

ENDUED WITH POWER:
THE PENTECOSTAL-CHARISMATIC RENEWAL
AND THE ASIAN CHURCH IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY¹

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It would not be too much to say that the Pentecostal-Charismatic renewal has taken the global Christian movement by storm in the twentieth century. And increasingly, much of Christianity in Asia is impacted by it in one way or another. This essay seeks to understand and reinterpret this movement from the perspective of the growth of the Christian church in Asia, and to understand in a deeper measure its strengths and weaknesses. It will conclude with some tentative suggestions of what it would take for the movement to remain at the heart of God's purposes for the Asian church in the twenty-first century.

1. Introduction

David Barrett, an editor of the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (2001), is one of the most authoritative observers of worldwide Christian growth. In his recent article titled "The Worldwide Holy Spirit Renewal,"² he notes that Pentecostals, Charismatics and neo-Charismatics have hit the worldwide Christian church like three simultaneous tidal waves in the twentieth century. These groups form some "27.7% of organized global Christianity" today, found "across the entire spectrum of Christianity,"

¹ This is a reprint of the author's chapter with the same title in *Truth to Proclaim: The Gospel in Church and Society*, Trinity Theological Journal Supplement, ed. Simon Chan (Singapore: Trinity Theological College, 2002), pp. 57-76. The publisher's gracious permission for reprint is acknowledged here. Minor editorial changes were made according to the Journal editorial style.

² David B. Barrett, "The Worldwide Holy Spirit Renewal," in Vinson Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal, 1901-2001* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2001), pp. 381-414.

and are “gaining momentum and size all the time.” Their impact can be observed in various ways. A majority of the fifty or so mega-churches in the world, each with over fifty thousand members belong to the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement. They have made serious penetration into the media world through radio, television, movies, literature, magazines, and the like. Financial giving in these churches is way above the global average (although giving to world missions is weak). And over one-third of the world’s “full-time” Christian workers are Pentecostals, Charismatics or neo-Charismatics. They are also in the forefront of the concern for world evangelization and together constitute the fastest growing segment of the church today.

What is true about the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement globally is no less true in Asia, which has the lowest percentage of Christians among the continents. Abundant evidence lends support to this. To begin with, this is clearly indicated by the following statistics on the Asian church for mid-AD 2000:³

Total population of the continent	3,697 Million
Number of Christians - Adherents	313 Million
Professing Christians	199 Million
Number of Charismatics-Pentecostals	135 Million ⁴

Classified under third wave neo-Charismatics are also included the following indigenous groups from different parts of Asia:

Filipino indigenous Pentecostals/Charismatics	6.8 Million
Han Chinese indigenous Pentecostals/Charismatics	49.7 Million
Indian indigenous Pentecostals/Charismatics	16.6 Million
Indonesia indigenous Pentecostals	6.8 Million
Korean indigenous Pentecostals/Charismatics	3.3 Million

The figures show that about two-thirds of all professing Christians in Asia are Pentecostals, Charismatics or neo-Charismatics. And a very high proportion of these are found within churches which arose out of indigenous Christian movements, rather than in traditional denominations brought from the west.

We see the same pattern in the growth of individual congregations. Hong Young-gi has pointed out that, of the fifteen mega-churches in

³ Barrett, “The Worldwide Holy Spirit Renewal,” pp. 388-91.

⁴ These consist of classical Pentecostals (5%), Charismatics (16%) and neo-Charismatics (79%).

Korea that have adult attendance of 12,000 and more, nine are Pentecostal-Charismatic churches. Denomination-wise, there are two Presbyterian, two Methodist, three Assemblies of God, one Unification Holiness and one Southern Baptist. And the largest of these, and possibly the largest in the world, is Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul under the Pentecostal Cho Yonggi which has a regular adult attendance of 230,000.⁵ In Metro Manila, Philippines, a recent study shows that eight out of the ten fastest growing congregations are Pentecostal-Charismatic.⁶ Similar observations would also apply in Malaysia and Singapore. A large majority of the fastest growing churches and a high proportion of the largest local congregations are Pentecostal-Charismatic in character.

A third set of evidence pointing to the strength of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement in Asia is that whenever there has been revival in recent years, “signs and wonders” which are so central to the movement have invariably played a crucial role. This is true of the Indonesian revivals of the 1960s and early 1970s, and also the *Sidang Injil Borneo* or Borneo Evangelical Church (S.I.B.) revivals in the 1970s. Perhaps the most significant has been the widespread revival of the church in China which has often been spurred on by miraculous healings and deliverance ministries. And these have not been restricted to the house churches only. Indeed even some of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement churches and magazines are reporting similar occurrences.⁷

The above evidence demonstrates clearly the widespread impact today of Pentecostalism on the global church in general, and within Asia in particular. But how is this movement to be understood in the context of the advance of the Asian church? Before answering this question, we need first to define the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement and clarify its identity more clearly.

⁵ Hong Young-gi, “The Backgrounds and Characteristics of the Charismatic Mega-Churches in Korea,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 3:1 (2000), pp. 99-118.

⁶ Jung-ja Ma, “Pentecostal Challenges in East and South-East Asia,” in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel*, eds. Murray W. Dempster, et al. (Oxford: Regnum, 1999), pp. 183-202 (196).

⁷ Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions: The Costly Revival* (London: Monarch Books, 1999), pp. 109-120.

2. Defining the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement within the Asian Church

Much of the existing literature on the subject follows the prevailing interpretation. This speaks of three successive waves of Pentecostal-Charismatic renewal hitting the worldwide Christian movement in the twentieth century. How valid is this?

2.1 The Three-Wave Theory of Pentecostal-Charismatic Origins

According to this approach, the first wave of classical Pentecostalism began on Jan 1, 1901 at Charles F. Parham's Bethel Bible School in the Topeka, Kansas. The subsequent revival of 1906-7 at Azusa Street, Los Angeles, under William J. Seymour, led to the spread of classical Pentecostalism to many countries through its missionaries. Out of this came the classical Pentecostal groups such as the Assemblies of God, Church of God, Foursquare Church and the like. They may not have a common position on all doctrines. But almost all would subscribe to the belief that all Christians need a baptism of the Holy Spirit which is distinct from and usually subsequent to conversion, and that speaking in tongues is *the* distinguishing mark of such a baptism.

The second wave came in the form of the penetration of Pentecostalism into the historic Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. This is the Charismatic movement which is perceived to have also originated primarily in the United States around 1960. Historically the origin of this movement is often attributed to Dennis Bennett, the Episcopal rector in Van Nuys, California, and author of the best seller, *Nine O'Clock in the Morning*. From there it spread to other denominations, including the Catholics, and eventually to the Eastern Orthodox Churches.

The third wave of renewal is often linked to John Wimber's ministry at Fuller Theological Seminary, beginning around 1981. This involves the neo-Charismatics, which includes vast numbers of independent and indigenous churches throughout the world. Most of these churches have no connections with classical Pentecostal or traditional mainline Protestant denominations. According to the figures quoted earlier from Barrett, neo-Charismatics form 79% of those in the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement in Asia today.

Thus, according to the three-wave theory, the Pentecostal-Charismatic renewal is perceived to have begun essentially in the United States with classical Pentecostalism. It then spread outwards into other parts of the world, first via first-wave Pentecostal missionaries, then via

the second-wave Charismatics and finally through third-wave neo-Charismatics. Although not everyone sees it this way, it has nonetheless been the predominant interpretation of the whole Pentecostal-Charismatic phenomenon accepted by most, not least its adherents in the non-western world. This interpretation, however, is now being challenged by different writers for various reasons.

2.2 The Weaknesses of the Three-Wave Theory

To begin with, this interpretation assumes that the primary identity of the global Pentecostal-Charismatic movement is found in its historical linkage to classical Pentecostalism's self-definition, in terms of a post-conversion experience of Spirit baptism as evidenced by speaking in tongues. But this doctrine, which is so central to the classical Pentecostalism derived from the experiences of Charles Parham and William Seymour, is itself being questioned from within. Most significantly, Gordon Fee, a highly respected evangelical New Testament scholar and an ordained Assemblies of God minister, has raised serious questions about whether the doctrine of an essential post-conversion experience of Spirit baptism evidenced by speaking in tongues can be sustained on biblical grounds. What must be noted is that he is not attacking the speaking of tongues nor the fact that many Christians experience the work of the Holy Spirit as classical Pentecostalism has defined it. But rather he suggests that not all Christians after conversion must experience the Holy Spirit in exactly the same way.⁸

Fee's critique has been further strengthened by writings from outside the classical Pentecostal tradition. Some scholars have argued that the belief, that all who are baptized in the Spirit must necessarily speak in tongues, cannot be sustained on exegetical grounds. Indeed many within the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement today do not place the same emphasis on tongues as classical Pentecostalism once did. If this is the case, then what is central to classical Pentecostalism's self-definition, namely, *the post-conversion experience of Spirit baptism leading to speaking in tongues*, cannot be taken as the defining characteristic of the whole Pentecostal-Charismatic movement today.

What then should be the defining characteristic of the whole Pentecostal-Charismatic movement today? I believe that what is increasingly being recognized as central today is the empowering work of the Holy Spirit leading to a recovery of apostolic signs and wonders in

⁸ Gordon Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), pp. 105-19.

the life and mission of the church. Understood this way, the three-wave theory, which sees everything flowing out of American classical Pentecostalism, will readily be seen as a schematized but highly inadequate interpretation. This is clearly demonstrated by the history of renewal both in the west and the rest of the world.

In the West, there were clear antecedents of the Pentecostal-Charismatic renewal even before the twentieth century. One of the most notable was the Catholic Apostolic Church of Edward Irving, beginning in London in 1831. Again, Pentecostal-Charismatic experiences like being “slain in the Spirit,” “holy laughter,” “jerking” and the like were known occurrences in Holiness Camp meetings in the nineteenth century American frontier. Going back further, early Methodism under John Wesley also manifested the phenomena of being “slain in the Spirit” and cases of healing as well. Jack Deere also unearthed evidence of prophecy exercised by Scottish Presbyterians during the sixteenth century Reformation.⁹ Other examples are also known.¹⁰ To see the movement as beginning with Parham and Seymour at the turn of the twentieth century is surely an oversimplification.

Further, scholars have also pointed out that the Pentecostal-Charismatic phenomenon has a multiplicity of beginnings in different cultures, and not just in the west. As Everett A. Wilson has noted, Pentecostalism is not just another American phenomenon which then became globalized in the twentieth century. Rather, it “has broken out or has been rediscovered or been appropriated recurrently since the beginning of this century—if not before.”¹¹ He therefore argues that the study of Pentecostalism,

[N]eed not focus exclusively on U.S. precedents, since...non-Western groups have cultivated their own analogous, cognate forms (including their own founders, origins and subcultures), but in a variety of settings, in different ways and with their own spiritual achievements. If they exhibit similar if not identical Pentecostal features, it is notable that they have never had more than the most tenuous ties to the North

⁹ Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Voice of God* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1996), pp. 64-78.

¹⁰ For a brief list of “signs and wonders” in the western church history, see John Wimber, *Power Evangelism-Signs and Wonders Today* (London: Hodder, 1985), pp. 151-66.

¹¹ Everett A. Wilson, “They Crossed the Red Sea, Didn’t They? Critical History and Pentecostal Beginnings,” in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism*, pp. 85-115 (107-108).

American institutions.... Because of their chronological priority and large and rapidly growing memberships, should non-Western movements not be considered in assessing the formative years of the movement?¹²

If this is the case, then non-western beginnings of the Pentecostal-Charismatic phenomenon must therefore be taken seriously in their own right, and assessed accordingly.

There is an abundance of evidence in support of non-western origins and contributions to the global Pentecostal-Charismatic movement. For example, many of the African Independent/Initiated Churches which came into being from the end of the nineteenth century onward definitely took signs and wonders seriously. These together with other African Christian movements certainly contributed much to the global Pentecostal-Charismatic movement. Within Asia, many Christian leaders in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century made similar contributions. Among these were names like John Christian Arroolappen in India and Pastor Hsi of China in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century we have the famous Brahmin woman convert, Pandita Ramabai, and Sadhu Sundar Singh in India, John Sung, the greatest evangelist and revivalist of China, and other lesser known figures.¹³ In the face of such evidence, no one-source theory of the Pentecostal-Charismatic renewal can stand.

This reinterpretation of Pentecostalism is also supported by others. For example, although David Barrett uses the “three waves” language in his analysis, he nevertheless understands it in a substantially different manner from those who take an Americo-centric view of Pentecostal-Charismatic history. Rather than the three *successive* waves of the prevailing three-wave theory, Barrett speaks instead of the three *simultaneous* waves of renewal impacting global Christianity. Further, he refers to the majority, those in the “third wave”, as non-white indigenous neo-Charismatics. These are described as “apparent/seemingly/largely pentecostal or semipentecostal members of *this 250-year old movement*

¹² Wilson, “They Crossed the Red Sea, Didn’t They?” pp. 109-110.

¹³ See Gary B. McGee, “Pentecostalism,” *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity*, eds. Scott W. Sunquist, et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 646-50 and also article by Hwa Yung, “Pentecostalism and the Asian Church,” in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Changing Face of Christianity in Asia* (forthcoming).

of churches indigenous to Christians in non-white races across the world, and begun without reference to Western Christianity.”¹⁴

2.3 An Alternative Interpretation of the Global Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement

It is evident from these considerations, that the traditional “three-waves-flowing-from-one-main-center” approach which still prevails in the minds of many people, is in need of serious modification. As a schematic way of seeing the work of the renewal by the Holy Spirit, the “three-wave” pattern applies reasonably well to the western churches. It also applies to churches in the non-western world which have been or are being strongly influenced by the changing patterns in churches in the west. Examples of these would be English-speaking urban churches in many parts of Asia, including Malaysia and Singapore. But when it comes to churches that do not have the same degree of contact with the west, it clearly becomes an arbitrary imposition which often hinders us from understanding the real dynamics at work in many non-western churches. The fact is that much of indigenous Christianity in Asia has often borne the marks of classical Pentecostalism, even though in many cases their origins were independent.

The real problem that we are wrestling with here is that of worldview. Western civilization in the past two to three centuries has increasingly accepted an anti-supernaturalistic worldview. Within such a worldview there is simply no place in which to fit the miraculous dimension, answers to prayer, the work of angels or demonic powers, and related ideas—the very realm where Pentecostalism makes its impact. Hence the modern western worldview became increasingly naturalistic in that the world can be understood without recourse to the spiritual realm. Many in the western church have accepted the western scientific worldview as a sufficient description of reality. These included both liberals and Evangelicals. Consequently they cannot cope with Pentecostalism and its acceptance of signs and wonders. It should also be noted that this worldview has infected many educated people in the non-western world, because they have received a thoroughly good western education—which has been described as the most powerful secularizing force in the modern world.

¹⁴ Barrett, “The Widespread Holy Spirit Renewal,” pp. 382, 390, 404. Italics mine.

This naturalistic worldview contrasts sharply with the supernaturalistic and more holistic worldviews that are found in most traditional non-western cultures. For example, many of us in Asia grew up accepting the supernatural, whether it is belief in spirits and charms, fortune-telling, *feng-shui*, spirit worship in temples, occultic practices of all kinds and so forth. There is no sharp dividing line between the natural and supernatural world. Indeed the two interpenetrate and are inseparable. For example, many non-Christian Chinese and Indians would go to both the doctors and the temple priests when they are sick! It is not one or the other, but both together will give maximum help and the quickest healing. Most non-westerners possess such a supernaturalistic worldview, which even a modern western scientific education could not fully eradicate easily. It is so much part and parcel of their cultural backgrounds. Consequently, a truly indigenous Christianity in Asia has to be supernaturalistic, and therefore Pentecostal-Charismatic!

We find in Asia and in other parts of the non-western world a most interesting mix as a net result. There is a very small minority of Christians who have been influenced by the modern western scientific worldview and liberal theology. They cannot cope with the renewal sweeping across much of Asia today. There is a second group that is far larger. They are theologically conservative or evangelical. But their western education and evangelical theology learnt from the west make it difficult for them to know what to do with signs and wonders. Their theology does not allow them to reject the supernatural because the bible takes the miraculous seriously. Yet many try to rationalize it away. But like the first group, they continue to reject the Pentecostal-Charismatic renewal.

This brings us to the third group. Most come out of the same background as the second group, and in some cases as the first. Their numbers are greatly increasing at the expense of those in the second group, although it is sometimes difficult to demarcate the two. But they can be found in almost every denomination, from the Roman Catholic to the Brethren. They have never been entirely comfortable with the western conservative or liberal theologies they were brought up in, because these are rooted in a worldview which is alien to their own cultures and to biblical Christianity. In moving into some Pentecostal-Charismatic version of Christianity, they are unconsciously laying claim to a recovery of their own indigenous Asian worldviews which take the supernatural seriously. While many have left their original denominations to join the fourth group (see below), others have stayed with the specific desire to bring renewal to their churches.

The fourth group consists of those who became Christians in Pentecostal denominations brought from the west, including the Assemblies of God, Foursquare Church and the like, as well the newer Charismatic independent churches. Some of the largest congregations belong to this latter category, like Full Gospel Assembly in Kuala Lumpur and Faith Community Baptist Church and City Harvest in Singapore.

Finally there is a fifth group consisting of those who belong to the churches who did not originate through direct western influence but through indigenous leadership, and whose theology has usually been open to signs and wonders. In China these include groups like the True Jesus Church, the Jesus Family and the house church movement. In places like Indonesia, they would include some of the churches which emerged out the revivals of the 1960s and 70s. In Malaysia and Singapore, probably the most notable would be the New Testament Church started by the Hong Kong actress, Kong Duen Yee, popularly known as Mui Yee, in 1963. Her ministry, which stressed the baptism of the Spirit and speaking in tongues, drew many followers, not least from Chinese Brethren churches. This movement resulted in the formation of a string of churches known by the names of their location: the Church of Penang, of Singapore, and so forth. It should be noted that, whereas most of these indigenous churches have remained in the mainstream of the Christian movement as shown by their adherence to the basic tenets of the faith found in the creeds, some are certainly in danger of extremism and heresy.

To sum up, what is seen as the resurgence of an evangelical and Pentecostal-Charismatic renewal today in Malaysia and Singapore is largely a coming together of the third, fourth and fifth groups in the life of the Asian church. It is the result of the Holy Spirit's work which began at different times, cultures and places. They are united together by their commitment to the Lordship of Christ and the authority of the Bible in life and belief, and their adherence to the foundational beliefs of the church as defined by the historic creeds. At the same time they are characterized by a common acceptance of the empowering of the Spirit, and his acts of signs and wonders in the life of the church. These streams of renewal are now coming together and coalescing in an amazing manner, both in Asia and many other parts of the world. It is *this complex, untidy and yet profound mix* that is being referred to when the term Pentecostal-Charismatic movement is used here.

3. The Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement in Asia Today: Impact and Problems

The Pentecostal-Charismatic movement in Asia is therefore by no means a unified one. Some things and beliefs are commonly shared. Yet even within these commonalities can be found wide-ranging positions. To begin with, churches identified with this movement would generally be theologically conservative. But this conservatism can range from rigid fundamentalism to open Evangelicalism. Almost all the churches in the movement tend towards less structured and free worship, but some would take the best of other spiritual and liturgical traditions with much more seriousness than others. All would be open to the speaking of tongues. But some would follow the classical Pentecostal doctrine of insisting on a post-conversion Spirit baptism accompanied by tongues, whereas others would interpret the New Testament evidence quite differently. All would affirm to the exercise of the spiritual gifts like prophesy and healing. But the manner in which these are exercised would vary considerably within the movement. Again, whereas all would take the deliverance ministry seriously, yet the practice of “spiritual warfare” would range from the cautious to the bizarre.

Given this complex mix, how then are we to assess the movement today? We will begin by noting the impact of the movement on the church as a whole, before looking at some of the problems.

3.1 The Impact of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement in Asia

Earlier in this essay, we noted in different ways the impact of the movement upon revival and church growth throughout much of Asia at different times during the past century. We see further that the impact clearly continues today in, for example, the large growing congregations in cities like Seoul, Manila and Singapore, and the wild-fire growth of the house churches in China. Simply put, with some two-thirds of Asian Christians being caught up in the renewal, one cannot understand the church in Asia today without coming to terms with the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement.

The second significant impact of the movement on the Asian church is found in the recovery of New Testament teachings on the empowering of the Holy Spirit and the release of spiritual gifts in the churches today. As already noted, owing to the impact of modernity, western Christianity has tended to ignore the miraculous in the past. Thus many western missionaries to Asia in the last century had relatively little to say on the

prophetic and healing gifts, or deliverance from demonic bondage that came through idol worship, use of charms, witchcraft and other similar occultic practices. By drawing attention to these things and emphasizing their proper usage, the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement has helped Asian Christians to address certain “felt needs” in Asian cultures. For example, many non-Christians in Asia regularly go to fortune-tellers to seek guidance in life, and to temple mediums and priests for healing and deliverance from demonic powers. It is when the church demonstrates that in Christ we have far better and more lasting answers to these “felt needs” in our lives that the non-Christian will begin to pay serious attention to the gospel! Consequently, it is often through the ministry of prophecy, healing and deliverance that the church has made the most significant evangelistic inroads in Asia.

Related to this is the strong emphasis on worship and prayer found within the movement. It should be pointed out however that this is not a uniquely Pentecostal-Charismatic characteristic. The history of the Asian church shows that other groups at different times have also placed tremendous emphasis on these. For example, Korean churches, whether Pentecostal-Charismatic or not, have done so regularly throughout much of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, it would seem correct to say that those within the movement today have tended to be more consistent and passionate in their practice of worship and prayer than those outside. This would certainly be true in the Malaysia-Singapore region.

Because many churches caught up in this movement tend to be independent and congregational, they are not bound by the denominational, and generally more rigid, structures of the traditional churches such as the Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Mar Thoma and the like. Further, the acceptance of the New Testament teaching on spiritual gifts and “body life” in the church has released countless ordinary church members for effective ministry, instead of always depending only on the “full-time” pastor. Churches in the movement are thus able to manifest much greater flexibility in structures, pragmatically adjusting them to the needs of ministry and mission. This flexibility is certainly one key reason for the faster growth of such churches, and thus constitutes a fundamental challenge to some of the outdated denominational structures of the traditional churches. Where traditional churches have been able to break out of their rigid denominational structures, especially through the use of small groups, they too have been able to grow much faster.

One other way in which the movement has had a major impact on Asian churches is that it has unintentionally brought about a lot of

cooperative efforts between churches at the grassroots level. These cooperative efforts affect not just independent churches but often all churches caught up in the renewal movement, whether denominational or independent. This is true whether it is about big city or area-wide rallies, or about cooperation between a few churches in a small locality. It also happens at meetings like the Full Gospel Businessmen lunches or regional conventions, which are not church-based. There may be differences in church polity and in doctrinal details, but the existence of a common evangelical theology, shared Pentecostal-Charismatic distinctives, a passion for the gospel and a Spirit-empowered life is often sufficient to bring about such popular or grassroots ecumenism. By effecting such cooperation between Christians, the Pentecostal-Charismatic renewal has succeeded admirably where organized ecumenical efforts have often miserably failed. One important lesson for the church may well be that such a success at popular ecumenism is often the result of a common concern for the gospel and revived Christian lives, rather than of organized efforts at cooperation for its own sake.¹⁵

3.2 Problems within the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement

The fact that the renewal movement is strongly impacting the life of the Asian church in a positive way does not mean it is without problems. What are some of these?

One of the central defining characteristics of the Pentecostal-Charismatic renewal is that it is the faith of apostolic signs and wonders, with a robust emphasis on the power and gifts of the Spirit. Yet, one recurring criticism of the movement is that its emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit is often not matched by a corresponding emphasis on the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). To be fair, among the churches in Malaysia and Singapore, this weak emphasis on holy living and the fruit of the Spirit is not peculiar to churches in the Pentecostal-Charismatic tradition, but is fairly widespread across the board. But it remains true that within the renewal movement, concern for spiritual gifts and “anointing” often overshadows the concern for holiness and the pursuit of Christian character.

¹⁵ It is of interest to note that in the eighteenth century Evangelical Revival in England, such “popular ecumenism” at the grassroots was regularly observed among the Baptists, Congregationalists and Methodists, all of which were impacted by the revival and growing steadily. See Alan D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740-1914* (London & New York: Longmans, 1976), pp. 58-59.

Further, the apparent success of the movement in attracting large numbers has often blinded the eyes of its leaders to the centrality of the cross in New Testament teaching on Christian life. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23; cf. Matt 16:21; Mark 8:31; John 12:24). Despite the fact that this emphasis on costly discipleship is found throughout the New Testament, many preachers choose to preach a gospel of "health and wealth" instead. One preacher, who was strongly stressing the theme of blessing, was asked what he thought of Jesus' teachings on sacrifice and the cross. His reply was instructive: "It is for the special minority who has been specially called to suffer. The promise of blessing applies to the rest of us." How convenient! But the fact is that he would not be the only preacher who thinks in this manner. Otherwise, why would this theme be so rarely taught in our churches?

The sad result is that the financial excesses and moral problems sometimes associated with some of the TV evangelists are being actually replicated right before our eyes. And the power of God manifested through the movement, which ought to lead us to an increasing sense of awe and reverence of the living God, has often given rise to a success mentality and a sense of self-seeking pride in one's achievements (or the church's) instead. The success of one's personal organization or church and self-promotion sometimes seem to take precedence over the advancement of the wider work of the kingdom of God. Claims to importance and fame go from the sublime to the ridiculous. One pamphlet advertising a seminar in Kuala Lumpur some time back described the lady American speaker as one whose "accomplishments in world evangelism are unequalled among Christian women leaders"! Can you beat that?

A second problem often observed is that the strong emphasis on the work of the Spirit results in the renewal movement being so experience-centered that the word of God often ends up being neglected. It is not that those in the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement do not take the Bible seriously. Rather, they often do not pay enough attention to the diligent study of the word to interpret it properly. Thus biblical truth is sometimes compromised within the movement by default. This weakness is manifested in various ways, not least in the insufficient emphasis on holiness, Christian character and the cross already noted above.

Another example is found in teachings on spiritual warfare. It is to the credit of the movement that it has rightly challenged the church to rethink the importance of this subject, in the face of the unbelief of much of the western church towards demonic powers. Yet, in the process of

doing so, some have definitely gone to wild extremes. Witness the tendency in some circles to see demons everywhere, or some of the bizarre ideas thrown around on spiritual mapping. One visiting Pentecostal pastor spoke with a sense of unbelief about an encounter with the wife of a cell-group leader in one of the large Charismatic churches in Kuala Lumpur. She had said to him that the devil bites her every night and she wanted to know what can be done! Some reflective Christian teachers have suggested that, in trying to get away from the rationalistic mindset of modernity that has so crippled western Christianity, some advocates of spiritual warfare are in danger of ending up with a Christian animism and superstition. Surely the one way to avoid this is to ensure that our theological thinking and pastoral practice are more firmly anchored to sound biblical teaching.

The same problem is sometimes seen in the exercise of the prophetic gift. There is no doubt that there have been times when individuals and churches have been wonderfully blessed by those with genuine and powerful prophetic gifting. But there are also those who claim to be prophets who are careless and presumptuous at best, or mere charlatans at worst. A good example is the highly irresponsible “prophecy” that was sent out on the internet recently, concerning a terrible earthquake which was to have befallen Singapore on October 21, 2001. This illustrates yet again what has been regularly been observed in church history: that experience-centered forms of Christianity inevitably tend towards extremism and heresy. Jack Deere who has written one of the most helpful books on the prophetic gift, *Surprised by the Voice of God*, notes sadly that “the church has encouraged a silent divorce between the Word and the Spirit.”¹⁶ The only way to overcome this divorce is to always hold prophecy and the careful exposition of the word together.

A third problem concerns church structures. Earlier it was pointed out that churches in the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement, with their emphasis on the spiritual gifting of the laity and greater organizational flexibility, are rightly posing a fundamental challenge to the moribund structures of more traditional churches. This is something for which we must be thankful. At the same time, the question that must be asked is, “What structures are we replacing the old ones with?” Put in another way, are the new wineskins that we using compatible with the new wine of the renewal? Or, are the new wineskins merely different versions of

¹⁶ Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Voice of God* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1996), p. 358.

the old ones? Space does not permit a full discussion to be entered into here. But I will simply raise a few questions here.

First, for many in the movement the modern mega-church is the model for the church. But is this model really suited for instilling discipleship and building community? Making disciples requires personal mentoring, as the examples of Jesus and Paul so clearly demonstrate. Building community requires the growth of deep and trusting personal relationships. Is the mega-church really suited for these processes? It should be noted that in South Korea while mega-churches abound, the church today is in decline, and nominalism is one of the key problems. It would appear that if the mega-church model is still a worthwhile one to pursue, then some serious rethinking on its internal structures is necessary.

Some would reply to the above questions by arguing that the answer to the concerns raised is the cell-church. I believe that this answer does have some validity—if we define our cell-church objectives clearly. But I am not convinced that this is so with many of the cell-churches today. If you ask what functions the cells or small groups are meant to play, the invariable answer is evangelism and discipleship. But if you analyze the programs of the cell groups properly, you will invariably find that the emphasis is tilted towards the former—because numbers is the bottom-line. Now every cell is meant to grow by splitting every six months to a year. If so, how do you build community when personal relationships are torn apart by the frequent splits even before they have had time to deepen? Further, discipleship results from close mentoring, openness, and honesty that again require trust and deep relationships. However, how can that happen when the very structures, which are meant to enhance discipling, militates against it?

A second major issue concerning structures is that increasingly among these churches, the pastor is defined as the CEO, a model borrowed from modern management theories. Now it goes without saying that in the modern world, good management is absolutely essential to the building of a church. But the question is, which is the primary model for the pastor? Is it the CEO, or is it the shepherd and teacher modeled by Jesus in the gospels? It is interesting to note how “senior pastors” in many of these churches become increasingly authoritarian as their churches grow. Thus what starts as a renewal movement, challenging moribund and stifling structures, can often end up producing little “popes” and “bishops” who rule as monarchs in their little kingdoms! Why? Because we forget Jesus’ rejection of leadership models borrowed from the world around us: “Not so with you. Instead

whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all” (Mark 10:43).

A fourth problem with the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement today is that its success has sometimes led to its thinking that it possesses in itself all the necessary grace and gifts for the work of the kingdom of God. Consequently it often lacks appreciation for other Christian traditions and their strengths. Yet, Richard Foster in his latest book, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of the Christian Faith*,¹⁷ reminds us that the Pentecostal-Charismatic tradition is only one of six broad traditions of spirituality which find their roots in the bible. The others are the contemplative, holiness, social justice, evangelical and incarnational traditions. At different times and in different ways in the history of the church, they have all impacted the church and the world in significant ways. It is when it learns to appreciate and appropriate the strengths of other traditions that the present renewal movement will fully come into its own.

4. The Pentecostal-Charismatic Renewal and Asian Christianity in the Twenty-first Century

We come finally to the question of whether the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement will continue to have a significant impact on the church in Asia in the coming years. The answer would appear to be that, if the movement is to come increasingly into the center of God’s will and deepen its impact on the church in Asia, certain remedial actions need to be taken. The Pentecostal-Charismatic tradition is only one among a number of different spiritual traditions that God has used in history. But that is something that many in the movement have not understood. If the present renewal can learn this important lesson, and allow the other traditions to effectively complement its own strengths and offset its weaknesses, the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement will certainly impact the Asian church in an even deeper manner in the days ahead. What would this entail?

For a start, with a spirituality that is strongly activist, the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement will need to learn a deeper and more reflective prayer life from the contemplative tradition. It will benefit immensely from the latter’s emphasis on waiting upon God, meditation,

¹⁷ Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Waters: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (London: Fount, 1998).

honest self-examination before God of one's innermost motives, and the purifying fire of God's love. This form of spirituality is notably exemplified by the Desert Fathers and the best of the monastic tradition. But we can also find it in the life of people like the great Indian Christian saint, Sadhu Sundar Singh, who also had very charismatic spirituality and whose ministry had such a significant impact on the Indian church.

It will also need to draw upon Pentecostalism's own historical roots in Methodism and the Holiness movement to find the necessary spiritual resources to form a holy people for God in Asia today. We need to remember that Jesus warns us in no uncertain terms that signs and wonders themselves are no guarantee of a genuine spirituality or, for that matter, our salvation (Matt 7:21-23). Earlier we raised some questions concerning the modern cell-church movement. It is important to note that the use of small groups in the modern period owes much of its inspiration to the class and band meetings of the eighteenth century Evangelical Revivals under John Wesley. Yet there is a vital difference between Wesley's use of his class meetings, and the way many cell-church gurus use cells today. For the latter, despite the explicitly stated purpose of cells, the bottom-line ultimately is numbers growth. However, for Wesley, the primary purpose of classes was always the pastoral nurture of his people in their growth in "scriptural holiness." Do we wonder why the Methodist revival went on for about a hundred years, as one of the longest sustained revivals in church history?

Further, it will also reach back to the Reformation roots of its Evangelicalism to recover afresh the centrality of the Bible in the life of the church, together with the ideal of godly scholarship. Experiences of God's power are wonderful. But when they become more important than the word of God, heresies start to creep in! The calling of the church back to the authority of the Bible was the single most important contribution of the sixteenth century Reformers like Luther and Calvin to the church universal. But they did more than just to emphasize the finality of the word. They pioneered careful methods of study and biblical interpretation, and taught systematically from the Bible. By their lives of godly scholarship and prayer, they set biblical truths free to bring revival to a spiritually, morally and doctrinally corrupt church.

But the teachings of the Reformers went further than that. Scholars have noted that it was their theology that laid the foundation for the beginning of modern science, and the development of the "Protestant work ethic." These helped generate wealth and brought economic prosperity to those countries that adopted it. Their teachings also contributed significantly to the development of modern-day democracy,

with its concern for human rights, the equality of all men and women before God, and the checks and balances in government to prevent corruption and the abuse of power. This is no small achievement when we note that these are all foundational ideas upon which the world of today has been built.¹⁸

If today's renewal movement is to impact the Asia of tomorrow similarly, it must shed its legacy of anti-intellectualism and get down to serious biblical and theological homework. Only then can it demonstrate to the world that the gospel has answers for the toughest intellectual questions of our time. Thankfully there are signs that this is happening among some Pentecostal scholars in Asia today, especially those from the Assemblies of God.

Again, it will draw on the social justice tradition in order to develop a more sensitive social conscience, identify with God's concern for the poor and oppressed, and help make Asian societies more just and godly. It will allow the incarnational tradition to teach us how to bring God's presence and the imitation of Christ into our homes, work and the world. And it will allow the various streams of spirituality, working together, to bring us to the point of authentic self-denial, total commitment and simplicity of life, which is what the path of radical discipleship requires. Without these things, the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement will not be able to cope with the seduction of money and the over-abundance of material wealth that the twenty-first century will bring to many in the church in Asia.

One final thought. Up to this point, many in the renewal movement today are looking primarily to western models for inspiration in our lives and ministry. What many do not realize is that almost all that we can learn from the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement in the west, can be learned from the lives and teachings of some great Asian heroes of faith. These include people like Sadhu Sundar Singh and Baht Singh of India, Pastor Hsi and John Sung of China, and Petrus Octavianus, one of the key leaders of the Indonesian Revival. In present-day charismatic language, these men were certainly as "anointed" as any of the visiting preachers from the west, if not much more. At the same time, they combined outstanding demonstrations of "signs and wonders" in their ministries with a strong biblical stress on holiness of character and sacrificial living. They serve as far better role models for us than many of the dispensers of the prosperity gospel today. Thus in the lives and

¹⁸ See, e.g., Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 218-35.

teachings of such men and women, there is a well-spring of largely untapped spiritual resources that can be drawn upon to help sustain the present renewal movement today, and move it forward to greater heights tomorrow.

As we peered into the twenty-first century, all the signs indicate that the church in Asia will play an increasingly prominent part in world Christianity and global mission. Numbers will continue to grow, and in some cases exponentially. Certainly our desire is that the Pentecostal-Charismatic renewal will mature, and thereby impact the Asian church even more powerfully in the future. But one thing we must do is never to take God for granted. God may use us today and someone else tomorrow. No one is indispensable, and none may assume a monopoly on the Holy Spirit! The people of Israel in Samuel's time had to learn the lesson of "*Ichabod*.... 'The glory has departed from Israel'" (1 Sam 4:21). Whenever unfaithfulness prevails, God's glory leaves. The same lesson was impressed upon Israel in Ezekiel's time. As judgement came upon Jerusalem because of its persistent lack of repentance through the centuries, "the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple" (Ezek 10:18). God's glory comes, and God's glory goes! A lot depends on his people. Are we keeping in step with the Spirit (Gal 5:25)?