

PENTECOSTAL WORSHIP IN ASIA:
ITS THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS¹

Wonsuk Ma

1. Introduction

The growth of Pentecostal Christianity in the second half of the twentieth century, particularly in non-western continents, has been the object of a stream of studies from a variety of perspectives: theological, sociological, historical, psychological, contextual and missiological. The publication of *World Christian Encyclopedia* by David Barrett (1982 and 2001) and his annual updates in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* have continually provided a trajectory of the global Christian movement, including Asian Pentecostal churches. Also in the last decade or so, studies on Asian Pentecostalism have progressed remarkably. The launching of the *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* signaled serious academic reflection among Asian Pentecostals, and the publication of its supplement series is another important development in Asian Pentecostal studies. The formation of the Asian Pentecostal Society in 1998 was another important step towards networking among emerging Asian Pentecostal minds.

Pentecostal worship in Asia is an incredibly complex subject. It is in fact a contextualization process on a daily basis, as several important elements shape how one congregation worships in a given location and context.

The first element is the spiritual and theological tradition of Pentecostalism as it was introduced to them. Interestingly, although it is

¹ The first draft of this study was presented at the 40th International Ecumenical Seminar, Strasbourg, France, on July 5-12, 2006. I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Kenneth Appold, the Director of the Ecumenical Institute, Strasbourg, France, A revised version is to be published under the same title in Siga Arles, ed., *Theological Education Bridging the Ecclesial and Academia: Essays in Memory of Rev. Derek Tan* (Singapore: Asia Theological Association, 2007).

claimed that North America is the source of the tradition, it is not that simple. For example, in many parts of Asia, understandably North American, often Azusa Street Mission Pentecostal missionaries brought the new message. But, in some areas, European Pentecostal missionaries from England and Finland were active, while in Korea, the first group of national workers, who worked under the first North American Pentecostal missionary, was trained in Japan.

Second, the local spiritual milieu greatly alters the original form of spirituality. Whether it is Christian or not, Asia is rich in spiritual awareness and every Asian religion has a good dose of spiritual beliefs and practices. This explains why Chinese Christians practice different forms of spirituality, including worship, from let's say, an Indian counterpart. This has, in part, to do with the religio-cultural soil of a given location. For another example, a powerful revival took place in Korea in 1904-1907, prior to the arrival of the first Pentecostal missionary, and several forms of spiritual exercises had already been shaped. These include the daily early morning prayer meeting, unison prayer in loud voices, repentance as the mark of the Spirit's presence, and others.

The third is the changing social context of the congregation shaping their spiritual tradition, which in turn influences how they worship. Political, economic, and social situations easily condition one's prayer, selection of songs, and even the mood of worship. Affluent Singaporean Pentecostal worship is radically different from how people in a Chinese house church network worship and this can be explained by their social context, among others. What I try to illustrate here is the diversity in Pentecostal life and worship in Asia.

In spite of the formidable nature of this study, I will attempt to deduce a set of common features of Pentecostal worship in Asia in the following way. First, I am selecting an Asian Pentecostal church that may provide a reasonable model for Asian Pentecostal worship. Through a descriptive presentation, an example of Pentecostal worship in Asia is introduced. This church or its particular worship service we are going to observe is, by no means, a perfect example or representation of Asian Pentecostal churches, but nonetheless, it will serve as the starting point for our discussion. Then secondly, based on an observation of the sample Pentecostal worship, as well as many other Pentecostal churches that I have observed, several characteristics will be discussed. In this process, we will use Albrecht's illuminative study.² Also coming into play in this

² Daniel E. Albrecht, "An Anatomy of Worship: A Pentecostal Analysis," in *The Spirit and Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Russell P. Spittler*, eds. Wonsuk Ma and Robert P. Menzies (London: T. & T. Clark, 2004), pp. 70-82.

general characterization is the socio-religious context of Asian Pentecostals. Any unique features of Asian Pentecostal worship, particularly in comparison with non-Pentecostal churches, surrounding this sample church will be discussed. Interwoven with the characterization are the theological presuppositions and, often implicit, theological motivations that produce certain distinct features of Asian Pentecostal worship. Also in discussion is the contribution of worship experience to the formation of Asian Pentecostal theology. Thirdly, I will move to the correlations between worship and theology, with a concluding proposal for the healthy future of Asian Pentecostalism.

2. A Visit to All the Gospel Church, San Fernando, La Union, Philippines (June 4, 2006)

San Fernando (population: 115,605 in 2002 projection),³ a port city by the South China Sea in the archipelago of the Philippines, is a major financial, political and commercial center of what is called Region I (estimated population for 2005 as 4,481,820),⁴ an administrative region comprising several provinces predominantly speaking the Ilocano dialect. This region is also known for its strong presence of the Roman Catholic Church and Aglipayan (Philippine Independent Church), the national version of the Catholic Church.

Established in January, 1988 in a rented second floor of a deserted commercial building, the All the Gospel Church has steadily grown under the leadership of Rev. Conrado Lumahan. He currently serves not only as Senior Pastor of this church and its 20 daughter churches in nearby towns and villages, but also as Superintendent of the Northern Luzon District Council of the Philippines Assemblies of God, the largest Protestant denomination in the country. He received a good theological education, which is a growing trend among Asian Pentecostals, through Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, a premier Pentecostal school in Asia. He has finished the Master of Divinity and Master of Theology degrees and is presently studying toward the Doctor of Ministry degree from the same school.

They have two Sunday morning worship services at 9:00 and 10:30 a.m. More people (around 150) attend the first service than the second one (around 120). I normally participate in the second worship service, partly

³ City of San Fernando, "Baseline Profile" (<http://www.sanfernandocity.gov.ph/quick.html>), Access: June 23, 2006.

⁴ National Statistics Office, "Summary of Projected Population by Region, by Single-Year Interval, Philippines: 1995-2005" (<http://www.census.gov.ph/data/sectordata/popproj09.txt>), Access: June 23, 2006.

because this one has less time constraints (especially when I preach). By the time the first gathering is about to end, early comers for the second one experience the highlights of the first service.

Their Sunday morning service began with what is called "worship," that is singing with a call to worship. After a short prayer inviting God's presence among them, a group of musicians and singers lead more than a half-an-hour segment. One can hardly see any clergy as being a part of this section. The songs are highly "contemporary," such as the music by Hill Song of Australia. The atmosphere is lively and the music is loud with electric guitars, a keyboard and a drum set. Incidentally, all the music team members are either in their teens or twenties, with one leader perhaps in his early thirties. There is no traditional church music instrument such as a piano and organ; and several young girls dance with cymbals in their hands. There is no hymn book, and songs are projected through an overhead projector. Most of this time, the congregation not only stands, but also clap and raise their hands, and some even dance. Between songs, often a spontaneous prayer and praise burst forth and the whole congregation freely joins in with their own prayers in a loud voice, and the leader seems to guide the congregation through this process. During the singing session, the auditorium becomes filled with young and old members and visitors. After many fast and lively songs, toward the end, a little slower song is introduced to calm the heightened atmosphere, evidently to prepare the audience for reflection and listening to the Word of God. This celebrative session comes to an end with a loud round of applause and shouts of "Amen."

The second portion of the service began with the pastor giving a welcome remark and a report on the recent missionary trip to Malaysia and Cambodia. His report is met by an excited response from the audience; he also makes several announcements. And, just before he proceeds to his preaching, he acknowledges the presence of new members.

However, this portion of the service is dedicated to sharing the word of God. And typically, although not on this particular day perhaps due to time constraints, this portion is further divided into two periods: testimonies by several members of the congregation, normally not prearranged, and the proclamation of the word by the preacher. Pastor Conrado Lumahan reads almost the entire chapter of Acts 2. Noting that it is Pentecost Sunday, his message traces the appearance of God in the Old Testament through "fire," and then the presence of the "tongues of fire" on the day of Pentecost. Frequently repeated are words such as "fire," and "empowerment," and placing emphasis on the "empowering aspect" of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. The preaching was quite long, almost an hour. And yet, the response of the congregation was active with an

occasional "Amen," as well as various expressions, such as the nodding of their heads in agreement and clapping their hands. In fact, toward the end of the sermon, the audience enthusiastically responded in unison with "Amen." The sermon is concluded with the entire congregation standing and joining in the pastor's prayer for the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the sign of speaking in tongues. The prayer eventually turns into a communal prayer as the audience is divided by threes and fours and prays for one another, particularly for the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

At other times, the church has a long "altar service," when people are invited to come forward for prayer, often to respond to the message just preached. In addition, people come forward for prayer for healing, baptism in the Spirit, and for various other needs. The ministers lay their hands on the heads and offer special prayer, and this is often accompanied with expressed responses from the people, including sobbing, raising of hands, crying, or even "slaying in the Spirit." This is the time when various spiritual gifts are best exercised, such as a word of knowledge, speaking in tongues, interpretation, prophecy, healing, casting out of demons, etc. The entire congregation spends a good 20-30 minutes for this characteristically Pentecostal part of worship.

The next segment of the service may be termed a "koinonia" time. First, is the recognition of birthday celebrants; on this Sunday, about six or seven come to the front. After the congregation sings "Happy Birthday to You" (not necessarily a Christian song!), the pastor prays for God's blessings upon them. I recognized that this is not necessarily a "Pentecostal" feature as many Pentecostal churches do not have this part in their service.

Then, after the collection of offerings and tithes, the pastor pronounced a benediction through an elaborate prayer of God's blessings, along with a commitment to reach out to our own neighbors. What is also noted is his prayer for his members to speak in tongues in order to live a powerful Christian life. The facial expressions of the people indicate their enthusiastic reception of the prayer of blessing. The entire worship ends with a burst of applause and another time of joyous singing. The service lasts close to two hours.

3. Characteristics and Theological Reflection

In a number of ways, this worship service represents a typical Pentecostal worship. It contains all the three major "foundational clusters or rites: the worship and praise rite... the sermon or biblical-pastoral message rite, and the later response rite."⁵ Also in agreement is all the "values,

⁵ Albrecht, "An Anatomy of Worship," p. 78.

expressions, and sensibilities," some of which we will discuss. Several characteristics noted in the worship of All the Gospel Church, as well as in many other Asian Pentecostal churches, will be enumerated, particularly in comparison with traditional or evangelical churches in Asia. I will try to bundle them under several headings. For each, I will attempt to offer its theological rationale, as commonly held by Pentecostals, although seldom explicated.

3.1 Intensity and Liveliness

Perhaps the most striking element in Pentecostal worship is its intensity and liveliness, often represented by verbal expressions and body movements. In the worship we just observed, such characteristics are abundant in every segment of it. The "worship and praise" is characteristically intense and lively with plenty of body motions, lively music, dances, lifted hands, clapping of hands, and even jumping by some members. The message part is again lively, not only by the preacher's enthusiastic communication with constant motions and body movements (including walking across the pulpit), but also by the response of the congregation. The last part is much like a celebration which prompts more expressive response from the congregation.

When I first attended a small Pentecostal church in a Korean city, after having spent my early teen years in a small town, but in a large Presbyterian church, my first impression was of its "noisiness." They enthusiastically prayed loud, sang loud, and clapped their hands (which people in my previous church never did). For example, we were expected to be reverently silent during the preaching in the previous church; but, in the Pentecostal church, we were now expected to respond to particular segments of the message with a loud "Amen," "Hallelujah" or even with exuberant hand clapping.⁶

This intensity and liveliness may have come from at least two theological orientations. In Pentecostal worship, there is a high expectancy of experiencing God. Both "expectancy" and "experience" can immediately prompt enthusiastic responses. God is never abstract, but concrete; He is never static, but dynamic. And particularly to Asians, a deity is always acting, either bringing curses or blessings, thus constantly interacting with humans, deeply involved in human affairs. Many Asians coming from other religious backgrounds, although quite different in the case of the Philippines, may have gone through the process of functional substitution

⁶ Albrecht, "An Anatomy of Worship," p. 78 calls this and similar oral or verbal expressions "sacred expletives."

in their Christian development. Their new God is to interact with his worshipers, listening to their prayers, responding to their worship and providing for their needs, which is quite different from the version of Christianity which western missionaries once propagated, except for Pentecostalism.

Another theological reasoning for this liveliness may have come from the restorationalist nature of Pentecostalism. With the Pentecostal's high regard for the scriptures and their literalistic interpretation, there is a sense that they are reaching all the way back to apostolic times, characterized by heroic faith and daily experience of God's miraculous power. This notion, like early Reformers, has made Pentecostals "odd" or "anti-cultural" to many contemporaries including Christians, and yet they remain consciously satisfied with their understanding of their unique locus in God's economy. One example may be found among Chinese Christians of some house church networks.⁷ They are literally surrounded by forces of persecution, but their Christian outlook is amazingly positive, due to their self-understanding of being true people of God, and the understanding of God's unique calling, for example, as expressed in the highly publicized "Back-to-Jerusalem" missionary movement.

This feature has its own weaknesses which are already apparent. There is a simplistic popular notion that "louder worship" is a better one. In many rural Pentecostal churches, I have seen that, at the top of their shopping list is a powerful audio system, electric guitars and a drum set, even if the church does not have enough copies of their hymn book. A potential danger is that the loudness may become an empty shell, if hearts are not committed to meaningful worship. However, a more serious danger is that Pentecostals, already well used to loudness, may have lost their ability for meditation and reflective spiritual discipline. If this is true, then Pentecostalism, in spite of its lively forms, may indeed represent a religion of shallow spirituality. Also often mentioned are the possible emotional excesses of Pentecostal worship. While being given credit that the movement has rediscovered the importance of the affective dimension of human religiosity, emotions can become uncontrollable during a time of religious excitement.

⁷ Whether they are "Pentecostal" is highly debated. For recent studies on the topic, see Luke Wesley, *The Church in China: Persecuted, Pentecostal and Powerful* (Baguio, Philippines: AJPS Books, 2004). There are three useful chapters in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, eds. Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang (Oxford: Regnum; Baguio: APTS Press, 2005) by Gotthard Oblau, "Pentecostals by Default? Contemporary Christianity in China" (pp. 411-38); Deng Zhaoming, "Indigenous Chinese Pentecostal Denominations" (pp. 439-68); Edmond Tang, "'Yellers' and Healers: Pentecostalism and the Study of Grassroots Christianity in China" (pp. 469-88).

Also to be guarded against is the "feeling-oriented expectation" of worshipers. Such an attitude can turn worship into a sort of religious entertainment, thus creating a theological environment where worshipers develop an expectation of "receiving" through the worship experience or simply an unengaged spectator attitude and forgetting that we are to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice.

3.2 Participatory Worship

The full participation of many (often lay) members of the church in various segments of their worship is quite noticeable. In fact, the psychological distance between the pulpit area and the pews is very narrow. This is an obvious contrast with the notion I had during my Presbyterian years, in that the pulpit was unapproachable for the "rest of us." This "open stage" nature of Pentecostal worship is evident in all the three major "rites." The worship and praise is marked not only by the group of musicians (most of them are on the stage) and singers primarily coming from the laity, but also the full and enthusiastic participation of the congregation blurs the demarcation between the leaders and the led. In the message "rite," the most significant democratized feature of ministry is the testimony time. As I elaborated elsewhere,⁸ this session brings anticipation to the church, but also anxiety to the worship leadership. Although some members regularly testify about their experiences with or of God in their daily lives, there could be a visitor who comes forward to share his or her experiences. Often hosted by a lay leader, this time becomes an "open pulpit," and the "prophethood of all believers" is at its best in a corporate worship setting. As discussed below, this has an enormous implication to the theologizing process of Pentecostal beliefs in a local church context. Ministry for the altar service is not restricted to clergy. Lay leaders, friends, family members, or church members of those who have come to the altar area for a special prayer can come and join them. Often by laying their hands on the shoulders or even the head of their friends, they freely minister to them. The fellowship time is obviously celebrative and everyone joins in expressing their welcome to visitors and fellow members.

One significant theological foundation for such democratized ministry is the Pentecostal emphasis on the Holy Spirit's empowering role. Based on their cardinal scripture, Acts 1:8, Pentecostals believe that the primary

⁸ Wonsuk Ma, "Doing Theology in the Philippines: A Case of Pentecostal Christianity," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 8:2 (2005), pp. 215-33 (220-21).

role of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life is to empower them for service.⁹ This is a considerable departure from Pauline pneumatology which stresses the Spirit's role in regeneration. As Peter rightly quotes Joel 2:28-29 to explain the advent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17-21), the strong emphasis was on the "democratization" of the Spirit's endowment without regard to age, gender and social status. The modern Pentecostal movement has seen the same egalitarian nature of the Spirit's experience. With a strong link between the baptism in the Spirit and empowerment for witness, Pentecostal believers are literally "liberated" to serve the Lord and his church. This theological understanding widely opens ministry opportunities to people, clergy as well as laity, and that is what happens in Pentecostal worship.

Already strongly alluded to is the democratization of ministry. Against the ministerial scene where clergy monopolized in the established churches, the Azusa Street Mission, for instance, saw the ministry now fully open to the whole church. The Mission further overcame the strong social hurdle of racial division. The Azusa leader, William Seymour's leadership included not only male and female, but also white and African-Americans. In the Asian context, where social hierarchy is still recognized, be it by age, economic status, educational attainment, or social positions, clergy-laity has been clearly demarked. In some countries, such as Japan and Korea, even among Pentecostal churches, the clergy-laity demarcation is more evident than in the Philippines, for instance, primarily due to their own cultural contexts. Nonetheless, an increased involvement of laity in Christian ministry is quite obvious among Pentecostals. One example, in spite of the cultural surroundings, is David Yonggi Cho's revolutionary involvement of lay women leaders for his renowned cell group system. This liberation of ministry from the hands of a few elite (that is, clergy) to the mass of the church is a significant theological impact of Pentecostalism.

Also implicit is a general belief that the presence of the Holy Spirit is not necessarily assumed, or at least the presence is in varying degrees. One of the most common terms used by Pentecostals associated with worship is "anointing." Arguably based on the Old Testament usage,¹⁰ but appropriated by Pentecostals, this term is used in how the preacher, song leader, musicians, singers, or the whole ambiance of worship "touches" individuals or if the Lord has "spoken" to worshippers. Normally liveliness and spontaneity are two ingredients of "anointed" worship. For this, worshippers are urged to "submit" themselves to the move of the Holy

⁹ The most articulate theological treatise is by Roger Stronstad, *Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984).

¹⁰ The closest is Isa 61:1.

Spirit, so that he will have full "freedom" to minister to his people. Inherent in this is also the conditionality of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in a worship setting.

These theological contributions can also produce negative consequences if not properly guided. Prevalent among Pentecostal-charismatic churches, particularly among independent ones, is the casual attitude toward ministry.

3.3 Spontaneity

Spontaneity is another strong characteristic of Pentecostal worship.¹¹ In the worship of All the Gospel Church, this "improvisation" occurs frequently in all the three "rites" of the service. During the "worship and praise," although songs were pre-selected and the music team rehearsed previously, the leaders are prepared to be "led by the Spirit," a common expression among Pentecostals to refer to an unexpected urge to do something not planned at all. This sensitivity to the move of the Spirit is crucial in Pentecostal worship, and as a result, a singing segment can turn into a season of congregational prayer or corporate worship, often with individuals voicing their praises and thanksgiving to the Lord, or "singing in the Spirit." In the message segment, Pentecostal spontaneity is best seen in the testimonials. Anyone among the congregation may rise and share his or her experience with the rest of the church; this part is seldom prearranged. Even the preaching by the minister contains sufficient room for spontaneity. Most Pentecostal preachers preach from a set of outlines, seldom from a full text.¹² The altar service again is full of spontaneity, as this is not structured at all. It is often the case among Pentecostal churches that participants are dismissed as they wish, while others remain in prayer around the altar area. The fellowship time, which often extends even beyond the benediction, is another less organized part of worship. Humanly speaking, the pastor should be open to the changing scenes of human responses and be able to lead the congregation into a suitable mode of worship.

A couple of theological themes may have contributed to this distinct characteristic of Pentecostal worship. The first is the fundamental understanding of worship and the role of the Holy Spirit. As Albrecht

¹¹ This is also a "value" of Pentecostal worship that Albrecht includes (p. 76).

¹² Vincent Leoh, "Pentecostal Preaching: A Century Past, a Century Forward" (a paper presented at the 8th annual meeting of Asian Pentecostal Society, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, September 2006), p. 3 calls this "sanctified illiteracy."

rightly asserts, "For Pentecostals, worship is not strictly a human activity.... Believers expect God to come and meet with them. Pentecostals believe that God alone inaugurates such a meeting by God's gracious acts and presence."¹³ This experience with the presence of God is made possible through the work of the Holy Spirit, according to common Pentecostal notion. And this is where the creativity of the Holy Spirit is manifested and Pentecostals are to leave "enough room" for his activity. Often a prayer is said to the Holy Spirit "to take full charge over the worship." Also the worshipers are prepared to be surprised by the Holy Spirit, as "God 'comes' to meet with God's people, that God listens and responds to worshipers"¹⁴ and this takes place through the Holy Spirit. As people sense the move (or often said as "prompting") of the Holy Spirit, the whole congregation is to follow the move, and this requires sensitivity and spontaneity. The surprise role of the Holy Spirit in Pentecostal worship can best be epitomized by utterances, either in tongues (preferably followed by an interpretation) or as prophecies. Although absent in the worship we visited, this "interception" by the Spirit in worship is a distinct feature of Pentecostal worship. In common minds, any tightly prescribed order of worship which fails to leave room for such work of the Spirit is viewed as "grieving the Spirit," by not allowing him to minister to his people.

Closely related to the preceding discussion is the expectation of an encounter with God's presence throughout worship. In fact, "the personal encounter with the Holy remains at the center of Pentecostal spirituality and worship."¹⁵ This expectancy naturally heightens the sensitivity of worshipers to what God speaks to individuals and to the collective gathering. Impressions in the heart, audible voice, dreams, visions, any scriptural passage or words of a song "that stand out" are all perceived as means of God speaking to his people. This dynamic view of God's word is in stark contrast with the static view of God's revelation, that is, the "closed" view of the word of God. However, this is not necessarily God's words "outside of the scriptures," as Pentecostals diligently measure any "revelation" by the written scripture. The high regard Pentecostals have toward the scripture has been a critical safeguard toward "private" interpretation of God's revelation. This "open" view of God's revelation is particularly relevant to Asian believers. Asian traditional religious traditions have oriented most Asians to the communication between humans and the divine. Although it takes different ritual procedures, almost every religion has a common belief

¹³ Albrecht, "An Anatomy of Worship," p. 72.

¹⁴ Albrecht, "An Anatomy of Worship," p. 74.

¹⁵ Albrecht, "An Anatomy of Worship," p. 74.

in such experiences, and this prepares Asian Pentecostals to be more attentive to the revealing of the Lord.

What is observed in a Pentecostal worship service is the absence of written liturgy. Although Korean Pentecostal churches have adopted more liturgical elements, such as the Apostle's Creed or a responsive reading of the scripture as part of their Sunday worship, most Pentecostal churches have not incorporated any prescribed liturgy. As Hollenweger argues, Pentecostals do have rich liturgical components in their worship, but they are primarily non-verbal and unprescribed. For instance, spontaneous congregational response to certain points of a sermon by saying an "Amen" is a good case of Pentecostal liturgical practice. Body gestures such as raising hands during the praise time is also liturgical expressions.¹⁶

3.4 Experience of the Transcendental

The experiential aspect of Pentecostal spirituality has often been cited as one of the most distinct Pentecostal values.¹⁷ At the Azusa Street Mission, for example, experience of God's presence and his working was their hallmark. It is true that every Christian tradition has an experiential aspect included in their religious life. What stands out in the Pentecostal tradition is more than cognitive awareness of God's being. It is rather a tangible encounter with the great God, and such an experience affects the whole human being including one's feelings and will power. This unique feature makes Pentecostalism a "religion with flesh and bones,"¹⁸ that is, a religion that brings an encounter with God to the daily living of believers, and this experience is marked by its tangibility. In the worship of the All the Gospel Church, the impact of the divine encounter was expressed in various ways by the worshippers, and some parts of the worship in fact highlighted these tangible experiences, such as healing, repentance, and baptism in the Holy Spirit with an emphasis on speaking in tongues as a sign. Prayers are

¹⁶ This oral tradition is part of what is called the "Black Root" of Pentecostalism. See the elaborate discussion of Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), pp. 17-131, particularly illuminating is his discussion on Black Pentecostalism in the United States and African Pentecostalism.

¹⁷ E.g., Russell P. Spittler, "Spirituality, Pentecostal and Charismatic," *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds. Stanley M. Burgess, et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), pp. 804-809 (804-805).

¹⁸ Wonsuk & Julie C. Ma, "Jesus Christ in Asia: Our Journey with Him as Pentecostal Believers," *International Review of Mission* 94 (Oct 2005), pp. 493-506 (498).

often offered for the healing of family members who are not present in the worship service, family problems (such as financial matters), relationship issues, and even for tuition payments for their children. We notice that the nature of God's work can be "natural" as well as "supernatural." God is believed to be not only good, but also capable, indeed answering their prayers in the "here and now."

Even communion, which Pentecostal churches celebrate every month, typifies this tendency. Pentecostals typically take a "low" theological view of the Lord's presence in communion, that is, the elements are received to symbolize or to "remember" the Lord's body and blood. However, it is often expected that through this experience physical healing takes place. Passages such as "By his wounds, you have been healed" (Isa 53:5; 1 Pet 2:24, NIV) is often recited by the minister to remind the congregation that communion is a special occasion with its powerful ritual elements when healing indeed takes place.

A few roots of such expectation can be cited. The first is the "primal" nature of Pentecostal religious values. This expression, coined by Harvey Cox,¹⁹ may also indicate the Pentecostal ethos to bring back to the modern Christian life the spirituality and patterns of worship of the early church as recorded in the book of Acts. This restorative impetus is further enhanced by general Asian religious worldview which makes little distinction between the natural and supernatural. For example, Julie Ma convincingly demonstrates how such tangible demonstration of God's power, often in miraculous ways, has impacted many tribal groups in the northern Philippines, resulting in mass conversions. She partly contributes this movement to the similarities in the Pentecostal worldview and that of the tribes.²⁰ Thus, Pentecostalism has become a corrective of traditional Christianity which was characterized by its worldview with an "excluded middle."²¹ As I argued elsewhere, Christianity in a non-western (or majority-

¹⁹ Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995), pp. 82-83, 88-89.

²⁰ Julie C. Ma, *When the Spirit Meets the Spirits: Pentecostal Mission to an Animistic Tribe of the Northern Philippines* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000), esp. pp. 167-232. Recently a similar study was published by Lalsangkima Pachuau, "Mizo 'sakhua' in transition: Change and Continuity from Primal Religion to Christianity," *Missiology* 34:1 (Jan 2006), pp. 41-57, particularly pp. 51-53 for the incorporation of their worldviews into Christianity.

²¹ Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), p. 89.

world) setting may be inherently charismatic in type, if left without any theological interference from outside, especially from a western church.²² The very fact that many "indigenous" forms of Christianity is of Pentecostal-charismatic varieties may attest to this, be it in Africa (such as African Initiate Church) or in Asia (Chinese house church networks, for example). This recovery of "primitive" elements of Christianity by Pentecostalism has also "renewed" the existing churches in the West as seen in the Charismatic movement during the 1960s.

The other contributing factors may also be found in the social context of Asia. In many Asian societies, suffering is the most urgent social context in which Pentecostal believers find themselves. Today, some political systems often oriented to a certain religious system pose a formidable challenge to Christians. Pentecostals, as the more vibrant form of Christianity, tend to attract hostile treatments from political, religious environments. Wiyono, an Indonesian Pentecostal, informs us that the most number of churches which militant Muslims burned, vandalized, or destroyed were Pentecostal-Charismatic ones.²³ Believers in house church networks in China or Pentecostal believers in some Middle Eastern countries may fall in the same category. Or, some political systems simply do not allow room for religious activities, and this applies to some churches in Vietnam, Laos, Bhutan, North Korea and others. However, the most serious daily challenge comes from suffering out of poverty. The Asian Development Bank has a quick summary of the current state: "Asia and the Pacific are still home to 900 million poor people—nearly one third of the region's population. South Asia alone has more than 500 million poverty-stricken people, twice as many as in the whole of Africa. Two-thirds of Asia's poor are women."²⁴ Such daily struggle has made people turn to religions which promise divine answers, and Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity has presented the most attractive message. The nine-million strong El Shaddai Catholic Charismatic group in the Philippines exemplifies

²² Ma & Ma, "Jesus Christ in Asia," p. 503.

²³ Gani Wiyono, "Pentecostals in Indonesia," in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia* (Oxford: Regnum; Baguio, Philippines: APTS Press, 2005), pp. 307-328 (319-320). For a more comprehensive study of the subject, see Harold D. Hunter and Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., eds., *The Suffering Body: Ecumenical and International Perspectives on the Persecution of Christians* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006).

²⁴ Asian Development Bank, "Fighting Poverty in Asia and the Pacific" (http://www.adb.org/Documents/Brochures/Fighting_Poverty/default.asp?p=poverty, 2006), accessed: June 26, 2006.

the flight of poverty-stricken masses to the miracle-performing God.²⁵ And David Yonggi Cho's message of God's blessing is another instance of such an approach.²⁶ The fundamental difference between the controversial prosperity gospel and what is preached in Asia may not necessarily be found in their messages, but in their motivations. The West preaches it for what people "want," while the majority world offers the prosperity message for what people "need." Such struggle of suffering brings people to God out of desperation and their resultant expectation for God's help in their daily sustenance. Considering that Pentecostalism is basically a religion of the "poor,"²⁷ their worship reflects this felt need.

There could be a few other features of Pentecostal worship that have theological implications. For example, the emphasis on and operation of spiritual gifts, and emphasis on evangelism and mission could be included in the list.

4. Concluding, Theologically...

Now, how Pentecostal worship in Asia interacts with their theological orientation is an interesting inquiry. There are several aspects of this discussion.

4.1 Worship as Theological Expression

What is the relationship between worship and theology? It is obvious that they are closely linked. First of all, theology informs how one worships, and Asian Pentecostals are not an exception. As I suggested, several theological underpinnings for each feature of Pentecostal worship in Asia, their theological orientation, although often implicit in articulation, contributes greatly to how Asian Pentecostals worship. Practically, what they believe makes who they are. In addition to the "received" theology from western Pentecostal hands, each socio-cultural context plays an important role in the process of theologization.

²⁵ For a recent study on miracles claimed by the El Shaddai group, see Katharine L. Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles: El Shaddai and the Transformation of Popular Catholicism in the Philippines* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005).

²⁶ For theological reflections on Cho's message, see Wonsuk Ma, William W. Menzies, and Hyeon-sung Bae, eds. *David Yonggi Cho: A Close Look at His Theology and Ministry* (Baguio, Philippines: APTS Press, 2004).

²⁷ See the characterization of Pentecostals as the poor in Wonsuk Ma, "When the Poor Are Fired Up": The Role of Pneumatology in Pentecostal-Charismatic Mission," *Cyberjournal of Pentecostal and Charismatic Research* 15 (<http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj15/Ma.html>, Feb, 2006).

Secondly, the reenactment through various expressions of worship affirms, reinforces, and strengthens its theology. Worship is the formal and corporative platform where such process takes place. Due to the high relevancy to the worshipper's daily experiences, their theology is lived out as it is tangibly expressed and experienced in the worship context.

Thirdly, worship is also a place where theological revision, reinterpretation and even alteration take place. This can take place in various ways: 1) inclusion or choice (of certain songs, sermon topics, etc.), 2) emphases, 3) reinterpretation (particularly in a changing social context), and more seriously, 4) by omission. The decreasing message of the Lord's return, for example, is a case of the latter.²⁸

4.2 Worship as Theological Formation

The "democratic" nature of Pentecostal worship promises a good possibility for the formation of "people's theology." How the worship leader selects songs for a given worship service and how the emcee for the testimony time offers "interpretation" for presented testimonies are all part of the corporate theologizational process. However, the most significant element of corporate theologization is the testimonial tradition. Here is my own assessment of the role of testimonies in the theologization process:

Even in tribal churches in the Cordillera mountain region of the Philippines, old and young members stand or come forward to the pulpit to share their experiences with God. Sometimes this lasts more than an hour.... This tradition provides a place not only for participation in theology-making, but also a space for the rest of the congregation to reflect, evaluate, and commonly share, once accepted as genuine and valid, the theological experiences of one member as a community possession. This has made Pentecostal theology inevitably a "people's theology." The uniqueness of this feature should be understood in the context where theologizing has been left exclusively in the hands of theological and ecclesial elites in most Christian traditions.²⁹

However, it is unfortunate that this unique Pentecostal tradition has not been practiced in some countries like Korea, perhaps due to cultural

²⁸ See Wonsuk Ma, "Pentecostal Eschatology: What Happened When the Wave Hit the West End of the Ocean," in *The Azusa Street Revival and Its Legacy*, eds. Harold Hunter and Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. (Cleveland, TN: Pathway), pp. 227-242.

²⁹ Ma, "Doing Theology in the Philippines," pp. 220-21.

reasons such as those in Korea. Also true is that in large Pentecostal churches, for obvious practical reasons, this practice is slowly disappearing. As a result, the theologization process is steadily shifting to the clergy's hands.

4.3 Who Is Behind the Wheel?

In spite of the revolutionary feature of the democratization of theologization, the most critical role is played by pastors. They are practically behind the wheel as worship takes place under their leadership, and also the message is proclaimed by them. They have a weekly opportunity to shape the theological orientation of their parishioners. Also, due to frequent contact with members, either through formal worship, house visitation, daily dawn prayer meetings (as in Korea) or house meetings (such as in China), the pastor has the best possibility for theological formation of his or her church.

The influence of the pastor for theological formation does not stop there. Often future Pentecostal and Charismatic pastors and Christian workers are raised up and trained in a local church setting. Obviously the pastor functions as the mentor for the future pastors and workers.

It is estimated that about 80% of pastors in the Philippines have never received any formal theological and ministerial training. It is plausible that the Pentecostal and Charismatic counterparts may be even less formally trained, at least for two reasons: 1) considering its general anti-intellectual tendency, and 2) some well known and successful pastors with little or no ministerial training themselves have served as powerful role models for many who are turning to a ministerial vocation. Also challenging is the pressure which a Pentecostal preacher would feel to address life's issues in his or her preaching and teaching. In spite of its advantage of relevancy, this approach may promote a consumerist tendency in the process of theological formation.

Now the challenge for the pastor is surmountable. One possible answer to this dilemma is a close partnership between the ever-increasing Pentecostal ministers and emerging theological minds in the Asian Pentecostal circle. Asia has already seen more than a dozen Pentecostal graduate schools, many national Pentecostal societies, academic journals and publications; and this is the time that scholars can begin to produce materials that are pastor-friendly in language and subject matter. By "translating" their existing scholar work into popular versions, pastors, lay leaders and Bible school students will greatly benefit from such contributions. Such partnership will bring churches and theological schools closer to the healthy future of Asian Pentecostalism.