Pentecostals and the Poor
Reflections from the Indian Context
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Author’s Preface

The immediate occasion for my reflection on this theme was an invitation from the Asia Pacific Theological Association [APTA] to address their General Assembly at Chiang Mai, Thailand, in the Fall of 2011. I was asked to present four lectures, reflecting on the topic of Power, Tradition & Social Engagement, with a focus on how these themes may be integrated in theological education and the equipping of leaders for ministry in Asia.

Although the theme was not my selection, it was not long before I found myself deeply absorbed in it for several reasons. To begin with, my personal spiritual journey had involved exposure to several older Christian traditions. My paternal grandfather was a Presbyterian minister in the German Basel Mission, which had a strong presence along the south west coast of India during the earlier years of Protestant missions in India. My parents, however, attended a Methodist Church during my growing years in the city of Bombay (now Mumbai) and later became members of an Evangelical Alliance Church. My schooling was in a Church of England school, but it was the Charismatic movement in Bombay that shaped my discipleship following my conversion at the age of seventeen. Later, I found my church home in the Assemblies of God.

My subsequent theological journey exposed me to influences from a wide variety of traditions, including Pentecostal, Brethren, Baptist, Reformed Anglican and Roman Catholic. Whenever I
heard references being made to the “Reformed” tradition or “Anglican” tradition or “Roman Catholic” tradition, I would often wonder whether it would be appropriate to speak of a “Pentecostal” tradition and, if so, how should it be described? My research led me to conclude that not only was it appropriate to refer to a Pentecostal tradition, but that despite some challenges of characterization posed by the diverse nature of the Pentecostal movement, the “traditioning” process was in fact an urgent necessity. Failure to do so in a timely manner could result in the emergence of inauthentic and inadequate depictions of the Pentecostal tradition that fail to fairly represent its roots and distinctives. These papers are a small contribution towards a broader ongoing global task that I trust more Pentecostal scholars will pay attention to in future.

A second reason this theme gripped my interest was because it brought together two of my deepest passions in ministry. My earliest years in ministry were spent as a grass-roots evangelist in the streets and slums of Bombay. I was engaged subsequently in church-planting efforts, first in downtown Bombay and then in a city in North India. When I joined the faculty at Southern Asia Bible College (now Centre for Global Leadership Development), Bangalore, it was because of the promise it held for raising leaders who would powerfully impact Christ’s Church-in-mission all across South Asia. After twenty-one years in institutional leadership training, we were called to a very unique pastoral ministry in Kolkata—a local church which served as the hub of a Mission with a strong social outreach across East India.

One of two questions that frequently had me preoccupied and with which I often struggled in the course of my mission engagement was: How should the relationship between evangelism and social concern be expressed in a way that is both biblically sound and optimizes missional impact? While I had reflected, taught and written on this issue on previous occasions,
reflecting on various sources from the perspective of my grass-roots experience in preparation for the APTA lectures helped me crystallize my thoughts on this critical issue with greater clarity and confidence than ever before. I was amazed to see how the Spirit-led intuitive responses of first-generation Pentecostals, who naturally and spontaneously blended social and evangelistic engagement, anticipated the more systematic formulations of Pentecostal theologians that have emerged in recent times. Pentecostals who have a genuine experience of the Spirit have always been moved by love to share the good news of Jesus and the same Spirit moves them to extend God’s compassionate concern for the poor, to feed the hungry, to reach out to the oppressed and so on.

The other question that was my constant preoccupation was: Is there anything distinctive about Pentecostal leadership training that is uniquely shaped by the Pentecostal experience of the Spirit? In other words, if there is a distinctive Pentecostal tradition that shapes Pentecostal social engagement and missiology, how does that impact Pentecostal leadership development? I believe that it should and does, and the final article in the series attempts to answer how that could happen.

I am grateful to the APTA leadership for providing the occasion for my reflection on this critical theme. I am also indebted to Dr. Dave Johnson of the APTS Press for the incentive and encouragement to publish these lectures. If they inform and bless the reader, in addition to those acknowledged in the footnotes, my thanks is also due to innumerable unnamed people whose teachings, writings and stories have shaped my reflection on the theme down through the years. To God alone be the glory!
Foreword

There are occasions, when a book comes along at a critical time, where the insights provided and foundations established through its publishing, fills a broad vacuum with new vision. Dr. Ivan Satyavrata has written just such a book at a critical moment where serious theological reflection about the Church’s engagement with the poor again requires recalibration. If readers will take seriously the sturdy scholarship and prophetic voice of Dr. Satyavrata, we will avoid the debilitating results of popular pop justice causes of the day that threaten to dissipate the Church’s witness with feel good activities that rob the fullest impact of Spirit-empowered ministry.

I think it is particularly appropriate that a Majority world leader would write such a theological corrective. The American propensity for the bifurcation of evangelism and social concern activities is again swinging the proverbial pendulum toward an out of balance point on the continuum. It is instructive that a Pentecostal leader, who lives in a context where Christianity is a distinct minority, is the author of such a book. With the stakes, increasingly higher, the Church must reflect Jesus fairly in word, deed and sign or cease to be a viable metanarrative. Dr. Satyavrata provides
us a clear pathway to vital demonstration of the viability of the Gospel in a tragically volatile global climate.

I believe that *Pentecostals and the Poor: Reflections From the Indian Context* will become a central resource, not only for our tradition, but for a 21st century Christianity that is growing exponentially around the world and values the Spirit-empowered life and ministry. This volume’s strength is focused around several critical elements: It has *missiological focus*, it is *contextually dynamic*, it exhibits *contemporary awareness*, it demonstrates *biblical and theological rootedness* and it affirms the *vitality of Pentecostal life*. Joined together, these foci yield a dynamic volume that is at once a scholarly treatise, while providing accessible inspiration to the broadest of interested readers.

*Missiological focus* is not the same as saying this is a book with a missions focus. Missiology is a discipline that works in the intersection of theology, social science and the history of Christian movements. It is not a function of current attempts to be *missional*, that all too often end up being so broad as to be ineffective in describing any ministry activity with particularity. Neither is it an attempt to build biblical foundations for our mission projects. Satyavrata’s missiological focus demonstrates what British scholar Christopher Wright calls a “missional hermeneutic”. In other words, we see the current events and trends of our world as the context in which God’s redemptive activity toward all creation is unfolding. As the Church continues the mission of Jesus, we take our awareness of the world through evaluative lenses such as social science *seriously*. We see the story of God’s mission through God’s people in their engagement with God’s work for the sake of the whole of
God’s creation in the Bible authoritatively. Pentecostals and the Poor is a clear and concise example of missiology done well.

This volume is contextually dynamic because the author has spent a lifetime among those people who are the objects of God’s redemptive concern. From being a street preacher in the poorest sections of Mumbai to leading significant ministries of compassion in Kolkata, this volume emerges from the real tragedy of humankind that is the daily experience of the author. The author acknowledges the particularity of his writing with sub-titles like Reflections From the Indian Context. This acknowledgement is not self-described delimitation, but affirmation of the legitimacy of the writing. This is not a book written in a conceptual vacuum, but the reflection of an author who has travailed through the volatility of humanity in its most desperate moments and settled in his heart that enduring and effective ministry to the poor must be rooted in the continuing ministry of Jesus through His Body, the Church.

This volume exhibits contemporary awareness, not only in its obvious interaction with contemporary events and realities. Additionally, Satyavrata demonstrates his clear identification with the moment in history that he stands, when he asks a most vital question: What do we need to do to effectively channel our Pentecostal legacy to the next generation? Using his long experience as evangelist, pastor, college president and renowned international scholar, the author considers the necessity of legacy. He affirms that theological education, framed for contemporary impact, is ultimately the steward of the Gospel. That stewardship includes how we interpret what was handed down to us, the
strategy and tools we use to disseminate or propagate that legacy in our lifetime and how we diligently apply ourselves to ensure its authentic to future generations. This is not a contemporary awareness that flashes shocking data to attract attention. This is contemporary awareness that understands the Christian faith as an historical reality that deserves serious reflection on where it is; where we have come from; where we are at present and how we may move into the future with clear connection to redemptive events that secure our legitimacy. This book is Ivan Satyavrata’s response to the necessity of channeling a Pentecostal legacy to the next generation.

Satyavrata’s *biblical and theological rootedness* affirms the belief that theology must emerge from ministry activity. Theology requires our spiritual discernment of the present tense of Jesus’ redemptive mission, continuing by the power of the Holy Spirit, that takes seriously participation in the messiness of human lives. In the context of humankind, that desperately needs the transforming power of Jesus Christ, the continuing work of the Spirit keeps in step with the redemptive plan of God seen most clearly in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the clearest and most complete picture of redemption humanity has ever seen and that narrative is authoritatively recorded in the Bible. Satyavrata makes obvious that the authoritative source for any Pentecostal scholar to understand the essential concept of what mission entails, is clearly the Bible. This is not an enterprise to find selected biblical texts by which to buttress one’s “cause du jour” marketed for popular applause. He is quite clear that if Pentecostals are truly to represent Jesus fairly to the poor the central theme of Scripture needs to be acknowledged in its
entirety. While seeing the trajectory of God’s redemptive mission clearly as the central theme of the Bible, Satyavrata sees the biblical narrative of the earthly mission of Jesus as the crucible for understanding the mission of the Church to live in the reality of the rule of God represented in the Kingdom of God.

Ivan Satyavrata clearly affirms his Pentecostal identity. He demonstrates a clear awareness of Pentecostal history with an informed sense of its global texture. He offers a very thorough explanation of what it means to be part of Pentecostal tradition. However, rather than isolating his Pentecostal identity from other Christian faith traditions through a discussion of Pentecostal *distinctives*, he demonstrates the maturity of a person who is confident in the legitimacy of his faith family while implicitly acknowledging it is but one of many Christian siblings. He offers us this demonstration of Christian maturity by describing the *affirmations of the vitality of Pentecostal life*. In the current milieu of global Christianity, “distinctives” usually describe practices and emphases that a faith tradition does which sets it apart. A discussion of “affirmations” demonstrates what practices and emphases that a faith tradition places its “accent marks” on. For example, the author says that a “theologically robust Pentecostal understanding of mission thus views mission in terms of *God’s ongoing redemptive project of extending his kingdom-rule to people of all nations as the Holy Spirit empowers the whole Church to take the whole gospel to the whole world*. As a Pentecostal I look at this statement and say Amen! That will preach! I also acknowledge, with just as enthusiastic an Amen, that this statement incorporates the language of the
Lausanne Covenant about the mission of the Church. That is why this book is so vital for both we who self-identify as Pentecostals and for those who can be enriched by the author’s understanding of mission, though they would not call themselves Pentecostals.

I admit that my brief description of *Pentecostals and the Poor* is biased. Ivan Satyavrata has been a friend for more than 20 years. Our families are close: we have stayed for extended visits in each other’s homes, though we live thousands of miles apart. We have traveled together and enjoyed close friendship that is a treasure we both hold dear. But my personal relationship with Ivan also enhances my deepest respect for the extraordinary mind and scholarship that is in full view in this volume. It is proper that reflections “from the Indian context” be instructive globally. It is time that we in the West listen to the voices of those who represent places in the world where the Gospel is most resisted and least accessible; largely because that is where followers of Jesus demonstrate a vibrant Spirit-empowered ministry that is the exemplar for 21st century Christianity.

Byron D. Klaus, President
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