# Pentecostals Doing Church

# Pentecostals Doing Church:

## *An Eclectic and Global Approach*

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# CHAPTER ONE

# RATIONALE, METHOD AND STRUCTURE

## The rationale for this work

I entered the world of Pentecostalism when I was eight years old. My devout middle-class Anglican mother joined a local "church plant" of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa in a community hall close to our home in Durban, South Africa. Their language and culture was Afrikaans, and most folk were converts from just over the railway line – geographically as well as a culturally. Many had recently been redeemed from massively dysfunctional family contexts, often dominated by alcohol and domestic abuse. Their mode of doing and being church was typical 1950's South African dynamic classical Pentecostalism: emotionally expressive, centred on regular encounter with God, and celebrating Jesus and his cross.

However, my *very* first experience of Pentecostal gatherings was in my preschool years: my old-school Salvation Army grandmother regularly visited a peri-urban Zulu settlement even further along the geographical and cultural railway line, and would sometimes take me to the Sunday afternoon services she conducted. There I heard my first Pentecostal hymn, sung polyphonically as only Zulus can: "There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus, no not one, no not one." I also remember once being "conned" into attending a tent service at the age of about 5, believing it to be a tent "circus." There I heard another hymn (sung with great gusto, very un-Anglican!) that has stirred me ever since: "I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene." During that first season of Pentecost in our new church, when the annual ten days of "tarrying" meetings took place and my mother was baptised in the Holy Spirit, it is the singing I remember most: "Let the fire fall just now", "It's the Holy Ghost and power that is keeping me alive", and "It is Jesus, hallelujah, it's the power of God in Jesus." Indeed, it is the memory of the singing and dynamic preaching of radically-changed mid-century Afrikaans and Zulu Pentecostals that has provided much of the vision and motivation that has guided my own later ministry.

As I grew, my experience of church and God became part of a wider religious context. A nearby derelict Hindu temple featured as an occasional playground, replete as it was with its idol and decorations – and irregular visits from an irate priest. The local Hindu people would often invite curious neighbourhood children to participate in their lavishly-catered outdoor wedding or birthday feasts. Downtown Durban boasts the largest mosque in the Southern Hemisphere, and I spent many Saturday mornings during my early teens at the nearby Oriental Bazaar discussing religion with both Hindu and Muslim merchants. I was fascinated by the history and culture of the Zulu people, and often during my childhood roaming I would pass by the exuberant gatherings of the Zionists in their colourful robes, held in the shade of trees or on the beaches. The three-metre surf proved useful assistance to the Zionist pastors in their very robust forms of baptism and purification. My earliest experience of the gifts of the Spirit was the exorcism of a tribal woman, conducted quietly by my mother and grandmother in our own back yard, as though it were commonplace. Much to Mother's dismay, during neighbourhood football games I learned a number of pithy but dubious expressions in the Zulu and Indian vernacular from the other players. I also was intrigued by the spirituality of Eastern religions, and in my early adolescence attempted skills and rituals such as reading auras and astral travelling – which all came to an end when in my mid-teens I encountered Jesus radically and personally for myself, as both Saviour and Baptiser in the Spirit. Our local church pastor at that time had been a missionary, and spoke seven local languages including Zulu, Tamil and Hindi. His influence on my own theological and inter-cultural development was considerable.

Today I look back on 45 years of ordained Christian ministry, most of it conducted among people of cultures and languages far removed from the staid Anglicanism of my childhood. I have taught and preached throughout Southern and Central Africa, interacted with the emerging Pentecostal theologies of Africa and Asia, and contributed regularly in Western forums for Pentecostal theology. I have pastored a rural community of White African's during the bush war in Rhodesia, holding throughout close fellowship with both my White and Black Pentecostal colleagues. From this brutal conflict emerged an interest in political theologies that led to a Pentecostal investigation of Jurgen Moltmann's works as my first doctoral thesis. This prepared me for a significant role in the negotiations leading to the end of racial segregation in my own denomination in the mid-1990's.

I have “done church” with people of many different languages and cultures, often in rural areas where the local shaman would lead very real and physical persecution against Christians for defying the traditions of the elders and the spirits of the ancestors. I have gathered with them also in large urban auditoriums, where they have freely celebrated the good that God has done for them, including their upward social mobility and increased prosperity. I have taught in their seminaries and local churches and conferences and leadership seminars, shared their joys, fears and sorrows, and participated fully in the glad story that has been Pentecostalism in the global South - and sorrowed with them at the sad story that has been the political and economic failure of post-colonial Africa, with the awful toll taken by political mismanagement, war, famine and disease.

My theological interest has always been eclectically Pentecostal. Theologians in the Global South will usually find themselves in leadership rather than seminary roles, and I have been privileged to occupy both roles simultaneously. The demands of leadership in the dynamic and fluid social and religious contexts of the South require a reasoned and relevant response on a vast scope of topics. Thankfully the South African tradition then to require a qualified theologian to hold an initial theologically-eclectic postgraduate degree, usually a comprehensive Bachelor of Divinity, served many of us well. The level of theological maturity and debate I enjoyed in both church and seminary has fostered a desire to contextualise as widely as possible any and all relevant theological findings that may be produced by more focussed specialised research.

And so to the rationale for this book: at present the topics “doing church” and “leading churches” are some of the most evident and pressing in present-day Pentecostal thinking and practice. Yet at the same time never has so little sustained thinking – at popular level at least – been given to crucial questions such as: What is the Pentecostal church, or what is the theological basis of Pentecostal leadership? And while quantitatively most Pentecostal church and leadership is being done in the Global South, it is in the North Atlantic region that the majority of Pentecostal research and publication is reaching publication. This can influence readers in the Global South to focus on theological contexts and theory that may be only tangentially relevant to their own situation, or even to dismiss that type of ecclesiological research that never scratches (or even identifies) their own contextual itches. So, having lived most of my life in the South, been involved for decades in Pentecostal ministry and in a formal leadership training environment, and having pursued my own intensive theological

research in a quest to articulate and answer some very burning questions from the South, it is now time to bring fingers to keyboard and attempt my own thorough articulation of Pentecostal notions of being and doing church. My personal background, training and experience urge me to attempt this as eclectically as possible, involving insights from the full spectrum of theological and social disciplines, and to do so in the context of global Pentecostalism – which in effect demands an affirmative emphasis on the context of the global South.

## Some definitions

How does one define "Pentecostal ecclesiology"? Without retracing every discussion that has emerged recently[1], for my own attempt I will be utilising the following definitions in this work:

*Pentecostal* – by this is intended individuals and groups that explicitly or implicitly locate their ethos, *proprium*, theological paradigm, liturgical practice, historical self-understanding and existential emphases within the broad framework and legacy of the classical Pentecostalism that emerged in the early 20th century. Obviously there are numerous examples that could be considered borderline Pentecostal or alternatively Pentecostal – but when considering ecclesiology the viable definition will be narrower rather than broader. While charismatic communities within the Roman

[1] Just a few of a number of recent contributions and collections on this theme include: Chan, Simon. *Pentecostal Ecclesiology: An Essay on the Development of Doctrine*. Blandford Forum: Deo Publishing, 2011; Green, Chris E.W, ed. *Pentecostal Ecclesiology: A Reader*. Leiden: Brill, 2016. (This is a comprehensive reader featuring some more recent names in the discussion); Hall, Christine, and Rowell, Geoffrey, eds. Ecclesiology and the Pentecostal Churches. *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 11, 2011., includes a number of papers by well-known Pentecostal scholars; Lord, Andy. "Network Church: A Pentecostal Ecclesiology shaped by Mission." PhD Diss., University of Birmingham, 2010.; Robson, Robert B. "The Temple, the Spirit and the People of the Presence of God: Examining Critical Options for a Pentecostal Ecclesiology." PhD diss., University of St Michael's College, 2012; Thomas, John C. ed. *Toward a Pentecostal Ecclesiology: The Church and the Fivefold Gospel*. Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010 is a collection of papers from an international theological conference at Bangor University, Wales in summer 2010.; Tippurainen, Riku and Joseph Dimitrov, eds. *Pentecostal Issues, Ecclesiology and Ecumenism*. Sint Pieters Leew: Continental Theological Seminary, 2011, which includes a number of papers from recent research presented at a colloquium on theological positions held at Continental Theological Seminary in 2011.

Catholic and Anglican communions, for instance, may resonate with aspects of Pentecostal expressions of church, they remain ultimately defined and confined by established church conceptuality – even if uncomfortably so at times. The more recent burgeoning independent ministries cover a wide spectrum of charismatic and Pentecostal styles, and are included in this discussion only where particular examples may claim relationship with or historical roots in the classical Pentecostal movement.

*Church* – in the context of Pentecostal ecclesiology this refers to communities: local, regional, national, transnational, corporate, denominational, notional, or philosophically mutual. For this work Pentecostal ecclesiology views Pentecostal *communities* as its field of interest.

*Global South* – the ebb and flow of correctness has led to various terms being utilised for those regions and nations that are not geographically and culturally part of the North Atlantic homelands of modernity. These include Third World, developing nations, Two-thirds World, and more recently the South, or the Global South. This work will employ the latter term, and refer to the one-time West, or First World, as either the West or the North Atlantic region, depending on context.

*Ecclesiology* – this is traditionally understood as "the doctrine of the church," or "the nature of the church." It is normally discussed and researched within the disciplines of systematic theology and church history. The multidisciplinary approach of this work, while maintaining this basic notion, will also explore the term from and within the perspective, understanding and implication of the biblical, historical, practical, missiological and theological disciplines of theology.

## The aim of this work

It is therefore intended that this work will offer a wide theological perspective on and informed discussion of the Pentecostal church in its multiple contexts and expressions. From this discussion it is hoped that a viable explanation of Pentecostal ecclesiology may emerge that can inform and operate within Pentecostal theology as an authentic and recognisable description, one with which both scholar and layman may identify. While it will be operating in cognisance of the plethora of recent explicit contributions to the topic, and some works with significant implications, the aim will not be to operate primarily as an overview or even in

sustained conversation with such material. It is an attempt to further the conversation from a specific point of view and context and thus hopefully to offer its own perspective on the issue and further an own rather than a derived agenda. It is primarily the work and insights of a Pentecostal minister and thinker who has been in and "doing" Pentecostal church for six decades, a personal contribution informed by life and work rather than a traditional research project. While its scholarly language and appropriate terminology will hopefully be maintained at a technically high level, a conscious attempt is made to offer a style that an informed Christian layman might also find readable and intelligible.

## Method and structure

The method and structure of this work coalesces from its commitment to a multidisciplinary approach**.** Every theological discipline has its own contribution regarding the nature, expression and purpose of "church." Pentecostal writing, teaching and preaching, whether scholarly or popular, has drawn its implicit and explicit understanding of what the church is from biblical material, historical insights, practical experience, missional emphases, and doctrinal formulae. The structure of this work follows this scheme, commencing with a review of biblical perspectives encountered in Pentecostal notions of "church."

### A biblical theological approach

The text of the Christian Scriptures remains the richest source for the most popular and authoritative understandings of Pentecostal ecclesiology. Embedded in every genre are reflections on the nature of the community of God, and on the community in interaction with God. Therefore Biblical Theology, as developed, accessed and utilised by Pentecostals at all levels, is a prime source for Pentecostal ecclesiology. From it may be derived models, typologies, ideologies and conceptuality for being the People of God. Pentecostals have done so with great gusto if not always with great precision or responsibility. Local and cultural preferences abound, for instance converts from some tribal societies may resonate with many Old Testament values and narratives, as opposed to the tendency of urbanised Westerners to gravitate to the context and conceptuality of the New Testament text and its originating context. While Pentecostals, particularly at populist level, often demonstrate a certain literalism and naiveté in their grass-roots hermeneutic, for all the shortcomings of their methodological

approach the Bible remains the richest resource for their metanarrative and symbolic world.[2]

## A church historical approach

The historical disciplines within theology are replete with crucial material and insights into two millennia of Christian identity and community. Pentecostal scholars and teachers have not been loath to mine this rich vein, and much theological effort within the community has attempted in some way to locate Pentecostalism coherently within the wider history of Christianity and its many streams. Its interest in doing so may not correspond exactly with that which drives scholarship in the more traditional and established Christian traditions, but it would be simplistic to categorise it as exclusively focused on the "underside" or the "radical elements" of Church History. Rather, its own narrative and experience provides it with a correspondingly unique perspective on the full spectrum of Christian forms and experiences of community. As with biblical theology, there may not always be a commonly-held approach to the understanding and application of historical material and insights to Pentecostal theology. Contemporary Western culture's postmodern disdain for history is also often reflected in popular Pentecostalism, with the result that it is not unusual to encounter the re-invention of wheels and the repetition of the theological and historical inconsistencies and disasters associated with many of these historical affinities. Therefore no serious attempt to establish a viable Pentecostal ecclesiology can ignore the insistence that the history of the church be heard.

## A practical theological and missiological approach

Insights from the practical disciplines of theology are no doubt among the most prevalent in popular Pentecostalism. Pentecostals seem by default to operate phenomenologically, even pragmatically, usually with little attempt to systematically analyse practical material, insights and experiences, nor to base their activities on any comprehensive theory of Christian practice. This has produced a plethora of works on *how* to do corporate Christianity: how to lead, how to preach, how to teach, how to "worship"

[2] Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals (*Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1977), 427-429, argued that in the absence of a formal theological approach at that time, Pentecostals defaulted to New Testament theology for their normative practices and beliefs. This is probably still true for popular Pentecostalism, in their articulation if not always in practice.

or conduct the liturgy, and how to counsel and care. Alongside such works are a handful of more scholarly attempts at empirical research into the workings of aspects of Pentecostalism, such as preaching, member satisfaction, the pastoral care of ministers and numerous others.[3] The empirical work and field research on Pentecostalism undertaken by social scientists has also proliferated recently, particularly but not exclusively among sociologists and cultural anthropologists.[4] For Pentecostal ecclesiology

[3] Just a few examples from South Africa, where the largest Pentecostal church has been intensively researched by its own theologians, include: Blom, Louis. "A Critical Evaluation of Evangelism as Understood and Practised by some Black African Christian Leaders of the Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches in South Africa" D Litt et Phil diss., University of Johannesburg, 2009; Erasmus, Lodewijk E. "Theological education in the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa", DTh diss., University of South Africa, 1996; Malebe, George N. "The phenomenology of divorce among Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa's pastors : a practical theological perspective", D Litt et Phil diss., Rand Afrikaans University, 2004; Maré, Leonard P. "AGS-pastore se belewenis van hulle teologiese opleiding. M A diss., Rand Afrikaans University, 2003; Evans, Etresia M. "A Theological perspective on the holistic needs of emeritus pastors of the Apostolic Faith Mission of SA", DPhil diss., Northwest University, 2014; Basson, Ernrich F. *"*AGS-pastore se belewenis van gemeentestrukture*"*, D Litt et Phil diss., University of Johannesburg, 2007; Myburgh, Andre J. "AGS-pastore se belewenis van die donkerkant van leierskap", MA diss., University of Johannesburg, 2006.

[4] Much earlier interest in Pentecostalism stemmed from the spread of tongues-speaking outside of the movement in the Neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. John Sherrill's *They Speak with Other Tongues*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1965 (40th ed. released in 2004 by Chosen Books) was a semi-populist journalistic investigation of this phenomenon, while F P Moller, the president of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, a qualified clinical psychologist, produced his third doctoral thesis on the wider charismatic phenomena (the nine gifts of the Spirit) and included a critique of some psychological and sociological attempts to explain these (published as *Die diskussie oor die charismata soos wat dit in die pinksterbeweging geleer en beoefen word* by Evangelie-Uitgewers, Braamfontein, 1975.) Margaret Poloma's sociological critique of developments in the Assemblies of God (*Assemblies Of God At Crossroads: Charisma Institutional Dilemmas***,** Cleveland TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1989) flowed from within the movement, while an earlier collection of anthropological studies of Pentecostalism in the Caribbean region (Glazier, Stephen D ed. *Perspectives on Pentecostalism: Case Studies from the Caribbean and Latin America.* Washington DC: University Press of America, 1980) foreshadowed an increasing interest and flow of research in the social sciences such as those collected in Anderson, Allan et al. eds., *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2010, and the research of Miller, Donald E. and

such material on practical theological issues is a rich mine for investigating the implied ecclesiological models within the movement, if not the explicit.

The theological discipline of *missiology* directs the ecclesiological focus toward those understandings of church that underpin Pentecostal missions activity, while the concomitant disciplines of science of religion, philosophy of religion and psychology of religion encourage the ecclesiological researcher to locate their theology of church in these wider fields, which include typologies of religions, spiritualities, philosophies and communal piety. The implications in this field for the emergence of the dynamic Pentecostalism of the Global South have recently begun to impact research publication in the West, alongside a growing interest in the notion of Full Circle Mission as missionaries go out from the South to reach other communities in that region, or even to "bring the gospel back home" to the now-secularised traditional missionary-sending countries of the West.

### A systematic theological approach

It is primarily from within this discipline that so many recent contributions to Pentecostal ecclesiology have been made. The aim of this study is to bring together the ecclesiological material extracted according to the deposit and methods of the other disciplines, and to attempt a synthesis by which a cogent contribution can be made to the systematic theological understanding of "church" in a Pentecostal context. This synthesis can then be brought into conversation with other contributions, with particular emphasis upon insights gleaned from the Global South.

## An eclectic approach

Theology no longer operates as the unquestioned "Queen of the Sciences", nor can it maintain its autonomy in a secularised academic world as the study of divinity. This is evident in the current lack of any convincing argument for a special hermeneutic for Biblical material, and the subsequent admission of (and submission to) a spectrum of literary interpretive techniques and frameworks from wider textual studies. Similarly church history now usually proceeds according the methodologies

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Yamamori, Tesunao. *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement.* Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2007.)

of the wider historical sciences, systematic theology in parallel to philosophy, and aspects of practical theology and missiology on the basis of a universal empirical methodology. A multidisciplinary discussion of Pentecostal ecclesiology must therefore take cognisance of many of the methods and findings of the humanities, of the social sciences, and even of the physical and health sciences. The global growth of Pentecostalism, with its claims regarding the "god" question and supernatural intervention in the processes of nature and humanity, particularly lends itself to the insights, critique and findings of these other sciences – indeed, can neither ignore nor escape them. Therefore discussion of its ecclesiology cannot be exempt from this process.

## A phenomenological approach

The phenomenological approach adopted is borrowed from science of religion, or comparative religion. In this field a religion or *cultus* may be studied as a phenomenon, without prejudice or Christian apologetics - it is the aim of the researcher to achieve as far as possible an objective description and analysis of the phenomenon under scrutiny, on its own terms. Research into Pentecostal community is well-suited to such an approach, and its application relates to a number of important facets. These include the recognition of complexity within the studied phenomena, the facility to develop typologies to categorise the material, an avoidance of a simplistic "one size fits all" solutions, and a commitment to a hopefully objective presentation of "what is" rather than what the researcher believes "ought to be." It is also a worthwhile approach for detecting and exploring *implied* as opposed to *explicit* ecclesiologies.

## An inclusive approach

The intention of this aspect of methodology is to include a multiplicity of social contexts in which Pentecostal community is or has been demonstrated. Pentecostalism has established itself globally, and in a multiplicity of local contexts. These include more than just obvious contrasts such as urban context versus rural, in social caste and class distinctions, and in language and cultural differences. They include macro social and political contexts that differ markedly, some of which provide within their ambit considerable constraint upon the scope of possible demonstrations of Pentecostal community. Much Western research into Pentecostalism appears to assume a largely Western origin and location for "significant" Pentecostalism, and presents a discussion in which primarily

two types of Pentecostalism are taken as representative of "church" – those in the Western "homelands" of Pentecostalism, and those that the homeland has established on the mission fields of the non-West. The latter category in particular is often treated collectively as though situated in a single relevant context: the non-Western. This work will aim to recognise and respect the scope and complexity of contexts particularly within the Global South without ignoring the reality that there is also no such thing as a "typical" Western context – as the experience of Pentecostalism in the neighbouring but disparate contexts of the USA and the UK clearly demonstrates.

A short typology of typical social environments illustrates this, and includes:

- An *established church* context (most of Europe and Latin America) in which Pentecostalism has been clearly identified in the public mind-set as an eccentric sect;
- A *Christian theocratic* context, such as those parts of the United States where evangelical forms of Christianity are influential. Here Pentecostalism may be marginalised because of its perceived lack of interest in public influence;
- A *minority Christian* environment, such as the so-called 10/40 Window, where other major religions and spiritualities predominate;
- An "*unreached peoples*" environment, normally but not exclusively in the 10/40 Window, where the Pentecostal form of Christianity is sometimes the first or only Christian witness to a particular social or cultural group;
- A *persecution environment*, where a dominant form of Christianity or of another religion or ideology exacts a price for Pentecostal (and perhaps other) forms of Christian conversion, practice, community and lifestyle. Such environments may occur in Marxist territories, in Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist cultures, in tribal cultures where animism and shamanism occur, or in nations where the established Christian religion (usually Roman Catholicism or Orthodoxy) may take active steps to marginalise or eject Pentecostal Christians.
- In a few (but increasing) number of localities, a *majority Pentecostal* environment where Pentecostals outnumber other spiritualities, religions or Christian denominations. This already occurs in some local regions of Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and East Asia.

In the following chapter the first step in this undertaking begins, with a discussion of the relationship between Pentecostalism and the Bible, and its use of the Bible to establish implicit and explicit ecclesiological insights and practice.

# CHAPTER TWO

# BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

## The role of the Bible in the Pentecostal understanding of Christian community

Pentecostalism is grounded firmly in the Protestant mould. The Bible remains its primary source for belief, behaviour and religious practice, with all other claims to authority subordinated to it. Whether it has ever in its origin and essence been fundamentalist is debateable,[5] nevertheless it tends to argue for the perspicuity of the Scriptures with a strong emphasis on a literal understanding of the text. However, Pentecostal hermeneutics cannot easily be reduced to merely adopting a modified conservative evangelical approach as opposed to a liberal (critical) approach or a creative (postmodern or literary critical) approach.[6]

The search for a scholarly understanding of the nature of a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic featured intensively in Pentecostal theology during the 1980's and 1990's, often as a sub-stream at theological conferences. While interest from North America focussed primarily on its relationship to evangelical hermeneutics, and from the charismatic wing

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[5] In his epic work Barr does not consider Pentecostals to be typically fundamentalist, even if many ministers use it similarly, see James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM, 1977), 208. A useful recent study maps some of the earliest relationship in North America between Pentecostalism and Fundamentalism (King, Gerald W. *Disfellowshiped: Pentecostal responses to fundamentalism in the United States, 1906-1914.* Eugene OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011.) The precise relationship is difficult to spell out, with both terms (Pentecostalism and Fundamentalism) clearly requiring contextualised definition e.g. in the Global South Pentecostals may be as conservative as in the USA with regard to Scripture but probably less doctrinaire. During the intensive theological discussions on Pentecostal hermeneutics during the 1970's to 1990's it was often approached almost solely from the point of view of its relationship to evangelicalism – a typically North American interest.

[6] A debate summarised in my thesis (Clark, Mathew S. "An investigation into the nature of a viable Pentecostal hermeneutic". DTh diss., University of South Africa, 1997, pp. 53-130.)

on the relationship between text and Spirit as revelatory authorities, the recent emergence of new (sometimes controversial) leadership paradigms now points the debate to issues such as the personal authoritative revelation claimed by many "anointed" leaders, as opposed to a consensus understanding of a community of autonomous Spirit-filled readers.

The progress of the hermeneutical debate beyond the stage of "Is it admissible to build theology and doctrine on the narrative material in the Bible?" can be seen as a recent success for Pentecostal theological input on this issue. The Pentecostal ethos lays great emphasis on narrative, especially testimony, and is more likely to view the text as a witness to the relationship between God and *homo sapiens* than as merely or primarily a source-book of dogma. In this it clearly parallels the earlier Anabaptist and Wesleyan ethos. Pentecostal preaching, in its earlier years and now particularly in the Global South, was primarily story-telling based on the Bible. The Pentecostal invitation to conversion may be a simple appeal to join the still-unfolding story: to leave the seats in the playhouse and join the actors, as players and participants on stage rather than passive or critical spectators in the audience.[7]

This preference for the narrative form underlies many Pentecostal notions of church – its popular ecclesiology is built on the notion of the *people of God* being distinct in some major aspects from all other people. From the Biblical narrative it therefore extracts rich material for its self-understanding as God's people in a hostile but needy world – in the stories of Israel, of the disciples, of the early church, and of the apostolic witness in and to the world.

However, the non-narrative genre in the Scripture has also been mined by Pentecostals for their understanding of community. The words of the prophets are understood as addressed primarily to the community of God's people and its leaders; the psalms contain the songs not just of individuals

[7] Wright uses the notions of an incomplete Shakespearian drama where the missing scene could only be authentically completed by using both innovation and consistency (Wright, Nicholas T. "How can the Bible be Authoritative? (The Laing Lecture 1989)." Vox Evangelica 21 (1991):7-32.) McKay notes how the personal experience of the charismatic gifts can promote even the academic scholar from critic to actor on the stage, from observer to participant, in the Christian drama (Mckay, John W. "When the Veil is Taken Away: The Impact of Prophetic Experience on Biblical Interpretation." In *Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A reader*, edited by Lee Roy Martin, 57-80. Leiden: Brill, 2013.)

but of the community; and the wisdom writings, unlike much of early Western philosophy, reflect the experiences and concerns of the collective as well as of the individual. The epistles, while sometimes interpreted simplistically within a rather common Biblicist approach, nevertheless function for Pentecostals as authoritative instruction for the community of God's people as much as instruction for the individual believer. For this reason Biblical theologians who can contextualise each of the New Testament teachings within the *story* of the early church will often be influential in Pentecostal pulpits and classrooms.

The following offers a review of some primary biblical motifs that drive a popular Pentecostal ecclesiology, followed by critical reflection on the present-day appropriation of these and other motifs in the various contexts in which Pentecostals now do church.

## Significant Old Testament motifs relevant to Pentecostal ecclesiology

### The pre-diluvian narratives

Early Pentecostalism seemed not to discover much in the first five chapters of the Bible for developing their concept of Christians in community. The lessons from the narratives of Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel were usually considered to reflect personal or domestic ethical and relational issues rather than communal. Some may have detected significance in the apparent divine election of the line of Seth as opposed to the line of Cain, but rarely does one encounter sustained deliberation on the recorded development of pastoral, agricultural, urban and industrial forms of human culture and its implications for a community of "the people of God". Those inclined to a strict fundamentalist interpretation might visit the genealogies to demonstrate the age of the Earth, and others might identify individuals such as Methuselah, Enoch and Noah as examples of the concept of the "faithful remnant" that is encountered throughout the Bible.

The eruption onto the Pentecostal scene of the Faith Movement in the 1980's, with E W Kenyon's alternative neo-gnostic dualistic world-view as its basic (if largely implied) philosophy, immediately challenged Pentecostalism with crucial questions regarding its self-understanding as community. Were Adam and Eve intended to live in a garden paradise for eternity, establishing this as an ideal existence to which believers in Christ

are redeemed? Did Satan strip Adam of his God-given authority, taking it to himself and thereby depriving God of it? Would this define the redemptive efficacy related in the Passion events primarily to retrieving this divine authority from Satan and returning it to a new redeemed humanity, Kenyon's wealthy and healthy super-race headed by a superhuman Jesus?[8] Popular Pentecostalism has not wrestled decisively with these questions, even while some theologians argue that the ethos of the Faith Movement remains strongly enculturated at popular level in the movement.[9] This is certainly true of African Pentecostalism, where it relates directly to those issues in anthropology, Christology and pneumatology that bring together African cultural understandings as well as Christian ecclesiology.[10]

The Noah narrative is the first to explicitly identify a domestic (family) group as a community of God's people distinct from and within the wider culture. It is Noah and his sons and their wives and children who are chosen and then saved in the Ark, providing the first clearly-articulated biblical concept of the people of God as a counter-cultural and subversive community, dissenting from a wider social consensus. Some Pentecostal preaching has embraced the typical conservative evangelical approach of identifying the Ark as a *type* of Christ and the church, and offering no specifically Pentecostal perspective upon the narrative. Those pragmatic and triumphalist Pentecostals who identify the ideal successful ministry primarily as "bottoms on benches and bucks in the bank" might find sobering material for reflection in this Diluvian narrative–the man who found grace in God's eyes bore witness to his culture with very little result. This highlights a crucial aspect particularly of earlier Pentecostal self-understanding: that they were a tiny marginalised group who in their

[8] The most complete compendium of Kenyon's theological views with regard to a new super race of redeemed humanity is Kenyon, Essek W. *New Creation Realities*. Lynwood WA:Kenyons Gospel Publishing, 1989. His *What Happened between the Cross and the Throne* (same bibliography) outlines his view that the death of Jesus was his defeat by Satan, that he was tormented by Satan in Hell, but emerged victorious and vicariously as the first of a race of super-humans at his resurrection.

[9] e.g. Atkinson, William. *The 'Spiritual Death' of Jesus: A Pentecostal Investigation*. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

[10] As outlined in: Clark, Mathew S. "*Christology and pneumatology in Pentecostal-Charismatic missions theology–conflicting paradigms in practice?*" Paper presented at University of Chester Theology and Religious Studies seminar, May 2014.

dissent from the wider consensus are (or will be) vindicated by the course of events. This resonates with the primitivist separatist ecclesiology of other historical communities such as the Montanist and Anabaptist groups.

The Noah narrative is therefore crucial to Pentecostals as the earliest overt expression of corporate personality in the Scriptures. Noah's family was saved, although it was only Noah who was said to have found grace in God's eyes. For Western Pentecostals, Paul's identification of the first and the last Adams as corporate personalities is less widely recognised as such than are the families in the later Patriarchal narratives. However, Pentecostals in the Global South usually recognise and understand a domestic and social context where the head of a family, clan, tribe or nation embodies in their person and actions the weal and destiny of the collective. To them the stories of Noah and later of Achan hold no mystery–it was as proper that Noah's family be spared with him as it was that Achan's family and servants die with him. This patriarchal social form is reflected in many Pentecostal communities in the South, sometimes engendering the promotion and acceptance of authoritarian forms of church governance and ministry that would seem foreign to many Westerners. The notion of church leaders as authoritative Apostles or Prophets (and sometimes Teachers) has always been reflected in African Pentecostalism, and recent emphases on the Five-fold Ministry have exacerbated this trend, especially in reinforcing the importance of the Man of Power or Great Man of God.[11]

## From Babel to Moses

The watershed of Babel makes it easier for a basic reading of the text to recognise the distinction in the on-going narrative of salvation-history between the wider human community and the people of God. The people

[11] The idiosyncrasies of much African Pentecostal and charismatic leadership can be shocking. In 2015 the South African government called a meeting with 40 such mega-church leaders to confront them on their more excessive and abusive practices, such as forcing congregants to eat grass and snakes, and drink petrol. One healer gained notoriety for jumping on a prostrate pregnant woman's stomach to "heal" her. More recently the practice of leaders having promiscuous sex with young women under the guise of being "Blessers" or spiritual father-figures has also caused debate. The South African Council of Churches has also condemned such practices, cf. http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Snake-pastors-are-heretics-SA-church-council-20150806 .

of God are from now on clearly identified as the seed of Abraham, an elect nation.

Pentecostals share evangelical and free-church ambivalence when interpreting the narratives of Israel into the language of the church, in that a believers' church paradigm that stresses membership-by-*rebirth* does not easily integrate the notion of membership-by-birth that permeates the Israel narratives. Pentecostal preaching has not always appreciated the Pauline struggle with this ambivalence, and has tended to simply appropriate the personal spiritual and ethical elements of the narrative. Even more crucially, recent emphasis on generational curses has developed an understanding of the generational effects of sin and curses from the corporate personality ethos of the Old Covenant, and today undergirds practices that ignore or obscure the radical change regarding individual ethical responsibility intended in the New Covenant, changes prophesied in e.g. Jeremiah 31 and proleptically appropriated in Ezekiel 18, and eventually made explicit in the Pauline corpus.

The Bible's language of community identifies the chosen people of God as the offspring of Isaac (as opposed to Ishmael) and of Jacob (as opposed to Esau). The offspring of Isaac are understood as the community to whom God made promises, and in the Pentecostal ethos this promising God explicitly offers the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in and among the future people of God.[12] This becomes proleptic in the narrative of the seventy prophesying elders of Israel in Numbers 11.

The Pentecostal understanding considers the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as an alternative community, as those who walked as pilgrims in a world to which they did not belong. In the course of the narrative their interaction with the world illustrates a number of crucial emphases for ecclesiological self-understanding: the people of God are vindicated in the world, protected in the world, offer leadership in the world, demonstrate wisdom in the world, are enslaved by the world, are redeemed/delivered from the slavery of the world, are led by the powerful intervention of God toward a promised land, are sustained and protected by God in hostile

[12] This notion of the "straight-line" promising God of Israel and Christ (in contrast to the gods of the cycle of the Mediterranean seasons) is one that Moltmann takes from Von Rad, and it provides the hermeneutic that underlies his entire theology of hope. It was Moltmann's predilection for the ethos of Anabaptism that later brought him into contact with Pentecostalism, and he attended a number of Pentecostal theological conferences.

environments, and are established by God in their new land as the ultimate fulfilment of the promises made to Abraham. Pentecostal sermons and teaching are replete with these themes, more so in the Global South where upward social mobility has not yet completely subverted the notion or attraction of alternative community, and where persecution is often a very real local social response to a substantially Pentecostal Christian presence.

The Mosaic narrative lays the foundation for the crucial Pentecostal understanding of Christians as the redeemed (delivered and liberated) community of God's people. The Pentecostal experience of deliverance from addictions, harmful lifestyle choices and practices, demonic oppression, pagan superstition and hostile spiritualities has contributed to their understanding of the delivering power of God as a powerful phenomenological and empirically observable and demonstrable process. These things are seen to occur regularly when people are added to the community, and within the community itself. In the context of the Global South, where experience of other spiritualities is often deeply embedded in a social culture where it is encountered daily, the saving and healing Jesus is also the Lord of all spirits, and the Holy Spirit who witnesses to Jesus stands demonstrated as more powerful than all other spirits, including the ancestral spirits and inimical nature spirits. The community of God's people is a community of redeemed slaves, who once knew themselves to have been in bondage but are now free, by the intervention of the saving and delivering Christ. It was among a community of just such transformed individuals that I spent my own childhood and teenage years, with the inevitable effect that to me it is intuitive to understand all God's people as transformed people–and radically so![13]

The prophetic criticism of those new forms of Yahweh's religion and cultus that emerged under the kings and the priesthood in later Judah and Israel was firmly grounded in their understanding of the Exodus events as redemptive and transformational. Pentecostals readily resonate with the arguments of Eichrodt and Brueggeman on the radical development of this concept by the charismatic leaders of Israel.[14] These were prophets who

[13] It was this experiential basis that underlies my argument for questioning every social consensus (Clark, Mathew S. "Questioning every consensus: A plea for a return to the radical roots of Pentecostalism." *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, 5/1, (2002): 73-86

[14] Eichrodt, Walter. *Theology of the Old Testament Vol 1.* London: SCM, 1961. His discussion of the charismatic leaders of Israel and their confrontation with the political leaders (kings and priests) refers. Walter Brueggemann (*The Prophetic*

(to use Eichrodt's language[15]) had had their entire being reformed and reshaped in the fires of a burning encounter with Yahweh, an encounter which left them no alternative but to confront the contemporary models for being the people of God with the radical divine analysis, critique and rejection of that consensus–and who paid the inevitable price for such audacity. Present-day Western Pentecostalism in particular sometimes appears strangely forgetful of the price paid by their forebears who shared with the prophets a similar radical transformation, a fiery encounter, and fearlessly lived and proclaimed the unpopular implications for the secular and religious consensus of their day.

## Israel as an established community: the intention of the Law

Pentecostalism's popular reading of the Law as given by God to Israel and described in the Pentateuch has often tended to be uncritical, naïve and literal. The motifs of redemption, deliverance and freedom developed from the Exodus narrative, and the theological implications of a redeemed nation of slaves who developed a political and religious institution, have often been ignored in favour of a naïve and legalistic present-day application of the individual laws and customs outlined in these books.

Whereas in the West this legalism has concentrated on matters of diet, dress, and the role of women, the Pentecostalism of the Global South has identified the literal intention of the Law much more comprehensively. This has been especially true in the plethora of syncretistic Christian groups that have sprung up across the continent of Africa (paralleled in East Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America), many of which are led by bishops, priests or prophets who may adopt the full regalia of the Old Testament priesthood, insist on compliance with their own preferred aspects of the Law, and consider themselves entitled to speak as an unchallenged prophets and apostles. Even some mainline Pentecostal and charismatic groups have incorporated this tendency by assigning to their leaders the implicitly shamanistic role of prophet and deliverer – the one who discerns the working of the spirits and who can intervene to deliver the compliant from such inimical workings.

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*Imagination*. Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 2001) expresses similar conclusions with regard to prophetic dissent from the social, political and religious status quo in Israel and Judah.

[15] Eichrodt, *Theology*, 331, 345.