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A Biblical Theology on Power Manifestation: A Singaporean Quest¹

Anita Chia

[[HTTP://www.apts.edu/ajps/99-1/99-1-a-chia.htm](http://www.apts.edu/ajps/99-1/99-1-a-chia.htm)]

1. Introduction

Pentecostals have a unique contribution to make to society, i.e., the release of God's power into life situations. Pentecostals believe that miracles are for today. We actively pray for the sick to be healed, the deaf to hear, the blind to see, and the demon possessed to be delivered. During the hay day of the Charismatic renewal in the 70s and 80s, Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in Singapore grew because of the manifestation of God's power in the Sunday services and mid-week house fellowships. Hundreds came to the Lord through the house fellowships. Whether individually or as a family, they testify of the power of God in their lives.

Unfortunately as the 80s turn into the early 90s, signs and wonders became fewer and fewer. Returning mission teams excitedly testify of signs and wonders happening in the mission field; but where are the manifestations in the local church? Has the church outgrown the stage of miracles? Has the church become too sophisticated to expect miracles from God. Or are Singaporeans now self-sufficient?

In this paper I seek to establish a theology for power manifestation, and then argue that since the major ethnic groups in Singapore are familiar with power in the spiritual realm, power evangelism would be an effective tool for sharing the gospel.

The expressions power manifestation and signs and wonders may be used interchangeably. Both of these terms mean any kind of manifestation that reveals the power of God. Unless otherwise explained in the paper, power manifestation refers to God's power manifestation. It includes tongues and interpretation of tongues, a word of wisdom, a word of knowledge, visions and dreams. Power encounter is the confrontation between God and another lesser power being. This may include deliverance and healings. Power evangelism occurs when there is the sharing of the gospel with power manifestation, especially through a power encounter. This may occur in small groups or in large public meetings.

In the Old Testament, God's power is demonstrated through His deeds (signs and wonders). In the Ancient Near Eastern and Hebrew belief system, the gods were in control of everything, including nature and land. The gods were also territorial. Baal was

the god of the Canaanites, Molech was the god of the Ammonites, and Dagon was the god of the Philistines, while YHWH was the God of Israel. The political boundaries defined the territorial reign of the gods. Hence when Naaman was healed of leprosy, he asked for some of Israel's soil to take back with him so that he could worship YHWH. The ten plagues in Egypt and Elijah's encounter with the prophets of Baal at Mt Carmel are the two prominent power encounters in the Old Testament. YHWH demonstrated His supreme powers over the pagan gods. Signs and wonders were also symbols of YHWH's presence, protection and provision. The signs and wonders demonstrated during Israel's wilderness experience were of such nature.

2.1.1 Signs and Wonders as Power Encounters

The deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt was only made possible through a series of power encounters between God and the gods of Egypt. The ten plagues were a demonstration of YHWH's supremacy over the gods of Egypt.²

Scripture Reference	Plague	Defeated Egyptian God(s)
Exod 7:17-21	Water to Blood	Osiris Trinity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Osiris: fertility god, king of the dead. • Isis: wife of Osiris • Horus: sky-god/ god of sunrise Hapimon: god of north Nile
Exod 8:1-15	Frog	Hekt: goddess of the land
Exod 8:16-19	Lice	Geb: earth god
Exod 8:20-32	Flies	Scarob -god: sacred insect
Exod 9:1-7	Disease of Beast	Apis: bull-god Hathor: cow-headed goddess of the desert
Exod 9:8-12	Boils on Humans and Beast	Toth: god of intelligence & medical learning. Gods of healing -- Apis, Imhotep, Serapis.
Exod 9:13-25	Hail	Nut: sky goddess
Exod 10:1-20	Locusts	Nepir: grain-god Anubis: guardian of the fields

Exod 10:21-29	Darkness	Ra: sun-god Tem: god of sunset Shu: god of light
Exod 11:1-8 cf. 12:29-30	Death	Ermuetet: goddess of childbirth Pharaoh: ruler-god of Egypt

Table 1: The Ten Plagues in Egypt³

YHWH had told Moses that He would do miracles, which would compel Pharaoh to release His people. As a confirmation for Moses, YHWH showed him two signs. One was turning Moses' staff into a snake when he threw it onto the floor and reversing the miracle when he picked up the snake. Second, was turning Moses' hand leprous and then restoring it. YHWH said that He would make Moses as God to Pharaoh (Gen 7:1). This was significant because the Pharaohs were regarded as god-rulers. Moses was YHWH's emissary to Pharaoh as his equal. YHWH also claimed in 7:5 that Egypt shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst. YHWH was declaring war against the Egyptian gods. The magicians from Pharaoh's court initially tried to rival the signs performed by Moses but their gods were impotent before YHWH. The final outcome of this confrontation of powers was the release of the children of Israel from Egypt. Rise up, get out from among my people, both you and the sons of Israel; go, worship the Lord, as you have said (Gen 12:31). Pharaoh and his servants did regret their decision to release the Israelites and gave pursuit. The final power confrontation was at the Red Sea. God caused the entire Egyptian army to drown in the Red Sea while the Israelites crossed the sea on dry ground (Gen 14:26-29). Verse 31 records, And when Israel saw the great power which the Lord had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in His servant Moses. The Exodus became a benchmark in Israel's history. The Israelites commemorate the event annually and remember that their God, YHWH, delivered them from Egypt by His mighty acts.

Another great power encounter was recorded in 1 Kings 18:20-40, the confrontation between Prophet Elijah and the 450 prophets of Baal. This was the darkest period of spiritual adultery in Israel's history. Ahab, Israel's King, served and worshipped Baal. Ahab was described in 17:30-32 as the king who did more to provoke YHWH than all the kings of Israel before him. The challenge on Mt. Carmel was to prove to the people who was God, YHWH or Baal? Despite the frenzied yelling and demonstrative rituals by his prophets, Baal was silent. Conversely, when Elijah called on YHWH, His fire consumed the wet offering completely including the wood and water. Elijah's prayer was that the people may know that YHWH was God and that Elijah was His prophet. At the end of this encounter the people repented and admitted that YHWH was God. They slew the 450 prophets of Baal.

The above power encounters culminate in the general recognition of YHWH as God. This recognition, however, should not be mistaken as an allegiance to YHWH, which was

evidenced in the Israelites who believed and Rahab who feared YHWH and acknowledged Him as Lord and God in heaven above and on earth beneath (Josh 2:11). Others, like Pharaoh and his servants, King Ahab and Jezebel, witnessed the power of YHWH but refused to give allegiance to Him.

2.1.2 Signs and Wonders as Symbols of God's Presence, Protection and Provision

God did not tell Moses the destination when He delivered the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt. He only promised them a land flowing with milk and honey. From the very beginning of their journey, YHWH's presence was with them as their guide. The pillar of cloud that guided them by day and the pillar of fire by night were a miraculous, visible manifestation⁴ of YHWH's presence. The children of Israel's footwear never wore out during the forty years in the wilderness. In the desert of the wilderness, YHWH miraculously provided them with water (Exod 15:22-27; 17:1-9; Num 33:8, 12, 13), manna (Exod 15:1-5, 14; Num 11:1-9), and quails (Exod 16:8, 11-13; Num 11:31-34). The wilderness experience was a special time in Israel's history; YHWH manifested Himself at Mt Sinai to establish His covenant with Israel. Having set Israel apart to be His people (Lev 20:26), YHWH revealed His presence with them via His deeds.

YHWH also did signs and wonders in response to prayers. When Hannah earnestly prayed for a son (1 Sam 1:10,11) YHWH opened her womb and she gave birth to Samuel (v. 20). Elijah prayed for the widow's dead son to live. God heard Elijah's prayer and life returned to the boy (1 King 17:21, 22). The power of intercessory prayer could be demonstrated in Israel's battle with Amalek (Exod 17:8-13).⁵ As long as Moses' hands, with the rod of God in them, were raised heavenward, the Israelites prevailed but whenever his hands grew tired, Amalek prevailed. Aaron and Hur supported Moses' hands and Israel won the battle.

God's miracles were not reserved for His people only. Naaman, captain of the army of Aram, was healed of his leprosy (2 King 5). His miraculous healing caused him to proclaim, Behold now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel (v. 15b). The widow who hosted Elijah during the drought was from Zarephath in the land of Sidon near Tyre. YHWH manifested His miracles through her and for her. Elisha also raised from the dead the son of a Shunammite woman (2 King 32-35). The miracles of Daniel in the lions' den (Dan 6:16-28) and of the three Hebrew children in the furnace of fire (Dan 3:19-30) caused Nebuchadnezzar to confess that there was no other gods like YHWH and to decree the reverence of YHWH in his kingdom (Dan 6:26, 27). The miracle of Jonah and the big fish forced the reluctant Jonah to warn Nineveh of YHWH's pending judgement. Nineveh repented and was spared from YHWH's judgement.

2.2 Power Manifestation in the New Testament

Jesus' ministry was filled with signs and wonders. John recorded that if all the details about what Jesus did were written even the world itself would not contain the books which were written (John 21:25). Merrill Tenney posits that the miracles which John recorded revealed the characteristics of Jesus' power and ministry.⁶

John recorded these signs so that his readers may believe and have life in his [Jesus] name. This may be John's purpose in writing his gospel account, but he was also very aware that there were those who responded to the signs in belief and others who responded in unbelief (see table 2).

Luke, on the other hand, noted that Jesus introduced His own ministry by reference to a quote from Isa 61:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor.
He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives,
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set free those who are downtrodden,
To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.
(Luke 4:18, 19, NASB)*

Reference	Sign	Jesus' Power Over	Belief	Unbelief
2:1-11	Water changed to wine	Quality	Disciples believed (2:11)	
4:46-54	The healing of the Nobleman's son	Space	Man believed word (4:50) Man & Household believed (4:53)	
5:1:18	The healing of the man at the pool	Time	Belief implied by action (5:9)	Reaction from the Jews.
6:1-14	The feeding of the 5000	Quantity	Acknowledgement of Jesus as prophet (5:14)	Departing of many (6:66)
6:16-21	Walking on water	Nature	Willing to receive Him into the boat (6:21)	
9:1-41	The Healing of the Blind man	Mis-fortune	Progressive belief (9:11,17,33,38)	Reaction of Pharisees (9:16, 24, 29, 40, 41)
11:1-44	The raising of Lazarus	Death	Martha (11:27) Jews (11:45; 12:11)	Plot of Pharisees to kill Jesus (11:53)

Table 2: The Signs in John⁷

Luke presented Jesus as the Prophet like Moses. Just as many signs and wonders were performed through Moses in Exodus, Jesus also did many signs and wonders. He healed the sick, restored sight to the blind, delivered the demon-possessed, fed 5,000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish, stilled the storm, and raised the dead. These signs and wonders were proofs that Satan's power has been broken and the Kingdom of God has come.⁸ Jesus also empowered his disciples to perform signs and wonders. In the sending out of the seventy, He said, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall injure you (Luke 10:19). Before sending out the twelve, He gave them power and authority over all the demons, and to heal diseases (Luke 9:1). Thus empowered, His disciples went about among the villages preaching the gospel and healing; and Jesus saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning (10:18).

In the book of Acts, signs and wonders were very much a part of the Apostles' ministries. Just as Peter affirmed in his Pentecostal message that Jesus' ministry was attested to by God through signs and wonders (Acts 2:22), the ministry of the Apostles was also confirmed by signs and wonders. People believed due to the signs and wonders performed through the disciples. The healing of the lame beggar at Gate Beautiful coupled with Peter's preaching resulted in 5,000 men believing (Acts 4:4). Luke also recorded that the Apostles did many signs and wonders and multitudes of men and women were constantly added to their number (Acts 5:12-16). At Joppa, Peter healed Aeneas from paralysis and raised Tabitha from the dead. Both these miracles caused many to believe in the Lord (Acts 9:32 ff). Paul himself had such a miraculous encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus that the persecutor became the persecuted for the Gospel's sake (Acts 9:1-31). At Ephesus, Paul performed extraordinary miracles in Jesus' name. Other Jewish exorcists attempted to copy Paul but they were overpowered by the demons. Many who heard about this, both Jews and Greeks, converted and gave up their magic practices (Acts 19:11-20). Luke's summary comment was that the Word of God prevailed and grew mightily.

The biblical data above show that power manifestation formed a large part of Jesus' ministry and in the life of the early church. Power manifestation either set the stage for the preaching of the word, or followed the preaching of the word. The two basic responses to power manifestation are belief or unbelief. Many who encountered the power of God believed and were baptised into the church. There were also those who encountered the power of God, but did not believe because of their hardened hearts.

In summary, power manifestation, both in the New and Old Testaments, regardless of power encounter or signs and wonders, does not necessarily evoke a response of allegiance to God in the people. Power manifestation is like durian. Those who are open to God will turn to Him in faith, but those who are opposed to God will turn away.

2.3 Implication

The authority to cast out demons and to do signs and wonders was not given to just the twelve and the seventy. Jesus stated clearly in Mark 16:17-18 that these signs will accompany *those who have believed*: In My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it shall not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover. James also said (James 5:14-15), Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. Among the list of Spirit gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, Paul included healing, the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, discernment of spirits and the working of miracles. These are gifts given to the church for the purpose of ministry. They are given freely by the Spirit to whoever will desire them. De Wet noted that Jesus gave His disciples - yesterday, today and forever -- authority to heal every disease and infirmity, charging them to preach, 'The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.'⁹

Thus from the biblical perspective, power manifestation is not a historical monument to be fossilized in Church history. Christians have been given the authority by Christ and empowerment by the Holy Spirit to do signs and wonders in Jesus' name for the purpose of establishing God's kingdom. From the missiological perspective, signs and wonders are needed for effective ministry in non-western cultures. Charles Kraft wrote about his own frustration as a missionary to Nigeria because his Christianity was powerless against the spiritual practices of the natives.¹⁰ Kraft was not alone in his experience. Peter Wagner also had a similar experience during his sixteen-year term in Bolivia. He recognized that the Evangelicals did not prepare their missionaries to deal adequately with a culture where spirit powers were seen to be at work in every area of life, and where the clash between divine and satanic power often was felt.¹¹ Thus, with the help of John Wimber from the Vineyard movement, Wagner introduced the Signs and Wonders class into the School of Mission at Fuller Seminary.

From the practical perspective, church growth studies have shown repeatedly that the churches that are experiencing explosive growth are the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches¹² where the power of God is manifested through enthusiastic worship and signs and wonders.¹³ The non-western world has a concrete mind-set. They are not interested in the concept of Trinity or the *kenosis* of Christ. To these people, God has to be practical in their daily lives. God has to be immanent to them. Their spirit world is very real and concrete. Signs and wonders point to a powerful God who answers prayers. Before a person changes his/her allegiance from folk/animistic religion to Christianity, he/she has to be convinced that God is more powerful and will protect him/her from the spirits of the folk/animistic religion. The Bible presents such a God, as do the Pentecostals/Charismatics.

3. Singapore Perspective

We have looked at power manifestation from the biblical perspective and the missiological and practical implications. The question yet to be answered is whether power evangelism is a valid evangelistic approach for Singapore of the 90s and beyond.

3.1 Religious Profile

Singapore has a population of 3.1 million¹⁴ comprising 75% Chinese, 13.5% Malays, 7.5% Indians, and 4% other races. The religious distribution¹⁵ is 31.1% Buddhist, 22.4% Chinese Traditional Beliefs/Taoism, 15.4% Islam, 12.5% Christianity, 3.7% Hinduism, 0.6% other religions, and 14.3% no religion.

Table 3 (see appendix 1) shows that the Chinese are the most mobile religiously. The Malays remain generally unchanged. Although the table does not reflect any Malay Christians, Johnston reported about 200 Malay Christians in Singapore,¹⁶ of which only 30 to 40 meet together regularly. Indian Hindus took a mild dip while Indian Muslims increased by 6 percent. There is a Muslim Convert Association in Singapore who helps Muslim adult converts learn the ropes of Islam. Conversion into Islam is usually by marriage. The data seem to indicate that Christianity has not made many inroads into the Malay and the Indian communities. Table 4 (see appendix 1) shows that more Christians are found among the higher educated than the lower educated. Forty percent of university graduates are Christians while only 6% have primary education and below. The reverse is true of the followers of traditional beliefs/Taoism and Buddhism. These percentages become even more stark when one considers that Christians only represent 12.3% of the total surveyed, whereas Buddhism and traditional beliefs/Taoism makes up 31.3% and 22.8% respectively. Hinduism and Islam, being affiliation by birth, are quite evenly spread over the different educational levels.

Singapore Christians (Pentecostals included) have experienced economic upward lift. English speaking churches, in particular, are having difficulty reaching non-Christians in the lower income bracket. This is a sad setback for the Pentecostals who use to have the Gospel message for and the ministry of reaching the poor in society.

3.2 Receptivity to Power Manifestations

The Asian worldview accepts the spirit world without question. This spirit world has power over or is influential over the happenings in the physical world. Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism may be classified as high religions. However, because of the historical roots of the Chinese, Malays and Indians, they are generally very open to seeking spiritual guidance, healings and intervention.

3.2.1 The Malays

Singapore Malays can trace their roots to peninsular Malaya, Sumatra, Java, and the other islands of the Indonesian archipelago.¹⁷ Their ancestors were primarily folk Muslims. Although officially Muslims in Singapore are *Sunnis*, Malay magic used to be a part of their culture before the 80s. They apply magic to economics, building, human life cycle, curing, entertainment, forecasting events, personal life and interpersonal relations.¹⁸ Spiritual powers are evoked in *bersilat* (a Malay art of self-defence) and *Wayang Kulit* (shadow puppet). Singapore Malays are familiar with spiritual power struggles. This used to be a common theme in locally produced Malay movies.

Their practice of magic makes them easy victims of demon possession. Christians have the authority to cast out demons. Deliverance ministry would be a powerful witness to the authority of Jesus. Muslims also believe that Allah speaks to them in dreams and visions. There have been many testimonies of Muslims coming to Christ through dreams and visions. One such testimony is recorded in 1998's *30 Days Muslim Prayer Focus* (Day 27).

3.2.2 The Indians

Almost two-thirds of the Indian population were from southeastern India.¹⁹ They were from the poorer class who came to work in Singapore. Coming from the less educated class, the nature of their religion would be more popular and animistic than philosophical. Their religious worldview allows them to receive Jesus Christ as one of their gods. Roger E. Hedlund noted that traditional methods of evangelism and mission in south India failed to yield much fruit but ministry that is characterised by prayers for the sick and the possessed yields church growth by 11.8%.²⁰ Since the majority of the Indians in Singapore are from similar areas in India, they may be more drawn to power evangelism with emphasis on prayers for the sick and the possessed than the conventional evangelistic crusades. Power evangelism to the Indian community should be followed through with strong discipling. Praying the sinner prayer does not mean changing allegiance from their Hindu gods to Christ. They must be brought to the point of total allegiance to Jesus Christ.

3.3.3 The Chinese

In Hinton's 1985 book, he described the Chinese religionist²¹ as result-oriented, highly pragmatic, problem oriented, this-worldly and materialistic, individualistic, and highly concrete and action based.²² The Chinese religionist would be those classified under Buddhist and traditional religions/Taoist. Technological advancement over the last ten years did not change the basic characteristics of the Chinese described by Hinton. Neither has the Chinese worldview on the paraphenomena changed. As the nation becomes more and more materialistic and affluent, there seems to be a concurrent increase in spiritual activities. These activities are related to seeking prosperity -- consulting geomancer and inviting *Choi Sun*²³ into private homes. Geomancy²⁴ used to be observed in private but now it has gained favor among the professionals. Many building development projects name their geomancy consultants along side their architects and engineers on their display boards. The geomancer would advise the architect on the layout of the building. The belief is that spatial design must be in harmony with nature for good fortune to flow.

Power evangelism is not strange to the older Singapore Chinese. John Sung used to hold healing crusades in Singapore during the 1930s. It was reported that the Chinese were very responsive to his ministry.²⁵ In 1963, Madam Kong Mui Yee, a converted, Spirit-filled actress, also made a great impact on the Chinese community and the Chinese non-Pentecostal Christians. A number of them began to speak in tongues and they had to leave their churches. A Chinese Pentecostal church was started, the Church of

Singapore.²⁶ Power manifestations seem to appeal to the result oriented, high pragmatism, problem-centred Chinese.

Based on the above observations, I believe that power evangelism through signs and wonders is a viable strategy for winning Singaporeans to Christ. Churches that experienced explosive growth in the 70s and 80s were those that moved in the power of signs and wonders.²⁷ Today, the fastest growing churches are still those that move actively in signs and wonders. The Muslims, the Hindus and the Chinese religionists are more likely to receive the gospel via power encounters than via the conventional *Four Spiritual Laws*. The agnostics and the atheists, on the other hand, will be more inclined to hear God's truth when they experience the immanent God in their moments of crisis.

My father was one such agnostic. He had heard the gospel many times, even witnessed miracles but refused to believe that Jesus is the only answer. Our family had many discussions over this issue. One night the discussion became very heated and my father walked out. Strangely, the next morning, he told mother that he wanted to accompany her to her Bible study class that evening. That night, he gave his heart to God. All of us in the family were puzzled. We had reservations about his salvation. It was only later that father told us that God visited him that night of the heated discussion. Frustrated, he had challenged God to reveal Himself to him if Jesus was the only way. God did.

As a case in point, I offer the fellowship group that meets every Friday in a home at Nassim Hill, Singapore. The leaders of this group are third-wavers from a vibrant Anglican church. According to a regular attendee, the weekly attendance is about 150 and growing. What is the attraction? Those who have either attended or heard about this fellowship group say that needs are met there. This fellowship group has led many people to Christ through demonstrations of signs and wonders.

4. Conclusion

Power evangelism, power encounter or signs and wonders are not the latest fads in church growth principles. They are biblical models demonstrated by God who proves His words by His deeds. Kraft was correct in affirming that experiencing God's power may be both pleasant and impressive, but only a commitment to God through Christ really saves.²⁸ We, therefore, do not encourage people to chase after signs and miss God in the process. Neither do we want to deprive people of experiencing the miracle working power of God in their lives.

Hinton made a valid observation.²⁹ He commented that in Singapore's dive for meritorious excellence and materialism, Singaporeans have become very materialistic and lack moral values. I agree with him that only Christianity has the best moral value to offer. Power evangelism is a good way to turn the people's attention to God, and to offer them a living faith that is relevant to their lives. Pentecostals have much to offer in terms of a balanced power ministry because of our rich heritage. We must be aware that we do not lose our Pentecostal distinctive for the sake of respectability in the ecumenical movement.³⁰

Ethnic Group and Religion	1980 (%)	1990 (%)
Chinese	34.1	39.3
Buddhism	38.4	28.4
Chinese Traditional Beliefs/Taoism	10.7	14.0
Christianity	0.2	0.3
Other Religions	16.6	18.0
No Religion		
Malays	99.6	99.6
Islam	0.3	0.2
Other Religions	0.1	0.2
No Religion		
Indians	56.5	52.6
Hinduism	21.7	27.0
Islam	12.5	12.2
Christianity	8.1	7.0
Other Religions	1.2	1.2
No Religion		

Table 3: Religion by the Major Ethnic Groups³¹

Religion	Total (%)	Primary & Below (%)	Secondary (%)	Upper Secondary (%)	University (%)
Buddhism	31.3	33.9	30.5	25.0	15.1

Chinese Traditional Beliefs/Taoism	22.8	28.8	14.6	12.6	7.4
Islam	15.6	17.8	16	7.2	2.6
Christianity	12.3	6.3	16.8	26.1	39.4
Hinduism	3.8	4.0	3.8	3.1	3.5
Other Religions	0.6	0.4	0.7	0.7	0.9
No Religion	13.6	8.8	17.6	25.3	31.1

Table 4: Religion and Highest Qualification Attained, 1990³²

References

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Do "Good Fences Make Good Neighbors"?

Evangelization, Proselytism, and Common Witness

Cecil M. Robeck, Jr.

[[HTTP://www.aps.edu/ajps/99-1/99-1-c-robeck.htm](http://www.aps.edu/ajps/99-1/99-1-c-robeck.htm)]

A Text

John answered, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us." But Jesus said to him, "Do not stop him; for whoever is not against you is for you" (Luke 9:49-50, NRSV).

The year was 1914. Walls came crashing down as several European countries ignored their geographical boundaries and soldiers invaded their neighbors' lands. Hostilities were in full swing. It was the beginning of World War I. That same year, the American poet laureate, Robert Frost, wrote a poem titled "Mending Wall."¹ It tells the story of two neighbors who make an annual ritual of walking the fence along their common property line. "Something there is that doesn't love a wall," observed Frost, "That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it, and spills the upper boulders in the sun...." We've all seen it. You pile a bunch of rocks, one on top another, and the next time you pass that way, something has shifted. You can't figure out when it happened. No one will ever admit to moving these rocks. But there they lie, scattered "boulders in the sun."

Life is like that - well, kind of. The constant pull of gravity overcomes any inertia to climb. It has a tendency ultimately to bring mountains to their knees. It can fill valleys with their boulders. It levels things out. In southern California where I live, we see this phenomenon each winter when the rains come. Those who have built their homes too close to the edge watch tearfully, as this constant, nagging force drags their dreams relentlessly down the hillsides.

Frost's neighbor had an interesting philosophy regarding this annual wall mending ritual. "Good fences make good neighbors." Perhaps he saw something in that annual ritual that escapes us. Frost figured that his apple trees would never cross, uninvited into his neighbor's pine forest and eat its cones. He kidded his neighbor with this ridiculous picture. But his neighbor had not argued. He simply replied, "Good fences make good neighbors." So Frost went on, accompanying his neighbor along the wall. "Cows," thought Frost. You might need good fences to make sure that two herds of cattle were kept apart. But there were no cows on this property.

Then Frost freely admitted to his mischievous mind. He wanted to suggest to his neighbor that maybe elves were responsible for the holes in the walls and the boulders lying on the ground. But he couldn't bring himself to say it. His neighbor was much too serious for that. His neighbor kept repeating the age-old adage, passed on to him by his ancestors, "Good fences make good neighbors." So Frost tried to be that good neighbor. He helped to restore the wall. But he didn't do it without asking himself a very important question. "What am I walling in or walling out, and to whom am I like to give offense?"

The apostle John was like the neighbor in "Mending Wall." He liked his walls. They provided certainty to him. Some people belonged on one side. Others belonged on the other. They needed to be kept separated from one another. His theory was like that in a Sunday School chorus I sang as a kid.

*One door and only one, and yet its sides are two.
I'm on the inside, on which side, are you?
One door and only one, and yet its sides are two.
I'm on the Lord's side, on which side, are you?*

Taking Sides

John was clearly on the Lord's side. For him the answer was an easy one. He had come up against a man who was performing exorcisms. Indeed, he was even performing these exorcisms by appealing to the Name or authority of Jesus. But John didn't know him. There were many exorcists in John's day. They appealed to all kinds of names, from Beelzebul to Solomon. But John had run up against a stranger who was using Jesus' name. John had spent years with Jesus. He didn't know this man. And this man was appealing to a name that meant a great deal to John. He was using Jesus' name. How could this be? He had to put a stop to it. And so he had tried. "You have no right to use the name of Jesus," he must have told this stranger.

We don't know the identity of this stranger. But I have to laugh when I see the way the words have been recorded. "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we *tried* to stop him..." It looks as though John had done his usual thing. I wonder if he hadn't tried to call down lightning from heaven in order to put a stop to something he may have considered blasphemous. "We tried to stop him," he said. But it is the reason for making that attempt that I find most intriguing. Why did John try to stop this stranger from casting out demons in Jesus' name? He did it because the man "does not follow with us."

That is it exactly. If you don't follow with us, you are something else. If you don't follow us, you have no reason to appeal Jesus. I'm on the inside, and clearly, you are not. You belong on the other side of the wall. "Good fences make good neighbors." Unless I believe that you follow *with us*, you have no reason to be taken seriously. You have heard it all before.

Since the rise of the Pentecostal movement in the 20th century, many of our denominations have said this same thing about other Christian denominations. Our parents have passed on to us what their parents passed on to them. "You do not follow with us." In my own Pentecostal denomination, we have claimed since the year Robert Frost wrote his poem, that we preach the "full gospel." What that claim signals is that those who are not "with us" must be preaching something less. And just because their churches do not say it in the same way doesn't for a minute mean that they are any less exclusive. Our denominational labels and the names we have given to our traditions have helped to define us. They tell us what is important to us. Specific forms of church government quintessentially define Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians. Adventists preach the Second Coming. Baptists and Anabaptists find the key to their identity in their doctrine of baptism. Catholics look at the universality of the Church. Holiness churches talk about how to walk the "sanctified" walk before God. The Orthodox view themselves as giving right or proper glory to God. Pentecostals hark back to Acts 2. And so it goes. And because we hold these specific values as sacred, we often do not appreciate what the other holds at all.

At one level, Frost's neighbor is correct. And maybe John is correct as well. Good fences make good neighbors. If it is really an annual ritual for two neighbors to walk along a common wall and repair it *together*, to work on a common project *together*, then good fences can make good neighbors. But good fences don't always make good neighbors.

Some Walls Don't Make Good Neighbors

We watched from the West as the Soviets constructed the Berlin wall. It didn't make us good neighbors. It raised our suspicions. It nourished our fears. It separated families and loved ones from one another, and it led to the deaths of hundreds who dared to challenge its defining intentions. Just one month before the wall came down, I traveled through the maze called "Checkpoint Charlie." On the one side, the East, it was a well-painted, and well-guarded, white wall. On the other, the West, it was marked with the epithets of those who thought very little of what it stood for. It was a scar in the middle of a city, covered with the graffiti of disrespect. It was a perversity upon the landscape that separated East from West. It was designed to keep some people *in*, and it was designed to keep other people out. Good fences do not necessarily make good neighbors.

In more recent years, and much closer to my home, we have watched as the American government has attempted to construct a fence along the Mexican-American border. We have used concrete, barbed wire, underground movement sensors, armed guards, and dogs. And we have done so in the name of forcing our neighbors to be *good neighbors*. It is designed to keep certain people *out*, but ultimately it can't help but keep other people in. We have watched as people in the United States have argued, even voted to make the fence stronger, thicker, and higher. We are now on the white side of the wall, the guarded side, the side that hopes this wall will keep us safe from their desire to walk "with us." And we have watched as our neighbors have ridiculed that wall. They have scaled its heights, and dug beneath it. They have slipped around it and tried to blast holes through it. It is viewed from the Mexican side with as much disdain as the West held for the

Berlin wall. Good fences do not necessarily make good neighbors. I suspect that in Asia, similar things could be said about the Great Wall of China, or in more recent times, about the "Bamboo Curtain," or even the notorious DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) that separates Korean families from their loved ones.

John thought that the stranger casting out demons in Jesus' name belonged on the other side of the wall. He was intent on mending any breach in the wall, and of making sure that it was a defining wall. He was on the inside. The stranger was on the outside. John thought that it should stay that way. But Jesus did not agree.

"Do not stop him," was the imperative that Jesus gave! "Leave him alone!" "You obviously don't understand the danger of building walls. You have fenced out a friend. Don't you know that whoever is not against you is for you? Don't you see that the wall that separates the two of you is not conducive to making good neighbors? He is not against you. He stands with you."

Some Walls Are Important

Jesus was not arguing against walls. After all, it is he who said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven," not even those who have cast out demons in His Name. The kingdom of heaven is reserved only for "the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Matt 7:21-23). There is an ultimate wall, but it did not stand where John thought it did. Jesus' message to John was that "the one who is not against you is for you." You belong on the same side of the wall. But His message also carries the opposite implication for those who would hear His words. "The one who is against you must be taken with all seriousness." Your job is to discern the difference. Some walls are good walls. They separate the friend from the enemy. Some are not good walls. They separate friend from friend. Don't build walls that fence friends out.

I find this passage to be very interesting. Each time I come to this text I see something I had not noticed before. Each time I read Jesus' words, I find myself coming under the same scrutiny as John, more often than I would like. You see, I am essentially a wall builder by nature. Some of my walls are too high. They separate me from those who would be "for me." Some of my walls may be too low. They are not adequate to keep me separated from the enemy. My job is to discern the difference.

I find this passage to be very interesting also because it comes in the middle of a larger conversation that Jesus is having with his disciples. They had been torturing themselves wondering who was the greatest. Jesus had read their thoughts and set a little child in their midst. "Whoever welcomes this child in my name," He said, "welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest." Jesus spoke of welcoming the child. John spoke of refusing the stranger. Jesus told them how to be great. John demonstrated just how little he could be. "Good fences make good neighbors," but only if they are properly placed. In his eagerness to preserve truth and purity, John had failed to see the truth he sought to preserve. He had become so exclusive that he had no place for including the stranger who stood *with him*.

As we near the turn of the century, society is being overwhelmed by many voices. Some argue that our walls are too high. Let us break them down. We should not have any fences. All we need to do is love one another. All we want is peace. Tolerance and pluralism are the calls of the world. I'm OK, You're OK. Can't we all just get along? Everyone can do what is right in his or her own eyes. In some ways it seems that we have lost all order, and chaos reigns.

On the other hand, some of our peers argue that the walls are not high enough. "Come out from them and be separate from them," they cry. Contact is equated with compromise. Those who hold to doctrinal positions that we do not fully appreciate or fully understand, those who celebrate histories or traditions into which we have not entered, those who do not vote the way we think that they should vote, and who do not hold to the same standards of political correctness that we believe they should embrace, are not to be trusted. They need to be "outed." They are extremists. They are dangerous. They are the radical left, or the religious right. In short, they are not "with us."

I find Jesus' word to John very instructive at this point. As we approach the end of this century, we find ourselves in the morass of change. It is difficult to know which way to proceed. We have grown up with the reality of denominations all our lives, yet the walls between us seem to be failing. Fewer and fewer of my students at Fuller Theological Seminary are members of the church of their birth. Increasingly students who come to Fuller have held membership in ever more denominations. Last week I read the application of a potential adjunct professor. Under the designation for denomination he had written "Ukrainian Baptist Anglo-Catholic Wesleyan." I couldn't help but wonder if he was as confused about who he was, as I was.

Things have changed, and in many places, those we once thought were in enemy camps, are no longer viewed as the enemy. We have come to discover one another as standing "with us." But there are still many people who claim the Name of Jesus that we view with suspicion. The Pope isn't born again, is he? Is it possible to be an Orthodox priest and a Christian? Is it possible to be a "liberal" Christian, or is that very juxtaposition of words an oxymoron? And what about the Fundamentalists? If we are on the inside, on which side are they? Have we struggled adequately with Frost's questions? "What am I walling in or walling out? To whom am I likely to give offense?"

Jesus' instruction is clear, but it is a hard word. "Do not stop them," he contends, "for whoever is not against you is for you." There are many people in the world that are against those that name the Name of Jesus. There are many people in the world who view the Christian faith as merely one among many, the source of judgment, and pain, and exclusion, and even the source of nearly every major war in recent history. They view Jesus, not as Messiah, but as a good man, maybe even a genuine prophet. They deny the exclusive claims of Jesus on human lives. They agitate to limit the Church and its work around the world. They legislate anti-proselytism laws, persecute our brothers and sisters, deprive people of religious freedom, and attempt to define our evangelization as a crime of intolerance and hate. These people *do not* stand "with us." It is our duty as followers of

Jesus to speak a clear word of hope to them. But we are also told to receive those who truly stand *with us*, and ultimately to celebrate our unity with them.

Pentecostal Ecumenical Experiences: Breaking Down the Walls

In keeping with the teachings of Jesus, in recent years many Pentecostals around the world have been looking at the walls that have traditionally separated Pentecostals from the rest of the church world. Many are the stories that could be told about how, as they come to the wall, they are struck by the similarities they find in those they thought were their "enemies," and how ready their "enemies" are to hear what they have to say. To be sure, these things are not happening with equal vigor everywhere in the world, but they are happening in a surprising number of places with ever more frequency. These ecumenical encounters are important for they tap into the root of Pentecostalism that was, in its own peculiar way, envisioned by persons such as Charles F. Parham and William J. Seymour. It was a vision that the Pentecostal Movement would in some way bring unity once again to *all* the churches.

When the subject of Pentecostalism arises, it is not very often connected with the subject of ecumenism. Yet there has been a long history of ecumenical impulses throughout its history, and some of that has led to ecumenical participation at a range of levels: local, national, and international. Pentecostals have sought close ties with one another for years, but especially since the 1940s.² Their participation in various ecumenical groups, their participation in coalitions with Evangelicals, and their desire to fellowship with one another have been well documented in several places.³

Pentecostals and the WCC

Through the years it has been some of the so-called "autochthonous" churches of Latin America that have had the most formal relationship with the organized Ecumenical movement. Some of these are churches that came into being in the first decade of the 20th century. They had no ties to missionary churches in Europe or North America. They developed with minimal outside influence. Some of them, however, were originally affiliated with an outside missionary sending denomination but for one or another reason separated from those outside their region.

All of the Pentecostal denominations outside the United States that hold membership in the World Council of Churches are from the autochthonous family of Pentecostals. Their entrance into the WCC, beginning in 1961, may be as much a way of exercising their independence, in spite of the advice and sometimes pressure brought to bear upon them by their Pentecostal peers, as it is their desire to participate in a formal move toward greater unity. In Latin America, for instance, it has clearly provided a way for Pentecostals to cast a vote against what they perceive to be a form of neo-colonialism by certain North American Pentecostal groups. Their testimony has been heard in a variety of settings through the years, and it is currently the subject of some debate.⁴

Among the denominations that have joined the WCC are the *Iglesia Pentecostal de Chili* and the *Misión Iglesia Pentecostal* in 1961, Manuel de Mello's *Igreja Evangélica Pentecostal "O Brasil para Cristo"* in 1969, the International Evangelical Church in 1972, Bishop Gabriel O. Vaccaro's *Iglesia de Dios* from Argentina in 1980, the *Missão Evangélica Pentecostal de Angola* in 1985, and the *Iglesia de Misiones Pentecostales Libres de Chile* in 1991. Only the International Evangelical Church, founded by former Church of God (Cleveland, TN) minister, Bishop John Meares, does not belong to the autochthonous family of churches.

Many of these churches from Latin America, as well as other Pentecostal churches from that region, participate in *la Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias* and/or in *la Comisión Evangélica Pentecostal Latinoamericana*. This Commission, frequently designated as *CEPLA*, was founded as a result of the entry of the two Chilean groups into the World Council of Churches in 1961, though it did not formalize itself until much later. Its primary role includes such tasks as undertaking study on the origins of their various member churches, working together on theological issues, raising consciousness regarding spirituality, supporting efforts toward greater unity between Latin American Pentecostal churches, and publishing work that is relevant to their situation. One of the first publications was *Pentecostalismo y Liberación: Una experiencia latinoamericana*, edited by Carmelo Alvarez, in 1992.⁵

Since the 1991 Assembly of the World Council of Churches, the WCC has been making a concerted effort to reach out to Pentecostals. Through the auspices of the office of Huibert van Beek, Director of the Office of Church and Ecumenical Relations, three major consultations have been held that have focused on the concerns of Pentecostals. The first of these occurred in Lima, Peru in 1994, and gathered some 31 participants and a number of observers to talk about issues unique to Latin Americans.⁶ In 1996, nearly 30 participants, largely from the United States, but with several from Latin America, met in San Jose, Costa Rica. The concerns explored in this meeting were those that surface in the United States, and which have been exported to churches that have been brought into existence by many American missionaries. The encounter between Pentecostals from North American and Pentecostals from South America also provided for considerable discussion, since North American Pentecostals seldom hear directly from their grassroots counterparts elsewhere.⁷

In December 1997, another consultation that included about 25 Pentecostals and a number of World Council of Churches leaders, including Dr. Konrad Raiser, General Secretary of the WCC, was held in Château de Bossey, Switzerland. In this meeting, substantial discussion included the exploration of the possible development of a "Joint Working Group," which might make possible greater communication between Pentecostals who do not wish to participate in the full life of the WCC, but nevertheless, may find some contact with the WCC to be beneficial.⁸ The World Council of Churches will publish a full account of this consultation in early 1999.

Other Forms of Pentecostal Ecumenical Participation

Pentecostals participate in a variety of evangelical groups such as the National Association of Evangelicals, in the United States. What is less known is that not long ago the President of the Liberian Council of Churches was a Pentecostal.⁹ Frank Chikane, a Pentecostal minister from the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, was Director of the Institute of Contextual Theology that developed the famous *Kairos Document* during the days of apartheid in South Africa. He also served as General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches, even though his own denomination was not a member of that group.¹⁰ More recently, the Korean Assemblies of God which includes, as its member church, Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, an Assembly of God congregation of over 800,000, made a controversial move by joining the Korean National Council of Churches.¹¹ The Finnish Pentecostal Movement holds Observer status with the Finnish Council of Churches and frequently sends observers to meetings of the Nordic Ecumenical Council. They have also participated in a two-year bilateral discussion with the Lutheran Church of Finland.¹²

The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America has invited Pentecostal participation in the work of its Faith and Order Commission since the early 1980s. Since at least 1984, there has never been a Faith and Order meeting held in the US in which one or more (generally two, but often as many as four) Pentecostals have not been present. In 1986, the NCCCUSA and the Society for Pentecostal Studies began a series of meetings that were designed to help Pentecostals and members of the National Council to get acquainted with one another. The first round of discussions extended from 1987 through 1992. A second round of discussions began in 1995. It is currently scheduled to continue through at least 1999. A book that includes the papers that were discussed during these two rounds of discussions will be published at the conclusion of the current round ending in 1999. Held either adjacent to meetings of the Commission on Faith and Order or meetings of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, these meetings allow for participants to enter into the life of the other community at minimal expense. Thus far, the meetings have been quite successful in educating both communities about the life and work of the other. ¹³

On the international scene, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) asked that a Dialogue be opened in order to explore issues of common concern between the member churches of WARC and Pentecostals. Impetus for these discussions came from WARC member churches in the Korean context. An exploratory meeting was held in Mattersey, England in 1995, and the first meeting of the new WARC-Pentecostal Dialogue was held in Torre Pellice, Italy in 1996. At its initial meeting, the discussion focused on three issues related to spirituality: 1) the interpretation of Scripture, 2) justice, and 3) ecumenism.¹⁴ Work on "The Role and Place of the Holy Spirit in the Church" was conducted in Chicago, Illinois, USA, in May 1997.¹⁵

From May 14-20, 1998, the meeting was held in Kappel-am-Albis, Switzerland, the site at which the Zürich Reformer, Ulrich Zwingli, was killed in a battle against neighboring Roman Catholics. The topic under discussion there was "The Holy Spirit and Mission in Eschatological Perspective." The Dialogue team met with Professor Walter Hollenweger, former Professor of Missions at the University of Birmingham and a world class scholar

on the nature of Pentecostalism, as well as with Ruedi Reich, President of the Cantonal Reformed Church of Zürich.¹⁶ The meeting for May 14-21, 1999 is scheduled to convene in Seoul, Korea around the theme "Charism and Kingdom."

Pentecostals and Catholics?

Ecumenical encounters between Pentecostals and Roman Catholics have been conducted in such places as Springfield, Missouri, where intermittent meetings continue between leaders of the Assemblies of God and the diocese of Cape Girardeau since the 1970s. Pentecostals have been involved from the beginning in an Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue sponsored by Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California and the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, a dialogue that has focused on issues related to ministry within the Hispanic community and ministry among youth and on college campuses.¹⁷

The annual meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies has proven to be a place in which ecumenical topics have been addressed with increasing interest. In 1996, for instance a Roman Catholic-Pentecostal conversation was initiated at which expectations were that there might be about 25 persons present. In the end, over 80 persons attended the meeting and the discussion proved to be highly appreciated by the SPS membership. Similar discussions were held in 1997 and again in 1998, coordinated by Church of God (Cleveland, TN) professor Dr. Cheryl Bridges-Johns and Loyola Professor Fr. John Haughey, S.J.

Many people are aware of the groundbreaking work that the Reverend Dave J. du Plessis undertook in participating in a variety of ecumenical encounters in the 1950s and following.¹⁸ Most notable among these encounters has been the establishment of the International Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue. This meeting has been a continuing conversation since 1972. It has spawned several Ph.D. dissertations.¹⁹ And its fourth major report, printed in this issue of the *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, was released by the Vatican in July 1998. The topic of this discussion is "Evangelization, Proselytism, and Common Witness."

The late Dr. Jerry L. Sandidge, former secretary to the Pentecostal team, described this Dialogue as "A Study in Developing Ecumenism." Indeed, it is. When the Dialogue began, it was very difficult for David du Plessis to find Pentecostals who were willing to participate in anything with the Vatican. Thus, in the first round of discussion, from 1972-1976 he drew his team from among close friends, generally pastors in the Pentecostal Movement, as well as from members of historic churches who had come into the Charismatic Renewal. Arnold Bittlinger, a Lutheran, was one such person, as was the Presbyterian theologian J. Rodman Williams. Professor Howard Ervin, an American Baptist who was on the faculty of Oral Roberts University, was also part of that group. It was a time of getting acquainted. They explored a wide range of topics, too many to do them adequate justice. The interesting fact is that the Pentecostals and the Charismatics disagreed among themselves too often for the Roman Catholics to understand the Pentecostals. Some of the Pentecostals also felt badly represented. One example of their

disagreement grew out of the commitment to paedobaptism that the Charismatics tended to support.

After reviewing the process and the makeup of the teams, the Pentecostals reformulated their team. They drew other pastors, as well as a few scholars, and continued to present a number of papers each year. Toward the end of this second round, which ran from 1977-1982, the teams decided that one topic per year, with a paper presented on each side, would be adequate to allow for sustained discussion. When the topic of Mary emerged in the last year, it proved to be especially difficult. The papers were both excellent, but the headlines that appeared in the press did considerable damage to the dialogue. Indeed, Dr. Jerry L. Sandidge, at that time an Assemblies of God missionary in Belgium and the author of the Pentecostal paper on "Mary," lost his missionary appointment because of this fallout. There were some Pentecostals who, without ever asking what he had written, believed that he had crossed over the fence between Pentecostals and Roman Catholics. He would only later be vindicated, but by that time he was dying of cancer.

The third round of discussions, from 1985 through 1989, focused on the topic of "*Koinonia*." The subject actually grew out of the treatment of Mary. Mary, the Roman Catholic team argued, could only be understood within the context of the "Communion of Saints." Thus, the "Communion of Saints" past, present, and future, those who actually form the Church Universal, led ultimately to the discussion of "Perspectives on *Koinonia*." With the retirement of David du Plessis from the Chair of the Pentecostal team, his brother Justus du Plessis led these discussions. The report of this third round of discussions was published by the Society for Pentecostal Studies in its journal, *Pneuma*, together with the previous two reports.²⁰ It became a source of considerable interest among the membership of the Society, and the Society became a place from which new participants for the Dialogue could be drawn.

In August 1989, as the discussion on "*Koinonia*" came to a close, considerable debate emerged about the topic for the fourth round of discussions. It was Jerry Sandidge who proposed the topic "Evangelization, Proselytism, and Common Witness." Neither Fr. Kilian McDonnell, O.S.B., Co-chair for the Roman Catholic team nor I were very pleased with the idea. We thought that it was too volatile, and that the topic had the ability to destroy the Dialogue. We were, however, outvoted by the rest of the two teams after Jerry Sandidge made an impassioned plea for the topic.

In 1992, Justus du Plessis announced his retirement from the position as Pentecostal Co-chair. I was asked to take his place, and in an ironic twist, the two who had spoken against the topic were placed in charge of the ensuing discussion. We threw ourselves into the task, extended the discussion to eight years, and produced the document that is now before you.

The eight years over which these discussions were held were good years. They were also difficult years because of the deaths of two young men, Jerry L. Sandidge, Co-secretary for the Pentecostals, and Fr. Heinz-Albert Raem, Co-secretary for the Roman Catholics. They were difficult, too, because the issue of proselytism is a difficult issue. There were

sessions in which tears flowed freely, stories were told with passion and pathos, tables were pounded, words were critiqued, honed, and carefully defined. We even spent an entire day debating the meaning and implications of the word "persuade" as it was translated into languages other than English.

You have the result of this work. It will be up to you to take what you have before you and determine whether Roman Catholics and Pentecostals should continue to hold the same high walls between them. Yes, there are many questions still unanswered, but a start has been made at a critical point of intersection. Could it ever be that Catholics and Pentecostals might be able to see one another as allies instead of enemies? Could it be that they might find it possible to address their common pastoral problems? What is the nature of discipleship? What causes so many to lose interest in the church? Is it possible for us to hold Bible studies together, even cooperate together in evangelistic crusades? I hope that you will take the time to read through the entire document carefully and prayerfully.

Professor Walter Hollenweger may help us begin our prayer together. He is a theologian, an evangelist, a pastor, an ecumenist, a playwright, and sometime poet. He has written a number of what I call "animal" prayers, prayers in which he speaks as though he were one of them, and offers insights into how we might think new thoughts. Among these prayers is a prayer that I have found instructive even as I have read the Lukan passage with which I began this introduction. He calls it "The Prayer of the Ostrich."

*O God,
Sometimes I feel like an ostrich,
a bird with wings - yet he can only run
a bird with wings - yet he has only the memory of flying.
And so I run over the hot sand and spread my wings,
Yet only a poor hop is the result.
I am a Christian with the memory of the early Christians,
when in one day the gospel emerged in a foreign culture,
when in one day that which was considered essential, faded
away,
when in one day for the sake of a foreign officer's salvation,
your servant crossed the frontiers of what he considered to
be the
limits of the Gospel,
when in one day more of the Gospel was discovered than
we could hope
in a hundred years.
Why must I be an ostrich, the laughing stock of the world?
I did not make myself. You did not ask me whether I wanted
to
be an ostrich, nor whether I wanted to be at all, nor
did my parents ask me.
So, I am a bird and I cannot fly.*

*And yet I see other birds taking to the sky.
So I bury my head in the sand, in the Bible, in the tradition,
in scholarship.
Today I pray just for one thing, one little thing.
O God,
Help me at least not to hinder the others from flying.
Help me not to think that because we cannot fly, other birds
shouldn't either.
Help me to rejoice in the sight of those who fly higher than
I can ever dream.[21](#)
Amen.*

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¹⁰ Frank Chikane, *No Life of My Own: An Autobiography* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), and Bernard Spong with Cedric Mayson, *Come Celebrate! Twenty-five Years of the South African Council of Churches* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Communications Department of the South African Council of Churches, 1993).

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¹⁵ H. S. Wilson, "Reformed and Pentecostals in Dialogue," *WARC Update* 7:2 & 3 (June-September 1997), p. 6

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¹⁷ Jane Estes, "Mahony Calls to Unity," *Pasadena Star-News* (November 3, 1988), pp. 1, 7; Hermine Lees, "Ecumenical Service to be Held at Cathedral," *The Tidings* (January 15, 1993), p. 4; Mike Nelson, "Ecumenical Service: 'Fruits of the Spirit' Lead to Unity," *The Tidings* (January 22, 1993), p. 4. The work of this Committee has been outlined in a brochure, "A Journey Just Begun: A Reflective Statement by the Los Angeles

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CONTRIBUTORS

Anita CHIA serves in the pastoral staff of Trinity Christian Center, Singapore.

Nelson P. ESTRADA serves in the faculty of Asian Theological Seminary in Manila, Philippines, and presently in the doctoral program at Sheffield University, England.

William R. FILSON is an Australian serving in Sulawesi, Indonesia.

Walter J. HOLLENWEGER is Professor Emeritus of University of Birmingham, and now resides in Krattigen, Switzerland.

Reuben Louis GABRIEL pastors a Pentecostal church and is the Chairman of Action for Asia Outreach, a Pentecostal missionary organization based at Nagpur, India. He is also completing his M.Th. (missiology) from Union Biblical Seminary, Pune, India.

Cecil M. ROBECK, Jr. is Professor of Church History and Ecumenics and Director of David Du Plessis Center for Christian Spirituality at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, U.S.A.

Daniel A. TAPPEINER is professor of New Testament and Pentecostal Theology at the Asian Seminary of Christian Ministries, Makati, Metro Manila, Philippines.

Amos YONG is Assistant Professor of Theology at Bethany College of the Assemblies of God, Scotts Valley, California, USA.

Journal Reflections: An Editorial Assessment at the End of the First Year

Now that the two issues for the initial year of the *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* have been published, it seems fitting that we review the intended character and goals of this young publication. Let us consider, then, our course.

It was with some anxiety that the editors launched this enterprise. Questions were faced: Is there a need for yet another journal? In what ways does this effort complement existing publications? Will it be received with sufficient enthusiasm to warrant its continued publication? Thus far the initial responses to this pioneer project have been most encouraging. It does indeed appear that the journal is carving out a sufficiently useful place for the editors and supporters to be reassured about its usefulness. On the inside front cover of each issue of the journal appears a statement of purpose that specifies four intended outcomes: 1) The *Journal* is for the purpose of encouraging serious theological thinking and articulation by Pentecostals/Charismatics in Asia; 2) To promote interaction among Asian Pentecostals/Charismatics and dialogue with other Christian traditions; 3) To stimulate creative contextualization of the Christian faith; and 4) To provide a means for Pentecostals/Charismatics to share their theological reflection.

Of special significance is the opportunity the journal provides for Asian participation. To enhance the cooperative nature of the journal, we invited several Pentecostal schools and institutions in Asia to participate in the ministry of the journal. These are listed on the editorial page. These institutions actively support the publication and encourage their constituencies, especially faculty members and students, to submit their theological reflections to the editors for consideration for journal publication. Hence, although Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, Baguio City, Philippines, is the sponsoring organization of the journal, it is not intended to be merely an in-house publication, but rather a platform for a much larger association of Pentecostal/Charismatic scholars and leaders.

The journal, then, is a forum in which a variety of topics, opinions, and fruit of research can be shared, featuring as much as possible, items pertinent to Pentecostalism in Asia. It is expected that the majority of articles that will be received will be in the areas of theology, history and biblical exposition. However, it is not intended that the journal be limited to these studies. There may, indeed, be topic in the areas of missiology, pastoral issues, sociological studies, ethics, as well as many others. The editors' hope is that this publication will encourage significant writing and research among Asian scholars. We trust that the creative reflections of an emerging generation may be shared through this mechanism with many others in Asia and throughout the world.

Since the journal is titled "Asian," it is fitting that how that term is understood in this context be articulated. One with Asian ancestry living in North America may be no more

Asian than a European missionary who has been living in Asia for decades. In our use of the term, "Asian" means both those of Asian ancestry and non-Asians who are concerned for, and are working for or with Pentecostals/Charismatics in Asia and have interest in the future of the church in Asia. Hence, the door is open to "friends of Asian Pentecostalism" to share their insights with us, so that together we can strengthen the Pentecostal movement in Asia, and furnish useful resource material to emerging leaders in Asia.

What do we mean by "Pentecostal"? For the purposes of the journal, we are using this term in an inclusive way. In addition to traditional Pentecostalism, as expressed by denominations such as the Assemblies of God and the Church of God, there are now a significant number of people who register many shared values with traditional Pentecostalism. Some of these are labeled Charismatics--some continuing to be renewal agents in parent denominations; some having left parent bodies to form new associations or independent congregations. Some of those who share an active interest in the work of the Holy Spirit do not classify themselves as "Pentecostal," but nonetheless feature values that intersect Pentecostal teaching and experience in important ways. Among these are the so-called "Third Wave" Charismatics of Evangelical Christianity. Contributions to the journal by any of those who are "Pentecostals" and friends of the Pentecostal revival are welcomed. You will note that in the second issue of the journal, at least two articles appeared that were written by Evangelicals who are not strictly identifying themselves with Pentecostals. The reason for this inclusive policy is so that lively discussion and interaction, even debate, may be engaged in a friendly environment. Our belief is that competing views thus expressed and engaged will sharpen the insights of all participants, and hopefully will strengthen and clarify the message of believers in days to come. It should be understood, therefore, that the editors do not necessarily endorse the theology and implications of every article that may be published. It is expected that truth will best be served by allowing for differences of opinion in the publication. Charity among those who share basic Christian convictions and who welcome the fresh flow of the Holy Spirit among God's people in our day is to be hallmark of this journal. Perhaps in an academic setting, such as a theological journal like ours, we can expect to see harmony amid lively debate. This level of spirited interaction with a view to strengthening the spiritual life of the participants we hope to nourish in the days to come.

So, we the editors welcome your responses and your participation in this new venture.

Editors

PRAISE FOR PROMISES FULFILLED: A Study on the Significance of the Anna the Prophetess Pericope

Nelson P. Estrada

[[HTTP://www.pts.edu/ajps/99-1/99-1-n-estrada.htm](http://www.pts.edu/ajps/99-1/99-1-n-estrada.htm)]

I. Introduction

The concept of "continuity" between the Old and New Testaments is a complex issue. The complexity lies on how to understand the extent of the relationship of the two testaments. The numerous literature arguing for or against the theological unity and disunity of the Bible attest, not only to its meandering nature, but also to the tortuous attempts to find a solution to the problem.^{[1](#)}

While there are some who deny a clear connection between the OT and NT, the argument for continuity is gaining ground.^{[2](#)} The recommendation of Rudolf Bultmann for the theological discontinuity of the OT and NT did invite some supporters.^{[3](#)} However, both Bultmann and his followers have not truly posited a convincing argument as to debunk the idea of continuity from the perspective of the NT.^{[4](#)}

The "continuity" camp is a "battle-ground" in itself. The center of contention resides on methodology. Several methods have been proposed in an attempt to identify and define the theological unity of the Bible.^{[5](#)} Three of the most popular methods are typology, salvation history, and the promise-fulfillment scheme.^{[6](#)} Typology endeavors to find types of persons, institutions and events in the Old Testament, which serve as divine models leading to New Testament realities.^{[7](#)} Salvation history, on the other hand, relates the New Testament to the Old by showing the continuous pattern of God's plan of salvation. Oscar Cullmann, a staunch proponent of this method, sees the significance of Jesus' mission as the binding unity of the two testaments.^{[8](#)} The promise-fulfillment scheme, initiated by Zimmerli and von Rad, sees an eschatological aspect in both testaments.^{[9](#)} In simple terms, this approach views some of the promises in the OT as receiving its complete fulfillment in the NT, specifically in the person of Christ.

Among the three methods, the promise-fulfillment approach has the most proponents. This is evidenced by the many exegetes who agree that the NT writers saw the fulfillment of many OT promises in Jesus. This promise-fulfillment scheme is best understood, according to many commentators, in the Infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke.^{[10](#)}

The promise-fulfillment pattern in the Infancy narratives on Matthew and Luke differs from each other. Particularly interesting is Luke's employment of the pattern in chapters 1 and 2. While Matthew speaks of the fulfillment of the OT promises through "formula

quotations" (e.g., 1:22f; 2:5-6; 2:15; 2:17), Luke responds with hymns of praise. While Matthew emphasizes an apologetic intent in proving Jesus' messiahship, Luke instead focuses on hymns as the response to God's act of salvation. Thus, instead of just Matthew's promise-fulfillment, Luke has a pattern of promise-fulfillment-praise.

The promise-fulfillment-praise scheme is proposed by Stephen Farris in his published doctoral dissertation entitled *The Hymns of Luke's Infancy Narratives*.¹¹ Farris is to be commended when he demonstrated that the *Magnificat*, *Benedictus* and *Nunc Dimittis*¹² are the responses of Mary, Zechariah, and Simeon to the fulfillment of the promises given to each of them. Farris argues that Luke has arranged three parallel episodes with the hymns as the climax of each.¹³

As much as Farris's parallel episodes are viable, his structural analysis is short sighted. Farris leaves out the pericope of Anna the Prophetess in Luke 2:36-38 because it does not have a corresponding climactic hymn which can serve as a response to the fulfillment of a promise. Since his promise-fulfillment-praise pattern requires a hymn of praise, he felt that it is best left out.

In this paper, I will attempt to demonstrate that the pericope of Anna the Prophetess fits the promise-fulfillment-praise very well. This can be seen through a modified parallel structure where the pericopes of Simeon and Anna are linked together by a common hymn, the *Nunc Dimittis*.

In order to prove this point, three aspects of study need to be established. First, it is essential that we understand the meaning of the promise-fulfillment method. A brief analysis of Matthew's Infancy narrative will best define this method. Second, a study of Luke's promise-fulfillment-praise pattern will be made including the analysis of the significance and function of the hymns in Luke's Birth stories. And finally, the issue of how the *Nunc Dimittis* may function as a common praise response for both the Simeon and Anna pericopes will be discussed.

II. State of Current Research

The research on the Infancy Narratives is enormous.¹⁴ In spite of the immensity of materials, several names stand out as having made significant contributions to the Infancy studies. Such names include John Drury who effectively demonstrated the importance of early Christian "historiography" in Luke and 1 and 2. Drury showed how Jewish "midrash" strongly influenced the composition of the Lucan Infancy narratives.¹⁵

The commentaries on Luke by Joseph Fitzmyer,¹⁶ I. Howard Marshall,¹⁷ and John Nolland¹⁸ present an exceptionally helpful verse-by-verse analysis of the subject. Raymond Martin's syntactical analysis of the grammar of the Birth stories can provide a good companion to these commentaries.¹⁹

The need for comparative studies between Luke and Matthew is inevitable. This is why the work of George M. Soares Prabhu is indispensable. Prabhu provides an excellent

method on how to understand the function of "formula quotations" in the Infancy narratives of Matthew.[20](#)

The most comprehensive study on the Infancy narratives is found in Raymond Brown's *The Birth of the Messiah*. The new updated edition practically covers all existing arguments posited about the subject. At the same time, Brown presents his own viable analysis.[21](#)

In spite of the overwhelming studies on the Infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke, no author has really made a serious analysis on the function of the hymns as a whole in Luke's Birth stories. Farris's perspective comes from an individual approach to the hymns. In turn, Farris failed to see the overall function of the three hymns in the Infancy narratives.

The Promise-Fulfillment Scheme in Matthew 1:18-2:23

Although our study is not focused on the book of Matthew, a brief look into Matthew's Infancy narratives is necessary. There is a need to understand how Matthew views the fulfillment of the OT promises in the person of Jesus. This can be done by answering the following questions: What are "formula quotations"? What is Matthew's main intent in his Infancy stories? We will start our study by defining the term "formula quotations."

3.1 What are Formula Quotations?

Formula quotations mark the difference between Matthew's Infancy narratives and that of Luke's. Though the promise-fulfillment method is clearly visible in the Infancy stories of Matthew and Luke, the two authors differ in their application of the method. The promise-fulfillment method in Matthew is highly characterized by formula quotations.[22](#)

Formula quotations are the "citing of OT passages as prophecies that have been fulfilled in given events in the life of Jesus."[23](#) Through formula quotations, Matthew reminds his readers that Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecies in the OT.[24](#) While it is true that formula quotations are also found in the Synoptic Gospels,[25](#) the book of Matthew contains most of them (1:22f; 2:5f; 2:15; 2:17; 2:23 in the Infancy narratives; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4f; and 27:9f in the rest of the gospel).[26](#) Matthew also has a different usage among the four gospel writers. The following features characterize Matthean formula quotations:

First, is characterized by exegetes as being of "mixed type," leaning more towards the Hebrew text than the expected Septuagintal type. For example, in 2:15, Matthew's quotation of Hosea 11:1 is rendered *eks Aiguptou ekalesa ton huio mou* ("out of Egypt I called my son"). This is considerably different from the Septuagint's *eks Aiguptou metekalesa ta tekna autou* ("out of Egypt I called his children"), but very similar to the Masoretic text's *mimmisrayim qarati libeni*.[27](#)

Second, is Matthew's use of *pleroun* in the passive voice. *Pleroun* is a key word signaling a striking fulfillment formula. It appears particularly on passages making "assertions about the Scripture in general but not in formulas introducing specific OT texts."* Moreover, their structure basically follows the pattern *hina (hopos) plerothe to rheten dia tou prophetou legontos* ("in order to fulfill what was said through the prophet...").

Finally, Matthew's formula quotations are immediately followed by a commentary. This commentary is not part of the author's narrative, but serves primarily to explain the fulfillment of a promise.²⁸ Thus, in 1:22, the author explains the meaning of the name "Immanuel." In 2:5, the author explains how the Magi were called secretly by Herod. In 2:17, Matthew includes the death of Herod and how an angel appeared in Joseph's dream. These commentaries, which were not originally part of the Infancy tradition, come consistently after the formula quotations.

3.2 What is Matthew's Intent in his Infancy Stories?

It is essential to know Matthew's intent in his Infancy narratives. This is needed in order to see its distinction from Luke's intent later. There are two views concerning Matthew's intention. The first one sees an exclusive Christological intent,²⁹ with Matthew's Infancy stories simply presenting a symbolic affirmation of the Christian kerygma. This view focuses on the overall function of the Infancy narratives, particularly its function and relation to the whole gospel. The aim of the author then is to present a theology rather than to defend one.

The other view, which is more common, emphasizes the apologetic intent. Matthew is keen in proving that Jesus is the Davidic Messiah for whom the people have been waiting. This can be seen in the accumulation of OT prophecies, a commentary function designed to enhance the fulfillment of the prophecy, and a number of modified formulaic phrases which were inserted by the author.³⁰

3.3 Summary

The promise-fulfillment method in the Infancy narratives of Matthew is primarily characterized by formula quotations. Formula quotations are direct quotations of OT promises. The fulfillment of which are connected to the person of Jesus. The method of promise-fulfillment is utilized by Matthew in order to emphasize to his readers that Jesus is the Davidic Messiah.

The Praise of the Prophetess Anna in Luke's Infancy Stories

After having briefly investigated how the promise-fulfillment pattern is employed by Matthew, we now turn to Luke's narrative. We have seen how Matthew uses "formula quotations" as a key device in proving the messiahship of Jesus. In Luke's Infancy narrative, formula quotations do not play a big part. Instead, the third evangelist uses the

hymns in a unique way to substantiate that Jesus is the Son of God. The hymns in Luke act as the responses of Mary, Zechariah, and Simeon to the fulfillment of the promises. Thus, while Matthew has a promise-fulfillment pattern, Luke displays a promise-fulfillment-praise sequence.

This sequence can be seen as one analyzes the structural parallelism of the narratives of Mary, Zechariah, and Simeon, with the hymns serving as the climax of each. However, this structure leaves out the pericope of Anna the Prophetess (2:36-38) since no hymn immediately follows. Thus, as Mary utters the *Magnificat*, Zechariah chants the *Benedictus*, and Simeon warbles the *Nunc Dimittis*. Anna the Prophetess, has no hymn to sing.

In this section, I will attempt to show that the pericope of Anna is very much a part of the structural parallelism. A modified structure will demonstrate that the *Nunc Dimittis* links the pericope of Simeon with the Anna pericope.

This argument will be pursued by answering the following questions. First, what is meant by the promise-fulfillment-praise scheme in Luke? How different is this sequence from Matthew? Second, what is the significance of the hymns in the Infancy narratives of Luke? Moreover, what role do they play in the whole Lucan gospel? And third, how should we understand the function of "Anna the prophetess" pericope? How does this pericope fit in the promise-fulfillment-praise scheme of Luke's Birth stories?

4.1 What is the Promise-Fulfillment-Praise Pattern in Luke?

The promise-fulfillment-praise sequence in Luke was proposed by Stephen Farris. Through what he calls "parallel episodes," Farris finds a uniformed sequence of events in the narratives of Mary, Zechariah, and Simeon. He argues that an analysis of the "thought through strands of the narrative rather than the parallelism of the individual parts" is a progression which leads up to the hymns.³¹ Thus, we find the sequence.³²

	Zechariah	Mary	Simeon
Promise	That his wife would bear a son	She would conceive a special son	He would see the Messiah
Fulfillment	John's birth bears	Elizabeth's conception witness and	He sees Jesus blesses Mary
Praise	<i>Benedictus</i>	<i>Magnificat</i>	<i>Nunc Dimittis</i>

This chart indeed displays a striking pattern. The structural parallelism of the three events shows that the hymns serve as the climax of the promises.

As we have stated previously, the method of promise-fulfillment can be seen in the Infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke. The application of the method, however, differ with each author. The difference can be seen in the author's understanding of promise. Matthew literally quotes Old Testament passages as promises and finds their fulfillment in the person of Jesus. Matthew also uses "formula quotations" to show that prophecies about coming Messiah are already fulfilled in Christ.

The promise-fulfillment scheme in Luke is employed from a different perspective. The promise in Luke is part of the narrative itself. They are not quotation from the OT, rather, they are part of the story. Thus, the message to Zechariah concerning Elizabeth's conception of a son in spite of her age is a promise (1:13b). Also, the news to Mary that she would conceive the son of God is a promise (1:31-33). The promise to Simon that he would see the messiah before he dies (2:26) is part of the story and not a quotation from the OT. These three promises saw their respective fulfillment, and as a response, hymns of praise were uttered.

4.2 The Significance of the Hymns in the Infancy Narratives of Luke

It is essential for us to understand the significance and function of the hymns in general. To do this, we need to briefly discuss certain presuppositions. First, we must understand that the canticles were formed from OT models. This means that they were originally independent songs which were modified to serve the author's purpose. Second, that these songs, after their modifications, were inserted into an existing narrative. Third, that the songs were primarily salvific songs about the saving acts of God.

4.2.1 Parallels from OT Hymns

Several scholars believe that the hymns were composed in the manner of OT psalms. The attribution of pattern to the OT hymns is based on style and content. James W. Watts confirms this view by saying that "the position and contents of the *Magnificat* in particular show clearly the influence of Hanna's song (1 Sam 2:1-10)...."³³ Likewise, Brown concludes that the hymns in Luke were heavily influenced by the canticles from Jewish Christian *Anawim* ("poor").³⁴ Brown based his study from parallel hymns found in the Qumran caves. The Qumran community is a community of *Anawim*, and the hymns found in their caves share the style of Luke's hymns. Phrases as this indeed points to an *anawim* ideology.³⁵

*He has exalted those of low degree;
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich He has sent empty away (1:52b-53).*

Likewise, the *Benedictus* yields an evidence of Jewish Christian tone. The phrase "who sat in the darkness and in the shadow of death" (1:79) points to the concern about the

"poor ones" in their community. Brown rejects the idea that the hymns were from a Gentile Christian community. The stress on Israel and David, together with the frequent mention of the phrase "our fathers" (91:54-56; 1:55, 72), substantiates his claim.[36](#)

4.2.2 Modified and Inserted Into the Narrative according to Luke's Agenda

The similarity of the canticles' style and language with Jewish Christian hymns show that they were modified to suit the author's intention.[37](#) The following are views on how the hymns were composed and inserted into the Infancy narratives: First is the suggestion that the hymns were composed by those who uttered them.[38](#) Thus, Mary composed the *Magnificat*, Zechariah for the *Benedictus*, and Simeon for the *Nunc Dimittis*. This view was dominant during the pre-critical era.[39](#) The second view argues that the hymns were composed simultaneously with the Infancy narrative. This view did not invite strong supporters since the hymns fit awkwardly into the narrative.[40](#) The third view believes that the hymns were composed by Luke himself and that they were inserted by him into an earlier Lucan narrative.[41](#) Finally, the fourth view completely eliminates the possibility of Luke composing the hymns. This view asserts that the hymns were pre-Lucan or non-Lucan and were simply adapted and inserted by the author.[42](#) Many find the fourth view as the most persuasive. One primary evidence is that the narrative flow will not be disrupted even if they hymn were omitted.[43](#)

4.2.3 The Hymns as Salvific Songs

If the hymns were composed independent from the narrative, what were they originally intended for? A study of the content and genre of the songs reveals that the hymns were of thanksgiving type of psalms focused on the saving acts of God.[44](#) Thus, there is a low tone of Christology among the hymns. Brown cites that even probably an "orthodox Jew" can recite the *Benedictus* with the exception of vv. 76-77.[45](#)

The modifications which Luke did reveals his intention. For example, the inclusion of vv. 76-77 in the *Benedictus* shows the author's desire for his readers to see not only the fulfillment of God's promise of salvation, but also the role of Jesus in carrying out God's plan.

*Now you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High God.
You will go first before the Lord to prepare his people for his coming.
You will make his people know that they will be saved.
They will be saved by having their sins forgiven.*

Another example is Luke's modification of the *Benedictus*. Although scholars are divided on this view, they do agree that the two stories show great similarity, and that the author intends to show Jesus' superiority over John.[46](#)

To further emphasize the superiority of Jesus over John, Luke has the story of Simeon. This pericope shows the author's "tilt" in his parallelism. This tilt helps us see that Luke's

focus is not on John but on Jesus. The story of John the Baptist serves as one fulfillment story for the more important fulfillment story which is Jesus'.[47](#)

4.3 The Place of the Anna the Prophetess Pericope in Luke's Infancy Narratives

The structure of Farris leaves out the pericope of Anna the prophetess. The three parallel sequences show the respective stories of Mary, Zechariah, and Simeon with the three hymns serving as the final of each in the promise-fulfillment-praise scheme.

The structural parallelism of the three indeed displays a parallel flow of sequences. However, Farris seemingly found no place in his structure for the pericope of the prophetess. In fact, the structure was too limited that the pericope of Anna can be eliminated without fracturing the said sequence. This is quite unfortunate since a careful study of the whole narrative shows that the Anna pericope is equally significant as the pericopes of Simeon, Mary, and Zechariah. We shall try to prove this point by first analyzing the pericope of the prophetess.

4.3.1 The Striking Similarities in the Pericopes of Simeon and Anna

The Revised Standard Version starts the pericope of Simeon in v. 22 of chapter 2. This kind of division presupposes that the text stating about required "purification according to the Law of Moses" (v. 22) is the beginning of the pericope of Simeon (v. 25). This division is not the case in the Greek text. The Nestle-Aland sees the pericope of the ritual concerning purification as independent pericope. While it is true that v. 27b confirms the role of Simeon in the purification rite, this does not necessarily require the reader to see vv. 22-24 as part of the Simeon pericope.

With the "purification" pericope (vv. 22-24) as distinct from the Simeon story, we can see a clearer scenario. The scene is the presentation of the infant Jesus in Jerusalem. In Jerusalem we find two characters who met the child. These two characters, when viewed from a parallel perspective, independent from the Mary and Zechariah stories, show striking similarities:

- a. Both were promptly introduced with the customary Greek imperfect *kai...en* (2:25; 2:36).[48](#)
- b. Both were pictured as faithful, devout, and were in the temple during the time of Jesus' presentation. Simeon was "righteous and devout" (v. 25) and Anna "did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day" (v. 37b).
- c. Both were seen to be of old age. Simeon was told "that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ" (v. 26b) while Anna "was of great age...she was eighty-four" (vv. 36b, 37).
- d. Both held significant cultic offices. Simeon was possibly a priest serving in the temple, for only temple priests are task to do child presentations (v. 27), whereas Anna was called a prophetess (v. 36).

- e. Both were able to recognize the child.
- f. Both gave thanks and spoke of God's salvation upon seeing the child. Simeon "took him up in his arms and blessed God" (4:28), while Anna "coming up at that very hour, (she) gave thanks" (v. 38a).

The similarities we find between the characters of Simeon and Anna show a possible parallel structure of the two pericopes. These two characters, when placed side by side, will reveal that the *Nunc Dimittis* serves as its common link. Brown admits this view when he stated that the purpose of the parallel between Simeon and Anna is Luke's parallel reference to the Law and Prophets. Simeon was the representative of the Law, while Anna the representative of the prophets.⁴⁹ Thus, to presuppose that the story of the presentation of the child Jesus will not be disrupted, even if the pericope of Anna is eliminated, is unjustified.

Notice this alternative parallel structure for the Simeon and Anna pericopes:⁵⁰

	Simeon	Anna
Promise	of old age, would see the salvation of God through the messiah	of old age, would see the salvation of God through the messiah
Fulfillment	saw the messiah	saw the messiah
Praise		<i>Nunc Dimittis</i>

4.3.2 An Overall Alternative Structure

Can the *Nunc Dimittis* serve as a song of praise for the fulfillment of promises in the lives of Simeon and Anna? The answer to this question is seen on the same role which the *Magnificat* played for Mary and Elizabeth. Farris states, "...the promises concerning both children are first fulfilled as John hails from the womb itself the one who is to come. The *Magnificat* responds to the fulfillment of both sets of promises."⁵¹ Moreover, we also find some similarities with the characters of Mary and Elizabeth. First, both of them cannot conceive a child; Elizabeth was barren (1:7), while Mary was a virgin (1:34). Second, unlike the characters of Zechariah, Simeon, and Anna, both were chosen to conceive children with whom God would carry out his plan of salvation. John as the forerunner, Jesus as the Messiah.

From this, we find that there is a more plausible structural parallelism where all characters in the Infancy narratives of Luke fits into one whole picture. Notice how all the characters consistently fit into the promise-fulfillment-praise scheme:

Elizabeth	Mary	Zechariah	Simeon	Anna
Magnificat		Benedictus	Nunc Dimittis	

As we can see from this modified structure, the *Magnificat* serves as the praise response for both Mary and Elizabeth. The same is true for Simeon and Anna who shares the *Nunc Dimittis* as their single hymn. Zechariah has the *Benedictus* for himself.

Summary

In this study, we discussed that the promise-fulfillment method is best demonstrated in the Infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke. However, Luke's application of the promise-fulfillment method is different from Matthew's. While Matthew has the promise-fulfillment pattern, Luke has the promise-fulfillment-praise scheme.

The promise-fulfillment-praise scheme is proposed by Stephen Farris. Farris believes that the hymns serve as the praise responses of Mary, Zechariah, and Simeon to the fulfillment of the respective promises they received. This conclusion is the result of Farris's use of structural parallelism. Through structural parallelism, the three episodes of Mary, Zechariah, and Simeon are placed in parallel to each other, with the hymns as the climax of each.

The structure of Farris leaves no room for the pericope of Anna the prophetess. Farris thinks that since the Anna pericope is not immediately followed by a hymn, the story does not fit the structure. We demonstrated, however, that the pericope of Anna fits in well with the structure. This is possible by seeing the *Nunc Dimittis* as a song that links the pericopes of Simeon and Anna together. Through the striking similarities seen in the characters of Simeon and Anna, we demonstrated that the Simeon pericope does not end after the hymn. Thus, the pericopes of Simeon and Anna form a continuous strand.

We also showed that the same structure is seen in the pericopes of Elizabeth and Mary. Many commentators agree that the *Magnificat* is a response to the fulfillment of both the promises to Mary and Elizabeth. The *Nunc Dimittis* fulfils the same function in the Simeon and Anna pericopes.

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⁴⁴ Watts states that "the psalms' contents proclaim a general theme of the Gospel, that God is acting to save God's people," *Psalm and Story*, p. 180.

⁴⁵ Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, p. 347.

⁴⁶ Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, p. 88.

⁴⁷ Farris, *The Hymns*, p. 102.

⁴⁸ Many commentators recognize the role of Anna as another witness to the messianic child. This recognition attests to the continuity of the pericope of Simeon to Anna. Cf. Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, p. 123.

⁴⁹ Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, p. 688.

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A Response to Wonsuk Ma's "Toward an Asian Pentecostal Theology"

Reuben Louis Gabriel

[[HTTP://www.aps.edu/ajps/99-1/99-1-r-gabriel.htm](http://www.aps.edu/ajps/99-1/99-1-r-gabriel.htm)]

While introducing the paper Wonsuk Ma points out that Asian Evangelical theology is still in its formative stage, and hence there are many unanswered questions. His purpose of doing this paper is to probe the possibility of doing theology from an Asian Pentecostal perspective - highlighting the value it would have in the context of a broader Asian Evangelical theology. It will also serve to enlighten Asian Pentecostal thinkers concerning their unique capability and calling to engage in theological reflections within their context; and then to communicate their reflections in relevant ways to Asian recipients.

He begins by defining theology in a simple way to suit his purposes in the paper, and then goes on to elaborate on the elements that are involved in doing theology and the emphasis placed on the different elements in different theological formulations. He wraps up each of his three main sections on theology with his suggestion of the ideal model. However, in the last section on Asian Pentecostal theology, which is the main thrust of the paper, he prefixes the elements of, and the emphasis in an Asian Pentecostal theology with briefings on the distinctives of an Asian Pentecostal theology (the need for an APT, the significance, and the ecumenical possibilities in an APT). His conclusion is brief, revisiting his purpose statement at the beginning of the paper.

In this paper, I would like to discuss several important issues arising out of Ma's paper.

Starting Point of the Theological Process

Immediately after giving his definition of theology he says "the (theological) process can begin from either end: divine truth or human needs." There is no problem with the first end, but it is the latter that raises questions. If human need by itself should start off the theological process it could then mean that it is human need that validates contemplation of God. Which is to say, if you have a need, you get a glimpse of God corresponding to your need. If your need is political liberation you see God in Scripture as a political liberator, and His work running through Scripture as political liberation. Logically, this should also mean that if there is no felt human need, there is no need for God either, or for contemplation of Him. If this point is taken to its end, such a premise for doing theology could also lead to the undoing of all theology - by questioning the very existence of God.

But this is not to be. It is not human beings and their need that validate God, rather it is vice versa. It is God who validated human life by putting His image therein, and by

expressing serious concern for human need through out salvation history. In fact at a later stage in the paper Ma rightly holds liberal theology responsible for making human need the indispensable starting point for doing theology. The process of all theological reflections I believe should rightly begin not from any one of the two ends, but rather with a combination of both ends.

The Revelation of God

2.1 A basic confusion concerning revelation

It seems to me that Ma confuses the biblical understanding of the revelation of God. He says God reveals Himself and His will through His words, which includes Scripture and experiences (not necessarily the experiences limited to the select history of biblical times, for he specifically adds that these experiences are contemporary). Then, he again adds that God also reveals Himself and His will through salvation history, which Ma limits to the history of Israel (p.17).

I am quite surprised that Ma *equates* experiences with scripture to speak of both as the agencies through which God reveals Himself and His will to us. It is not just Scripture that is God's word to us, but also our experiences are His word. This belief is not exclusive to Ma. Many from among us Pentecostals would agree with Ma concerning this. What it does however is that it raises questions on the sufficiency of the Bible and of the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible for faith and practice today.

I suggest that our experiences are not revelations of God and His will, but rather actualization of the revelation of God and His will as found between the covers of the Bible. Our experiences are not authentic in themselves. They are authenticated in reference to the objective standard of God's word. God's word as His revelation along with the historic Christ of the Bible, always occupies the highest place as the standard for any type of Christian enlightenment. If experiences and contemporary events are also the revelation of God, then one may ask if there is any limit to such revelation. If listening to God's voice is by listening to the voices of people and of the world, as some streams of theology would desire to impress upon us, then what about the conflicting and confusing messages we may hear? Should our theological process be all-inclusive? The welcome rediscovery of the exercise of spiritual gifts and ministries in this century has brought with it its own problems. God still speaks through prophecies, words of wisdom, even dreams, and visions, as He did in biblical days. But how are we to know that "thus says the Lord" is truly the voice of God? How can we be sure that a vision is really from God and that we have got the right interpretation? After all, it is quite possible for two people to have "messages from God" which contradict each other. How do we know which one to follow? We also believe that God speaks to our hearts directly through His Holy Spirit. But recognizing the voice of the Spirit is itself not always easy because there are other deceptive voices which sound like the voice of the Spirit. It is hence that John warns us in 1 John 4:1 to test the spirits and make sure that they are truly from God. God does speak to us in many ways and through many people, but none of these are sufficient to know God on its own. There is too great a risk of error. We can very easily and too frequently

mistake the voice of the Holy Spirit. Our feelings and reasoning can lead us astray. And that is why God has given us the Bible. Only there do we have something that is fixed, something outside of ourselves, that is not subject to the changing fashions and pressures of each generation. The Bible provides the basis from which we can assess all other ideas, teachings and experiences.

2.2 Finality of Christ

I would have liked Ma to make at least a reference to the final and most perfect revelation of God, namely the Lord Jesus Christ, the very embodiment of God. The writer of Hebrews begins his epistle with the words, "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets many times and in many different ways. But now in these last days God has spoken to us through His Son" (1:1, 2a). The Son reflects the glory of God and shows exactly what God is like. He holds everything together with His powerful word (3a, b). There is much theology that claims to base itself on scripture but subtly omits the historic Jesus of scripture. In such a context, it is essential for all evangelical and Pentecostal theological formulations to treat the historic Jesus as the focal point of God's revelation on which any Christian theological process should be based. No study of the revelation of God is complete without mentioning God's revelation of Himself and His will through His Son.

2.3 A Misplaced Motif in the Doing of Contextual Theology in Asia.

My final comment for this section is that Ma's second venue of God's revelation is a duplication of the first. The first venue, he says, is scripture, experiences and contemporary events. The second is the history of Israel as salvation history. I cannot see why God's choice of Abraham and the Israelite nation should be treated as a separate revelatory category apart from or in spite of scripture as a whole. This all the more should not be done in a paper that leads towards an Asian Pentecostal theology where proper relevance is sought for all the peoples of Asia. Most modern indigenous Asian theologies as well as theologies from other continents have kept the implications of God's choice of Israel to the minimum and have instead highlighted God's love for all the peoples of the world to generate required relevance of theology to the context.

FORMULATING AN Asian Pentecostal Theology - Flaws and Omissions

Wonsuk Ma categorizes the composite issues of an APT quite well in the final section of the paper, just before the conclusion. But there are flaws and omissions in his perception of Pentecostalism, Pentecostal theology and even other mainline churches which I seek to address under this point.

3.1 Contextual Issues - Spiritism Alone?

When it comes to contextual issues which an APT will need to address, and will find parallels to amongst the Asian people, it is only the issue of spiritism that stands out. *Because he sees just one relevant contextual issue, the human element (i.e., the context) does not contribute much to the making of his APT.* This failure makes him rely heavily on the past contributions of Pentecostalism, four of which he brings out quite well in the section on theological significance, to develop his APT. I suggest that Pentecostalism historically has made invaluable contributions that can be categorized in the human element (context), which bears close affinity to the Asian context and hence must be an indispensable part of an APT.

3.2 Essence of Early Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism began as a counter-culture movement in the context of an established and structured Christianity. The first Pentecostal churches suffered at the hands of mainline Christian denominations. Their people comprised the poor, the uneducated, those from the margins of society, and the oppressed - in contrast to the rich, the influential and the powerful who occupied the pews of main line churches. The hostility these Pentecostal churches faced from established Christendom and the outside world made them look up with even greater earnestness; thereby enhancing their own spirituality, their spiritual equipment for service, their zeal to suffer for God and their hope in an imminent future with God.

They indeed did perceive the eschatological significance of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The latter rain was anticipated with eagerness and when it came it was welcomed with ecstasy. But it was not the end. All this was a preparation for an even greater reality to come - the rapture. These suffering churches which bore the brunt of opposition to their surging ahead with their distinctives were convinced that the rain of the Holy Spirit came down upon them not to give them a utopic life here, but to draw them even more close to God and prepare them for His service - therein preparing people for the eschatological hope (the rapture). This was the essence of Pentecostal theology known to the early Pentecostals.

3.3 Deviations of Modern Pentecostalism

Today's Pentecostalism goes with the early Pentecostal churches on the same route till the latter rain - but then takes a deviation that betrays erstwhile Pentecostal convictions and goals. Today's Pentecostalism depends on God for the latter rain but its motives are suspect. The latter rain is not sought to prepare it for the life ahead, but to serve the interests of this life, here and now. This has come to be the one point program of most Pentecostal philosophy and work today. The reason for this is probably that the Pentecostal church today as a whole largely lacks the will to suffer, to lead a simple life, to practice self-denial and sacrificial service for God, and to forsake all worldly pleasures, which were the outstanding qualities of Pentecostalism in the early times. The church that once dared to be hated from all quarters now has the uncontrollable desire to be loved, making it the most trendy church for modern-day times. Ma too notes this

tendency of Pentecostalism to crave for acceptance, but he identifies the problem only partially. Says he,

... one laments the evangelicalization of Pentecostalism in recent years... the movement of Pentecostal groups towards the evangelical churches brought the long-awaited recognition, as a "decent" Christian group. *However this coupled with other factors has caused the Pentecostals to be less appreciative of their distinctives, and consequently to lose some of them* (p. 38, italics are mine).

3.4 Waning Away of Eschatological Emphasis

Wonsuk Ma says the emphasis on the eschatological hope in Asian Pentecostalism waned away because it did not correspond to the needs of the context. I wish to disagree. When Pentecostalism came to India, it came with the message of the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the eschatological hope. The call to self-denial, simplicity, forsaking of worldly pleasures and zealous service for God were all enthusiastically made in the backdrop of the conviction concerning Jesus Christ's soon return and the rapture. If this emphasis has receded today it is not so much because of Asia's peculiar circumstances as Ma suggests, but rather because of Asian Pentecostalism's tendency to uncritically ape Western Pentecostalism. I concede here that David Yonggi Cho whose case Ma has taken to illustrate his point might be an exception to the rule. I am unable to comment on his work for not being sufficiently informed concerning the features of his work.

3.5 Faith of Our Pioneers

Pentecostal theology has the tendency to occupy itself with the divine element (i.e., pneumatology). To develop a sensitive, relevant and effective APT it is necessary to revisit the human element (i.e., the context) which is - the early Pentecostals themselves. They were people of color, the poor, the uneducated, the oppressed and despised in society. The early Pentecostal churches were suffering churches. This dimension of early Pentecostal life is totally neglected in today's Pentecostal theology. This may not be that relevant for a Pentecostal theology in a rich and prosperous West, but in a poor and miserable Asia this aspect of historic Pentecostal reality when brought out through an APT will reveal the very heart of God to a people in need.

Ma does speak of human suffering in Asia but he speaks of it being caused by hostile spiritual forces for which the Holy Spirit is the antidote. While this is true and should become part of an APT, we must take care not to keep repeating the mistake of living and doing theology in a "spirit world." While it is necessary to know and to assert that Satan is active and he is the prince of the air, we must stop short of suggesting that he is hence also in our non-Christian neighbor's tea cup. This is where APT needs to be more human. It is human to suffer; it is human to experience pain; it is human to be despised, forsaken and oppressed. This was what our own forefathers and mothers in the Pentecostal faith went through, and this is what most of the people of Asia go through even today. Their

predicament prepared them to know God and His power like no one else could. And this is the offer of an APT to the Asian people. They can be overcomers by the person and the power of God's Holy Spirit. Says Ma,

... the significance of the Pentecostal message can best be preserved and enhanced, only when Pentecostals remain truthful to their distinct beliefs and practices. This should be preached in the pulpit, not for the sake of the distinctive, but for the maximum contribution to the church at large and for the blessing of the people (p. 38).

I wholeheartedly agree with Ma. It is necessary for Pentecostal theology to take back Pentecostals to their roots and therein set an example to the whole church and also to the rest of the world, of what true life in the Spirit is. The theology of the poor, theology of the *Minjung*, Dalit theology, theology of the suffering God and His suffering people - all these in their essence portray the experiences of the early fathers of the Pentecostal movement. These issues are now being raised by Roman Catholic and Ecumenical theologians, to our shame; and should I say the reason is because the trend in Pentecostalism today is to see its own distinctives as instruments that will bring success, popularity and prosperity.

3.6 Pentecostal Theology of Worship

An APT should also explore on some other characteristics of Pentecostalism that have not received due recognition hitherto. These would have very close relevance to the Asian context. The special reverence for God (awe and wonder - Acts 2) frequently experienced in Pentecostal worship, and the childlike humility and hungering and thirsting for God seen in Pentecostal spirituality are distinctives that offer immense scope for a Pentecostal theology of worship. They could bring forth invaluable implications for the devotional, attitudinal and practical aspects of theology.

The renewed interest in *rhema* (the spoken word) has a lot of bearing on the revivalistic overtones of contemporary Pentecostalism, especially in the West. It has its own parallels in the Asian context where the spoken word (through pronouncement of curses and blessings) especially when it comes out of the mouth of the elderly or the religious is thought to be consequential. This is another issue which an APT should address.

3.7 A Final Plea for Balance and Objectivity

Finally while doing APT we must take care not to find fault with everything that is not Pentecostal, and to unjustly defend everything that we believe is Pentecostal. In his fourth theological contribution of Pentecostalism Ma says "high" or "decent" worship has fostered the distancing of God from the people. Pentecostalism narrowed the gap between God and people. I am not sure if this is true. Proper rules, orders, words etc., I believe, expressed the lofty intents of the heart concerning God, and not necessarily the distancing of God from people. I do not think Ma is fair enough when he says the experiential expectation full of emotion is non-existent in churches preceding the 20th century Pentecostal church. Without that there could not have been a living church, and without

an emotional experience of God there could not have been its rich outpourings in liturgy, Christian art and architecture, theology, hymns and songs and collective worship. The difference probably was that they were not as expressively emotional as we Pentecostal worshippers today are. The reasons for the difference are as non-theological as they are theological. Western society of the Victorian era has tended largely to be orderly, systematic, lofty in its ideals and emotionally self-restrictive. These characteristics quite naturally permeated into the practice of religion. In recent times however due to big sociological, political and ideological changes (e.g., the French Revolution, the American Civil War, the two world wars, the American counter-revolution of the 60s etc.), the change in the pace of life, the mounting pressures of living etc., orderliness, restrictive behavior and emotional control have slowly been waning away. The "in thing" now is to get on to the bandwagon of that which is "happening." This changed scenario has also crept into the church with sweeping changes in worship, liturgy, authority and many other aspects of church life.

What distances people from God is not emotionally self-restrictive worship, but ritualistic religion. Much prior to the event of Pentecost came Jesus' teaching of God as Father (Abba) which endeared the crowds and the disciples to Him and to the Father, and which simultaneously became a thorn in the flesh for the marauders of ritualistic religion, the priests and the Pharisees. Keeping God distant from people helped them because they could then assert their authority over people and exploit them. Jesus broke these shackles by encouraging the people to think of God as Father. So, the core of the message of Jesus is human experience of the Father's love which bears the foundational liberative dimension for all people. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is a subsequent experience which adds to the liberative experience. Ritualism by the way could creep even into Pentecostalism and distance God from the people, and that is a danger we must be aware of and guard ourselves against.

Concluding Remarks

Wonsuk Ma's paper deals mostly with the framework for theology, with emphasis on an APT. He does bring out some exclusive features of a Pentecostal theology now and then, but fails to do a systematic elaboration of them (briefly), which I think for a paper of this nature is essential. On the whole, the paper does serve the one purpose the author had in mind - that of motivating fellow Pentecostals to endeavor to work towards the doing of Asian Pentecostal theologies.

Syncretism and Capitalism¹

Walter J. Hollenweger

[[HTTP://www.pts.edu/ajps/99-1/99-1-w-hollenweger.htm](http://www.pts.edu/ajps/99-1/99-1-w-hollenweger.htm)]

INTRODUCTION

In an enlightening article, the South African missiologist Willem Saayman describes the missiological situation in Russia.² One of his postgraduate students, a Russian-born evangelical Protestant, Peter Penner (an ethnic German) answered the question of one of his examiners, "How would Russians in general react to foreign missionaries coming to help them?" by stating bluntly: "It depends on how they come."²

Indeed, it depends on how they come. For instance, they should not ignore that already before Gorbachev there were more Christians in Russia than members of the Communist Party and that after almost a century of state-directed atheistic propaganda. They should not "approach Russian people as if their thousand years of Christian culture does not exist, and wish to evangelize without even learning Russian." Indeed,

...some foreign missionaries operate as if they work under the assumption "before us there was nothing!" This is totally unacceptable, the more so in a context where the religious and cultural domains are so thoroughly intertwined as in Russia. There is no way that the re-evangelization of Russia can therefore be undertaken apart from the Russian Orthodox Church. That is in any case the conclusion of experienced Protestants such as Reimer, Penner and Muller.⁴

Because the Russian churches (both Protestant and Orthodox) are very poor, there is a serious danger of creating "a new dependent class of 'rice Christians.'" In this respect serious warning signs are flashing, reminding us of lessons we should have learned from mission history."⁵

But there is also the problem that the Russian Orthodox Church tries to become a new state church. On the other hand, the Protestants are divided and are becoming more and more divided. There are already at least six separate Protestant seminaries/Bible schools operating in the St. Petersburg area alone. Some have very little relationship with the Orthodox Theological Academy. Saayman concludes his article by stating:

(The) First World has seemingly learnt very little from the total Third World mission experience of more than two centuries. Is it still acceptable at the end of the twentieth century, with the benefit of two hundred years of hindsight, to formulate mission policy "on the run," during tea breaks, between evangelistic meetings, between planning committees for church planting and rescue missions?

Saayman's analysis is complemented by an article by Archpriest Vladimir Federov, Vice-Rector of the Russian Christian Institute of Humanities in St. Petersburg. Different from Saayman, this Orthodox clergyman puts not all the blame on the side of the western missionaries. He criticizes his own church for her letargy and lack of information.⁶ He does not go so far as Saayman who writes,

Is it not urgently necessary to revive the call for a modified moratorium on Western missionaries to the Third as well as to the (previous) Second World? ... I wish to make it very clear that I understand "moratorium" in a specific sense: not as a call to stop mission altogether, but as a call to stop doing it the way it is done now, and to start doing it in a totally different way.⁷

The following is an attempt at thinking theologically on this *different way*. In order to do this, I translate Saayman's alarming analysis into theological categories. What we see in Russia and indeed in many other parts of the world is a conflict between differing kinds of Christian syncretism. The western missionaries present a western European/ Christian or an American/Christian syncretism. This foreign syncretism clashes with the indigenous Russian/Christian syncretism. All of their representatives find proof texts in the Bible by which they try to prove that theirs is not a syncretism but the biblical message in its purity. *We* do contextual theology, so it is said. *The others* fall victim to syncretism.

That is a naïve but very common way of looking at things. One forgets that *all* Christian churches are by definition syncretistic. The problem is only that we do not recognize our own syncretism as such. Leonardo Boff is certainly right when he writes, "Christianity is a syncretism *par excellence*."⁸

2. Christianity as a Syncretism *par excellence*

There is, for instance, no question that the different forms of Pentecostalism are syncretistic: the transformation of Shamanism into Korean Pentecostalism, the black and African roots in American Pentecostalism, the Africanization of Christianity in Congolese Kimbanguism and in South African Zionism, the excavation of old Mexican cultural elements in Mexican Pentecostalism, the integration of popular religion in Chilean Pentecostalism, etc.⁹

However, so are *all* forms of Christianity, in particular western Christianities. The question is not: Syncretism, yes or no? but: What kind of syncretism? Remember the example of the exile.¹⁰ The Israelites came to Babylon with the theology of the Yahwist. They brought with them a nomadic religion which quickly became dysfunctional in the new context. In order to understand this situation, one has only to remember the different parties in the exile.

The first was the "party of the old-time religion." They said, "If it was good enough for father Abraham, it's good enough for us. We know that the world is an oasis, that's how it

is written in our holy books. Yahweh has led us out of Egypt. What the Babylonians say is darkest paganism."

The second party was the party of philobabylonian Jews. They said: "Perhaps once upon a time Yahweh saved us from Egypt, but now he is vanquished. The temple is destroyed. The aristocracy has been led into captivity. We have saved a few remnants of our old documents. The Ten Commandments? What a joke! The Babylonians have them too and in an updated version. Babylon is the victorious cultural and military power. Their science explains the world."

The third party was a minority. Their views are documented in Ezekiel, in some psalms and above all in the Priestly Codex (P). They said: "We do not quarrel with the Babylonians on the origin and shape of the world. Perhaps they are right. Only, they should be a little more consistent and a little more critical, for there is no evidence of a goddess of chaos, as they pretend. The water which surrounds the world is not a goddess, but simply H₂O. Sun and moon are not gods, they are lanterns (*oroth*). Blood is not the blood of a god as the Babylonians say. All these are biological and physical phenomena. They are things, not gods. And they function according to God's law. They are made by him but not identical with him." In fact, these insights are the basis of our natural sciences for as long as the moon is a god one cannot walk on him. As long as water is a goddess, one cannot submit it to electrolysis. These are things and therefore open to human investigation and manipulation. That this approach to nature also has its drawbacks is another question.

It is clear that the Jews would have disappeared in Babylon if only the two first parties had existed. We owe it to the third party that the biblical tradition could continue. It is an example of a theologically responsible syncretism. We find more such syncretisms in the Bible. The temple, for instance, was built according to Canaanite plans, by Canaanite craftsmen and architects. Only, where the idol had stood in a Canaanite temple, there was the ark and the tablets of the commandments, the signs of the covenant of God with his people.

If we turn to the New Testament, we find the same kind of syncretism. Matthew was audacious enough to state that the *magoi* (not kings) found their way to the cradle of Jesus on the basis of their pagan astrology, whilst the Bible-reading scribes in Jerusalem tried to kill little Jesus. Matthew could only be glad that he did not have to submit his Gospel to a theological commission, Pentecostal or otherwise, for approval. He would have failed.

As we shall see later, Paul too does not shy away from syncretism. His famous thirteenth chapter in 1 Corinthians is a collage of contemporary religious sayings (as one can find out by consulting any critical commentary). He even manages not to mention Christ in the whole chapter. It only becomes Christian through its inclusion in 1 Corinthians. The popular ring in 1 Cor 13 is perhaps the reason why so many marriage couples choose it as a text for their wedding.

The same applies to our modern churches, whether Catholic, Protestant or Pentecostal. They are examples of syncretism. Examples: Since Thomas Aquinas, we have accepted the methodology of logics of a pagan philosopher (Aristotle), in particular the evangelicals who say that all statements in the Bible must be harmonizable in order to be true. The supposition that logical consistency is a sign of the truth is certainly not a biblical but an Aristotelian philosophical insight. At our universities and Bible schools we function according to the laws of coherence and logic. Otherwise, we would not fit into this culture. However, this becomes fatal when we think that our *forms* of thinking are the thing itself, if we forget that there are cultures - e.g., the Chinese, the Hebrew, the Old Mexican - which do not know Aristotle and do not operate according to these laws. In more recent times, even some mathematicians and physicists have found out that the laws of logic and coherence, the laws of uncontradictibility are only true in a limited way.¹¹ And furthermore, we experience in daily life that somebody can be inconsistent but reliable. Ask any married man or woman about that. And there are persons who are totally consistent - they function like a computer - yet they have proved to be unreliable. Ask anybody who has lost his job in the last months. They experience that type of logic as a brutal law. On the other hand, the Bible is in places not consistent, but it is reliable.

It is also well known that our rites and festivals (Christmas, Easter), even the names of our days (Sunday, Monday, etc.) do not come from the New Testament but from our Celtic and Germanic forefathers, just as the form of our sermons, just as our church buildings which are often built on the foundation of pagan temples. Our Christian rites and festivals carry with them a great heritage from our pagan past. Think of our marriage ceremonies and funerals. They too go back to pagan patterns. The early Christians did not conduct funerals. "Let the dead bury their dead," they said. Christ disturbed every single funeral where he was present by raising the corpse. From this I do not draw the conclusion that pastors have to resurrect the dead instead of burying them. What is necessary is the adaptation to a new situation or, in other words, a theologically responsible syncretism. We no longer expect the *parousia* around the corner as the early Christians did. Therefore other forms of witness are demanded from us.

3. Religion As a Business

Over twenty years ago we were promised a totally secularized future. The contrary is now the case. Europe is flooded by one religious wave after the other. "We cannot be unbelievers.... In order to carry through atheism one would need a deep religious commitment."¹² No theological discussion can do away with this fact. Religion - not just Christian religion - is part of humankind. That is why religion has to be dealt with in the same way as other givennesses of creation, like trade and commerce, *eros* and friendship.

Think of the confusion we create in people who have had religious experiences, spontaneous healings, visions or dreams. We western theologians have not been trained to deal with such experiences. So we send these people to the psychiatrist. And when this type of theology is exported to Asia it is simply a catastrophe.

That is why those people who have religious dreams do not go to the pastor but to the psychiatrist or to self-appointed gurus from overseas. Those who yearn for religious experience, for direction in their life and for fellowship, go to a charismatic prayer group, or to a Yoga class. They make a pilgrimage to the monks of Taizé, to an Indian Ashram, to a Tibetan monastery, to a Philippine ghost healer or to the German Kirchentag. But they couldn't care less about the parish around the corner. "Amongst all my patients under the age of forty, there is not one whose final problem is not a religious one," said Carl Gustav Jung.¹³

So also in the west, religion will not die out. The question is only in whose service will it be? Will it serve the thirst for self-realization, for inner peace of the modern westerner? Nowadays westerners have houses, cars, and clothes in abundance. Now they are seeking inspiration in drugs, in exotic tastes, in extraordinary images and sounds, in rebirthings into a former existence, in therapies and exciting feelings. The one who can "sell" feelings does good business. It is no longer a disgrace to lose possessions but it is a disgrace if we have not tried out the newest fashion in religion. Harvey Cox calls this "spiritual gluttony."¹⁴ In the past, one made a journey to Africa. Nowadays one makes a trip into transcendence. After the commercialization of sex we are now watching the commercialization of religion.

With religion one can earn a lot of money, and not only in America. The clients deliver both capital and raw materials. The data banks of the business-people of the electronic church are sold and hired to political organizations and commercial mail order enterprises.

It is obvious that the western churches protest against this religious weed, against this banalization of the Holy, this commercialization of religion, and with reason - but without success. The pastors are unable to fight against the religious multi-nationals. For in this matter it is true as in everything else: The best critique of the false is the praxis of the true.

What is this praxis of the true, how do we soberly and biblically deal with this religious boom? What is a theologically responsible syncretism in this situation? Good guides for this are the biblical authors. But we will not discover their secret if we say: "The New Testament has no funeral liturgies, no military chaplains, no Sunday Schools, no theological seminars, no infant baptism, no Christmas trees, no doctrine of the trinity, no church bells; therefore all these things are wrong." We will discover this only if we ask: How did the biblical authors deal with the religious context of their time?

We will then discover that the biblical authors give differing answers, according to the situation in which they were. That means, there is not only one syncretism but also many, depending on the partners with whom we speak. After all, we have four Gospels which emerged in different cultures and situations. In certain ways their content is identical, but in others not. What they have in common is the way in which they dealt with their surrounding religious context. We shall now examine this on the basis of a concrete example.

4. The Syncretism of Colossians

I quote the hymn in Col 1:15-20 without the interpretations and corrections by the author of Colossians:

*He is the image (eikon) of the invisible God,
the first-born (prototokos) of creation
for in him everything was created in heaven
and on earth, the visible and the invisible.
Through him and for him everything is created.
He is before all
everything has in him its coherence.
He is the head of the body.
He is the beginning (arche), the first-born of the dead;
for in him all the fullness (pleroma) wanted to live,
and to reconcile everything through him and for him,
making peace on earth and in heaven.* [15](#)

This is a quotation from the "New Age Hymnal" (the esoteric song-book) of the Church at Colossae. We can understand that this hymn was sung in the Colossian church in honor of a godhead which was present in the whole cosmos ("he is the head of the body"). For the Colossian Christians, this was certainly Christ, although Christ is never mentioned in the hymn. Perhaps it was once a non-Christian hymn.

The hymn is sung by people for whom the world, the body of the cosmos, is torn asunder. The streams of harmony are disturbed. The cosmos is in uproar with itself and must be reconciled. Even the very existence of the cosmos is in question. [16](#) The battle of the natural elements against each other shows itself in catastrophes which threaten to lead to a general collapse of the whole world. People are the victims of this shaky world. They experience themselves as prisoners of a nature which is in turmoil.

We know the New Age literature of that time fairly well. It is full of gripping complaints on the sorrowful existence of humanity. One can do nothing about it. The famous psalm of the Naassenes [17](#) - a pagan hymn - complains like this:

*The soul is like the timid game
ever hunted over the earth by stern death
proving his power ceaselessly in the long chase.
If today in realms of light, then tomorrow sunk in sorrow.
Father, look down and bless this sore afflicted being,
as she wanders far from home, aimless across the earth and grieving.
She wants to flee the bitter chaos, but she knows not any way out.*

That then is the situation in Colossae, but how does the author of the Epistle to the Colossians react? For brevity's sake I call him Paul. What does Paul do with this text?

First, he accepts the mythical (and for him foreign) language - very different to many of today's theologians. He tries to answer in the language of the Colossians and deals with this popular New Age religion in the Hymn Book of the Colossians. At the same time, however, he essentially corrects this popular religion by his interpretative changes, as well as through the interpretations which he adds at the end of the hymn.

Let me give three examples:

The Colossians sang: Christ is the head of the cosmic body. Paul corrects and writes: Certainly, Christ is the head of the body. But the body is not - as you think - the world. The body, this is people, that's you the Colossians. The body is the church (he adds *tes ekklesias* in v. 18). Through you, you Colossians, Christ executes his headship - an unexpected statement if one realizes the small number of Christians in Colossae. They were a little sect and relatively unimportant in the Roman Empire.

The Colossians sang: Christ has reconciled cosmos and forces, people and powers through his resurrection. Paul adds: Certainly, he is the first-born from the dead and has reconciled us. He reconciled us through "his death in his body of flesh" (v. 22). That is a massive formulation which should make sure that the first-born of all creation, the image of the invisible God is the very same one who died a lamentable death on a cross at a given time, at a given place. He is not just a principle, a cosmic power which operates in the world. He is also an historical person.

The Colossians sang: The chaos in the cosmos must be overcome. Something must happen to this world. Paul answers: Certainly, our world is sick and must be healed, but healing does not happen through mysterious cosmic powers, but through people, who follow the one who died on a cross, that means through reconciled and reconciling people.

What does Paul do here? He accepts provisionally the syncretism of the Colossians and transforms it into a theologically responsible syncretism. He *socializes* their syncretism, focussing on people, not powers. The New Age syncretism is not left in its beautiful isolation. Paul specifically mentions the details of everything that is under the lordship of Christ. Already this concrete list makes clear that the thrones and lordships, the powers and radiations - the laws of economics and technology,¹⁸ but also the rays of stars, crystals etc. - that they may no longer play the same role which they had played so far in Colossae. The will of this Lord to rule over everything includes the life of those to whom the Epistle is written. That is why Paul can no longer speak ahistorically. He *historises* their syncretism, focussing on the cross of Jesus and on a concrete Christian community. Even more, the author must speak of himself. The power of Christ, which penetrates the whole world is not a mysterious cosmic power but the power of the word and life of the apostle who fulfills his ministry in the shadow of the cross, which means to perspire and freeze, to go hungry and thirsty, to be beaten and ridiculed. Thus he walks along the roads of the Roman Empire. This theologically responsible syncretism anchors the Colossian New Age syncretism not in a myth but in the fact of the cross. Of course, Paul knows that the Gospel also means deliverance from cosmic powers. He does not reject

the mythical poetry of the Colossians out of hand: instead he anchors it in the factual event of the cross.

5. Questions to Asian Pentecostals

If Asian Pentecostals have followed me so far they will have realized that I argued within a western context. However, now this west is subjected to a religious invasion from the East. We are more and more facing a multi-religious and multi-cultural situation in Europe. This is new for us. But it is not new for Asian Pentecostals. For most of them, this is their daily experience. So, I thought, perhaps they could give us a hand, how to deal with this new situation. Here are my questions:

First, how are Asian Pentecostals dealing with the fact that "story telling" is a primary way of doing theology in the Bible (cp. the parables of Christ) *and* a primary mode of communication in Asia.¹⁹ In fact, that is not only true for Asia. It is also true for Europe including University education. Only, we are slow to realize it. We believe, that "story telling" is a primitive way of doing theology not worthy of the lofty levels of an academic education. This misunderstanding is only possible because we have not developed "story telling" to a highly scholarly level, for instance to the level of doctoral research. I, for my part, used "narrative theology" with good academic results at the university.²⁰ Furthermore, narrative theology is also a contribution to "democratization of theology."²¹ It allows lay people to participate in critical and complex theological thinking. Perhaps it would also give women a better chance in Pentecostalism.²² That is not to say that women cannot do abstract, conceptual and propositional theology. But could it be that - because many of them explain the Gospel to their children - women are better qualified to do narrative theology on an academic level than men. So my question is this: What are the experiences of Asian Pentecostals with narrative theology on an academic level? (That they use this method in the pulpit is self-evident).

Secondly, how are Asian Pentecostals dealing with the fact that many of their family members (parents, children, in-laws, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and grandparents) are members of non-Christian religions? How do they for instance celebrate Christmas in the family? Or do they not? Do they celebrate some of their relations' religious feasts with them? Or do they not? On what criteria do they base their decisions? How do they deal with the widespread belief in re-incarnation (also in Europe)? How do they interpret the healing miracles in other religions? And how do they understand the obvious spiritual qualities in some of the Buddhist monasteries? These questions become more and more important for the European churches, Pentecostal and others. Perhaps some of the European and American theologians are too lighthearted in their tolerance towards non-Christian religions (after having condemned them in the last century). What contribution do Asian Pentecostals have to offer on these vital issues? Is it possible that God speaks also through non-Christian religions? After all, the pagan Persian king Cyrus is called a Christ (Isa 45:1, "anointed," Messiah, Christos). Balaam's ass had to prophecy because the prophet was stubborn and the already mentioned *magoi* in Matt 2 found the way to the cradle on the basis of their pagan astrology.

Thirdly, Wonsuk Ma asks the question: "Is traditional western theology adequate to answer some non-western questions, such as 'what do we do when there is a drought, and people expect God to be able to bring rain?'"²³ That is no longer a non-western question. Modern technology has destroyed the ecological balance of the world. A collapse of the climate threatens the world - not unlike the fears of the people in Colossae. The culprits are mainly the western industrialized nations and here in particular the US who stubbornly refuse their responsibility to reduce their output in CO₂. I have discussed this question with industrialists and scientists and all of them told me: The energy problem is technically solved. We have drawers full of plans for alternative energies and for an alternative solution of the traffic problem. We can build cars that use only a fraction of the fuel which they use now. This is not a technical but a political problem. As long as we are not forced by a political will, we shall go on selling the old highly poisonous stuff to the west and to the East. Now, what is the answer of Asian Pentecostals to the initial question knowing that many - not all - of the climatic catastrophes are human-made? Knowing that some of the Pacific islands and large coastal areas in Asia will be flooded, how do Asian Pentecostals face the forthcoming collapse of the climate? And how do they inform their fellow Pentecostals in Europe and America? What do they expect from them, especially those who are in influential positions?

6. Capitalism

The fourth question is the most important one. I am looking for help from Asian Pentecostals on what I consider the most dangerous syncretism (most dangerous because it is unconscious), namely the syncretism of Christianity with capitalism. Part of this essay was presented to the European Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Conference in Prague (1997). With flimsy excuses the final part of the paper was suppressed. Why? Something is refused when it is either highly relevant or highly irrelevant. Which one it is I leave to the reader. The organizers of the conference preferred to sing "Hallelujah" and to pretend that when the Holy Spirit comes things will get better. That is of course true but I would like to know: How does this Holy Spirit enlighten us this difficult issue.

I want to give some background on this question. It is based on the work of Jane Collier, a lecturer in economics at the University of Cambridge, who under my supervision wrote a doctoral dissertation on the topic: Can managers and economists be converted?²⁴ By conversion she meant not only a religious experience but, following Lonergan, also a cognitive process.

Jane Collier was disappointed that church leaders always argued morally on television when they commented on economics, instead of tackling the technical arguments of the economists. They used *their* language instead of using the language of the economists. Moral arguments are in this instance irrelevant because the economists say: The mechanics of economy are given. Whether we like it or not, the Thames flows downwards into the sea. No argument, whether theological or moral, can change this law of nature. It is the same with the free market system. It functions according to given laws of nature.

Instead of arguing morally, Mrs. Collier took up this technical argument and said: Economics is not a neutral science which informs us on the mechanism of economy. It uses hidden and open prejudices and value judgments. These value judgments Mrs. Collier calls "the culture of economism." In our biblical example they would correspond to the thrones and powers, the cosmic forces of the cosmos. Mrs. Collier proves that these value judgments function only as part of a secular faith option, a religion which believes to be a science. Her disappointment with the church leaders was based on the fact that they argued morally instead of calling economists to scientific honesty. One cannot expect economists to be moral. But one can expect them to be good scholars.

And that is what Mrs. Collier does in her work. She remains strictly within the framework of economics and shows how their decision - like all so-called scientific decisions - are always also determined by faith options. She shows convincingly that the culture of economism is a faith option. That is the right of economists. Otherwise they could not function. Only they should call their faith option a faith option and not a given scientific law. In her chapter on conversion, Mrs. Collier proceeds to show that there are also other faith options for economists, namely those which do not "believe" in the powers and thrones and reckon with the fact that Christ has taken their authority away.

Here we have a theologically responsible syncretism. The gods of capitalism are not denied. The worldview of the free market economy is not denied *a priori*. Like Paul in the epistle to the Colossians, she does not say: Your mechanisms and powers are not in the Bible, therefore they do not exist. Instead she regards this worldview as open for a theological syncretism. So she does not recognize the absolute power of economy; she sees them as belonging to the created world, which means that they can be questioned, changed and re-arranged. On the basis of this, she says to the economists: Economics is not - as you say - an objective science, but a faith option. We can prove this to you by the very instruments you use. We want to show you the consequences of your system. Is it really the best system that you can come up with? We theologians do not know which would be a better system. But we call on your scholarly ambition to come up with something better. If you put *your* faith aside for a moment you might come to other insights.

A system which depends on producing enormous surpluses on the one hand and miserable hunger on the other, which needs the stimulus of a huge arms industry and produces armies of unemployed - such a system can surely not be the best you can think of! A system which forces a little girl of twelve to write the following poem cannot be the best which you can invent:

*My mother is called sorrow.
In summer she cares for water.
In winter she cares for coal
and the whole year through for rice,
During the day she cares for daily food,
during the night she cares for her children
and each day is filled with sorrow.*

*That's why my mother is called sorrow
and my father is called raving madness through drunkenness.
And I am called tears and sadness.*

7. Conclusion

To come back to the beginning of this article, it seems to me that missionaries from the west are hardly qualified for missionary work in Russia or elsewhere as long as they do not recognize that their own culture of economism is highly idolatrous, and that their own churches and theologies are heavily syncretistic. Perhaps one of the more important missionary tasks would be to ask: What would be a theologically responsible syncretism between Christianity and capitalism? This question is not asked insistently enough - certainly not in missionary circles - despite the fact that the so-called free market economy is certainly not in line with the teachings of Christ and his apostles.

So, my question to Asian Pentecostals who have experienced both the blessings and the curses of modern capitalism and many of whom are now in responsible positions²⁵ is this: What, in your opinion, are the ingredients of a theologically responsible syncretism between capitalism and Christianity in your culture? What has to change and what should be kept? With whom do we have to hammer out such a type of syncretism? Or do you perhaps say - as I have heard many times in charismatic circles-: The Holy Spirit, which we know, is silent on this question. He only judges that which happens in the *bedrooms* and not that which happens in the *boardrooms*? Is that the Holy Spirit in which we believe?

References

¹ Published originally in a different form under the title "A Plea for a Theologically Responsible Syncretism," *Missionalia* 25 (1997), pp. 5-18.

² William Saayman, "It Depends on How They Come: Some Preliminary Reflections on Foreign Mission Assistance to Russia," *Missionalia* 24 (1996), pp. 249-60. Saayman is the General Secretary of the Southern African Missiological Society and the head of the Department of Missiology, University of South Africa, Pretoria.

³ Saayman, p. 249.

⁴ Saayman, p. 256.

⁵ Saayman, p. 257.

⁶ Vladimir Fedorov, "New Religious Movements: An Orthodox Perspective," *Current Dialogue* 31 (Dec. 1997), pp. 2-20, published by WCC, Geneva.

⁷ Saayman, pp. 259-60.

⁸ Leonardo Boff, *Igreja, carisma e poder* (Petropolis, Brazil: Voces, 1985). English translation: *Church, Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*, trans. John W. Diercksmeier (London: SCM, 1985), pp. 92ff.

⁹ This is of course a sweeping statement. It is discussed and substantiated in detail in my *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997).

¹⁰ Walter J. Hollenweger, *Conflict in Corinth: Memoirs of an Old Man* (New York: Paulist, 1982). Indian edition under the title *Memoirs of a Babylonian Exile* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1985). Indonesian edition under the title *Konflik di Korintus & Buku kenangan seorang tua, Dua certia yang memben terang tentang cara Kitab Suci ditulis* (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Yayasan Kanisius, 1984).

¹¹ This epistemological problem is discussed in detail in Hollenweger, *Geist und Materie*, *Interkulturelle Theologie 3* (Munich and Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser and Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1988).

¹² Ernst Lange, *Predigen ist mein Beruf* (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1976), p. 83.

¹³ Carl Gustav Jung, "Ueber die Beziehung der Psychotherapie zur Seelsorge: Psychoanalyse und Seelsorge (1932/48)," *Gesammelte Werke IV* (Zurich and Stuttgart, 1963), pp. 355-83, quote, p. 362.

¹⁴ Harvey Cox, *Turning East - the Promise and Peril of the New Orientalism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1977), p. 133. See also the clear and strong criticism of Pentecostal scholars on some of the more flamboyant "healing evangelists," resumé in Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, ch. 18 ("Signs and Wonders").

¹⁵ I used the commentaries by Ed. Schweizer, *Der Brief an die Kolosser* (Zurich and Neukirchen: Neukirchner Verlag, 1976) and Joh. Lähnmann, *Der Kolosserbrief. Komposition, Situation und Analyse* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1971).

¹⁶ See pp. 55-56 for the discussion on Wonsuk Ma.

¹⁷ The Psalm of the Naassenes is a contemporary hymn "directly suited to performance in the theatre," in A. von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1931), p. 438. For an English version of this psalm see *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, V, p. 58 (Hippolytus V, lo. 2)

¹⁸ See below the discussion on capitalism, pp. 57-59.

¹⁹ Wonsuk Ma, "Toward an Asian Pentecostal Theology," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 1 (1998), pp. 15-41, quote, p. 22. See also Hollenweger, "Theology and the

Future of the Church" in *Companion Encyclopedia of Theology*, eds. Peter Byrne and Leslie Houlden (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), lo. 17-35. On evangelism not only *at* but *with* those together we want to evangelize see Hollenweger, "Evangelism - a non-Colonial Model," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 7 (1995), pp. 1-22.

²⁰ An example in chapter 9 in the book mentioned note 9, "England: Interaction Between Black and White in Theological Education."

²¹ Wonsuk Ma, p. 29

²² Wonsuk Ma, p. 30.

²³ Wonsuk Ma, p. 35 n. 38.

²⁴ Jane Collier, *The Culture of Economism: An Exploration of Barriers to Faith-as-Praxis*, Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity 65 (Frankfurt, New York: Peter Lang, 1990).

²⁵ William W. Menzies, "Reflections of a Pentecostal at the End of the Millenium: An Editorial Essay," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 1 (1998), pp. 3-14, quote, p. 12.

BOOK REVIEW

[[HTTP://www.apeo.edu/ajps/99-1/99-1-a-yong.htm](http://www.apeo.edu/ajps/99-1/99-1-a-yong.htm)]

***Kosuke Koyama: A Model for Intercultural Theology* by Merrill Morse, *Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity*, No. 17. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1991. Pp. xiv + 317.**

***Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* by Hwa Yung, *Regnum Studies in Mission*. Oxford: Regnum Books International, 1997. Pp. xi + 273. \$16.00.**

These two volumes can be read together profitably. Both are revised Doctor of Missiology dissertations focused on the development of an Asian Christian theology. The differences are the contrasting methods and results that emerge from comparing the Lutheran Morse's presentation of the United Church of Christ theologian, Kosuke Koyama, and the Methodist-Evangelical Hwa Yung's development of a viable Asian Christian theology of mission.

For those interested in one of the earliest and most sustained efforts to construct an Asian Christian theology, Morse's book on Koyama is necessary preliminary reading. Admittedly, Morse does not attempt to present a complete treatment of Koyama's theology, nor is this a full-length intellectual or theological biography. Rather, Morse's objective is far more selective in that he focuses on themes related to what he calls Koyama's "theology of encounter"—a theology that has emerged from Koyama's experiences as a child born and raised in Japan and as an adult learning, teaching and ministering in Thailand, New Zealand, and the United States.

To accomplish his limited goal, Morse divides his book into three parts. The first treats Koyama's biographical, cultural, and theological context, including discussions of his experiences of World War II and its aftermath, the influences of his theological predecessors in Japan (Kagawa, Uchimura, and Kitamori), and his studies at Drew and Princeton. The second highlights aspects of Koyama's "theology of encounter": his worldview and understanding of theology, contextualization, and history; his hermeneutical method; his christology, "neighborology" (the importance of neighborly relations not only to Christian existence but also to Christian thinking—i.e., Christian theology in the Asian context), and theology of the "crucified mind" (developed from Luther's "theology of the cross"); and his theology of other religions. These last two aspects of Koyama's theology are evaluated in light of their ethical, theoretical, and anthropological implications. In the final part, the theological genre (narrative rather than systematic), method (experiential rather than dogmatic), and language (story-oriented, symbolic, and paradoxical rather than logocentric) employed by Koyama are examined, and some conclusions are suggested about Koyama's theology as a missionary theology.

The reader is left with the very distinct impression that Koyama's contribution to Asian Christian theology is thoroughly biblical, fundamentally christological, contextually relevant, and decidedly ecumenical, in both the inter-Christian and in the interreligious senses of the term. Those who are previously acquainted with Koyama's work, or who are led by Morse to read him for themselves will find that to be the case. Particularly admirable is Koyama's ability to bring together the biblical tradition with the historical, existential, and religio-cultural experiences of Asians. Yet it is also the case that Koyama's theology is still a theology *in via*. Morse underscores the sense that even at this juncture, Koyama is "perhaps a forerunner to future Asian theology" (p. 263).

Hwa Yung's *Mangoes or Bananas?* also suggests that even with Koyama's contributions, Asian theology as a whole is still on its way. His reasoning, however, is not that of Morse's. Hwa's thesis is that a truly indigenous Asian Christian theology has yet to emerge insofar as previous Asian Christian theological contributions have been held captive by western presuppositions, concerns and methods. Thus, for example, he concurs with missiologists like Charles Kraft and anthropologists like Paul Hiebert that Enlightenment rationality has bequeathed to the contemporary mind what Hiebert calls the "flaw of the excluded middle": the arbitrary reduction of reality to two tiers—phenomenal and noumenal, to use Kantian language—that contemptuously dismisses or purposefully ignores the middle realm of spiritual and demonic beings. This has resulted in less than fully contextualized theologies that have only superficially engaged Asian cultures and mentalities which include ancestors and complex layers of cosmological spirits. Asian Christian theologies have therefore to date been more akin to bananas (Asian-yellow on the outside, but Western-white on the inside) than mangoes (the quintessential Asian fruit representing an authentic homegrown theological product).

More adequate contextual Asian Christian theologies, Hwa suggests, must therefore be theologies of mission or missiological theologies. With this in mind, he develops four criteria by which to assess Asian Christian theologies: (A) their ability to address the diverse socio-political Asian contexts in which the Churches find themselves; (B) the empowerment they bring to the evangelistic and pastoral tasks of the Churches; (C) the means by which they facilitate the inculturation of the Gospel; and (D) their faithfulness to the Christian tradition. Thus, he demonstrates how pre-World War II Asian theologies were defective on at least one or more of these criteria—i.e., how Mateo Ricci was overly accommodative, thus failing (D); how Sadhu Sundar Singh was not much concerned with (A); and how Kagawa's secularized mentality prevented him from placing a more central emphasis on evangelism (B).

Hwa proceeds to argue that more recent Asian Christian theologies have also heretofore been less than adequate when measured by the criteria proposed—a failure attributable in large part to their being infected with Enlightenment dualistic thinking. Evaluated and found wanting are ecumenical thinkers like D. T. Miles, who neglects the "excluded middle" and tends toward universalism; M. M. Thomas, whose weak ecclesiology negatively affects evangelism; C. S. Song, whose theology is missiologically weak as a result of going too far in accommodating the Gospel to Asia; Koyama, who also falls prey to the "excluded middle" and whose faithfulness to the Christian tradition is

compromised by his stance toward other religions; Minjung theologians in Korea, who are much more western in their thinking than Korean; conservatives like evangelicals in the Asian Theological Association, who are weakest in socio-political engagement and still too captive to western categories for successful inculturation; Vinay Samuel, who relativizes biblical truths and themes as a concession to dualistic modes of thinking; and Cho Yong-gi, who is weakest in developing the socio-political implications of the Gospel due to a dualism between Church and society, Gospel and culture. Hwa concludes his final chapter—"Toward an Asian Christian Theology"—with some suggestions about what such a theology should look like in light of the successes and failures of these other efforts, and in light of the criteria developed in this book.

A number of questions are sure to surface in any careful reading of Hwa's book. First, Hwa faults previous attempts to develop an Asian Christian theology for their being too "western"; yet, the facts that approximately one-third of the more than 360 bibliographic entries are from Asian sources and all the mentors of this dissertation are westerners (faculty of Asbury Theological Seminary), raises the question of whether Hwa's own emerging theology is similarly tainted.

Secondly, Hwa's assessment of the weaknesses of conservative theologies seems to be right on the mark. His own constructive proposals for the future direction of Asian Christian theology are designed in part to push conservatives beyond the boundaries that they have thus far been reluctant to explore. By so doing, Hwa seems to be conscious of the fact that evangelicals have been hindered as much by dualistic categories as ecumenists, and that evangelicals need to break through their own cultural captivity to the West in order to develop an authentic Asian Christian theology. But Hwa does not seem to realize that his own proposals may push conservatives in the direction of ecumenists like Koyama. Hwa in fact draws positively from Koyama's work at a number of places in his book, even if his own extended assessment of Koyama was mainly negative. It is clear that Hwa is familiar with Koyama's work. But, it is equally clear that only elements of Koyama were presented that fit Hwa's thesis, resulting in an overall distortion of Koyama's theological contributions.

Thirdly, Hwa expends much energy exposing the inadequacy of the western theological paradigm, based as it is on Enlightenment dualistic categories. His argument that Christian theology has yet to achieve emancipation from the West and genuine contextualization and inculturation in Asia, is surely successful. Yet, Hwa does not in turn suggest what kind of worldview would be superior for the emergence of a genuine Asian Christian theology. If "dualism" is to be discarded, is "monism" now favored? Hwa never comes out and says that an Eastern worldview is to be preferred to that of the Enlightenment West. On the one hand, this may be what is implied by his suggestion that a fully contextualized Asian Christian theology must be presented and comprehensible in Asian categories. On the other hand, his treatment of theologians like Thomas, Song, and Koyama would seem to suggest that the Asian worldview is the object toward which inculturation is directed rather than the framework within which theologizing occurs. It would seem that Hwa advocates a "biblical" worldview. Does this refer to a Hebraic-Semitic, a classical-Hellenistic or an Eastern Orthodox paradigm? Hwa does discuss the

classical worldview, and suggests that Asian Christian theologians would benefit from an encounter with the patristic fathers. But his reading of the fathers is itself dependent on westerners (E. L. Mascall and Thomas Oden; similarly, Hwa's rejection of theological pluralism with regard to other religious traditions seems to rely on the work of Western evangelicals like Harold Netland). What does his own constructive proposal consist of? Perhaps if Hwa had included in his analysis and assessment Catholic thinkers like Raimundo Panikkar, Bede Griffiths, and Aloysius Pieris, or other Protestants like Stanley Samartha or those affiliated with the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA), he may have been forced to confront this question more straightforwardly. Rather than simply rejecting Panikkar's and Samartha's work as tainted with Advaita Vedantism, or dismissing Pieris for his recourse to Buddhist praxis and spirituality, or labeling ATESEA thinkers as Christian-Confucian syncretists—none of which he does, but which would be easy enough for any evangelical to do, Hwa would have had to more clearly identify and delimit options available to Christian theologians in arguing against these Asian-based theologies.

Finally, and most importantly for readers of this journal, one wishes that Hwa would have engaged more of the Pentecostal-Charismatic tradition than Cho Yong-gi. Hwa's treatment of Cho is fair; he even goes so far as to suggest that in the long run, Cho's advocacy of social response at the micro-level may be more effective than the strategies of Minjung theologians targeted at the macro-level. Cho also rates highly for his evangelistic emphases and his efforts at contextualizing the Gospel in Korea. Cho is challenged for elements of incoherence running through his theology. Yet, other Asian Pentecostals such as those associated with the Pentecostal Society for Theological Studies (Bangalore) and the Asia Pentecostal Theological Association (Manila) have more recently contributed to just those areas of weaknesses that Hwa discerns. Further, because of Pentecostalism's emphasis on the experiential and bodily aspect of spirituality, there may even be grounds for a Pentecostal dialogue with and critique of Asian religions and spiritualities that could contribute to the kind of missiological theology envisioned by Hwa.

With this said, however, Hwa Yung has clearly identified important elements that need to be cultivated in a "mango" theology as well as necessary aspects to be avoided in "banana" theologies. Adding a clearly conservative voice to voices like Koyama's can only serve to bring Asian Christians closer to the development of a truly indigenous Asian Christian theology. May Asian Pentecostals read both, take them to heart, and be empowered by the Spirit to contribute to this task.

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P. O. Box 377

Baguio City 2600, Philippines