

# **Reflections of a Pentecostal at the End of the Millennium: An Editorial Essay**

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## **1. Introduction**

As we approach the beginning of the new millennium, it is clearly an opportune time for Pentecostal and Charismatic believers to ponder from whence we have come and whither we are bound. A revival movement, at some point in its maturation, finds value in evaluating significant dimensions of its existence--its history, its theology, its experience, and the challenges and opportunities confronting it. Such reflection is an important resource for conserving those elements in the revival which should be nourished and for identifying those elements that are inconsequential baggage, the barnacles of tradition. I salute those who have made the sacrifices necessary to inaugurate a journal at Asia Pacific Theological Seminary for just such a time. I trust that in the days to come, this undertaking will prove to be a useful instrument for this reflective purpose. As such, it should be seen as a service to the kingdom of God, and an act of worship to the Lord of the harvest.

In the nations that border the vast Pacific Ocean, especially the lands of east Asia, remarkable, even startling, developments have changed the politics, the economies, social patterns and values, and the relative influence of these lands among the family of nations. The Christian churches of these lands, both in east Asia and in the south and west Pacific, have undergone great changes in the last century, as well. Although the stories of growth and development are not evenly distributed through the region, it is evident that the Pentecostal and Charismatic dimensions of the Christian church have flourished in many places, so much so that groups such as the Assemblies of God are perceived to be among the fastest-growing bodies in several countries. This growth deserves review--both to evaluate strengths and to note possible areas of concern. In this initial editorial, I would like to sketch some topics that might be fruitful for Pentecostal and Charismatic scholars interested in the future of the current Pentecostal/Charismatic awakening in the Asia Pacific region to pursue. Some of the topics are in the nature of observations of positive developments; some are notations of apparent problems and challenges.

## **2. Brief Historical Review**

The origins of the modern Pentecostal revival are not easy for historians to mark with precision. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, diverse groups of earnest Christian believers, scattered in various parts of the world, with no particular human leadership, were simultaneously and independently seeking God for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. There are indications of unusual manifestations of the Holy Spirit among such seekers as early as the 1850's. As time went on, especially among Wesleyan holiness people, reports appeared of isolated awakenings marked by tongues, prophecy, and other workings of the Holy Spirit reminiscent of the Apostolic Age. A sense of expectancy gripped a significant portion of the Evangelical world, including many non-Wesleyans--Calvinists of various groups and Anglicans, as well. Terminology, such as "baptism in the Holy Spirit" passed into common usage by 1880. Some employed this term to describe the experience called "entire sanctification," while others (and increasingly) identified this baptism in the Holy Spirit as an empowerment for evangelistic and missionary service. Those who sought God for this experience generally linked the experience to the great missionary vision sweeping the Christian churches of that era. The modern Pentecostal movement understood its reason for being to be a "latter day" instrument of God for evangelizing the unreached peoples of the world. Early Pentecostals readily identified with those Evangelicals who saw through the shallow optimism of much of the Christian church. They understood scripture to teach that the closing days of the present age would be characterized by a conflict between the faithful remnant, the people of God, and the spirit of the age, an age doomed to violent, cataclysmic destruction. Pentecostals saw themselves as part of the "rescue mission" called by God to reach as many as possible to save them from the wrath to come. Many Evangelicals who employed the baptism in the Holy Spirit terminology did not adopt the Pentecostal understanding of speaking in tongues as the biblical accompanying sign of that experience. In fact, most Evangelicals, both of the Wesleyan type and of the Reformed and Anglican, or Keswickian type, were offended by the teaching of the early Pentecostals. Evangelical Christians for the most part were reluctant to encourage a modern replication of the gifts of the Spirit--especially the vocal manifestations of tongues, interpretation of tongues, and prophecy. Sadly, the larger church world rejected the offense of the Pentecostal revival, even largely abandoning the terminology of baptism in the Holy Spirit.

A case can be made for a connected institutional history of the modern Pentecostal revival to have begun in Topeka, Kansas, on New Year's Eve, December, 1900, at Bethel Bible School. It was in this place that the theological identity of the modern Pentecostal movement found initial expression--identifying speaking in tongues as the accompanying sign of baptism in the Spirit. Although there had been isolated occurrences of apostolic-like phenomena for some years before this, it appears that it was here, in Topeka, Kansas, that the self-understanding of the "Latter Rain" revival was first clearly defined. Most Pentecostals thereafter recognized that baptism in the Holy Spirit, marked by the initial sign of speaking in other tongues, was the distinguishing theological identification factor that gave them particularity. This has been titled by some scholars as the "First Wave" of the modern renewal that has impacted Christianity so significantly.

The early Pentecostal revival was an offense to many. Consequently, Pentecostalism developed for two generations quite separately from the Fundamentalist and Holiness components of the Evangelical church. It was not until the era of World War II that some courageous leaders in Evangelicalism sought to make a place for Pentecostals within their ranks. In the ensuing years, Pentecostalism became strongly identified with Evangelical values. This identification with Evangelicalism became so pronounced that in recent years some Pentecostals have felt it necessary to redefine the important distinctions that appear to have been too-easily surrendered for acceptance in the larger church world. Virtually all Pentecostals recognize themselves to be squarely within the Evangelical tradition. Pentecostals today are not always clear regarding the meaning of this relationship. Is there, indeed, any continuing uniqueness that Pentecostals have to contribute to Evangelical values? If there is a clear identity for Pentecostalism in this generation, how shall it be defined?

To further muddy the water, we must acknowledge a related, or at least, parallel revival movement of more recent years. Until the mid-1950's, if a pastor or lay person in a traditional mainline Christian denomination reported a baptism in the Holy Spirit with the accompanying sign of speaking in tongues, that individual was routinely disfellowshipped.<sup>1</sup> In fact, whole congregations of some denominations quietly identified with groups such as the Assemblies of God in that era, since there was no acceptance for such teaching and experience in the traditional groups. However, by 1960, pastors and lay people were reporting such experiences in considerable numbers--so much so that in the decade that followed most of the great Christian Protestant church bodies adopted position papers that allowed "Spirit-filled" members and leaders to stay within the parent denomination, with cautions, to be sure. This became known as the Charismatic movement. The Charismatic movement began as a penetration of the more traditional (and generally less-evangelical) Protestant denominations with phenomena and emphases previously limited to the Pentecostal churches. By 1967, this Charismatic renewal reached into the Roman Catholic Church, and since that time has had a growth more phenomenal than the movement within Protestant mainline churches. This break-out of Pentecostal-like phenomena into the larger church world has generally been titled the "Second Wave."

More reluctant than the more liberal Protestant bodies and the Roman Catholic Church to make room for apostolic-like manifestations, nonetheless Evangelical Christianity by 1985 had its own Charismatic renewal. Speaking in tongues, prayer for the sick, and an openness to various manifestations of the Spirit finally were becoming acceptable, at least among some Evangelical groups. This is the so-called "Third Wave," according to Peter Wagner.<sup>2</sup>

David Barrett, well-known Christian statistician, reckoned that by 1985 the number of Christian believers around the world claiming to be either Pentecostal or Charismatic had reached such numbers that this component of the Christian church now exceeded all the Reformation bodies combined.<sup>3</sup> Certainly one of the great stories within the Christian church for the century will turn out to be the dramatic growth of this revival around the world. The rapid growth of the Pentecostal/Charismatic revival of this century has

generated an urgent need for assessment and evaluation, especially by those who are confronted with questions and issues that the rapid and varied growth of the revival has occasioned. The very success of this movement has thrust Pentecostals, for example, into proximity with Christian believers from widely differing groups, each with its own self-understanding. New questions are surfacing that were non-issues in a simpler age. So, now appears to be a good time to address matters of substance impacting the future course of the current renewal.

## **3. Some Significant Questions for the Present Generation**

### **3.1 Definitions**

What is a Pentecostal? How does a Pentecostal differ from a Charismatic? In earlier years, anyone who believed in the possibility of the gifts of the Spirit described in the New Testament as being available to believers today was considered a Pentecostal. One either made room for such phenomena--or did not. Early Pentecostals, largely ostracized by their Christian colleagues, did not spend much time reflecting on their theology--they simply were proclaimers and practitioners of a glorious, newfound experience. Nearly all assumed that the "Bible pattern" of baptism in the Spirit, an experience subsequent to salvation, was to be accompanied by speaking in other tongues. Along the way, in this environment, the other manifestations of the Spirit enumerated in 1 Cor 12 were welcomed and expected in worship settings.

At the heart of this new awakening, however, was not a preoccupation with these gifts and manifestations, but rather a compelling sense of the presence of the living God and an urgency to reach the lost of this world for Christ. From the beginning, especially from the Los Angeles revival of 1906-9, commonly called the "Azusa Street Revival," missionary endeavor had a very high priority.<sup>4</sup> After all, if we were at the end of a dying age, and Jesus would soon reappear, His servants should be busy about the Master's business, rescuing the lost. The meaning of Pentecost was understood to be an empowering for Christian witness to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The Pentecostal gift was understood to be integral to the mission task.

The Charismatic movement developed along somewhat different lines. Pentecostals had been rejected and consequently had to form their own associations and networks. They started "fresh." When believers in the mainline churches began to experience gifts of the Spirit, many of them saw their role as instruments of renewal within their own denomination, or within the local church of which they were a part. Many of these people who had come alive spiritually felt that they had a mission to their friends within that communion. They yearned to share with colleagues the availability of the apostolic gifts. In this role, they looked *inward* rather than *outward*, recognizing those Christians with whom they lived to be in need of a spiritual refreshing. The term "charismatic" is an apt term to describe the function of these believers, as they sought to get their friends to open up to a new level of spiritual reality, the possibility of the expression of gifts of the Spirit

in the present day. One result of this domestic mission has been a different theological emphasis. Few within the Charismatic movement say much about baptism in the Spirit. Many Charismatics link the flow of the Spirit in the life of the believer with an "actualization" of what was incipient in the believer from earlier sacramental moments, such as baptism and confirmation. Thus, the new vitality in the believer is frequently seen as integral to new birth, not a baptism of power for witnessing. It is not surprising, therefore, that Charismatic groups have not really featured missions and evangelism, at least not until recently.

It is delightful to see such a widespread outpouring of the Spirit in virtually all parts of the world today, and among nearly all Christian denominations. Nonetheless, there is a need for theological clarity. The theological agenda of Pentecostals should be understood in its own terms, and not simply be swept along with the euphoria generated by association with other believers who have made room for gifts of the Spirit in their midst. This proximity of groups with diverse theological understandings poses special challenges to Pentecostals, many of whom have not been encouraged to think theologically.

Important today, as well, is the need to define with care the meaning of *Evangelical*, especially as this relates to Pentecostalism. In what ways are Pentecostals Evangelical? In what ways may there be a valid distinction? In recent years, Pentecostals have virtually acceded their theological agenda to Evangelicalism. Is this entirely wise? Are there some issues that Pentecostals have a calling to illuminate and emphasize, even if these are not acceptable to many Evangelicals? Are Pentecostals merely "Evangelicals with a Plus," or are there more foundational differences that should be explored? If these questions are not dealt with squarely, it may not be long before Pentecostalism will become an appendage to "Third Wave" Evangelicalism. What might be lost in this fusion of values?

## **3.2 The Place of Theology**

There are three component issues here for Pentecostals, as well as many Charismatics. It is interesting to note that Catholic Pentecostals have attended perhaps more faithfully to the task of articulating theology for the renewal than have either Pentecostals or other Charismatics. Note the bibliographical entries flowing from Catholic sources.<sup>5</sup> The three issues are: a) focus on *experience*, b) concerns about *ecumenism*, and c) assumptions about *ethics*.

### **3.2.1 Focus on Experience**

Pentecostals and their Charismatic counterparts have been caught up in the wonder of a profound relationship with the living God. Early Pentecostals spoke frequently of what they termed "reality," to give expression to the magnitude of the sense of God's vital presence in their lives and in their meetings. Pentecostal believers greatly desired other Christian believers to enter into the same joyful experience they had found. Some looked with jaundiced disdain on the Christian groups that had expelled them, discounting the trappings of "dead theology" they associated with desiccated Christianity. These earnest

believers looked with suspicion on the intellectual dimension of Christianity, since theirs was essentially a religion of the heart. This found expression in training programs that featured Bible "doctrines," and encouraged indoctrination rather than critical theological inquiry. Quite frankly, early Pentecostals were consumed with spreading the gospel, and encouraging converts to receive the baptism in the Spirit--they had little time for argumentation or the luxury of reflection. The result of this has been a heavy borrowing on the theological work of others, particularly Evangelical scholarship, to supply the need for textbooks in Pentecostal schools. There has been a virtual abdication of the task of developing a theological agenda to Evangelicalism. The result has been a growing perplexity among Pentecostals about theological self-identity.

### **3.2.2 Ambivalence regarding Ecumenism**

Growing for at least two generations in virtual isolation from interaction with other Christian traditions, suddenly in the mid-1940's, Pentecostals were for the first time accepted within Evangelical circles, at first with great caution, and more recently with full-acceptance. Early Pentecostals often feared association with other believers, wary lest such association would blur uniqueness. Later, upon being accepted in the Evangelical ranks, Pentecostals seemed to go overboard to gain approval among peers. In the 1950's and 1960's, this took the form of alignment with Fundamentalists against liberal Christianity, such as were found in the World Council of Churches. The fortunes of David duPlessis are illustrative of this capturing of Pentecostals by conservative Evangelicals.<sup>6</sup> DuPlessis was disfellowshipped by the Assemblies of God for his association with World Council of Churches leaders, who had invited him to address them. This was an "embarrassment" to Evangelicals, who put pressure on the Assemblies of God to disconnect totally from the WCC. DuPlessis pleaded with his Assemblies of God people that many leaders within the WCC were receiving the Pentecostal experience--but he noted that this was *not* occurring among the Evangelical leaders with whom the Pentecostals had become so cozy.<sup>7</sup> Later, when the "Second Wave" of Charismatic renewal was fully-formed, it became apparent that over-identification of Pentecostals with conservative Evangelicals was somehow out of tune with what the Holy Spirit seemed to be doing. Quietly, duPlessis was reinstated in the Assemblies of God before he died. There continues to be ambivalence within the Pentecostal movement about the theological guidelines that should shape ecumenical relationships.

### **3.2.3 Ethical Concerns**

Christianity is really triangular--featuring experience, theology, and ethics; the subjective, the cognitive, and the behavioral dimensions. The Pentecostal movement has, of course, eagerly focused attention on the experiential. It is evident that the intellectual element, or theology, has had less attention. Not always noted is that Pentecostals have likewise tended to *assume* Christian ethics, rather than addressing personal and social issues substantively. It was commonly assumed that proper Christian deportment would automatically follow in the wake of the new birth and baptism in the Spirit. Alas, Pentecostal believers, including highly visible leaders, have frequently fallen into gross sin. It is evident that biblical instruction and the disciplines of godly living are not to be

taken for granted, but must be pursued with vigor, lest the unwary and the naive stumble along the way. There remains much work to do within Pentecostal circles to articulate freshly in a new generation the biblical implications for life and its challenges in the emerging millennium.

### **3.3 Upward Mobility, Success, and Mission Focus**

In earlier years, in Asia and the Pacific, as well as in the west, Pentecostals had humble roots. Over the years, the very numerical success and the ensuing prominence and power that accompany such growth, have generated a set of challenges an earlier generation did not face. All Pentecostals would do well to read Richard Foster's *Money, Sex and Power*,<sup>8</sup> a study in the temptations that assault Christians in their spiritual journey. Is it possible that Pentecostals may be in greater danger of spiritual decay in the very midst of great numerical growth? Those who have featured the activist dimension of Christian life, rather than the reflective, are perhaps at great risk. There is need today for prophetic voices that summon Pentecostal and Charismatic believers to the "first works," to repentance and humility. How easy it is to gloat over the accession of prominent citizens to one's congregation, and express impatience when the poor and unlovely stray into the fellowship! The church is at its best when it looks outward, not inward! Jesus came to the dispossessed, who heard Him gladly.

Exacerbating the problems of success in the Asian context is the meteoric rise of the economies of the region. Material success has flowed into many Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. In fact, many professional and business leaders in some lands have been saved and filled with the Spirit. Many have identified with Pentecostal or Charismatic groups. Young adults, blessed by God in multiple ways, have found themselves on a track to professional and financial success. These are gifts of God. Yet, is it possible for materialism to distort the true focus of Christian life in what are clearly very secular cultures? What should be said to affirm the good things God provides and yet to set proper biblical boundaries around this sphere of life?

### **3.4 Commitment and Stress**

In young revival movements, in the freshness of a new challenge, in Asia it is apparent that many have been swept into the kingdom of God out of paganism. Such fresh converts, delighted with the new-found grace of God, are eager to serve. It is relatively easy for leaders to elicit extraordinary dedication from such new converts. Many of these are teen-agers, filled with the idealism common among adolescents. Such devotees readily respond to unusual depths of sacrifice--of time, energy, and resources. Mobilizing this great reservoir of talent and response often produces great and immediate results, especially in short-term mission enterprises. However, it is difficult to sustain this very high level of commitment indefinitely. Teen-agers mature; eventually the question of responsibility to young and growing families surfaces. Some believers are caught on the horns of a great dilemma--which is to have priority, the church or the family? Sadly, some who are "burned out" feel they can no longer continue in a fellowship that exacts so much of their personal life, so they drop out. Some encounter severe stresses in their

family life because of the conflicting demands of church and home. Sad to say, many energetic and pious Pentecostal pastors and leaders are likewise assailed by the stresses of ministry in an overheated environment. And, there are casualties along the way. There is likely a good reason for the recent great interest in the topic of pastoral counseling throughout the region. Is it time for a theological study of appropriate priorities for Pentecostal and Charismatic ministry, especially as these impact home and family?

### **3.5 Church Polity**

In the early days of the Pentecostal revival, the structures for church life, both at the local level and at the national level, were largely borrowed from Evangelical groups whose patterns of operation seemed most compatible to the young revival group. For example, in the United States, the Assemblies of God adopted almost wholesale the polity of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, a hybrid of congregational and presbyterial governance. However, the American Church of God (Cleveland, TN) adopted the episcopal forms of the Methodist Church. In Sweden, a strictly congregational form of church government prevailed. In Asia, there are variations on all of these themes. Certainly the scriptures allow for a wide variety of ecclesiastical forms, provided basic guidelines are observed. Of concern today is the apparent need for theological reflection on appropriate boundaries for church polity within the cultural contexts of various Asian and Pacific societies. How does one arrange for proper church governance without exploiting or abusing power? How is a church to be governed so that it is not crippled with anarchy and chaos? How are Pentecostal and Charismatic congregations to arrange themselves so that they can not only function well within their own constituency, but also relate constructively to other church bodies? What services are best provided by cooperating with other congregations? Is world-missions work such an activity better-suited to cooperative enterprise than to the local church by itself? What about educational institutions? Are some better-suited to cooperative support and management than to the efforts of single congregations? What biblical values should govern such decisions? These are some of the questions of present urgency for Asians and Pacific islanders to ponder in these exciting and challenging days.

## **4. Conclusion**

I have sought in the foregoing paragraphs to review briefly the rise of the modern Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. I have likewise sought to identify a few of the issues and challenges that thoughtful scholars might wish to address in forthcoming issues of this new journal. Certainly there are many other matters not ranked here that others will wish to speak to. Without question there is much work to be done. Let us recognize the efforts of faithful scholars whose labors will be conserved in the forthcoming pages of this journal to indeed be a noble service to our Lord and His kingdom. And let us agree to pray for one another in these remarkable days of great opportunity and challenge.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>William W. Menzies, *Anointed to Serve* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1971), p. 74; C. W. Conn, "Hostility/Persecution," *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds. Stanley M. Burgess et al (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), pp. 447-50.

<sup>2</sup>C. Peter Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit: Encountering the Power of Signs and Wonders Today* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1988), pp. 13, 18.

<sup>3</sup>David B. Barrett, ed., *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comprehensive Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World A.D. 1900-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 792-93.

<sup>4</sup>C. M. Robeck, Jr., "Azusa Street Revival," *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, p. 36.

<sup>5</sup>E.g., Kilian McDonnell, *The Charismatic Renewal and Ecumenism* (New York: Paulist, 1978); Kilian McDonnell, ed., *Open the Windows: The Popes and Charismatic Renewal* (South Bend, IN: Greenlawn, 1989); Kilian McDonnell, ed., *Presence, Power, Praise: Documents on the Charismatic Renewal*, 3 vols. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1980); Kilian McDonnell, ed., *Toward a New Pentecost for a New Evangelization* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1993); Kilian McDonnell and George T. Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit: Evidence from the First Eight Centuries*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1994); Kilian McDonnell and George T. Montague, eds., *Facing the Flame: What Does Baptism in the Holy Spirit Have to Do with Christian Initiation?* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1991); Peter Hocken, *Streams of Renewal: The Origins and Early Development of the Charismatic Movement in Great Britain* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1986); Peter D. Hocken, *One Lord, One Spirit, One Body: Ecumenical Grace of the Charismatic Movement* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1987); Harold D. Hunter and Peter D. Hocken, eds., *All Together in One Place: Theological Papers from the Brighton Conference on World Evangelization* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

<sup>6</sup>R. P. Spittler, "Du Plessis, David Johannes," *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, p. 252.

<sup>7</sup>David DuPlessis, *A Man Called Mr. Pentecost* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos, 1977), pp. 197-98.

<sup>8</sup>Richard J. Foster, *Money, Sex and Power: The Challenge of the Disciplined Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985).