

Contemporary Spirit-Empowered Engagement with the Great Commission¹

By Rebekah Bled

Introduction

Pentecostal mission is fueled by Pentecostal eschatology.² The conviction that Spirit baptism and subsequent ongoing empowerment of the Spirit is for the purpose of mission propels Pentecostals into crossing all kinds of barriers including national, economic, socio-political, and language.³ The Pentecostal understanding of Christ as the soon-coming King⁴ propels this eschatological urgency to fulfill the Great Commission. This article will survey how Spirit-empowered communities in the Global South are living out strategies to complete the remaining tasks of the Great Commission. Recently published volumes stemming from Empowered21's Scholars' Consultations will serve as the primary resource for this article as they represent current research in this area.⁵ Other sources include seminal works on the theme of Spirit-empowered mission and social action, including *Mission in the Spirit* by Ma and Ma, and *Global Pentecostalism* by Miller and Yamamori.

This paper will look first at the biblical mandate to go and make disciples, then briefly look at the broad categories of proclamation and social action as a response to this mandate. It will then highlight insights and encouragement from Asia, Africa, and Latin America regarding the Spirit-empowered movement's unique contributions and contextualized approaches for engagement with the remaining tasks of the Great Commission.

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²Julie C. Ma and Wonsuk Ma, *Mission in the Spirit: Towards a Pentecostal/Charismatic Missiology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 5.

³Ibid, 154.

⁴Daniel D. Isgrigg, *Imagining the Future: The Origin, Development, and Future of Assemblies of God Eschatology* (Tulsa, OK: ORU Press, 2021), 3.

⁵Wonsuk Ma, Opoku Onyinah, and Rebekah Bled, ed., *The Remaining Task of the Great Commission & the Spirit-Empowered Movement* (Tulsa, OK: ORU Press, 2022).

The Great Commission and Great Consummation

Jesus gave his disciples the Great Commission, instructing them to make disciples of every nation, baptizing those disciples in the name of the trinity, and teaching them obedience to his commands (Matt 28:19–20). Christ then promised his continual presence, which he had ended with “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matt 28:18) until the end of the age; that is, until the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matt 28:20; Matt 24:14) (Quotations are from that version unless otherwise indicated). Thus began the era of the church. The mandate set forth in Matthew 28 is not yet complete, and the era of the church continues. As Trevor Grizzle notes, the disciples originally tasked with making disciples would have given the mandate to new believers, who would, in turn, make disciples. Thus, the mandate is passed from generation to generation until Christ’s return.⁶ Between the bookends of the Great Commission in Matthew 28 and the great consummation described in Revelation 7:9, the church is called into a process of obedience and faithfulness which spans culture, language, geography, and generations. It is called into full participation in a mandate whose outcome it does not control, but whose promised fulfillment is continuously anticipated.

While the day and hour of Christ’s return are unknown, he has promised that he is indeed returning. It is yet unknown how many generations the era of the church will include, but it is certain that it is the church’s calling to preach, baptize, and teach all nations in concert with the Spirit in every generation. Furthermore, it is a certainty that every nation will be present before Christ’s throne in glory, where the “multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-cultural” family of God, “united in being his” will worship together (Rev 7:9).⁷ God’s good creation, begun in a garden, finds joyful fulfillment in an urban banquet in which “a great multitude” (Rev 7:9) lifts unified voices “with the sound of many waters . . . and the sound of mighty thunder peals” (Rev 19:6) crying out the consummation of the Great Commission (Rev 19:6–8). The Great Commission is a mandate sweeping across human history, encompassing every tribe, tongue, nation (Isa 25:6–7; Phil 2:10–11; Rev 5:9–10), and age (Ps 78:6–7; 102:18; Dan 4:3; Luke 1:50). Indeed, the participation in the Great Commission mirrors its fulfillment.

⁶Trevor Grizzle, in “Spirit Empowerment and Service to the Poor in Acts,” in *Good News to the Poor: Spirit-Empowered Responses to Poverty*, Wonsuk Ma, Opoku Onyinah, and Rebekah Bled, ed., (Tulsa, OK: ORU Press, 2022), 54.

⁷John Odom, “God’s Multiracial Vision,” (sermon, Cornerstone Church, Tulsa, OK, May 8, 2022).

Matthew's Missiology

David Bosch notes several key themes embedded in Matthew's gospel which serve as hermeneutical keys to "interpreting his missionary consciousness."⁸ These themes include God's sovereignty, his justice, and his commands to pursue holiness, to bear fruit, and to teach.⁹ Though some of these themes are more reminiscent of Pentecostalism's holiness roots, others are at home in classical Pentecostalism.¹⁰ Still others, such as justice and the reign of God as interpreted through a lens of eschatological liberation find a home in the larger family of the Spirit-empowered movement.¹¹ Bosch notes that where Luke and John emphasize the role of the Spirit in missions—Luke with emphasis on proclamation with a preferential option for the poor, and John with an emphasis on the intimacy of the Spirit—Matthew's Great Commission seems, at first glance, to shift away from this Spirit focus. Indeed, as Bosch describes, "The Matthean Jesus sounds extremely didactic and legalistic and is an embarrassment, particularly to Protestants, who would prefer to hear about proclamation rather than teaching, about the forgiveness of sins and the power of the Holy Spirit, rather than the keeping of commandments."¹² However, Bosch quickly elaborates, describing Matthew as strategic and intentional in his missiological viewpoint rather than embarrassingly recalcitrant, giving "the extremely sober vocabulary of the Great Commission" as a distinctive and incisive strategy. Matthew divides the word "teach" into teach and proclaim, using 'proclaim' when the message is focused on unbelievers or outsiders, reserving the word 'teach' for instructing believers or insiders in the way of Christ.¹³ Here, what the disciples teach is submission to Christ in the Spirit lived in the context of the world.

Pentecostal Proclamation and Social Engagement

Since the context of disciple-making is the broken world, the question of proclamation or social action immediately arises, presenting

⁸David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 66.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 7.

¹¹Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 182.

¹²Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 67.

¹³*Ibid.*

an issue which has long divided Protestants, especially in the West.¹⁴ As Gene Green notes, “The questions that have conditioned Western discourse about the Bible and society are different than those germane to [minority group] communities. . . . And as the Majority World church self-theologizes, the attention turns to the meaning of the gospel in relationship to its context.”¹⁵ Ivan Satyavrata reflects on the experience of the founding missionaries of the Assemblies of God Church and Mission, Kolkata, which well illustrates this tension. Satyavrata describes North American missionaries, Mark and Huldah Buntain arriving in Kolkata and “be[ginning] their ministry by doing what they knew best to do: preaching the gospel and conducting evangelistic services.”¹⁶ However, the year was 1947, and India was suffering the social and economic consequences of the recent partition with Pakistan. One day, an impoverished man called out during the Buntain’s sermon, “First, feed our bellies, then tell us there is a God in heaven who loves us!”¹⁷ The Buntains responded to the man’s plea by establishing a feeding program which remains active to this day.

Recent studies show Pentecostals in the Global South on the leading edge of social engagement and proclamation.¹⁸ These Pentecostal believers refuse to fall into the binaries of either proclamation or social engagement that have so long plagued their evangelical cousins and simply do both.¹⁹ Charles Kraft calls this “wrapping power in love,”²⁰ ‘power’ here being salvation in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Pentecostal worldview, encompassing a present spiritual reality whose good end is assured, gives tenacious courage and hope in the face of grim material and spiritual circumstances. An interview with a non-Pentecostal pastor in the Global South speaks to the witness of this bold tenacity: “Pentecostals will go where no one else has the courage to go.

¹⁴Cecil M. Robeck Jr. “Ecumenism,” in *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, Allan H. Anderson, Michael Bergunder, André Droogers, and Cornelis Van Der Laan, ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, CA 2010) , 286; Wonsuk Ma, “Spirit, Mission, and Unity: A Personal Journal,” in *Mission in the Spirit: Towards a Pentecostal/Charismatic Missiology*, Julie C. Ma and Wonsuk Ma, ed., (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 264.

¹⁵Gene L. Green, “The Challenge of Global Hermeneutics,” in *Global Theology in Evangelical Perspective: Exploring the Contextual Nature of Theology and Mission*, Jeffrey P. Greenman and Gene L. Green, ed., (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 50, 52.

¹⁶Ivan Satyavrata, “A Church with a Heart: Spirit and Praxis in Pentecostal Social Engagement,” in *Good News to the Poor*, Ma, Onyiah, and Bled, ed., 90.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Miller and Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*.

¹⁹Ma and Ma, *Mission in the Spirit*, 10.

²⁰Charles H. Kraft, “A Third Wave Perspective on Pentecostal Mission,” in *Called & Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*, Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen, ed., (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 312.

The universities, the desperately poor, places that are just a mess. Pentecostals are already there ministering. If the people in these situations had to wait for the mainline denominations to have enough courage to go. . . .” Here the pastor trailed off with a shrug of the shoulders indicating the wait would be long indeed.²¹ Each community and culture of believers offers unique giftings and witness, which becomes interwoven into the tapestry of God’s grand redemption of the world. Spirit-empowered communities hold among their missiological distinctives: power encounters, healing evangelism, vibrant and expressive prayer and worship, and grassroots discipleship.

Spirit-Empowered Witness in Asia

In her overview of Pentecostal approaches in Asia, Connie Au makes use of Arjun Appadurai’s various “scapes” that characterize globalization.²² Regarding the urban context, for example, Au notes, “Urban Asian Pentecostal churches embrace a diverse ethnoscape characterized by multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-racial congregations constituted by a significant component of migrants.”²³ On one end of the financial spectrum, these urban congregations with their professional affiliations, flows of financial capital, modern worship styles, and ethnic diversity can be “partners with modernity.”²⁴

The urban ethnoscape is no less active on the other end of the financial spectrum in Asia, however, because of the vast numbers of South-South migrant workers.²⁵ Indeed, Eric Newberg notes that “in the Arab states six in ten women are employed as migrant domestic workers.”²⁶ Newberg summarizes Bina Fernandez’s findings on Pentecostal mission to South-South migrant workers in the Middle East region of Asia: “Pentecostal churches have created a safe space for migrant workers, in which forms of mutual support create a counterculture, empowering their members to navigate the world of

²¹John Hamilton, interview by author, August 24, 2021. Hamilton, was located in Montevideo, Uruguay and the author was in Tulsa, OK. The interview took place via Zoom.

²²Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 7:2-3 (June 1990), 297-299.

²³Connie Au, “Asian Pentecostal Mission and Spirituality: The Dual Quests in the Globalized World,” in *The Remaining Task*, Ma, Onyinah, and Bled, ed., 106.

²⁴David Reed, “From Bethel Temple, Seattle, to Bethel Church of Indonesia: Missionary Legacy of an Independent Church,” in *Global Pentecostal Movements: Migration, Mission and Public Religion*, Michael Wilkinson, ed., (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 103.

²⁵Au, “Asian Pentecostal Mission and Spirituality,” 101.

²⁶Eric N. Newberg, “Global Poverty and Transnational Pentecostalism in the Middle East,” in *Good News to the Poor*, Ma, Onyinah, and Bled, ed., 365.

undocumented workers.”²⁷ At each end of the financial spectrum, urban Pentecostals in Asia are embracing an ethic of “urban missions,” reaching out to the multitude of nations present in the city centers.²⁸ These Pentecostals offer counseling, vibrant prayer and worship experiences, cell groups, divine healing services, and worldview instruction through Spirit-focused sermons, often with an emphasis on prosperity.²⁹ The intentionally missional paradigm of these urban congregations means that there are often pastors from various nations and language groups represented and that the services and offerings extended to the community are offered in multiple languages.³⁰

The reality of urban life brings disparities up close.³¹ Writing from the context of the Philippines, Joel Tejedo notes that “. . . the widening gap between the rich and the poor remains as the prime challenge facing Filipinos.”³² Tejedo gives an urban slum called Lower Rock Quarry (LRQ) in Baguio City, the Philippines, as one such example. An area affected by regular flooding, much of the city’s garbage is also dumped here, worsening an already desperate living environment. Tejedo writes: “Although the city is populated by Catholic, Protestant, and Pentecostal churches, as well as paganism, no religious groups [have] dare[d] to build a chapel in the village because of recurring floods. . . . So, the spirituality of the people in this village is dependent on the church centers and fellowships in the city.”³³ Pentecostal students and professors from Asia Pacific Theological Seminary stepped into this gap, going to LRQ with regular proclamation and social engagement outreaches and networking with local government, NGOs, and churches in the area in order to both proclaim the good news and relieve the effects of material poverty. This marriage of approaches “expand[s] the capability [of LRQ inhabitants] to experience human dignity and wholeness.”³⁴

The rural Asian context is also diverse and multi-layered. Au describes a revival in the jungle that: “transform[ed] this tribal area into

²⁷Bina Fernandez, “Degrees of (Un)Freedom: The Exercise of Agency by Ethiopian Migrant Workers in Kuwait and Lebanon,” in *Migrant Domestic Workers in the Middle East: The Home and the World*, Bina Fernandez and Marin de Regt, ed., (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 51, 57–61, 64–68, referenced in Newberg, “Global Poverty,” 371.

²⁸Au, “Asian Pentecostal Mission and Spirituality,” 100.

²⁹Ibid, 100–102.

³⁰Ibid, 100.

³¹R. Wade Paschal, “God in the City: Poverty,” God in the City Lecture Series, The Culture Lab, Tulsa, OK, September 2019.

³²Joel Tejedo, “Pentecostal Civic Engagement in the Squatter Area of Baguio City, Philippines,” in *Good News to the Poor*, Ma, Onyiah, and Bled, ed., 333.

³³Ibid, 334.

³⁴Ibid, 335.

a multi-ethnic, multi-national, and multi-denominational carnival.”³⁵ Thang San Mung notes the relevance of Pentecostal worship in the rural Asian context. Mung describes the extroversion of prayer and worship seen taking place in Revelation 19 as a present-day missional strategy that Spirit-empowered worshipping communities are well-poised to embrace.³⁶ Mung locates this strategy in part in the Lord’s Prayer, noting that this liturgy “has a global perspective in view, action steps in the project, and inclusive tones in practice.”³⁷ Extroverted Pentecostal worship as a missiological strategy includes manifestations such as speaking in tongues and divine healing,³⁸ and can lead to power encounters, inviting the Holy Spirit into confrontation with other spirits.

Au describes power encounters in geographically specific places known to “belong” to evil or contrary spirits. These places thus become potential spiritual battlegrounds for the Spirit-empowered church. In contexts where the spiritual realm is considered part of everyday life, there is a focus on the particular uniqueness of Christ’s commands and the Spirit’s authoritative power. In these contexts, one might argue for “believing before belonging” as a path to discipleship where the specifics of Christ as a unique savior and his specific salvation are worked out in the believing community of the Spirit-empowered church. Au makes the significant observation that it is charismatic experiences that empower believers to engage in power encounters with contrary spirits, confronting them “in a way consistent with their culture.”³⁹ Power encounters provide evidence in the physical world that demonstrates the authority of the Holy Spirit over forces and powers both seen and unseen, systemic and personal. Emboldened and empowered by the Spirit, Pentecostals “intentionally increase and intensify their prayer,” practicing fidelity with their actions to their fervent belief that the Spirit is at work winning the battle.⁴⁰ Julie Ma urges Pentecostal pastors and missionaries to “pay attention to the community dimension of a power encounter,” describing rural settings in which a single divine healing was “jointly owned by the entire community.”⁴¹ Ma also urges theologizing in the area of Pentecostal pastoral care for long-term suffering, when prayers for divine healing do not seem to be heard. Ma describes the open

³⁵Au, “Asian Pentecostal Mission and Spirituality,” 108.

³⁶Thang San Mung, “Extroversion of Worship: Spirit, Worship, and Witnessing,” in *The Remaining Task*, Ma, Onyiah, and Bled, ed., 237–250.

³⁷Ibid., 242.

³⁸Ma and Ma, *Mission in the Spirit*, 156, 159.

³⁹Au, “Asian Pentecostal Mission and Spirituality,” 111.

⁴⁰Miguel Alvarez, “Focusing on the People of the Margins in Latin America: A New Approach to Social Concern,” in *The Remaining Task*, Ma, Onyiah, and Bled, ed., 146.

⁴¹Ma and Ma, *Mission in the Spirit*, 192.

door for Asian Pentecostal theologizing in the areas of power encounter, noting that this is a gift Asian Pentecostals can bring to the body of Christ.⁴²

Spirit-Empowered Witness in Africa

Power encounters and healing evangelism can also frequently be seen in African Pentecostalism as people seek spiritual protection from what Harvey Kwiyani describes as “contrary spirits.”⁴³ Paul Hiebert positions power encounters within the search for agency and control, calling this quest “the central concern of our day.”⁴⁴ Beyond prayer as a missional strategy, prayer has urgent, personal implications as well. Harvey Kwiyani notes that Pentecostals in Southern Africa “pray like their lives depend on it—and usually, their lives actually do.”⁴⁵ In Africa, as in Asia, divine healing seamlessly integrates into an already spiritual worldview, which takes seriously the presence and activity of the spirit world in human life. Daniel King notes, “The gospel of healing has always been an essential part of the ethos of Pentecostal spirituality. . . . There is no artificial bifurcation of salvation and miracles; rather, they are two sides of the same coin.”⁴⁶

Ogbu Kalu describes healing “as the heartbeat of the life of the church,” which Cephas Omenyo concurs “is not in any way an overstatement.”⁴⁷ Omenyo continues: “Spiritual explanations of causation and healing are so vibrant, entrenched, and central in the Akan/African worldview that any caring African church has no choice but to address it.”⁴⁸ One of these churches, Northmead Assembly of God (NAG) in Lusaka, Zambia, has been active in holistic healing ministry since 1992. Partnering with the Zambian government, NAG provides HIV/AIDS testing, and ongoing care for thousands of people annually, many of whom are street children who have been orphaned by the same

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Harvey Kwiyani, “The Great Commission and Pentecostalism in Southern Africa,” in *The Remaining Task*, Ma, Onyiah, and Bled, ed., 84.

⁴⁴Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 237.

⁴⁵Kwiyani, “The Great Commission,” 85–86.

⁴⁶Daniel C. King, “Mass Healing Evangelism: The Unique Contribution of the Spirit-Empowered Movement to the Practice of Evangelism,” in *The Remaining Task*, Ma, Onyiah, and Bled, ed., 308.

⁴⁷Cephas N. Omenyo, “New Wine in and Old Wine Bottle? Charismatic Healing in the Mainline Churches in Ghana,” in *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing* Candy Gunther Brown, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 236.

⁴⁸Ibid, 238.

disease.⁴⁹ NAG understands that addressing issues of healing and disease includes long-term, dignified, care for those who are not immediately healed and has steadfastly directed their resources and creativity to this endeavor. As of 2013, Banda and NAG's HIV/AIDS ministry has tested over 7,000 people, with continuing care for each person who tests positive (nearly 72 percent of those tested as of the 2013 report).⁵⁰ The scope of the holistic work Banda spearheaded resulted in his invitation to lead the National AIDS Council in Zambia in 2007.⁵¹ For Banda, proclamation is intertwined with care for the physical body. As Julie Ma states, “. . . the proclamation of the gospel and responding to the immediate needs of the vulnerable have [gone] hand in hand from the very beginning.”⁵²

Like their Asian counterparts, African Pentecostals are also often on the move because of South-South migration. Jehu Hanciles states that as of 2008, “one in every thirty-four people in the world is an international migrant.”⁵³ Indeed:

The vast proportion of global migration takes place within the non-Western world in the form of South–South migration. The impact of such massive people movements and displacements on the impoverished economies and dilapidated infrastructures of societies in the developing world beggars the imagination.⁵⁴

One effect of migration is the in-breaking of enchanted worldviews into materialist countries and cultures. Viewing secularism as a pressing danger,⁵⁵ the first-generation African diaspora maintains strong and vibrant spiritual community wherever they go. Consider, for example, Samson Fatokun's description of missionaries from a highly spiritual worldview bringing this worldview into a secular society:

⁴⁹Julie C. Ma, “Holistic Ministry of the Pentecostal Church,” in *Pentecostal Mission & Global Christianity: An Edinburgh Centenary Reader*, Younghoon Lee, Wonsuk Ma, and Kuewon Lee, ed., (Oxford: Regnum, 2018), 285.

⁵⁰Joshua Banda, “Engaging with the Community: The Fight Against AIDS,” in *Good News from Africa: Community Transformation Through the Church*, Brian Woolnough ed., (Oxford: Regnum, 2013), 41.

⁵¹Ma, “Holistic Ministry,” 285.

⁵²Ibid, 286.

⁵³Jehu Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and the Transformation of the West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), EPUB location, “Part I: The Limits of Experience and Experiencing the Limits.”

⁵⁴ Ibid, EPUB location, “Part I: The Limits of Experience and Experiencing the Limits.”

⁵⁵Harvey Kwiyani, “Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire: Stories of Young African Pentecostals Engaging Secularism in Europe,” in *Proclaiming Christ in the Power of the Holy Spirit: Opportunities and Challenges*, Wonsuk Ma, Emmanuel Anim, and Rebekah Bled., ed., (Tulsa: ORU Press, 2020), 355.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed a new form of Spirit-empowered evangelism in Europe and North America with the emergence of neo-Pentecostal churches in Nigeria whose members carried a new Evangelical zeal to European nations in their quest for fulfilling the mandate of the Great Commission . . . today several Nigerian pioneered Pentecostal church denominations are found in virtually every city in Europe, North America, Australia, and the Caribbean.⁵⁶

Whether these churches are able to evangelize beyond ethnic boundaries remains an open question and will take skill and require an adaptability reminiscent of Joseph of the Old Testament who was able to move from the position of slave to prophet to civic leader second only to the Pharaoh. J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu sees the resiliency of the African faith as God's strategic providence:

For Africa in particular, it is worth pointing out that Christian growth currently being witnessed in the continent may be God's way of preserving the heart of the message – the lordship of Jesus Christ – for a fresh advance in mission in the Northern continents where the faith has been in recession since the years of the Enlightenment.⁵⁷

Spirit-Empowered Witness in Latin America

As in Asia and Africa, prayer is a defining characteristic of Pentecostal mission in Latin America. Indeed, Miguel Alvarez states, "Pentecostals have learned to depend on prayer and fasting for most of their actions."⁵⁸ Emphasizing the communal nature of prayer, Mireya Alvarez describes community prayer as "foundational to the Pentecostal worldview"⁵⁹ and, by extension, a primary "engine" of courageous missiological engagement that Julie Ma states as the "key to the crucial elements for revival."⁶⁰ Prayer in, with, and through the Spirit integrates well with themes of liberation in Latin American culture. "Prayer has an

⁵⁶Samson A. Fatokun, "Evangelism Home and World: Nigerian Church with Islam and Internationalization," in *The Remaining Task*, Ma, Onyinah, and Bled, ed., 186.

⁵⁷J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "God Has Made Him Both Lord and Messiah . . .": An African Perspective on Christology and the Pentecost Day Message," in *Proclaiming Christ*, Ma, Anim, and Bled., ed., 188.

⁵⁸Alvarez, "Focusing on the People of the Margins," 145.

⁵⁹Mireya Alvarez, "The Impact of Evangelism and Prayer: Pentecostals in Central America with Emphasis on Guatemala and Honduras," in *The Remaining Task*, Ma, Onyinah, and Bled, ed., 319.

⁶⁰Ma, "Theology."

empowering quality since shared burdens are no longer individual struggles. The results are left to God. The believer is liberated to continue with the daily tasks of life.”⁶¹ Alvarez describes worship services as unbounded, following the emotional and sometimes ecstatic flow of the Spirit.⁶² In prayer, believers are equal before God regardless of their socio-economic status or gender. Mireya Alvarez notes the liberative corrective this sense and practice of equality gives to the element of machismo. As women gain confidence and take on significant leadership and discipleship roles in the context of the church, this has a discipling effect in the home and society.⁶³

Julie Ma states, “If Christ liberated all humanity, including women, on the cross, Pentecostals should endeavor to liberate women in every area of ministry.”⁶⁴ In Korea, Yoido Full Gospel Church’s thousands of cell groups are led by women, for example.⁶⁵ Richard Harding and Manuela Harding describe the Bogota, Colombia’s G12 network of missional discipleship, stating, “evangelism plus discipleship equals missions.”⁶⁶ Scholars, pastors, and other traditional experts have significant, even potentially prophetic roles to play in discernment; however, their role is to offer insight, encouragement, and support rather than to be the head of the funnel through which discipleship efforts flow. Indeed, in current discipleship movements across the globe, including Latin America, what can be seen is the democratization of “experts.”

Children, too, experience the emboldening effects of Spirit-identity through holistic mission efforts on their behalf. Mary Mahon describes the image of God being “marred” in the lives of vulnerable children because of the powerlessness of poverty.⁶⁷ However, Mahon also describes the transformation made possible through Spirit-empowered education, which includes teachers’ belief in student potential, students’ own assertions of agency and destiny, experiential spirituality, and empowering sacred stories.⁶⁸ Children given consistent, holistic, identity-

⁶¹Mireya Alvarez, “The Impact of Evangelism,” 319.

⁶²Ibid, 318.

⁶³Ibid, 319.

⁶⁴Ma and Ma, *Mission in the Spirit*, 206.

⁶⁵Darrin J. Rodgers, “Yoido Full Gospel Church: How Women Ministers Fueled the Growth of the World’s Largest Church,” November 2, 2017, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, <https://ifphc.wordpress.com/2017/11/02/yoido-full-gospel-church-how-women-ministers-fueled-the-growth-of-the-worlds-largest-church/>, date of access October 28, 2022.

⁶⁶Richard Harding and Manuela Harding, “Missional Spirituality of the Global G12 Network,” in *The Remaining Task*, Ma, Onyiah, and Bled, ed., 342.

⁶⁷Mary Kathleen Mahon, “Todo lo Puedo: The Empowerment of Children Born Into Poverty through ChildHope: A Case Study,” in *Good News to the Poor*, Ma, Onyiah, and Bled, ed., 209.

⁶⁸Ibid, 207–208.

transforming and skill-building education, can thrive in the power of the life-giving Holy Spirit. Giving the example of Spirit-empowered children praying for (and receiving!) divine healing,⁶⁹ Mahon describes an alternative narrative: “I am a child of God; it doesn’t matter what statistics about poverty predict for my life. I am a child of God, and I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”⁷⁰

Conclusion

This article has looked at examples of Spirit-empowered communities’ approaches to making disciples of all nations. Though examples from Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America have been discussed, this article has barely scratched the surface of the courageous and creative agency of contemporary Spirit-empowered missions in concert with the Spirit. Julie Ma states that Spirit-empowerment is “Pentecostalism’s treasured experience”⁷¹ which leads directly to mission. Yet, this treasure is held in tension. Spirit-empowerment invites individuals and communities into the paradox of weakness and powerlessness. Christ’s global family is invited into the tension of bearing witness to the one who spoke the galaxies into being and who gives and sustains all life, yet remaining grounded in full humility, accepting that without the Spirit’s enlivening, witness alone cannot bring transformation. Andrew Walls gives the pertinent reminder that the story of God’s rescue through global missions is a long one, with a good end:

Abraham is waiting for ‘us’ before he receives everything that was promised him. He must wait until the whole story of the people of God is complete. The generations belong together. They form one story that is not complete until every power that resists God’s kingdom is destroyed. Each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming, those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, so that God may be all in all.⁷²

Daniel Isgrigg poses the question, “What if the goal of reaching the whole world is not a prediction but rather a challenge to every generation

⁶⁹Ibid, 220.

⁷⁰Ibid, 221.

⁷¹Ma, “Theology.”

⁷²Andrew Walls, “Eschatology in the Western Mission Movement,” *Studies in World Christianity* 22:3 (2016), 199.

to take responsibility for reaching the world they have inherited?”⁷³ This challenge invites believers into an ongoing process of creative and courageous discovery in order for faith communities to continually ask the question, “how might the next group of people (culture, generation) best hear the gospel so that they have a fair chance of responding?”⁷⁴ The Spirit’s centrality is a gift, requiring ongoing dependence and submission to the Spirit for the sake of each believer’s ongoing transformation and for the transformation of the world.

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⁷⁴Michael Rynkiewich, *Soul, Self, and Society: A Postmodern Anthropology for Mission in a Postcolonial World* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 44.

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