MALAYSIAN PENTECOSTAL JOURNAL

Festschrift in honour of
Rev. Dr Delmer R. Guynes

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Pentecostal Ecclesiology and Missions

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Inaugural Issue 2023

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EDITORIAL

The *Malaysian Pentecostal Journal's* inaugural issue, themed "Pentecostal Ecclesiology and Missions," captures some historical narratives of the Pentecostal movement in Malaysia and the ongoing conversations on Pentecostal theology, spirituality, missions, and practice. It is a festschrift in honour of Rev. Dr Delmer R. Guynes, one of the great missionaries in forming the Assemblies of God of Malaya and Singapore on 6 February 1957 and the first General Superintendent. Rev. Guynes had also been instrumental in securing the land for the Pentecostal Bible school in Jalan Gasing, Petaling Jaya, and being the founder of the Bible Institute of Malaya (now known as Bible College of Malaysia—BCM), established in 1960. The Guyneses and the many Assemblies of God missionaries had brought the gospel and spread the Pentecostal movement to this part of the world.

This festschrift expresses our heartfelt gratitude to Dr Guynes, representing the early missionaries who sacrificially came to Malaya in the last century. The growth and development of Pentecostalism in Malaysia are the fruits of their labour and obedience to the Lord of Harvest. The early Assemblies of God missionaries first arrived in the 1930s, and over the decades, they saw the need to raise national leadership and local workers for the field. There has been almost one century of history and spiritual heritage to preserve and pass on to the next generation! Through the Spirit's empowerment, their legacy continues to the present generations and into the future. A heartfelt thanks to Dr Del Ray Guynes, the son of Delmer and Eleanor Guynes, for his significant contribution to the brief story of his beloved parents.

The Malaysia Pentecostal Research Centre (MPRC), established on 15 September 2022, is a research avenue to promote Spirit-led theological studies and practice through scholarly engagements, theological platforms, networks, research facilities and services. MPRC publishes this annual e-journal on Pentecostal studies in the Malaysian context

and beyond; and hosts a yearly Pentecostal Conference.

The inaugural Pentecostal Conference on 18-19 July 2023 is themed, "Paradoxes of the Spirit: Towards a Holistic Pentecostal Spirituality," graced by the special guest speaker, Rev. Dr Simon Chan, Pentecostal and systematic theologian. This inaugural issue of *Malaysian Pentecostal Journal* is launched at this conference, featuring two significant presentations. First, Rev. Dr Chan Nam Chen studies the "Pentecostal Spirit and God's Mission in Malaysia and a Post-Pandemic Twenty-First Century World" and evaluates the challenges and opportunities in God's mission, thus suggesting the ways forward. Second, Dr Leon Lim reflects on "Renewing the Pentecostal Distinctive of the Sending in Worship," inviting the church to respond in obedience to God's call as believers encounter God through worship by the power of the Holy Spirit. Rev. Dr Simon Chan discusses on "Worshipping God in the Spirit and Liturgically," and suggests a rediscovery of the role of Pentecostal liturgical worship in the gospel-shaped community in this contemporary times. Also, concerning church and worship, Pastor Nick Lim discusses "Speaking in Tongues in Public Worship," a vital argument on the distinguishing mark of Pentecostal distinctives.

I am contributing research on "Malaysian Pentecostal: The Early Beginning" and suggesting the future direction with the Malaysia Pentecostal Research Centre. Interestingly, there is another guest contribution by Rev. Dr Guichun Jun of Oxford Centre of Mission Studies, UK, on "Mission in the Age of Digitalization: Metaverse, Metamodernism, and Metanarrative." This article is apt for Pentecostal churches to reflect theologically and biblically on missions in the post-pandemic era.

This first issue offers readers a broad spectrum of scholarly engagements on Pentecostal ecclesiology and missions from the past, present, and into the future!

Eva Wong Suk Kyun, Ph.D.
Editor

A Brief Story of Rev. Dr Delmer and Eleanor Guynes

Del Ray Guynes

Chronology

Rev. Delmer and Eleanor Guynes arrived as Assemblies of God missionaries in Penang, Malaya, in the year 1954, with their two children, Rebecca, age 4, and Patricia, age 1. They both served with missionary Evelyn Hatchett at the First Assembly of God in Penang for approximately two years before moving to Petaling Jaya in 1956 to focus on establishing English-speaking churches throughout Malaya. Subsequently, Rev. Guynes became the first pastor of Calvary Church, the English-speaking congregation at First Assembly Kuala Lumpur.

Rev. Guynes was instrumental among the early missionaries in establishing the Assemblies of God of Malaya and Singapore on 6 February 1957, a legal entity that could hold property for churches and a Bible school in Malaya. Rev. Guynes became the first General Superintendent of Malaya and Singapore from 1957 to 1958 and served again in the same role from 1961 to 1962. In 1966, the Assemblies of God of Malaya and Singapore separated into two entities, the Assemblies of God of Malaysia and the Assemblies of God of Singapore.

In 1960, Rev. Guynes led the vision—a "faith" mission—in which the early missionaries took a weighty step to commit toward building a school for the raising up of local, Malayan and Singaporean ministers. It was a commitment to purchase a 2-acre property on Jalan Gasing in Petaling Jaya, which soon became the home of the Bible Institute of Malaya (BIM). Later, it also housed Glad Tidings Assembly of God, an English-speaking church pastored by the Rev. Howard C. Osgood. In addition to initially serving as Business Manager for the school, Rev. Guynes and Eleanor taught classes and led the student ministry in

outstation ministries. Rev. Guynes followed Rev. Osgood as principal in 1963. During their tenure in Petaling Jaya, two additional children were born to the Guynes family, Del Ray (1957) and Janette (1958).

The English-speaking congregation begun by the Guyneses at First Assembly Kuala Lumpur eventually became known as Calvary Church in 1964. Jim Jones, an Assemblies of God missionary, pastored the church and led the effort to purchase property for Calvary Church in Damansara Heights. Rev. Prince Guneratnam, one of BIM's early alumni, was installed as Calvary's lead pastor in 1972, the first national pastor of Calvary Church.

After returning to the United States in November of 1964 for a regularly scheduled itineration, the Guynes family was unable to receive visa extensions from the Malaysian government to return and continue their ministry in Malaysia. It was due to a ten-year limit on missionary visas by the Malaysian Immigration authorities, which limits the Guyneses reached the year they left Malaysia for itineration.

Building upon their fruitful experience training ministry students at BIM, Delmer and Eleanor sensed the Lord leading them to pursue their higher education credentials for long-term involvement in ministerial training in the future. Accordingly, they began their M.A. Education study programs at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, in 1965 and completed their graduate degrees approximately one year later.

In late 1965, after moving to Waxahachie, Texas, Rev. Guynes became the lead pastor of the University Assembly of God and began his doctoral studies at North Texas State University (NTSU, now University of North Texas). With the new academic credentials, Eleanor taught remedial learning in a nearby public school system. Rev. Guynes transitioned to become the Academic Dean of Southwestern Assemblies of God College in Waxahachie, where he served for two years.

In 1968, the Guynes family moved to Springfield, Missouri, where Rev. Guynes became the first Personnel Secretary of the Foreign Missions Department (now Assemblies of God World Missions—AGWM) of the Assemblies of God. In this role, Dr Guynes established onboarding testing and processing procedures for new Assemblies of God missionaries and helped create the first organizational unit for supporting missionary families with a particular emphasis on missionary children. Eleanor joined the Central Bible College (CBC) faculty, and her main instructional load was teaching mission classes.

In keeping with the calling to equip Pentecostal ministry students with studies and credentials in higher education, Rev. Guynes completed his Doctor of Education degree at NTSU and concurrently supported the creation of the M.A. Missions program at the newly formed Assemblies of God Graduate School of Theology (now Assemblies of God Theological Seminary—AGTS). Dr Guynes both led the Missions program at the Graduate School as Dean of the Missions program and continued duties as the Personnel Secretary of the Assemblies of God Foreign Missions Department for approximately three years.

In 1976, Dr Guynes was appointed the Executive Vice President of the Assemblies of God Graduate School of Theology, a position he held for approximately three years. Eleanor continued her teaching of missions and other courses at CBC while also serving as a faculty sponsor of the CBC Campus Missions Fellowship—a student-based organization promoting student involvement in missions. In 1979, Dr Guynes and Eleanor resigned from their positions at the Assemblies of God headquarters and CBC. They sensed the Lord leading them into another season of ministry, though unclear at the time as to what it was to be.

As the People's Republic of China began opening to the West, the Guyneses were appointed, once again, as Assemblies of God missionaries in 1979, this time to an opening door for ministry in

China. Most Assemblies of God's missional efforts related to China were facilitated through offices long-established for many years in Hong Kong. In their ministry focus, the Guyneses and their team in Hong Kong had started four new programs: The placement of qualified English-speaking teachers at state-sponsored institutions of higher learning in China; a correspondence-based English language program launched through a national television advertising campaign; a Pen-Pal program to link believers in the United States with those that had written into the correspondence program; and perhaps most importantly, a prayer ministry for those enrolled in the English language correspondence program. All of these efforts came under the umbrella ministry name of Operation Sunrise.

In 1982, Dr Guynes assumed the president role at his alma mater, Southwestern Assemblies of God College (SAGC, now Southwestern Assemblies of God University). Eleanor once again found herself in a teaching capacity focusing on mission classes. The Guyneses served at SAGC for approximately three years while continuing their ministry remotely with Operation Sunrise. Dr Guynes then resigned from his president role at SAGC to refocus efforts on Operation Sunrise and travelled with Eleanor to support higher education for ministerial training in many nations.

In 1991, in response to an appeal by the leadership of SAGC, Dr Guynes returned with Eleanor to become president a second time, a position he held for over ten years until his retirement in 2000. During this time, the Lord blessed the campus with a tremendous spiritual and fiscal turnaround, resulting in financial solvency and an enrollment increase from approximately 450 students to over 1,700. During this season, SAGC obtained university status and was renamed Southwestern Assemblies of God University (SAGU). A key motivation for the change to university status was to increase the opportunity for SAGU graduates to be qualified English teachers in the university system of the People's Republic of China, and this ministry continues

to the present time.

Family Life

Both Delmer and Eleanor Guynes came from humble beginnings. Delmer was born and raised in the southeast region of Texas, Eleanor in Oklahoma. Delmer's father worked in the oil fields of southeast Texas, a dangerous work environment not unlike the historic tin mines of Malaysia in Perak. Even in secondary school, Delmer began to follow his father's career by working in the oil fields, which required his parents to sign a liability waiver due to the inherent dangers of oil field work. At the young age of 14 years, Delmer worked at the top of oil field derricks, handling the heavy drilling pipes that were raised and lowered in and out of the well-drilling platforms scattered throughout oil-rich southeast Texas. While working in those oil fields one summer, a friend invited Delmer to a Pentecostal revival in his home town, where he was saved and baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Eleanor was the youngest of several children of a family from Okmulgee, Oklahoma. Eleanor's father worked for a railroad whose routes crossed the state. Most of her growing-up times were difficult in her father's absence. During her secondary school years, Eleanor visited an Assemblies of God church holding a Pentecostal revival. Like Delmer, she was saved and baptized in the Holy Spirit during that revival.

Delmer and Eleanor felt a call to vocational ministry and prepared for that calling at Southwestern Bible Institute (now SAGU), where they would later serve in leadership. At Southwestern, they met, grew in love and married in 1949. Eleanor gave birth to their first child, Rebecca, in Waxahachie approximately one year later.

The alignment of their ministry callings was not specific in the early

days of their courtship. While both had a conviction of missionary calling, they were focused on different people groups and languages respectively. Over time, as they progressed in courtship, the Lord brought about a shared call to a specific region of the world, and they felt confirmation that they should join together in marriage and ministry, focusing on China and the Chinese-speaking peoples. Shortly before they graduated from Southwestern in 1949, however China became the communist People's Republic of China under Mao Tse-Tung (Mao Zedong), and missionaries were no longer allowed to enter the country. The missionaries there in China were either expelled or, in some cases, executed.

After graduation and a short time of evangelistic ministry in south Texas, the Guyneses became pastors of an Assemblies of God church in Caldwell, Texas. At the time, they were unclear how God would fulfil their calling to China and the Chinese-speaking people. By this time, their first two children had been born into the family, Rebecca in 1950 in Waxahachie and Patricia in 1953 in Caldwell.

During their pastorate in Caldwell, Mrs Lula Baird, a woman missionary to Malaya, was itinerating in Texas to raise prayer and financial support. Having been exposed to her ministry in the Caldwell church and ensuing conversations with the Assemblies of God Mission leadership, after prayerful consideration, the Guyneses sensed the Lord's direction to the Federation of Malaya, at the time a British colony.

Not long after resigning from the Caldwell pastorate and completing their itinerating to raise prayer and financial support, the Guynes family departed the United States for Penang.

Highlights

In the 70 years since the Guyneses arrived in the Federation of Malaya, God's faithfulness to use people from humble circumstances has created a legacy of apostolic ministry, with many "firsts":

- The first General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God of Malaya and Singapore, before the separate entities, i.e. the Assemblies of God of Malaysia and the Assemblies of God of Singapore
- The first Assemblies of God Bible school in Malaya
- The first English-speaking Assemblies of God church congregation in Malaya
- The first program to process Assemblies of God missionary candidates and support missionary families
- The first Masters level Missions education program in the Assemblies of God
- The first use of English language teachers and correspondence programs to establish Assemblies of God ministry with local people of China

A large number of BCM graduates have served the Lord faithfully and with distinction in prosperous, fruitful ministry, not only in Malaysia but also in other countries. BCM now continues its essential training role through the capable leadership of Rev. Dr Victor Lee, a descendant of a family that provided the leadership to First Assembly of God Church in Kuala Lumpur, the founding location of the first English-speaking Assemblies of God congregation in Malaysia. The relationship of the Guyneses with that congregation and Calvary Church, as it came to be known, has continued through the years; Dr Guynes is considered their Honorary Pastor.

In their later years, the Guyneses' faithfulness to higher education for the training of ministers was unwavering as they led their alma mater,

SAGU, through some difficult financial times. The Lord's sovereign intervention with their efforts brought SAGU from near extinction into a "broad place" (Psalm 18:19). Today, over twenty years after Dr Guynes left SAGU, the university continues to thrive in equipping students to fulfil ministry callings, whether in vocational or marketplace ministry.

The Guyneses' leadership as parents is also noteworthy. All their four children, spouses and grandchildren are serving the Lord, most in vocational ministry. Eleanor passed away from a long illness in 2011 in Mombasa, Kenya, and Rebecca—a three-time cancer survivor, passed away in 2022 in Waxahachie, Texas.

All surviving family members include 26 grandchildren and spouses, 43 great-grandchildren, and one soon-to-be-born great-great-grandchild, a total of 80 persons. Dr Guynes will turn 95 in October of this year (2023), the Lord willing, and continues to live a vibrant and prayerful life.

Del Ray Guynes, Ph.D.

Dr Del Guynes and his wife, Christi, reside in Dallas, Texas. They have served as Assemblies of God missionaries in Southeast Asia and in a variety of ministry leadership roles in the U.S. Until recently, Del was the Dean of the College of Music and Communication Arts at SAGU, where he and Christi, part of the music faculty, served for over fifteen years. They have four married children and 13 grandchildren.

Young Delmer

Newlywed Delmer and Eleanor

The Guynes Family
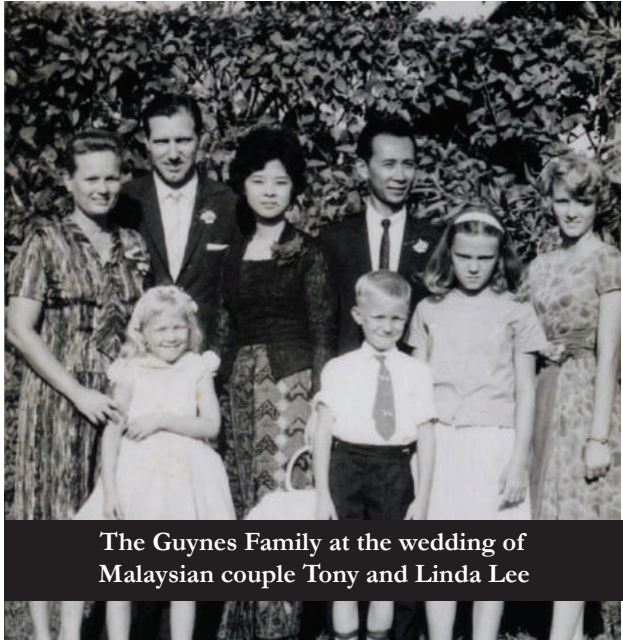
The Guynes Family at the wedding of Malaysian couple Tony and Linda Lee

Receiving the official property lease from the British authorities

Guyneses and BIM Students

Guynes with Ketcham in laying the BIM Cornerstone

1950s

In 1954 they were approved as missionaries to Malaya and in the late 1950s served as pastors in First A /G on Jalan Sayor, Kuala Lumpur.

1950s — At First A/G on Jalan Sayor, Kuala Lumpur
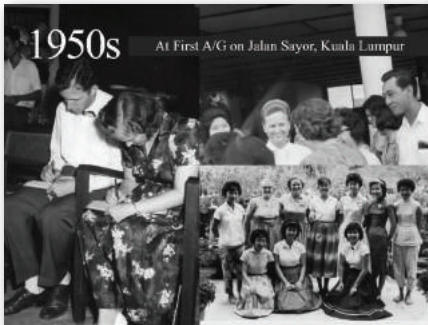
1950s — At First A/G on Jalan Sayor, Kuala Lumpur

1950s — Children's Story Hour - Evangelism Outreach

1958 — Christmas Service — Guyneses singing *Stranger At The Door*
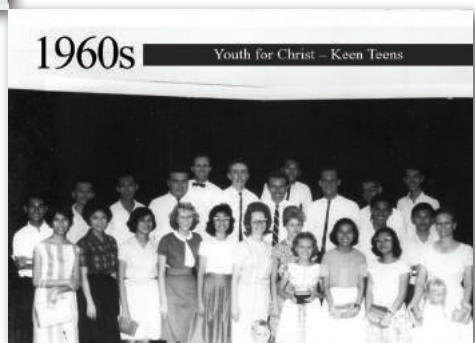
1960s — Youth for Christ – Keen Teens

Under the leadership of Delmer and Eleanor Guynes, an English youth service was started and this led to the birth of Calvary Church.

C.A. COMMITTEE

1962 The Faculty of BIM

The Guyneses were instrumental in the building of the Bible Institute of Malaya which began construction in 1958.

1962 Guyneses with first batch of Bible Institute of Malaya graduates

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1963 Guyneses with second batch of graduates, including Prince Guneratnam

Farewell dinner, 1964.

Delmer and Eleanor Later

Church Leader's Conference at Frasers Hill, 1986

At the 30 Years Celebration of Prince & Petrina Guneratnam's Ministry, 2002

Worshipping God in the Spirit and Liturgically

Simon Chan

Abstract

Although Pentecostal worship is usually classified as "free church," this paper proposes that Pentecostals in the twenty-first century should consider liturgical worship as a way to counter the secular assumptions underlying much of "contemporary" worship. The move towards the ancient liturgy is not as far-fetched as it appears given the early Pentecostals' "sacramental" practices and the special attention they gave to the Lord's Supper.

Introduction

If worship is the most basic practice of the church which forms the ecclesial identity, then Pentecostal worship shapes the Pentecostal identity for better or worse. This is beca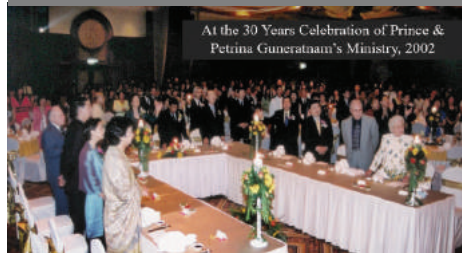use the object of worship is the object of supreme desire and love, and what we love is what forms us:[1] we *are* what we love.[2] The nature of worship is such that it forms people primarily at the subliminal and precognitive level; that is to say, far more deeply than at the cognitive level. This point has been explored in James K. A. Smith's book *Desiring the Kingdom.* According to Smith, "liturgies—whether 'sacred' or 'secular'—shape and constitute our identities by forming our most fundamental desires and our most basic attunement to the world."[3] Sadly, nowadays the Pentecostal

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[1] For a philosophical account of the formative effect of worship, see James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013).

[2] Cf. James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016).

[3] James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 25.

identity is being shaped mostly by secular liturgies which have found their way into "contemporary worship" which, as a number of scholars have pointed out, are debilitating to the formation of a stable ecclesial identity.[4] The problem of malformation cannot be overstated. Referring to the "liturgies" of the market and the shopping mall, Smith warns: "The pedagogy of the mall does not primarily take hold of the head, so to speak; it aims for the heart, for our guts, our *kardia*. It is a pedagogy of desire that gets hold of us through the body."[5] The powerful formative-effect of secular liturgies can only be offset by a counter-liturgy, namely, Christian worship.[6] A stable identity is critical for the long-term survival of the church, for without it the church will have no long-term memory and without long-term memory it will continue to be shaped by the culture of this world instead of the gospel.

The rediscovery of the importance of sacramental practices, especially the Lord's Supper, in early Pentecostal worship in recent scholarship, however, will help Pentecostals find their real identity *as* Pentecostal. It will reconnect contemporary Pentecostalism to its history and prevent it from mindlessly embracing whatever happens to be fashionable which

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[4] See the critiques by Martyn Percy, *Words, Wonders and Power: Understanding Contemporary Christian Fundamentalism and Revivalism* (London: SPCK, 1996) and Pete Ward, *Selling Worship: How what we sing has changed the Church* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005).
[5] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 24.
[6] Smith's study uses the terms worship and liturgy interchangeably as its approach is basically philosophical and phenomenological, whereas my theological-historical definition of liturgy which identifies a *normative* form (word and sacrament) and content (gospel, the Trinity, the church, etc.) requires making a distinction. There are many forms of worship which share phenomenological similarities but some have fallen short (some woefully so) of *the* liturgy that perdures throughout history. It is in recognition of this basic norm that theologians like Schmemann could speak of *the* theology of the liturgy. To be sure, Smith recognizes that some forms of worship are better than others and for the most part he tends to favour traditional forms (cf. *Desiring the Kingdom*, 151-154, chap. 5).

has led to its rapid mutation and identity crisis.[7] In this article I would like to suggest that this rediscovery needs to be taken a step further by considering the role that the ancient liturgy plays in forming the church as a gospel-shaped community. I will argue that the traditional liturgy is not foreign to the Pentecostal ethos precisely because Pentecostals are instinctively sacramental. In other words, if Pentecostal spirituality includes a sacramental dimension, it is one small step towards restructuring its worship to word and sacrament instead of the current form consisting of "praise and worship" and preaching. Word and sacrament is the shape of the traditional liturgy. Doing so will not make Pentecostal worship any less Pentecostal; rather, it will help them retain and advance everything that is quintessentially Pentecostal. The article will conclude by delineating some effects that a Pentecostal liturgical worship will have on the church.

The move I am proposing may not be easy since many Pentecostals tend to see their worship as inherently incompatible with liturgical worship. Doesn't the liturgy constrict the freedom of the Spirit? Early Pentecostals might have reacted strongly against the "dead worship" of traditional churches, but I would argue that historically and theologically they were not opposed to structure and order as such. This is because, as historian Grant Wacker has shown, the early Pentecostals were driven by two paradoxical impulses: "primitivism" and "pragmatism." On the one hand they were otherworldly and heavenly-minded; yet on the other hand they were down to earth and practical when they needed to. In Wacker's words, "The genius of the pentecostal movement lay in its ability to hold two seemingly incompatible impulses in productive tension."[8] Their ability to hold in tension various paradoxes could well be applied to their worship. There is no reason why Pentecostals who

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[7] I discussed this problem in "Pentecostalism at the Crossroads," in *Global Renewal Christianity: Asian and Oceania*, vol. 1, eds. Vinson Synan and Amos Yong (Lake Mary: Charisma House, 2016), 379–391.

[8] Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press, 2001), 10–12 *passim*.

treasured the freedom of the Spirit could not at the same time embrace the liturgy but they did not.

I think there are historical reasons for their failure to do so. The early Pentecostals, like their Holiness forebears, had a rather thin view of history. The Wesleyan-Holiness movement became disenchanted with the institutional (Methodist) church in its later phase. Many Holiness preachers spoke vehemently against not only the compromises with the world in the Methodist Church but also its formal worship. Even choir robes were singled out for condemnation! The early Pentecostals inherited the polemics of the Holiness movement and the late 19th century evangelicals.

Pentecostal Worship and Sacramental Renewal

Despite their opposition to formal liturgical worship, there was another impulse that potentially could bring the Pentecostals to the liturgy. The early 20th century Pentecostals may be too close to the controversies at hand to appreciate the liturgy, but there is good reason for Pentecostals in the early 21st century to rethink the place of the liturgy. I believe that a reconsideration of the liturgy in Pentecostal worship will help the church maintain greater theological integrity in its worship. Its worship will then be shaped by theological norms rather than be dictated by the spirit of the age as can be seen in much of contemporary charismatic megachurches.[9] The fear of some, however, is that moving towards liturgical worship would be doing something foreign to Pentecostals, but I will argue that the move in this direction is not foreign if it is drawn from resources within the Pentecostal tradition. There is a

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[9] See Kate Bowler and Wen Reagan, "Bigger, Better, Louder: The Prosperity Gospel's Impact on Contemporary Christian Worship," https://www.academia.edu/8476777/ Bigger_Better_Louder_The_Prosperity_Gospel_s_Impact_on_Contemporary_ Christian_Worship?email_work_card=abstract-read-more.

spiritual impulse within Pentecostalism which makes liturgical worship feasible. It is their sacramental instinct.

Pentecostals share with those in the Free Church tradition a preference for extemporaneous or free prayers as opposed to the set prayers of liturgical churches. For both, free prayers are a sign of the freedom of the Spirit. But since the second half of the last century, a number of Free Church scholars have been exploring the sacramental dimension of their tradition.[10] Baptists from the UK have pointed out that their London Confession (1689) was largely a replication of the Westminster Confession (1640). The only differences are on church government and baptism; everything else, including the Westminster view of sacraments, is retained. In short, modern Baptists are discovering that they were historically sacramental.

In more recent years, Pentecostals too have been returning to their roots and discovering that they were more sacramental than they had thought. Pentecostal sacramental practices have been the subjects of study by social scientists and theologians. The ethnographer R. Marie Griffiths, for example, has noted the extensive use of the "anointed handkerchief" for healing among the early Pentecostals. Here is one of many examples:

> I received the letter and the anointed cloths from you, for which I thank the Lord. My heart rejoiced and the power of God came upon me as I applied the cloth to my breast. I could feel the affected part being drawn, and when I applied the second cloth it completely left. I have not felt the hurting any more. I thank the Lord for being healed.[11]

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[10] E.g. *Baptist Sacramentalism*, eds. Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003) and more recently John D. Rempel, *Recapturing an Enchanted World: Ritual and Sacrament in the Free Church Tradition* (IVP, 2020). Rempel is Mennonite.

[11] http://www.materialreligion.org/journal/handkerchief.html, accessed 14 April 2023.

Some of the most overt sacramental practices are associated with the ministry of healing. This is not surprising because for early Pentecostals, the healing ministry was a vocation of all Christians and especially the ministers of the gospel.[12] Church of God theologian Kimberly Ervin Alexander notes that the means of healing in early Pentecostals often involved an implicit sacramental practice, such as laying-on-of-hands, anointing with oil, and the anointed handkerchief.[13] The usual practice was to send handkerchiefs or cloths to the office of one of the well-known Pentecostal publishers where they would be prayed over and returned to the senders. Remarkable healings were reported, such as this one:

> Soon as I received the handkerchief, or as soon as I opened the letter, such power went through my whole being as I have never felt before, and I praise Him, I feel the healing balm just now go through soul and body. Glory to King Jesus, the Great Physician of soul and body.[14]

If Pentecostals had believed that the Spirit works only directly on the individual, it would be difficult to account for the widespread practices which implicitly acknowledge that God works mediately as well.

An implicit sacramentality is found in the teaching of early Pentecostals that the Lord's Supper was a "healing ordinance." Chris Green has extensively chronicled the literature of early Pentecostals and shown that in practice they were mostly sacramental with regard to the Lord's Supper.[15] Although they did not use the term "sacrament"

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[12] Kimberly Ervin Alexander, *Pentecostal Healing: Models in Theology and Practice* (Blandford Forum, Dorset: Deo Publishing, 2006), 111.

[13] Alexander, *Pentecostal Healing*, 83-84, 93-94, 110-111, 173-174.

[14] Alexander, *Pentecostal Healing*, 84.

[15] Chris E. W. Green, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord's Supper: Foretasting the Kingdom* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012), chap. 3.

their acknowledgement of the Supper as a "means of grace" makes it virtually a sacrament.[16] In recent years a number of Pentecostal scholars have also noted the importance of the Lord's Supper in Pentecostal worship.

Jonathan Black from the Apostolic Church, a classical Pentecostal denomination in the United Kingdom, notes that the Lord's Supper occupied a significant place in early Apostolic worship. Citing the work of an Apostolic Church historian, Black notes that their worship "was such that it seemed as if the people had already entered into heaven." It had all the manifestations of a typical Pentecostal worship, such as the "nine gifts of the Spirit"; tongues, interpretation of tongues and prophecy; and "healing and restoration of spirit, soul and body." But what is most remarkable was that "[w]orship…is chiefly tied to the Lord's Table": "Solemn and ever to be remembered was the breaking of bread on that first Sunday morning in this new Temple. It brought God into the midst of the Convention as never before." The Breaking of Bread was not done hurriedly like the modern charismatic church; it went on for forty minutes! It was precisely at the Lord's Table that "the congregation found themselves drawn right into the heavenly places." Surprisingly, there was less singing and music in the service especially during communion. The worship of the early Apostolics was very unlike the "contemporary" service of present-day Pentecostal-charismatic where music dominates and the Lord's Supper is no more than an appendix.[17]

There are a few things to be noted from these accounts of early Pentecostal practices. First, Pentecostals were by nature sacramental even if they did not say so explicitly. Second, among the sacramental

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[16] Green, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord's Supper*, 6.

[17] http://apostolic-theology.blogspot.com/2015/06/a-foretaste-of-heaven-early-pentecostal.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+ApostolicTheology+%28Apostolic+Theology%29, accessed 14 April 2023.

practices, the Lord's Supper stood out not only as a healing ordinance but also the occasion in which the various gifts of the Spirit were manifested. Third, the Lord's Supper occupied a far more conspicuous place in their worship than it does today.

From Sacrament to Liturgy

The rediscovery of the importance of the sacraments, especially the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in the context of public worship has a significant bearing on the question of how Pentecostals should relate to the liturgy. But first, an explanation of what we mean by liturgy is called for, given the fact that it is probably unfamiliar to many of the readers of this journal and also because it has not always been understood in the same way even by liturgiologists. Confusion arises with the failure to distinguish between a ritological and a theological definition. We have often heard it said: "Any form of worship is a liturgy. Some prefer guitars and drums; others prefer the organ." When such statements are made, the speaker is assuming a social science definition of liturgy. From the perspective of ritual studies, any worship involving certain regular patterns of actions and words can be called a liturgy.[18] Even the traditionally anti-liturgical worship of the Quakers is itself a liturgy.[19] In fact, the term could be extended to include secular liturgies. Thus, Smith refers to the "liturgies" of the smartphone[20] and the shopping mall[21] in which many people are deeply immersed. These secular liturgies are having a debilitating effect on their capacity to engage in meaningful worship.

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[18] Daniel E. Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit: A Ritual Approach to Pentecostal/Charismatic Spirituality* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) would be an example of a ritual study approach.

[19] E.g. Pink Dandelion, *The Liturgies of Quakerism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

[20] Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 142.

[21] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 24-25.

A theological definition of the liturgy focuses on its *normative content*.[22] The liturgy of word and sacrament refers not only to its structure but also to what it contains. The following theological definition of the liturgy will do for our current purpose:

> The liturgy…is making present in word, symbol and sacrament of the paschal mystery of Christ so that through its celebration the men and women of today make a saving encounter with God."[23]

This definition contains three notable features. First, the liturgy is an enactment ("making present"). It is not the expression of one's experience of or feelings about God but an objective presentation of who God is. Who God is, second, is revealed in the "pascal mystery of Christ," that is, the redemptive work of Christ. But the work of redemption is not Christ's alone. It is the work of the Father who sent his Son to accomplish it (John 3:16) and the Spirit to effect new birth (John 3:8).[24] The content of the liturgy is thoroughly Trinitarian. To the Father is "appropriated"[25] the work of creation; to the Son the work of redemption; and to the Spirit the work of renewal and sanctification. In distinguishing the work of the Father, Son and Spirit, the liturgy displays three characteristics: it is sacramental in that it acknowledges created things as means of grace; it is evangelical in that it directs much of the liturgy to enacting the gospel of Jesus Christ; it is charismatic in that it "calls upon" (*epiclesis*) the Holy Spirit to renew the church. The liturgy faithfully enacts the work of the Trinity especially in the

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[22] Hereon, the word liturgy and its cognates will be understood theologically rather than ritologically, unless otherwise stated.

[23] Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold, S. J., Paul Bradshaw, eds., *The Study of Liturgy* (London: SPCK, 1992), 17.

[24] It is no coincidence that John 3:1-17 is one of the gospel readings for Trinity Sunday in the Revised Common Lectionary.

[25] I'm referring to the classical teaching of appropriation which states that although in any divine operation, the Three Persons are involved, yet certain works are usually associated with one of the Persons.

Eucharist by addressing all eucharistic prayers to the Father, recalling the various gospel events in the life of Christ, and calling upon the Holy Spirit to descend upon the church and the gifts of bread and wine. Third, the liturgy involves human response to the revelation of the Trinity ("a saving encounter with God"). The liturgy enacts the revelation-response, for example, in the many liturgical dialogues. The whole liturgy itself could be considered a sacrament because it is the means of grace *par excellenc*e through which the triune God manifests himself and blesses his people. It should also be pointed out that liturgical worship is not confined to the Sunday liturgy; the Sunday liturgy is observed within the larger cycle of the Church Year or Christian Calendar and as part of a series of interconnected liturgies including the morning and evening prayers (the "liturgy of the hours"). It is this larger whole that manifests more fully the gospel of Jesus Christ.

From the characteristically sacramental nature of the liturgy, we begin to see why the rediscovery of the sacrament in Pentecostalism would lead necessarily to a consideration of liturgical worship. First, when Pentecostals rediscover the sacraments, they also begin to realize the importance of the liturgy as the platform for expressing their sacramental belief and practice. We see this in convergence churches such as the International Communion of the Charismatic Episcopal Church (ICCEC) and the Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches (CEEC). They seek to bring together the sacramental, evangelical and charismatic dimensions of life into their worship. They adopt the ancient liturgy and emphasize the centrality of the Eucharist, evangelical preaching, and the charismatic work of the Spirit.[26]

Second, the close connection between sacrament and liturgy becomes more apparent when we consider the structure and theology of the

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[26] E.g. William L. De Arteaga, *Forgotten Power: The Significance of the Lord's Supper in Revival* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002). De Arteaga is also a priest of the CEEC.

liturgy. The liturgy is structured around word and sacrament. This is perhaps the least disputed aspect of the liturgy. Liturgiologists are generally agreed that the basic "shape" of liturgical worship from as way back as can be traced has been word and sacrament. This is because, according to Jeffrey J. Meyers, the word-sacrament order reflects "a gut-level familiarity with the biblical way of approaching God." It can be traced back even to the Old Testament sacrificial system.[27] Thus it comes as no surprise that, even though there were considerable differences among the 16th century Reformers over the *nature* of the church and sacraments, the least disputed teaching among them is that the church is constituted by word and sacrament. These two "marks of the church" are what make the church the church. The definition by John Calvin is representative: "Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists."[28] This means that in the liturgy of word and sacrament, the people of God are actualizing the church; they are practising church. When the early Pentecostals included the Lord's Supper as a regular part of their worship, they were by their very action moving towards a liturgy of word and sacrament.

Third, the calling upon the Father to send the Holy Spirit (the *epiclesis*) found in all traditional eucharistic prayers supports a key point in Pentecostal theology that Pentecost is more than a one-time event but a continuing reality in the life of the church, or in Pentecostal parlance, "one baptism, many fillings." Further, the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a special presence distinct from his ordinary presence. These ideas have the strong support of Orthodox theologians. According to Nikos Nissiotis the *epiclesis* gives the church the expectation of a "perpetual

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[27] Jeffrey J. Meyers, *The Lord's Service: The Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003), 78, 73-92.
[28] *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.1.9

Pentecost."[29] John Zizioulas refers to the coming of the Spirit as a coming from beyond history to transform history into "Pentecostal-charismatic events."[30] The Spirit works both "horizontally" within history and "vertically" from beyond history. Similarly, Pavel Florensky recognizes that besides the regular "miracles" of the Spirit in the liturgy, there are also "certain separate moments when the believers were jointly (and this is the key!) in the Holy Spirit or began to be in Him, this being in the Holy Spirit *did not become an ordinary current of life.*"[31] Their understanding of the place of the Spirit in the church bears strong affinities with Pentecostal experience. What, then, keeps many Pentecostals from engaging in liturgical worship given the strong underpinning from Orthodox theology? I think the problem may have to do with the way the gifts of the Spirit are understood. Pentecostals have tended to restrict the charismata to the more "supernatural" manifestations, for instance, by narrowly focusing on the "nine gifts" of 1 Corinthians 12 while generally paying less attention to the "natural" charismata such as the gifts of administration and giving in Romans 12. But the liturgy may serve as a corrective to their restrictive view. The liturgical celebration recognizes that at times prayer may be answered in the form of miracles and healings, but more often in less overt ways. The latter does not mean that the Spirit is any less present. In Acts, the Spirit who works signs and wonders through the apostles also works in a church council: "it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us…" (Acts 15: 28). The liturgy not only supports Pentecostal experience but also broadens the Pentecostal vision of spiritual operations.

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[29] Nikos A. Nissiotis, "Called to Unity: The Significance of the Invocation of the Spirit for Church Unity," in *Lausanne 77: Fifty Years of Faith and Order* (Geneva: WCC, 1977), 54.

[30] John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NT: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993), 115-116.

[31] *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, transl. Boris Jakim (Princeton, NJ, Princeton UP, 1997), 89-90. My emphasis.

The Possibility of a Pentecostal Liturgical Worship

Still, the question must be asked, "Can Pentecostals who are so accustomed to Free Church-, charismatic-type worship move towards a liturgically-shaped worship?" We have already noted that the convergence churches are already doing just that. These churches were formed by evangelicals and Pentecostals who found their respective Free Church worship inadequate.[32] Perhaps a more critical question is how the shift is to be made. A recent work by a Pentecostal scholar has suggested that one possibility is when the evangelical and sacramental dimensions are viewed through the Pentecostal lens; the Pentecostal experience of a "direct" encounter with God provides the perspective for discovering the evangelical and sacramental dimensions.

> Deeming worship as every encounter of the Spirit means that both the extravagant and the "mundane" experiences with God constitute worship. While renewal worship is experienced through ecstatic praise, miracles, and tongues, it is also experienced by hearing God's voice in the quiet of prayer, devotion, and Scripture reading.[33]

Jäger's acknowledging that the Spirit works in both "extravagant" and "mundane" ways is precisely what Orthodox theologians like Zizioulas and Florensky are also saying. Practically, if God works through the preached Word and partaking of the Lord's Supper, then it is possible to have a Pentecostal service of Word and Sacrament in which worshippers open themselves to God's Spirit working through evangelical preaching and sacraments. If Pentecostal worshippers open themselves to the work of the Spirit, they will experience not just the

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[32] For a brief discussion of the history and theology of the convergence churches, see Simon Chan, "New Directions in Evangelical Spirituality," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 2009, Vol. 2, No. 2, 219-237.

[33] Steven Félix Jäger, *Renewal Worship: A Theology of Pentecostal Doxology* (IVP, 2022), 33.

more "miraculous" works of the Spirit but also his presence in the hearing of the word and the partaking of the sacrament.

For instance, using a typical liturgical template such as the order of service in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*[34] or the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, a Pentecostal liturgical worship could include some distinctively charismatic components such as a time of free worship after the singing of the *Gloria in excelsis*. Pastoral ministry to individuals such as prayer for healing can appropriately take place during Holy Communion.[35] There are spaces in the liturgy for various Pentecostal expressions.

What will a Pentecostal liturgical worship do?

First, if Pentecostal churches transition to liturgical worship, it will make their worship more Trinitarian. The focus will not just be on the Spirit and spiritual "manifestations" but also on the Father and the Son. Pentecostal worship is often too pneumatocentric or Christomonistic, focusing exclusively on Christ or the Spirit to the point of excluding the person of the Father. In fact, according to Thomas Smail, their exclusive focus on either the person of Jesus or the Spirit is the result of forgetting the Father who "is the integrating factor within the Godhead and the gospel."[36] The liturgy rightly directs worshippers' attention to the Father (as seen, for example, in the eucharistic prayers) and ultimately to the Trinity. The liturgy helps us practice and think in a Trinitarian manner. This is the key to a holistic spirituality.

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[34] https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry-faith-and-order-paper-no-111-the-lima-text, accessed 15 April 2023.

[35] For other examples, see Simon Chan, "Mutual Challenges of Pentecostal-Charismatic and Liturgical Worship," in *Pentecostal Theology and Ecumenical Theology*, eds. Peter Hocken, Tony L. Riches, and Christopher A. Stephenson (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 261-282.

[36] Thomas A. Smail, *The Forgotten Father* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980), 17.

Second, the liturgy will make Pentecostal worship more gospel-centred: The gospel is more than Jesus' dying for my sins; it is a series of events related to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ: his incarnation, life, death, descent, resurrection, ascension, outpouring of the Spirit, and return. It includes a theology of the cross culminating in final glory when he returns. In practicing the liturgy we are in fact practicing the full gospel. This is because liturgical worship is not just a form of worship restricted to Sunday but a series of integrated services spanning the entire Christian calendar, within which all the key events relating to the person and work of Christ are celebrated. Most evangelicals and Pentecostals remember only Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter. But the gospel is more than Jesus's birth, death and resurrection. It includes Christ's ascension, his sending of the Spirit at Pentecost and his return. Besides, the Christian calendar also marks out certain highlights in the life of Jesus such as the visit of the Magi, his baptism, transfiguration, etc. which are likely to be forgotten. Pentecostals may take pride that they proclaim the "full gospel" but in point of fact, it is the liturgy that reveals the full gospel.

Third, the liturgy can serve as a corrective to the questionable theologies in much of "contemporary" singing as noted by Percy and Ward.[37] It does so by providing a template for worship which covers a wide range of topics centring in the gospel of Jesus Christ (from Incarnation to Parousia) and the Trinity. Lester Ruth has noted that songs relating to the Trinity are conspicuously absent in contemporary worship for reason that Smail has noted: the "forgotten Father." Contemporary songs are mostly on Jesus and/or the Holy Spirit, with very few on the Father and hardly anything on the Trinity and Trinitarian *relationship*.[38] And even these songs about Jesus and the Spirit

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[37] See fn. 4.
[38] Lester Ruth, "Lex Amandi, Lex Orandi: The Trinity in the Most-Used Contemporary Christian Worship Songs," in *The Place of Christ in Liturgical Prayer: Trinity, Christology, and Liturgical Theology*, ed. Bryan D. Spinks (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 342-359.

tend to be individualistic and subjective, focusing on *my* experience of Jesus and the Spirit rather than on who they are.[39]

Finally, the liturgy returns us to a worship governed by biblical norms. The liturgy is deeply rooted in Scripture and Christian history. If we examine liturgical prayers and texts we will find that they follow biblical patterns and contents. For example, liturgical doxologies are mostly Trinitarian and patterned after the Hebrew *berekah* or the New Testament *eulogētos* or *benedictus* in Latin (e.g. Gen 14:20; Eph 1: 3-14). Further, the liturgy is predicated on a strong ecclesiology. It presupposes that when believers gather to worship the triune God, they are no longer a collectivity of individuals but the one Body of Christ. They are being constituted a living temple to "proclaim the excellencies or 'mighty acts' of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet 2:9, ESV). The liturgy enacts this truth by singing mostly objective and corporate songs, composing corporate prayers etc. (The "I" rarely appears in the liturgy.) In short, the liturgy creates an ecclesial identity. It makes us aware of being the church. The ecclesiological deficit that modern evangelicals and Pentecostals complain about can be blamed primarily on their highly individualistic expressions of worship. If worship shapes people at a deeper, subconscious level as Smith has strongly argued, corrective actions through preaching and teaching alone, no matter how sound they are, will not be effective. Ultimately, it is through faithfully practicing a comprehensive liturgy that a credible Pentecostal ecclesiology will emerge and with it, a credible missiology.[40]

The liturgy has stood the test of time. A worship that is informed by Scripture and the Christian tradition will be more enduring and stable.

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[39] Ward, *Selling Worship*, 198, 210 etc.

[40] The *theological* connection between the liturgy and mission is explored in Alexander Schmemann, *For the Life of the World* (Cresthood, NY: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1973). For a more recent study, see Winfield Bevins, *Liturgical Mission: The Work of the People for the Life of the World* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2022).

It will create a more stable Pentecostal ecclesial community. Without a stable identity, we will end up capitulating to the fleeting fashions of this world.

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Mission in the Age of Digitalization:
Metaverse, Metamodernism, and Metanarrative

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Abstract

We find ourselves in an era of profound transition, with the emergence of the metaverse poised to redefine various aspects of our lives, including the practice of Christian mission. Recognising the metaverse as a significant mission field for future generations, this article aims to examine and address several key challenges that arise within this context. Specifically, it explores the identity crisis resulting from the tension between Imago Dei (the image of God) and Imago Meta (the metaverse image), the challenges of disembodiment arising from the juxtaposition of ontological existence and epistemological presence, and the unrealistic expectations of utopia fueled by metamodernism and transhumanism.

In response to these challenges, this article proposes a missional approach that reintroduces the biblical metanarratives as a countermeasure for effective mission in the age of the metaverse. Drawing from the rich biblical heritage, it advocates for the inclusion of foundational narratives such as the Imago Dei within the narrative of God's creation, the significance of corporeal embodiment illustrated through Jesus's incarnation, and the biblical notion of utopia as depicted in the narrative of the eschatological event. By reclaiming and reemphasising these essential elements of the biblical metanarratives, Christian mission can navigate the complexities of the metaverse and offer a transformative and purposeful engagement within this virtual realm.

Introduction

We are living in a rapidly changing world. In particular, the speed of developing smart machines embedded with cognitive computing systems and deep learning such as artificial intelligence (AI) is incredibly fast, and the anticipation of its ramification is widely polarised. The World Economic Forum so-called Davos Forum in 2016 dealt with the issues and impacts of the fourth industrial revolution at all levels of human life. Its website clearly states that the extraordinary technology advances may create both huge promise and potential peril.[1] Whenever human history faces a major transition, there is a mixture of responses between hope because of the promise that the world will become better and fear that the change may create peril to humanity. Smith and Browne similarly state that the unprecedented advancement of technologies in our time can be either a useful tool empowering us or a formidable weapon threatening democratic values.[2] The fourth industrial revolution is a convergence of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), the internet of things (IoT), biotechnology, robotics and quantum computing. This revolution has already changed the way that we live and work. In addition, the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the development of various online platforms and networks to meet and work. One of them is the metaverse that merges virtual reality, augmented reality and physical reality. The metaverse is cyberspace where users create their avatars for interactions for various social, educational, religious and economic purposes. In particular, the metaverse creates an enormous market opportunity for monetization in the virtual world by selling and buying digital goods, services and assets that generates real-world value for users.[3]

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[1] https://www.weforum.org/focus/fourth-industrial-revolution.

[2] Brad Smith and Carol Ann Browne, *Tools and Weapons: The Promise and the Peril of the Digital Age* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2019).

[3] Grayscale Research Report, "The metaverse: Web 3.0 virtual cloud economies," November 2021, https://grayscale.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Grayscale_Metaverse_Report_Nov2021.pdf.

The metaverse certainly shapes a new economic landscape, especially among Generation Z and Millennials who find the metaverse to be more appealing than physical reality.[4] This is the reason that Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, recently changed the name to Meta and announced his intention to invest an astronomical amount of money in the metaverse. It is obvious that we are living in a transition in which the metaverse is shaping our future in all aspects of our lives. Therefore, it is the right time to consider how mission needs to respond to be effective and appropriate to the social and cultural changes in the era of the metaverse.

Modern mission history proves that mission and its strategic approaches have been focused primarily on emerging issues in the mission field. The modern mission began with William Carey who was a missionary to India in the 18th century. Missionary movement in this early era of the modern mission took place at the coasts. About a century later, the second generation of the modern mission was opened by missionaries such as David Livingstone and Hudson Taylor who moved inland. The third era of the modern mission began in the early 20th century with a significant recognition that mission was not undertaken by geography alone. Missiologists such as William Cameron Townsend and Donald McGavran could recognise the importance of people groups, in particular, the hidden and unreached people groups. Ralph Winter differentiated the distinctive feature of mission in this third generation from the two previous ones by saying that it was a significant transition from "where we go" to "to whom we go".[5] The metaverse and other relevant computing technology have already led us into the fourth generation of the modern mission. Until the third

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[4] Daniel Grassian, *Hybrid Fictions: American Literature and Generation X* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2015), 143.

[5] Ralph Winter, "Four Men, Three Eras, Two Transitions: Modern Missions," in *Perspective on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, eds. Ralph Winter, Steven Hawthorne, Darrell Dorr, Bruce Graham and Bruce Koch (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 253-261.

era, the focus of mission is "going" to either a geographic location or a people group. However, the focus in mission has shifted to "connecting and networking" through digital platforms in the fourth era. Allen Yeh rightly anticipated this new mission era and introduced a new perspective for a 21st-century mission called polycentric missiology meaning that mission should be carried on from everyone to everywhere.[6] Yeh, of course, does not mention mission led and directed by digital technology. However, Yeh's missiological concept based on polycentrism in mission, specifically poly-directional mission, provides a significant missiological foundation for the fourth era of the modern mission. In the fourth era, mission does not take place in one direction like the Christendom model emphasising "from the West to the rest" or like the reverse mission model emphasising "from global South to global North". In the era of digitalisation, mission can take place everywhere by everybody through omnidirectional internet technology without geographical and time limitations. Mission in the fourth era will be more than a linear movement through agencies. It will be more like multidirectional dynamic interactions between Christians and non-Christians in virtual space regardless of their geographic locations. At the dawn of this new mission era, this chapter aims to address some of the core social and cultural phenomena, in particular some of the negative effects, in the metaverse and the underlying philosophies underpinning the phenomena in order to suggest several significant considerations as missional responses toward them.

Metaverse

Metaverse as the Fourth Place

The sociologist, Ray Oldenburg, used the term "Third Place" first time in his book "The Great Good Place" in the 1980s. According to Oldenburg, there are three major places in society where we spend most

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[6] Allen Yeh, *Polycentric Missiology: Twenty-first-Century Mission from Everyone to Everywhere* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016).

of our lives: the first place is the home; the second place is the work setting; the third place is the social surrounding where people build social relationships and connections with neighbours such as cafés, gyms, restaurants and playgrounds.[7] Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the first, second, and third places remained distinctive with clear boundaries among them. However, the pandemic has caused two major social phenomena in terms of these places in society. Firstly, the boundaries between the first and the second places have collapsed as many people work from home. The boundaries between the first and second places have been gradually eroding over the past few years due to the development of internet technology, but the pandemic accelerated the collapse of these boundaries. Secondly, since the pandemic, the third place has been seriously affected by the social distancing rules. In particular, during the several lockdowns in the UK, the third place was physically closed so that individuals, clubs, and organizations have moved to virtual platforms to continue their social networking and community building. The general development of internet technology and the particular phenomena during the pandemic have converged the roles and functions of the first, second, and third places. The metaverse is a representative example of the convergence of the first, second, and third places. People have begun to live, work and socialize in the metaverse. Experts are convinced that the metaverse is the next-generation digital world that provides platforms for humans through their avatars to play, work and socialize.[8] It means that the metaverse is gradually replacing the first, second, and third places by converging their roles and functions through digital technologies providing

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[7] Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press Books, 1999).

[8] Minrui Xu, Dusit Niyato, Jiawen Kang, Zehui Xion, Chunyan Miao and Dong In Kim, "Wireless Edge-Empowered Metaverse: A Learning-Based Incentive Mechanism for Virtual Reality," *arXiv:2111.03776*, 7 November 2021, https://arxiv.org/pdf/2111.03776.pdf; James Heskett, "How Metaverse could change the way people work and live," *Quartz*, 3 December 2021, https://qz.com/2097559/how-metaverse-could-change-the-way-people-work-and-live; Jack Kelly, "Remote Work, Job Interviews, Business Meetings and Live Events will All be Conducted

immersive experiences and will become the dominant fourth place in the fourth era of the modern mission.[9]

Metaverse is a compound of the words "meta" meaning beyond, and "verse" as an abbreviation for universe.[10] The term metaverse was used for the first time in a science-fiction novel titled "Snow Crash" in 1992. The author, Neal Stephenson, coined the term metaverse to describe a virtual reality in which people created their avatars not only to explore the unknown digital space but also to escape from the dysfunctional physical reality due to the collapse of the global economy.[11] It means that the original concept of the metaverse contains the idea of escapism from a dystopian reality to a utopian reality. Thirty years after "Snow Crash" was published, the imagination of the metaverse has become a reality. However, the metaverse is far from the idea of utopia that Neal Stephenson desired as it has become another challenging area to deal with various cyber-crimes such as fraud or virtual theft.[12] For this

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on the Metaverse in the Near Future," *Forbes*, 13 December 2021, https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2021/12/13/remote-work-job-interviews-business-meetings-and-live-events-will-all-be-conducted-on-the-meterverse-in-the-near-future/?sh=4eab49147023; Thomas Frey, "Will We be Living in the Metaverse?," *Futurist Speaker*, 2 September 2021, https://futuristspeaker.com/future-trends/will-we-be-living-in-the-metaverse.

[9] Some experts, such as Karrinna Nobbs who is the Co-CEO of The Dematerialised, regard the metaverse as the emerging significant third place. See. Cathy Hackl, "Defining the Metaverse Today," *Forbes*, 2 May 2021, https://www.forbes.com/sites/cathyhackl/2021/05/02/defining-the-metaverse-today/?sh=3aaafa776448. However, she just focuses on the social aspect of the metaverse. The metaverse will be the transformative phase of the internet that allow users to purchase homes, work, interact with family and friends, attend concerts, sports events and religious services, and so on. See. Jack Kelly, "Remote Work, Job Interviews, Business Meetings and Live Events will All be Conducted on the Metaverse in the Near Future."

[10] Eliane Schlemmer and Luciana Backes, *Learning in Metaverses: Co-existing in Real Virtuality* (Philadelphia, PA: IGI Global, 2014), 49.

[11] Neal Stephen, *Snow Crash* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992).

[12] Christian Laue, "Crime Potential of Metaverse," in *Virtual Worlds and Criminality*, eds. Kai Cornelius and Dieter Hermann (Berlin: Springer, 2011), 19-30.

reason, James Cooper, a professor of law, asserts that there is an urgent need for meta-jurisdiction for the metaverse to bring out the best of humanity by promoting basic human rights, sustainable environmental protection, and equitable labour standards in virtual reality.[13] This is one of the significant and urgent reasons that churches and Christians need to get involved in mission in the metaverse not only to spread the Good News of Christ but also to make the virtual world a better place by upholding good social norms and values. It is almost certain that the metaverse will replace the internet in the near future. Most of the social and business activities that we do at the WWW (World Wide Web), such as social media, work, banking, education, and entertainment are already available in the form of reality in the metaverse. As aforementioned, the metaverse is being positioned as the fourth place where all human activities in the first, second, and third places are converged. Thus, it is vital to gain socio-cultural and theological understandings of what happens and what will happen in the metaverse as the dominant fourth place; how they impact human lives and communities; and what the appropriate missional responses will be.

Distinctive Features of the Metaverse as the Fourth Place

Digital Identities and Imago Meta

There is no doubt that the metaverse is a significant mission field for the next generation. Churches and mission agencies need to recognise the urgency of developing practical strategies and methods for mission in the metaverse. However, it is equally vital for them to realize some of the negative trends manifested in the metaverse, which need attention from cultural, social, and theological perspectives in order to consider missional approaches to deal with the underlying thoughts

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[13] James Cooper, "Why we need Meta Jurisdiction for the metaverse," *The Hill*, 13 February 2021, https://thehill.com/opinion/technology/583529-why-we-need-meta-jurisdiction-for-the-metaverse.

underpinning the trends. The first negative trends of the metaverse are digital identities and imago meta.[14] In the metaverse, everyone needs to create a digital version of themselves, which is called an avatar. It means that users create digital identities by customizing their pseudonymous avatars.[15] Avatars are users' virtual self-representations that are not generally identical to their real identities. Most of the users use pseudonyms to disguise or mask themselves, even changing their race, age, or gender. Being pseudonymous in virtual space means bearing a set of fabricated, artificial, or false distinctive characteristics.[16] In addition to the issues of pseudonymity, polynymity when users present themselves with many different identities to interact with different people and groups is another problem in terms of creating trust-based interactions in the metaverse. However, according to research, eponymity is not an alternative solution to enhance the prerequisites of virtual interactions such as identification, approachability, and authentication.[17] This raises a serious question regarding credibility and trust in the users' avatar-mediated interactions in the metaverse. It is limited to having credibility and trust in virtual relationships by just perceiving anthropomorphic images of avatars without clues about other users' physical characters and identities.[18]

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[14] The term "Imago Meta" was coined by Ian Harber and Patrick Miller in their article "How to Prepare for the Metaverse" to describe a virtually created being by a human user in opposition to "Imago Dei" describing human being created by God in His image. *The Gospel Coalition*, 2 November 2021, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/prepare-metaverse.

[15] Mary Anne Franks, "Unwilling Avatars: Idealism and Discrimination in Cyberspace," *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law*, 20:2 (2011), 225.

[16] Mikko Jakala and Eleni Berki, "Communities, Communication, and Online Identities," in *Digital Identity and Social Media*, eds. Steven Warburton and Stylianos Hatzipanagos (Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference, 2013), 8.

[17] Jakala and Berki, "Communities, Communication, and Online Identities," 8.

[18] Guichun Jun, "Virtual Reality Church as a New Mission Frontier in the Metaverse: Exploring Theological Controversies and Missional Potential of Virtual Reality Church," *Transformation* 37:4 (2020), 302.

The aforementioned description concerning the different types of digital identity acknowledges that there is a tension between being autonomous in the metaverse and being authentic in avatar-mediated human relationships. However, there is a more profound theological issue concerning digital identities, in particular, in the user-avatar relationship. It is not difficult to foresee that humans will identify themselves more with their digital identities created by them than with their real identities given by God when the metaverse has deeply permeated our lives and creates an irresistible momentum of our lifestyle in the future. Why is this a theological problem? God created humans in His image so that we are the image-bearers of God. However, there is a reasonable concern that the God-given identity "imago Dei" would be conflated with the self-made identity "imago meta" crafted in the metaverse.[19] As the users gradually transfer and eventually migrate to the online environment, the human sense of imago Dei will certainly be converged with their avatars' imago meta not only by sharing emotional intimacy but also by sharing experiences, moral decisions, and responsibilities of their behaviours in the metaverse.[20] The metaverse as the dominant fourth place in the future will create a culture of fusion that confuses the users' God-given real identities but also their biblical worldviews, values, and views of life formed and developed in the real world.

Disembodiment and Discrepancy between Presence and Existence

The metaverse is a new digital ecosystem to integrate virtual and real worlds through an immersive experience. In their immersive experience, users' physical location is in their real world while their minds are transferred to the three-dimensional virtual environment created with electronic data through the internet. This is the second negative metaverse trend called disembodiment that separates the physical body

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[19] Ian Harber and Patrick Miller, "How to Prepare for the Metaverse."
[20] Jun, "Virtual Reality Church," 301.

from the virtually expanded consciousness. This means that users' consciousness is transferred from where their physical bodies are to a space where they have an immersive experience of the constructed virtual reality.[21] One particular problem of disembodiment through immerse experience is that users' internal sensations are stimulated only by the senses of vision and sound, and other somatosensory organs, such as senses of smell, taste, and touch are not used.[22] According to the philosopher, Richard Kearney, "If we lose touch with ourselves, we lose touch with the world. No tactile connection, no resonance between self and other",[23] the experience of disembodiment in the metaverse downgrades what God intends humans to be as holistic beings. Similarly, Sushma Subramanian asserts that humans increasingly have fear of being trapped inside the digital world and become less in tune with their bodies and lose their connection to the physical world.[24]

The idea of using the metaverse to become a disembodied self is rapidly adopted by people in order to escape from the miseries of the brick-and-mortar world.[25] However, they soon realize that there is a contradiction between their physical existence of the body in the real world and the virtual presence of the mind in the metaverse. To borrow Heidegger's thought to explain the discrepancy between one's physical existence and virtual presence as a phenomenon of disembodiment, the

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[21] Marko Suvajdzic, Azra Bihorac, Parisa Rashidi, Triton Ong and Joel Applebaum, "Virtual Reality and Human Consciousness: The Use of Immersive Environments in Delirium Therapy," *Technoetic Arts* 16:1 (2018 March), 76.

[22] Suvajdzic et al., "Virtual Reality and Human Consciousness."

[23] Richard Kearney, *Touch: Recovering our most vital sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 101.

[24] Sushma Subramanian, *How to Feel: The Science and Meaning of Touch* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).

[25] David Casacuberta, "One Bright Byte: Dogen and the Re-embodiment of Digital Technologies," in *Co-designing economies in transition: Radical approaches in dialogue with contemplative social science*, eds. Vincenzo Giorgino and Zack Walsh (New York: Palgrave Macmillan; Berlin: Springer, 2018), 300.

user's avatar is ontically present as a mere entity in cyberspace without understanding the meaning of human existence like animals or plants in the real world, but the user exists ontologically as only humans can ponder existence and its meaning in their relationship with their Creator.[26] Based on the concept of Heidegger's existence and presence, the location of an ontological being and the place of the presence of the being are inseparable.[27] If one's existence is closely related to self-awareness recognizing one's ontological existence in the real world and one's presence is connected to consciousness realizing one's experiences in the virtual environment through one's ontic avatar, disembodiment in the metaverse causes depersonalization by disabling self-awareness of users and increasing the sense of presence through reinforcing the sense of spatial presence, involvement, and reality in their immersive virtual experiences.[28]

Virtual Immortality and Digital Resurrection

As aforementioned, the term metaverse was first used in "Snow Crash" as a utopia to escape from this earthly dystopia. Metapia is a newly coined term by combining metaverse and utopia to describe that the ultimate aim of the metaverse is to create a virtually ideal society[29] where everyone feels happy and satisfied without the fear of violence, conflict, or the economic and social gaps between the rich and the poor. In the discourse of virtual utopia, the hottest topic is digital immortality. There are people who pursue the possibility of immortality

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[26] Claude Cernuschi, *Barnett Newman and Heideggerian Philosophy* (Lanham, Md: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012), 58.

[27] Cernuschi, *Barnett Newman and Heideggerian Philosophy*, 58.

[28] Thomas Schubert, "The sense of presence in virtual environments: A three-component scale measuring spatial presence, involvement and realness," *Journal of Media Psychology* 15:2 (2003), 69.

[29] Si Han Lee, *The Era of Metaverse* (Metaverseui Sidae) (Seoul: Dasan Books, 2021), 75.

by uploading their consciousness into cyberspace.[30] Although users are physically deceased, their avatars will infinitely live, behave, and interact with others as they have evolved with the deceased users' digital archives.[31] The term "avatar" in Hinduism is considered as the mortal manifestation of an immortal being.[32] However, an avatar in the metaverse is considered as the immortal manifestation of a mortal being. The collective digital information of users is the sum of their personality, interests, and beliefs recorded and archived in their avatars, and this collection of data is called "digital soul".[33] This digital soul is to be immortal.

An internet company called Eternime (eterni.me) already launched a service for those who want to remain as digital souls in the virtual space after their physical death. The theory that their customers' avatars would eventually become their immortal digital egos has come true in reality.[34] This is called digital cloning technology that will allow people to make a speech at their own funeral services and even to have interactions with their offspring who are born after they pass away. In fact, this digital cloning technology in combination with holographic technology was already used by a South Korean digital company to allow a mother to meet her deceased young daughter in virtual reality.[35]

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[30] Tim Jordan, *Cyberpower: The culture and politics of cyberspace and the internet* (Milton Park: Taylor & Francis, 2002), 28.
Jonna Quitney Anderson and Harrison Rainie, *The future of the Internet: Ubiquity, mobility, security* (New York: Cambria Press, 2008), 311.
[31] Simon Parkin, "Back-up brains: The era of digital immortality," *BBC*, 23 January 2015, https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20150122-the-secret-to-immortality.
[32] Eliane Schlemmer and Luciana Backes, *Learning in Metaverses: Co-Existing in Real Virtuality* (Philadelphia, PA: IGI Global, 2014), 87.
[33] Sumit Paul-Choudhury, "Digital legacy: the fate of your online soul," *New Scientist* 210:2809 (April 2011), 42.
[34] Marius Ursache, "The Journey to Digital Immortality," *Medium*, 23 October 2015, https://medium.com/@mariusursache/the-journey-to-digital-immortality-33fcbd79949.
[35] You can watch the video clip here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uflTK8c4w0c.

This particular experiment in virtual reality proved that the "Digital Resurrection" of the deceased is not in its conceptual stage but already in the stage of practical use. This is more advanced technology than "Deepfake", synthesizing "Deep Learning" and "Fake", which is used to replace the likeness of someone, and recently, the deceased Margaret Thatcher was digitally resurrected in the Virtual Maggie project in a contemporary film drama.[36] This particular social and cultural trend of the metaverse raises the alarm in the area of ethics and theology as it is more than decluttering digital legacies left behind after death or developing a new form of post-mortem veneration by developing a culture of social interactions of the dead through cloning human minds in the digital version.[37]

Underlying Philosophies: Metamodernism and Transhumanism

Meta-modernism: Ontological and Epistemological Challenges

The aforementioned distinctive trends of the metaverse will bring complex and multifaceted challenges not only to Christian ethics and theology but also to the Christian worldview concerning Christian ontology, epistemology, and anthropology. The biblical understandings of the ontological nature of humanity and the epistemological understanding of reality will be seriously challenged in the era of the metaverse. These challenges look like sociocultural phenomena on the surface level in the age of the fourth industrial revolution, but in reality, they are profoundly related to a newly emerging philosophical

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[36] Dominic Lees, Tom Bashford-Rogers and Marcus Keppel-Palmer, "The digital resurrection of Margaret Thatcher: Creative, technological and legal dilemmas in the use of deepfakes in screen drama," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 27:4 (2021), 954.

[37] David Burden and Maggi Savin-Baden, *Virtual Humans: Today and Tomorrow* (FL: CRC Press, 2019), 236.

paradigm called meta-modernism.[38] All socio-cultural phenomena have their underlying philosophies. In other words, socio-cultural phenomena are incubated and manifested within specific contextual conditions underpinned and influenced by philosophies of the time. Socio-cultural phenomena are the products of human actions and interactions influenced by the thoughts of the time as emergent patterns become established regularities. The negative sociocultural trends of the metaverse are at the stage of producing emergent patterns at present and will become dominant cultural regularities nurtured and underpinned by metamodernism.

From a chronological point of view, metamodernism emerges after post-modernism. In this sense, metamodernism can be called post-postmodernism emerging in reaction toward post-modern critics and philosophical frameworks. However, in terms of its ontological and epistemological stance, metamodernism is located in the third position between modernism and post-modernism[39] not only to overcome the polarity between the modernists' thesis about rationality and conviction and the postmodernists' cynical, relativistic, and ironic antithesis but also to synthesize them to establish a platform for a more integrated pluralism.[40] Vermeulen and van den Akker in their article "Notes on Metamodernism" explain that the prefix "Meta" was derived from the word "Metaxy" in Plato's Symposium, which means "Betweenness".[41] Vermeulen and van den Akker interpret the term betweenness as oscillation that engages two opposed philosophical stances, modernism

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[38] Gregg Henriques and Daniel Gortz, "What is Metamodernism?," *Psychology Today*, 17 April 2020, https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/theory-knowledge/202004/what-is-metamodernism.

[39] Eun-Nyoung Choi, "Metamodernism as a new direction in art aesthetics of the 21st century – Focusing on the Wachowski Brothers' movie The 「Matrix」 series," *Korean Kafka Society* 37 (2017), 115.

[40] Henriques and Gortz, "What is Metamodernism?"

[41] Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, "Notes on Metamodernism," *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 2:1 (2010), 5, DOI: 10.3402/jac.v2i0.5677.

and postmodernism, like a pendulum swinging between the two poles.[42] Eric Voegelin, a German philosopher, sees betweenness (or In-between) as the intangible mysteriousness of human existence and as the tension between birth and death, immanent and transcendent, mortality and immortality, external and internal, this world and the other world, and so forth.[43] These kinds of mysteriousness and tensions are expressed as oscillations of human existence in the era of metamodernism not only in the cultural domains, such as painting, film, music, architecture and literature but also in metaphysics to develop philosophical principles in ontology and epistemology.

Conceptually, a metamodernist's oscillation is similar to Hegelian's dialectical synthesis that intends to accommodate both modernism and postmodernism while being neither one nor the other.[44] On the one hand, from a general point of view, metamodernists intend to create more holistic visions and environments for human flourishing to solve human and social problems by integrating modernists' positivism, objectivism, sincerity and conviction and post-modernists' fragmentations, deconstruction, irony, cynicism and nihilism. On the other hand, the oscillation of human identities and perceptions of reality between the real and virtual worlds challenge biblical ontology and epistemology. This particular oscillation between the real and virtual worlds forces humans to restructure the norm of human identity and existence. Metamodern ontology, in particular, emphasizes co-existence and hybridity between humans and their avatars in the metaverse. The concept of the human-avatar symbiosis is not only about the co-existence of biological humans and digital humans (avatars) but also about co-evolution by reciprocal interactions and

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[42] Vermeulen and van den Akker, "Notes on Metamodernism," 5.
[43] Thomas Heilke, *Eric Voegelin: In Quest of Reality* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 36.
[44] Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons and Timotheus Vermeulen, *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth After Postmodernism* (London; New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), 199.

mutual dependence,[45] which seems to be a new type of ontological syncretism amalgamating human and avatar ontologies. As far as a metamodernist's epistemology is concerned, the metamodern episteme transcends the boundaries of modernism's certainty and postmodernism's scepticism through the "Both and Neither" dynamics. A postmodern epistemological perspective is at once modern and postmodern and neither of them.[46] For example, a metamodernist's view on life in the real world is both meaningful and meaningless and neither of them. This is why some scholars understand indeterminacy as the core of metamodernism because of the epistemological ambiguity generated by a perennial state of uncertainty as a result of the infinite oscillation between modern and post-modern epistemologies.[47] The conceptual understanding of metamodern epistemology by Vermeulen and van den Akker as a perpetual movement and changes between position and outlooks perfectly fits into the epistemological understanding of people's cognitive process for the acquisition of knowledge and the justification for it in the metaverse as their self-awareness and consciousness infinitely swing between reality in the real world and hyperreality in the virtual world.

Transhumanism: Theological Challenge

Another underlying philosophy underpinning the phenomena of the metaverse is transhumanism. Although the term transhumanism was coined and popularized by Julian Huxley, a biologist and philosopher, in his essay of the same name written in 1957,[48] its philosophical concept

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[45] Peter Hancock, *Mind, Machine and Morality: Toward a Philosophy of Human-Technology Symbiosis* (London: CRC Press, 2009), 56.

[46] Vermeulen and van den Akker, "Notes on Metamodernism," 2.

[47] Wolfgang Funk, *The Literature of Reconstruction: Authentic Fiction in the New Millennium* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 3.

[48] Baris Bayram, "Utilizing Transhumanism for the United Nations Global Goals," in *The Transhumanism Handbook*, ed. Newton Lee (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 682.

and practical applications to improve human conditions through social and cultural changes have a long history. Humans have been always trying to overcome physical limitations and enhance living conditions for a better life. However, the contemporary version of transhumanism is more than an intellectual movement but a religion that conceives of a superhuman state free of illness, unhappiness, and death[49] through the use of advanced technology. It means that transhumanists define value and meaning for individuals in the here and now. Many transhumanists have professed faith in the eventual uploading of human minds into machine bodies and virtual reality in the pursuit of immortality,[50] which is their religious concept of salvation. In a lecture at St. Antony's College University of Oxford in June 2019, Professor Thomas Fuchs made a connection between virtual immortality through mind-uploading and neo-gnosticism that emphasizes the secret knowledge to be saved from the inferiority of the human body and the imperfection of this world. Fuchs rightly points out that the transhumanists' techno-optimistic view on digital immortality is the ultimate soteriological goal of technological development to liberate the human mind from the prison of the body after physical death.[51] Thus, it is critical to keep in mind Fuchs' balanced view on the human body and mind to overcome the theological challenge of neo-gnostic soteriology permeated in transhumanism: "human body and mind are inseparable as they are intertwined: the body is alive and therefore also mindful; the mind is alive and therefore also truly embodied".[52]

In terms of the fate of humanity, there are two incompatible views between hope and despair. Transhumanism is a futurist philosophy for

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[49] Robert Geraci, *Virtually Sacred: Myth and Meaning in World of Warcraft and Second Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 287.
[50] Geraci, *Virtually Sacred*, 287.
[51] Mikael Leidenhag, "Saved through technology: Exploring the soteriology and eschatology of transhumanism," *Religious Compass* 14:11 (2020 June), 7.
[52] Thomas Fuchs, *Ecology of the Brain: The Phenomenology and Biology of the Embodied Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 282.

those who have a utopian hope for transformed future humanity that will eventually be emancipated from all kinds of human limitations, including mortality. However, Christianity has judged immortality in this present world negatively because the present life is like a dystopia in contrast to the afterlife that awaits the faithful believers, and immortality would only prolong this world and its suffering.[53] There is no doubt that technology has enhanced the human condition and given endless opportunities to overcome barriers, yet it is necessary to have a theological scepticism toward the quasi-religious promises of transhumanism offering digital immortality and a utopia.

Biblical Metanarratives as Missional Responses toward the Phenomena and Philosophies of the Metaverse

Jean-François Lyotard, the postmodern philosopher, captured the essence of the postmodern sensibility as being the absence of the metanarrative[54] by saying, "Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives."[55] Whereas postmodernists deconstruct metanarratives by being relative and sceptical of universal narratives such as the biblical truths, metamodernists make efforts to rediscover the valuable things constructed by modernists but deconstructed by postmodernists. In other words, one of the noticeable aspects of metamodernism is that it engages in the resurgence of metanarratives and universal truths. This is the ambivalence of metamodernism. On the one hand, its philosophy challenges the biblical human ontology and epistemology by underpinning the phenomena of the virtual identity crisis and

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[53] Richard Ned Lebow, *The Politics and Ethics of Identity: In Search of Ourselves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 65.

[54] Henriques and Gortz, "What is Metamodernism?"

[55] Jean-Francois Lyotard and Geoff Bennington, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

disembodiment. On the other hand, it opens a tremendous opportunity for Christian mission in the era of the metaverse by resurging some of the important modern values and by reinforcing the importance of the biblical metanarratives. This positive side of metamodernism can be used as a missional tool to reintroduce the biblical metanarratives, which can bring hope to humanity by overcoming the hopelessness and deconstruction caused by postmodernism's cynical irony and relativistic scepticism toward the universal truths. Here are the three main narratives that Christian mission needs to particularly focus on as responses toward the phenomena and philosophies of the metaverse to reconstruct the biblical truths.

The Narrative of God's Creation: Imago Dei

Genesis 1:26-27 exposes that the imago Dei is best understood as human identity since humanity was created in a manner appropriate to the realization of its God-given identity.[56] This God-given identity has a distinctive theological role to play, which is the unique office as a divine representative and divine reflection.[57] In the era of the metaverse, it is likely to happen that humans will identify more with their digital identities than their real identities. In other words, humans will replace their God-given identity with the virtual identities that they create in the metaverse. This will result in two serious theological consequences. First, the very nature and foundation of human identity will be altered from the triune God who created humans in their image to humans who create their virtual beings. This is more than the humans' evil ambition and desire to be ontologically independent from God. This is also more than a distorted anthropocentric perception of God and

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[56] Ryan Peterson, *The Imago Dei as Human Identity: A theological Interpretation* (Philadelphia, PA: Penn. State University Press, 2016), 120.
[57] Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 184.

His created world without acknowledging the existence of God and a theocentric perspective on reality. This is a vain endeavour to place humans in the place of the Creator by creating the metaverse and controlling their anthropomorphic avatars. The Israeli philosopher, Yuval Harari, anticipates in his book "Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow" that one of the human agendas in the age of digitalization is to attain divinity.[58] Although he explains that the term divinity does not mean the omnipotent biblical God but superhuman like Greek gods or Hindu devas, the term "Homo Deus" per se reveals the latent human desire of being rebellious against the Creator by continually evolving to the status of divine beings through their anthropomorphic avatars created in and reflecting their images. In the era of the metaverse, imago Dei emphasizing the very nature of human identity in God will be seriously challenged by imago meta persuading humanity to identify them with the virtual version of themselves to progress toward divinity.

The second consequence is related to altering God's mandate from actualizing God's divine purpose to actualizing human ambition. First and foremost, imago Dei implies God's own self-actualization through humankind.[59] God created humans in His image to make His plans and purposes known and actualize through them.[60] It means that imago Dei is not only related to who we are but also what we are created for as God's image bearers. After creating the first human in His image, God gave him the mandate to act as His agent to cultivate the real world that He created. This mandate is the original mission of God given to humankind so that imago Dei is inseparable from "Missio Dei" since both are central to human existence as the cultural mandate

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[58] R. Yuval Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (New York: Vintage Publishing, 2017), 114.
[59] Jacob Kavunkal, Errol D'Lima, Evelyn Monteiro and Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, *Vatican II: A Gift & a Task: International Colloquium to Mark the 40th Anniversary of Vatican Council II* (Mumbai: St. Paul's, 2006), 179.
[60] Kavunkal et al., *Vatican II*, 179.

of God ties both together.[61] It is obvious that the metaverse is an important emerging mission field where Christians share the gospel of Christ and cultivate the virtual environments to fulfil the missional and cultural mandates of God. This actualization of God's mandates in the metaverse will be only possible when His people are constantly aware of who they are and what they are created for in relation to Imago Dei. In the era of the metaverse, experts anticipate that people, even Christians, will be confused between their God-given identity and their self-created virtual identities or simply conflate them together as they are more inclined to immerse themselves in the virtually constructed world and live a kind of blurring of the distinction between real and non-real.[62] The disenchantment of the biblical human identity, which began in the Enlightenment and was followed by postmodernism's deconstruction, will be accelerated through the identity confusion and crisis in the metaverse. Hence, the re-enchantment of the creation narrative, in particular imago Dei, needs to be reminded to reinforce the biblical understanding of human identity, dignity, mission and destiny as well as to differentiate the God-given identity from the self-created virtual identities.

The Narrative of Jesus' Incarnation: Corporeal Embodiment

The term "avatar" is derived from "ava-tri" which means descent in Sanskrit.[63] The word ava-tri in the religious context means divine descent, and Indian Christians have used ava-tri to understand the

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[61] Clark Fobes, "Imago Dei in Missio Dei: Biblical Foundations for Work and Mission," *The Evangelical Missiological Society Southwest Regional Conference 2018*, 2-3, https://www.academia.edu/36262616/IMAGO_DEI_IN_MISSIO_DEI_BIBLICAL_FOUNDATIONS_FOR_WORK_AND_MISSION.

[62] Leila El Kamel, "For a Better Exploration of Metaverses as Consumer Experiences," in *Virtual Social Identity and Consumer Behavior*, eds. Natalie Wood and Michael Solomon (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2015), 29.

[63] Jun, "Virtual Reality Church," 303.

concept of the incarnation of Christ.[64] However, there is a fundamental discrepancy between the avatar in the Indian religious context, in particular in Hinduism, and the incarnation of Jesus in Christianity. Avatars in Hinduism refer to divine beings taking various earthly forms for fulfilling different tasks, and they are mythical and perfect while the incarnation of Christ is real but imperfect because He became a human in history although He was without sin.[65] Furthermore, in Christianity, Jesus' divine nature is not blended with His human nature because He, the transcendental God, completely became embodied in human flesh while avatars in Hinduism are the manifestation of divine beings taking forms of humans or animals so that they are not truly embodied in flesh. Sankara, the 8th-century philosopher, raised a reasonable question about dualism in the notion of the avatar with an example that Brahma is only One, and it is impossible for him to be two - both Brahma and his avatar at the same time[66] if he is truly embodied. The conclusion was that Brahma's avatar is not a real incarnation, but merely another image within Maya (the veil of illusion).[67] Thus, Sankara's question can be extended to the concept of virtual avatars in the metaverse. The online avatar is not a true presence of the human users in virtual reality but their graphic representation in the veil of cyber-Maya.

As aforementioned, the metaverse ushers are living in the disembodied age. Some scholars criticise that avatar-mediated immersive experiences may cause serious mental problems, such as schizophrenia since they constantly experience fragmentations and disembodiment between their corporeal existence and virtual presence.[68] But even more profoundly, it will jeopardize the biblical understanding of humanity

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[64] Jun, "Virtual Reality Church," 303.

[65] Noel Sheth, "Hindu Avatāra and Christian Incarnation: A Comparison," *Philosophy East and West* 52:1 (2002 January), 108.

[66] Zoe Detsi-Diamanti, Katerina Kitse-Mytakou and Effie Yiannopoulou, *The Flesh Made Text Made Flesh Cultural and Theoretical Returns to the Body* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 30-31.

[67] Detsi-Diamanti, Kitse-Mytakou and Yiannopoulou, *The Flesh Made Text*, 30-31.

[68] Leila El Kamel, "For a Better Exploration of Metaverses," 29.

that God created in the combination of earthly material (dust) and His breath (His Spirit). It means that biblically authentic humans consist of body, mind, and soul that are holistically and mysteriously integrated. God created humans as embodied beings that do not allow the compartmentalization of body, mind, and soul until death. Thus, it is only possible for a human to have a fully embodied existence when we interact with God, fellow humans, and nature in physical reality. The incarnated Christ was a completely embodied human who was seeable, touchable, and even killable to offer Himself as the eternal atonement for our sins. The real theological peril expected in the disembodied age is that the metaverse can play a role to foster a disembodied theology, such as digital Docetism that denies corporeality to be fully embodied human or digital Gnosticism that undermines the significance of physical experiences of humans in the ordinary earthly life. These theological tendencies in the era of the metaverse will affect humans to disregard the well-being of our physical body, to be disengaged in the mundane responsibilities of life, and to withdraw from social interactions and engagement with God's created world. Hence, the narrative of Jesus' incarnation as an authentic model of human embodiment needs to be re-emphasized in the age of disembodiment to overcome a digital version of Platonic dualism separating physical life from virtual life and to live as fully embodied humans whose existence of the physical body and presence of soul are accompanied until death separates them.

The Narrative of the Eschatological Event: The final restoration of utopia

Religion is closely related to human suffering. All the major religions have developed their own soteriology and eschatology for humans to be rescued from suffering or to permanently escape from the suffering world (dystopia) to a utopia where there will be no more pain and death. Soteriology and eschatology are the essential basis

in all the major religions not only for providing meaning to life at present but also for giving hope for the uncertain future. In this light, transhumanism is more than a philosophy. It is a religion since it pursues the evolutionary development of cloning human minds for the very telos of human existence in the metaverse and of cybernetic immortality after death as its soteriological goal.[69] In addition, transhumanism is based on a techno-optimist perspective on the eschatological end of the physical world, which will be accomplished by human efforts alone.[70] This soteriological goal and eschatological hope of transhumanism aim to replace traditional religions by proclaiming that through technology transhumanism can achieve what traditional religions have sought for millennia: immortality and the establishment of a cyberspace utopia.[71] Technologically transformed digital humans will eventually elevate them to a god-like status, an immortal "Homo Deus" in the metaverse.[72] The ultimate goal of transhumanism is to create a cyberspace utopia where there will be no Christian God, the Creator, the Sustainer and the Judge, but full of digitally transformed humans who deify themselves and who reign in their cyber heaven.

Transhumanism in the metaverse seems to entice humans by offering great religious comfort and a vision that humans will be redeemed from this dystopia full of sufferings caused by war, disease, and death and enter into the cybernetic utopia without going through the apocalyptic eschatological process in which everyone needs to face divine justice. However, many experts anticipate that the metaverse will be a virtual

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[69] Mikael Leidenhag, "Saved Through Technology: Exploring the Soteriology and Eschatology of Transhumanism," *Religion Compass* 14:11 (2020 November), 1-9, https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12377.

[70] Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, "Transhumanism as a Secularist Faith," *Journal of Religion and Science* 47:4 (December 2012), 725.

[71] Tirosh-Samuelson, "Transhumanism as a Secularist Faith," 715.

[72] Giulia Isetti, Elisa Innerhofer, Harald Pechlaner and Michael De Rachewiltz, *Religion in the Age of Digitalization: From New Media to Spiritual Machines* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2021), 8.

dystopia where there will be financial inequality between the haves and the have-nots, which will lead to social inequality in the virtual space.[73] There will be different kinds of cyber-crimes too. All the problems that we observe and experience in the real world will be transferred to the metaverse because transhumanism cannot resolve the sinful nature of humans. The ultimate goal of transhumanists using the metaverse as a medium is to establish a Godless society where superhumans can reign. From the perspectives of biblical soteriology and eschatology, the promise of transhumanism for superhumanization will actually end up with dehumanization depriving humans of their God-given identity, dignity and destiny. Furthermore, transhumanism will deprive humans of opportunities to fully trust in Christ who died and was resurrected to redeem us from our sins and death and to participate in the glorious eschatological event when Christ returns to restore fallen humanity and the world. Hence, it is significant for Christians to proclaim the biblical version of eschatology to enable humans to live their ordinary lives either in joy or suffering through embracing the suffering of Christ and the hope that He will restore His kingdom to bring them into the perfect utopia.

Conclusion

Advanced technology in the fourth industrial revolution and Covid-19 have opened the fourth mission era when connection and networking through internet technology will become the main platform for mission. In particular, the metaverse is expected to replace the 3W-based internet service by creating virtual environments as the fourth place in human society where home, work and socialization

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[73] Jean-Philippe Vergne, "The Future of Trust will be Dystopian or Decentralized: Escaping the Metaverse," *Forthcoming in special issue of Revista de Occidente on The Future of Trust*, 17 September 2021, https://ssrn.com/abstract=3925635 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3925635.

are converged. Thus, it is significant to understand the potential effects of the metaverse in both our daily lives and God's mission by analysing its positive and negative phenomena and the underlying philosophies underpinning the phenomena. The scope of this chapter was to describe only the negative effects of the metaverse and to propose some theological reflections as missional responses toward the phenomena and philosophies. In the age of digitalization and metaverse, human identity based on Imago Dei will be challenged by imago meta, which will lead to confusion about the original mandate of God to cultivate His created world. The disembodiment of humans by the discrepancy between their physical existence and virtual presence will cause other ontological and epistemological problems as their perceptions of themselves and realities will be illusory.

Finally, the metaverse will be a platform to foster a God-less culture and society by enticing humans with anthropocentric hope for immortality and a utopia. The concept of oscillation in metamodernism seeking the third position underpins the ontological and epistemological claims of metaverse regarding the human-avatar symbiosis for not only co-existence but also co-evolution between biological humans and digital humans. The long-standing human desire to redeem themselves from the dystopian world and to deify themselves in the virtual environment is well supported by the goal of transhumanism, which is regarded as a secularist faith for human flourishing. In this fourth era of mission in the metaverse, the fundamental missional approach as a counter-measure is to reintroduce the biblical metanarrative: Imago Dei in the narrative of God's creation; the embodiment of Jesus in the narrative of Christ's incarnation; the restoration of fallen humanity and the world in the narrative of the apocalyptic eschatology. Interestingly, the creation narrative is located at the very beginning of the Bible; the incarnation narrative can be found in the middle of the Bible and the narrative of the apocalyptic eschatology is at the end of the Bible. The three narratives are the essential parts of the Bible containing the core messages for biblical soteriology and eschatology. This

interesting feature is a strong justification to emphasize the necessity of reintroducing the biblical metanarrative in a fresh way not only to rescue God's people from the complicating confusion caused by the philosophies of this age but also to expand the Kingdom of God in both this physical world and the virtual world.

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Renewing the Pentecostal Distinctive of the Sending in Worship

Leon Lim

Abstract

The Pentecostal movement is marked by its distinctive emphasis on the Holy Spirit. One of its core beliefs is the empowerment by the Holy Spirit for the ministry of the gospel to the world. The Pentecostal revival sparked worship that has a heavy emphasis on missions, and it is reflected in the many who commit their lives to the mission of God to the world. This made the movement one of the fastest-growing in the world. Today we see the mainstream Pentecostal worship service shift away from a strong Sending portion of worship. The Sending of worship (the final part of the four-fold order of worship) is the portion of corporate worship in which the church receives the Spirit's invitation for empowerment and blessing for God's mission to the world and the church's response to be sent out. This article seeks to speak to the need for us to keep a strong emphasis and in some ways rediscover the importance of the Sending of worship as it would go far in bringing back the Pentecostal distinctive of being a missional movement empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Introduction

I was seven years old, seated in a children's camp when I was overwhelmed with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon me. As I stood there for hours speaking in an unknown language, I do not remember all the details of that day, but I remember the intense drive to bring the good news of God to the world that came after. That

intense missional call was affirmed in me at the age of 12 when I received a call to full-time pastoral ministry. I remember saying many times to God, at countless worship services during moments of response and calling to missions, "Here I am, send me!" I didn't want to be a pastor, I wanted to be a missionary. Little did I realize that decades later it would all make sense. God's call for me to pastoral ministry and to worship are all intrinsically connected to the mission of God.

In my journey, I discovered that worship can be defined as the Father's invitation to his family of love where we enjoy a relationship with him through Jesus Christ and fellowship with each other through the power of the Holy Spirit. God is actively working to draw the entire world back to him. Worship and missions are dynamically related. Corporate worship engages worshippers in the mission of God to draw humanity back to God, offers us redemption through Christ, forms us into the likeness of Christ, and empowers us for witness through the power of the Spirit.[1] In this article, I will focus primarily on the Sending of worship. Any time the word worship is used in the context of this paper refers mainly to corporate worship as the Gathering of God of his people, the revealing and responding to God's story through the Word, Jesus Christ, the remembrance and celebration of our response through Christ at the Table, and God's Sending of the church by the power of the Spirit. This pattern of worship can be seen throughout the ages and is a model of worship widely known as the four-fold order of worship (Gathering-Word-Table-Sending).[2]

What I came to understand growing up in my context as a Pentecostal worshipper, was that this pattern of worship was consistent in all my experiences of church. Not only that, but the worship in my context also had a characteristic emphasis on the Holy Spirit, the constant

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[1] Ruth A. Meyers, *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission; Gathering as God's People, Going Out in God's Name* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 10. The capital letters for these words are my emphasis.

invocation of the power of the Spirit, and a peculiar urgent missional call in their worship for the church to reach the world in light of the imminent return of Christ. Sad to say, there appears to be a shift away from such emphasis, invocation and call in mainstream Pentecostal worship. What I have noticed however is that the Pentecostal services I have attended have moved away from their roots of fiery altar calls and missional sending of worship. In most cases, the sending in the service is reduced to casual and quick dismissals that have very little significance in reminding the worshipper of God's missional call and sending into the world.[3] The service elements that were located as response to the revelation of God's Word are now located in the middle of the service in favour of video announcements or elements that try to get your buy-in for church events. The sermon is often viewed as the most important part of the service whereas the response to the Word is often just a song and the dismissal just an operational matter or the next happening of the day.[4]

More than ever before, I believe the Sending of the worship service needs to be addressed if we long and desire for us to renew and continue our God-given mandate as the church. Perhaps the renewal of our Sending in our worship service will do us good in reminding us not just of our roots but our continual purpose as the church of Jesus Christ in bringing the hope of the gospel to the world. To do that,

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[2] Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old & New: A Biblical, Historical and Practical Introduction*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), Chapter 13, Kindle; Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), Chapter 2, Kindle; William A. Dyrness, *A Primer on Christian Worship: Where We've Been, Where We Are, Where We Can Go* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2009), Chapter 5, Kindle; Greg Scheer, *Essential Worship: A Handbook for Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2016), 79–98.

[3] Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services*, Chapter 8, Kindle.

[4] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, Chapter 8, Kindle.

let us begin by examining our Pentecostal missional distinctive in our worship.

Pentecostal Missional Distinctive

A look at the recent Asbury Revival reminded me so much of our Pentecostal roots where there is a distinctive emphasis on experiencing God and responding to him.[5] Similarly, Pentecostal worship thrives on encountering God through the Holy Spirit. If there is anything that Pentecostalism has been characterized by it is its worship.[6] The tangible experience of God's Spirit in our worship is seen as pivotal in leading us towards worshipping the Father and seeing the truth of the gospel but also characterizes our movement by an intense seeking of the baptism of the Holy Spirit for the empowerment for ministry to serve God in the world.[7] The Pentecostal movement is no stranger to worship services that have a heavy emphasis on missions. Such emphasis is in the worship services with calls and invitations to ministry and service resulting in many committing their lives to the mission of God for the World.

One of the marks that distinguishes the worldview of Pentecostals is their strong emphasis on the immanent presence of God in the lives of believers.[8] The experience of God is so important in Pentecostal

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[5] Jonathan Powers, "The Tabernacle and the Auditorium: What the Asbury Outpouring Shows Us About Worship" (April 2023), accessed 9 May 2023, https://iws.edu/2023/04/what-the-asbury-outpouring-shows-us-about-worship/.

[6] Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christin Social Engagement* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 23; William W. Menzies and Robert P. Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentecostal Experience* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2000), 24.

[7] Steven Studebaker, *From Pentecost to the Triune God: A Pentecostal Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 191.

[8] Wonsuk Ma, "'When the Poor Are Fired Up': The Role of Pneumatology in Pentecostal-Charismatic Mission," *Transformation* 24, no. 1 (2007): 29.

worship that it is not peculiar to hear worship services being evaluated as good or bad based on whether worshippers feel they have encountered or experienced God. Our experience with God is so important to us that we often value our experience over theological reflection. This value caused us to be a people of action rather than that of reflection over our fundamental beliefs or even our worship.[9] In the practice of worship, Pentecostalism has had, arguably, the greatest contribution to the larger Church.[10] Yet it is in this area of influence in Christian worship that we have been slow to leverage.[11] What use is the experience of God if it does not lead us to action?

Pentecostalism, from its strong emphasis on the experience of God, brought about a distinct call to ministry, a strong urgency to minister the gospel due to the imminence of Christ's return and a strong expectation of God restoring his kingdom.[12] Marked by this distinct missional thrust, the Pentecostal movement then became the fastest-growing Christian movement in recent history.[13] The Assemblies of God in its beginnings was a sending movement with proclaiming the gospel at home and abroad as part of its reason for being.[14] One of the purposes the fellowship was formed was to oversee the ongoing thrust of missionaries out into the world.[15] The narrative of God sending us out into the world was pivotal to our worship as Pentecostals.

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[9] Menzies and Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, 209.

[10] Harvey G. Cox, *The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the 21st Century* (London: Cassell, 1996), 139–157.

[11] Chris E. Green, "Introduction to Pentecostal Worship," in *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Worship*, ed. Lee Roy Martin, 2nd ed. (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2020).

[12] Ma, "'When the Poor Are Fired Up'," 29.

[13] Allan Anderson, "The Origins of Pentecostalism and Its Global Spread in the Early Twentieth Century," *Transformation* 22, no. 3 (2005): 175; Francis A. Sullivan, "The Pentecostal Movement," *Gregorianum* 53, no. 2 (1972): 237.

[14] Edith Waldvogel Blumhofer, *The Assemblies of God: A Popular History* (Springfield, MO: Radiant Books, 1985), 73.

[15] Gary B. McGee, *People of the Spirit: The Assemblies of God* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2004), 114–116.

This growth should not come as a surprise to us because our fundamental belief in the empowerment of the Holy Spirit is for the ministry of the gospel. The Assemblies of God in its seventh fundamental truth states:

> All believers are entitled to and should ardently expect and earnestly seek the promise of the Father, the baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire, according to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the normal experience of all in the early Christian Church. With it comes the enduement of power for life and service, the bestowment of the gifts and their uses in the work of the ministry…This experience is distinct from and subsequent to the experience of the new birth…With the baptism in the Holy Spirit come such experiences as an overflowing fullness of the Spirit, a deepened reverence for God, an intensified consecration to God and dedication to His work, and a more active love for Christ, for His Word and for the lost.[16]

The experience of the Holy Spirit in our worship should lead us to seek empowerment for ministry to bring the gospel to those whom God loves. Our expectation to encounter God, especially in the work of the Holy Spirit, not only enhances our faith and intensifies our call and love for God but also drives our commitment to God's work and mission to save the world. For classical Pentecostals, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is not merely a gift for self-edification but a gift that enables us to be powerful ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Although this gift of enablement through the Spirit may be obvious to many of us, I submit that it is often not the case in practice.

At least in my experience, there is in general a diminished expectation of God encounters and experiences in Malaysian Pentecostal churches

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[16] "Assemblies of God 16 Fundamental Truths," n.d., accessed 10 May 2023, https://ag.org/Beliefs/Statement-of-Fundamental-Truths#7.

so much so that what was dynamically a weekly encounter with God is now seen more as a chance to encounter God if the music is good, or if the song ministers to me, or if the preacher is awesome. The diminished expectation of God encounters and experiences is also reflected in the deflated response in returning to corporate church services post-pandemic. The desire and expectancy for the gifts of the Holy Spirit are more about personal desire than the ability to be empowered for ministry. It is also not too much to say that our missional distinctives are not quite what they used to be. Our weak emphasis on the Sending of worship has also led to people dismissing themselves from corporate worship rather than expecting the sending and blessing of God before God disperses those whom he gathered to continue our worship in the world.

Truth be told, our missional distinctives should never be dislocated from the expression of our weekly service and Christian worship as a whole. As it may be, it would do us good to rediscover and renew the Sending portion of our worship service to reflect not just more of the work of the Holy Spirit in our worship but the call to God's mission. I submit that the renewal of the Sending of our worship service and our journey towards coming back to our Pentecostal missional distinctives could contribute to the larger tradition of the Church in a significant way since we firmly believe in the empowerment of the Spirit.

Sending of Worship

What I have come to learn over these years is that the gospel's missional thrust is a major part of God's story and has been an integral part of worship services, especially in the Sending portion of congregational worship.[17] The four-fold order of worship in its simplest manner begins with the Gathering which is God's invitation to assemble and

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[17] Clayton J. Schmit, *Sent and Gathered: A Worship Manual for the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 44–46.

our response to prepare to worship, praise and thank him, confess our sins, and receive his pardon. The Word becomes the revelation of the truth of God's invitation as he speaks to his people, which they listen, receive, and respond. The Table is the invitation to partake of Christ, experience, and participate in the life of Christ in which we offer our everything in thanksgiving and obedience. The Sending becomes for us the Spirit's invitation for empowerment and blessing for God's mission to the world and our response to be sent out.[18]

The purpose of God's gathering to worship is to dialogue with his people and reveal to us more of who he is and then call us to obedience in which we are then empowered and blessed to be sent out. The Sending of worship is crucial because it connects us with not only the truth that God gathered us as the community before God in worship, but he then calls and scatters this community out into the world to serve his purposes.[19] The Sending reveals to us that God's mission is at the heart of Christian worship.[20] It should come as no surprise that the work of a missional church is the work of God by the power of the Holy Spirit.[21] If our distinctive as Pentecostals is the work and encounter of the Spirit, then this portion of the service would seemingly be a very significant part of the service to us.

While the Sending is probably the shortest part of the worship service, it is not in any way the least important.[22] The Sending for many in history, is the most important part of the service.[23] The Sending connects our worship to our participation in God's mission and our call to respond and engage in God's mission to the world. For centuries,

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[18] Robbie Fox Castleman, *Story-Shaped Worship: Following Patterns from the Bible and History* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), Chapter 4, Kindle.

[19] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, Chapter 8, Kindle.

[20] Meyers, *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission*, 10.

[21] Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 45.

[22] Meyers, *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission*, 181.

[23] Meyers, *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission*, 181.

the Sending was established as the primary act of worship as we can see from the word "Mass" which means "you are sent".[24] Clayton Schmit rightly points out that the Sending is more than a dismissal. The Sending is moving from one state of worship to another instead of the conclusion and suspension of worship.[25] Worship does not start or stop contrary to our notion; it is unceasing and thus only changes form.[26] A worshipper is gathered by God into corporate worship only to be sent out worshipping through the blessing of God to their vocation and calling to the world.

Schmit raises his concern that if the Sending is seen as mere dismissal, what we gathered for is now concluded and we have no further agenda.[27] This problematic view of the Sending has regrettably caused us in our routinised close of worship, to hurry or omit the benediction entirely. It is a common occurrence in many contexts to close worship and to dismiss the congregation with a casual "the service is now over", or common for us to witness people leave before the closing song is done. The idea of the dismissal suggests that God's presence and purpose only occur during the worship service and further separates the dichotomy between the sacred and secular. The Sending however, reminds us that God's purpose and will (charge) is sending us out into the world empowered by God's blessing (benediction) to do the mission of worship where he has called us to.[28]

The two major parts of the Sending, the charge and benediction, surrounded by other elements serve to remind us of God's missional endeavour through worship to draw the world back to worship him.[29]

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[24] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, Chapter 8, Kindle.

[25] Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 47.

[26] Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), Chapter 1, Kindle.

[27] Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 47.

[28] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, Chapter 8, Kindle.

[29] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, Chapter 8, Kindle.

The Sending serves as a reminder that there is no such thing as an adjournment or dismissal of worship but rather a dispersal, a going forth from the presence of God to the world.[30] The Sending prepares believers for the demanding action of worship where we are thrust out into the world throughout the week, fully engaged in outward worship fulfilling our work as God's people.[31] Meyer writes that the Sending is "essentially the commissioning, sending the assembly into the world to continue their participation in God's worship and mission."

The spirit of the Sending proposes Constance Cherry, should be typically joyful for having met God, inspiring from capturing the heart of God and seeing the opportunities to respond to and serve him, and authoritative in blessing and empowering the assembly to fulfil the commands of God.[32] Pentecostals should be excited because the Sending is a pivotal moment where God calls the church to action since we gravitate to action than to theologize our worship. The Sending becomes the starting point where our faith becomes practical and having been in God's presence, we are now given the mandate to live it out. We have received and seen the true and living Word. Now, we are empowered to respond as the chosen faithful being led by the Holy Spirit to live out God's presence in a world that desperately needs him.

Over the centuries, we have had many practices and elements that constitute part of the Sending of worship. Common elements of the Sending of worship are the concluding prayer, benediction, the commissioning or call to service/discipleship, announcements, acclamations/doxologies, sending song, recessional, and postlude.[33] These elements are not ordered in any specific way except to ensure

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[30] Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 50.

[31] Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 52.

[32] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, Chapter 8, Kindle.

[33] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, Chapter 8, Kindle; Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 157–160; Carrie Steenwyk and John D. Witvliet, *The Worship Sourcebook*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 357.

the intentionality of both the two main elements, the charge and benediction, led from the revelation of the Word in worship.[34] The Sending through the intentional crafting, design and order of the service encapsulates the entire worship service leading us from God's revelation to our departing to do his will.

The concluding prayer expresses the congregation's thanksgiving for their encounter with God and the gift of worship they have experienced then requests God's blessing upon the assembly as they depart.[35] The words of the prayer whether carefully crafted or extemporaneous should encapsulate the revelation/experience/encounter with God through the service, invoking God's grace and power for the actions that we are going to take that he has called us to.[36] The dialogue is to God on behalf of the assembly to do his will through our lives, and should not be an alternative for the blessing. We are invoking God's blessing not pronouncing his blessing.

The Benediction, Latin for "good words" is the pronouncement by the leader of God's blessings to the worshippers as God declares the final words of sending. It also gives the congregation the assurance that the God they met who gathered them, revealed his Word to them, and offered them a way to worship will also be faithful to bless and be with them in their daily life as they depart.[37] The benediction also highlights that the church is sent forth into action through the power of the Spirit and they are not mere words from the leader or presider of the service. Therefore, it is beneficial that the blessings come from Scripture itself and in some contexts, the blessings are limited to specific biblical texts. However, in other contexts, it may be fitting to combine other words of blessings with various Scripture passages, drawn from varied sources in

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[34] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, Chapter 8, Kindle.

[35] Steenwyk and Witvliet, *The Worship Sourcebook*, 363.

[36] Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 157–158.

[37] Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 156.

our history or even spoken extemporaneously.[38]

The charge of the Sending which comes to us in the form of a commissioning, call to service or call to discipleship, reminds us that worship does not end when we leave the worship service. These elements challenge and remind us that our worship continues through obedient and grateful living and bears fruit through our witness.[39] The commissioning or call essentially reminds us that we live in faithful service to God. We do so not so that God will love us more. Instead, the call emphasizes that our response is because of the love of God and that we live by the power of the Spirit, not by our strength.[40] The charge commissions the church to faithful service of God's mission and calls forth a response of faith from the church, praying and blessing the church to remind the congregation of God's continual presence and sustenance to equip, protect and inspire those whom he commissions.[41] From being blessed, we can live as proactive citizens of the kingdom of God in the world God is redeeming and drawing back to him.[42]

Announcements as part of the Sending become for us, God's invitation into opportunities for ministry engagement and Christ-like communal living both in the church and out in the world.[43] Announcements serve to call us to our God-given task of being God's disciples who are in the world but not of the world. Announcements become key for us to connect and communicate with the church, not only on local matters of the church but also on the broader mission of the church.[44] As such,

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[38] Steenwyk and Witvliet, *The Worship Sourcebook*, 369.

[39] Steenwyk and Witvliet, *The Worship Sourcebook*, 357.

[40] Steenwyk and Witvliet, *The Worship Sourcebook*, 357.

[41] Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 159.

[42] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, Chapter 8, Kindle.

[43] Alan Rudnick, "A Theology for Announcements in Worship," October 15, 2012, accessed 10 May 2023, https://alanrudnick.org/2012/10/15/a-theology-for-announcements-in-worship/.

[44] Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 160.

announcements should never become sales pitches or advertisements to win participation in events that the church is organizing. Instead, it should reflect God's invitation to active participation in his mission. I also submit that announcements in the middle of the service before the sermon (a very common occurrence in the order of worship I experience in the churches I minister to nowadays) fail to command and communicate the same charge and blessing because it is void of the movement from the response to the Word and connection to the mission of God. When announcements in our services omit the need for God's blessing or do not connect it to the blessing of God and empowerment of the Spirit, they cause a dangerous disconnect where we do not realize the need for God's blessing to fulfil the call and task of God's mission. Announcements as part of the Sending help believers see its connection to the charge God has for our lives and our need for his invitation and blessing to do what he calls us to do. I have come to see announcements as akin to God's call to worship for all he has in store and sends us out to do.

The acclamation or doxology as an element in the Sending praises God for his glory and goodness, sets the tone for the dismissal as something joyful, hopeful, inspiring, and authoritative. The acclamation or doxology can be spoken but more often it is sung which makes it akin to a Sending song. However, a Sending song is different as it captures God's revelation and message in the worship service and compels the church forward into their week of Christian witness and service.[45] The song/s send the church out as active participants of God's mission in the world generally in a moving, rousing, or lively tempo that stirs us into action[46] calling "Onward Christian Soldiers!"[47] or "send us out, so the world may know You reign in us."[48] The Sending song commonly

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[45] Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 158.
[46] Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 158.
[47] Sabine Baring-Gould, *Onward Christian Soldiers* (Public Domain, n.d.).
[48] Starfield, *Reign in Us*, CD, I Will Go (Birdwing Music, 2008).

leads to a recessional in certain contexts where the leadership leaves the worship space, leading the way forward out as those sent into the world before a closing instrumental postlude with inspiring music that sends us back into the world.[49]

Importance of Renewing the Sending in Worship

I cannot overemphasize the importance of renewing the Sending in our worship services. Like any portion of worship, the Sending must regain its significance for us to recapture the fullest extent of the biblical worship that we have been invited into. In the context of this journal which concerns our broader Pentecostal ecclesiology and mission, we must regain our emphasis on what matters to the Holy Spirit in the worship of the Church. The Holy Spirit, the sender of worship, empowers and calls believers to a missional call to the world from gathered worship of the church. By renewing the Sending of worship, we are reminded that we are not just worshippers as the gathered but worshippers that are sent out to worship wherever God has called us to for the mission of God. The Sending helps us to regain the understanding as Meyer so aptly says, "worship is mission and mission is worshipful."[50]

When the Sending of the church becomes more than a dismissal until we meet again the following week, we realize how important it is for us to receive the blessing and empowerment of the Holy Spirit for the continual work of witness and service throughout the week wherever God calls. Worship does not end but it continues as we are sent out until we are gathered again whenever God calls. Worship calls us to a continual relationship with God that is not divided into different spheres for example the sacred and the secular. Worship as

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[49] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, Chapter 8, Kindle.
[50] Meyers, *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission,* 230.

the gathered for Pentecostals, becomes even more vital as they realize the need for encountering God in worship and receiving his power and blessing to be all he has called us to be and do all he has called us to do. The Sending then can raise the expectancy for us, not only for God to work among us but work through us. The Sending should raise our expectation of our encounter with God through the week as we ardently and earnestly seek the empowerment of the Spirit in our lives daily.

That leads us to the Sending being essential to help the church regain the emphasis on the need for the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives all the time. The Sending reminds us that we should be expectant to meet and experience God when we worship in the house of God. We should also be reminded by the Sending to be expectant of God's presence as we are out in the world. That the ever-abiding presence of the Holy Spirit and his promise and presence to always be with us making his face shine upon us, continually be gracious to us, lifting his countenance upon us and giving us peace. So that we are enabled to be bearers of the good news to a world that desperately needs to hear God's invitation back to him. Meyer says, "Worship establishes the assembly's distinctive identity as the body of Christ and sends the assembly forth to be the body of Christ in the world."[51] Worship becomes for us the way we discover God's purposes and learn how to live according to those purposes as we are sent out to the world. The Sending of worship, therefore, challenges the church to remember the purpose of worship. Worship is not purely for our enjoyment of God but thrusts us into the divine narrative of salvation and revelation that God is where we find our identity as the church and our calling to be the church, the primary manifestation of God's activity to the world.[52]

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[51] Meyers, *Missional Worship, Worshipful Mission*, 230.
[52] Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 72.

I believe that if we long to see the continual growth of our movement, we must acknowledge that our history of being the fastest-growing Christian movement has always been because worship and missions, for us, are integrally connected through the work and power of the Spirit. Missional worship should be seen through our emphasis on being empowered and sent by the Spirit from an encounter with the living God. This emphasis must be reflected in the worship of our church. Our distinct worship, I submit, can be reflected better through the renewal of the Sending in our worship services. Our remarkable growth as a movement lies not in the fact that we have some secret formula for evangelism but as a church community, our stories continue to remind us that God is on a mission to save the world. I hope that Pentecostals will desire to be at the forefront of worship that reflects that very reality to the world.[53] Perhaps taking steps towards and renewed importance of the Sending in our worship will remind us continually keep our distinctives as a missional movement empowered by the Spirit.

Practical Steps Toward a Renewed Sending

To leave us with some practical steps that will help us renew the Sending in our worship services, I will submit that it is helpful for the Sending of our service to recollect and remind the congregation of God's revelation for us during worship. This is not a summary of the entire service but the Sending, touching or alluding to the main emphasis of the Word will do much in helping the church remember that God is speaking to them, challenging, and charging them to follow him as they are sent out to be his people. The Sending should recall God's revelation and remind people that just as he gathered, invited us, inspired us, helped us, and met us, he will bless us to fulfil all he has called us to do as we go out into the world.

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[53] Ma, "'When the Poor Are Fired Up'," 33.

Secondly, it is also vital that as we carry and prepare the Sending of the church, whether we choose different elements or sequences to the elements of the Sending, there is intentionality on our part to contextualize the missional call to the local church. To effectively challenge our specific contexts, it is imperative for us to know and understand what God's challenges and blessings are for his people. We need to know and understand our people to challenge and bless them in ways that have significance and are meaningful to the church.[54] We also need to exhort and bless our people through the leading of the Spirit in ways that matter to their specific context and the challenges they face. If we can charge our congregations in loving ways that assure them of God's continual promise to be present and powerful in their specific circumstances, the Sending will become powerful reminders of the truth that they are not sent out defeated but able to succeed in all God has tasked them to do through the power of the Spirit.

This leads us to the third task for leaders, presiders, or even pastors as they send the church from corporate worship out into the world, we must send the church with the knowledge they are empowered by the Spirit. I suggest that it is not enough to allude to the reality of the truth that God is with us and gives us the power of his Spirit. The assurance of God's continual presence and blessing to his people must be given to them as they are sent out. The Sending needs to assure us to know that God's got our backs and that we can boldly do the ministry that God has prepared ahead for us.

Finally, with the creativity he has given us, let us make the Sending of our services meaningful by making it intentional rather than incidental. Preparation for the Sending requires not just foresight but the ability to understand the Spirit's leading and how to exhort the people by tying the entire narrative of God's story in our worship, challenge them to what God has called them to, and bless them with the assurance of

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[54] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, Chapter 8, Kindle.

the ever-present help of the Holy Spirit as they continue to worship wherever they are called. How we prepare and the way we conduct the Sending will make all the difference in the world in either the church seeing the Sending as important or something insignificant in the worship of the church.[55] We would do well to ensure that the core of the Sending becomes not a mere dismissal or adjournment[56] but rather that it becomes our habitual movement from the gathered worship to missional worship compelling us to go into the world and make disciples of every nation sent by the Father, centred on Christ, and empowered by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

As we conclude, I am reminded once again that the Holy Spirit's work in empowering us to witness is not merely incidental. God through sending his Spirit made a way for the Church to bearers of the gospel of Jesus Christ in which we became a recipient of this invitation and now we are sent to bring that invitation to the world. Our Pentecostal heritage of encountering God and seeking the empowerment of the Spirit for ministry should become for us something we can leverage to exemplify the missional worship that God has called us into. Maintaining a strong emphasis on our distinctives would be easier in some ways if we rediscover the importance of the Sending of worship and not diminish it to be a mere dismissal from worship.

The Sending as we have come to understand plays a major role in challenging and blessing the Church to become missional worshippers. By renewing the Sending of worship, we can strengthen our distinctive as a Pentecostal church that is missional by nature and perhaps grow to be even more dynamic in demonstrating the truth of God's

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[55] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, Chapter 8, Kindle.
[56] Schmit, *Sent and Gathered*, 157.

empowerment by his Spirit. My hope is that as a movement, we will rediscover the pattern of worship God has given us that enables us to become the worshippers he has called us to be. For the sake of the scope of this article, we have focused primarily on the renewal of the Sending of worship. But in due time that Pentecostals will see the renewing worship as a whole will form us to become the Church God called us to be. That the renewal of our worship will be a step in the direction of obedience towards who God called us to be as the church and towards what God calls us to do as his church.

When I was seven years old, I did not grasp the beauty of the worship God has gifted to us and invited us into. Through the years, I thank God for the opportunity to grow to come to see a tiny bit more of the big picture God has for the worship of the Church. As a movement, we are still the "new kid on the block"[57] and our growth is a gift to us by the power of the Spirit. Perhaps it is time to come of age to articulate and renew our worship by learning from the rich history and traditions that have come before us, leveraging the wisdom of the Spirit throughout the ages. Perhaps renewing our worship rather than reinventing the wheel is the way to go in raising our movement to do all that God has purposed for us. The renewal of the Sending of worship is possibly a great initial step that reminds us once again of what God

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[57] Ma, "'When the Poor Are Fired Up'," 33.

has so distinctively blessed us to know through our encounter with him by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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Speaking in Tongues in Public Worship

Nick Lim Kah Ken

Abstract

"Speaking in tongues" has been a hot topic in the Christian circle; let alone the idea of speaking in tongues in public worship. Those who disagree with tongues speaking in public worship tend to quote the Apostle Paul's words about tongues that unless it is a tongue with interpretation to edify the church, then the speaker should keep it to himself as self-edification. Yet the Pentecostal and Charismatic believers often practice the otherwise. From the Pentecostal perspective, one should understand Paul's teachings in the First Corinthians epistle by looking at the original context of his letter. Paul's teachings here cannot be treated as a universal timeless command to forbid tongues in public worship. Rather, in Pentecostal public worship, there is a purpose, time, and space for believers to pray and worship together in tongues as a body of Christ.

Introduction

If anyone were to do a search entitled "fake speaking in tongues" on the Google search engine would see that there are 2.58 million results – arguing for and against tongues-speaking as fake. With different people from all walks of life having different views about speaking in tongues – with some claiming that the religious experience is authentic, others claiming the opposite; Christians are now tasked with another question, whether such practice is permitted in public worship.

This paper entitled, "Speaking in Tongues in Public Worship" envisions answering the question, "How can the Pentecostal and Charismatic

movement respond to the challenges posed by others concerning tongues speaking in public worship?" This study aims to discover the truth behind the public prohibition of speaking in tongues as stated by Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians. The hypothesis is that with the proper understanding of the context in Paul's writings to the Corinthians, speaking in tongues in public worship has her "function" in public worship so long it fulfils several criteria. As tongue-speaking is a broad topic to cover, this paper will only attempt to answer whether speaking in tongues is permitted in public worship based on the context of First Corinthians chapters 12 – 14.

Tongues Speaking in the Eyes of the Bible

Have Tongues Ceased?

The Pentecostal and Charismatic believers often face challenges from other brothers and sisters in Christ from different denominations—especially the cessationists; questioning the idea of speaking in tongues, let alone in public worship. The cessationists believe that such gifts have ceased thus making the brothers and sisters from the Pentecostal and Charismatic background look as if they are a form of cult. Of course, over the years, the acceptance of the charismatic gifts has increased—with many of the mainline denominations getting more and more receptive, yet there is still a need to address the question of whether the practices of speaking in tongues publicly by the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement is biblical. Peter Master and John Whitcomb state, "Either the Charismatic point of view is biblically right, and we are all dutybound to obey the Lord and subscribe to it, or it is a great mistake and we should be doing something to persuade our Charismatic acquaintances to look at things differently."[1]

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[1] Peter Masters and John C. Whitcomb, *The Charismatic Phenomenon* (London: Wakeman Trust, 1992), 75.

Paul's Teachings on Tongues

The practices of spiritual gifts and in particular for the discussion of this paper—speaking in tongues, has always been a long-debated topic, be it among the theologians or the believers. And looking at the argument set forth by Paul in First Corinthians, many are confused because the teaching on tongues speaking seems to be contradicting one another because, on one hand, Paul told us that "tongues will be stilled"[2] while on the other, he said that we should "not forbid speaking in tongues."[3] Holding on to the words of Paul on the stilling of tongues, cessationists believe that spiritual gifts especially speaking in tongues have served their purposes in the past and it is no longer required.[4] Gordon L. Swanepoel in his book, *The Case Against Tongues*, used the writings of Apostle John, where he argued that there are no more revelations to be given in the book of Revelation and as such the perfect revelation—the Word of God: the Holy Bible has arrived; causing the cessation of the spiritual gifts.[5]

Furthermore, Paul's teaching may seem to bring up the idea that speaking in tongues is less superior[6] and that it should be practised in private.[7] This has caused the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements —who enjoy praying in tongues publicly; to be violating the teachings of the Bible since Paul has commanded it in his letter. Have the Pentecostal and Charismatic believers been violating the word of God? First, we need to understand the background and the context of Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Thereafter, we would need to address several issues relating to tongues such as whether tongues are intelligible or is

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[2] 1 Corinthians 13:8 (Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.)
[3] 1 Corinthians 14:39.
[4] Jimmy Jividen, *Glossolalia: From God or Man?* (Fort Worth: Star Bible, 1971), 144.
[5] Gordon L. Swanepoel, *The Case Against Tongues: Weighing up the Evidence* (Dubai: Anchor Publishing International, 2016), chap. 1, Scribd.
[6] 1 Corinthians 14:5.
[7] 1 Corinthians 14:27-28.

it a heavenly language, and the purpose of tongues as argued by both proponents and opponents on spiritual gifts.

Understanding the Corinthian Church

Since the teachings on tongues—be it the ones for or against; were given by Paul to the Corinthians, it is thus, imperative for us to first look at the background of the church in Corinth as it would provide a good perspective as to what Paul was trying to deliver to his audiences.

David Prior in his commentary pointed out that although Corinth was a prosperous and thriving seaport, the culture in Corinth was bad. He stressed that "the Greeks had a word for leading a life of debauchery: *Korinthiazein,* that is, to live like a Corinthian."[8] With such imagery in mind, Prior mentioned that the church in Corinth was sadly no different. Although the church in Corinth was large, it was full of cliques and a church of little discipline where they were lax both in their morals and doctrine. They were busy enjoying their new-found freedom and some of them were busy seeking the gifts of the Holy Spirit yet "short on love rooted in the truth."[9] While the Corinthians accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior, they were spiritually immature. Matthew Malcolm quotes David Ackerman in his book, "that Paul's theological conception of Corinthian problems is best thought of as 'spiritual immaturity.'"[10]

The Corinthians believed that the freedom that they had obtained allowed them to do whatever they deemed fit, and that intertwined with

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[8] David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians: Life in the Local Church* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2020), chap. Introduction, Scribd.

[9] Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, chap. Introduction.

[10] David A. Ackerman, *Lo, I Tell You a Mystery: Cross, Resurrection, and Paraenesis in the Rhetoric of 1 Corinthians* (2006): 24, quoted in Matthew R. Malcolm, *The World of 1 Corinthians: An Exegetical Source Book of Literary and Visual Backgrounds* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2012), chap. Content and Arrangement of 1 Corinthians, Scribd.

the cultures of the day. And this was the church that Paul was writing to—a church that was spiritually immature and lacked discipline. While the background provided may not be extensive, it provides a general overview of what the church in Corinth was like as we look at the issue of speaking in tongues.

Speaking in Tongues

Since the arguments on tongues-speaking are broad, we will only be looking at the arguments presented by both the proponents and opponents on the topic of whether tongues are intelligible or is it a heavenly language, whether tongues are true or is it a counterfeit, and whether lastly, if tongues are true, what could be the role of speaking in tongues in our lives? After presenting all the arguments revolving around these three factors, I will then present my position on whether Christians should speak in tongues in public worship settings. Firstly, let us look at the types of tongues.

Types of Tongues: Intelligible or Heavenly Language?

> [2] For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit.[11]

The Bible verse is one of the highly debated texts among scholars on whether speaking in tongues are foreign languages that humans could understand or is a tongue that no one understands except God. The first occurrences of the infilling of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 showed that the disciples were speaking in other languages where the foreign visitors around them understand them as declaring the wonders of

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[11] 1 Corinthians 14:2.

God in their languages.[12] Many had argued against this text—tongues being the language spoken to God. Tony Watts in his book, *Tongues Shall Cease?* argues that when Paul used the term "unfruitful" in 1 Corinthians 14:4, he did not mean that the tongues were something unintelligible. On the contrary, he argues that "the apparent unintelligibility of tongues speaking in the absence of an interpreter."[13] William O. Farmer in his book *Removing the Mystery from Tongues*, rebukes those who claim that they do not understand the words that they utter when they speak in tongues as false claims. Farmer claims, "This assumption has to be false if the Bible is true. It specifically refers to the speaker's 'understanding' and not to his 'lack of understanding.' It is his 'understanding' (knowledge of what he is saying) that is unfruitful, not his lack of comprehension."[14] Terry Miethe, the author of *A Christian's Guide to Faith & Reason*, supports Farmer by arguing that since the very essence of God is rational and "He created the universe in an orderly manner and man with reason, the Holy Spirit also used reason to work within man."[15] Therefore, in their arguments, they see no reason why the Holy Spirit would infill someone to speak in tongues that no one could comprehend. The arguments brought forth by the opponents on tongues being intelligible are convincing. After all, both the proponents and opponents would agree that the purpose of the infilling of the Holy Spirit is supposed to be empowerment for the witness of Christ.[16]

Therefore, the proponents believe that tongues are intelligible, using the xenolalia phenomena that had taken place in Acts 2 – where the

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[12] Acts 2:1-12.

[13] Tony Watts, *Tongues Shall Cease?* (Pennsauken: BookBaby, 2017), chap. Foundational Questions and Answers, Scribd.

[14] William O. Farmer, *Removing the Mystery from Tongues: A Commentary on the Verses Dealing with the Subject of Tongues* (Bloomington: Xlibris, 2006), chap. Tongues in 1 Corinthians 14, Scribd.

[15] Terry L. Miethe, *A Christian's Guide to Faith & Reason* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1987), 83.

[16] Acts 1:8.

people around the apostles heard them praising in their languages[17] as their supporting evidence. In addition, Daniel B. Wallace—a scholar in the Greek language cements the argument by stating, "It is therefore probable that Paul would speak in the tongues of human beings, but not in the tongues of angels (v1). 1 Corinthians 13:1, then, offers no comfort for those who view tongues as a heavenly language."[18]

So, is it true that tongues are supposed to be intelligible and not unintelligible? If it is so, and the purpose of the tongues is meant solely for evangelism just like in the early days when the missionaries were speaking in tongues to evangelize; then just like how the cessationists argue, tongues should be stilled since the perfect revelation (Bible) has arrived.

According to The International Bible Society, the full version of the Bible has been translated into 704 languages, with the New Testament being translated into 1,551 languages as of the year 2020.[19] Adding to the argument, with churches now segregating into language services, speaking in tongues is no longer required since there will be no one among the audience who will understand and even if there is an interpreter, why would God speak to his people in such a troublesome manner? God could have easily spoken to his people according to the language used in the services.

Prior refutes those arguments because he believes that such argument by those who do not hold to the idea that tongues are heavenly language from the context of 1 Corinthians 14 tends to take the words

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[17] Acts 2:6-11.

[18] Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, 9. Repr. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 698.

[19] "How Many Different Languages Has The Bible Been Translated Into?", The International Bible Society, accessed 20 April 2022, https://www.biblica.com/resources/bible-faqs/how-many-different-languages-has-the-bible-been-translated-into/.

of Paul out of context. Prior argues:

> If we take the text of 1 Corinthians 14 at face value, speaking in tongues bypasses the mind (14), is addressed to God himself and not to other human beings (2), and is acknowledged to be for the individual's edification (4), as well as being unintelligible because 'they are speaking mysteries in the Spirit (2).[20]

Sam Storms argues in his book that tongues are a heavenly language and the reason we are unable to understand the language that we are speaking is because it is the Holy Spirit who gives the utterance.[21] Charles Campbell in his theological commentary on First Corinthians supports the heavenly language idea as he believes that Paul "values this esoteric speech that communicates directly with God in the language of the heavenly angels."[22] However, the idea of tongues being a heavenly language is once again refuted by Farmer. According to Farmer, if indeed the utterance of this special language is when the person is filled with the Holy Spirit, then it cannot be out of love since it is the Spirit who controls such activity.[23]

Tongues: True or Counterfeit?

With all the discussions above, one cannot help but wonder if the gift of tongues is indeed a counterfeit. Tony Watts boldly states that he is convinced that the practice of the gift of tongues is a counterfeit because he reasons that whatever "benefits" that were stated by the pro-tongues group were already given to each Christian through their

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[20] Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, chap. 14, Scribd.

[21] C. Samuel Storms, *The Beginner's Guide to Spiritual Gifts* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2012), 181.

[22] Charles L. Campbell, *1 Corinthians*, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), chap. 14:1-36 Pursuing Love in Worship, Scribd.

[23] Farmer, *Removing the Mystery from Tongues*, chap. Tongues in 1 Corinthians 13, Scribd.

acceptance of Christ as the Lord.[24]

On the other hand, Timothy Laurito states that it seems illogical for Paul to promote speaking in tongues if what Watts states were true because if Paul were to view the idea of speaking in tongues as somewhat deficient, then using the examples from the Corinthians, Paul would have easily grabbed on the chance to rebuke the usage of speaking in tongues. He further adds that "given Paul's concern for the appropriate usage of speaking in tongues within the Corinthian church, it is evident that speaking in tongues should continue within the church today."[25] To add to what Laurito has indicated, Paul would not have said to the Corinthians in verse 39 to "… not forbid speaking in tongues,"[26] if Paul was against the idea. So, if indeed what Laurito said is correct, then what is the purpose of tongues?

Purpose of Tongues

Those who are against the idea of speaking in tongues and that spiritual gifts have ceased, do not find that there is any reason for spiritual gifts to exist in this current age. To the others who hold that tongues are intelligible only, they would have agreed that the purpose of the tongue is then for evangelism purposes.[27]

As for the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, the gift of tongues is both intelligible and a heavenly language. Tongues are not limited only to intelligible languages as shown in Acts 2, but they can also exist as a form of heavenly language where our communication is directed to

[24] Watts, *Tongues Shall Cease?* chap. WHY? The Purpose(s) of Tongues, Scribd.
[25] Timothy Laurito, *Speaking in Tongues: A Multidisciplinary Defense*, 2021, accessed 21 April 2022, https://search.ebscohost.com/login. aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=3121469.
[26] 1 Corinthians 14:39.
[27] "Speaking in Tongues," Bible.org, accessed 23 November 2022, https://bible.org/ article/speaking-tongues.

God only. So, what is the purpose of this heavenly language? According to Craig Keener, the focus of tongues is to pray with the Holy Spirit leading us.[28] Morton Kelsey—a psychologically trained tongue-speaker, believes that tongue-speaking is not just a mere religious expression, but evidence of how God works in reconciling our mind, spirit, and soul. Kelsey claims:

> This phenomenon is not, therefore, pathological nor infantile. Instead, it can relate the conscious mind to the ground of its existence in the collective unconscious. It can free the conscious mind from its extreme rationalism. It can allow the emotional side of the psyche not only a means of expression but also a method of nurture. Speaking with tongues can be a most concrete means of expressing joy and praise to God. Speaking with tongues is evidence of the Spirit of God working in the unconscious and bringing one to a new wholeness, a new integration of the total psyche, a process that the church has traditionally called sanctification.[29]

Based on Kelsey's argument, speaking in tongues has two purposes: one, it is the evidence that the Spirit of God is working and the other, edifying the person just as Paul has taught: "Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves…"[30] Prior argues that here shows that Paul approves of the usage of such a gift. What Paul disagrees with in the context of the Corinthian church is the abuse of this gift in public worship. Paul is asking for the church to use it in a disciplined and loving manner, and the purpose of this gift is to edify the church.[31]

The biblical understanding of the authenticity, types, and purposes

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[28] Craig S. Keener, *Gift & Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today*, 2020, 122.

[29] Morton T. Kelsey, *Tongue Speaking: An Experiment in Spiritual Experience* (London, 1965), 222.

[30] 1 Corinthians 14:4.

[31] Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, chap. 14, Scribd.

of tongues sheds light on the issue of speaking in tongues in public worship as advocated by the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements.

My Position on Speaking in Tongues in Public Worship

My position in speaking in tongues in public worship will be depicted through the three factors specified above: tongues being intelligible and heavenly languages, tongues being real, and the purposes of speaking in tongues.

Tongues Being Both Intelligible and Heavenly Language

Firstly, I believe that tongues can be both intelligible and heavenly languages that only God comprehends. This is not a neutral stance rather it is adhering to what Paul has stated in 1 Corinthians. Indeed, the first occurrence of the gift of tongues in Acts 2 speaks of the intelligible qualities of tongues. However, we cannot also discount the statement of Paul in 14:2 "For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit"[32] to a mere hyperbolical statement. While Paul is known for his rhetorical methods and the usage of hyperbole in his writings is probable, it would have made no sense for him to point out in this manner—almost in a sarcastic tone; where he argues that tongues utter the mysteries by the Spirit in this passage to state the otherwise. Therefore, we can only conclude, that Paul does agree that tongues can also be heavenly language.

Tongues – a True Religious Experience

Over the years, we have seen various teachings that speaking in tongues can be learned and it may be seen that such practices negate

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[32] 1 Corinthians 14:2.

the supernatural factor; thus, the idea of counterfeit. But one must acknowledge with millions of Pentecostals and Charismatic Christians around the world, there cannot be "mass-hallucination" among the tongue-speaking Christians where they were all speaking in tongues under the disguise of wrong teachings. Those who have experienced it would have stated that whatever they experienced is true and real—not out of obligation towards their denomination but out of their conscience and desire to be near God.

Besides that, even with those wrong teachings, due to their hunger for the presence of God and the infilling of the Holy Spirit to grant them the gift of tongues, it can still be that God had granted them this gift out of their desperate cries. Therefore, I do not think that speaking in tongues experience and its benefits are counterfeit as claimed by Tony Watts.

Purpose of Tongues: Self Edification

Since tongues can be both intelligible and unintelligible, then tongues are not only reserved for evangelism. As highlighted by some of the pro-tongues scholars above, unintelligible tongues also serve to edify oneself. How would this bring edification?

Firstly, it brings edification to our faith. As the utterances that we made with our mouths were by the Holy Spirit and not something that we can learn, such a gift reminds us that God's presence resides in us. Therefore, whenever we are weak in our spirit, by speaking in tongues, we are again reminded that God is still real and present in our lives.

Besides that, Paul mentioned that "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans."[33] This verse shows us that our Lord understands our struggles

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[33] Romans 8:26.

and at the same time, due to the mysterious utterances that came out of our mouths supernaturally, we cannot help but acknowledge that God is real and that he is working through us.

Importantly, praying in tongues edifies us because it propels us as disciples to live a holy life. The spiritual experience is a good reminder that since the Holy Spirit is working through us—through utterances of mysteries, holy living is required of us—thus the idea of sanctification.

Purpose of Tongues: Church Unity through Diversity

Just like the body has many parts, so do languages. Gordon Fee states:

> The body is one, yet the body has many parts. In saying that it is one, his concern is for its essential unity. But that does not mean uniformity. That was the Corinthian error, to think that uniformity was a value, or that it represented true spirituality. Paul's concern is for their unity; but for him, there is no such thing as true unity without diversity.[34]

Speaking in tongues should bring up our conscious mind to see how God is working in different people in the church to speak different languages but ultimately still speaks the praises of God. With many churches now being more specialised in serving their languages, it is hard for us in the church to hear different languages praising God and tongues seem to be the solution. Why must we use different languages to praise God when we can praise God intelligibly? It is not to show off how great we are in speaking such a divine language, rather it is a reminder that despite our differences - some worshipping God intelligibly, others in tongues; God still resides among us, and we all come with one goal in mind and that is his name is praised.

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[34] Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 178.

Purpose of Tongues: Breakthrough in Prayer

One of the advocates for tongues speaking in my church is Rev. Stephen Ong, who emphasises the importance of praying in tongues. According to Ong, he often finds himself having breakthroughs in prayer when he prays in tongues. Beyond the limitations of words when praying intelligibly, praying in tongues allows him to spend hours and hours praying and praising the Holy One.[35] Ong's personal experiences reveal that tongues enable us to pray differently. Just like the analogy of the parts of the body where we are created to function differently, I do not believe that there is only one universal form of prayer. While some might be able to pray hours and hours intelligibly, the Lord also grants to those—who are limited in this nature; his Spirit to help us to pray.

Purpose of Tongues: Rallying the Members

I believe that tongue-speaking is a great moment to rally people's attention to God. Gathering the church members to pray in tongues causes the members to focus not on their own needs but on God. Praying in tongues corporately and passionately in the service also shows how God is present with his people through different people exercising their spiritual gifts and with the gift of interpretation. Such practice can even bring the church into a deeper experience where we see how God is working among us—allowing us to work with one another in edifying the Body of Christ.

Another minister in my church also shared her experience in prayer. Pastor Jesslyn Ong, the worship pastor, was asking for a response during an altar call session to pray in tongues. As the members were praying in tongues, she received a vision and saw tongues of fire on top of each believer, and miraculously, they informed her at the end of the service that they all felt the heat throughout the prayer despite the hall being cold earlier and they were all "fired up" to win more souls.[36]

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[35] Interview with Rev. Stephen Ong, 20 October 2022.
[36] Interview with Pastor Jesslyn Ong, 20 October 2022.

Tongues – Part of the Order of Church Services

As I have presented above, I believe that tongues can be practised in public worship. While Paul inferred in verse 28, "If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God."[37], we need to understand the nature of the letter. This letter was written to address the issue of abuses of spiritual gifts in the church. Some spiritual elitists thought that their spiritual gifts had given them a higher position in the church, and many wanted to fight for the spotlight. Paul instructed that there should be order in the church and reminded them that the purpose of the gifts is not self-prominence but to be practised with love so that the church will be edified. Therefore, such an imperative cannot be taken as a universal command but to be read in context. If such a command is a universal and timeless truth, then the directive in verse 34 where Paul states that women should remain silent in the church should also be taken in the literal sense. Therefore, reading in context is important to catch the original intention of the author and how the timeless truth that the author is trying to depict can be brought across to believers in the current age. I strongly agree with Prior's interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:

> He is redressing an imbalance in Corinthian spirituality and correcting confusion in Corinthian worship. He wants tongues to find their proper place in the life of the church —neither reckoned to be the most important gift of all nor used in public worship without interpretation.[38]

Since it is not a universal, timeless command, and the instruction is to address the abuses, then the principle that we can draw from chapter 14 is that tongues should not be forbidden. Instead, tongues

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[37] 1 Corinthians 14:28.

[38] Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, chap. 14, Scribd.

are encouraged by Paul in verse 39 and speaking in tongues in public should be permitted so long it is done in an orderly manner. And in the case of the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, it is done in an orderly fashion because the pastors or leaders of the church would have given the congregation the instruction to pray together in tongues. Since it is an order or instruction from the leaders, these instructions then became the order of the church, thus practising tongues in public worship should be permitted. Laurito asserts, "Just as speaking in tongues results in the single believing individual offering prayer and praise to God, speaking in tongues within the corporate assembly of believers should result in the offering of prayer and praise to God."[39]

Conclusion

Despite the many arguments from both sides on speaking in tongues based on the context of 1 Corinthians 12-14, I am of the position that speaking in tongues is real and plays a role in public worship. The issue here is whether the practices are done in an orderly manner or are done out of members' selfish intentions. Despite Paul's instructions to the church in Corinth that there should not be any tongues if there is no interpretation, this should not be treated as a universal, timeless command for believers as the core issue with the Corinthians was their abuses of the usage of spiritual gifts. Paul was using his authority as the founder of the church to deal with this issue. Since this is not a universal command, the church should not be timid in practising such a gift as long as it is practiced with love under the overarching purpose to edify the church. Moving forward, I believe that the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches should advocate and teach the doctrine of tongues and corporate tongues can be practised in certain parts of the service. Members should have a better understanding and boldness

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[39] Laurito, *Speaking in Tongues*, chap. 2, Scribd.

in practising speaking in tongues in public worship. All these should be taken into consideration that there is spiritual maturity among the members and that it is done with love in an orderly manner.

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The Pentecostal Spirit and God's Mission in Malaysia and a Post-Pandemic 21ˢᵗ Century World

Chan Nam Chen

Abstract

How may Pentecostalism effectively participate in God's mission in a changed twenty-first-century world, including Malaysia? Pentecostalism has grown significantly around the world, contributing much to outreach and mission growth. Pentecostalism's pairing of the Holy Spirit empowering with its traditional emphasis on the Great Commission has sent Christians to evangelise, plant churches and meet the needs of the poor and marginalised. However, ground realities have changed drastically in the twenty-first century. This article makes its proposals in two fields. Theologically, Pentecostal engagement with the Great Commission may be enhanced and made more effective when it is framed within the larger concept of the *missio Dei*. Strategically and practically, the resources of Pentecostalism as found in its positive characteristics should be re-applied to address the six major changed realities: 1) urbanisation, 2) migration, 3) cross-border controls, 4) changes in the local socio-economic context, 5) growth of local Christianity, and 6) the online world.

Introduction

Historically, Pentecostalism was synonymous with mission and the Great Commission that mandates God's people "to go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Mt. 28:19). The vision of Acts 1:8 energised the early Pentecostal organisations in the United States

that emerged from the 1907 Azusa Street Revival. John W. Welch, the former chairperson (1915-18, 1921-25) of one such organisation stated, "The General Council of the Assemblies of God was never meant to be an institution; it is just a missionary agency."[1] This emphasis fuelled the growth of the *World Assemblies of God Fellowship* (WAGF) which today has more than 160 national church bodies worldwide with an estimated 70 million adherents.[2] Yet, the WAGF is but one part of the global Pentecostal phenomena. In a little more than a century, out of seemingly nowhere, Pentecostalism has grown to 679 million in 2023, one of the fastest-growing segments in global Christianity.[3]

For all that, it should be noted that through the years, the term 'Pentecostal' has morphed in its use as a category and in its connotations. Pentecostal Christianity is now mainstream, a stark contrast from the larger part of the twentieth century. Earlier, it referred to explicitly Pentecostal groups that at times carried connotations of Christians and churches on the margins, highly fundamentalist in orientation, usually small and almost cult-like. In recent decades, the scholarly study of Pentecostalism has expanded the use of the term into a larger catch-all category. For Roman Catholic scholar Edmund Chia, it is a "shorthand term" for "Renewalist" Christians that have "the emphasis on experience with the Holy Spirit and the other spiritual gifts."[4] Pentecostals are now to be found in every spectrum of global Christianity. *The World Christian Database* divides Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians (also known collectively

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[1] "A Missionary Movement," in *The Pentecostal Evangel* (Springfield, Missouri, 13 November 1920), https://archives.ifphc.org/.

[2] "World Assemblies of God Fellowship," accessed 16 January 2023, https://worldagfellowship.org/.

[3] Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., "World Christian Database" (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2023), accessed May 2023, https://worldchristiandatabase.org.

[4] Edmund Kee-Fook Chia, "Pentecostalism in Asia," in *Asian Christianity and Theology: Inculturation, Interreligious Dialogue, Integral Liberation* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 204, 215.

as "Renewalists") into three types: (1) *Pentecostals* – from explicitly Pentecostal denominations, (2) *Charismatics* - from historical non-Pentecostal denominations (Protestant, Catholic or Orthodox), and (3) *Independent Charismatics* – from movements and churches that resemble the first two types but do not fit their definitions.[5]

One aspect of the "Pentecostal spirit" is the passion and commitment to God's call to His Church for His mission. Pentecostalism's pairing of the Holy Spirit empowering with its traditional emphasis on the Great Commission has sent Christians all over the world to evangelise, plant churches and meet the needs of the poor and marginalised. This essay addresses the question of how may Pentecostalism continue to effectively participate in God's mission in a changed twenty-first-century world, especially in and from Malaysia. It proposes that Pentecostals may be more effective when its emphasis on the Great Commission is theologically framed within the larger concept of the *missio Dei*, and its Pentecostal strengths are strategically reapplied to six changed realities that have occurred in the Church and the larger world. Prefacing the essay's main proposals is a summary of the growth of global Pentecostalism that explains its indigenous nature. It concludes with a brief reflection on my personal experience as a Pentecostal.

Pentecostalism and the Growth of the Church in Mission

To chart the course forward, a brief overview of the nature, growth, and characteristics of global Pentecostalism is in order. This establishes where we were and where we are at. First, I reiterate that in the non-Western world where much of the growth of the Church has occurred, Pentecostalism is biblical and evangelical Christianity that is indigenous.

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[5] Gina A. Zurlo, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing, "World Christianity and Mission 2021: Questions About the Future," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 45, no. 1 (2021): 15–25, https://doi.org/10.1177/2396939320966220.

It is the Christian faith as understood and practised from non-Western worldview perspectives. Second, the growth and the spread of the church around the world in recent decades are largely Pentecostal in nature. Third, the characteristics of Pentecostalism which have fuelled its growth also contribute to its weaknesses. This needs to be addressed for Pentecostalism to engage deeper and more effectively with God's mission and the Great Commission.

The notion that Pentecostalism is Christianity indigenous to the non-Western world is not new. As suggested by Allan Anderson,[6] the notion is reinforced by Hwa Yung who also stresses its biblical and evangelical pedigree.[7] He lays the premise that the supernatural and miraculous are inherent to the cultural worldviews of Asian Christians. Hence when Asian Christians read the Bible through their worldview lenses and in faith put into practice what they read, Pentecostal manifestations and practices will naturally follow. This is in truth normative New Testament Christianity. Hwa opines that the current evangelical and Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal in Asia is the coming together of the different streams of what the Holy Spirit is doing in the Asian Church, "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."[8]

A similar perspective is indicated by Pentecostal Theologian Wonsuk Ma's definition of Pentecostalism (which I shall assume in this essay).

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[6] Allan Anderson, "Pentecostalism in East Asia: Indigenous Oriental Christianity?," *Pneuma* 22, no. 1 (2000): 115–32, https://doi.org/10.1163/157007400X00088.

[7] Yung Hwa, "Pentecostalism and the Asian Church," in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, ed. Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang, Revised (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2011), 30–45. Hwa cites numerous examples of pre-and-post Azusa Street Pentecostal-type manifestations in Asian Christianity which had no links with Western Pentecostalism to show that the earlier Western "Americo-centric" view of a three-wave development of Pentecostalism is only partially valid.

[8] Hwa, "Pentecostalism and the Asian Church," 44.

Ma proposed it as a provisional definition that takes into consideration the diversity among Pentecostals:

> …a Christian movement where vitality of the Spirit in the life of believers and the church receives a special emphasis resulting in the manifest operation of spiritual gifts, the presence of miracles, lively worship, renewal in the body of Christ, and committed zeal for winning souls through the empowerment of the Spirit.[9]

This definition is narrower than a generic emphasis on the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, and miracles. It harkens to the roots of classical Pentecostalism that associate the experience of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual gifts with mission and the Great Commission. Yet, it is also broad enough to equally describe Christians and churches that are less than comfortable with any ascription of Pentecostal or Charismatic to their identity. In Asia and the majority world, "the presence of miracles" and "zeal for winning souls through the empowerment of the Spirit" are not characteristics exclusive to Christians who self-identify as Pentecostals.

This is exemplified by the case of the *Sidang Injil Borneo* (SIB), a denomination that is now one of the largest in Malaysia. The SIB is the fruit of the *Borneo Evangelical Mission* (BEM), an interdenominational mission body formed in 1928 in Melbourne, Australia. Patterned after the *China Inland Mission* (CIM), the pioneering missionaries and founding Council members of BEM were evangelicals from the Anglican, Baptist, and Brethren denominations.[10] Jin-Huat Tan's

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[9] Wonsuk Ma, "Asian (Classical) Pentecostal Theology in Context," in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, ed. Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang, Revised (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2011), 62.

[10] Jin-Huat Tan, "The Borneo Evangelical Mission (BEM) and the Sidang Injil Borneo (SIB), 1928-1979: A Study of the Planting and Development of an Indigenous Church" (Ph.D., Oxford Centre for Mission Studies and University of Wales, 2007), 57–93.

research tells of the critical role of "revival movements" in the growth of SIB among the indigenous peoples of Sarawak, East Malaysia.[11] These revivals that resulted in spiritual revitalisation, evangelism and conversions were accompanied by Pentecostal phenomena such as the prophesying, "words of knowledge", long extended times of prayer, exuberant worship, and worshippers falling "flat on the floor unconscious" under the power of the Holy Spirit and "shake all over" when prayed for.[12] Of significance, the SIB churches in Sarawak and Sabah developed separately from the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in West Malaysia.[13] Many in the SIB's leadership nonetheless still shy away from any self-ascription of "Pentecostal" or "Charismatic."

Pertinent to God's mission, much of the growth in global Christianity is in the Global South and Pentecostal in nature. Pentecostalism grew from 58 million in 1970 to 656 million in 2021 with 86 per cent of them residing in the Global South.[14] On one part, this is due to the growth of explicitly Pentecostal churches, Neo-Pentecostal, and indigenous churches from the majority world. On another part, it is due to its increasing influence in churches, mission organisations and movements that are traditionally non-Pentecostal. Edmund Chia notes that in the Philippines, its "greatest influence is within the Catholic Church, specifically through the Catholic Charismatic Renewal."[15] In Malaysia, 80 per cent of the leadership in the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) may be considered Pentecostal or Charismatic.[16] Within the fold of the mainline denominations in

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[11] Tan, 241–278.

[12] Tan, 269–275.

[13] Jin-Huat Tan, "Pentecostals and Charismatics in Malaysia and Singapore," in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, ed. Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang, Revised (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2011), 227–247.

[14] Zurlo, Johnson, and Crossing, "World Christianity and Mission 2021: Questions About the Future," 18.

[15] Chia, "Pentecostalism in Asia," 219.

[16] Tan, "Pentecostals and Charismatics in Malaysia and Singapore," 247.

Malaysia, charismatic-oriented church services are not uncommon. Some of their larger local churches such as the Damansara Utama Methodist Church (DUMC) and the Anglican Holy Trinity Bukit Bintang (HTBB) have observably Pentecostal-type practices. Furthermore, many mission agencies and Christian NGOs in Malaysia also have Pentecostals or Charismatics in their leadership.

At the same time, the characteristics of Pentecostalism that drive its growth also contribute to recurrent challenges in its theology and leadership, especially amongst its newer adherents. Pentecostal historiography shows that "multitudes of nameless Christians are responsible for the grassroots expansion of the movement".[17] This strength in the grassroots comes from Pentecostal groups not restricting leadership and recognition as 'pastors' to those with higher education and formal theological training. However, this can carry with it a lack of theological comprehensiveness, sophistication, and depth, making it susceptible to deviant teachings. Its focus on soul-winning and church planting also causes it to ignore other aspects of God's mission such as social justice and creation care.

In addition, the pragmatic faith and entrepreneurial style of Pentecostal leaders that enable them to effectively evangelise, and build large churches and ministries often give rise to inadequate governance structures. In worst cases, this allows for controlling, even toxic leadership. As observed, many Pentecostal megachurches are "dominated by bold personalities, leading to problems with leadership

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[17] Teresa Chai, "Pentecostalism in Mission and Evangelism Today," *International Review of Mission* 107, no. 1 (2018): 119. Edmund Chia further notes that "a highly prized practice of Pentecostalism is the empowerment of lay people for apostolic ministry. This is in keeping with the theology of the priesthood of all believers… Empowering the laity closes the gap between the clergy and the lay, facilitating shared ministry and collaborative leadership. It also establishes a culture where the church is not overly dependent on ordained pastors or full-time workers to fulfil its ministries." Chia, "Pentecostalism in Asia," 229.

in the second generation. Some have tried to keep control within biological families, often making the situation worse."[18] Theological training, governance structures and leadership accountability are thus ongoing concerns for the burgeoning global Pentecostal family.

The *Missio Dei* as a Theological Framework for the Great Commission

While Pentecostals are noted to be more doers than scholars, its praxis is nonetheless framed by theological assumptions, conscious or otherwise. Hence, a more comprehensive Pentecostal theology of mission will make for better missional praxis. In Asia, poverty and inter-ethnic conflict are common concerns and Christians are usually minorities in societies of other faiths. Hence, theological articulations are sorely needed for themes such as social justice, religious pluralism, interfaith encounters, theology of suffering, creation care as well as ecumenism.[19] For foundations, I herein suggest that classical Pentecostalism's traditional emphasis on the Great Commission is better practised when it is understood and expounded within the broader framework of the *missio Dei*. This is a corrective and an enhancement for Pentecostal mission.

The term *missio Dei* in modern missiology was coined in 1932 by Karl Hartenstein to differentiate it from the *missio ecclesiae*, the mission of the church.[20] According to Bevans and Schroeder, the foundational

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[18] Zurlo, Johnson, and Crossing, "World Christianity and Mission 2021: Questions About the Future," 19.

[19] Ma, "Asian (Classical) Pentecostal Theology in Context"; Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "Mission in Pentecostal Theology," in *Christian Mission, Contextual Theology, Prophetic Dialogue: Essays in Honor of Stephen B. Bevans, SVD*, ed. Dale T. Irvin and Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2018).

[20] Stephen B. Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004), 290.

ideas are drawn from Karl Barth's trinitarian theology. Barth argued that mission is not primarily a human, nor an ecclesial activity, but it is "primarily God who engages in mission by sending God's self in the mission of the Son and the Spirit." That initial concept of the *missio Dei* was expanded; from God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit to "Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world."[21] However, the concept of the *missio Dei* did not start to gain traction with evangelicals until the 1970s. Nonetheless, the different streams of Christianity converged on its trinitarian theology of mission by the end of the twentieth century.[22] For the evangelicals, the most comprehensive presentations are Christopher Wright's *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* and his subsequent *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission.*[23]

The *missio Dei* is a more comprehensive and integrated perspective because it contexts the Great Commission within the larger picture of what God has revealed about Himself in both the Old and New Testaments, and what He is doing in the world. This is a corrective to Pentecostalism's earlier identification with the fundamentalist wing of Western Christianity. The latter's singular emphasis on evangelism and church planting often ignores social concerns or treats them as

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[21] Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 290; David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 390.

[22] Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 290–294. There would perhaps have been a quicker convergence if not for a secularized interpretation that emerged from the 1952 International Mission Conference at Willingen. This held sway amongst the Conciliar Christians for decades. The convergence among ecumenical, Roman Catholic, and evangelical missiologists in the 1980s on the missio Dei is discussed in depth by James A. Scherer in *Gospel, Church & Kingdom: Comparative Studies in World Mission Theology* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987).

[23] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2006); The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 2010), Kindle.

appendixes and mere platforms for the task of soul-winning.[24] The *missio Dei's* larger perspective is especially important for Pentecostalism in Malaysia as it transits from the margins to become mainstream. Pentecostals constitute a substantial part of the larger Malaysian Church. Growing strength entails greater responsibility. Sooi-Ling Tan notes that the Malaysian Church is steadily growing from being a client of mission toward being missional as it "continues to engage with issues such as ethnic tensions, constructing and owning a Malaysian Christian identity, and being authentic witness in word and deed to all its neighbors."[25] The *missio Dei* offers Pentecostals the theological framework to guide its commitment to the Great Commission. It ensures that proclamation is not only sensitive to the socio-cultural and religious realities but that the gospel is demonstrated through broader engagement with society.[26]

The *missio Dei* also aligns with concepts of "integral mission" that seeks to remove the sub-biblical dichotomy between the everyday life of the church and its mission. René Padilla argues that traditional concepts of mission allow for a church to perceive itself as being "missionary" by sending and supporting a few of its members to serve in foreign

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[24] Ma, "Asian (Classical) Pentecostal Theology in Context," 64–65. This shift in theological paradigms of mission amongst the Pentecostals started in the 1990s as the emphasis on church growth expanded to include holistic and social concerns, and Pentecostal theology also shifted to a more ecumenical stance. Andy Lord, *Spirit-Shaped Mission: A Holistic Charismatic Missiology* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 2005), 5. Closer home to Malaysia, Singaporean Pentecostal May Ling Tan-Chow, stressed that "mission as shalom is a more holistic and integrated understanding of missions… This understanding is a significant departure from the dominant conservative evangelical's model of mission, which is primarily proclamation and church planting, and has defined how the Singapore Church practices missions." Tan-Chow May Ling, *Pentecostal Theology for the Twenty-First Century: Engaging with Multi-Faith Singapore* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 73.

[25] Sooi-Ling Tan, "History of Christianity in Malaysia," in *Missions in Southeast Asia: Diversity and Unity in God's Design*, ed. Kiem-Kiok Kwa and Samuel K. Law (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Global Library, 2022), 57–58.

[26] Tan, "History of Christianity in Malaysia," 57.

missions whilst doing little to influence its surrounding neighbourhood. This reduces mission to what is done elsewhere in the "mission fields", one that is preferably in a foreign land. Hence, the task of mission becomes primarily that of a few individuals sent by the church rather than that of the whole church.[27] Padilla asserts, "mission may or may not include a crossing of geographical frontiers but in every case, it means primarily a crossing of the frontier between faith and no faith," whether in one's own locality or in a foreign land. The church's "purpose is to incarnate the values of the Kingdom of God and bear witness to the love and the justice revealed in Jesus Christ, by the power of the Spirit, for the transformation of human life in all its dimensions, on a personal and community level."[28]

Thus, viewing the Great Commission in the context of the *missio Dei* makes for a humbler perspective because God's mission is not confined to that which is understood or attempted by the church, but it encompasses all that He is doing in the world and creation. This is an antidote to the 'messianic complex' malady that can afflict sacrificial Pentecostal pioneers who at times perceive themselves to be God's only solution to the needs around them. The mission of the church is not wholly synonymous with the *missio Dei* but rather, it is derived from it.[29] The *missio Dei* is a God-centred, God-sourced concept of mission. As succinctly stated by David Bosch, it is "God's self-revelation as the One who loves the world, God's involvement in and with the world, the nature and activity of God, which embraces both the church and the world, and in which the church is privileged to participate".[30]

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[27] C. René Padilla, *What Is Integral Mission?*, trans. Rebecca Breekveldt (Oxford: Regnum, 2021).

[28] Padilla, *What Is Integral Mission?*, 7, 8.

[29] *The Capetown Commitment*, 2010, Pt.1:10A, https://lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment#capetown.

[30] David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology series, no. 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 10.

Changed Mission Contexts Requires a Reapplication of Pentecostal Resources

Mission contexts around the world have changed radically in the last few decades. The rate of change has accelerated, especially post-Covid, with significant reconfigurations in the global socio-economic and political spheres, and advances in the digital space. In these changed contexts, the positive characteristics of Pentecostal mission that fuelled its past growth are potential resources. These resources are legacies from its past that may be re-applied to six changed realities that I shall unpack in this section: 1) urbanisation, 2) migration, 3) cross-border controls, 4) changes in the local socio-economic context, 5) growth of local Christianity, and 6) the online world.

The characteristics of Pentecostal mission are well explained by McClung (1994) and Anderson (2005).[31] The traditional hallmarks of Pentecostal reliance on the Holy Spirit, its "eschatological urgency" and sacrificial faith for the Great Commission are vital resources in contemporary missions. Julie and Wonsuk Ma describe an early Pentecostal movement "armed with and compelled by eschatological urgency, and a Spirit-filled sense of missionary calling," its zeal and commitment exemplified by the 'one-way ticket missionaries' of

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[31] L. Grant Jr. McClung, "Pentecostal/Charismatic Perspectives on a Missiology for the Twenty-First Century," Pnuema 16, no. 1 (1994): 11–21; Allan Anderson, "Towards a Pentecostal Missiology for the Majority World," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 8, no. 1 (2005): 29–47. McClung describes seven characteristics representative of Pentecostal/Charismatic missiology: 1) Mission is experiential and relational, 2) Mission is expressly Biblical and Theological, 3) Mission is extremely urgent, 4) Mission is focused, yet diversified, 5) Mission is aggressively opposed, 6) Mission is interdependent, and 7) Mission is unpredictable. Anderson offers six characteristics: 1) Pneumatocentric mission that highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in mission, 2) Dynamic mission praxis evidenced by 'signs and wonders', zeal and commitment, 3) Evangelism as the central mission thrust; 4) Contextualization of leadership or development of local leadership, 5) Mobilization in mission where everyone is called and empowered, 6) Contextual missiology with local expressions of the gospel.

its early days.[32] They attribute these characteristics to Pentecostal spirituality. This spirituality with its space for the Holy Spirit is "the springhead of mission dynamism and ethos," a "spiritual tradition [that] is a unique gift from God to the global church and to the world."[33] More recently, research from Asia highlights other resources such as efficient organisation, leadership styles and empowering leadership. Edmund Chia partly attributes Pentecostalism's rapid growth in Asia to these factors. He notes the co-relation between Pentecostalism's key value of "the empowerment of lay people for apostolic ministry" and the many Pentecostal pastors and leaders who are "transplants from other professions" shaped by entrepreneurial thinking and organisational management know-how.[34] These resources are best utilised when Pentecostals recognize the implications of the changed realities at the local and global levels.

Urbanisation and Migration

These first two changed realities have their repercussions on mission perspectives and practices at the local level - for local churches and national contexts. In 1990, urban dwellers constituted less than half of the global population at 43% (2.3 billion).[35] This galloped to 56% (4.4 billion) in 2020 and is still climbing.[36] In Malaysia, the urbanisation rate tripled from 28.4 per cent in 1970 to 75.1 per cent in 2020; through natural population increase, migration, and urbanisation of places that

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[32] Julie C. Ma and Wonsuk Ma, *Mission in the Spirit: Towards a Pentecostal-Charismatic Missiology* (Eugene, OR.: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 8.

[33] Ma and Ma, "*Mission in the Spirit*," 110.

[34] Chia, "Pentecostalism in Asia," 227–229.

[35] "World Cities Report 2016: Urbanization and Development: Emerging Futures" (Nairobi, Kenya: United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), 2016), 5.

[36] "World Cities Report 2022: Envisaging the Future of Cities" (Nairobi, Kenya: United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), 2022), 10.

were previously rural.[37] Accompanying urbanisation are unparalleled migrations wherein 2020, 281 million individuals do not reside in their countries of birth.[38] Including movements within countries, there are now more than 1 billion migrants worldwide, most of them converging in the cities. Urbanisation combined with migration has sharply transformed the ethnocultural landscapes and socio-economic structures of cities and even entire nations.

God's mission is thus increasingly more urban than rural. The challenge is that urbanisation often occurs in destructive ways; slums, increased poverty, vices, insecurity, exclusion, and rising inequalities of social and economic opportunities that lead to deprivations in groups unable to cope with the pressures. Amidst these challenges, the sub-biblical dichotomy between evangelism and church planting and that of social concerns and social justice is passé. The "whole gospel" requires the integration of gospel proclamation, incarnational lifestyles and ministry approaches that engage holistically with an increasingly complex and needy urban world. At the same time, the movements of diverse ethnocultural people groups from other parts of the country and other nations bring new mission opportunities. This makes less relevant, and even constricting, the past division between "local mission" and "foreign mission."

Therefore, the Acts 1:8 passage that energised Pentecostal mission should be reread through fresh lenses. Traditionally, this is often interpreted in spatial terms. To fulfil the spirit of being witnesses "to the ends of the earth," mission is imagined as traversing geographical distances, the further the better. It is praying and sending forth financial

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[37] "Statistics Dept: Malaysia's Urbanisation Rate Tripled Over Five Decades," *Malay Mail*, 23 December 2022, https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2022/12/23/statistics-dept-malaysias-urbanisation-rate-tripled-over-five-decades/46783.

[38] "World Migration Report 2022" (Geneva, Switzerland: International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2021), 23.

support and workers, and if that happens to cross international borders into other nations, then it is truly being "missionary". However, modern migrations have brought the nations to the doorsteps of local churches. Unreached people groups from other nations may well be in proximity to the local church. In these new contexts, migrants reached and discipled by local churches can in turn bring the gospel back to their home countries. Mission scholars Bevans and Schroeder rightly assert that a reading of Acts shows that "the church only emerges as the church when it becomes aware of its boundary-breaking mission."[39] For Pentecostal churches in the twenty-first century, the new boundary-crossing challenges are closer to home. Intentionally crossing these socio-economic and ethnocultural boundaries at the local levels will open portals to cross geographical boundaries into other nations.

The implications of urbanisation and migrations will also require a rethink of how churches define "missionaries" whom they send and support. Mission workers serving foreign migrants in local contexts often struggle with financial support because they are not viewed as "missionaries" for the reason that they are not serving overseas, or in another country. Furthermore, mission workers serving migrant and refugee groups are often involved in areas such as education, advocacy, community development and micro-enterprises. Hence churches often view them as "social workers" rather than "missionaries". This again influences financial support. Lastly, evangelism and church planting among poorer migrant and refugee groups often result in transient-type churches. They seldom result in churches as typically understood by local Christians, that is, churches that meet in proper church buildings with legal registrations and are led by trained pastors whom they also support financially. It is hence timely that local churches give recognition to mission workers who serve migrants and refugees in local contexts as full-fledged 'missionaries' and financially support them.

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[39] Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants* in Context, 2.

Cross-border Controls, Changes in Local Socio-Economic Contexts, and Growth of Local Christianity

These three changed realities have ramifications for cross-border missions. First, many countries are increasingly watchful over their boundaries and visas, being well aware of the "creative access" often used by Christians for mission work. Second, country-specific socio-economic situations that in the past allowed long-termed stays for foreign mission workers with professional skills can also quickly change. For example, foreign mission personnel are now less likely to get long-termed visas in China as English language teachers. Economic and educational levels there have risen. They have more of their qualified teachers and have less need for basic-level foreign language teachers. This means that local governments can afford to be less tolerant of outsiders whom they know to have other agendas aside from what is stated on their visas.

Third, Christianity has grown around the globe and vibrant Christian communities now exist in nearly every country. The increasing maturity and presence of well-qualified local Christians means that the roles needed of foreign mission workers, and the foreign assumptions about national churches must also change. To illustrate, the Cambodian Church is a case in point. It emerged over the last three decades as one of the fastest-growing in the world. The growth spurt took off in the early 1990s after the devastations from the 1970s "Killing Fields" and 1980s tussles between the warring factions. Foreign mission personnel, churches and agencies allowed in from all over the world contributed to a wide range of areas; from church planting to child sponsorship, medical care and community development to building schools. The number of Christians in Cambodia grew exponentially, from less than 0.48 per cent in 1970 to 2.55 per cent of the population in 2020 with an annual growth rate of 5.51 per cent from 2000 to 2020.[40] The

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[40] Johnson and Zurlo, "World Christian Database," accessed May 2023, https://worldchristiandatabase.org.

local Christian leadership capacities also grew. Now, three decades later, Cambodian Christians have developed their own materials and contextualized training.

Concurrent with the growth of Cambodian Christianity, the country also prospered. Regular visitors to its capital city of Phnom Penh will not fail to notice its rapidly improving roads and highways, better restaurants, and the mushrooming of high-rises, albeit with worse traffic jams. These developments do not make up for the poor infrastructure and relative poverty that still plague large parts of the country, but it is nonetheless a far cry from the impoverishment of the early 1990s. The World Bank reclassified Cambodia as a lower-middle-income country in 2016. Its gross domestic product (GDP) grew at an average of 6.96 per cent a year from 1994 until 2022, reaching an all-time high of 13.30 per cent in 2005.[41]

This combination of changes calls for foreign mission personnel to move on to other roles. Mission skillset levels of the 1990s will also no longer suffice. Outdated assumptions by foreign Christians about the state and capacities of local churches and Christians will only make for patronising attitudes and missionary redundancy. Barnabas Mam observes that the "tension between influence and resources coming from the mission-sending nations and the development of local leadership arises only when missionaries are not willing to move from the pioneering stage to the parenting stage, then to the training stage and finally to the partnering stage."[42] Cambodian churches can no longer be viewed patronisingly as mission clients. Cambodian churches

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[41] "Cambodia GDP Annual Growth Rate," *Trading Economics*, accessed 28 May 2023, https://tradingeconomics.com/cambodia/gdp-growth-annual#:~:text=GDP%20 Annual%20Growth%20Rate%20in,statistics%2C%20economic%20calendar%20 and%20news.

[42] Barnabas Mam, "Cambodia," in *Christianity in East and SouthEast Asia*, ed. Kenneth R. Ross, Francis D. Alvarez S. J., and Todd M. Johnson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 186.

with their increased capabilities, and spiritual and financial resources are rightly, mission partners. In some areas, such as outreach to other unreached people groups in the country and neighbouring countries, it is likely that because of the cultural affinities, mission workers sent from Cambodia under Cambodian leadership will do a better job than personnel from elsewhere.

Online World and Advances in Digital Space

This sixth changed reality has mission implications that cut across the local and global levels. The Covid-19 Pandemic lockdowns in recent years underscored the possibilities when people indifferent to the virtual world were jolted to learn the use of online technology. Teaching and conferences via Zoom are now commonplace. The array of apps on our handphones, social media and other online communication systems suggest that the Church should maximize the use of online technology for mission. However, the digital space can cut both ways. Apart from the anti-Gospel worldviews and practices that it can be used to propagate, we live in a polarised and tribalised world where one's faith can give cause for hostility and even violence. The news of the 2011 burning of the Quran by an unwise obstinate pastor in the United States shortly led to the killing of at least twelve people in faraway Afghanistan.[43] The social media and online search tools make it conceivable that Christians carelessly posting photographs can result in harm to mission workers and faith communities in another country. While it is easy enough to relocate or deport (as the case may be) foreign mission workers, local Christians and faith communities remain vulnerable, bearing the brunt of what is suffered.

However, the biggest challenges lie in the ways that the online

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[43] "Quran Burning: It Takes a Fool to Start a Fire," *Sojourners*, 30 April 2012, https://sojo.net/articles/quran-burning-it-takes-fool-start-fire.

world has changed how human beings function, experience life, and interact with each other. The online world raises questions of biblical anthropology and ecclesiology that are beyond the scope of this essay. Nonetheless, the enforced deprivation of physical meetings during the Covid-19 Pandemic when the online church was the norm compelled the questions: What is church? How should God's people function as a community? For these questions, John Dyer and Heidi Campbell in *Ecclesiology for a Digital Church* (2022) make some pertinent observations. In discussing the digital church, online and offline religion, Dyer states that most Christians "move fluidly between the two spheres as they connect and interact with overlapping networks of relationships. 'Online' and 'offline' are useful distinctions but labelling one real and the other unreal is neither helpful nor accurate."[44]

Campbell further observes that most people seldom engage or think solely in terms of online or offline space. Rather, today's lived reality is a blending, "a reality that continues to blend and blur our communicative and lived context."[45] How communities are formed and shaped has also changed. Due to migration, globalisation and better communications technologies, communities today are best described as social networks. It is "a world in which social connections are thought of in terms of being an interconnected web of individually structured relationships." This is accentuated by the digital space because "people are increasingly forming relationships both online and offline that function in a network format."[46]

These networks that transcend geographical distance and online-offline distinctions can be powerful means for missions. This was vividly illustrated to me by a Nepalese Christian leader whom I met while in transit in Dubai in 2018. Prakash (a pseudonym) is a marketing

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[44] Heidi A. Campbell and John Dyer, eds., *Ecclesiology for a Digital Church* (London: SCM Press, 2022), 17.

[45] Campbell and Dyer, *Ecclesiology for a Digital Church*, 58.

[46] Campbell and Dyer, *Ecclesiology for a Digital Church*, 59–60.

executive. He came to faith in the early 2000s when he arrived in the United Arab Emirates as a lowly migrant worker, one of the millions of South Asians who worked in that region for the sake of better lives for their families back home. Full of the zeal commonly observed in converts, he has a deep desire to see others encounter Christ. His efforts, together with his network of Nepalese Christians, have resulted in churches planted in his home village and four other provinces back in Nepal. At the end of our conversation, he casually asked me if I know anyone in Lisbon, Portugal. A small group of Nepalese migrant workers there had come to faith, and he is now preparing them for water baptism through online meet-ups.

Concluding Personal Reflections

I came to faith in Christ as a teenager in the mid-1970s through the witness of a friend who himself was a new convert of a few months. I followed him to church, a new church plant of a classical Pentecostal denomination that met in a rented house in our neighbourhood on the fringe of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It was barely a few months old, mainly consisting of teenagers and young people like myself. It was in this church and denomination that I grew and eventually went into full-time ministry in my early twenties. I remain in this same classical Pentecostal denomination and take pride in being a card-carrying ordained member.

I currently lead a trans-denominational agency, but I feel deeply indebted to the experiences and perspectives learnt growing up in a Pentecostal environment, especially during the first two decades of my ministry life that were critically formative. I started in my early twenties as a solo church planter, planting my first two cross-cultural churches in a typical Pentecostal fashion. I launched out by faith during my third year in Bible School, just about to graduate with a diploma, with no exposure or training in cross-cultural missions except for the conviction

that the Holy Spirit has spoken to me to do it. That was where I learnt to fast, pray, live sacrificially, and acquire new perspectives through personal readings, and practical skills through hands-on experiences and different types of training, both formal and informal. I grew in courage, develop spiritual entrepreneurship, and learnt in practical terms the gifts of the Holy Spirit as defined in 1 Corinthian 12:8-11. But those early years were also very trying. Yet, through it, I experienced God's provisions, and interventions and saw the Holy Spirit's power in making Christ and His gospel real to people as He encountered and transformed them.

These initial foundations are what I regard as part of a "Pentecostal spirit" and the Pentecostal resources for God's mission. Later ministry as a ministry trainer, teacher and senior pastor constantly churned out lingering questions about our theological assumptions and practical responses as we engage in God's mission. Hence, when I went on for my graduate and doctoral degrees during transitional hiatus in ministry, I intentionally chose to study in non-Pentecostal institutions. It was not because I felt any less loyal to my denomination, but because I knew that the best way to contribute to my own tribe in God's Church is to learn from the larger body of Christ.

The widened interactions cemented three key convictions about our engagement in God's Mission. First, our engagement must be biblically based, requiring a theological framework that enables us to know where we fit in God's larger purposes. This is the *missio Dei*. Second, effective mission is always contextual in practice, being shaped by ground realities and impacted by situational factors such as the local configurations of sociocultural, economic, religious, and political realities. This is where understanding changed realities is crucial. There are no cookie-cutter solutions, but the leading of the Holy Spirit and Pentecostal innovation are key resources. Third, the complexities in God's mission require the capabilities of all of God's people with all of their varied expertise. This is where the Pentecostal value of

empowering the laity is an ongoing resource, but it must be coupled with the willingness to see the big picture and collaborate with others in the larger Body of Christ.

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Malaysian Pentecostal: The Early Beginning

Eva Wong Suk Kyun

Abstract

Christianity in Malaysia settled in its diverse context much earlier centuries ago. Although the Pentecostal movement in the country only began in the twentieth century, it already has an almost one-century history. It is vital to recognise the situatedness of the Assemblies of God Malaysia (AGM) as a contextualised Pentecostal movement and to understand the uniqueness of Malaysian Pentecostalism in a broader sense. The purpose of this essay is to introduce the early beginning of the AGM and Malaysian Pentecostals within the larger body of Christ. This brief introduction covers the early beginnings of Christianity in Malaysia, the establishment of the AGM, and the shaping of the Malaysian Pentecostal. Having about one century of Pentecostal history in the country, the newly launched Malaysia Pentecostal Research Centre at Bible College of Malaysia is a timely ministry to preserve and continue the Pentecostal heritage, spirituality, fervour, theology and practice for present and future generations.

Introduction

The shaping of Malaysian Pentecostalism owes significantly to the early missionary period that has pathed the way to a unique spirituality. This brief historical narrative aims to discover the early beginning and situatedness of the contextualised Pentecostal movement within the spiritual landscape of the country. This essay explores the early beginnings of Christianity and the arrival of missionaries to Malaya and Borneo in the earlier centuries. It was only in the twentieth century that the Pentecostal movement arrived at the Malayan shores, particularly with the arrival of the early Assemblies of God missionaries in the early

1930s, alongside other Pentecostal missionaries from Ceylon, China, Finland, Hong Kong, and Australia. The Assemblies of God of Malaya and Singapore (AGMS) was established in 1957 and later restructured into two entities in 1966, the Assemblies of God Malaysia (AGM) and the Assemblies of God Singapore. Subsequently, the spread of charismatic and Spirit-filled movements in the country further shaped the uniqueness of Malaysian Pentecostalism. To date, the Pentecostal movement has almost a one-century history since the arrival of the missionaries. On the way forward, I propose and introduce the newly launched Malaysia Pentecostal Research Centre as an avenue to promote Pentecostal scholarship and to preserve the Pentecostal heritage, spirituality, fervour, theology and practice for the present and future generations in this twenty-first century.

The Spiritual Landscape of Malaysia

Malaysia is a multiracial, multicultural, and multireligious country. In 2023, the current Malaysian population is around 33.6 million,[1] of which 29.8 million (91.7 per cent) are citizens.[2] Malaysia's ethnicity comprises 69.8 per cent Malay and Indigenous, 22.4 per cent Chinese, 6.8 per cent Indian, and 1 per cent others.[3] The religious demography is 21.5 million Muslim (63.7 per cent), 5.99 million Buddhism (17.7 per cent), 3.18 million Christianity (9.4 per cent), 2 million Hinduism

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[1] Countrymeters, "Malaysia Population: Demographics of Malaysia," United Nations Statistic Division, accessed 20 Apr. 2023, https://countrymeters.info/en/Malaysia.

[2] Ministry of Economy, Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal, "Population and Housing Census," accessed 20 Apr. 2023, https://www.dosm.gov.my/portal-main/release-content/launching-of-report-on-the-key-findings-population-and-housing-census-of-malaysia-2020-.

[3] Ministry of Economy, Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal, "Current Populations Estimates: Major Ethnic Group Composition 2021," accessed 20 Apr. 2023, https://www.dosm.gov.my/portal-main/release-content/current-population-estimates-malaysia-2021.

(6 per cent), and 1 million others (3.2 per cent).[4] Although predominantly Muslim, not all indigenous populations are Muslims.

Christianity (9.4 per cent of the population) is the religion of 3 million people, with a high concentration of 2.25 million or 75 per cent in East Malaysia.[5] The main denominations in the country are Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist. The Pentecostal had grown rapidly from 5,440 in 1960 to 61,500 adherents in 1985 which made up 13.6 per cent of Christianity in Malaysia, whereas Evangelical is 17.5 per cent, others 15.2 per cent, and the largest denomination the Roman Catholic 53.7 per cent.[6]

Christianity in Malaysia is a minority that stands united especially more evident from the 1980s to the present with the ecumenical efforts of national Christian leaders. The AGM is a member of the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF),[7] one of the three component bodies of the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM),[8] along with the

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[4] Countrymeters, "Malaysia Population: Religion in Malaysia," Pew Research Center, The Global Religious Landscape, https://countrymeters.info/en/Malaysia, accessed 20 Apr. 2023.

[5] Ministry of Economy, Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal, "Current Population Estimates, Malaysia 2022," accessed 20 Apr. 2023, https://www.dosm.gov.my/.

[6] Robert A. Hunt, Kam Hing Lee and John Roxborogh, eds., *Christianity in Malaysia: A Denominational History* (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 1992), 357.

[7] NECF Malaysia, "History," accessed 20 Apr. 2023, https://www.necf.org.my/index.cfm?&menuid=3. The member churches include AGM, Baptist Church, Brethren Church, Evangelical Free Church, Sidang Injil Borneo, some major independent charismatic churches, Bible seminaries, para churches, and individual churches from Methodist, Presbyterian, etc. NECF was formed on 21 March 1982.

[8] Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM), "About Us," accessed 20 Apr. 2023, https://cfmsia.org/about-cfm/. CFM comprises the Roman Catholic Church as represented by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia, the Council of Churches of Malaysia (CCM), and the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) Malaysia. CFM was formed on 6 February 1985 and registered on 14 January 1986.

Council of Churches of Malaysia (CCM), and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia.[9] AGM churches claimed 42,708 adherents in 2022,[10] that is around 1.34 per cent of the Christian population of some 3.18 million in Malaysia.[11]

Christianity is a minority within a minority in a pluralistic Malaysian society where Islam became the national religion after Malaya's independence in 1957. In the formation of Malaysia in 1963, the Federal Constitution states that "Islam is the religion of the Federation." There is "freedom of religion" but with religious laws in place that governs and shapes the religious landscape in the country.[12]

The Early Beginning of Christianity in Malaysia

Missionaries from the mainline traditional Christian denominations had arrived in Malaya (now West Malaysia) and Borneo (East Malaysia) much earlier than the Pentecostals. Historians suggest that Nestorian missionaries from Syria had travelled through the Silk Road to the Malay Archipelago as there are signs of Nestorian settlements dated the seventh century in the northwest of Malaya Peninsula and north

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[9] Council of Churches of Malaysia: An Ecumenical Fellowship of Churches and Christian Organisations in Malaysia, accessed 20 Apr. 2023, http://ccmalaysia.org/index.php/about-ccm/history/. CCM (formerly Malayan Christian Council) was formed in 1947, inauguration on 9 January 1948.

[10] Rev. Lawrence Yap, General Secretary Report, AGM 54th Business General Meeting 2023, "Forging Ahead," 13-14 Jun. 2023, 12, BR2023-54.

[11] Countrymeters, "Malaysia Population: Religion in Malaysia," Pew Research Center, The Global Religious Landscape, accessed 20 Apr. 2023, https://countrymeters.info/en/Malaysia.

[12] Judiciary Appointments Commission Malaysia, Law of Malaysia Federal Constitution, accessed 20 Apr. 2023, https://www.jac.gov.my/spk/images/stories/10_akta/perlembagaan_persekutuan/federal_constitution.pdf. The formation of Malaysia took place on 16 September 1963 with the merger of the Federation of Malaya (includes Singapore), Sabah and Sarawak.

Sumatra.[13] Since the sixteenth century, the rule of the Portuguese (1511), Dutch (1641), and British (1786) opened doors to Roman Catholicism (1511) and Protestantism.[14]

Christianity grew during British rule in the nineteenth century when prominent missionary works had begun mainly in the Straits Settlements and Borneo. Straits Settlements was a British colony of the coastal islands and ports, namely Penang (1786), Melaka (1824), and Singapore (1819), under the British East India Company. Borneo (Sarawak) was under the rule of James Brooke (1848), and North Borneo (Sabah) under the British North Borneo Company Charter (1878).

The beginning of major missionary works and the Christian denominations have continued to grow over the centuries which include the following: French Catholic *Missions Étrangères de Paris* missionaries from Siam (now Thailand) established the Major Seminary in Penang (1809), Catholic missions in Sarawak (1841), and Mill Hill Fathers from London, Austria, and Holland in Borneo (1881); Anglican in Melaka (1741), Penang (1800) and Borneo Church Mission Institution to Sarawak (1848); the London Missionary Society in Melaka and Penang (1815) and Johor (1843); Open Brethren in Penang (1860) and Taiping (1880); American Methodist from India (1885), Presbyterian from

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[13] John Roxborogh, *A History of Christianity in Malaysia*, STM Series (Singapore: Genesis Books, 2014), 1-2, cited John C. England, "The Earliest Christian Communities in South East and North East Asia – an Outline of the Evidence Available in Seven Centuries before 1500 Ad," *East Asian Pastoral Review*, no. 2 (1982): 88.

[14] Worldatlas, Religious Beliefs in Malaysia, accessed 20 Apr. 2023, https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/religious-beliefs-in-malaysia.html#:~:text=Malaysia%20is%20a%20Muslim%20majority,and%20traditional%20Chinese%20religion%20practitioners. John Roxborogh, An Outline History of Christianity in Malaysia, accessed 20 Apr. 2023, http://roxborogh.com/Area%20Studies/Malaysia%20www.htm.

Penang to Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur (1900), and Johor (1886); Basel Mission in North Borneo (1882); Lutheran to Kuala Lumpur (1907); Mar Thoma Syrian Orthodoxy brought by migrant Syrian Christians from Kerala, India (the 1930s). The key contributions of these early Christian missionaries were the establishment of churches, schools, hospitals, social concerns, and Bible seminaries. Mission works among the diverse races continued to expand to other parts of Malaya and Borneo.[15]

The Early Beginning of the Assemblies of God Malaysia

Pentecostal missionaries only came to Malaya in the twentieth century from the Assemblies of God of the United States of America (AG USA) along with other streams mainly from Ceylon, China, Finland, and Hong Kong. The Australian missionaries started mission work in Borneo. The shaping of Malaysian Pentecostalism owes significantly to the early missionary period, which pathed the way to a unique spirituality.

Early Pentecostal Missionary Period

The first missionaries from the AG USA, Cecil and Edith Jackson,[16] arrived in Singapore in 1928, and Malaya in 1932. C. Jackson was instrumental in training Napitoepoeloe, a Batak young man, who became the first missionary to the *Orang Asli* (aboriginal tribal people) in Pahang in the 1930s.[17] In 1930, Esther Johnson and Carrie P.

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[15] For details, see Roxborogh, *A History of Christianity in Malaysia*; Hunt, Lee and Roxborogh, eds., *Christianity in Malaysia*. This list of major missionary works is not exhaustive.

[16] Cecil Jackson, Mr. and Mrs., "A Trip through the Malay States," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, (Springfield, MO, 18 Jan. 1930), 11, PE19300118; Fred G. Abeysekera, *The History of the Assemblies of God of Singapore 1928-1992* (Singapore: Abundant Press, 1992), 91-98.

Anderson, followed by Katherine Clause in 1931, came to Singapore as their first station before starting their pioneering work in Malaya.[18] Anderson was the first missionary to Malaya, and she began Cantonese work among the Chinese at 4th Mile, Ampang Road, Kuala Lumpur in 1934, with two new Chinese converts, and founded the First Assemblies of God, Kuala Lumpur.[19] For two years, she was assisted by Leong Shik Ngon, a paid worker from Hong Kong. In 1936, Anderson returned home for furlough and Leong returned to Hong Kong due to illness. Jackson visited and conducted baptismal service for the new converts, Ng Kam Foh and Lee Charn Yew. This oldest existing AGM church was formerly known as Jalan Brunei Chapel, then changed to Assembly of God Church, Kuala Lumpur Assembly, and subsequently renamed as First Assembly of God Church Kuala Lumpur, presently situated at Pudu.

In 1936, Arthur E. Sandhal and his wife Esther Johnson, arrived and pastored the church until 1949, (then) assisted by Tsang Toh Hang, Lee Chee Leong, Paul Lim, and two Chinese lady missionaries known as Bible Women, Lee Siew Ling, and Lee Sow Lan. Evangelists and some local youths formed a Tent Evangelistic Team and held evangelistic rallies in 1937-8 and many new believers were added to the church. In 1940, the church was officially registered and affiliated with the AG

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[17] Abeysekera, *History of the Assemblies of God of Singapore*, 93; Cecil M. Jackson, "My First Missionary Journey to the Sakai," *The Latter Rain Evangel* (Chicago, Jun. 1933), 11, LE193306; "Redeemed … Every Kindred, and Tongue, and People and Nation," an article on Miss Katherine Clause, missionary to the Federated Malay States, 23 February 1935, (n.p.), PE19350223; "Souls Saved in the Malay States," *The Pentecostal Evangel* (Springfield, MO, November. 1933), 7, PE193311; Assemblies of God of Malaysia 50th Anniversary 1957-2007 Souvenir Magazine, 14 and 19, AGM2007-50A.
[18] For details, see Abeysekera, *History of the Assemblies of God of Singapore*; AGM 50th Anniversary, 14, AGM2007-50A.
[19] It moved to several locations, from Lorong Brunei to Jalan Sungai Besi, Imbi Road, and then to Jalan Sayor.

USA.[20]

The Establishment and Growth

The Assemblies of God of Malaya and Singapore (AGMS) was officially organised on 6 February 1957 with the formation of the General Council at Elim Assembly of God in Serangoon Road, Singapore. From 1930 to 1957, there were two churches planted in Ipoh and Kuala Lumpur.[21] On 31 August 1957, Malaya gained independence from British rule and Malaysia was formed on 16 September 1963 from the merger with the Federation of Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak. The AGMS separated into two entities in 1966, the Assemblies of God of Malaysia and the Assemblies of God of Singapore, following the political separation of Malaysia and Singapore in 1965.[22]

The early Pentecostal foreign missionary community[23] of the

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[20] This is a brief note on some earlier missionaries. For details on pioneer missionaries to Malaya and Singapore since 1928, see Abeysekera, *History of the Assemblies of God of Singapore*; Denise A. Austin and Lim Yeu Chuen, "Critical Reflections on the Growth of Pentecostalism in Malaysia," in Denise A. Austin, Jacqueline Grey and Paul W. Lewis, eds., *Asia Pacific Pentecostalism*, Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies, vol. 31 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019), 198-202.

[21] Delmer Guynes, "Minutes of the Assemblies of God Field Fellowship of Malaya Conference," 6 February 1957, M/FF19570206; Minutes of the Constitutional Convention of the Assemblies of God of Malaya and Singapore, 6 February 1957, M/CC19570206. Constitution and By-Laws of the Assemblies of God of Malaysia, 1957; revised 1984; new revision adopted at the 51st General Council 31 May 2016, AGM-CBLr20160531.

[22] Minutes of the 9th General Council of the Assemblies of God of Malaysia and Singapore, 12-14 April 1966, 5, M/GC196604-9.

[23] AGM 50th Anniversary 1957-2007, 11, 14, 23, AGM2007-50A; "Rev. Lula M. Ashmore (Baird), an Extraordinary Missionary, Played a Significant Role in the Early Era of the History of the Assemblies of God Mission in Malaya & Singapore from 1939-1941, 1947-1952, 1957-1962," 70th Anniversary, First Assembly of God Church Kuala Lumpur, FAG2004-70A.

Assemblies of God in Malaya led the movement for 40 years. The foreign missionaries to Malaysia include Carrie Anderson, Daniel and Anita Bogdan, Duane Dorsing, Daisy Fern Ogle, Frederick and Margaret Seaward, Dale Wisner, Lawrence Jayapalan, Dan Anglin, Glen and Kathleen Stafford, Ruby McMurray, Jack Willis, Leslie Martin, Lester and Betty Jo Kenney, Robert Stevenson, David and Alice Nyien, Katherine Clause, Arthur and Esther Sandhal (Esther Johnson), Vallance and Lula Baird (Lula Ashmore), Evelyn Iris Hatchett, Howard and Edith Osgood, Delmer and Eleanor Guynes, Garland Benintendi, Bonny Colleen Guinn, David Hugh Baker, Steven L. Nolin, Donald E. McMurray, and R. B. and Barbara Cavaness. Local leadership emerged in 1974 with the first Malaysian General Superintendent Prince Guneratnam (1974-2000) followed by Vincent Leoh (2000-2008);[24] and Ong Sek Leang (2008 – present).[25]

There were noticeable spurts of growth and geographical expansion especially from the 1970s to 1980s,[26] followed by slower but steady growth to the present time. For example, from 1974 to 2000,[27] the total number of churches increased almost sevenfold from 43 to 301, membership from around 2,000 to 33,662, and adherents from around 3,400 to 47,073 under the leadership of Guneratnam. The founding of BCM has been instrumental in raising pastors, missionaries, and leaders for the field.[28] In 1972, Malaysia Tamil Bible Institute (now Malaysia Tamil Bible College), a sister Bible school was founded, and about 90 per cent of the Tamil work was pioneered or led by ministers who

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[24] AGM 50th Anniversary 1957-2007, 34-35, AGM2007-50A.
[25] AGM, "The History of the Assemblies of God Malaysia."
[26] At the same time, there were revivals and spiritual renewals in mainline denominational churches, especially in the 1970s to 1980s. Chan Kok Eng, "A Brief Note on Church Growth in Malaysia, 1960-1985," in Hunt, Lee, and Roxborough, eds., *Christianity in Malaysia*, 354-378.
[27] AGM 50th Anniversary 1957-2007, 47, 53, AGM2007-50A.
[28] AGM 50th Anniversary 1957-2007, 73, AGM2007-50A.

graduated from there.[29]

The early AG mission works were concentrated on the western coast of West Malaysia and only started limited church planting efforts on the eastern coast in 1977 because of the Islamic dominance in the Malay states.[30] AGM's church planting was mainly in the urban areas using English, Chinese, and Tamil languages, and much later the Malay language in the 1980s. The recent missions in the rural areas are small outreach works among the indigenous communities as compared to the long-established indigenous churches planted by Borneo Evangelical Mission (BEM), largely Sidang Injil Borneo, and mission works by the Anglican Church's Society for the Propagation of the Gospel mission, Roman Catholic Mill Hill Mission, Methodist Episcopal Mission, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Seventh Day Adventist, Basel Mission in East Malaysia since the early 1900s.[31]

The Significant Role of Pentecostal Education

The establishment of a national church/movement and its leadership, the AG general council, and Bible schools was the main missional strategy of the AG missionaries. A very significant contributing factor to the expansion of the Pentecostal movement was the founding of the BCM (formerly known as the Bible Institute of Malaya),[32] AGM's own Pentecostal Bible college to train and raise local credentialed ministers of a pioneering spirit who are engaged in local missions, church planting and church ministry in Malaysia and Singapore. Delmer

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[29] AGM 50th Anniversary 1957-2007, 74, AGM2007-50A.
[30] Austin and Lim, "Critical Reflections on the Growth of Pentecostalism in Malaysia," 202.
[31] Tan, *Planting an Indigenous Church*, 12-52; Roxborough, *A History of Christianity in Malaysia*, 53-54.
[32] The change of name to Bible College of Malaysia (BCM) took place in 1982 with the introduction of the Bachelor of Theology programme.

and Eleanor Guynes, missionaries to Malaysia from 1952-1964 and the first General Superintendent of the AGM, founded BCM at 99, Jalan Gasing, Petaling Jaya, in 1960. Howard C. Osgood, the first principal, and his wife, Edith, Francis, and Chris D. Thomas, who served as the Dean. The Guynes joined the faculty in 1961 after their short furlough. The first lecturers were American missionaries.[33] The first twelve students were recruited from Penang, Raub, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.[34]

Alongside church planting,[35] revival meetings,[36] evangelistic rallies,[37] and so on, Bible schools are said to be one of the AG USA's "DNA". Ronnie Chin remarked, "That is the practice in the 'AG DNA' that has served us well, even in Malaysia … it's in the Bible school that 'Pentecostal DNA' is perpetuated."[38] As the AG missionaries detected the need to train and send local workers, and Bible Institute of Malaya (BIM) was established on 3 January 1960. BIM started with a three-year diploma programme and the first enrolment of 12 youths from Malaya and Singapore. The first graduating class was in 1962 with

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[33] "BCM 50th Anniversary 1960-2010 Remarkable Journey Promising Future," Souvenir Magazine, 8-15, BCM2010-50A. Derek Tan, "The Assemblies of God," in *Christianity in Malaysia*, eds. Lee and Roxborough, 235.

[34] Tan, "The Assemblies of God," 235.

[35] Lula Ashmore Baird, "Dedication Day for New Assembly at Kuala Lumpur, Malaya," missionary report, 21 Jan. 1951, MR19510121; Delmer R. Guynes, "Lost…A Church in Malaya!," Foreign Missions, 1 Dec. 1958 (n.p.), FMR19581201; "Ipoh, Malaya, Has a New Assemblies of God Church," 31 Jan. 1960 (missionary report, n.p.), MR19600131; "Malaya: New Church Formed in Raub," Aug. 1960 (missionary report, n.p.), MR196008; Baird, L., Missionary to Malaya, "Church Dedicated at Ipoh, Malaya," Foreign Missions, 24 Mar. 1963, FMR19630324; Letter from Wong Soon Lee, Chartered Architect, to Rev. David H. Baker, on "Proposed Church Building & Pastorage on Lots 351 & 352 T.S. 4, MacAlister Road, Penang for the Assemblies of God," 22 Aug. 1963, L19630822.

[36] Vallance Baird, "Revival in Ipoh, Malaya," 11 Jan. 1960 (missionary report, n.p.), MR19600111.

[37] "Ipoh First Assembly Holds Evangelistic Meetings and Sacred Concert," *Assemblies of God Voice*, 1962 (n.p.), AGV1962.

[38] Interview with Rev. Ronnie Chin, Assistant General Superintendent.

seven graduates. At that time, there were six faculty members and around 19 students.[39] Many youths enrolled over the years. Many of the AG missionaries were church planters as well as educators in the Bible schools.[40] The AG's Bible school is one of the most successful, fruitful, and lasting Pentecostal missionary work established by the early missionaries.[41] Most AGM pioneers, church planters, ministers, and leaders were being trained here and sent out into the field over six decades, and BIM,[42] renamed Bible College of Malaysia in 1982, and had her sixtieth anniversary in 2020.[43] Pentecostal theological education plays a vital role in the process of contextualisation.

Overall, there was a homogeneity in doctrinal beliefs, theological emphases and practices. Owing to the foundational work laid by early AG missionaries in these formative years, AGM has been well-

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[39] Letter from D. G. Foote, Assistant to the Secretary, to Delmer R. Guynes, Secretary of the Field Fellowship, Kuala Lumpur, on the development of Bible School, 8 Nov. 1956, L19561108; Letter between Guynes, Assembly of God Church, Kuala Lumpur, and Office of Administrator, Petaling Jaya, on the process of development for the Assemblies of God Bible School of Malaya, 1 Sep. 1956, L19560901; 12 Sep. 1956, L19560912; Howard C. Osgood, "Dedication of the Bible Institute of Malaya," 1960, BIM1960-HO; Letter from Delmer R. Guynes, The Assemblies of God of Malaya and Singapore, to Petaling Jaya Development Corporation, 5 Jan. 1961, regarding the 97 and 99 Jalan Gasing (BIM property) be held in the name of The General Council of the Assemblies of God, Inc. USA, L19610105; Constitution and ByLaws for Bible Institute of Malaya, n.d., L19610105; B.I.M. Annual 1962, BIMA1962; Howard C. Osgood, Principal's Report for 1961-2, 9 April 1962, BIMPR1961-2; B.I.M. Newzette, vol. 2, no. 11, Nov. 1962 BIMNZ196211.

[40] Another AGM national Bible school, Malaysia Tamil Bible Institute (MTBI) was established in 1972. There is a new sister Bible seminary Borneo Bible School began in the 2010s.

[41] General Council of the AGM, Policies made by the Executive Committee 1965-1966 on Publications Committee; Required Courses of Study for Credentials (Non-Bible School Students); Home Missions Department and Director (for the establishment and supervision of pioneer works), GC1965-1966.

[42] Letter from Selangor State Development Corporation to The General Council of the AG, Inc., USA, on the approval of title transfer of BIM property, 2449 and 2450, Section 10, Petaling Jaya, to "Registered Trustee of The Assemblies of Malaysia," 27 Nov. 1978, L19781127.

structured and organised, with the espoused classical Pentecostal theology and Bible schools set in place. Ministers and workers were well-equipped to contain and sustain the revival which was an impetus to the rapid growth of AGM in the following period under the national leadership.

There had been a strong emphasis on the theological understanding of Joel 2 – Acts 2 and the centrality of Baptism in the Holy Spirit, glossolalia, and missions as the core Pentecostal distinctives. Baptism in the Holy Spirit has been the central teaching and practice since the classical formation period as the empowerment for life and service, especially empowerment for missions, evangelism, and church planting. BIM annuals and newsletters record that the early Bible school students were trained mainly by foreign missionaries in the 1960s and early 1970s and their students adhered to this classical Pentecostal theology on Spirit-baptism and missions. The pioneers had a burning conviction of the core beliefs, their purpose and their calling. Most of these main classical emphases were being carried on strongly into the movement growth period under national leadership.[44]

Ng Kok Kee recalls the earlier part of the AGM's movement growth was the pioneering period. The homogeneity of the classical emphases on the espoused theology and practice continued strongly under the

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[43] BCM conferred at least 1,371 certificates, diplomas and degrees from 1960 to 2020, and produced more than 1,000 graduates, of whom are in the ministry. 1960-1969 (43 graduates), 1970-1979 (119), 1980-1989 (209), 1990-1999 (195), 2000-2010 (415), "BCM 50th Anniversary 1960-2010 Remarkable Journey Promising Future," 14, 24, 36, 48, 61-2, BCM2010-50A; 2011-2017 (260 graduates), Student Information Report, BCM, 27 October 2017, GPS2017; 2018 (47 graduates), Graduation Programme Sheet 2018, GPS2018; 2019 (41 graduates), Graduation Programme Sheet 2019; GPS2019; 2020 (42 graduates), Graduating Student List 2020, GSL2020. The actual number of graduates is lesser than the number of diplomas and degrees conferred due to some alumni returning to pursue higher degree programmes over the years, and some students had graduated with double programmes concurrently.
[44] B.I.M. Annuals and B.I.M. Newzette, 1961-1981, BIMA, BIMNZ.

national leadership from 1975 until the mid-1980s.[45] Since the transition of leadership from AG missionaries to the national leadership of Guneratnam as the first Malaysian AG General Superintendent in 1974, the major missional strategy for growth under his leadership was the intensity of Bible school's mission in raising local pioneers and ministers for church planting endeavours.

The intense emphasis on evangelism and church planting from the labour and fruits of Bible schools was evident in the exponential growth in pioneering work and church planting endeavours as consistent batches of pioneers and ministers were launched out into the harvest field. There were noticeable growth spurts, especially from the 1970s and 1980s,[46] followed by slower but steady growth to the present time. As mentioned earlier, from 1974 to 2000, the total number of churches increased almost sevenfold from 43 to 301, membership from around 2,000 to 33,662, and adherents from around 3,400 to 47,073.[47] The explosive growth of the AGM in the 1970s peaked in the mid-1980s making it the fastest-growing church movement at that time and becoming the leading Pentecostal movement in the country.

The Shaping of Malaysian Pentecostalism

The Pentecostal and (later) Charismatic Movement that swept across Malaysia has been strong on mission and church planting, and the new churches are identified as "spirit-filled", "charismatic" or "Pentecostal". It is a fact that the churches that emerged or were planted in these pioneer movements identify themselves with an emphasis on the Holy Spirit until the present day. Over half a century, many young people

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[45] Interview with Rev. Ng Kok Kee, former BCM President.

[46] At the same time, there were revivals and spiritual renewals in mainline denominational churches especially in the 1970s to 1980s. Chan K. E., "A Brief Note on Church Growth in Malaysia, 1960-1985," 354-378.

[47] AGM 50th Anniversary 1957-2007, 47 and 53, AGM2007-50A.

received Spirit-baptism in youth camps and crusade meetings, and these powerful moves of the Holy Spirit have brought many into full-time ministry.[48]

Earlier Pentecostal Movements and Spirit-filled Influences

Besides AG USA missionaries in Malaya, the Finnish Free Foreign Mission (FFFM) of Pentecostal Churches of Finland had started mission works on the eastern coast of Malaya after WW2.[49] The Australian Borneo Evangelical Mission (BEM) had played an important role in extensive indigenous mission works since 1928 in the interior of Sarawak. Their 'Three-Self' indigenous church, Sidang Injil Borneo (SIB) was established in 1959 and became the fastest-growing church in East Malaysia among the Orang Ulu.[50]

The Ceylon Pentecostal Mission started mission work among the Indian and Ceylonese (now Sri Lanka) migrant workers in Malaya in 1930 by A. K. Titus in Ipoh, Mr and Mrs V. V. Samuel in Kuala Lumpur. The Pentecostal Church of Malaya was registered in 1952 and began work among the Chinese in Penang in the 1950s. In 2000, there were around 1,000-1,500 members with 13 centres.[51]

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[48] AGM 50th Anniversary 1957-2007, 38, AGM2007-50A.

[49] Tan-Chow May Ling, *Pentecostal Theology for the Twenty-First Century: Engaging with Multi-Faith Singapore* (London: Routledge, 2007), 19; Austin and Lim, "Critical Reflections on the Growth of Pentecostalism in Malaysia," 202.

[50] Tan Jin Huat, *Planting an Indigenous Church: The Case of the Borneo Evangelical Mission* (Oxford: Regnum, 2011), 1, 2, 162. The *Orang Ulu* is the collective term for natives in Borneo, namely Lun Bawang (Lun Dayeh or Murut in North Borneo), Kelabit, Kayan, Kenyah, Penan, and Sekapan.

[51] Tan Jin Huat, "Pentecostal and Charismatics in Malaysia and Singapore," in Anderson and Tang, eds, *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, eds. Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang, AJPS Series, 3 (Baguio: Regnum, 2005), 282-284, cited *The Biography of Pastor Paul*, Publication 15 (Chennai: Pentecost Press Trust, 1998), 36; "The Origin of the CPM work in Malaysia and Singapore," in *The Pentecostal Messenger*, April 2001, 8, 20-21; Chris D. Thomas, *Diaspora Indians: Church Growth among Indians in West Malaysia* (Penang: MIEC, 1978), 128.

Notably, John Sung (1901-1944), an evangelist of the Methodist Church in Fujian, China, educated in America, conducted revival meetings in China and among the Chinese in Southeast Asia. He had a phenomenal influence in major towns in Malaysia and Singapore from 1935-40. He formed evangelistic bands (groups for prayer and witness) which were still active in the 1980s.[52] Spontaneous prayers in John Sung's revival meetings were common among the Chinese churches, mainly Methodist and Presbyterian, and created an openness to Charismatic and Pentecostalism.[53] Kong Mui Yee (Kong Duen Yee), a Hong Kong actress, ministered in Malaysia and Singapore much later in 1963. Her evangelistic rallies and Pentecostal teaching on Baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues had stirred some opposition among the Chinese due to her condemning the Chinese religious practices. She was initially invited by AGMS but soon disassociated when she started her churches under the New Testament Church movement.[54]

These early missionaries from different countries had done some groundwork which had helped create the distinctiveness of Malaysian Pentecostalism. The AG USA missionaries did not come into a spiritual vacuum. The early mission presence and Pentecostal revival ministries had attributed to the unique Malaysian Pentecostal spirituality and theology, which are not identical with the AG USA's.

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[52] Levi Sung, trans. Thng Pheng Soon, *The Journal Once Lost: Extracts from the Diary of John Sung* (Singapore: Genesis Books, 2008), 289-457; Roxborogh, *A History of Christianity in Malaysia*, 54-56; Ka-Tong Lim, *The Life and Ministry of John Sung* (Singapore: Genesis Books, 2012), 194, 222-223, 229; Leslie T. Lyall, *Flame for God: John Sung and Revival in the Far East* (London: Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1972); also see Leslie T. Lyall, *John Sung*, 1954, rev. and repr. (London: The China Inland Missions, 1956); Timothy Tow, *The Asian Awakening* (Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1988); Daryl R. Ireland, "The Legacy of John Sung," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 40, no. 4 (October 2016): 349-357, accessed 15 January 2022, https://doi.org/10.1177/2396939316658409.

[53] Roxborogh, *A History of Christianity in Malaysia*, 111; Tan, "Pentecostal and Charismatics in Malaysia and Singapore," 286.

[54] Austin and Lim, "Critical Reflections on the Growth of Pentecostalism in Malaysia," 199 and 204; Tan, "Pentecostal and Charismatics in Malaysia and Singapore," 287-289.

The AGM in Times of Revival

AGM was strongly impacted by the waves of revival that were sweeping across the region during the formative period, which heightened the eschatological and missionary emphasis in evangelism rallies and revival meetings. Missionary reports and magazines confirm the first outpouring of the Holy Spirit throughout Malaysia and Singapore as witnessed and reported by Guynes was around 1957.[55] BIM Principal, Howard Osgood wrote about the Youth Camp in 1960, "[I]t was the biggest ever with well over two hundred young people registered. Over twenty were saved. Over forty received the Baptism in the Spirit. Several made the consecration for full-time service and are planning on entering the Institute this coming year."[56]

In the 1960s and 1970s, the revival swept across Malaysia and surrounding countries as well. AGM's pioneering years were revival times when "people were spiritually hungry" and responsive to God and the work of the Holy Spirit. People were more receptive to the gospel.[57] There was a harvest of souls and revival among the youths as many gathered to pray and seek God. Many were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to evangelise and serve God zealously. The strong Pentecostal fervour and missions, evangelism and church planting since the formation period continued to thrive as AGM went through growth and development in the next two decades.

AGM was an expanding Pentecostal movement, spreading and growing rapidly during this period of revivals, Charismatic Movement and Spirit

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[55] Delmer R. Guynes, missionary report on Baptism of the Holy Spirit and the revival spread throughout Malaysia and Singapore, circa 1957, MR1957; "25th Anniversary Assemblies of God Malaysia," Souvenir Magazine, Apr. 1982, 16, AGM1982-25A.
[56] Christmas Greetings and Missionary Report Letter by Rev. Howard and Edith Osgood, BIM Principal, Kuala Lumpur, Malaya, 24 Oct. 1960 BIMHO19601024.
[57] There were revivals in other parts of Malaysia and a strong manifestation of the power and works of the Holy Spirit as groups of missionaries and young people prayed and sought the Lord.

Renewals. The tremendous growth spurts resulted in AGM becoming a strong influence in spearheading the Spirit-filled Christian landscape in the nation. The Pentecostal had grown rapidly from 5,440 in 1960 to 61,500 adherents in 1985 which made up 13.6 per cent of Christianity in Malaysia, whereas Evangelical is 17.5 per cent, others 15.2 per cent, and the largest denomination being Roman Catholic 53.7 per cent.[58] The AGM movement had become almost as large as the total Evangelical Christian population of the country. Roman Catholicism is the faith of half the Christian population of Malaysia due to the influence brought in during the earlier Portuguese and Dutch colonial rule in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, before the coming of the British.

The Charismatic Movement and Spiritual Renewals

In the larger surrounding context alongside the Pentecostal movement in Malaysia and the establishment of AGM, the times of revival with the outpouring of the Spirit in Baptism in the Holy Spirit became more widespread in Malaysia. The Charismatic Movements and Spiritual Renewals were also happening simultaneously among other denominations in Malaysia from the mid-1970s to 1980s, particularly the Anglicans and Roman Catholics, and among the indigenous groups in East Malaysia.

In the early 1960s, the charismatic renewal spread from the United States to the United Kingdom. However, not being accepted by the leadership of the traditional churches, many members left to join Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. The Fountain Trust was founded in 1964 in the United Kingdom by Michael Harper, an Anglican clergy, who experienced the Pentecostal blessing, with the aim, "the renewal of spiritual life of the Christian Church" and "to enable Christians to

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[58] Hunt, Lee and Roxborogh, eds., *Christianity in Malaysia*, 357.

receive the power of the Holy Spirit and the full benefits of charismatic renewal whilst at the same time safeguarding these blessings from dangers such as fanaticism, schism and doctrinal error."[59] The Fountain Trust was a vehicle for spreading the Charismatic Movement and Spiritual Renewal in Singapore, Sabah, Sarawak, and Peninsular Malaysia in the 1970s first among the Anglican denomination, as the diocese was under the metropolitical jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The charismatic renewal of the Anglican Church in Malaysia came through an Anglican priest from England, Peter Young, who organized "The Renewal Fellowship" in 1974. The inaugural meeting was held on 25 November 1974 with 22 persons led by Tan Jin Huat. The society was registered on 14 Jan. 1976 with J. S. Devaraj as Chairman. The non-denominational fellowship attracted people from the Assemblies of God, Methodist, Lutheran, and Brethren from Petaling Jaya (P.J.) Gospel Hall.[60]

In 1975, the Roman Catholic Church in Malaysia also joined this Renewal Fellowship Council, making all denominations in Malaysia fully represented as the Charismatic Movement swept across Malaysia. Many Spiritual Renewal Conferences were conducted in major state capitals throughout the country. "The Renewal Fellowship Society of Selangor and Federal Territory" was registered in 1976. The Roman Catholic Charismatic Renewal also had its version of "Catholic Charismatic Renewal" (CCR) within the Catholic Church from 1978 onward. The CCR movement with "The Life in the Spirit Seminar", a seven-week course of study, and CCR's Charismatic prayer meetings on Fridays focusing on exorcism and healing were made popular by Father Marc Duplesis, a French priest, in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, and spread nationwide. "The Life in the Spirit Seminar" by the Catholic Church taught all the gifts of the Spirit mentioned by St. Paul, i.e. "tongues,

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[59] Archival document: J. S. Devaraj, "Spiritual Renewal in Malaysia," Renewal Fellowship Society of Selangor and Federal Territory, n.d., 2-3, RFSSFT001.
[60] Devaraj, "Spiritual Renewal in Malaysia," 3-4, RFSSFT001.

wisdom, knowledge, prophecy, healing, discernment of spirits, teaching, faith, miracles, interpretation of tongues," with the emphasis on the gifts of tongues, healing and discernment of spirit being "CCR group's expression of the power of the Holy Spirit."[61]

There were also pockets of revivals in indigenous villages in East Malaysia such as in Ranau and Taginambur in 1973, and Ba'kelalan of Bario Highlands in 1973, 1975, 1978, and 1984.[62] The Charismatic Movement peaked from the mid-1970s through 1990s throughout Malaysia.

The Way Forward: Malaysia Pentecostal Research Centre for Malaysian Pentecostalism

Malaysian Pentecostalism has around one century of historical development since the early missionary period around the 1920s-1930s. The Assemblies of God Malaysia and all other Pentecostal-Charismatic movements and churches alike have respectively contributed significantly to the overall history, growth, and development of Malaysian Pentecostalism in the country. A more general definition of "Pentecostal" includes Charismatic and Spirit-filled movements, denominations, churches, and believers. Malaysian Pentecostalism is uniquely contextualized and indigenous. Its diversity and spiritual landscape have been shaped by historical, political, socio-cultural, religious, theological, and missional factors over the past century to present issues. Malaysian Pentecostalism has evolved through the century and decades and is becoming even more diverse in

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[61] Devaraj, "Spiritual Renewal in Malaysia," 1-4, RFSSFT001.

[62] Tan, *Planting an Indigenous Church*, 214-215, 225-243. For further details on revival, see Solomon Bulan and Lillian Bulan-Dorai, *The Bario Revival* (Kuala Lumpur: HomeMatters Network, 2012); Christopher Choo, *The Ba Kelalan Revival of East Malaysia* (Petaling Jaya: El Shaddai Sdn Bhd, 1994); Peter Elliott, *Asang: The Story of Trevor White and the Dusuns of Sabah* (Cleveland, Qld: Delia Wilson, 1997).

contemporary times.

Understanding the situatedness of AGM amid other Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Spirit-filled movements and churches within the larger body of Christ in Malaysia, there is a growing awareness of Malaysian Pentecostalism that is unique and contextual, and different from other countries. Many histories and stories are yet to be preserved, documented, researched, written, and shared. There is also the pressing need to impart Pentecostal theology and spirituality to future generations. There are many pioneers and spiritual leaders of the Pentecostal, Charismatic and Spirit-filled movements and churches with rich spiritual heritage to pass on to the younger generations in the future. There is a necessity to preserve the historical records and data of the development and changes of the movements and churches, which is the spiritual legacy for the current and future generations. Pentecostal scholarship on the Malaysian context is scarce and it is essential to raise scholars to research on this important area. The establishment of the Malaysia Pentecostal Research Centre shall be strategic to preserve the Pentecostal heritage and foster the Pentecostal theology and spirituality of Malaysian Pentecostalism in the twenty-first century and beyond.

On 15 September 2022, the Bible College of Malaysia launched the Malaysia Pentecostal Research Centre (MPRC), a new wing under BCM and AGM, as a future direction for Malaysian Pentecostals. MPRC has plans in serving the larger body of Christ as a one-centre for the Pentecostal-Charismatic or Spirit-filled Church in Malaysia. A brief introduction and proposal are appended below:

> **Description:** Malaysia Pentecostal Research Centre is a research avenue for scholars on Pentecostal theology, education, spirituality, practice, missions, and history in the Malaysian context.

Theme: Spirit-led theological studies and practice.

Mission Statement: The Malaysia Pentecostal Research Centre seeks to instil and enhance the Pentecostal theology and practice of Pentecostal distinctives and missions in the Spirit-filled movements through research, scholarships, and theological education, as well as the preservation of past and present publications.

Vision Statement: The Malaysia Pentecostal Research Centre envisions the enrichment of holistic Pentecostal education and spirituality among current and new generations that will strengthen the God-spirited revival movements and churches in Malaysia in the twenty-first century and beyond.

Purpose: The purpose of the Malaysia Pentecostal Research Centre shall be to promote Pentecostal scholarship through scholarly engagements, theological platforms, networks, research facilities and services.

Plans for 2023:
o To publish an annual e-journal on Pentecostal studies in the Malaysian context and beyond.
o To host an annual one to two days Pentecostal conference with some key speakers for main sessions and workshops.
o To network with Pentecostal societies, study/research centres, theological education institutions, and churches.[63]

Proposed plans for the future, subject to the availability of resources:
o To start physical and digital archives for Malaysian

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[63] See Bible College of Malaysia, "Malaysian Pentecostal Research Centre," https://bcm.org.my/mprc.

Pentecostalism.

o   To serve as the repository for the AGM General Council.

o   To extend the MPRC as a repository of primary sources for the other Pentecostal-Charismatic movements and Spirit-filled churches in Malaysia in mutual agreements. The primary sources would include various forms of church publications (e.g. anniversary publications, local church histories, special church events, speeches, etc.) in various formats: printed, audio-visual, etc.

o   To provide a physical research facility for scholars and researchers on Malaysian Pentecostalism and Christian studies.

o   To promote the broader scope of Pentecostal research and scholarships on Malaysian Pentecostalism with a wider range of Pentecostal-Charismatic or Spirit-filled research materials for scholars nationwide and beyond.

o   To have more theological conversations and collaborations among theological institutions, Christian organisations, and churches on various Pentecostal topics in theology and practice.[64]

Looking into the future, the MPRC's vision and mission are not only for the AGM but it is an avenue to serve the broader Malaysian Pentecostals and the Spirit-empowered community at large. The plans would include the abovementioned and a research facility as a research avenue and repository for primary and secondary sources preferably in digital format which will be made available to all researchers.[65] The work and ministry of the MPRC are to bless the larger body of Christ locally and abroad as all diverse denominations and churches are part of the universal church.

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[64] Eva Wong, "Malaysia Pentecostal Research Centre Proposal," 15 June 2022.
[65] Wong, "Malaysia Pentecostal Research Centre Proposal."

Conclusion

This brief overview of the early beginning of the Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Spirit-filled movements, and the times of revivals and Spirit renewals shows their significance in shaping the unique Malaysian Pentecostalism within the context of the larger Christianity in the country. Every church's history is important and invaluable to the body of Christ as we are one in Christ. Jesus prayed, "that they may be one even as we are one" (John 17, ESV). Unity in diversity makes the Malaysian Pentecostals and the Malaysian church stand strong as one body in Christ, belonging to the larger Christian tradition.

As the director of MPRC, I propose the future direction to advance Pentecostal scholarship and hope to see the Pentecostal movement in Malaysia continue with a strong theological and biblical foundation and pass on the Pentecostal heritage, spirituality, fervour, and practice to future generations in the twenty-first century and beyond. This new venture needs resources, collaborations, and funding. This proposal for future direction is written down and will await the appointed time when this vision shall be fulfilled as the Spirit leads.

Dr Eva Wong Suk Kyun is the Director of the Malaysia Pentecostal Research Centre and full-time faculty of the Bible College of Malaysia. She is an AGM minister (ordination on 10 September 2023). Presently, she serves on the Executive Committee of the Asia Pentecostal Society (APS), and the Lausanne Global Analysis Editorial Board. She also co-leads the Asian Pentecostal Women's Fellowship in APS and the ScholarLeaders Women's Peer Leader Forum. She holds a PhD in Theology (Pentecostal Studies) from Oxford Centre for Mission Studies in partnership with Middlesex University, UK.