries. Faculty experienced online learning first-hand participating as students on the learning management system (LMS).

Online Courses at TCA

The institution differentiated classes held weekly over Zoom (a cloud-based video conferencing platform) during the pandemic from courses that are specifically designed for online education. During the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2021, nearly all onsite classes were

¹ E. L. Lam, "Spiritual Formation in the Online Learning Community of a Bible College" (EdD diss., Regent University, Virginia, 2020), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

² Carol A. McQuiggan, "Faculty Development for Online Teaching as a Catalyst for Change," *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks* 16, no. 2 (March 1, 2012): 27–61.

shifted from the physical classroom to the web-based platform. However, online courses in English and Chinese at TCA are designed for asynchronous learning, catering to students who cannot come to campus physically and reside in countries with differing time zones. Such students include those who could not obtain a visa for entry to Singapore, are not able to relocate, as well as those who consistently travel for varying reasons.

Methodology

One optimal method used to examine and describe meaning in computer mediated communication is content analysis.³ The method uncovers different perspectives, facilitates the identification of emerging themes, and involves subjective interpretation of the meaning of texts (latent content).⁴ Unlike manifest content that is physically present and countable, latent concepts are represented by indicators.⁵

This article focuses on textual content posted by students on the discussion forums of four online graduate courses in response to content questions formulated by the instructor and to fellow students. The weekly discussion forum is a distinguishing feature of asynchronous fully online courses that constitute a major learning space for students. Content of research projects, essays, or term papers that involve students uploading a separate document into the LMS were not included in the analysis since such assignments are not exclusive to an online learning platform. For the intent of this article, there seems to be no available deductive framework for content analysis of the work of the Holy Spirit in an online learning environment. Instead, the author relied on descriptions of the work of the Spirit in Scriptures and in literature.

There have been quantitative instruments developed to measure different aspects of spirituality and spiritual growth such as the Christian

³ K. Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013); J. Drisko and T. Maschi, *Content Analysis*, 2016.

⁴ K. A. Meyer, "A Study of Online Discourse at The Chronicle of Higher Education," *Innovative Higher Education* 35, no. 3 (2010): 143–60, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-010-9138-8>.

⁵ K. A. Neuendorf, *The Content Analysis Guidebook*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2017).

Spiritual Participation Profile,⁶ Spiritual Assessment Inventory,⁷ Faith Maturity Scale,⁸ and others. However, these instruments measure predetermined elements of spiritual development relevant to particular contexts and were not designed for examining the work of the Spirit in online communication. Wiens points out that “the greatest limitation of quantitative assessments for faith formation is that they measure spiritual or religious constructs that may or may not align with the theological identity of the institution conducting the study, let alone, the person being tested.”⁹ Besides being an educator in a Pentecostal-Charismatic theological institution, the writer of this article has also been an ordained minister of the Assemblies of God of Singapore for about 20 years. To be reflexive,¹⁰ the author is conscious of biases, values, and assumptions in her denominational background and worldview that could influence a subjective interpretation of data. More than 70% of students in the study attend church with a Pentecostal affiliation.

Glimpses of the Work of the Spirit in Students’ Online Discussion Posts

Scripture passages such as John 14-16, Romans 8, 1 Corinthians 12, and Galatians 5 portray the multidimensional work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit remains active in the lives of believers today and is more than just

⁶ O. J. Thayer, “Constructing a Spirituality Measure Based on Learning Theory: The Christian Spiritual Participation Profile,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 23, no. 3 (2004): 195–207.

⁷ Todd W. Hall and Keith J. Edwards, “The Spiritual Assessment Inventory: A Theistic Model and Measure for Assessing Spiritual Development,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41, no. 2 (June 2002): 341–57, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5906.00121>.

⁸ P. L. Benson, M. J. Donahue, and J. A. Erickson, “The Faith Maturity Scale: Conceptualization, Measurement, and Empirical Validation,” in *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, ed. M. L. Lynn and D. O. Moberg, vol. 5 (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1993), 1–26.

⁹ T. L. Wiens, “Educating Clergy Online: A Pedagogical Map to Guide and Assess Spiritual Integration” (PhD diss., Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 2014), 213, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

¹⁰ J.W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2013); L. Richards, *Handling Qualitative Data: A Practical Guide* (London, UK: Sage, 2015); R. K. Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish* (New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 2011).

a professed doctrine of the church or a way to explain God's activity.¹¹ Among the works of the Holy Spirit, he creates faith, convicts sin, inspires, reveals, encourages, empowers, energizes, motivates sanctification, distributes gifts to the church, intercedes, produces fruit within believers, and transforms.¹² His divine action is not limited to physical face to face interactions among God's people. Being "supra-spatial,"¹³ the Spirit is "intimately present with every believer"¹⁴ wherever they are located. History records experiences of those who encounter God in the seclusion of the monastery or while in deep isolated times of prayer and fasting. He can bring revelation and conviction within the confines of a prayer room in much the same fashion as when one uses a digital device and ponders over Scriptures and the text at hand. I propose that the Holy Spirit was working in the hearts, minds, and will of the students even as they underwent their studies online. One does not become disembodied to participate in a virtual platform. One participates as a fully embodied person, engaging the mind, spirit, emotion, and will. Illumination and conviction by the Holy Spirit can take place and sometimes be expressed in the forum discussions that occur in the online platform.

While interaction often refers to synchronous communication between or among people, Moore posits that interaction takes place between learner-learner, learner-instructor, as well as learner-content in an educational context.¹⁵ In a Christian context, Heinemann and Estep present online interaction as seven-fold: (a) God-Instructor, (b) God-Student, (c) God-Content, (d) Instructor-Student, (e) Student-Student, (f) Student-Content, and (g) Student-Self.¹⁶ As the Spirit operates in a variety of ways and often in an integrative manner – works such as the convicting of hearts, illuminating of minds, influencing of will, and

¹¹ Craig S. Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit: Paul's Approach to Transformed Thinking* (Baker Academic, 2016), 133.

¹² Keith Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology: A Theology of Encounter*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2008); Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit*.

¹³ Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology*, 49.

¹⁴ Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology*, 48.

¹⁵ M. G. Moore, "Three Types of Interaction," *American Journal of Distance Education* 3, no. 2 (1989): 1–7.

¹⁶ M. H. Heinemann and J. R. Estep Jr., "Educational Theory and Online Education," in *Best Practices of Online Education: A Guide for Christian Higher Education*, ed. M. A. Maddix, J. R. Estep, and M. E. Lowe (Charlotte, N.C: Information Age Publishing, 2012), 3–16.

directing of ways cannot be precisely delineated and specifically categorized as they often overlap. Hence, in this section, glimpses of the work of the Spirit are presented from two main interactions of an online learning context: interaction with content, and engagement with the learning community.

When Students Interact with Learning Content

Learners' interactions with content are as valuable as interactions with their instructor and peers in the class.¹⁷ For institutions training ministers and leaders to serve the kingdom of God, how learners process and apply content, including Scriptures, is of crucial significance. Like Willard and Simpson argue, "Information begins our transformation" and "without correct information, our ability to think has nothing from which to work."¹⁸ Therefore, learning should go beyond memorization of facts and aim for learners' encounter with the content.¹⁹ This may include solving problems related to the topic, learning how to critique concepts,²⁰ or reflecting and applying content.

Students typically interact with three types of content in an online course: course content (including textbooks and videos), external references (related resources), and Scriptures. The student in the following forum post identified with the metaphors in an article read and was convicted of his spiritual condition.

When I first read the article, I found it deeply penetrating and cut my heart. For example, I saw myself "stuck" in progressing further as a Christian given John the Cross' three metaphors, such as identifying myself with the damp log in the "fire" analogy.

While content plays a foundational role in education, content alone has no power to invoke such a response or to transform a person. In the

¹⁷ H. Kanuka, "Interaction and the Online Distance Classroom: Do Instructional Methods Effect the Quality of Interaction?," *Journal of Computing in Higher Education* 23, no. 2 (2011): 143–56, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12528-011-9049-4>.

¹⁸ D. Willard and D. Simpson, *Revolution of Character: Discovering Christ's Pattern for Spiritual Transformation* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005), 34.

¹⁹ Matthias Wenk, "Do We Need a Distinctive European Pentecostal/Charismatic Approach to Theological Education?," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 23 (2003): 58–71.

²⁰ Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*, Reprint edition (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1993).

above example, the student could well be experiencing a prodding of the divine agent. Fee portrays the work of the Spirit to include dwelling among or within believers, crying out from within our hearts, bearing witness with our own spirits, and helping us in our weaknesses.²¹ He contends that “spirituality without the Holy Spirit becomes a feeble human project.”²² Likewise, the following student in her study of course content, realized that her natural personality preference needed to be subjected to God’s truth and call to the ministry.

As an extreme introvert and thinker, at some point, I may prefer hiding behind books, online discussions, and thoughts in my head to interacting with people. Yet it is a solemn reminder that without being in the body of Christ a.k.a. church, I am not practicing theology. The study of God requires me to apply who God is in my life. How will I obey His commandment to love my neighbor, if as a ministry intern, I choose to have minimal contact with the people I serve?

Would it not be possible that it was the work of the Holy Spirit that has brought about such revelation of truth and led to this understanding of self in relation to God? The Advocate, as Jesus described the Spirit, “will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (Jn. 14:26 NIV). The next example demonstrates change that goes beyond the conviction of the heart to volitional commitments for action as well.

Having read Bill Hull’s book, I found that my cell group is becoming inward-looking and self-focused. . . . As such, I am planning to conduct “Unfinished Story,” a four-session course that challenges each believer to be meaningfully involved in the world Christian movement, followed by a mission trip to Indonesia. In addition, I am planning a Good Friday gathering for members’ friends and colleagues.

From this post, insight into the state of the cell group has led the student to missional commitments that may potentially transform the life of the group. The Spirit’s influence extends beyond the online

²¹ G. D. Fee, “On Getting the Spirit Back into Spirituality,” in *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, ed. J. P. Greenman and G. Kalantzis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010).

²² Fee, “On Getting the Spirit Back into Spirituality,” 42.

student to the corporate dimension – believers “experience God as empowering and commissioning them for mission.”²³

The examples support the notion that online learning modes generally affords students more time and space to read, ponder, and reflect on content than the spontaneous interaction of the onsite classroom. It could also encourage some students to be more open and transparent. In the privacy of the following student’s space, some serious reflection and confrontation of his spiritual journey seemed to have been roused when interacting with a course resource.

On the second theme I find myself both convinced of Piper’s explanation and yet found wanting in my personal experience – specifically, where is the comparable experience I have of finding the most delightful Treasure (i.e., God Himself, for whom I am able to forsake all else for this treasure) that Piper expounded via the parable in Matthew 13:44? I seriously reflect if I am truly a Christian if I seem to have been driven more by the desire to escape hell than to enjoy God in heaven, and if this could be the reason why I see no victory in certain sins, where a lack of delight in God provides limited fuel for me to hate sin – a point Piper highlighted twice in relation to the third theme.... I would say that I am in a crisis of faith, and I need God’s revelation and intervention to resolve this.

What could have led this student beyond a pure academic exercise in answer to course questions to a transparent evaluation of his spiritual condition? Grenz and Smith describe the Spirit’s work in convicting sin this way: “We cannot sense regret and sorrow for our failures and acts of unrighteousness unless we are conscious that they are displeasing to God. . . . How does this realization of sin arise? Ultimately, the answer is: through the work of the Holy Spirit.”²⁴ Could this not be the work of the divine agent opening the eyes of this student and revealing to him his true condition and need for intervention? Just as the Spirit speaks through this mode of interaction with textual content, glimpses of this unseen Teacher were also observed when students engage with the learning community of their online courses.

²³ Clark H. Pinnock, “Church in the Power of the Holy Spirit: The Promise of Pentecostal Ecclesiology,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 14, no. 2 (2006): 151, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0966736906062119>.

²⁴ Stanley J. Grenz and Jay T. Smith, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 150.

When Students Engage with the Learning Community

The Spirit's work in forming believers has often been portrayed in the context of a community.²⁵ Online learning communities are digital versions of a learning community where interaction and connection take place within a virtual space such as an LMS.²⁶ In such online learning communities, instructors can facilitate connections with God, self, and others leading to the manifestation of the "presence of divine life and power"²⁷ necessary for transformation in students.

Students need not be passive and isolated learners online. Effective instructional design and attentive facilitation can enable learners' active engagement with their learning community.

My knowledge of God and faith was shaken by the exposure to scholarly worldviews and my discovery of new information on the Israelites historical, cultural, and sociopolitical anthropology that were outside of my embedded theology. However, my faith was deepened overtime with the robust reflective discussion between fellow Christian theological classmates and teachers.

The "robust reflective discussions" of this learning community over the duration of the class made it conducive for the Spirit to not only secure a shaken faith but deepen it as well. It demonstrates the importance of learning by participating in the life of others and facilitating the Spirit's work in building and maturing the body of Christ.²⁸ In other instances, one can glimpse the work of the Holy Spirit examining motives and revealing potential character issues in the lives of students such as the following two posts:

²⁵ Council for Christian Colleges & Universities, *CCCU Report on Spiritual Formation* (Washington, D.C.: Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, 2011); M. J Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015); Stephen D. Lowe and Mary E. Lowe, "Spiritual Formation in Theological Distance Education: An Ecosystems Model," *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 1 (2010): 85–102; Wenk, "Do We Need a Distinctive European Pentecostal/Charismatic Approach to Theological Education?"

²⁶ D. W. Calhoun and L. S. Green, "Utilizing Online Learning Communities in Student Affairs," *New Directions for Student Services* Spring 2015, no. 149 (2015): 55–66, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.20117>.

²⁷ R. White, "Promoting Spiritual Formation in Distance Education," *Christian Education Journal* 3, no. 2 (2006): 306.

²⁸ Wenk, "Do We Need a Distinctive European Pentecostal/Charismatic Approach to Theological Education?"

- 1) Your two questions resonate with me in helping me always check the motives of my intentions and pursuit for knowledge and understanding. Indeed, when we lose sight of the Creator God, whom we need to pursue, we tend to then run after knowledge in a vacuum. This sort of knowledge has little or no impact on our relationship with God and others. It is probably more self-edifying and tends to lead towards self-sufficiency and arrogance.
- 2) I like and agree with the point you made with reference to 1 Cor 8:1. I did observe that after acquiring a habit of deliberating over my beliefs, there are times that I get over-zealous in the pursuit of what is truth and “right.” That aggression leads to an insistence to “get it right” all the time, and sometimes imposing this quest on the people around me, even though they may be in a different stage of their faith journey. . . . It is an area of improvement for myself, to learn to give people time and space, to be patient, and to focus on my own journey.

Since the image of the triune God pictures his existence as community, the people of God in reflecting the “relational and dynamic pattern of the Trinity”²⁹ are not “isolated disciples but communities incorporated into the Spirit-filled Body of Christ.”³⁰ Participation in faith communities then, such as churches, cell groups, and learning communities, fosters a fellowship and experience of the Spirit. This should also encourage theological institutions to avoid a pure self-study approach, and endeavor to provide students with a learning community of faith where they interact and contribute to one another’s life.³¹ Just as instructors seek to establish a classroom climate conducive for learning in the face-to-face context, a learning climate that is risk-free for open communication is also prescribed for the online platform of learning.³² Within such an environment, students relate the self not only to others, but also to the Spirit of the living God. Would the experiences of students in online learning communities be less credible than those who acquire their education in physical classrooms?

The few examples quoted in this article provide not only glimpses of the work of the Spirit but also empirical indications of students’ experiences while enrolled in the online courses. Theologians agree on

²⁹ Pinnock, “Church in the Power of the Holy Spirit,” 154.

³⁰ Pinnock, “Church in the Power of the Holy Spirit,” 150.

³¹ Wenk, “Do We Need a Distinctive European Pentecostal/Charismatic Approach to Theological Education?,” 70–71.

³² D. R. Garrison, *E-Learning in the 21st Century: A Community of Inquiry Framework Research and Practice*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017).

the transcendence and immanence of God. As the omnipotent and omnipresent God, there is virtually no space that is inaccessible to Him.³³ As the students engage online, nothing restricts the Spirit from provoking change in their personal, spiritual, or ministerial development.

How students' formation will progress in yielding to the work of the Spirit is a continual lifelong process extending beyond the confines of courses taken online or onsite. The renewal of the image of Christ in man "is a process that continues as long as one lives."³⁴ Besides being lifelong, it is also life wide. Lowe and Lowe put forth an ecosystems model of spiritual formation, based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems of development.³⁵ The online learning environment of a theological institution is one of the spaces in the student's ecology that can potentially foster faith development and spiritual progress.

Recommendations for Practice

In the light of this article, three recommendations for practice are proposed - as avenues for Pentecostal theological educators to create space for the Spirit to work in the online learning environment.

Practice intentional course design

Pentecostal curriculum developers should bear in mind the multidimensional ways of how the Spirit works and recognize that each course contributes differently to the holistic spiritual development of the online student. One way to do so is to glean ideas from appropriate educational theories for course design. It is akin to "spoiling the Egyptians" by drawing from and integrating from a variety of sources and disciplines.³⁶ In *Assuring Quality in Online Education*, recommended approaches include the Backward Design model, the use of rubrics to evaluate online course design, the Community of Inquiry (COI)

³³ M. J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013).

³⁴ A. A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 91.

³⁵ Lowe and Lowe, "Spiritual Formation in Theological Distance Education."

³⁶ R. W. Pazmino, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008).

framework, and forms of assessment to enhance teaching and learning in the digital platform.³⁷

Intentional course design should also consider the diverse contexts of the online students. Yong's thesis, "The many tongues of Pentecost (Acts 2) invite a pluralistic-pedagogical approach to theological education, one that should be facilitated by online technologies"³⁸ applies here. Besides the multicultural factor, he also highlights that the people on the day of Pentecost experienced a range of senses such as hearing, seeing, feeling, and speaking as they encounter the manifestation of the Holy Spirit.³⁹ Intentional design, then, also means employing pedagogical approaches that cater to the range of learning needs and senses of students. Research in brain-based learning also supports the benefit of learning through "multiple sensory channels."⁴⁰

For theological institutions with a Pentecostal ethos, the implication is for instructors to be intentional in formulating strategic questions and assessments, establishing an open and risk-free climate, and selecting appropriate content to create opportunities for the work of the Spirit. Warrington suggests a learning environment where the Spirit is experienced "through the learning journey, the learners, the teachers, the questions, the probing analysis, and the silence."⁴¹ Students must be viewed with more than an academic or economic lens. They must be valued as Spirit-enabled ministers, leaders, counselors, and missionaries who impact current and future generations. Intentional online course design is also one way to avoid the dichotomy between the Spirit-emphasized culture of their Pentecostal church settings and their academic environment of learning.

³⁷ Kay Shattuck, ed., *Assuring Quality in Distance Education: Practices and Processes at the Teaching, Resources, and Program Levels* (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2014).

³⁸ A. Yong, "Incarnation, Pentecost, and Virtual Spiritual Formation: Renewing Theological Education in Global Context," in *A Theology of the Spirit in Doctrine and Demonstration: Essays in Honor of Wonsuk and Julie Ma*, ed. T. Chai (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 30.

³⁹ Yong, "Incarnation, Pentecost, and Virtual Spiritual Formation: Renewing Theological Education in Global Context."

⁴⁰ Eric P. Jensen and Liesl McConchie, *Brain-Based Learning: Teaching the Way Students Really Learn*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2020), 19.

⁴¹ Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology*, 159.

Develop an online learning community

Since community is deemed conducive for spiritual development and fosters the work of the Spirit, there needs to be conscious development of a community in online courses. The use of the COI,⁴² an empirical framework, is one holistic approach to developing an online learning community. The key components of social presence, teaching presence, and cognitive presence along with the categories and indicators of the model can be used to establish and examine how a learning community is represented in online courses.

Features of the LMS and educational technology tools can also be constantly explored to enhance the community online. This includes prayer requests forums, synchronous web conferencing, networking, and community-building apps. Onsite residencies, assignment of faculty spiritual mentors, online field education directors, online institution chapel services⁴³ or connecting via group chats or social media can also augment the community online. With the proliferation of ideas for connection comes the reminder that the use of tools and activities do not necessary create a community unless there is intentionality towards the achievement of desired outcomes.

Learning can be so much richer when believers, endowed by the gifts of the Spirit, possessing varied experiences, and connected to their own communities – contribute and participate in a shared learning community.⁴⁴ The multiplicity of gifts, knowledge, experiences, and personalities meld together a concord of voices for enriching discussions. As a faith community this reflects what Paul in Ephesians 2:10 calls the *poiema*

⁴² M. Befus, “Conducting a Multivocal Thematic Synthesis on an Extensive Body of Literature,” *Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology* 42, no. 2 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.21432/T2789B>; Garrison, *E-Learning in the 21st Century: A Community of Inquiry Framework Research and Practice*.

⁴³ D. Hockridge, “Challenges for Educators Using Distance and Online Education to Prepare Students for Relational Professions,” *Distance Education* 34, no. 2 (2013): 142–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2013.793640>; M. A. Maddix, “Developing Online Learning Communities,” in *Best Practices of Online Education: A Guide for Christian Higher Education*, ed. M. A. Maddix, J. R. Estep, and M. E. Lowe (Charlotte, NC: Information Age, 2012), 31–40; A. P. Rovai, J. D. Baker, and W. J. Cox, “How Christianly Is Christian Distance Higher Education?,” *Christian Higher Education* 7, no. 1 (2008): 1–22.

⁴⁴ Yong, “Incarnation, Pentecost, and Virtual Spiritual Formation: Renewing Theological Education in Global Context.”

(handiwork, workmanship) of God.⁴⁵ To facilitate such an environment, faculty need to not only continue to be subject experts and constantly hone instructional skills, but also be conspicuously present in the online courses, and sensitive to the Spirit in the ministry of teaching.

Adopt an incarnational posture

The more digitally wired students become, the more crucial it is for faculty to adopt an incarnational posture. One of the ways for faculty to adopt an incarnational posture is to first project themselves as real, concerned, and welcoming persons who are interested in the students who are learning online. Social presence humanizes the experience across a digital platform.

When Gresham posits the concept of divine pedagogy for online education, he explains that “at the heart of divine pedagogy is the personal embodiment of divine revelation in the incarnation.”⁴⁶ By this “pedagogy of incarnation,” Gresham is referring to the “incarnation of divine truth in the life of the instructor” and the instructor’s ability “to communicate and foster that personal faith and insight among students.”⁴⁷ Pazmino also refers to an incarnational perspective in the contextualization of the teaching ministry to real-life settings.⁴⁸ Hence, adopting an incarnational posture also means instructors need to facilitate integration and contextualization of learning while being cognizant of students’ local contexts. They can begin by adopting the posture of a learner⁴⁹ – seeking to understand the students’ background, learning how the church or ministry operates in their students’ settings, and engaging in online discussions where their own perspective will also be expanded.

Warrington emphasizes the need for teachers to be “Spirit-led learners” who “model Spirit-controlled lives, recognizing the Spirit’s presence in the lives of their students, facilitating the students’ exploration of the Spirit, and giving him the opportunity to be a

⁴⁵ Gary A. Parrett and S. Steve Kang, *Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful: A Biblical Vision for Education in the Church*, Illustrated edition (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

⁴⁶ John Gresham, “The Divine Pedagogy as a Model for Online Education,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 9, no. 1 (January 2006): 25, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9647.2006.00257.x>.

⁴⁷ Gresham, 26.

⁴⁸ Pazmino, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*.

⁴⁹ Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology*.

participatory guide and dialogue partner in the learning process.”⁵⁰ One of the ways to “incarnate” this walk with the Spirit in the online platform is for instructors to weave testimonies of their own experiences with the Spirit into the communication of their classes as well as in web-conferencing interactions.

Conclusion

In a world that presents ever-evolving challenges, theological institutions, together with churches and Christian organizations, continue to play a collaborative and strategic role in the equipping of men and women to fulfill the timeless mandate to make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20). Till Christ returns at the “end of the age,” the watchword of the Reformation, *semper reformanda*, “always being reformed by the gracious work of the Holy Spirit in our time,”⁵¹ is an essential reminder for Christian education to be on the cutting edge of what the Spirit is doing in every generation. Jesus warned that in the last days, “There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events” (Luke 21:11). With the continuing threats of infectious diseases or calamities due to climate change or international hostilities because of geo-political differences that can restrict movement and travel, availing and enhancing online learning becomes a critical strategy if the mission of discipleship and training of laborers for the harvest fields is not to be hampered.

With the Covid-19 pandemic, most have accepted the online format as one mode of learning. However, as theological institutions with a Pentecostal ethos, it is also vital to ensure that the dimension of the Spirit is not neglected. This article presents glimpses of the work of the Holy Spirit through the online interactions of students with content and in engagement with their learning communities. Deliberate efforts such as employing intentional course design, establishing a learning community within each online course, and adopting an incarnational posture by faculty to facilitate the work of the Spirit should be considered. The writer represents an institution that is continually exploring and learning to develop effective ways to enhance students’ development in this respect. As institutions in the Pentecostal tradition forge forward in our digital endeavors to expand learning to “all tongues and tribes,” may glimpses become more apparent demonstrations of the Spirit’s work online.

⁵⁰ Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology*, 159.

⁵¹ Pazmino, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, 276.

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The Role of Pentecostal Education in the Development of the Assemblies of God of Malaysia from Classical Emphases to Contemporary Emphases

Eva Wong Suk Kyun

Abstract

The Assemblies of God Malaysia (AGM) has grown and developed from a Classical Pentecostal Movement (CPM) to a Contemporary Pentecostal Church Movement (CPCM). This essay aims to analyze the role of Pentecostal education, particularly the Bible College of Malaysia (BCM) in the historical development of the AGM from classical emphases to contemporary emphases. The changing nature and paradigm shifts have impacted the changes in practices of the Pentecostal distinctives over six decades since AGM's inception in 1957 to present. It is vital for Pentecostal education to continually be the backbone of the Pentecostal movement in training the current and future generations of Pentecostals in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Pentecostal education, classical, contemporary

Introduction

Pentecostal education has been the main missional arm of the Assemblies of God worldwide in contextualization and transitions from foreign missionaries to local leadership. It is the powerhouse in churning out ministers and workers for the mission field and local churches. This essay explores the significant role of Pentecostal education in the development of the Assemblies of God Malaysia (AGM) from classical emphases to contemporary emphases over six decades and how it remains crucial for the next generation to carry the torch of Pentecostal fire.

The early Pentecostal foreign missionary community¹ of the Assemblies of God in Malaya led the movement for 40 years beginning in the early 1930s. A very significant contributing factor to the expansion of the Pentecostal movement was the founding of the Bible College of Malaysia (BCM), (formerly known as the Bible Institute of Malaya),² AGM's own Pentecostal Bible college to train and raise up local credentialed ministers with a pioneering spirit who engaged in local missions, church planting, and church ministry in Malaysia and Singapore. Delmer and Eleanor Guynes, missionaries to Malaysia in 1952-1964 and the first General Superintendent of the AGM, founded BCM at the location of 99, Jalan Gasing, Petaling Jaya, in 1960. The first lecturers were American missionaries.³ The first twelve students were recruited from Penang, Raub, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore.⁴ Local leadership emerged in 1974 with the first Malaysian General Superintendent Prince Guneratnam (1974-2000), followed by Vincent Leoh (2000-2008),⁵ and Ong Sek Leang (2008 – present).⁶

¹ The foreign missionaries to Malaysia include Carrie Anderson, Daniel and Anita Bogdan, Duane Dorsing, Daisy Fern Ogle, Frederick and Margaret Seaward, Dale Wisner, Lawrence Jayapalan, Dan Anglin, Glen and Kathleen Stafford, Ruby McMurray, Jack Willis, Leslie Martin, Lester and Betty Jo Kenney, Robert Stevenson, David and Alice Nyien, Katherine Clause, Arthur and Esther Sandhal (Esther Johnson), Vallance and Lula Baird (Lula Ashmore), Evelyn Iris Hatchett, Howard and Edith Osgood, Delmer and Eleanor Guynes, Garland Benintendi, Bonny Colleen Guinn, David Hugh Baker, Steven L. Nolin, Donald E. McMurray, and R.B. and Barbara Cavaness. "Assemblies of God of Malaysia 50th Anniversary 1957-2007" Souvenir Magazine, 11, 14, 23, AGM2007-50A.

² The change of name to Bible College of Malaysia (BCM) took place in 1982 with the introduction of the Bachelor of Theology programme.

³ Howard C. Osgood, the first principal, and his wife, Edith, Francis, and Chris D. Thomas, who served as the Dean. The Guynes joined the faculty in 1961 after their short furlough. "BCM 50th Anniversary 1960-2010 Remarkable Journey Promising Future" Souvenir Magazine, 8-15, BCM2010-50A. Derek Tan, "The Assemblies of God," *Christianity in Malaysia: A Denominational History*, eds. Lee Kam Heng and John Roxborough (Petaling Jaya, 1992), 235.

⁴ Tan, "The Assemblies of God," in Hunt, Lee, and Roxborough, eds., *Christianity in Malaysia*, 235.

⁵ "AGM 50th Anniversary 1957-2007," 34-35, AGM2007-50A.

⁶ "AGM, "The History of the Assemblies of God Malaysia," accessed 16 May 2016, <http://www.ag.org.my/ag-history.php>.

There were noticeable spurts of growth especially from the 1970s to 1980s,⁷ followed by slower but steady growth to the present time. For example, from 1974 to 2000,⁸ the total number of churches increased almost sevenfold from 43 to 301, and adherents from around 3,400 to 47,073 under the leadership of Guneratnam. There had been noticeable numerical growth and geographical expansion since the founding of BCM and the pioneering ministers who graduated from the school. BCM's former President Ng Kok Kee states, "Many of our early graduates were pioneers who . . . put into action what was learnt. Almost everybody in the national Assemblies of God leadership is a graduate of BCM. Many senior pastors, pastors and leaders of para-church organizations and missionary movements are BCM graduates."⁹ In 1972, Malaysia Tamil Bible Institute, a sister Bible school, was founded and about 90 percent of the Tamil work was pioneered or led by ministers who graduated from here.¹⁰ In 2020, the AGM had 393 churches, 49,810 adherents, and 823 credentialed members.¹¹

Pentecostal education has been the backbone of AGM and has been evolving alongside the changing nature and paradigm shifts of the Pentecostal movement. It is vital for Pentecostal education to continually be at the cutting edge in preparing lives for ministry both locally and abroad.

Classical Formation

The fellowship of the Assemblies of God of Malaya and Singapore was officially organized on 6 February 1957 with the formation of the General Council¹² and separated into two entities in 1966 following the

⁷ At the same time, there were revivals and spiritual renewals in mainline denominational churches especially in the 1970s to 1980s. Chan Kok Eng, "A Brief Note on Church Growth in Malaysia, 1960-1985," in Hunt, Lee, and Roxborough, eds., *Christianity in Malaysia*, 354-78.

⁸ "AGM 50th Anniversary 1957-2007," 47, 53, AGM2007-50A.

⁹ "AGM 50th Anniversary 1957-2007," 73, AGM2007-50A. Some ministers have undertaken training from other seminaries.

¹⁰ "AGM 50th Anniversary 1957-2007," 74, AGM2007-50A. Malaysia Tamil Bible Institute has been renamed Malaysia Tamil Bible College in 2018.

¹¹ Rev. Lawrence Yap, General Secretary Report, AGM 53rd Business General Meeting 2021, 11, BR2021-53. AGM's New Constitution & Bylaws adopted at the 51st General Council 31 May 2016, 73-4, AGM-CBLr20160531.

¹² Delmer Guynes, Minutes of the Assemblies of God Field Fellowship of Malaya Conference, 6 February 1957, M/FF19570206; Minutes of the

political separation of Malaysia and Singapore in 1965.¹³ AGM is a contextualized Pentecostal movement, and it is fundamental to examine its classical roots in order to understand its historical formation, development, theology, and practices being a Classical Pentecostal Movement (CPM). AGM's classical emphases were the espoused classical Pentecostal theology particularly on the Pentecostal distinctives and Pentecostal fervor, early traits and practices inherited from the early AG missionaries, AGM and Bible schools, the eschatological and missionary fervor, spiritual atmosphere of revival, and homogeneity in AGM's formative period.¹⁴

Classical Emphases

The classical emphases during the formation period as shown in Figure 1 are themes that emerged from the primary data analysis and supported by archival documents. It is characterized firstly by the espoused classical Pentecostal theology with the foundational texts on Joel's prophecy and Acts 2 on the outpouring of the Spirit or the baptism in the Holy Spirit (BHS).

Constitutional Convention of the Assemblies of God of Malaya and Singapore, 6 February 1957, M/CC19570206. The venue was at Elim Assembly of God in Serangoon Road, Singapore. From 1930 to 1957, there were two churches planted in Ipoh and Kuala Lumpur. Constitution and By-Laws of the Assemblies of God Malaysia, 1957; revised 1984; new revision adopted at the 51st General Council 31 May 2016, AGM-CBLr20160531.

¹³ Minutes of the 9th General Council of the Assemblies of God Malaysia and Singapore, 12-14 April 1966, 5, M/GC196604-9. In 1965, politically, Singapore had separated from Malaysia (the merger with the Federation of Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak in 1963). This resulted in the formation of two new entities, Assemblies of God of Malaya and Assemblies of God of Singapore, in 1966. AGM, "The History of the Assemblies of God Malaysia," accessed 16 May 2016, <http://www.ag.org.my/ag-history.php>.

¹⁴ "Rev. Lula M. Ashmore (Baird), an Extraordinary Missionary, Played a Significant Role in the Early Era of the History of the Assemblies of God Mission in Malaya & Singapore from 1939-1941, 1947-1952, 1957-1962," 70th Anniversary, First Assembly of God Church Kuala Lumpur, FAG2004-70A.

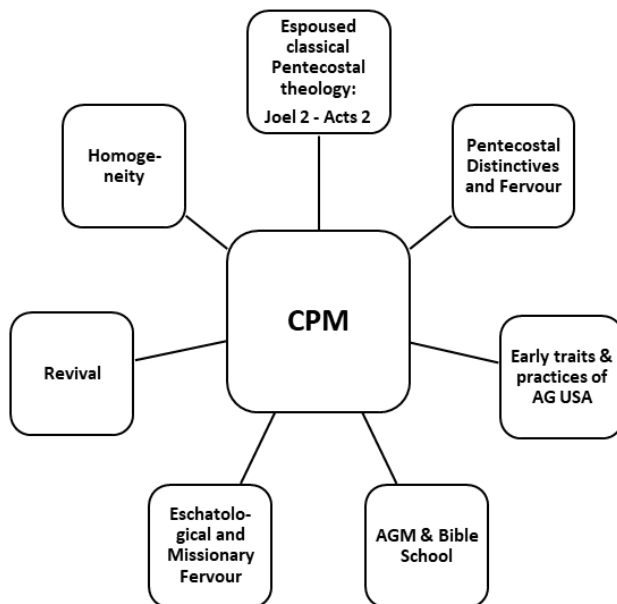


Figure 1. Classical Formation 1957-1974 – Classical Emphases

The central Pentecostal distinctives are the BHS, glossolalia, and missions, which were strongly emphasized especially among the early traits and practices brought in by the AG missionaries. The AG USA General Council and the Bible schools are formal organizations and platforms to perpetuate its theology and practice in raising workers for the field, especially with eschatological and missionary fervor. The homogeneity in theological emphasis and practice in the midst of revival accelerated AGM’s growth and development from the formation period through the movement’s growth period.

Espoused Classical Pentecostal Theology: Joel 2 – Acts 2

AGM has inherited its espoused classical Pentecostal theology and practices from early the AG USA missionaries.¹⁵ The theological themes derived from Joel 2 – Acts 2 are fundamental to understand AGM’s theology and practices particularly in the formative period as illustrated in Figure 2, where from the central Pentecostal distinctive of BHS flows to other distinctives, emphases, and practices:

¹⁵ Collective interview data.

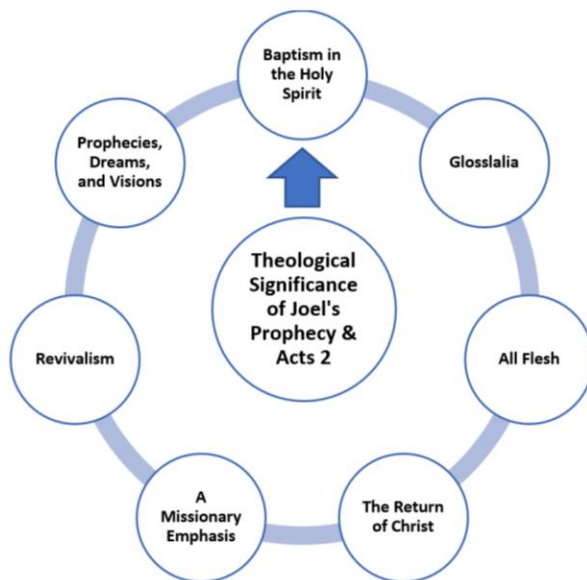


Figure 2. Key Theological Themes of Joel 2 – Acts 2

Pentecostal Distinctives and Fervor

AGM's theological position and doctrine are rooted in the Statement of 16 Fundamental Truths of the AG USA.¹⁶ AGM's Pentecostal distinctives are fundamentally Spirit baptism, speaking in tongues as the initial physical evidence of Spirit baptism, and the empowerment for life, missions, and service for Christ.¹⁷ Ng defines Spirit baptism as "the second work of the Holy Spirit and after conversion, evidenced of speaking in tongues . . . Baptism of the Spirit means fullness of the Spirit, and it is total immersion of the Spirit . . . overwhelmed by the Spirit. This is what Jesus is saying, 'You will be baptized,' immersed

¹⁶ Collective interview data. See Glenn W. Gohr, "The Historical Development of the Statement of Fundamental Truths," *AG Heritage*, 2012, 61-6, accessed 20 April 2019, http://ifphc.org/Uploads/Heritage/2012_08.pdf.

¹⁷ This distinctive is found in most classical Pentecostal denominations. The Association of Pentecostal Churches of America representing more than 30 classical Pentecostal denominations has the initial evidence doctrines as one of its statements of faith.

completely, ‘in the Spirit.’”¹⁸ Classical Pentecostalism views Spirit baptism or, as termed by Bonino, the “receiving” of the Spirit as involving empowerment.¹⁹ AG USA holds to glossolalia as the initial physical evidence of BHS, which Pentecostal theologians affirm is the distinct belief.²⁰ In fact, a pioneer, Florence Teh, testified that speaking in tongues and the interpretation of tongues were common practice in worship services.²¹

Early Traits and Practices of AG USA

AGM inherited the early traits and practices of early Pentecostalism from AG USA missionaries which influenced AGM’s formative period, such as BHS, tarrying meetings, revival services, and a proclamation of the “full gospel,”²² similar to Dayton’s record.²³ AGM’s experiences of BHS are consistent to that of the earlier Pentecostal testimonies.²⁴ AGM’s early practices like “tarrying meetings” during the pioneering

¹⁸ Interview with Rev. Ng Kok Kee, pioneer, former AG General Secretary, and former president of BCM, 24 April 2017.

¹⁹ José Míguez Bonino, “Changing Paradigms: A Response,” in Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus and Douglas Petersen, eds., *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel* (Oxford, 1999), 118, 120. The Pentecostal interpretation is that tongues, healing, and an empowered witness are clear signs of empowerment of the Spirit.

²⁰ See Gary B. McGee, ed. *Initial Evidence: Historical and Biblical Perspectives on the Pentecostal Doctrine of Spirit Baptism* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991); and William W. Menzies and Stanley M. Horton, *Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 1993).

²¹ Interview with Rev. Florence Teh, retired BCM faculty member, presently itinerant minister, 28 March 2017.

²² Collective interview data.

²³ Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Peabody, 1987), 21. The late nineteenth century Wesleyan-Holiness movement on the “common four-fold pattern” contributed directly to the overall theology of the AG, particularly in North America, distinguishing Classical Pentecostalism. The “four-fold gospel” can be summarized as Jesus saves (John 3:16), Jesus baptizes with Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4), Jesus heals (James 5:14-15), and Jesus is the coming King (1 Thess. 4:16-17). Preached by A.S. McPherson, founder of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel. BHS, the common pattern in early Pentecostals until the 1960s (with the rise of the Neo-Pentecostals) was being saved, filled with the Spirit, and spoke in tongues.

²⁴ For archival resources, visit J.R. Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, accessed 16 Jan. 2020, <https://ifphc.org/>.

period can be traced to the Wesleyan-Holiness revivals in the late nineteenth century. Pentecostals inherited both this and other revival practices from their immediate spiritual forebears, as recorded by Synan.²⁵

In the formative period of AGM in 1960s and 1970s, there were many revival meetings and “tarrying meetings.” The members would have long hours of praying and waiting upon God in the expectation of receiving Spirit baptism, the empowerment by the Spirit, waiting for God’s revelation, and listening to the Spirit’s leading. These were long services in the presence of the Holy Spirit where many received the BHS and spiritual gifts with evangelistic zeal and passion. As Anderson describes, “Early Pentecostals spent days, sometimes weeks and even years, waiting in prayer for the ‘promise of the Father.’ Coupled with the overwhelming desire for power was a conviction that the only way to receive the promise was through prolonged, constant and persistent prayer, sometimes called ‘tarrying’ or ‘waiting’ upon God. There was no other way.”²⁶ This was the same practice as that of early AGM leaders like Guneratnam’s testimony: “It was in those ‘tarrying meetings’ that I received my call through a vision of seeing Jesus.”²⁷

AGM and the Bible School

Interviews, minutes, and missionary reports confirm that the AG General Council, that is, the establishment of a national church/movement, its leadership, and Bible schools, was the main missional strategy of the AG missionaries.²⁸ Alongside church planting,²⁹

²⁵ Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, 1997), 25, 31. For more historical information on Wesleyan-Holiness Movement, visit IPHC Archives and Research Center, accessed 16 Jan. 2020, <https://iphc.org/gso/archives/>. “Tarrying” is a quasi-technical term in Holiness and Pentecostal parlance. It originated from the Wesleyan Holiness camp meetings and holiness crusades for the “work of entire sanctification.”

²⁶ Allan Anderson, *Spreading Fires: The Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism* (Maryknoll, 2007), 66.

²⁷ Interview with Tan Sri Datuk Rev. Dr Prince Guneratnam, first Malaysian General Superintendent of AGM, 4 May 2017.

²⁸ Collective interview data.

²⁹ Lula Ashmore Baird, “Dedication Day for New Assembly at Kuala Lumpur, Malaya,” missionary report, 21 Jan. 1951, MR19510121; Delmar R. Guynes, “Lost...A Church in Malaya!” *Foreign Missions*, 1 Dec, 1958 (n.p.),

revival meetings,³⁰ evangelistic rallies,³¹ and so on, Bible schools were said to be one of the AG USA's "DNA."³² Ronnie Chin remarked, "That is the practice in the 'AG DNA' that has served us well, even in Malaysia . . . it's in the Bible school that 'Pentecostal DNA' is perpetuated."³³ As the AG USA missionaries recognized the need to train and send local workers, and Bible Institute of Malaya (BIM) was established on 3 January 1960. BIM started with a three-year diploma program and first enrollment of 12 youths from Malaya and Singapore. The first graduating class was in 1962 with seven graduates. At that time, there were six faculty members and around 19 students.³⁴ Many youths enrolled over the years. Many of the AG missionaries were church planters as well as educators in the Bible schools. The AG's Bible school has been one of the most successful, fruitful, and lasting Pentecostal

FMR19581201; "Ipoh, Malaya, Has a New Assemblies of God Church," 31 Jan. 1960 (missionary report, n.p.), MR19600131; "Malaya: New Church Formed in Raub," Aug. 1960 (missionary report, n.p.), MR196008; Baird, L., Missionary to Malaya, "Church Dedicated at Ipoh, Malaya," Foreign Missions, 24 Mar. 1963, FMR19630324; Letter from Wong Soon Lee, Chartered Architect, to Rev. David H. Baker, on "Proposed Church Building & Pastorage on Lots 351 & 352 T.S. 4, MacAlister Road, Penang for the Assemblies of God," 22 Aug. 1963, L19630822.

³⁰ Vallance Baird, "Revival in Ipoh, Malaya," 11 Jan. 1960 (missionary report, n.p.), MR19600111.

³¹ "Ipoh First Assembly Holds Evangelistic Meetings and Sacred Concert," *Assemblies of God Voice*, 1962 (n.p.), AGV1962.

³² Collective interview data.

³³ Interview with Rev. Ronnie Chin, Assistant General Superintendent, 27 August 2019.

³⁴ Letter from D.G. Foote, Assistant to the Secretary, to Delmar R. Guynes, Secretary of the Field Fellowship, Kuala Lumpur, on the development of Bible School, 8 Nov. 1956, L19561108; Letter between Guynes, Assembly of God Church, Kuala Lumpur, and Office of Administrator, Petaling Jaya, on the process of development for the Assemblies of God Bible School of Malaya, 1 Sep. 1956, L19560901; 12 Sep. 1956, L19560912; Howard C. Osgood, "Dedication of the Bible Institute of Malaya," 1960, BIM1960-HO; Letter from Delmar R. Guynes, The Assemblies of God of Malaya and Singapore, to Petaling Jaya Development Corporation, 5 Jan. 1961, regarding the 97 and 99 Jalan Gasing (BIM property) be held in the name of The General Council of the Assemblies of God, Inc. USA, L19610105; Constitution and Bylaws for Bible Institute of Malaya, n.d., L19610105; B.I.M. Annual 1962, BIMA1962; Howard C. Osgood, Principal's Report for 1961-2, 9 April 1962, BIMPR1961-2; B.I.M. Newzette, vol. 2, no. 11, Nov. 1962 BIMNZ196211.

missionary works established by the early missionaries.³⁵ Most AGM pioneers, church planters, ministers, and leaders were trained here and sent out into the field over six decades. BIM,³⁶ renamed Bible College of Malaysia in 1982, had her sixtieth anniversary in 2020.³⁷ Pentecostal theological education plays a vital role in the process of contextualization.

Eschatological and Missionary Fervor

The eschatological and missionary fervor was a strong classical emphasis in relation to BHS and glossolalia based on Acts 2 and Acts 1:8. The theological link between Spirit baptism and missions was received and lived out by the early AG missionaries and pioneers of the AGM movement in the formative and pioneering period until the mid-1980s.³⁸ This primary theological focus was also transmitted to the nationals so that they became mission-oriented from the outset. Macchia explains that the Pentecostal movement first began from the Holiness Movement and developed an emphasis on empowerment for global witness along

³⁵ General Council of the AGM, Policies made by the Executive Committee 1965-1966 on Publications Committee; Required Courses of Study for Credentials (Non-Bible School Students); Home Missions Department and Director (for the establishment and supervision of pioneer works), GC1965-1966.

³⁶ Letter from Selangor State Development Corporation to The General Council of the AG, Inc., USA, on the approval of title transfer of BIM property, 2449 and 2450, Section 10, Petaling Jaya, to “Registered Trustee of The Assemblies of Malaysia,” 27 Nov. 1978, L19781127.

³⁷ BCM conferred at least 1,371 certificates, diplomas, and degrees from 1960 to 2020, and produced more than 1,000 graduates, whom most are in the ministry. 1960-1969 (43 graduates), 1970-1979 (119), 1980-1989 (209), 1990-1999 (195), 2000-2010 (415), “BCM 50th Anniversary 1960-2010 Remarkable Journey Promising Future,” 14, 24, 36, 48, 61-2, BCM2010-50A; 2011-2017 (260 graduates), Student Information Report, BCM, 27 October 2017, GPS2017; 2018 (47 graduates), Graduation Programme Sheet 2018, GPS2018; 2019 (41 graduates), Graduation Programme Sheet 2019; GPS2019; 2020 (42 graduates), Graduating Student List 2020, GSL2020. The actual number of graduates are lesser than the number of diplomas and degrees conferred due to some alumni returned to pursue higher degree programs over the years, and some students had graduated with double programs concurrently.

³⁸ Collective interview data.

with the significance of speaking in tongues.³⁹ The early Pentecostal emphasis was on eschatology, thus a sense of passion for the kingdom.⁴⁰ Abeysekera asserts that during the 1930s, “All the Assemblies of God Bible Schools became centers of thorough Bible training, evangelistic zeal, and missionary vision,” which “have established stability and growth of the Assemblies of God, worldwide.”⁴¹ The understanding of “mission” by early AG USA missionaries is not the same as is now practiced by the AGM.

Missionary reports, newsletters, and souvenir magazines show mission emphasis was very strong in the pioneering years and many who responded were youth in their teens and early twenties. Those were the times of large enrollment in the Bible school and the beginning of active church planting, missions, and evangelism. There were regular “open air meetings,” evangelistic and healing crusades or rallies, and national youth camps.⁴² The message to BIM students was the urgent call to answer the Great Commission, be reapers of God, and save souls (Matt. 8:36; 9:37; 10:37; 28:19-20).⁴³ The messages at that time were about divine healing, salvation, BHS, glossolalia, the second coming of Christ, evangelism, preaching the gospel, the Christian life, the word of God,

³⁹ Frank D. Macchia, “The Struggle for Global Witness: Shifting Paradigms in Pentecostal Theology,” in Dempster, Klaus and Petersen, eds., *The Globalization of Pentecostalism*, 16.

⁴⁰ Macchia, “The Struggle for Global Witness,” 23. See Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010); and David W. Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

⁴¹ Fred G. Abeysekera, *The History of the Assemblies of God of Singapore 1928-1992* (Singapore, 1992), 47.

⁴² “AGM 50th Anniversary 1957-2007,” 32, 48-49, AGM2007-50A; “A Youth Camp for Singapore C.A.’s,” 25 Oct. 1959 (missionary report, n.p.), MR19591025; “Ipoh, Malaya,” *Global Conquest*, Nov. 1960 (missionary report on youth camp, n.p.), MR196011; Mrs. Lula Baird, Missionary to Malaya, “After Youth Camp,” *The Pentecostal Evangel*, Springfield, MO, 30 Jul. 1961, 7, PE19610730; “Loren and Darlene Cunningham write from Malaya,” missionary report on youth camp in Penang, Sep. 1963, MR196309; The 8th Annual Pentecostal Revival Youth Camp of The Assemblies of God Malaysia, registration forms of Ipoh and Penang participants, 1964, YC-1964-8; Youth Rally Pamphlet 1972, YR1972.

⁴³ Phoebe Lee, “Echoing for God”; Eileen Tan, “Reaping for God,” BIM 1972 magazine, 27, BIM1972.

and prayer.⁴⁴ In fact, AGM started as a youth movement and many early church planters and their church members, who were mostly young people, were filled with zeal and boldness to go and do “house-to-house evangelism” or “door-to-door evangelism.”⁴⁵ Teh recalls their evangelistic fervor,

And because of the Holy Spirit, missions was very strong. We did not just plant churches. Every Sunday after service, we would go out to different places to do tracting and witnessing. I also joined at that time [1970s-1980s]. We would go to the Samping Flats, Pekeliling Flats, and also Loke Yew Flats. Because of the move of the Spirit, members were so on fire for God. We wanted to go out, witness, and do evangelism. I believe this was the main reason why AG Malaysia had grown so fast. It was because of the power and the move of the Spirit of God in the hearts of the believers and also in the church leadership to see the need to plant churches, to pioneer, and to do missions, whether local missions or foreign missions.⁴⁶

There was an urgency, zeal, and passion in missions and evangelism, with the eschatological fervor, to save souls for heaven before Christ’s return.

Revival

AGM was strongly impacted by the waves of revival that were sweeping across the region during the formative period which heightened the eschatological and missionary emphasis.⁴⁷ Missionary reports and magazine confirm the first outpouring of the Holy Spirit throughout Malaysia and Singapore, as witnessed and reported by Guynes, was

⁴⁴ Divine Healing Issue, *Assemblies of God Voice*, vol. 1, no. 5, 1964, AGV1964-1-5; Rev. D.H. Baker, “Baptism of the Holy Spirit,” *AG Voice*, vol. II, no. 1, 1965-66, 5-6, AV1965-66-II-1; R. Paul Miller, “The New Birth,” *AG Voice*, vol. II, no. 2, 1966, 3-4, AV1966-II-2. Pentecostal Issue (on salvation, fire, tongues, etc.), *AG Voice*, vol. II, no. 3, 1966, AV1966-II-3; Christian Life Issue, *AG Voice*, vol. II, no. 4, 1966, AV1966-II-4; Second Coming Issue, *AG Voice*, vol. II, no. 5, 1966, AG1966-II-5; Evangelism Issue, *AG Voice*, vol. II, no. 6, 1966, AG1966-II-6; Read Your Bible Issue, *AG Voice*, vol. III, no. 1, 1967, AV1967-III-1; Prayer, *AG Voice*, vol. III, no. 2, 1967, AV1967-III-2.

⁴⁵ Collective interview data.

⁴⁶ Interview with Teh.

⁴⁷ Collective interview data.

around 1957.⁴⁸ BIM Principal, Howard Osgood, wrote about the Youth Camp of 1960: “[I]t was the biggest ever with well over two hundred young people registered. Over twenty were saved. Over forty received the Baptism in the Spirit. Several made the consecration for full-time service and are planning on entering the Institute this coming year.”⁴⁹ In the 1960s and 1970s, the revival swept across Malaysia and surrounding countries as well. AGM’s pioneering years were times of revival where “people were spiritually hungry” and responsive to God and the work of the Holy Spirit. People were receptive to the gospel.⁵⁰

Movement’s Growth

This next period was marked by AGM’s historical milestones: the handover of leadership from AG missionaries to national leadership in 1974 and AGM’s fiftieth anniversary in 2007. The movement grew under national leadership comprised in two stages: homogeneity and the changing nature of the movement itself.

Homogeneity Until Mid-1980s

Ng recalls the earlier part of the growth of the AGM’s movement which was the pioneering period. The homogeneity of classical Pentecostalism emphasized Pentecostal theology and practice which continued strongly under national leadership from 1974 until the mid-1980s.⁵¹ After the transition to the national leadership of Guneratnam, the first Malaysian AG General Superintendent in 1974, the major missional strategy for growth under his leadership was to intensify the mission of the Bible school to raise up local pioneers and ministers for church planting endeavors. There was a tremendous growth spurt which resulted in AGM becoming a strong influence in spearheading the Spirit-filled Christian landscape in the nation. The Pentecostals had grown rapidly

⁴⁸ Delmar R. Guynes, missionary report on Baptism of the Holy Spirit and the revival spread throughout Malaysia and Singapore, circa 1957, MR1957; “25th Anniversary Assemblies of God Malaysia,” *Souvenir Magazine*, Apr. 1982, 16, AGM1982-25A.

⁴⁹ Christmas Greetings and Missionary Report Letter by Rev. Howard and Edith Osgood, BIM Principal, Kuala Lumpur, Malaya, 24 Oct. 1960 BIMHO19601024.

⁵⁰ Collective interview data. There were revivals in other parts of Malaysia and a strong manifestation of the power and works of the Holy Spirit as groups of missionaries and young people prayed and sought the Lord.

⁵¹ Interview with Ng.

from 5,440 in 1960 to 61,500 adherents in 1985 which made up 13.6 percent of Christianity in Malaysia, whereas the Evangelicals were 17.5 percent, others 15.2 percent, the largest denomination being the Roman Catholics, 53.7 percent.⁵²

The transition from AG missionaries to AGM's national leadership under Guneratnam was smooth.⁵³ In an interview, he shared his passion and vision in church planting since his early years,

Somehow, I felt the church is the key factor for the spreading of the gospel. If there is no church, the gospel cannot succeed or cannot be effective. That's why I believe very strongly in local churches and planting churches. That's why even from the time I was very young in the ministry, my desire was not so much as saving souls, which is necessary, but seeing churches planted so that people who got saved would have a home to go to. So, it is more of a strong passion to serve God that these things began to surface.⁵⁴

The spiritual atmosphere of revival was still ongoing. The strong Pentecostal fervor and commitment to missions, evangelism, and church planting, since the classical formation period, continued to thrive as AGM went through explosive growth and development in the next two decades. There was a stronger and more intense focus on the Bible school training of local youths who responded to God's call during the "youth revival" in the late 1970s and early 1980s,⁵⁵ and raising of many

⁵² Hunt, Lee, and Roxborough, eds., *Christianity in Malaysia*, 357.

⁵³ Calvary Church (Assembly of God Kuala Lumpur), "30 Years of Faithful Service: Committed to His Call, Compelled by His Love," 2002, 9-11, 27, CC2002-30A. Guneratnam graduated from BIM in 1966, pioneered Glad Tidings Assembly in Klang in 1967 and Calvary Church in 1972 during the classical formation period. He was already an Executive Committee member in General Council since 1969, National Youth Director in 1970, Home Missions Director in 1974, Foreign Missions Director in 1988, and Assistant General Superintendent in 1973-1974 in the formative period. Tan Sri Guneratnam was Pioneer/Senior Pastor of Calvary Church (1972), the largest AGM church. "Tan Sri" is the second highest honorary federal title granted to recipients of Malaysian Federal Awards namely the PMN (*Panglima Mangku Negara*) being the seventh rank, and the PSM (*Panglima Setia Mahkota*) the eighth rank. "Datuk" is the most common honorary title conferred to recipients who have contributed to the nation or state.

⁵⁴ Interview with Guneratnam.

⁵⁵ Collective interview data; "AGM 50th Anniversary 1957-2007," 38, AGM2007-50A.

local pioneers, pastors, missionaries, and evangelists for the field. Pioneers remember that BIM was full, and there was a surge in evangelism and church planting endeavor. BIM started with only 12 students in 1960, the number increased to 33 in 1965, 46 in 1970, 86 in 1976, 75 in 1977, and 94 in 1979 including part-time students. BIM Update 1976 reported, “Due to our limitations of facilities, faculty and budget, we were only able to accept about one-half of the 47 new applicants,” which was 28 freshmen. In 1979, there were 82 requests, 42 applications received, but only 23 were interviewed. In 1981, BIM started to build a new dormitory building.⁵⁶

Vincent Leoh and Ronald Ooi were among those who started serving God in 1975 in their youths.⁵⁷ Wong Yin Ming recalled, “That time was the revival time. . . . The Bible school was overflowing and had to turn down students during those times.”⁵⁸ There was continuous high enrollment at the Bible school, and the most active church planting, missions and evangelism endeavors, “open air meetings,” and evangelistic and healing rallies were common features, even in big scale at the Negera Stadium with Yonggi Cho. Many early church planters and their church members, who were mostly young people, would do house-to-house or door-to-door evangelism.⁵⁹ There was an urgency, zeal, fervency, and passion in winning the lost for God’s kingdom and saving souls for heaven.

In the 1970s and 1980s, every Bible school student was passionate about pioneering and church planting while studying in BIM/BCM or immediately upon graduation even though that was not a prerequisite for ordination. Such was the passion and drive for evangelism and missions. There were few churches in the nation, and it was relatively easy to begin a church anywhere. Most of the students served as student pastors in small townships and villages, especially during the weekends.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ B.I.M. Newzette May 1965; Jan.-Mar. 1970; Jan-Mar 1977, Sep.-Nov. 1979; B.I.M. Update 1976, 1979; B.I.M. Key 1981, BIMNZ, BIMU.

⁵⁷ Interviews with Rev. Dr Vincent Leoh, second General Superintendent of AGM, 18 April 2017; and Rev. Ronald Ooi, former BCM President, 27 April 2017.

⁵⁸ Interview with Rev. Wong Yin Ming, EXCO member and BCM board member, 24 July 2019.

⁵⁹ Collective interview data.

⁶⁰ B.C.M. Student Outreach Assignment listing, 1980s (n.d.), BCM/SO1980; Collective interview data.

There were noticeable growth spurts,⁶¹ followed by slower but steady growth, to the present time. Indeed, Guneratnam's vision was successfully and effectively implemented for the movement throughout his 26-year tenure of leadership as the General Superintendent from 1974 until 2000. It was reported as of June 2000, AGM grew to 325 churches and outreaches with 45,000 adherents and members, 615 credential members, 8 overseas missionaries, and active social ministries including six drug rehabilitation centers and 18 social homes.⁶²

The explosive growth of the AGM in the 1970s peaked in the mid-1980s made it the fastest growing church movement in the country.⁶³ Lawrence Yap testifies that AGM became a strong influence spearheading the Spirit-filled Christian landscape in the nation.⁶⁴

*Complexities in the Movement's Changing Nature and Shifts in Emphases*⁶⁵

Complexities began during the latter part of movement's growth period from the mid-1980s onward, when the changing nature of the movement became more prominent with a shift in emphases. In the 1980s through the fiftieth anniversary in 2007, AGM had grown large and strong and stabilized in the outward expansion. The pioneering period with its homogeneity until mid-1980s began to shift in emphases during the maturing years of the churches and the movement.

⁶¹ At the same time, there were revivals and spiritual renewals in mainline denominational churches especially in the 1970s to 1980s. Chan K.E., "A Brief Note on Church Growth in Malaysia, 1960-1985," in Hunt, Lee, and Roxborough, eds., *Christianity in Malaysia*, 354-78.

⁶² "A Tribute to Twenty Years of Leadership (1974-1994)," Book of Tribute in Appreciation of General Superintendent, Rev. Dr Prince Guneratnam for 20 years of Superintendency, The General Council Assemblies of God Malaysia, 1994, GS1994-PG20A; Calvary Church, "30 Years of Faithful Service: Committed to His Call, Compelled by His Love," 2002, 57, CC2002-30A.

⁶³ The AGM movement had become almost as large as the total Evangelical Christian population of the country. Roman Catholicism is the faith of half the Christian population of Malaysia due to the influence brought in during the earlier Portuguese and Dutch colonial rule in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, before the coming of the British.

⁶⁴ Interview with Rev. Lawrence Yap, General Secretary of AGM and BCM Chairman, 22 August 2019.

⁶⁵ More detailed discussions in my PhD dissertation 2022 entitled, "Contextualised Pentecostalism from a Classical Pentecostal Movement to a Contemporary Pentecostal Church Movement: A Study of the Assemblies of God of Malaysia with Special Reference to Joel 2:28-32."

Major shifts after the mid-1980s resulted in AGM gradually morphing into its contemporary state. The movement’s vast expansion inevitably resulted in the process of AGM’s changing nature (physical changes and natural processes) and shifts of emphases as the movement progressed from classical to contemporary as illustrated in Figure 3:

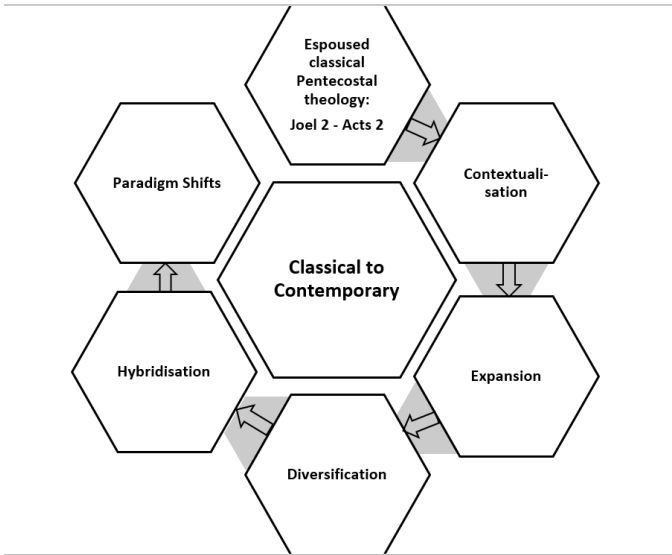


Figure 3. Classical to Contemporary – complexities in changing nature and shifts in emphases (CPM homogeneity until mid-1980s)

The process of changing nature started with the espoused classical Pentecostal theology to contextualize from American Pentecostalism to Malaysian Pentecostalism. Gradually, the movement’s growth and expansion were followed by the consolidation of churches shifting the focus to church building, diversification of ministries, generational growth, and multilingual congregational growth which naturally led to a diversification of emphases in theological, missional, ecclesiological, and ministerial aspects. And there was the hybridization of theological influences (Evangelicalism, Charismatic, Third Wave, etc.), resulting in paradigm shifts that shaped AGM’s current perspectives and practices, thus impacting changes in theological emphases and practices of the Pentecostal distinctives.

The gradual shifts of emphases in the movement have resulted in the lack of spiritual traditions and theological articulation about Pentecostal

theology, doctrines, and practices.⁶⁶ The interviews and surveys show that, in general, there is a decline in spirituality in the younger generations which is also due to their mindsets being influenced by secularized education. Thus, there is a lack of personal spiritual convictions towards BHS, theological concern, and a sense of Pentecostal history.⁶⁷ There is an urgent need for AGM to recapture its spiritual heritage and Pentecostal distinctives as a God-Spirited movement.

Changes in Spiritual Dynamism

The paradigm shifts in ministerial aspects imply the change in spiritual dynamism from earlier generation to the second generation. There are concerns regarding ministers' convictions on Pentecostal distinctives from homogeneity to autonomy, from an understanding of God's calling to service and ministry, and from pioneering churches and evangelism to filling ministerial portfolios within the church.

Marcus Tan has observed a paradigm shift in church ministerial calling compared to the early period. As churches become more established, they send potential church workers for theological training to Bible schools in order to serve in their own churches to meet the growing needs of the local church and members. The focus of preparation of this new generation who receive God's call into full-time ministry is on training and equipping them for specific ministries prepared for them in the churches,⁶⁸ such as youth pastor, children's pastor, worship pastor, or assistant pastor. As such, there is a drastic decline in church planting and mission outreach by ministerial workers compared to AGM's formative and pioneering period. In the survey conducted among BCM full-time residential students, most of them still received God's call through prophecies, dreams, and visions like in the earlier days.⁶⁹ However, the purpose of answering God's call and being trained in Bible school has morphed.

Nowadays, AGM church members are exposed to a more popular appeal to God's call by professionals and laity serving God in

⁶⁶ Collective interview data.

⁶⁷ Interviews with Ng and Wong Y.M.; collective interview data and others.

⁶⁸ Interview with Rev. Marcus Tan, EXCO member and BCM board member, 28 April 2017.

⁶⁹ Surveys with BCM full-time students, 2017.

“marketplace ministry”⁷⁰ without the sacred-secular divide. There is a renewed biblical theology of work where God’s kingdom, vocation, and calling are undivided as a Christian. Christians do not need to work in church as a clergy, pastor, or staff, and do not need to be ordained ministers called by God. All Christians in whatever vocation participate in God’s kingdom purposes, creation, and providence. This is more of a Protestant understanding and more Christians are subscribing to this trend. There are also the increasing variations of bi-vocational pastors or tentmaking ministries in missions rather than the old practice of churches sending full-time missionaries to live in a foreign land.

The reconceptualization of Christian service and missional approach in contemporary times has directly impacted theological education. This is evident in the demographics of the student body and BCM’s adaptations in the twenty-first century. Registration record shows that there is an increasing number in the enrollment of non-full-time students contrasting the drastic reduction of the number of full-time students who have a full-time calling as pastors. The average number of full-time students in the past five years have decreased from more than 40 to around 10 at the end of 2021. There are also students changing status from full-time to non-full-time due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the number of non-full-time students, many of whom are lay leaders, has tripled to more than 700, compared to only 13 full-time students in January 2022.⁷¹ Although AGM places top priority in providing credentials to ministers with a conventional full-time calling, BCM has been designing and offering new programs and courses that are well-suited for equipping lay leaders, particularly counselling and leadership⁷² which are needed in churches and the marketplace.

Other Bible colleges have also been upgrading and improving their theological training programs to meet the needs of an alternating spiritual dynamic. Soh has recently done research on “Fostering Vocation” in a case study at ACTS College, the AG Bible College in Singapore, which shows similar trends in the changes of conventional understanding of full-time calling to a wider spectrum of vocation as Christian service in the world. The meaning of “vocation” is redefined

⁷⁰ “Pentecostal Movement,” BCM Chapel Service sermon by Rev. Stephen Ong, Pastor of First Assembly of God Church Kuala Lumpur, on the Chinese Pentecostal Movement in Malaysia and Marketplace Missions, PowerPoint slides in pdf file and audio m4a, 14 Feb. 2019, CS20190214-P/aud.

⁷¹ Student information report, SIR2015-2022.

⁷² BCM Catalogues.

where nowadays Christians believe that they are called to serve anywhere in the marketplace, industries, and any arena in society, not confined to full-time pastors and workers in the church. As such, the role of Bible schools or theological education has advanced from training pastors and missionaries to “equipping the saints” or lay leaders for any kind of service unto the Lord.⁷³

Pentecostal theological education at Bible schools and in the local churches has a strong impact on the spiritual dynamics of the movement in theology and practice. Over time there is a tapering down in the Pentecostal fervor from the classical formative period to the twenty-first century as more focus is given to “equipping the saints” with knowledge, diversified ministry skillsets, and vocation training for the marketplace.

The Way Forward in Contemporary Emphases

Pentecostal theological education evolves with a changing society, spiritual dynamism of the generations, and focusing on “equipping the saints” in diverse ministry skillsets and vocations more than the conventional training for full-time ministers. The challenge is reflected in theological education, both in curriculum and faculty preparedness. The huge change in demography of Bible colleges in training more lay leaders has impacted the emphasis on Pentecostal fervor as most non-full-time students only attend courses but receive limited focus on the spiritual dynamics of Pentecostalism in contemporary times. There is an urgent need for Pentecostal education and churches to adapt effectively in the fast-changing world, particularly in the post-pandemic period and age of digitalization, to raise the next generation of Pentecostals.

Centrality of Joel 2 – Acts 2

There is the realization of the centrality of Joel 2 – Acts 2, the vitality of the central Pentecostal distinctives as AGM’s identity, and the need to preserve the Pentecostal heritage for the younger generation. Thus, continuous emphasis on the centrality of Joel 2 – Acts 2 and BHS is much needed as the theological significance of Joel’s prophecy needs to be re-emphasized. This has resulted in AGM’s emphasis on revival

⁷³ Soh Hui Leng Davina, “Fostering Vocation in the Here and Now: A Case Study,” in Alexander, P. et al. eds., *Pentecostal Education*, A Journal of the WAPTE, vol. 5, nos. 1 & 2, (2020), 33-43, accessed 8 Jun. 2021, <https://wapte.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/pentecostal-edu-vol-5.pdf>.

especially in the past decade during the present leadership of Ong and the EXCO.⁷⁴ The most significant implication is AGM's continual morphing into a contemporary movement and the introduction of a new vision and image of a Contemporary Pentecostal Church Movement (CPCM).

Holistic Pentecostal Education

A holistic Pentecostal theological education is much needed for AGM to thrive in its Pentecostal spirituality and preserve the Pentecostal heritage for future generations. The transformative roles of Bible colleges, leadership, pastors, ministers, and lay leaders in churches are significant to ensure the ministers-in-training, church workers, and all church members are well-equipped with a holistic biblical-theological understanding of Pentecostal spirituality, particularly the spiritual experiences and exercising of Pentecostal practices.

AGM Bible colleges ought to be intentionally firm in teaching and advocating the Pentecostal position, beliefs, and practices of the distinctives which assume Pentecostals' confident identity in order to raise new generations of Pentecostal ministers and leaders for the future. AGM ministers have raised their concerns over the transformative role of Bible colleges with their Pentecostal emphasis in the movement.

The AGM leadership believes that the Bible colleges are responsible to instill the personal conviction of local pastors, Bible college students, and ministers-in-training. Their students must teach and emphasize the BHS in the local churches and build Spirit-filled Pentecostal churches.

The EXCO recognizes the need for the Bible colleges to re-emphasize the Pentecostal heritage of Pentecostal distinctives and missions. Maintaining the Pentecostal heritage in the next generation needs to be done via the pulpit, the Bible colleges, and local churches. There needs to be closer dialogue and communication between the local churches, pastors, and the Bible colleges. This is one of the strengths of BCM, the national Bible school, which has synergy with the leadership.⁷⁵ How to execute programs to accentuate this theological agenda requires close partnership between the college, denominational leadership, and local churches.

⁷⁴ AGM Leadership Summit Report, "Energize! Extend! (Col. 1:29) An Era of Revival, Church Planting, Emerging Leadership & Pastoral Excellence," 18 Sep. 2012, LSR20120918.

⁷⁵ Collective interview data.

Contemporary Pentecostal Theology

AGM being a CPCM needs to embrace the holistic theological understanding of BHS and glossolalia based on advanced contemporary hermeneutics, which has expanded, enhanced, and enriched the classical Pentecostal view. This theology has broadened believers' understanding of functions, dimensions, and meanings. Pentecostal theological education must be updated and enhanced with a holistic theology and spirituality accordingly.

Participants suggest that as the AGM national Bible colleges are established to train ministers and leaders, it is fundamental that they be the source of education and training for Pentecostal theology and practice, preserving Pentecostal heritage, preparing ministers for missions, providing holistic training, and equipping for the contemporary world. Inclusivity of the more holistic contemporary Pentecostal theology and hermeneutics in Pentecostal Foundations, Holy Spirit, and Biblical Hermeneutics courses is needed in understanding the contemporary developments of Pentecostal theology in theological education. Thus, future ministers and leaders will be well-equipped with holistic theological understanding of Pentecostal distinctives.⁷⁶

Spirit-empowered Missions: Holistic and Integral Missions

Bible colleges play a significant role in preparing lives for “missions.” Contemporary theological education should refocus on preparing lives not just for ministries, but for holistic missions in new approaches. Missions had been the original and primary focus during AGM’s formative and pioneering period, churning out many missionaries, evangelists, church planters, and ministers. Amos Yong suggests, “A theological education that serves the church ought to facilitate participation in this divine mission . . . the missiological and the Pentecostal go together.” Referring to Acts 1:8 and Joel 2 – Acts 2 on the outpouring of the Spirit “upon all flesh,” he advocates that the Pentecostal and “Pentecost vision for theological education” is for the “church catholic (universal and ecumenical).”⁷⁷ Indeed, AGM as Pentecostals and its Bible colleges should always prioritize Spirit-empowered missions especially for current and future generations, and

⁷⁶ Collective interview data.

⁷⁷ Amos Yong, “Theological Education between the West and the ‘Rest’: A Reverse ‘Reverse Missionary’ and Pentecost Perspective,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 24:1 (Feb. 2021), 27-29.

even expand the “Pentecost vision” to the larger body of Christ through theological education and cultivating an interdenominational, united vision for missions. There is a synergy in ecumenical collaboration in holistic and integral missions in building the nation together.

Conclusion

The way forward for AGM and Pentecostal education is in preserving its holistic Pentecostal spirituality from which flows the new generation of vibrant Pentecostal communities, robust Pentecostal ecclesiology, missiology, and ministry in the twenty-first century and beyond. The transformative roles in developing and teaching its theology and Pentecostal practices begins with the AGM Bible colleges and leadership and with the concerted effort of church ministers, leaders, congregation, and members.

The new generations need to have a new understanding on the centrality of Joel 2 – Acts 2 in the Pentecostal *ecclesia* and in the lives of believers. True Pentecostal spirituality is encountering the living God in the “theophanic” Spirit baptism, and developing a continual intimate relationship with the triune God from whom flows wholehearted love for God in worship and Spirit-led life, mission, and service. Ultimately, Pentecostal education must remain at the cutting edge in raising new generations of Pentecostals to spread the Pentecostal fire.

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BIBLE COLLEGE OF MALAYSIA

Transition and Re-Entry from Host Country to Passport Country for Children of Missionaries (MKs) with Intellectual Disabilities: A Literature Review

Pamela Gregory

Abstract

After spending their formative years in the host country of their parents' ministry, literature review and anecdotal evidence show missionaries and their children with intellectual disabilities lack support during transition and re-entry back into their passport country when they reach the age of majority. The church has not been understanding of the needs of the disabled, especially in the Pentecostal church. The disabled have felt ashamed for not receiving divine healing when prayed for. Also, historically, the missionary family unit has not been a priority. This began to change in the late 1970s as mission agencies slowly recognized the value and needs of children. While the member care programs for children, in general, have improved, the lack of understanding of the needs of the intellectually disabled missionary child and their families still lingers. Therefore, member care programs for them are still lacking.

Keywords: missionary kid (MK), re-entry, intellectual disability, member care

Introduction

It is common practice today for missionaries to be sent overseas as a complete family unit. As opposed to times past,¹ it is my experience that mission agencies are now willing to send families with children with disabilities to the mission field. Working with missionaries and their children across the globe from various mission agencies, I have noticed one of the most challenging transitions missionary kids (MK) will make is moving back to their passport country at the age of majority, the age at which a person is legally a full adult. This comes after spending most

¹ Stanley White, *The Call and Qualifications for Missionary Service* (New York City: Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the USA, 1930), https://archive.org/stream/callqualificati00whit_0/callqualificati00whit_0_djvu.txt.

of their lives in the countries of their parents' ministry which has become "home" for them. The upheaval is unsettling. It is important to note this transition is even more challenging for the MK that has intellectual disabilities. While there are supports in place for the missionary family and their normative MKs,² there is a lack of available support through mission agency member care for the intellectually disabled MK both on the field and as they transition back to their passport country when they reach the age of adulthood.

This article looks at literature that analyzes how the church has historically viewed the disabled, which helps explain the lack of understanding and support of the missionary family with an intellectually disabled child. Pentecostal churches especially, in the past and even currently, have been guilty of alienating the disabled population by praying for divine healing and then causing the disabled person to feel a failure when they are not healed.³

A review of known literature, coupled with my experience, will shed light on the history of missionary qualifications looking at archived documents published by mission agencies at early as 1905. From these archived documents one will note that the view of children in the missionary family was significantly different than it is today, encouraging families to not even apply if they had children.⁴

In the 1970's there was an acknowledgement of MKs' needs that resulted in the growth of member care for the children of missionaries,⁵ particularly with transition and re-entry back to their passport country

² Assemblies of God World Missions has developed a ministry to MKs called the International Society of Missionary Kids (ISMK). As part of that ministry, they wrote a manual to guide parents in all aspects of taking their children overseas, planning for their education, and planning for cross-cultural transitions. Chad Phillips, et al., *ISMK Education Handbook: Your Education Questions Answered* (Springfield, Missouri: Assemblies of God World Missions, 2021).

³ Judith Woodall, "The Pentecostal Church: Hospitality and Disability Inclusion. Becoming an Inclusive Christian Community by Welcoming Mutual Vulnerability," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 36, no. 2 (September 2016): 131–44.

⁴ White, *The Call and Qualifications for Missionary Service*.

⁵ Joyce Bowers, ed., *Raising Resilient Mk's: Resources for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers* (Colorado Springs: Association of Christian Schools International [ACSI], 1998).

from their parents' place of ministry.⁶ This re-entry is chaotic and stressful and extra support from the mission agency is helpful. While there is a vast amount of literature that speaks to the transition of a normative MK to adult life, no literature was found that acknowledges the need for specialized support for the families and their children with intellectual disabilities.

The Pentecostal Church and the Disabled

Nancy Eiesland, looking back over history, states the church has treated people with disabilities as objects of pity and has left them feeling that the church is inaccessible and inhospitable.⁷ Amos Yong contends that people with disabilities have traditionally not felt welcome in Pentecostal churches because there is an unwritten feeling that they are broken, and divine healing is needed for them. If the disabled person is not healed, then there must be some underlying personal reason for the lack of faith.⁸ Judith Woodall agrees with Yong and states that currently in Pentecostal and charismatic movements, there are those who have been healed, but there are also others who have not. These people end up feeling embarrassed or condemned because there is such an emphasis on divine healing.⁹

There are also two legal passages in the Torah that shed seemingly negative light on disabilities. Yong explains regarding these two sets of text:

The first, part of the Levitical code regarding the work of priests, disallows those with disabilities from making the sacrificial offering in the Holy Place. The second, discernible at various places throughout the covenantal agreement at the end of the book of Deuteronomy, equates sicknesses and diseases with divine curses. Taken in their plain and

⁶ David Pollock, ed., *Third Culture Kids: Growing Up Among Worlds*, 3rd Ed (Boston: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2017). Kindle.

⁷ Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 20.

⁸ Amos Yong, "Disability and the Gifts of the Spirit: Pentecost and the Renewal of the Church," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 19:1 (2010), 76–93..

⁹ Judith Woodall, "The Pentecostal Church: Hospitality and Disability Inclusion. Becoming an Inclusive Christian Community by Welcoming Mutual Vulnerability," 131.

literal sense, these texts have functioned to stigmatize disability in the theological tradition.¹⁰

While the church in the US has acknowledged the passing of legislature in the federal government that defends the rights and value of people with disabilities,¹¹ the attitude of church leaders and members of congregations has been slow to change.¹²

Qualifications for the Missionary Family with an intellectually disabled child, then and now

As archived documents from 1900 – 1950 were searched, there was no mention as to whether a disability in a family disqualified them from missionary service. It was stated that missionaries themselves needed to be healthy, able to learn a language, and willing to leave their life and family in their passport country.¹³ Only one archived document was found that mentioned children. The Presbyterian Church of the US in 1930 stated, “Married people with children are not encouraged to apply. The risk to the lives of children taken from this country to the mission field is too great to make such appointments anything but the exception.”¹⁴

¹⁰ Amos Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011). 18.

¹¹ “Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Section 1400,” in *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, n.d., <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statute-chapter-33/subchapter-i/1400>; “Rehabilitation Act of 1973,” n.d., <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/leg/rehab/rehabilitation-act-of-1973-amended-by-wioa.pdf>.

¹² Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 20.

¹³ Bishop E. R. Hendrix, *The Call and Qualification of a Missionary* (Missionary Training School, 1905), 13-17; E. D. Dick, “Qualifications of Foreign Missionaries,” *The Ministry* (1937), <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1937/11/qualifications-for-foreign-missionaries>; “Qualifications of Missionary Candidates,” *National Holiness Missionary Society* (1952), <https://archive.org/details/missionaryqualif00inte/mode/2up?ref=ol&view=theater>; “Missionary Qualifications and Preparation,” *The International Foreign Missions Association of North America* (n.d.), <https://archive.org/details/missionaryqualif00inte/mode/2up?ref=ol&view=theater>.

¹⁴ White, *The Call and Qualifications for Missionary Service*.

There is a stark difference today as it is assumed missionary families will have children, and the children will go with them to the mission field. In fact, in the current Assemblies of God World Missions (AGWM) web page for initial career missionary inquiries, there is not only a request for references for the adults, they also ask for references from their children's and youth pastors, if their children are over the age of 5.¹⁵

MK Care prior to 1972

Due to a lack of written documentation, I am relying on my life experience for understanding the development of mission agency care for the children of missionaries, using AGWM as an example. My parents were first appointed as missionaries with AGWM in 1967, and there was no plan in place for MKs to be a part of the missionary training or orientation process. For the 12-week summer courses they were required to attend in Springfield, Missouri, my sister and I were left to live with family members in our home state of Washington. During our first furlough in 1973, we were again left with family as our parents went to Missouri. Upon arrival in Missouri, our parents discovered that in the year previous of 1972, a program of care and training for MKs was launched. However, they were not informed.

MK Care 1972 and Beyond

The history of the development of MK care has been thoroughly described in the books *Understanding and Nurturing the Missionary Family*,¹⁶ *Fitted Pieces*,¹⁷ and *Raising Resilient MKs: Resources for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers*.¹⁸ During the 1970's, issues of family dynamics, and a new willingness to talk about emotional wounds paved the way for conversations about the needs in the missionary family. Questions were asked about work/family balance and the possibility of sending MKs to boarding schools. Paul Nelson of Wycliffe and Dave

¹⁵ "Career Missionary: Overview" (Assemblies of God World Missions, n.d.), <https://wideopenmissions.org/career-missionary>.

¹⁶ Pam Echerd and Alice Arathoon, eds., *Understanding and Nurturing the Missionary Family* (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1989).

¹⁷ Janet R Blomberg and David F. Brooks, eds., *Fitted Pieces* (St. Clair Shores: SHARE Education Services, 2001).

¹⁸ Joyce M Bowers, ed., *Raising Resilient Mk's: Resources for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers* (Colorado Springs: Association of Christian Schools International [ACSI], 1998).

Pollock of Interaction birthed an idea of bringing together mission agencies to learn more about MKs and their needs. This would shape the future of MK care programs. In 1984 the first International Conference on Missionary Kids (ICMK) took place with successive ones in 1987 and in 1989. Bowers states:

It became clear that two areas are crucial in determining the way an MK's life is molded: elements of a cross-cultural or multicultural childhood experience, and elements of growing up in the mission's subculture. Both aspects of MK life are so basic they may be unnoticed, but both provide layers of complexity which have life-long implications.¹⁹

These conferences led to the creation of a “flow of care” for MKs²⁰ and a worldwide network of individuals with a vital interest in MKs and their families.²¹

One example of a program that took the lessons learned at the ICMK conferences and put them to practice is the MK care program of AGWM. Their most recent MK care and education manual was updated in 2021. It is designed to help families plan and choose education options for their kids, prepare for cross-cultural transitions, and anticipate re-entry to their passport country.²²

Care for the Disabled MK

The care plan for an individual MK gets more complicated when you add non-normative needs into the mix.²³ Today, missionaries with children that have disabilities *are* being sent to the mission field and, since they are being sent, their needs must be taken into consideration. Karen Wrobbel, who works with several mission agencies, released an in-depth guide in 2021 on helping missionaries make educational decisions for their children with a chapter dedicated to special needs children.²⁴ She states that a child with some sort of physical disability

¹⁹ Bowers, ed., *Raising Resilient MK's*, 6.

²³ Bowers, ed., *Raising Resilient MK's*, 6.

²¹ Echerd and Arathoon, *Understanding and Nurturing the Missionary Family*, x.

²² Phillips, ed., *ISMK Education Handbook*.

²³ Phillips, ed., *ISMK Education Handbook*, 9.

²⁴ Karen A. Wrobbel, *The Globally Mobile Family's Guide to Educating Children Overseas* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2021). 91-96.

may need to attend a school that has the physical accommodations in place that they will need. A child with cognitive disabilities may need special classes or accommodations that meet their unique learning needs. These MKs may need speech or occupational therapy, or possibly even a special type of school. Assessments should be carried out to determine the specific nature of the child's needs.²⁵ It is the responsibility of the mission agency's MK care team to assist the parents in their research for the location of their ministry assignment to ensure the needs of the child can be met.²⁶ Ulrika Ernvik states in her book *Third Culture Kids: A Gift to Care For*, "Sending agencies are the main parties responsible for the safety and well-being of the children of those they send."²⁷ Sending agencies need to be aware of this responsibility and should have trained people assigned to support these families.²⁸

Re-entry to One's Passport Country

All MKs will eventually reach the age when they are expected to launch on their own, which usually happens when they reach the age of majority or graduate from high school. MKs are expected to re-enter their passport country to begin life as an adult. Dave Pollock states:

After all these years of careful planning to make the most of the years in a host culture, . . . the time has finally come for the family, or at least the TCKs²⁹ themselves, to go "home." . . . Presumably, after living for "a significant period of their developmental years outside their passport culture," the day will come when most TCKs make a permanent, or extended, return to that country and culture.³⁰

For some, the re-entry process causes trauma because of such a huge change, grief over things left behind, a loss of culture, a loss of identity, and possibly unmet expectations as the passport country will be very

²⁵ Fred C. Gingrich, "Assessing Missionary Families (Not Just Individuals) for Missionary Service," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 44:4 (2016), 329–347.

²⁶ Phillips, ed., *ISMK Education Handbook*. 5.

²⁷ Ulrika Ernvik, *Third Culture Kids: A Gift to Care For* (Marlestad: Familjeglädje, 2019), Kindle, 377.

²⁸ Ernvik, *Third Culture Kids: A Gift to Care For*, 378.

²⁹ A TCK (third culture kid) is a broader category of kids raised overseas which include Missionary, Government Employees, Military, and Business kids. A Missionary Kid (MK) is a sub-group of the world of TCKs.

³⁰ Pollock, ed., *Third Culture Kids*, 269.

different from when it was left. Some MKs suffer from this trauma for many years while others can come to terms with it sooner.³¹

To pre-empt this trauma the International Society for Missionary Kids (ISMK) manual encourages parents to teach resiliency “by intentional planning, supportive modeling of friendship building, and coaching.”³² Ernvik gives additional guidance to parents and mission agencies in chapters titled *What Parents Can Do* and *What Mission Agencies Can Do*. She provides extensive lists of suggestions that will provide MKs support, preparation for life’s hard events, and training in all aspects of cross-cultural living.³³ Pollock and his team encourage families to prepare for the transition before it arrives. They suggest “to enter well you have to leave well.”³⁴ These are five transition stages to help MKs mentally prepare for this major re-entry back into their passport country:³⁵

- 1) Involvement – Engage in the host country and love it!
- 2) Leaving - Using the acronym of a RAFT: Reconciliation, Affirmation, Farewells, and Think destination. Tying these four “logs” together, the “raft” will be able to float and arrive safely on the other side.
- 3) In Transit – Take time to breathe before hitting the ground and running. Since travel by plane one arrives at the destination in hours, and not on ships as was the practice a century ago that took weeks, the destination is achieved before being mentally ready. This is a good time for families to take a family vacation before entering their passport country, take time to debrief what was left behind, and start to get excited about what lies ahead.
- 4) Entering – Adjust back to the passport country. Research has shown Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) that have attended a re-entry seminar felt the training had a profound impact on their adjustment to their passport country.
- 5) Re-Engagement – Feel truly at home in the passport country.

As an additional step to combat the trauma of re-entry, MK/TCK re-entry seminars (also called retreats or camps) have been developed to be used around the US and in other countries. A re-entry seminar can range from just a few days to multiple weeks. It helps the TCKs know they are not alone, gives them a chance to tell their story, supplies them

³¹ Pollock, ed., *Third Culture Kids*. 270-272.

³² Phillips, ed., *ISMK Education Handbook*. 65.

³³ Ernvik, *Third Culture Kids: A Gift to Care For*, 375-378.

³⁴ Pollock, ed., *Third Culture Kids*. 338.

³⁵ Pollock, ed., *Third Culture Kids*. 240.

with information about what it means to be an ATCK, and informs them of the struggles and successes of others that have gone before them.³⁶ Longer seminars have additional time available to provide experience in applying for jobs, setting up bank accounts, getting driver's licenses, going shopping, and other life skills that might be different in the US than where they had been living. Research of US-based TCKs that have taken part in a re-entry seminar shows that pre-entry orientation is beneficial to their adjustment to life in the US.³⁷

Transition and Re-Entry for the Intellectually Disabled MK

When taking a child with an intellectual disability to the mission field, it may take them longer to settle into their new life and routine than children without a disability. If they need to learn a new language, it may take them longer than others. It might take them longer to adjust to the new social norms of the culture.³⁸ Once established, the rhythms and routines of life tend to be very important to them. Because of that, it is imperative to begin preparing them in advance for the transition back to their passport country for adult life.³⁹

There are two transitions happening at the same time which makes it even more complex for the intellectually disabled. They are transitioning into adulthood and shifting from host country to passport country.⁴⁰ For the transition to adulthood, there are transition programs in the US public schools for the intellectually disabled to move to adulthood. Most of these programs are meant to begin at the start of high school to give

³⁶ Pamela Davis et al., "Evaluating Impact of Transition Seminars on Missionary Kids' Depression, Anxiety, Stress, and Well-Being," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 38:3 (January 1, 2010), 186–194.

³⁷ Justin Hopkins, "Coming 'Home': An Autoethnographic Exploration of Third Culture Kid Transition," *Qualitative Inquiry* 1, no. 9 (2015); Davis et al., "Evaluating Impact of Transition Seminars on Missionary Kids' Depression, Anxiety, Stress, and Well-Being."

³⁸ Adnan Nasser Al Hazmi and Aznan Che Ahmad, "Universal Design for Learning to Support Access to the General Education Curriculum for Students with Intellectual Disabilities," *World Journal of Education* 8, no. 2 (2018): 66–72.

³⁹ Ann Bullen et al., "Simple Ideas That Work: Celebrating Development in Persons with Profound Intellectual and Multiple Disabilities," *African Journal of Disability* 7, no. 1 (January 2018), 273.

⁴⁰ Pollock, *Third Culture Kids*.

the student with special needs plenty of time to absorb it all.⁴¹ Mission agencies need to encourage families to be proactive and plan ahead.⁴²

These programs have two overarching themes: success in post-high school life and self-advocacy. Research has shown developing the following attributes will set a disabled student up for success: self-awareness, proactivity, perseverance, goal setting, the presence and use of effective support systems, and emotional coping strategies.⁴³ Self-advocacy starts with the students being aware of the disability they have. They need to realize their disability does not define them but is only one part of who they are.⁴⁴ They need to be able to recognize their own strengths and weaknesses, understanding when it is appropriate for them to try something on their own, when they need to reach out to others for help, and whom to reach to for help. Understanding the support systems that exist is essential. These could be family, a church community, a social worker, or other services provided by the government.⁴⁵ They need to learn to proactively seek to be a part of the world around them, persevere through hardships, and embrace learning in the process.⁴⁶

Life skills for daily living are also very important. The following is a common, yet non-exhaustive list of skills that will help equip the student for life.⁴⁷ It is important to not just teach these skills in theory but to practice doing them, if possible.

- Transportation: car (buying a car and getting driver's license), bus, bike, walking.
- Banking: establishing an account, depositing and withdrawing, and building credit.
- Shopping: groceries, clothing, medicines, electronics, appliances, etc.

⁴¹ U.S. Department of Education (Department) and Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, *A Transition Guide to Postsecondary Education and Employment for Students and Youth with Disabilities* (Washington, D.C., 2020).

⁴² ISMK *Education Handbook*, 7.

⁴³ Marshall Rashkind et al., *Life Success for Children with Learning Disabilities: A Parent Guide* (Pasadena, California: Frostig Center, 2003), 5.

⁴⁴ Rashkind et al., *Life Success*, 6.

⁴⁵ Rashkind et al., *Life Success*, 7, 10, 17.

⁴⁶ Rashkind et al., *Life Success*, 9-13.

⁴⁷ Pat McPartland, *Implementing Ongoing Transition Plans for the IEP: A Student-Driven Approach to IDEA Mandates* (Verona: Attainment Company, 2007), 12-50.

- Housing – (if not remaining in the parent’s home) finding a place, understanding contracts, budgeting for all costs such as rent, utilities, and furnishings.
- Making appointments and schedule planning – in person, by phone, or online.
- Communication – electronic communication and postal services.
- Health Care – health insurance, finding a provider, making appointments, filling prescriptions.
- Leisure activities - discovering what they enjoy and how to participate.
- Daily living skills - dressing, grooming, and self-care; cooking; cleaning; laundry; budgeting; legal documents and signature; making friends, and being a friend.

Transitioning to the passport country: There was no literature found that specifically addressed the transition and re-entry of an MK with an intellectual disability. However, the principles from Pollock, et al. and Ernvik, as stated earlier, could possibly apply to all children but with different approaches and time scales for them to be accommodated.

But what about support that meets the specific need of the intellectually disabled MK and their families? What can mission agencies do to meet this need? A normative MK has the option of being sent to a re-entry seminar/camp with the goal of dealing with MK re-entry issues. While no similar camps have been found for the intellectually disabled MK, there are summer camps to support families that have disabled children, such as the Family Camps sponsored by Joni and Friends.⁴⁸ These camps not only provide fun, friendship, and community not only for the disabled child but for the entire family. The missionary family that has a disabled child who is now transitioning to adult life needs this level of community support. It is hoped it could be possible to merge the two types of summer camps, partnering mission agencies with ministries such as Joni and Friends, to provide both community and transition support in a Family Camp setting for these missionary families.

Conclusion

There has been a long-standing need in the church for change in the support of families with disabled family members. Thankfully, in recent years, there has been a positive change in churches and how they

⁴⁸ For more information on the Family Retreat with Joni and Friends visit: <https://www.joniandfriends.org/ministries/retreats-and-getaways/>

welcome the disabled, but this is still a work in progress. This is also mirrored in the missionary community. There is an acceptance that families with disabled children exist and are posted to ministry positions overseas, but there are some gaps in the care they receive from their mission agencies.

While needs of MKs have been written about extensively, the needs of the intellectually disabled MK have been left unaddressed. It may be assumed that mission agencies will address those needs on a case-by-case basis and that there is no need to write specific care plans that are only used by a few. It is my experience that there are intellectually disabled MKs who are not receiving the support they need. Considering this, there needs to be more specific studies on how the mission agency can facilitate the re-entry and transition of ALL MKs, including those with intellectual disabilities. As MKs encounter the challenging transition of re-entry back to their passport country at the end of high school, support from family, home church, and mission agency is vital, and even more so for the intellectually disabled MK.

Incorporating the current re-entry plans for normative MKs, including transition seminars and re-entry camps, and merging them with current ministries that support families that have intellectually disabled children, may be a possible solution. There are organizations who have developed ministries to support families that have children with disabilities, such as the Family Camps sponsored by Joni and Friends. Partnering ministries that specialize in re-entry programs for MKs with ministries that focus on the needs of families with children who have intellectual disabilities may be a positive way forward for the mission agency in their pursuit of supporting the whole missionary family.

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Reviews

Steffen G. Schumacher, *The Spirit of God in the Torah: A Pentecostal Exploration* (Cleveland, Tennessee: CPT Press, 2021). 474 PP.

Steffen G. Schumacher teaches Old Testament theology at the European Theological Seminary in Kniebis, Germany. He graduated from the Pentecostal Theological Seminary in the United States and was subsequently awarded a Ph.D. in 2019 at Bangor University, Wales. His doctoral dissertation embodies this monograph, *The Spirit of God in the Torah: A Pentecostal Exploration*, which is perhaps the first monograph-length investigation of the role of the Spirit in the Torah.

The Spirit of God in the Torah is a pneumatological investigation of the nature, manifestations, and functions of the Spirit of God within the Torah. It attempts to excavate biblical and historical perspectives of various scholars on the subject and infuses them into reflections of today's theological thinkers to inform and reshape pneumatological narratives. The author's interest in unearthing academic and spiritual insights into the Spirit's ontic and noetic expressions within the economy of salvation history drove him to engage in this comprehensive research to help contribute constructive pneumatology for Pentecostals and re-evaluate the impact of the Spirit within the Pentecostal tradition. Therefore, the book rediscovers the various expressions of the Spirit within the Spirit-related passages of the Torah and examines hitherto unexamined scholarly literature. Additionally, the book significantly exposes the reader to a new approach for Pentecostals to read about the Spirit in the Torah—a method with particular fidelity to the Spirit, Scripture, and the community. In the end, Schumacher affirms that there is a pneumatological connection between the Old and New Testaments—the Spirit in the Torah is the same, manifested from diverse interpretations and functions.

The Spirit of God in the Torah is demarcated into six chapters. Chapter One takes a cartographic excursus into historical scholarly literature of over one hundred and thirty years and reviews the views of twenty-seven notable writers on the diverse operations of the Spirit in the Torah. The review inculcates different academic, historical, and denominational contexts to analyze the pneumatological reflections of

the scholars. In the end, Schumacher discovers historical shifts in the contours of scholarly expressions regarding the Spirit.

Chapter Two concentrates on formulating a viable Pentecostal method for reading the Torah. The author navigates through the history of Pentecostal scholarship and revivalism in the nineteenth century and scholarly impressions of Pentecostal hermeneutics to highlight significant characteristics and the nature of the Spirit. Through that, Schumacher suggests that any Pentecostal method for reading the Torah must inculcate a God-centered worldview, personal Pentecostal human experiences, orality and storytelling, a communal involvement in the interpretive process, and a general acceptance of Scripture as an authoritative yardstick. Consequently, he proposes a new *literary-theological* approach for reading pneumatological texts—a method that has fidelity to the Spirit, Scripture, and the community’s involvement.

In Chapter Three, the author examines early Pentecostals’ interpretation of Spirit-related texts in the Torah and explores how those patterns of their interpretation shaped the interpreter as a Pentecostal reader. From a detailed assessment of eight Pentecostal publications in both the Wesleyan-Pentecostal and Finished Work persuasions, the author asserts that early Pentecostals maintained a high level of “experiential spirituality as centered on the baptism of the Spirit,” which naturally impacted how they read Scripture. Again, early Pentecostals read the Bible together and saw Pentecostal theology and spirituality as a communal affair. Finally, they were not one-sided but integrated orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and orthopathy and showed more affinity for narratives in their readings. Hence, these diverse expressions of their thoughts impacted and shaped their Pentecostal hermeneutics.

Chapter Four weaves through nine primary pneumatological texts in the Torah—canonically, literally, narratively, and theologically—texts which speak explicitly of the *ruach* as the petri dish for testing Schumacher’s literary-theological approach. Through the prism of his literary-theological method for reading pneumatological texts, the nine passages portray a relationship between God and Israel and highlight the Spirit’s role in the contours of Israel’s history. To that effect, Schumacher is convinced that his method presents a fresh Pentecostal paradigm for modern Pentecostals to read the Spirit in the Torah.

Additionally, Chapter Five constructs a Pentecostal pneumatology of the Torah from interaction with seven categories of the Spirit’s nature and functions in the Torah, such as creation, community, charismatic gifts, and human experiences. Schumacher makes some overtures to redefine and develop Pentecostal pneumatology through the prism of

the Torah that answers and guides orthodoxy and orthopraxy within today's Pentecostalism. For example, the Spirit's taking of some of Moses' anointing and distributing it upon the seventy leaders is quintessential of pneumatic communality—the Spirit operates within the community. Therefore, Pentecostals should embrace the Spirit in new and creative ways amid challenging situations within the community.

The Spirit of God in the Torah by is a significant compendium of insightful research-based and scripturally disciplined treatise relevant to Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity. The pneumatological analysis elevates intellectual discourse and makes a groundbreaking contribution to Pentecostal pneumatology. Hitherto, not many books and articles are available to strictly discuss the nature and work of the Spirit of God in the Torah—this book fills the lacunae. Such knowledge enriches Pentecostal pneumatology.

Moreover, the book enlightens and revitalizes the field of hermeneutics through a new viable method for reading biblical text. Schumacher has succeeded in enhancing a better understanding of a Pentecostal reading of the Spirit with his literary-theological approach, a technique that gives fidelity to Scripture, the Spirit, and the community. Additionally, by analyzing twenty-seven scholars, Schumacher provides an armamentarium of valuable materials for contemporary theological studies. These scholarly materials articulate the thoughts, impressions, and pneumatological reflections of scholars from different Christian traditions and provide a wide array of ways to understand the Spirit's functions in the Torah.

Finally, the book balances the conversation between the Torah and contemporary biblical and Pentecostal scholarship with valuable suggestions to address challenging current theological issues. His overtures with the Torah to address contemporary issues are significant for Pentecostal theology.

The Spirit of God in the Torah is masterfully researched, comprehensively discussed, and dexterously presented. The author uses readable and understandable language that allows the reader to follow the contours of the discussion easily. He also engages the reader in fluid conversations from diverse sources, religious traditions, and a potpourri of academic disciplines, such as church history, bibliology, pneumatology, and philosophy, for a broader understanding and worldview.

Nonetheless, the book is deficient in certain academic details. Some of the author's assertions are primarily simplistic and lack the insight to enrich the book's overall appeal. Again, to devote a significant portion

of its content to a survey of early Pentecostal literature seems excessively verbose. Thus, the book's lengthy nature, buoyed by the avalanche of historical sources and reflections for over thirty years, may appear irrelevant to readers who may not consider ancient theological ideas needful for contemporary Christian thought.

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Daniela Augustine, *The Spirit and the Common Good: Shared Flourishing in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019). 272 PP.

As Miroslav Volf acknowledges in the foreword, Pentecostal spirituality has often been characterized as “otherworldly” and withdrawn on the one hand, or overly worldly and politically aggressive on the other. Augustine, however, envisions a Pentecostalism concerned with the common good of creation, framing her project “as a theological ethic of the common good through distinctly pneumatological lenses.” A thoroughly interdisciplinary work, Augustine engages environmental studies, sociology, and political philosophy as part of her conversation.

Augustine's work is divided into 4 chapters, the first entitled “From the Common Image to the Common Good.” In a corrective to some segments of Pentecostalism, she argues, “It is impossible to think about redemption as a socially disembodied personal experience . . . (but) the process of bringing all social relationships that comprise human identity within the presence of God.” Her description of the “Church as the Icon of the Trinity,” drawing on Eastern Orthodox iconography, depicts what this ought to look like. In Augustine's view, that the church serves as an icon does not just mean that the church is a mirror of the divine image, but a community where God himself abides. The implications for how one treats the other are obvious; indeed, she makes the thought-provoking claim, “Human beings may recognize injustice when they see it, yet remain completely blind to their contribution to injustice in the world.”

In her chapter 2, Augustine explores several theories on the cause of violence, drawing on the political philosophies of Hobbes, Engels, Arendt and others. She reminds her readers that the first violent act in Scripture—Cain's murder of Abel—took place at an altar, a chilling example of how, at times, religion not only fails to guard against evil but

presents an opportunity to justify it in God's name. Yet she also notes that "the militantly religious zeal of atheism" has not fared better; despite its harsh critiques of religion, the blood shed in the name of secular ideologies demonstrates that they are not a remedy for religiously motivated violence. "The absence of God," Augustine says, "relativizes the suffering or the extermination of the other until it becomes an acceptable part of human existence." During the communist era in Eastern Europe, she notes, the church stood as one of the few dissidents, testifying to the coming Kingdom of God through their love for one another.

Augustine's 3rd chapter opens with a challenge to neoliberal economics, including the notion that the market is amoral. She argues that "the Eastern European experience has proven that neither socialism nor capitalism holds the answer to solving issues of economic justice and sustainability," given that neither is ultimately committed to the common good but individual interests. Thus, this chapter is framed as "a theological reflection on some potential building blocks toward a new Spirit-inspired political economy." Augustine looks to the Eucharist as a means by which believers may have their desires reshaped amid the prevailing consumerism of Western culture. The sacrament "teaches us to take responsibility for the hunger and poverty of others . . . starting with the most vulnerable in the community (the orphans and the widows, the children and the elderly, the disabled, the economic migrants) until the needs of all are met."

This is an especially noteworthy discussion in her book as it frames an integral practice of local church life—the celebration of the Lord's Supper—in terms that might reshape how Christians understand its relationship with the culture. Though politically conservative readers might be wary of an implied socialism here, given that Augustine begins her chapter with a strong critique of capitalism and socialism, particularly in reference to Eastern Europe, this is almost certainly not the intention. And, for the Christian, her claim that "economics is a spiritual matter and an external expression of the individual and communal inner life" is a much more theologically robust understanding than casting it as a morally neutral discipline.

Chapter 4 considers the eschatological goal of the Spirit's "world mending"; in the context of a violent world, the Hebrew prophets envisioned an eternal shalom under God's rule with humanity "peacefully sharing the world in upholding the common good." Augustine admits this vision is often met "with the challenge of encountering crimes and atrocities that the broader society perceives as

transcending the very limits of forgiveness,” leading her to address “forgiving the unforgivable.” One must remember, Augustine argues, that in forgiving those who crucified him, the Son of God did just that. Repentance and forgiveness are works of the Spirit, the “perfector” of the “new creation.” Addressing passages that seemingly link one’s salvation with showing forgiveness, she grants that such apparent “forced forgiveness” texts could be taken advantage of to maintain injustice. Yet, they are “not driven by thirst for vengeance and retributive justice at the great day of judgment but first and foremost by a longing for the healing of the cosmos.” Their purpose is not to force forgiveness nor perpetuate injustice, but to enlist the believer in the Spirit’s healing of creation.

Augustine concludes with an epilogue which documents instances of “Christian peacebuilding” by Pentecostals in Eastern Slavonia, the site of horrific conflict in the 90’s following the breakup of Yugoslavia. Neither Orthodox, Catholic, or Muslim, Pentecostals were frequently looked upon—if not with favour—at least not as enemies of any one demographic. Their pastors performed funerals for those of other faith traditions and even set up volunteer organizations to relieve the suffering of war victims. Augustine summarizes her accounts of such individuals by asserting that “the healing of the entire cosmos starts from within hallowed, Spirit-saturated humanity.” Though one might be tempted to skip an epilogue, in this case it is quite helpful to the reader. Augustine’s book is thoroughly academic and technical, to be sure. However, including stories like these illustrates how Augustine’s vision might play out in the church’s life.

Augustine’s volume draws deeply and extensively on the Eastern Orthodox tradition, integrating discussions of human free will, iconography, and theosis. Notably, there is relatively little discussion of Pentecostal theologians and their work compared to those of the Orthodox tradition and beyond. Perhaps this is due to a history of sustained reflection in the Orthodox tradition on matters Augustine raises, an unfortunate lack of Pentecostal reflection on them thus far, or a combination of both. Beyond academia, this text would serve as a useful resource for Pentecostal theological students and pastors, particularly those who resonate with the concerns she addresses like the rank individualism of western society, an attribute the church all too often mirrors. Such audiences, however, tend to be—at least in the West—relatively unfamiliar with the Eastern Orthodox theology from which Augustine draws heavily. Therefore, classical Pentecostal readers might do well to familiarize themselves with certain Orthodox concepts

she employs in order to more fully appreciate her arguments. Perhaps Augustine's work on this front might serve as a model for Pentecostal scholars to continue engaging more established theological traditions with the aim of enriching their own movement which is a relative newcomer to the broader Christian faith. Finally, her vision of the church's participation in the Spirit's healing of the world may well lead to a more culturally aware and socially compassionate form of Pentecostalism on a global scale.

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Jacob Sorenson, *Sacred Playgrounds: Christian Summer Camp in Theological Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021). 210 PP.

Throughout my pastoral ministry, I have dedicated thirty-one weeks of my life to either serving as a director, counselor, or keynote speaker with our church camp Laurelview in Rockwood PA (laurelview.org). That is the reason for my interest in reading Jacob Sorenson's new book about how a summer camp experience is vital to a person and a church. In *Sacred Playgrounds*, Sorenson submits that a well-crafted camp can assist a young person to grow in faith and support a congregation in dynamic ways.

The author's purpose details the theological perspective of a Christian Summer Church Camp. The impact of a camp experience in his youth led him to consider a calling into the ministry. He believes church camp provided an impetus for his vocational career. However, he also noticed little research and scholarly data substantiating the motivation a camp contributes to church ministry.

I will review and discuss four specific areas of *Sacred Playgrounds* that support Sorenson's thesis. First is understanding camp as a playground; second, the participatory nature of camp; third, faith formation at camp; and fourth, mountain top experiences. This review will unpack these major themes in the book.

Theology has been described as *play* in recent scholarship (such as Wolfgang Vondey's article, "*Religion as Play: Pentecostalism as a Theological Type*," and Jürgen Moltmann's *Theology of Play*). Given the all-to-common reputation of theology as dull and abstract, the absence of church camp from discussions on theology remains deafening. After all, is not church camp just a "fun and games" week away from parents? Yet, I would

propose that while theology is serious business, its ultimate subject is God whose Spirit produces joy. Instead of looking at church camp as “fun and games,” one should understand a camp experience as a theology of play that produces joyful experiences with God, binding the participants to the church and Christ. Sorenson contends that camp as a sacred playground is an “unstructured, joyful encounter in which relationship is fostered and creativity is encouraged” (8). Certainly, the image of a *sacred playground* is a meaningful metaphor representing the theology and joy which camp engenders.

Secondly, Sorenson observes that camp is a participatory environment. Everyone is involved. Community and friendship are established in a short time frame. Camp engages multiple intelligences such as music, art, sports, and drama. Campers are not only encouraged to pray and read Scripture aloud, but they are thrust into an atmosphere that tears down barriers we experience outside of a camp. Attitudes of acceptance and attempting innovative methods to worship God are encouraged. Teachable moments come from the “experiential laboratory” (100) of camp. These events accelerate faith formation and leadership development within individuals. Because of the concrete teaching nature of camp, Sorenson believes “camp theology is sacramental in that there is a recognition that God is present in the same mysterious way in the normal everyday things of this world: around a campfire, at the waterfront, or on the hiking trail” (101). Sacramental—what a wonderful theological term for the reality that church camp spiritually imparts in a young person’s life.

Thirdly, young people, whom some call “unqualified” (109), encounter faith formation and personally engage in leading prayer, Scripture reading, and music. The best way to learn a skill is hands-on experience. At church camp, theology, and praxis merge in ways unknown in a church. Indeed, camp is a playground to engage and experiment with faith. Where church traditions keep the status quo, church camp explores new methods that relate to a new generation. Sorenson writes that “camp is a place that can help break through the boundaries, or at least blur the lines, between sacred and secular” (111). Because of the multiple intelligences utilized, faith moves from the abstract to the pragmatic. Thus, Christopraxis is birthed. If the Bible is alive (Heb 4:12) and Spirit-inspired (2 Tim 3:16), then the voice of God speaks to participating people in the camp experience. Intentional discussions about the Lord and the written word provide new existential understandings of God that hasten faith formation.

Fourthly, camp is the mountain top experience. I know that at the camp where I have ministered, people have expressed at its conclusion that they were “coming down from the mountain.” Sorenson examines the pericope of the Transfiguration in Matthew 17 and utilizes that moment as a potential metaphor for the reality which church camp offers. I have heard many campers testify that they would desire to linger after the camp finishes. Others do not want to depart, but of course, they must leave as parents arrive on the site. What creates this desire to stay “on the mountain” we call camp? Again, Sorenson insightfully writes that “the camp community is the ‘real world’ in that it is closer to the world as it should be, as God intended it to be” (163). The desire to encounter acceptance and community run deep within our spiritual consciousness. Consequently, these mountain top experiences are desired again and again.

One aspect that I searched concerning church camp was how many vocational ministers attribute their motivation for ministry to a week at camp. At the beginning of his book the author noted (1-3) that he was a product of this experience. I wonder if any investigation has probed to discover this data? I know for myself that though church camp was not the primary impetus for my decision to enter the ministry, it was a major force in my motivation.

In short, church camp is more than just fun and games though it is an experience filled with joy. Undeniably, a playground to experiment and grow in faith. Sorenson’s book demonstrates that the church camp experience must be taken seriously by theologians, Christian educators, ministers, and church members. Overall, *Sacred Playgrounds* is an excellent read and will be a useful addition to the library of those interested in the topic of church camp.

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