Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies

The Mission of the Church in Asia and Beyond

THE JOURNAL SEEKS TO PROVIDE A FORUM: To encourage serious thinking and articulation by Pentecostals/Charismatics in Asia in all disciplines within the field of Pentecostal studies; to promote interaction among Asian Pentecostals/Charismatics and dialogue with other Christian traditions; to stimulate creative contextualization of the Christian faith; and to provide a means for Pentecostals/Charismatics to share their theological reflections.

EDITORIAL

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Mission of the Church in Asia and Beyond

Dave Johnson, DMiss

In this edition, we will take a broad, up-to-date look at the mission of the Church in Asia and beyond as it relates to worship, care for its members, ministerial training and engagement, and ministry to the world. The complexity of encountering our swiftly changing world with the timeless claims of Jesus Christ is reflected in the fact that Christianity is more global than it has ever been. This then requires engagement with a multitude of other cultures, global and local religions, and a host of other matters, including the rapid, technology-driven changes impacting our Global Village.

Monte Lee Rice leads this edition with a discussion on Pentecostal worship, with a slightly different twist on a theology of one of Pentecostalism's traditionally strong foci, the altar. Noting Pentecostalism's tendency to focus more on doing than reflecting, he notes that little has been done to develop a theology of the altar.

Rice's twist here is to see the altar call as a "foundational liturgical rite," a description that would likely have been frowned upon by early Pentecostals, but Rice makes a good case for his point of view. He posits the altar call in the Azusa Street Revival's salvation theology discourse as not only "effecting charismatic experience, but also fostering social inclusiveness" in responding to God together. He goes on to argue that at the altar, believers offer themselves as a sacrifice to God for use in his Kingdom to bring his hope to a hurting world. In doing so, he contends, "we discharge the priestly work (*leitourgia*) of invoking Holy Spirit outpouring on our offerings of thanksgiving to Christ, who commissions us for God's saving purpose."

Jemon Subang's article brings into focus the mission of the church as a corporate body, seeking to edify and build up its members. The specific issue for Subang is the controversy over whether churches should continue online services in the post-pandemic era. While there are some undeniable advantages to online worship, such as ministering to those who are ill and unable to come or those who have never heard the gospel or for some other reason would not consider attending a church, there are also some significant drawbacks. This is what Subang

deals with here. He "aims to show that (1) vibrant and healthy relationships in the church cannot be established through the use of digital technology, and (2) the deep level of relationships between people, including the dynamics of Christian love and service taught and required in the NT, demand in-person gathering. For these reasons, there is a pressing need to inspire, encourage, and provoke Christian churches to continue their in-person gatherings. The church community is integral to the holistic development of the Christian life. Human relationships are built and sustained through meaningful communication." In response to these considerations, the church he pastors ceased online services after the pandemic. This article will be a welcome inclusion to the debate.

Joel Tejedo adds to the discussion about the mission of the church with his study, funded by the John Templeton Foundation, on two mega-churches in Manila, Victory Christian Fellowship and Christ Commission Fellowship. Both are indigenous to the Philippines and fit the definition of Third Wave Pentecostals, although neither of them identifies themselves as such. His focus here is on how these two bodies generate spiritual capital in serving their members and communities.

He asks and answers questions like, "What attracts and predetermines vibrant, healthy, and growing megachurches in the Philippines? While there have been increasing studies on spiritual capital, few studies have been undertaken about the nature of the spiritual capital within mega-churches." He contends that when we have answered these questions, we can "unlock the enigma of why and how mega-churches have grown in the Global South."

Then Mark Rodli, an Assemblies of God missionary to Thailand, takes us down the road of the Church's mission as it relates to training ministers, focusing on the Thailand Assemblies of God Seminary, which provides training programs ranging from a diploma to a master's degree. Admitting the school's checkered history of occasional closings, low enrollment, and other issues which have impaired the growth of the school, he suggests that the school's newest initiative, a "diploma-level Leadership Development Program (LDP), holds promise of helping propel the Thailand Assemblies of God (TAG) into future growth." He then sets out to, "(1) examine the current educational approach in Thailand and the cultural factors that drive it, (2) outline a brief history of TAGS' development, (3) discuss the way(s) that the LDP fits well for the TAG, and (4) spell out its implications for the TAG." Given the experimental nature of the project, time will tell if the LDP is fruitful.

Finally, Lew Belcourt and Rebekah Bled's articles deal with the mission of the Church in its relationship to the world. Belcourt, a missionary to Indonesia, adds to the discussion of mission in places where Christians are in the minority and, as is often the case, persecuted.

He begins by looking at how the early Church, founded in the days of the polytheistic Roman Empire and often antagonistic to the church, dealt with persecution. Then, he moves to the Church in present-day Indonesia and explores Indonesian theologians' responses to persecution in its psychological, economic, and physical aspects. He then suggests how Indonesian believers can cope with the persecution in a way pleasing to God and "reach out to their Muslim neighbors with the love of Jesus Christ."

Rebekah Bled concludes this edition with a look at Christ's mandate to the church to go and make disciples of all nations. She begins by looking at the "broad categories of proclamation and social action as a response to this mandate." She then follows through on how this is being worked out on a global scale in what she claims is a unique, contextualized, Spirit-filled fashion, in Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

Before signing off, I need to announce some changes in our personnel. First, Frank McNelis, after ten years of exemplary service, has retired as our senior editor. Frank has been an incredible blessing to both APTS Press and this Journal and a great friend to me. I will miss him! He has been replaced by Larry Brooks, who is still in training and will increasingly take on a stronger role on our publishing team. Second, Adrian Rosen has stepped down as our book review editor and I am grateful for his service. He greatly enhanced our book review section. He has been replaced by Lora Timenia, a member of the APTS faculty who is currently working on her PhD at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

As always, you are welcome to contact me through our website, www.aptspress.org or through my personal email, dave.johnson@apts.edu. God bless you richly!

Dave Johnson, DMiss
Managing Editor

Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Altar

By Monte Lee Rice

INTRODUCTION[1]

In the 1970s, world Pentecostalism began producing an ecumenically recognized scholarship guild focusing on the movement's historiography and biblical studies to argue its beliefs about Spirit baptism and glossolalia. Yet at that time, Pentecostal scholarship 'father' Walter Hollenweger[2] posited a thesis which history has proved true—that the most important contribution of Pentecostalism to world Christianity lies not in any theological stress, such as pneumatology, but in its oral liturgy.[3] However, only within the past decade have Pentecostal studies embarked on a notable liturgical turn focusing on the tradition's liturgical life and generating a growing corpus of liturgical theologies. Unfortunately, there seems to be no published work assessing this production.

In my recently defended dissertation,[4] I provided an assessment by critically inquiring how those at the forefront of world Pentecostal liturgical theology are constructing liturgical theologies in ways which envision the flourishing that Pentecost signifies.[5] As one facet comprising my theological method, I followed an orientation known as the liturgy as

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[1]The original version of this paper was presented at the 31st Annual William Menzies Lectureship January 30-February 3, 2023. Asia Pacific Theological Seminary.

[2] D. William Faupel, "Walter J. Hollenweger: Charting the Pathway of Pentecostal Historiography," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 41, no. 1 (2021): 20-34 (20).

[3]Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, 3rd ed. (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd., 1972; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers: 1976), 466; idem, "The Ecumenical Significance of Oral Christianity," *The Ecumenical Review* 41, no. 2 (April 1989): 259-265 (264-265).

[4]Monte Lee Rice, "On the Altar, Willed to Pentecost: A Critical Enquiry on Emerging Forays in World Pentecostal Liturgical Theology" (PhD diss., Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, 2023).

[5]Namely, Tanya Riches, Worship and Social Engagement in Urban Aboriginal-led Australian Pentecostal Congregations, Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies 32 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2019); Daniela Augustine, The Spirit and the Common God: Shared Flourishing in the Image of God (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2019); Chris E.W. Green, Sanctifying Interpretation: Vocation, Holiness, and Scripture, 2nd ed. (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2020),;and Wolfgang Vondey, Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel (London, UK: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017).

primary theology movement, which defines liturgy as 'the church at prayer' (*ecclesia orans*).[6] Yet I discovered that Pentecostal experience accentuates this as more pointedly being, 'the church at prayer on the altar *(ecclesia orans in altari)*.

A pivotal movement towards this realization came through engaging the work of Pentecostal theologian Wolfgang Vondey, who provides the most comprehensive effort towards articulating a Pentecostal liturgical theology implicit within Pentecostal spirituality. He shows this through his 2017 ground-breaking work, *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel*. In it, he chronicles how Pentecostal experiences, practices, and beliefs traditioned in the Full Gospel have emerged through liturgical practices consistently observed in phenomenological studies of Pentecostal spirituality worldwide.[7] From his data, he suggests that the Pentecostal fivefold Christological motifs of Christ as Savior, Sanctifier, Spirit-baptizer, Healer and soon-coming King translate globally expansive Pentecostal altar-centric-grounded worship practices and experiences into a world Pentecostal liturgical theology.[8] More specifically, the Full Gospel expresses a theological narrative structuring Pentecostal spirituality[9] centered on its liturgical practice of encountering God at the altar.[10] Vondey posits how as the tradition's foundational worship practice—the altar call/response rite—functions as the source, center and summit of Pentecostal worship.[11]

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[6]Joris Geldhof, "Liturgical Theology," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*. Oxford University Press, 2017, accessed July 28, 2017, 2, 11, http://religion.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-14.

[7]Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 15, 17-18, 26, 30-32, 291; idem, "Embodied Gospel: The Materiality of Pentecostal Theology," in *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion: Vol. 8: Pentecostals and the Body*, ed., Michael Wilkinson and Peter Althouse (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2017), 103.

[8]Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 7-9, 15, 20, 31-32.

[9]Ibid., 21-24, 288-289.

[10]Ibid., 8-9, 25-26, 31-32, 282-283, 289.

[11]Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 5-6, 31, 40-43, 57-62, 84-85, 132, 267, 282, 289-292. The liturgical turn within Pentecostal studies has consistently noted the altar call/response rite as foundational within Pentecostal worship. Two other recently notable works exploring this are—Daniel Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments: Encountering God at the Altar*, rev. ed. (Charleston, SC: Daniel Tomberlin, 2015); Josh P. S. Samuel, *The Holy Spirit in Worship Music, Preaching, and the Altar: Renewing Pentecostal Corporate Worship* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2018). On how the term 'rite' aptly conceptualizes altar event from a ritual studies approach, see Daniel E. Albrecht, "Rites in the Spirit": A Ritual Approach to Pentecostal/Charismatic Spirituality, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series* 17 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 131-133, 165-166.

A Theological Analysis of Pentecostal Experience of the Altar

Although we may describe the above as an altar theology, Vondey has not yet attempted a Pentecostal theology of the altar; nor have I observed a substantial attempt at such, notwithstanding a long-sustained recognition towards its centrality. I thus realized that this warranted a briefly constructed Pentecostal theology of the altar, which I believe we can best achieve by assessing the liturgical *ordo* operative within Pentecostal liturgy.

Ordo is a ecumenical term referring to not only the basic structure/shape of Christian worship, [12] but also the underlying premises and spiritual efficacy mediated through this structure. [13] Liturgical studies have identified three features the *ordo* commonly displays—first, a sequence of word/proclamation and sacrament (Eucharist);[14] second, commonly framing these are the observed rites of gathering for worship; and then third, a sending forth to the world.[15] The *ordo* thus consistently conveys a liturgical direction by formalizing these movements towards and from that middle point, which we may designate as the actual worship event.[16]

My construction of a Pentecostal theology of the altar thus considers the following themes—(1) methodological insights from Graham Hughes' liturgical theology, (2) discerning the o*rdo* plot within Azusa Street worship, (3) Azusa sanctification experience as Mimesis₂,[17] (4)

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[12]Martha Moore-Keish, "The Importance of Worship that Centers on the *Ordo*," *Liturgy* 21, no. 2 (2006): 15-23 (15); Arlo D. Duba, "The *Ordo*: The Center of Liturgical Reform: Towards the Establishment of the Association for Reformed & Liturgical Worship—a 2004 expansion of material presented to a meeting in Seattle, WA, July 5, 2003," *Liturgy* 20, no. 2 (2005): 9-22 (10, 14-15). Highly influential towards this trend was Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Glasgow, UK: Dacre Press, 1945, 1949), xi-xiii. The term originated from medieval liturgical instructions on rightly ordering Christian liturgy. A notable example is the 7th century document prescribing the Latin mass, *Ordo Romanus Primus*; Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 131-132, 411-414, 522, 589-592, 620.

[13]Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 33; Moore-Keish, "The Importance of Worship," *Liturgy*, 15; Alexander Schmemann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 39.

[14]Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 62-70; Lathrop, *Holy Things*, 51-52.

[15]Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, 63, 128-146 (esp. 129-130); Geoffrey Wainwright, *Worship with One Accord: Where Liturgy & Ecumenism Embrace* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 31-32. On the symbolic significance of these framing rites, see Graham Hughes, *Worship as Meaning: A Liturgical theology for Late Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 166-169. The result is this four-phased sequential *ordo* of gathering; word/proclamation. Eucharist/sacrament (i.e., reflecting common Protestant sequence; Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions practice Eucharist prior to Word); and sending; 166-167.

[16]Hughes, *Worship as Meaning*, 154-156.

[17]As I shall later explain, "Mimesis₂" refers to the second stage of philosopher Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative emplotment, comprising three sequential stages: Mimesis₁, Mimesis₂ and Mimesis₃. As a unique convention, Ricoeur consistently used the subscript for distinguishing these three different phases. I will thus adhere to his convention.

how the Pentecostal altar effects God-pleasing sacrifice, and (5) how the Pentecostal altar rite functions within cosmic liturgy. Each of these themes will now be addressed.

Methodological Insights from Graham Hughes' Liturgical Theology

I find clarity through Anglican liturgical theologian Graham Hughes' liturgical theology of meaningful worship.[18] He argues that worship is meaningful when it effects 'limit experiences' at the vocative edge of that alterative Other, which Christian faith calls God.[19] He defines limit experiences (or experiences of limit) as events that bring us to the brink of what we can manage.[20] Thus, a limit experience within worship is that event, along the *ordo*, wherein God's Spirit brings one to that edge between human manageability and the unmanageable summoning presence of God[21]—when one experiences his manifest presence.[22]

Yet Hughes convincingly stresses that also requisite to worship is how well the *ordo* fosters and works in tandem with the human drive towards what philosopher Paul Ricoeur called emplotment (or narrative

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[18]Hughes relies on 20th century meaning/semiotic theories (particularly Charles Sanders Pierce) coupled with embodiment studies positing the role of nonverbal behaviors towards meaning-making (*Worship as Meaning*, 16-30, 118-127) for assessing how well a liturgy affects a meaningful worship experience; 11, 30-31, 115-116. He thus stresses three criteria towards a meaningful worship event—(1) 'reasonableness, in that it should make cognitive sense; (2) 'multisensory signification,' for meanings/meaningfulness require not only verbal, but also appropriate nonverbal channels; and (3) 'renewed theistic reference,' in that the event fosters spiritual maturation within the human-God relation and thus a more theologically competent reading of the world; 31-42. This present study focuses on Hughes' third criteria, which he stresses as being 'the main aim of worship; 63, 225, 254, 255.

[19]Hughes derives his edge' metaphor from Roman Catholic liturgical theologian Aidan Kavanagh's thesis that "Liturgy leads [its practitioners] regularly to the *edge of chaos* [italics mine] and that from this regular flirt with doom comes a theology different from any other;" Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, The Hale Memorial Lectures of Seabury-Eastern Theological Seminary, 1981 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 73, quoted in *Worship as Meaning*, 75 (also 227); see also 225-227, 255, 257-277. In Levinasian terms, Hughes describes this experience as vocative, for there God as the alterative Other summons a claim over us, summoning our "s" to his evoking Face, which the liturgy mediates before us; 280-285.

[20]Hughes, *Worship as Meaning*, 159-160, 260-275 296; see Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 2nd ed., trans. by John W. Harvey (London, UK: Geoffrey Cumberledge, 1923, 1950), 12.

[21]Hughes, *Worship as Meaning*, 75-75, 148, 159, 180-181, 225-227, 257, 275-277, 283-285, 295; see Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*, 73.

[22]Hughes, *Worship as Meaning*, 150-151. On manifest presence, see Vondey, "Pentecostal Sacramentality and the Theology of the Altar," in *Scripting Pentecost: A Study of Pentecostals, Worship and Liturgy*, ed. Mark J. Cartledge and A. J. Swoboda (London, UK: Routledge, 2017), 100.

configuration), which we may otherwise call a narrative-formed identity.[23] Following Aristotle, Ricoeur identified three sequential mimetic actions or stages (*mimesis praxeōs,* meaning making a representation), [24] which together forms the following three-step process—Mimesis$_1$/Prefiguratio (pre-narrative structure/understanding); Mimesis$_2$/Configuration, and Mimesis$_3$/Refiguration.[25] Especially crucial to Hugh's Ricoeurean reading of the *ordo* is the liminal role Ricoeur attributes to mimesis$_2$, stressing that, through the power of configuration, it transfigures the first to the third.[26]

After conceptualizing the emplotment theory through his *Time and Narrative* volumes, Ricoeur explained its applications to narrative identity by incorporating within this cycle a dialectical distinction between identity as sameness (Latin, *idem*) and identity as selfhood (*ipse*).[27] He showed how emplotment causes a transition from sameness to a fuller development of human identity—selfhood. [28] However, requisite is configuration. More precisely, for concordant identity formation, the experience of configuration entail admission of discordances that threaten this identity, often through taking away the support of sameness.[29]

Another crucial factor to meaningful worship is how well the *ordo* situates worshippers within liturgical emplotment—the configuring potency of limit experience through a God-encounter causing meaningful worship. The *ordo* thus aims at emplotment, perceiving it

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[23]Hughes, *Worship as Meaning*, 165-166; Paul Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative," in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991), 30-32. Building on Aristotle's emplotment (*muthos* as "plot") theory, Ricoeur defined it as an integrating process that transforms multiple discordant incidents in one singular and hence concordant story/narrative; Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative," in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 20-21; idem, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984, 1990), 65-67. Ricoeur substantially relied on the ancient Greek philosophical *concordia discors* notion that perceived (1) basic elements of earth, air, fire, and water in constant conflict; yet (2) how these often show harmonious coexistence evidenced through the natural aesthetics of living things. This concept accounts for Ricoeur's consistent depiction of emplotment as discordant concordance; William C. Dowling, Ricoeur on *Time and Narrative: An Introduction to Temps et récit* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2011), 6; Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative," in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 21; idem, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 4, 31, 38, 42-44, 66-73, 150.

[24]The resultant narrative represents the previously discordant events; Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 31-34, 53.

[25]Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 53-54, 178; idem, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 2, trans. by Kathleen McLaughlin Pellauer (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 20.

[26]Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 53.

[27]Ricoeur, "Narrative Identity," in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 189; idem, *Oneself as Another*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992, 1994), 2, 114.

[28]Ricoeur, Oneself as Another, 114.

[29]Ibid., 142, 147, 149. Thus, he notes, "Many conversion narratives bear witness to such dark nights of personal identity;" idem, "Narrative Identity," in *On Paul Ricoeur*, 199.

requisite to the limit experience that makes for such worship. To reiterate, most imperative towards the meaning-fullness of worship is its configuring potency[30]—hence, that liminal phase called configuration (Mimesis$_2$).

Vondey convincingly shows how the Full Gospel functions as a liturgical *ordo* operating within Pentecostal corporate worship events.[31] He observes that, as a soteriological narrative hermeneutically situated within Pentecostal spirituality, the Full Gospel plots a person's/community's continuous lifelong movement to, at, and from the altar. Or more specifically: (1) coming to the altar, effecting salvation/saving-conversion experiences; (2) expectant time at the altar, effecting sanctification/sanctifying experiences resulting in a God-encounter, such as; (3) Spirit baptism/empowering and/or (4) healing experiences; followed by (5) release from the altar to the world or commissioning experiences.[32] Vondey states that this narrative comprises ongoing cyclical returns to the altar throughout a person's/community's life.[33] Although he stresses these five plotted points along his altar-centric liturgical narrative, he infers how this narrative boils down to three basic movements—to, at, and from the altar.[34]

By applying Hughes' analysis to his perceived Pentecostal *ordo*, I would wager that this liturgical narrative ultimately boils down to these three basic movements,[35] and then argue that this three-phased *ordo* is his liturgical theology's most significant contribution towards world Pentecostal liturgical theology.[36] Thus, as Vondey shows, this *ordo* is requisite towards soteriologically emplotting within a person/people, the transformationally efficacious God-encounter(s) that the altar signifies within Pentecostal spirituality/worship.[37] The broader Christian *ordo* shows that all Christian traditions generally practice an altar-centric

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[30]Hughes, *Worship as Meaning*, 148-155, 164-166, 169-170.

[31]Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 281-283, 291-294.

[32]Ibid., 6, 9-10, 21-22, 51, 84-85, 108, 132-133, 289-292.

[33]Ibid., 21-22, 51, 289.

[34]Ibid., *Pentecostal Theology*, 8, 84-85; idem, "The Full Gospel: A Liturgical Hermeneutic of Pentecost," in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2020), 175.

[35]Vondey, Pentecostal Theology, 8, 84-85; idem, "The Full Gospel," in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology*, 175.

[36]Ibid., 38-40, 55, 290.

[37]I have devised the term 'emplotting' from Paul Ricoeur's notion of narrative emplotment, which I will soon integrate within this discussion on the Pentecostal *ordo*. Emplotment refers to the human drive towards identifying a plot that integrates random life experiences into a narrative identity; Paul Ricoeur, 'Life in Quest of Narrative,' in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991), 21, 29, 33.

liturgy.[38] However, Pentecostal spirituality differs in that as it over accepts the day of Pentecost, it conversely fosters meaning-full worship by *over accepting* the altar.[39]

Discerning the Emplotting *Ordo* within Azusa Street Worship

In light of the above, I suggest that the thickest potency of Pentecostal liturgy lies at the phenomena transpiring at the altar; which we may identify as the Mimesis$_2$/Configuration stage in the emplotment process within the tradition's *ordo*. Yet, if configuration transpires at the altar, we should consider the effectual role of the substance burning on—thus fuelling—the altar. After all, if we factor in its biblical imagery, an altar is a place for making offerings upon consuming fires. Thus, identifying this substance is crucial toward a Pentecostal theology of the altar.

I find help via Hollenweger's and Steven Land's shared thesis that the first ten years of 20th-century Pentecostalism represent its theological heart and thus most salient resources for its ongoing renewal.[40] I will thus map the preceding themes onto the basic *ordo* I perceive within the Azusa Street Revival's salvation theology discourse and worship experiences archived in its *Apostolic Faith* publication. I do so given the assumption that the Azusa Street Revival was a seminal harbinger of world Pentecostalism[41] and continues to function as an identity-marker within Classical Pentecostalism.[42]

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[38]It parallels the three-phased sequential *ordo* comprising the phases of Gathering and Sending that sandwich the two internal phases of Word/Proclamation and Eucharist/Sacrament; Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, 63, 128-146 (esp. 129-130); Wainwright, *Worship with One Accord*, 31-32. On these two framing rites' symbolic significance, see Hughes, *Worship as Meaning*, 166-169.

[39]Vondey, Pentecostal Theology, 12, 29.

[40]John Christopher Thomas, " 'What the Spirit Is Saying to the Church'—The Testimony of a Pentecostal in New Testament Studies," *Spirit and Scripture: Exploring a Pneumatic Hermeneutic*, ed., Kevin L. Spawn and Archie T. Wright (London, UK: TT Clark International, 2021), 116; idem, "The Spirit, the Text, and Early Pentecostal Reception," in *Receiving Scripture in the Pentecostal Tradition: A Reception History*, eds., Daniel D. Isgrigg, Martin W. Mittelstadt, and Rick Wadholm, Jr. (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2021), 49-92.

[41]Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 23; Allen Anderson, *Spreading Fires: The Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2007), 6, 52-54; Michael McClymond, "'I Will Pour Out My Spirit Upon All Flesh': A Historical and Theological Meditation on Pentecostal Origins," *Pneuma* 37, no. 3 (2015) 356–374 (360-363, 370-374).

[42]Reflecting my dissertation's critical discourse/discursive approach, I define 'discourse' as a body of knowledge produced and transmitted not primarily via a tradition's linguistic texts but via its practices, and 'discursive' as as the embodied behavioral practices that generate and manifest discourse insofar that a tradition institutionalizes them for its formative aims; Michel Foucault, "History of Systems of Thought," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY:

While charismatic phenomena became a discursively defining marker, Michael McClymond and Steven Studebaker both examine how what has not been equally significant towards its self-identity is the empowering racial/social inclusiveness that Azusa Street exemplified.[43] Yet both argue that one can retrieve from the Azusa Street discourse, this vital facet and labor towards it becoming a circulating identity- marker that should also discursively define Classical Pentecostalism.[44] Studebaker does so via his pneumatology-stressing theology of the atonement and McClymond via his strategic essentialism method towards a mediatory approach between monogenesis (singular origin) or polygenesis (multiple origins) reading of world Pentecostal history.[45]

My dissertation's broader analysis has shown that a recurrent theme throughout my interlocutors' trajectories is that Pentecostal experience thickly implies the following dynamic. That through its meaning-full worship, Pentecostal liturgy capacitates worshippers to rightly encounter human alterities for the cause of common good flourishing within shared cosmopolitan-marked geographies of God's new people willed to Pentecost. I thus believe that these intimations towards a Pentecostal theology of the altar can aid this effort.

Thickly mirroring the biblical Pentecost outpouring against the backdrop of early 20th century American violent-laden racial injustice, the Azusa Street Revival was marked by both an emerging highly diverse, racially inclusive worship community and highly ecstatic charismatic phenomena.[46] These two features together testified to how

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Cornell University Press, 1977), 200. Hence, I describe a practice or text as discursive when within a tradition it significantly generates and illustrates then circulates that tradition's core discourse themes; Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & the Discourse on Language*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1972), 45-46. I use the term 'discursive' not to argue theological or doctrinal legitimacy towards common descriptions of Classical Pentecostalism, but rather to stress their observed identity-marking function, such as commonly stressed reference to Azusa Street as a seminal harbinger to world Pentecostalism.

[43] Steven M. Studebaker, *The Spirit of Atonement: Pentecostal Contributions and Challenges to the Christian Traditions* (London, UK: T&T Clark, Bloomsbury Publishing Co., 2021), 117-118; McClymond, "'I Will Pour Out My Spirit,'" *Pneuma*, 369.

[44] Ibid., 117-118; McClymond, 370-374.

[45] McClymond, 359; 359-360, 368-369. McClymond taps on Michael Bergunder's strategic essentialism concept referring to historical attempts at defining an historical tradition in terms of certain essential traits for serving contemporary agendas. See Michael Bergunder, "The Cultural Turn," *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, ed. Allan H. Anderson, Michael Bergunder, André Droogers and Cornelis van der Laan (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2010), 58, 64.

[46] Studebaker, *The Spirit of Atonement*, 118-119; McClymond, 369-370, 373-374. Note the following quote integrating these phenomena: "Those who know God feel His presence as soon as they cross the threshold... The work began among the colored people... Since then, multitudes have come. God makes no difference in nationality, Ethiopians, Chinese, Indians, Mexicans, and other nationalities worship together"; "The

the Revival's meaning-full worship events were powerfully emplotting seekers of the Pentecostal Blessing into a new people identified by these experienced self-identity-markers.[47] They were thus crucial to the identify-forming meaning of apostolic faith, signifying the experience of Pentecost and thus confessional commitment towards contending its continuation.[48] Together, these markers exemplified William Seymour's and the Revival's consistent rendering of the Pentecostal Blessing and power as God's love binding human alterities into one common family.[49]

To tap on historian Gastón Espinosa's prose, it seems that the Azusa Street altar rite was functioning as a "transgressive social space wherein people from diverse backgrounds" were becoming corporately transformed into this new family.[50] Creating that space was the vocatively summoning limit experience transpiring through its *ordo*'s threshold—i.e., the altar rite. Recall that configuration signifies the turning point (Mimesis$_2$) within emplotment towards the re-figured life (Mimesis$_3$). Thus, I argue that the thickest potency of Pentecostal liturgy towards liminalizing worshippers into this event, lies within the phenomena transpiring at the altar; thus making that the turning point within its emplotting movement.

The Revival's discourse propagated this soteriology through a typology of the Old Testament tabernacle, likening the three salvific experiences to its three sequential spaces—(1) the the brazen altar in the outer court signifying justification, (2) the golden altar in the holy place signifying sanctification, and (3) the most holy place (holy of holies) with its Ark of the Covenant signifying Spirit baptism.[51] This reading rendered justification and sanctification as definitive works of grace,[52] typified by the altars within the

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Same Old Way," *The Apostolic Faith* 1, no. 1 (September 1906), 3. Hereafter, I abbreviate *The Apostolic Faith* as *AF*.

[47]Recall how I defined these as on-the-vocative edge/limit experienced God-encounters sacramentalized through the Holy Spirit's manifest presence; effecting an altering or re-configuring of one's identity (greater self-hood) and hence transforming renewal. In Levinasian terms Hughes describes the edge/limit experience as vocative for there, God as alterative Other summons a claim over us, summoning our 'yes' to his evoking Face which the liturgy mediates before us; Hughes, *Worship as Meaning*, 280-285.

[48]"Contend for the Faith," *Apostolic Faith* 1, no. 1 (September 1906), 3.

[49]"The Pentecostal power, when you sum it all up, is more of God's love... Pentecost means to live right in the 13th chapter of First Corinthians, which is the standard... Pentecost makes us love Jesus more and love our brothers more. It brings us all into on common family"; *Apostolic Faith* 2 no. 13 (May 1908).

[50]Gastón Espinosa, William J. Seymour and the Origins of Global Pentecostalism: A Biography & Documentary History (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 32.

[51]"The Baptism with the Holy Ghost Foreshadowed," *Apostolic Faith* 1 no. 4 (December 1906), 2; "Salvation According to the True Tabernacle," *Apostolic Faith* no. 10 (September 1907), 3.

[52]"The Apostolic Faith Movement," *Apostolic Faith* 1, no. 1 (September 1906), 2.

outer court and the holy place.[53] As the second experienced work of grace, the Azusa Street discourse posited sanctification as a cleansing that made one holy and ready for Spirit baptism.[54] As the holy of holies has no altar, it taught Spirit baptism not as a work of grace but as the gift of power upon the sanctified life.[55]

Following through with the tabernacle typology, the Revival discourse further taught that the Ark of the Covenant located in the holy of holies signified two things I believe are significant to this discussion. First, there is no altar for, at this point, the believer is on the altar continually.[56] Second, being always on the altar, the Spirit-baptized believer stays filled with Shekinah glory, receiving gifts and graces,[57] which comprise the full blessing of Christ.[58] For reasons I will soon delineate, we may well assume that the liturgical actions presumed operative through this metaphoric description ("on the altar") primed the Azusa Street altar rite as a highly meaningfully charged ritual field[59] that was formative within the Revival's worshipping community and broader linked constituency.[60]

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[53]"The Baptism with the Holy Ghost Foreshadowed," *Apostolic Faith,* 2.

[53] Ibid., 2; "Salvation According to the True Tabernacle," *Apostolic Faith*, 3.

[54]"The Apostolic Faith Movement," *Apostolic Faith*, 2; W. J. Seymour, "The Way into the Holiest," *Apostolic Faith* 1, no. 2 (October 1906), 4.

[55]"The Apostolic Faith Movement," *Apostolic Faith*, 2; "The Precious Atonement," *Apostolic Faith* 1, no. 1 (September 1906), 2; Seymour, "The Way into the Holiest," *Apostolic Faith*, 4 ("free gift of power upon the sanctified, cleansed heart").

[56]Seymour, "The Way into the Holiest," *Apostolic Faith*, 4. Note also, "My all is *on* [italics mine] the altar," Emma Cummings, *Apostolic Faith* 1 no. 8 (May 1907), 4 (recalling her Azusa Street altar experience). "There is always a fire in your soul. Why? Because you are *on* [italics mine] the altar . . . The only way men and women can be preserved is by living *on* [italics mine] the altar"; "Salvation According to the True Tabernacle," *Apostolic Faith*, 3.

[57]Constantly receiving gifts and graces; "The Baptism with the Holy Ghost Foreshadowed," *Apostolic Faith*, 2. See Seymour, "The Way into the Holiest," *Apostolic Faith*, 4; "Salvation According to the True Tabernacle," *Apostolic Faith*, 3 ("The fire remains there continually burning in the holiness of God").

[58]"Filling one with continual light; "Salvation According to the True Tabernacle," *Apostolic Faith*, 3.

[59]Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit*, 22, 121-123, 211-212.

[60]Hughes consistently stresses, as another qualitative feature effecting meaningful worship, the iconicity of worship and how that and limited experiences effect emplotment within worship events. 'Iconicity of worship' refers to how well the *ordo* iconically signifies movement to and from God's presence within a time/space designated for encountering God through congregational worship. Iconicity also signifies how well the *ordo* fosters a likeness to how we imagine or should imagine God's presence; Hughes, *Worship as Meaning*, 169. Through this iconicity, worshippers realize they are on sacred ground; 170. He derives the concept from Peirce's notion of "iconic" sign; referring to a sign that not only signifies its object but more significantly, signifies a richly recognizable "commonality or similarity or likeness between the sign-vehicle and the sign's object"; 139, also 35. To illustrate, he refers to the graphic representations we have on computer screens called *icons*, such as half-opened manila folders representing opening a document; 139. I believe that the Pentecostal distinctiveness observed through

Azusa's Sanctification Experience as Mimesis$_2$

I argue that, within the Azusa Street Revival's altar-centric liturgy, the configuring turning point (Mimesis$_2$) generally occurred within the altar event; which its discourse discursively identified as the consecrating experience of sanctification. Such was the experience effecting the subsequent movement called Spirit baptism. The phrase "Spirit baptized" thus designates the re-figured life (Mimesis$_3$).[61]

However, I am not validating the Azusa Steet three-staged soteriology scheme,[62] but simply observing (from Hughes' insights) how, within the Azusa Street discourse, the sanctifying experience at the altar seems to mark the configuring turning point within its communities' liturgical/worship experience.[63]

It is here where we tap into the transforming logic of the revival fires through God's Spirit operative within Pentecostalism (or spiritual maturation). For Pentecostal spirituality suggests I would argue, that spiritual growth comprises growth in charismatic power received through Spirit baptism. And this growth into the pneumatically fuelled charismatic fullness of Christ requires periodic on-the-edge 'dramatic moments of spiritual renewal'[64]—or perhaps, in more vivid terms, 'dramatic moments of God-encounter.' This study, however, has led me to accentuate the configuring experience (Mimesis$_2$) of phenomena transpiring at the altar, towards constructively funding a Pentecostal theology of the altar.

Vondey's Full Gospel theology lies not so much in its observed narrative sequence, but rather in the thick iconicity its *ordo* achieves within Pentecostal liturgy. I especially pinpoint this iconicity to the formational/teleological role that the term Pentecost symbolically plays within Pentecostal spirituality and, consequently, the tradition's altar call/ministry as its foundational rite and summit of Pentecostal liturgy, coupled with its transformational efficacy towards the God-encounter it signifies and sacramentally mediates within Pentecostal worship.

[61]I am not suggesting an absolute categorizing, for surely all three salvific experiences comprise their own uniquely facets—thus recalling Vondey's caveat that we recognize the Full Gospel altar-centric narrative not as a strict programmatic . . . cycle, but rather as a heuristic framework that may comprise entry to the altar from any the five narrative events; Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 13-14, 293.

[62]Concurring with Frank Macchia that justification and sanctification are not soteriological stages but actually overlapping metaphors characterizing all Christian life; Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 214-220; 140; idem, *Justified in the Spirit: Creation, Redemption, and the Triune God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 8-9, 86-92.

[63]For an article exemplifying the role that consecration at the altar plays in meaningful worship within the revival, see, "Victory Follows Crucifixion," *AF* 1, no. 1 (October 1906), 4. ("Think of what hung on that momentous hour that Jesus suffered... God will give you grace for the hour of your opportunity" for "When we get on the resurrection side of the cross, the glory and victory will be unspeakable").

[64]Macchia, Baptized in the Spirit, 32.

How the Pentecostal Altar Effects God-Pleasing Sacrifice

The Azusa Street discourse community intuitively grasped that the altar (being the *axis mundi*; the converging point between heaven and earth) functioned for offering God their bodies as living sacrifices according to the pattern of Romans 12:1-2.[65] At this point I draw help from Anglican liturgical theologian Nathan Jennings' liturgical theology as 'economic anagogy'[66]—namely, positing liturgy as a gift-economy perpetually moving non-bartered/commodified goods within the household of God.[67] Even as economics is about managing resources in ways that best foster flourishing within a household, Jennings demonstrates how God's envisioned flourishing comes through an ascetically practiced, cycling gift-economy.[68] For as we practice gift-giving through sacrifices of praise and our bodies to God, we labor with him in fuelling this economy,[69] thus becoming adept sharers within his household through the grace of giving (2 Corinthians 8-9).[70] Such happens as we thankfully render the property we hold, which we may earlier deem as commodities/capital having market value for something we perceive of equal or higher value, as now gifts for circulation throughout the household for its common-good flourishing.[71]

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[65]In his research, Albrecht observed how Pentecostal worshippers intuitively recognize the altar space/time rite as the *axis mundi* for sacrificing their lives to God for service; *Rites in the Spirit*, 132-133, 166, 206, 236, 247-249.

[66]Situating himself within the liturgy-as-primary-theology movement and the Anglican Platonic tradition, Jennings approaches liturgical theology from an understanding of theology as anagogy. Thus, understanding theology as a search for the highest possible level of human pattern recognition, the "highest being that of the Triune life of God;" ix-x, 1-2 (see also 8-9, 14, 20-23, 123-124). Hence, "Liturgy is a manifestation on earth of the divine economy of the heavens"; thus an "initiation into the divine mystery"; 124. Within liturgy, we discern the gift-exchange pattern of God's divine economy; hence, the economy of salvation; 2, 10, 30, 46, 72-73; esp. 128-129.-

[67]Contrasting with a market economy's requisite goods, exchange of theoretically equal value goods; Jennings, *Liturgy and Theology*, 1, 10-11. He explains how a barter economy exchanges goods for goods deemed of equal value; while market economy abstracted through using money as an arbiter of exchange; 10. His concern is not the rightness of market economy but rather establishing how market and gift economies differ (appropriate for different aims); *Liturgy and Theology*, 10.

[68]Jennings, *Liturgy and Theology*, 2, 10, 30, 46, 72-73; esp. 128-129.

[69]Jennings, *Liturgy and Theology*, 14-16, 35-36, 54-73.

[70]Ibid., 16, 21, 29.

[71]Ibid., 10-13, 30-32 (defining property as the right of action in things beyond recognized boundaries of the human body; 11). This reflects the base ancient meaning of liturgy (*leitourgia*) as civil/political work (*érgon*) performed for a people's (*laós*) common good; Aristotle; *Politics*, trans by Ernest Barker (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995), 244 (131a31); Frederick William Danker, "Leitourgéō," in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 4th ed., rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 523.

This begins with experiencing the circular gift-exchange that marks God's triune life.[72] Within a household, a gift-exchange economy manages goods we consider to have transcendental origins through founding gifts.[73] As founding-benefactor doner, God has primordially initiated this economy.[74] Via his cosmic liturgy, he now summons household recipients into this exchange through their own sacrificial gift-giving.[75] Thus, as encounters with God's manifest presence elicits our worship, so do they integrate us within the gift-exchange economy that marks his triune life, household, and kingdom.[76]

I would wager that the Azusa Street worshippers intuitively grasped this truth, and that, as participants through experiencing God's grace at justification[77] (thus reaching towards Jennings' reference to God as founding benefactor of his gift economy), this sacrificial facet was imperatively integral to their worship. The Azusa Street Revival discourse normalized this insight through the secondly identified altar experience that it designated as sanctification. Recall that Jennings argues how God, as its founding benefactor, enjoins this sacrificial facet to worship, given its requisite role towards fuelling the gift-economy that flourishes his household.[78] It follows then that the Azusa Street discourse appropriately construed that requisite to a sanctifying experience and the Spirit baptism as an empowering experience, are consecrating acts/resolves at sacrificing one's self to God *on* the altar.[79]

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[72] Jennings, Liturgy and Theology, 29-31.

[73] This premise lies within the Greco-Roman term *leitourgia*; Jennings, *Liturgy and Theology*, 15. Premised on the ancient Mediterranean/Near Eastern premise that all life is a gift/gifting from God, Christian liturgy begins with this transcendent act that evokes from unequal beneficiaries their thankful response through sacrifices of gift-exchange, granting a taste of peerage through cycling gifts fueling the household economy; 30-33.

[74] Jennings argues this economy was cosmically "restarted" (his word for Christ's atonement) through the liturgical sacrifice of Jesus; *Liturgy and Theology*, 65-70; esp. 68: "God reverses the effects of the fall through the incarnation and paschal mystery of the Word of God in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the re-start of the gift economy, the flow. For it is . . . the gift of God himself to humanity that is also, simultaneously, a human gift to God." Jennings is not, however, arguing a penal substitutionary atonement approach but rather an economic substitutionary atonement theory for stressing the atonement as a restart of God's primordial gift economy that redeemed humanity anagogically replicate it in all its life and missional witness/service to God's kingdom; 68 70-73, 129.

[75] Ibid., 32, 35-36. "Liturgy is a gift from a superior that establishes a household, an economy. God's liturgy is the benefaction that enables and empowers our sacrifices of thanks and praise, so that it can be successful—worthy of reception, generative of relationship"; 36.

[76] Jennings, *Liturgy and Theology*, 21, 29, 46.

[77] "The Apostolic Faith Movement," *Apostolic Faith* 2.

[78] Jennings, Liturgy and Theology, 16.

[79] After justification, "Then we go on to the Holy Place to consecrate ourselves. There we find the believer's altar which is the golden altar. We sanctify ourselves and consecrate ourselves to God as a living sacrifice"; "The Baptism with the Holy Ghost Foreshadowed," *Apostolic Faith*, 2.

At and, more pivotally, on the altar, the consecrating resolve to offer one's life as a sacrifice for the flourishing of God's household thus intrinsically presupposes the sanctifying experiences of purgation as the Spirit heals one's malformed will and orders its *telos* towards the flourishing that Pentecost signifies.[80] Pentecostal Old Testament scholar Ricky Moore, via his notion of altar hermeneutics, explicates this sequence by describing the altar as a sacred zone that 'altars' our life through its inevitably purgative effects as on the altar we lay bare that life in order for God's Spirit to transform it as a pleasing sacrifice.[81]

It should be evident that the purgation effected through the Azusa Street sanctification experiences was delivering, cleansing, and eradicating from its worshipping community the sin(s) of systemic racism. In this sense, the consecrating act of bodily presenting ourselves to God on the altar functions as a healing rite effecting not only the vertical but also horizontal sphere within human relations extending beyond the Church to the entire human race.[82]

Being fairly conversant with Roman Catholic philosopher Richard Kearney, let me further substantiate this trajectory through his Ricoeurean-rooted philosophy. Sometimes in life we traumatically experience disorienting events that he calls the *ana*-theistic moment.[83] Yet with it comes the *ana*-potential for epiphanic-renewal.[84] For these threshold moments[85] are always correspondingly, messianically vocative

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[80]I situate this study's aims and reference to human will within an Augustinian/Thomistic-rooted theology of salvation that heals, perfects, and recalibrates the will and its correlating disordered desires; Dale M. Coulter, "Introduction: The Language of Affectivity and the Christian Life," in *The Spirit, the Affections, and the Christian Tradition*, ed. Dale M. Coulter and Amos Yong (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 7-15. In this study I also argue that, as the tradition's core theological symbol (Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 3-4, 12-15, 28-34, 285, 291, 293), Pentecost should shape Pentecostalism as a potent symbol for the hospitable common-good flourishing it signifies; Daniela Augustine, *Pentecost, Hospitality, and Transfiguration: Towards a Spirit-inspired Vision of Social Transformation* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012), 13-14, 18, 44-45, 65-72; 123-124; 145-148.

[81]Ricky D. Moore, "Altar Hermeneutics: Reflections on Pentecostal Biblical Interpretation," *Pneuma* 38 (2016): 148-159 (149, 152, 155-156).

[82]Jacqueline Ryle, "Laying Our Sins and Sorrows on the Altar: Ritualizing Catholic Charismatic Reconciliation and Healing in Fiji," in *Practicing the Faith: The Ritual Life of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians*, ed. Martin Lindhardt (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2011), 68-69, 93-94.

[83]Richard Kearney, "God Making: Theopoetics and *Ana*-theism," in *The Art of Ana-theism*, ed. Richard Kearney and Matthew Clemente (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), 9-10.

[84]Kearney, "God Making," in *The Art of Ana-theism*, 8-9. The prefix *ana* (back again, anew) signifies after experiences of loss, return to one's primal experience in newer, fuller, and forward-moving epiphanic receptions; idem, *Ana-theism: Returning to God After* God (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2010), 3.

[85]Kearney, *Ana-theism*, 4, 29, 31, 38.

(Latin: *vocare*; "to call").[86] To frame this within Kearney's broader works, we could say that in them God as Sacred Stranger summons us from hostility to just, hospitable action (particularly towards others different from us) for the cause of equitably shared, common-good flourishing, both human and creational.[87] On this note, his *ana*-theistic moment recalls Pentecostal liturgical theologian Daniela Augustine's thesis—it being that, in worship, God summons our hospitable response to his alterative face that, beholding him so different than us, his Spirit primes our hospitable turn towards human alterities.[88]

Although not wholly parallel, Pentecostalism testifies to these *ana*-events through the purgative facets of its altar rite. Contingent to this refiguring of life willed towards the world's common-good flourishing, is wise response to this call of God whenever it surfaces through the *ana*-events that foster *ana*-theism.[89] Kearney often illustrates this response via Mary's womb becoming filled with the power of the Spirit. Yet contingent to her womb becoming filled with the impossible-made-actual is that, in the *ana*-theistic moment as she hovered on the threshold between "Will I" or "Won't I," she said "Yes" to the angelic summons.[90] Kearney defines this filling as the the "possibilizing power of the Spirit"

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[86]Kearney, *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001); 45. Behind Kearney's understanding of *ana*-moments is Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin's 'weak messianism;' illustrated in the latter's reflection that "at the heart of every moment of the future is contained the little door through which the Messiah may enter:" Walter Benjamin, ''Theologico-Political Fragment'' (1921), in *One Way Street* (London, UK: NLB, 1979), 155; quoted in Kearney, "Enabling God," in *After God: Richard Kearney and the Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy*, ed. John Panteleimon Manoussakis (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2006), 43. In continental philosophy, messianism speaks of the promise of transcendence breaking into immanence, though as a potentially unsettling ethical summons (particularly via Derrida's and John Caputo's deconstructive themes) towards human alterity; Clayton Crockett, B. Keith Putt, and Jeffrey W. Robbins, "Introduction: Back to the Future," in *The Future of Continental Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Clayton Crockett, B. Keith Putt and Jeffrey W. Robbins (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014), 3-4.

[87]Kearney, "God Making," in *The Art of Ana-theism*, 9-10. *Ana*-events thus traumatically liminalize us from past and ongoing pre-critical first faith-naïveté assumptions to a further critically-*purged*, idol-breaking, more matured faith in God; Kearney; 7. He builds on Ricoeur's hermeneutical movement "to a second naïveté after the dogmatic prejudices of one first naïveté have been purged"; thereby becoming freed from "false religious fetishism so that the symbols of the eschatological sacred may speak again"; *Ana-theism*, 202-203, footnote 47; see Ricoeur, "The Critique of Religion" in Charles Regan and David Stuart, ed., *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 213f. Kearney consistently calls this traumatically epiphanic outcome, "*God after God*"; "God Making," in *The Art of Ana-theism*, 7-8. Also drawing from Ricoeur's concept, Hughes conversely stresses how meaningful worship effects second naïveté experiences; *Worship as Meaning*, 150-151 233, 287-288.

[88]Augustine, The Spirit and the Common Good, 27, 45-49, 137.

[89]Kearney, "God Making," in *The Art of Ana-theism*, 6, 8.

[90]Ibid., 13-16.

that raised Christ from the dead and subsequently empowering the disciples for their prophetic mission.[91] Yet actualizing the possibilities of God entails, within those *ana*-theistic moments, our "Yes" to the Spirit of God.[92]

Kearney's reflections well clarify Seymour's teaching that, through this consecrating posture with its cleansing and purging experiences, the worshipper is now "on the altar ready for the fire of God to fall, which is the baptism with the Holy Ghost."[93] What I am stressing here is that, within the Pentecostal altar rite, the purgation experience of this liturgical act of sacrifice intrinsically effects its re-figured aftermath—that being the empowering experience of Spirit baptism.

Seymour taught that, through their consecrating posture before God, worshippers are now on the altar ready for the fire of God to fall.[94] There the Holy Spirit altars us into fuel for the fire. Metaphorically speaking, once the heavenly fire falls upon this sacrificial offering, God-pleasing smoke arises from altar-placed bodies, causing a constant incense (Philippians 4:18) as we willingly let our rightly-ordered life (through the healing of our will) gift his household for its flourishing.[95] The empowering experience that Classical Pentecostalism calls Spirit baptism is the fire of God falling from heaven and consuming this offering on the altar. This divine consumption thus enables our offering as a circulating gift within the cosmic economy for the flourishing of God's household.

How the Pentecostal Altar Rite Functions Within Cosmic Liturgy

A final observation to be retrieved from Jennings' theology concerns his argument that the cosmic temple liturgy that fuels God's gift-economy is not human projection but very real. Like Jacob's ladder (Genesis 28:12; John 1:51), it operates from heaven to earth and back to

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[91]Kearney, The God Who May Be, 81.

[92]Also, inspiring Kearney's perception of God as a loving, possibilizing force towards and within creation is Aristotle's notion of possibility (e.g., potentiality to actuality); *The God Who May Be*, 83, 101-102, 111.

[93]Seymour, "The Way into the Holiest," *Apostolic Faith*, 4.

[94]For similar observations, see Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments*, 12-17.

[95]R. Hollis Gause, "The Nature and Pattern of Biblical Worship," in *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Worship*, 2nd ed., ed. Lee Roy Martin (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2020), 148-151. See Christian A. Eberhart, "A Neglected Feature of Sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible: Remarks on the Burning Rite on the Altar," *Harvard Theological Review* 97, no. 4 (October 2004): 485-493 (490, 492): (The smoke from the sacrifice thus reaches God as a pleasing order). 2 Corinthians 8-9 illustrate this flourishing aim through the grace of giving capacitating the churches to offer themselves within the divine economy for servicing Paul's collection for the struggling Jerusalem community; Jennings, *Liturgy and Theology*, 120-121.

heaven.[96] In her monograph, *"I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day:" A Pentecostal Engagement with Worship in the Apocalypse*, Pentecostal Bible scholar Melissa Archer similarly argues how the early 20th-century Pentecostal worship ethos is saturated with imageries of the Apocalypse. For through Holy Spirit outpourings, worshippers found themselves in the Spirit, intensely caught up in the heavenly worship.[97] Indeed, *The Apostolic Faith* evidences how Azusa Street altar-centric worship made them adept at the tasks of pattern recognition, perceiving the divine patterns of transcendent causality from heaven to earth[98] and accounting for the Revival's phenomena of dreams, visions, and prophecies.[99] This accounts for the outcomes of human diversities becoming one in a singular house of worship[100] patterned after the heavenly economy.[101] Thus, the gift of the Spirit granted worshippers apocalyptic revelation to the cosmic temple.[102]

In his Christology stressing the gift of the Spirit as the prime aim of Christ's atonement and resurrection, Assemblies of God theologian Frank Macchia similarly expresses how his ongoing priestly work summons our own priestly labor and our worship to him as high priest. One aim of this labor is our taking on Christ's image, which we conversely "offer ourselves in the Spirit as living sacrifices to God for his missional purposes (Romans 12:1)."[103] By its analogies to the heavenly liturgy of Jesus, earthly liturgy should function as apocalypse, revealing these transcendent realities, transporting us within their operations, and enabling prophetic vision into how they should be manifesting within our earthly sphere.[104]

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[96]Jennings, *Liturgy and Theology*, 107, 121.

[97]Melissa L. Archer, *'I Was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day': A Pentecostal Engagement with Worship in the Apocalypse* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2015), 68-79. (She examines how *The Apostolic Faith* reports show how the Apocalypse shaped the worship of the Azusa Street Revival, 299-300).

[98]Jennings, *Liturgy and Theology*, 3, 91-94, 98, 108-111, 114, 116, 127. Discussing the millennium, an Azusa Street Revival participant states, "We shall be in the heavenly image:" "The Millennium," *Apostolic Faith* 1, no. 1 (September 1906), 3. Thus, the typological phrase, "Jesus is the true tabernacle...the tabernacle in the wilderness was made after the pattern of the heavenly tabernacle. . . . We now have the true pattern which is the Lord Jesus Christ"; "The Baptism with the Holy Ghost Foreshadowed," *Apostolic Faith,* 2; "Our tabernacle must be built according to the pattern in the Word"; "Salvation According to the True Tabernacle," *Apostolic Faith*, 3.

[99]*Apostolic Faith* 1, no. 1 (September 1906), 1, 2.

[100]"The Same Old Way," *Apostolic Faith*, 3 ("Ethiopians, Chinese, Indians, Mexicans, and other nationalities worship together"); "Spreads the Fire," *Apostolic Faith* 1, no. 2 (October 1906), 4 ("God is drawing His people together and making them one").

[101]"Our tabernacle must be built according to the pattern in the Word;" "Salvation According to the True Tabernacle," *Apostolic Faith*, 3.

[102]Jennings, *Liturgy and Theology*, 111-113.

[103]Macchia, *Jesus the Spirit Baptizer: Christology in Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018), 329.

[104]Jennings, *Liturgy and Theology*, 98-101, 111-114, 123-127.

While recognizing its intended teaching towards a far too strictly demarcated salvation sequence, I would suggest that, within *The Apostolic Faith's* tabernacle typologies[105] and its tabernacle/temple language,[106] we can discern an intuitive grasp of the anagogical structure of the cosmic liturgy [107] that integrates its earthly and heavenly levels in God's household.[108] That house is a temple;[109] and through the grace of giving (2 Corinthians 9:8-15), it is active with sacrificial worship for fuelling its gift-economy towards the flourishing of creation.[110]

I thus wager that the Azusa Street community perceived the cosmic temple liturgy manifested within its own worship events. In the Spirit, they obeyed Jesus' call to the sanctifying, empowering altar of sacrifice. For at the configuring moment transpiring *on* the altar of sacrifice, Christ (our Sanctifier, Spirit baptizer, Healer, and commissioning King) summons us to sacrificial worship so that our will can be healed through our obedience of faith in him (Romans 1:5; 16:26).[111] Thus, as we become re-figured in the vocational empowerment of Sprit-baptism, our capacity to promptly obey his summons from within, suffering alterities being made known to us, might be more rightly willed to loving embodied action now serviceable to his saving aims for creation.[112]

These intimations towards a Pentecostal theology of the altar rendezvous with Macchia's theology of the Spirit-baptized church

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[105]"The Baptism with the Holy Ghost Foreshadowed," *Apostolic Faith*, 2; Salvation According to the True Tabernacle," *Apostolic Faith*, 3.

[106]*The Apostolic Faith* typically uses the term 'tabernacle' to describe gathered church meetings and/or their localities in actual tent structures; *Apostolic Faith* 1, no. 2 (October 1906), 3; *Apostolic Faith* 1, no. 4 (December 1906), 3; *Apostolic Faith* 1 no. 10 (September 1907), 1 (whereas here, the tabernacle refers also to an upper room tent). Yet the tabernacle language also typically recalls within those meetings the designated ritual altar space; "Pentecostal Scenes," *Apostolic Faith* 1, no. 2 (October 1906), 3.

[107]Jennings, *Liturgy and Theology*, 20-21, 33, 93-94, 101.

[108]Sometimes reference is made to the heavenly temple of God interfacing with earthly worship; "The Lord is in his holy temple and let all flesh be silent before him." *Apostolic Faith* 1, no. 6 (February-March 1907), 5.

[109]Recognizing the cosmos as a temple nested within the basic Ancient Near East (ANE) cosmology and its temple-mythos funding the Old and New Testament Scripture Bible a Jewish/Christian cosmology; Jennings, *Liturgy and Theology*, 80-81, 91-93. Daniela Augustine articulates a similar understanding of the cosmos as temple, which the tabernacle foreshadows as a mini-cosmos and the garden of Eden as a proto-holy-of-holies within the created order; Augustine, "Liturgy, *Theosis*, and the Renewal of the World," in *Pentecostal Theology of Worship*, 222-227. Hence, the Spirit-filled church is to function on earth as temple patterned after the heavenly temple; 232-235.

[110]Jennings, Liturgy and Theology, 35-36.

[111]Paul D. Janz, *The Command of Grace: A New Theological Apologetics* (London, UK: T & T Clark, 2009), 86-87, 94.

[112]Oliver Davies, "The Interrupted Body," in Oliver Davies, Paul D. Janz, and Clemens Sedmak, *Transformation Theology: Church in the World* (London, UK: T & T Clark, 2007), 39, 43-57. See also Macchia, *Jesus the Spirit Baptizer*, ix, 2, 25-29, 64, 301-302, 315.

explicated as the temple of God's Spirit, given its aim towards liturgically forming worshippers into the "image of Christ as priests offering themselves as living sacrifices for the mission of God."[113] For through our embodied sacrifices of thanksgiving, praise, and gifted lives, his Spirit transforms us more and more as a mighty Spirit-powered army of God[114]—an army that touches heaven and wars in the spirit realm against the kingdom of darkness as it goes forth to the ends of earth prophesying the kingdom, freeing the captive, and healing the world until all creation is willed to Pentecost as the waters cover the sea.

Conclusion

I have constructed here a Pentecostal theology of the altar by mapping relevant liturgical theology themes developed within my dissertation onto the basic liturgical *ordo* I perceive within both the Azusa Street Revival's salvation theology discourse and the altar-centric worship experiences archived within the Revival's *Apostolic Faith* publication. My aim was to augment the identity-marking role that Azusa Street plays within Classical Pentecostalism. I thus strove to intimate a theology of the altar constructed from how the Azusa Street altar rite had effected—for a brief though exemplary witness to the promise of Pentecostalism for the world's healing—a discourse tradition defined and fueled by its empowering social inclusiveness and the apocalyptically functioning charismatic phenomena that together signified the experience of Holy Spirit outpouring (otherwise called 'the Pentecostal fullness'). The witness of Azusa Street's altar-centric liturgical outcomes thus clarifies how Pentecostal liturgy, through the efficacy of its meaning-full worship, capacitates worshippers to encounter human alterities for the cause of common-good flourishing within shared cosmopolitan-marked geographies of God's new people willed to Pentecost.

By wedding Hughes' and Jennings' liturgical theologies coupled with Ricoeurean emplotment theory, I have discovered and shown how a crucial event marking configuring experiences within the ongoing maturation of Pentecostals are those moments at the altar which in obedience to the vocative summons through the Spirit's manifest presence, worshippers place themselves on it as living sacrifices to God. Although they may not fully recognize it, in those healing vocationally empowering moments, they become gifts for fueling the gift-economy that flourishes God's household and his mission for the world's healing.

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[113]Macchia, *The Spirit-Baptized Church: A Dogmatic Inquiry* (London, UK: T&T Clark, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 117, 120.

[114]Macchia, The Spirit-Baptized Church, 121-125.

As his Spirit-baptized temple, we thus discharge the priestly work (*leitourgia*) of invoking the Spirit's outpouring on these offerings of thanksgiving to Christ, who commissions us for the mission of God.

To conclude, within the Pentecostal liturgical *ordo*, the Holy Spirit sacramentalizes the altar event into an epicletically-charged holy ground that liminalizes worshippers into that edge experience which Pentecostals often describe as encountering God through his manifest presence. There on the altar, they encounter him as the wholly Other. In offering themselves as living sacrifices of praise (i.e., living gifts for circulation as He chooses within the economy of his household), the Holy Spirit heals their malformed will to rightly order their *telos*, and vocationally empower them as God's ministering people to all alterities they encounter within his mission. Thus, having freely received this liberating power, they now in renewed measure, will themselves to Pentecost.

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Why Should Believers Gather Together?
A Theological and Exegetical Examination of Hebrews 10:24-25 in View of the Nature, Purpose, and Future of the Church

By Jemon Laguna Subang

Introduction

This paper aims to show that (1) vibrant and healthy relationships in the church cannot be established through the use of digital technology, and (2) the deep level of relationships between people, including the dynamics of Christian love and service taught and required in the NT, demands in-person gathering. For these reasons, there is a pressing need to inspire, encourage, and provoke Christian churches to continue their in-person gatherings. The church community is integral to the holistic development of the Christian life. Human relationships are built and sustained through meaningful communication.

Technology makes communication easier and almost accessible to most parts of the world, changing nearly every facet of human life.[1] However, there is an inherent limitation to technology. It lacks the facility to improve human relationships. Easy access to communication does not guarantee meaningful and genuine conversations.[2]

With the advent of COVID-19, governments imposed social distancing to abate the coronavirus spread.[3] As a result, in many places like the Philippines, in-person church meetings were banned. Hence, churches relied on the use of digital technology for church ministries. Digital technology has become the answer to the problem of social

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[1]Ralf Peter Reimann, "'Uncharted Territories': The Challenges of Digitalization and Social Media for Church and Society," *The Ecumenical Review* 69, no. 1 (2017): 70–71, doi:10.1111/erev.12267 (accessed April 27, 2023).

[2]See Laurel Dovich, "Digital Media Technology and Your Spiritual Life: An Uneasy Alliance" (2017), *Christian Engineering Conference*. 2, 8-9, http://digital commons.cedarville.edu/christian_engineering_conference/2017/technological_development/2 (accessed April 28, 2023).

[3]Anna Cho, foreseeing the detrimental effects of social distancing on the church, comments that prolonged social distancing may lead to social isolation. And if this occurs, it will debilitate human interactions that may lead to a lack of community. In this case, the church being a "community of gathering," may also collapse (Anna Cho, "For the Church Community After COVID-19"), *Dialog* 60, no. 1 (March 2021): 2, https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/church-community-after-covid-19/docview/2510066671/se-2 (accessed April 28, 2023).

distancing. However, it also introduced new challenges that we must carefully confront. And the church needs to be vigilant about its effects and reexamine the spiritual hazards that come with technology.[4]

For many, technology is a gift from God. It saved the church from the debilitating and restricting effects of the coronavirus. How could the church survive the pandemic without Facebook and Zoom? Initially, many Christians hesitated to use these media platforms for Bible studies, prayer meetings, and Sunday worship services. But today, many churches consider media technology as integral to the life and function of the church. In other words, churches are becoming increasingly dependent on technology. Even before the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was already an article written in 2007 titled, "'Get on the Internet!' Says the LORD."[5] Many perceive the internet as a "point of contact" to influence lives and cyberspace as "divine space." If the Spirit uses the internet to convert sinners and encourage the saints, cyberspace should be a space for ministry and evangelism. Hence, Christians should employ every possible means within their reach to bring God's message to all creatures.[6] In 2019, Peter Singh, in his article, "Social Media: A New Location for Christian Mission to the Digitizens," recognizes technology as a visible sign of human creativity which resembles divine creativity. He argues that this human creativity displayed in technology is part of God's image in man. Hence, the presence and advancement of technology are observable signs of God's active participation in guiding and shaping human interactions and relationships.[7]

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[4]Andrew Brubacher Kaethler, "The Enduring Significance of the Incarnation for the Church in a Digital Age," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 39, no. 2 (2021): 97, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAiE8N220606 000503&site=ehost-live (accessed April 26, 2023).

[5]See J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "'Get on the Internet!' Says the LORD: Religion, Cyberspace, and Christianity in Contemporary Africa," *Studies in World Christianity* 13.3 (2007): 225–42, https://doi.org/10.1353/swc.2007.0026 (accessed April 26, 2023).

[6]Asamoah-Gyadu, "Get on the Internet!," 230; See J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Anointing Through the Screen: Neo Pentecostalism and Televised Christianity in Ghana," *Studies in World Christianity* 11.1 (2005), 9–28, https://doi.org/10.3366/swc. 2005.11.1.9 (accessed April 28, 2023); Many Pentecostals think of the internet as "digital superhighways" fast-tracking the speed of gospel ministry to the unreached and as an avenue for church discipleship (see Mark J. Cartledge, "Virtual Mediation of the Holy Spirit: Prospects for Digital Pentecostalism"), *PentecoStudies* 21, no. 1 (2022): 31-32, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct= true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAiREM 220919000223&site=ehost-live (accessed April 28, 2023).

[7]M. Peter Singh, "Social Media: A New Location for Christian Mission to the Digitizens," *In God's Image* 38 (June 2019): 55–60, https://search.ebscohost.com/login. aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAiAZI211108001107&site=ehost-live (accessed April 26, 2023); Singh's concern is how the church can access unlimited social media for mission and spiritual formation. He also asserts that "With the advent of new

The Adverse Effects of Media Technology

But there is another side to this view of cyberspace. Rob O'Lynn notes that individuals have always had a tenuous association with technology. For example, the same radiation invented to cure cancer can also be used to destroy lives.[8] The same technology that can help solve human finitude can have dehumanizing effects on humans.[9] Alan Jacobs notes, "Powerful technologies come to dominate the people they are supposed to serve and reshape us in their image."[10] Science reveals that there is a negative side to the use of digital technology on individuals. One study shows that even the moderate use of social media can lead to some mental health concerns among individuals.[11] Similarly, researchers

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technologies, Church is offered a variety of means for fulfilling her mission. How does the Church WhatsApp or tweet the Gospel? For her mission, the church must avail herself of the new resources provided by human exploration in social media. Digital changes are also opening up new opportunities for inter-denominational collaboration for mission . . . Therefore, with openness, Church must see the potentialities of information technologies positively as well as critically allowing social media and Church to interact with each other" (Ibid., 56). For additional discussion on the positive impacts of social media on doing church ministries, see J. T. Mullins, "Online Church: A Biblical Community," Order No. 3454046, Liberty University, 2011, https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/online-church-biblical-community/docview/868328414/se-2 (accessed April 28, 2023); and Tim Hutchings, "Creating Church Online: A Case-Study Approach to Religious Experience," *Studies in World Christianity* 13, no. 3 (2007): 243–60, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA 0001632472&site=ehost-live (accessed April 26, 2023).

[8]Rob O'Lynn, "What Comes Next: Continuing the Digital Ecclesiology Conversation in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Religions* 13, no. 11 (2022): 1, https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/what-comes-next-continuing-digital-ecclesiology/docview/2734707173/se-2 (accessed April 26, 2023).

[9]Ashley John Moyse, *The Art of Living for a Technological Age: Toward a Humanizing Performance. Dispatches: Turning Points in Theology and Global Crises*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021, xix; see O'Lynn, "What Comes Next," 1-2.

[10]Alan Jacobs, "From Tech Critique to Ways of Living," *The New Atlantis* 63 (Winter 2021): 25, quoted in Kaethler, "The Enduring Significance of the Incarnation for the Church in a Digital Age," 97.

[11]Emily A. Vogels, Risa Gelles-Watnick, and Navid Massarat, "Teens, Social Media and Technology," *Pew Research Center* (August 10, 2022): 1, https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/08/10/teens-social-media-and-technology-2022/ (accessed April 26, 2023); Also, Kaetler notes that despite the assertions that social media and web-based communications improve "community" and "connection," there is a growing recognition that the opposite occurs over time and that there is a correlation between the amount of time spent on social media and feelings of isolation, discontent with one's life, and mental health problems ("The Enduring Significance of the Incarnation for the Church in a Digital Age," 115); Other research shows that spending too much time on social media can lead to individuals feeling more lonely and remote—and heighten mental health problems such as anxiety and depression (see Lawrence Robinson and Melinda Smith, "The Role Social Media Plays in Mental Health," *Well-Being & Happiness,* (accessed April 28, 2023): 1-7, https://www.helpguide.org/

in the medical and mental fields affirm the danger of isolation and prolonged exposure to the screen. These unhealthy social media habits may lead to an increased risk of depression, anxiety, a feeling of loneliness, sleep disorder, self-harm, and even suicidal thoughts. [12] Conversely, they affirm the need for companionship and face-to-face interactions. Social interactions can help ease anxiety and depression, provide comfort and prevent depression.[13] Laurel Dovich, in her article on "Digital Media and Your Spiritual Life: An Uneasy Alliance," discerns that human beings are too engaged with digital technology that they do not give time for self-examination about how media is affecting their lives, relationships, worldviews, and spirituality.[14] Excessive use of media technology leads to a lack of focus and an inability to process information.[15]

Many scholars note that the two of the most significant challenges with using media technology are multitasking and distraction.[16] This is why individuals highly dependent on media technology can hardly focus on what is more important. Based on the studies done on multitasking, the result shows that multitasking increases errors and decreases the ability to retain information. Also, multitasking lowers performance and reduces productivity. The finding is contrary to what many think about the effects of multitasking. One study shows that students' performance while multitasking decreased by one-third, a similar result taken from drunk drivers. Researchers at Sandford found that multitaskers lose their ability to filter information and are hampered by irrelevant information.[17] Multitasking causes "attention difficulties, poor decision-making, lack of depth of material, information overload, internet addiction, poor sleep habits, overuse of caffeine, impaired thought processes, reduced cognitive ability, weakened memory, and increased stress."[18]

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articles/mental-health/social-media-and-mental-health.htm#:~:text=However%2 C%20multiple%20studies%20have%20found,about%20your%20life%20or%20appearance.

[12]Robinson and Smith, "The Role Social Media Plays in Mental Health."

[13]Ibid.

[14]Dovich, "Digital Media Technology and Your Spiritual Life," 2.

[15]Ibid., 6.

[16]Ibid., 6-10; See Jean Francesco A L. Gomes, "On Christian Engagement with Digital Technologies: A Reformed Perspective," *Unio Cum Christo* 7, no. 1 (2001): 43–57, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAiREM 210530000664&site=ehost-live (accessed April 28, 2023).

[17]Ibid., 5-6.

[18]Ibid., 6; Sherry Turkle notes that multitasking also damages relationships in the household, with friends, and with romantic partners. For example, "At dinner and in the park, parents and children turn to their phones and tablets. Conversations that used to take place face-to-face migrate online" (Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*, New York: Penguin, 2015, 61-62).

The second problem is distraction. Some scholars suppose that we live in an "Age of Distraction."[19] Sherry Turkle notes that our moments of solitude that are necessary to practice Christian disciplines like meditation, prayer, Bible reading, and study have been challenged by our habit of switching on our phones and letting ourselves be unconsciously carried away by what we see on the screen.[20] Turkle further argues that in the absence of solitude, we cannot construct a concrete understanding of self: "It is only when we are alone with our thoughts—not reacting to external stimuli—that we engage that part of the brain's basic infrastructure devoted to building up a sense of our stable autobiographical past." [21] Theologian and philosopher David Wells comments that the "affliction of distraction" is the greatest challenge of this era. He asks, "How, then, can we receive from Scripture the truth God has for us if we cannot focus long enough, linger long enough, to receive that truth?"[22] A study from Harvard shows that our minds wander 47 percent of the time, and when it wanders, we are unhappy, feel anxious, and our brain is overloaded.[23] Conversely, other studies show that meditation and spending time in quietness, away from our technological gadgets, make us more socially active, reduce negative feelings, increase our level of productivity, help fight the effects of depression, and reduce stress.[24]

The data presented above clearly says that Christianity is not immune to the adverse effects of social media. Most of our existing relationships are mediated through digital technology. Technology makes it easy for us to connect with friends and family members and

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[19] Cf. Justin W. Earley, *The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction,* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019. Nicholas Carr comments that distractions in our lives have already been proliferating for a long time, "but have never been to a medium that, like the Net, has been programmed to so widely scatter our attention and to do it so insistently," (Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What Internet Is Doing to Our Brains,* New York: Norton, 2020, 113); also, he asserts that digital technology is enhancing our primitive reasoning while reducing our inherent ability to be more attentive thinkers (Ibid.).

[20] Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation,* 61-62. Turkle comments, "So it is not surprising that today young people become anxious if they are alone without a device. They are likely to say they are bored. From the youngest ages, they have been diverted by structured play and the shiny objects of digital culture." (Ibid.).

[21] Ibid.

[22] David L. Wells, *God in the Whirlwind: How the Holy-love of God Reorients Our World* (Nottingham: IVP, 2014) 17-18; see also Dovich, "Digital Media Technology and Your Spiritual Life," 10.

[23] Matthew Killingsworth and Daniel Gilbert, "A Wandering Mind Not a Happy Mind," *Science,* vol. 330 no. 6006, 2010, pp. 932, doi:10.1126/science.1192439 (accessed April 28, 2023).

[24] Tricia McCary Rhodes, *The Wired Soul: Finding Spiritual Balance in a Hyperconnected Age* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2016) 101; see also Dovich, "Digital Media Technology and Your Spiritual Life," 11.

make acquaintances. Distance is no longer a threat to our relationships. Because online communications are convenient, we can multitask our way through them. We do not need to give our undivided attention to anyone on the screen. Unfortunately, this kind of interaction leads nowhere. It can't make genuine relationships thrive. Media-mediated conversations are devoid of emotions. Dovich notes,

> 60 to 90% of our emotions are communicated in non-verbal ways – expressions on our face, eye contact, physical touch, inflections in our voice, body language. Written text is devoid of these emotional cues. We use emoticons and caps to try to capture some emotion, but digital engagement is an emotionally sterile structure which doesn't feed our souls.[25]

She further observes that it is not our online friends that attend our family graduation or funerals. "It is in-person relationships that share these emotional high and low points in our lives. As our neural circuits adapt to online relationships, our people skills diminish, and we lose emotional aptitudes like empathy."[26]

Despite the claims that media technology improves our sense of community and human communications, there is a growing recognition that the contrary is true over time. Moreover, the increasing number of online worship services and media-mediated ministries during and after the COVID-19 pandemic further acclimatizes the church to the disembodied form of a church community and an expanding tendency to promote an embodied faith to disembodied participants.[27] If this form of church gathering continues, it could lead to unhealthy Christian life and ineffective witness. How should the church respond to this concern? Perhaps a clear and robust biblical understanding of the church will help address the issue.

The *Ekklesia* of God

Helpful to my discussion on the need to encourage believers to in-person gatherings is to provide the basic meaning of ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*) as used in both the OT and NT.[28] This Greek word may have multiple meanings. A Greek lexicon defines *ekklesia* as follows:

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[25]Dovich, "Digital Media Technology and Your Spiritual Life," 13.

[26]Ibid., 9.

[27]O'Lynn, "What Comes Next," 2.

[28]In the Septuagint, ἐκκλησία translates קָהָל (*qahal*), which denotes the people of God. This Hebrew word is usually translated as ἐκκλησία and sometimes συναγωγή. For example, ἐκκλησία is used in the OT for the people of God, "This is the one who was in the congregation [ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ] in the wilderness together with the angel who was

1. A regularly summoned legislative body, an assembly;
2. A casual gathering of people, and assemblage, gathering; and
3. People with shared belief, community, and congregation. [29]

In the NT, it may refer to the gathering of Christians in a specific place to discuss important matters of concern to the community.[30] It may also mean the global community of the Christian church.[31] The term itself and its use in both the OT and NT presuppose not only a group of people but a group of people that gathers together. Thus, the church is an assembly of God's people gathered together in his name for worship. For example, God commanded Moses what to teach the Israelites, "*Remember* the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when

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speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers, and he received living oracles to pass on to you" (Acts 7:38); "I will proclaim Your name to My brethren, in the midst of the congregation [ἐκκλησίας] I will sing Your praise." [ἐκκλησίας] I will sing your praise" (Heb. 2:12, quoting Ps. 22:22); R.T. France states that ἐκκλησία "was a familiar term to a Greek-speaking Jew, being the regular LXX translation for *qahal*, the 'congregation' of the people of God," (R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004, 211); *qahal* is also used in the Old Testament to refer to the people of Israel gathered in the presence of God (Deut. 23:2–8; 1 Chr. 28:8; Mic. 2:5); see Harald Hegstad, "The Church: People Gathered in the Name of Jesus," in *The Real Church: An Ecclesiology of the Visible*, 1st ed., 14–55, (Cambridge, England: The Lutterworth Press, 2013), 16, https://www-jstor-org.gldtl.idm.oclc.org/stable/pdf/j.ctt1 cgf6hq.5.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A396a673db0e53907d9c50cae25d2992d&ab_segmen ts=&origin=&initiator= (accessed April 26, 2023).

    [29]Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 303-304.

    [30]For other uses of εκκλησία referring to the gathering of God's people in a particular locality see Acts 5:11; 11:26; 14:23; 1 Cor. 11:18; Phil. 4:15; and Rev. 1:4.

    [31]Cf. 1 Cor. 6:4, 12:28; Eph. 1:22, 3:10,21; 5:23-32; Col. 1:18,24; Phil. 3:6. The word ἐκκλησία is a word derived from two root words, *ek,* and *kaleo*. *Ek* is defined as "out of" or "from," *kaleo* means "to call" or an invitation. Together they form *ekklesia, commonly* translated from its roots as "those called out." Later on, after the time of Christ, the work *ekklesia* is used to mean "the Christian church," both local and universal, see Guy P. Duffield and Nathaniel M. Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology*. Rev. ed. (Los Angles: Foursquare Media, 2008) 420; J. W. Roberts argues that the English word "church" does not come from the word *ekklesia,* although later on, it essentially assumed its meaning. He asserts that it is rather derived from the Greek adjective *kuriakos,* which means "that which is the Lord's"; for a more detailed discussion, see J W. Roberts, "The Meaning of Ekklesia in the New Testament," *Restoration Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1972): 27–36, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx? direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001588356&site=ehost-live (accessed April 26, 2023). Conversely, Benjamin Merkle argues that it is incorrect to say that Matthew's use of ἐκκλησία in Matt. 16:18 and 18:17 indicates a later development of the concept of the church, see Benjamin L. Merkle, "The Meaning of Ἐκκλησία in Matthew 16:18 and 18:17," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167, no. 667 (2010): 65, https://search.ebscohost.com/login. aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001798207&site=ehost-live (accessed April 26, 2023).

the Lord said to me, 'Assemble the people to Me, that I may let them hear My words so they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children" (Deut. 4:10). The LXX, Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, translates the word for "assemble" (קהל) with the Greek word ἐκκλησιάζω[32] "to summon an assembly," the verb that is cognate to the NT noun ἐκκλησία.[33] Edmund Clowney notes that "To worship in that assembly is to gather in God's ekklesia."[34] We must consider *ekklesia* as both the act of coming together and the group that comes together. It is to be understood as a concrete, physical assembly of the people of God gathering in his name (see Matt. 18:20). Otto Weber notes that "It is well for us then to think always of the concrete aspect of coming together and of [the] assembly when we use the word 'Community,' which we used until now and will continue to do."[35] The *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* notes that the church refers to "the visible expression of the gathered followers of Jesus Christ who have been grafted into a community created by God, under the banner of Jesus Christ, embodying in an anticipatory way the life and values of the new creation."[36]

When people gather together for a specific purpose, the action of gathering can be described empirically and sociologically. But what makes the gathering of the people of God unique from others is that their gathering is something that God himself has initiated. The apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 1:9 writes, "God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.'[37] Also, Peter in 1 Pet. 2:9, "But you are A CHOSEN PEOPLE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *GOD'S* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." It is God who leads the individual member of the

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[32]For other translations: Assemble (ASV, 1901; NIV, 2011; YLT, 1898); Gather (NKJ, 1983; RSV, 1971); Summon (NLT).

[33]Danker, Bauer, and Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* 304.

[34]Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995) 31.

[35]Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981) 531; there are physical assemblies of churches in Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica, Philippi, and Rome (see Acts 8:1; 13:1; 18:22; 20:17,28; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1); also, there are assemblies gathering in houses (see 1 Cor. 11:18,20, 33; 14:26); Millard Erickson clarifies that the "individual congregation, or group of believers in a specific place, is never regarded as only a part or component of the whole church. The church is not a sum or composite of the individual local groups. Instead, the whole is found in each place," (*Christian Theology*, 3rd ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013, 1041).

[36]David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, ed. *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 252.

[37]For additional verses on being called by God to fellowship see Rom. 1:6,7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Thess. 2:14.

assembly into the fellowship of his church. Also, when the church gathers together, the goal is not only to meet each other but to meet the almighty presence of God. The confidence that God makes Himself present in the gathering of his people is the reason for Christian fellowship. The church is a visible and concrete fellowship between people whom God called together to form a community.[38] Hegstad notes that the church community has two facets: "First, it is a community with God—whenever people come together in the name of Jesus, Jesus promises to be present and have fellowship with them. Second, it is [a] community with one another. The church is not a place where individuals meet with God on their own, but a place where people meet with God together as a fellowship."[39]

God's Presence in the Gathering

Often, when we read Matt. 18:20, we fail to notice an essential element regarding the church being the gathering of the people of God; God promises that he will make his presence available in their midst. Jesus said, "For where two or three have gathered together in my name, I am there in their midst." Though the context may suggest that it is about dealing with a dispute between brothers, the gathering of God's people "in my name" is what the church fellowship and worship are all about. To gather in "his name" (εἰς τὸ ἐμὸν ὄνομα) means to be one with Jesus, become part of his community, and be subject to his authority.[40] It is important to note that when Jesus gave this promise to his disciples, He was still bodily present with them during his earthly life. But this does not mean that this promise of his presence is short-term. Jesus's continued presence will be with the disciples to the end of the age.[41] God's presence among his people is the central theme of Matthew's

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[38]Hegstad, "The Church." 14-17.

[39]Harald Hegstad, "Fellowship with One Another," in *The Real Church: An Ecclesiology of the Visible*, 1st ed., (Cambridge, England: The Lutterworth Press, 2013), 97, https://www-jstor-org.gldtl.idm.oclc.org/stable/pdf/j.ctt1cgf6hq.8.pdf?refreqid= excelsior%3A396a673db0e53907d9c50cae25d2992d&ab_segments=&origin=&initiator = (accessed April 26, 2023); also in 1 John 1:3, we read, "What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." This verse presents one of the purposes of this letter: "that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." The goal of the proclamation is so that others "may have fellowship with us." The Greek word *koinonia* is usually translated to English as fellowship, communion, intimacy, or participation (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 1:9; 10:16; Phil 1:5).

[40]Grant R. Osborne and Clinton E. Arnold, "Matthew," in *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series on the New Testament*, v. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010) 688.

[41]See Matt. 28:18-20.

gospel (see 1:23; 28:20). [42] He will abide with them through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, whom he will send in his name.[43] "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to *you* [italics mine]" (John 14:18). "But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to *you* [italics mine]" (John 16:7). The promise of Jesus' continued presence through the Spirit is given to "you." The Greek word for "you" is ὑμᾶς (*humas*). It is the accusative, masculine, and plural form of the word σύ (*su*). Thus, Jesus intends to give this promise to *all* the disciples (see Gal. 4:6; 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; 2 Tim. 1:14; 1 John 2:27). And to compare this to Matthew 18:20, we can find that there is another aspect of the presence of Christ, other than the personal indwelling of the Spirit in each of the believers that cannot be made available unless Christ's church gathers together. The text says, "For where two or three have gathered together." One person alone is not fellowship. There should be at least two persons gathering together in his name to constitute Christian fellowship. The availability of Christ's presence depends on the disciples' gathering together.

A classification of the different levels of God's presence is helpful. Most theologians recognize at least three levels of God's presence.[44] First, they note that God is present everywhere. He is "omnipresent." So even where there are no human beings, God's presence is there (see Ps. 139:7-12). The second level is God's indwelling presence in a believer by his Holy Spirit. This happens the moment the person believes in Jesus and is born again (see 1 Cor. 6:19; John 14:16-18). The third level is God residing in the midst of his people as they gather (see 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21-22).[45] God's permeating presence in creation is different from God's presence in the believer through the indwelling Spirit. It also means that his presence in individual believers is distinct when He is present in the gathering of his saints for corporate worship. John Frame notes,

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[42]Leander E. Keck, ed. "General Articles on the New Testament: The Gospel of Matthew; the Gospel of Mark." Nachdr, *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007) 379.

[43]Cf. John 14:26.

[44]According to Wayne Grudem, *"God is present in different ways in different places* [italics his], or God acts differently in different places in his creation," (*Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (England: Leicester; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1994), 379.

[45]See Ronald L. Giese Jr., "Is 'Online Church' Really Church? The Church as God's Temple," *Themelois* 45 (2020): 355, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/ themelios/article/is-online-church-really-church-the-church-as-gods-temple/ (accessed April 28, 2023).

This language does not mean that God's power, knowledge, and freedom to act are greater in the holy places than elsewhere on earth. But we might say that in these places his presence is more intense and more intimate, and the penalties for disobedience are more severe. When God makes his dwelling in a place, that place becomes his throne.[46]

Interestingly, if this is true, we can say that believers who do not participate in a gathering of the people of God for corporate worship do not experience this kind of divine inhabitation. But how about the church gathering online? Can God's presence be mediated through digital technology, as Jesus promised in Matthew 18:20? Can believers experience the third level of God's presence alone before the screen? Believers attending online fellowships may still experience the presence of God at the second level through the indwelling Spirit but not at the third level. Based on the biblical examples of the temple imagery and the church as God's new temple in the NT, it is assumed that God's dwelling in the church is in a place (see 1 Cor 3:16, 2 Cor 6:16; Eph. 2:21).[47] There are indeed limits to what media technology can do. The following examples based on the nature of man, the incarnation of Christ, and the nature of Christian love, reveal that the church needs to pursue its physical gathering and should not settle for doing less than what is commanded and required by the Scriptures.

A.   The Nature of Man

The Triune God created man according to his image. In Gen. 2:18, God created the woman because it was not good for man *to be alone*. God is a relational God. And he made man to be a relational being. Because of that, there is a genuine, pressing, and innate desire for man to commune with other people.[48] When we look at the Bible, we learn that God's dealings with human beings occur in the context of community. In the OT, God promised Abraham that he would make him into a nation so that through him all the nations of the world will be blessed (see Gen. 12:1-3; Acts 3:25). God, through the leadership of Moses, saved the Israelite community from the iron hands of Pharaoh (see Exod. 14). This group of people afterward lived in tribes (see Exod.

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[46]John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2002), 581.

[47]Giese, "Is 'Online Church,'" 367.

[48]According to Dovich "Spiritual formation can never be relegated to a solo endeavor. Community and relationships are the very currency of spiritual growth" ("Digital Media Technology and Your Spiritual Life," 12).

28:21; Josh. 4:8). After they would be exiled to Babylon, God promised to gather them again (Mic. 2:12).

In the NT, Jesus gathered his twelve disciples (see Matt. 10:1; Mark 3:14; Luke 6:13). The disciples on the Day of Pentecost were all together in one place (cf. Acts 2:1). The early church always gathered together for fellowship (see Acts 2:42; 4:31; 14:27). And the church will be gathered together in the presence of the Lord at the Second Coming (see 1 Thess. 4:16-17). It is also important to note that the nature of this gathering in the presence of Jesus is physical. The saints will be clothed with glorified, resurrected bodies (see Job 19:25-27; Rom. 8:2-24; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Cor. 15:51-52). If God wired human beings for a communal relationship with one another, we could say that the effective way of nurturing human relationships is through face-to-face interactions. Only meaningful conversation and genuine relationships satisfy the human heart's longing for community. As Dovich asks, "Is God's image in us slowly being extinguished as we rely more and more on technology and less on the gentle whisper of his voice wooing us to reach out and really touch each other?"[49] Many of the "one another" statements in the Bible would not make sense to us if we isolate ourselves from our community. When non-verbal communication speaks louder than words, the Scriptures command us to "Accept one another" (Rom. 15:7), "Bear one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2), "Be patient with each other" (Eph. 4:2, NLT), "Bear with each other" (Col. 3:13, NIV), "Comfort one another" (1 Thess. 4:18), "Stimulate one another to love and good deeds" (Heb. 10:24), "encourage one another" (Heb.10:25, NLT), "Employ it [spiritual gifts] in serving one another" (1 Pet. 4:10).

Kaetler rightly observes, "Communion through bodies is God's chosen best practice for Christian witness and Christian formation."[50] Not only is in-person interaction necessary for Christian life and maturity, but it is also fundamental to the gospel message. The communication of the gospel requires embodiment.[51] The Christian message does not disqualify the importance of the body; it upholds it. We can find this truth in the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. For example, Jesus taught his disciples not to worry about food, water, and clothes (see Matt. 6:25-31). Worrying is not the solution to responding to basic human needs. Instead, Jesus emphasizes the nature of God the Father as the good and generous Provider of his children. "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will he not much more clothe you?* [italics mine] . . . For the Gentiles eagerly seek

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[49]Ibid., 13.
[50]Kaetler, "Enduring Significance of the Incarnation," 101.
[51]Cf. Brad J. Kallenberg, *Following Jesus in a Technological Age* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011) 1-21.

all these things; for *your heavenly Father knows that you need all these thin*gs" [italics mine] (Matt. 6:30, 32).

Other passages are also telling us the importance of meeting our physical needs. "And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8).[52] The true expression of brotherly love is revealed in this passage, "But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but indeed and truth" (1 John 3:17-18). Also, "Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). Bearing [53] one another's burdens is a concrete expression of love. Douglas Moo notes that the present tense of the imperatival verb βαστάζω (bear) plus the use of ἀλλήλων (one another) being fronted before the verb stress the idea of making burden bearing a natural and constant practice of the believers in the community.[54] By carrying each other's burden, the Great Commandment to love is being fulfilled (see Rom.13:8,10; Gal. 5:14). Here, the burden bearing is related to the believers' action towards an erring brother or sister (see Gal. 6:1). The action must be done in a spirit of gentleness. Thus, mutual accountability is emphasized. These expressions of Christian love and ethics are difficult, if not unthinkable, to perform in a virtual format.[55] As Guy Sayles reminds us, "Humans *are* souls, more than we *have* souls; it is not so much that we *have* bodies as that we *are* bodies. All of our experiences, whether we call them intellectual, emotional, or spiritual, are also and always *physical.*" [56] The Christian faith does not only

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[52]See also Prov. 28:27; Acts 20:34-35; Jas. 2:15-16.

[53]βαστάζω may mean "pick up," "carry," "carry away," "bear," and "remove." In all senses, there is the suggestion of burden involved; see Danker, Bauer, and Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* 171.

[54]Douglas J. Moo, "Galatians," *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013) 376.

[55]Dovich warns us about the danger of isolating one's self from the rest of the community and resorting to online church. She states that the church is no longer about the community but about us. We create a digital world that caters to our views and preferences. "We need to build the depth of relationship where we are comfortable confessing our 'faults to one another' (James 5:16), receiving constructive criticism (Prov. 27:17), and seeking guidance and encouragement from fellow believers" (*Digital Media Technology,* 14).

[56]Guy Sayles, "Preaching incarnation, incarnational preaching: The witness of limitation." *Review & Expositor*, 114, vol. 2 (2017): 221, https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637317702118 (accessed April 28, 2023); Giese's remarks are helpful here, "It's interesting that Christian colleges and seminaries are looking, anew, at their educational goals. For the past twenty years, schools have hopped on the bandwagon of distance education, even offering entire degrees online. Yet now discussions are taking place on

emphasize the need for souls to be nurtured spiritually but also the importance of physical presence in relating, comforting, and encouraging others. Jesus went to attend his best friend's funeral service to comfort the bereaved family and even wept for the loss of a friend (see John 11). He dined with sinners and tax collectors (see Matt. 9:10-11; Luke 15:1). He ministered to a woman at the well (see John 4:1-28), attended a wedding feast at Cana (see John 2:1-12). After his resurrection, he spent time on the road with two of his disciples, explaining to them the things that must happen to him as written in the Scriptures (see Luke 24:13-31). Indeed, the Word of God took on human flesh and dwelt among us. And because of that, his disciples saw his glory (see John 1:14), believed it, and proclaimed to the ends of the earth (see 1 John 1:1-3).

B.   The Incarnation of Christ

Jesus' incarnation, being in the flesh, was not accidental. Rather, intentional. Jesus' bodily presence is essential to his message of God's love. Divine love was manifested to the disciples and the world in the person of Jesus Christ, God's only Son (see 1 John 4:9). The apostle John understood it very well. His confidence in the proclamation of the gospel message is based on God's love revealed in Jesus. His knowledge of God's love was not theoretical. It was received and understood through experience. According to John, the embodiment of the Father's love is something that they [disciples] have heard, seen with their eyes, looked at, and their hands have touched (1 John 1:1). Christ did not simply teach the "whys" and "hows" of God's love in a theoretical level, for words are not enough to express this love (see 1 John 3:18). Rather, Jesus taught love to his disciples by living it out. He came to the place of sinners. He healed the sick, cleansed a leper (see Mark 1:41), cast out demons (see Matt. 8:16; Luke 11:14), fed the multitudes (see Matt. 14:13-21), comforted the distressed (see Matt. 9:36), and raised the dead (Matt. 9:24-25). He also ate and had fellowship with tax collectors and sinners

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whether we've gone too far: whether mentoring students in some of the upper levels of Bloom's taxonomy (levels such as creating, evaluating, or applying) should be pulled back, at least in part, to in-person dialogues . . . The only reason such a dialogue exists in our time and day is that, after over twenty years of claims that distance education can, across-the-board, be comparable in achieving learning outcomes, we are only now realizing that this is not true" (Is "Online Church,", 363); Rachael Starke, a longtime advocate of using online tools, notes, "The Christian life, in other words, can never be fully digitized. This reality is . . . prompting some seminaries to adjust their programs accordingly—not by embracing the brave new world of digitally driven collaboration and education, but by resisting it" (cited in Giese, "Is Online Church," 363).

(see Matt. 9:10-17; Mark 2:13-17), and showed compassion to the weak and discouraged (see Matt. 9:36). In other words, Jesus had direct physical contact and interactions with people. He ministered to their needs and sympathized with them.

Could he minister from a distance? I believe he can. There is an example in Luke 7:1-10 where Jesus healed the centurion's servant who was sick and about to die. He could have done most of his ministry from a distance, healed the sick, and raised the dead from heaven. He would not need to come, leave his throne in heaven, and stay in this sin-corrupted world for thirty-three years. However, Jesus chose a different way–the most demanding but effective way of serving humanity. He humbled Himself by considering himself nothing. He took the very form of a servant and died on the cross for the sins of others (see Phil. 2:1-11). Kaetler, commenting on Jesus' incarnational ministry, asserts that

> He [Jesus] does not use these ancient body-bound forms of communicating God's all-encompassing love simply because social media or the internet had not yet been invented. The Incarnation is God's chosen way of sharing the Good News in Jesus' time and our time. Embodiment is not accidental to God's love; it is essential to it. The Incarnation is enduring.[57]

According to Gaspar Colón, sympathizing and ministering to people's needs through service create and foster social attachments that keep individuals wanting to continue the contact and the fellowship.[58] But more than that, by doing so, we grow in maturity and obedience to the Lord. Since Jesus taught us the way of love, the disciples ought to love in the same manner Jesus loved. Jesus' expression of love becomes the basis and model for Christian ethics and ministry. "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? (1 John 3:16-17)." "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11, NIV). Based on the example of Jesus, we learn that love is incarnational. It cannot be understood and done simply in theories. Jesus loves us so much that he came and gave his life to save us from our sins.

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[57]Kaetler, "Enduring Significance," 99.

[58]Gaspar F. Colón, "Incarnational Community-Based Ministry: A Leadership Model for Community Transformation," *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 6, no. 2 (Fall, 2012): 14, https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/incarnational-community-based-ministry-leadership/docview/1518931451/se-2, (accessed April 26, 2023).

In the same way, the love he has for us, being poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (see Rom. 5:5), is enabling us to love others not simply in words but also in deeds. Also, to fully express this love, face-to-face interaction with people is inevitable. We need to imitate this, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Thus, Jesus' incarnation was the example par excellence of the importance of both body and soul. Kaetler notes, "The church becomes the physical assembly of Jesus' followers who, as a people, continue to embody Jesus' teaching and practices of salvation, liberation, and reconciliation."[59]

C. The Nature of Christian Love

If love is a necessary element in the life of the church and a sign to the world of the abiding presence of God (see John 13:34-35), can love be mediated online? Can love be entirely and genuinely expressed without having face-to-face interaction between individuals? To answer this, we need to understand the biblical nature and expressions of love. This refers us back to God, who is Love. The Bible says God is love (see 1 John 4:8, 16). And whoever lives in love lives in God. The reason for this assertion is found in 1 John 4:19, "We love because he first loved us." Because of this great love (see 1 John 4:11), believers ought to love one another (see 1 John 3:11). Grudem understands God's love as "self-giving for the benefit of others."[60] A Bible dictionary defines love as "An inner quality expressed outwardly and a commitment to seek the well-being of the other through concrete acts of service. Love is a central biblical concept for defining the relationship between God and humans."[61] Love can also be expressed through the bond between parent and child[62] and mutual devotion and commitment expressed in a close friendship such as between Jonathan and David (see 1 Sam. 18:1-4; 20:17; 2 Sam. 1:26).[63] The greatest expression of love is seen in Jesus' willing and sacrificial death on the cross (see 1 John 3:16; 4:10). In light of that sacrifice, believers are commanded to express their love for one another not only "with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth" (1 John 3:18). Believers show their love for God and their fellow believers by concrete acts of willing and joyful service for the benefit of others. Serving others for their joy and faith is a definite picture of love (see 2 Cor. 1:24; Phil. 1:25; 2:4).

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[59]Kaetler, "Enduring Significance," 101.
[60]Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 198.
[61]Freedman, Myers, and Beck, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible,* 825.
[62]Ibid.
[63]Parental love always seeks the well-being of the child. This love may also be expressed in the form of physical discipline (Prov. 3:11-12; 13:24; Heb. 12:6).

But how about the online church? Dovich notes, "It is about us, not [the] community. Online we choose friends, and news sources, and create playlists that fit our worldview and our preferences. If someone disagrees with us, we hide, block, unfollow, unfriend, and delete. We create a digital world that caters to our views and preferences."[64] She added,

> Digital engagement can augment interpersonal connections but its sterile structure is dangerous to the well-being of our soul. Human relations are difficult and messy, and the internet makes it easy to hide from this. We need to develop the discipline of presence, freed from the tedium of incessant interruption, to experience the power and beauty in relationships, [and] to honor and attend to the people around us.[65]

On the other hand, being with other Christians, there is an endless opportunity to practice the "one another" commands in Scripture and therefore become nurtured in these virtues. "Accept one another, just as Christ also accepted [you]" (Rom. 15:7). "Admonish one another" (Rom. 15:14). "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other" (Eph. 4:32). "Bear with each other and forgive one another" (Col. 3:13, NIV). "Live in peace with one another" 1 (Thess. 5:13). "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another" (Jas. 5:16). These qualities are essential in living a life worthy of the Lord and of our calling (see Eph. 4:1; Col. 1:10). The apostle Paul used the technology available during his time to express his love and deep concerns for the churches. But he recognized that writing was no replacement for a face-to-face interaction with his fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord: "For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you *while* among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine" (Rom. 1:11-12). The same desire the writer of 2 and 3 John had when he wrote, "Though I have many things to write to you, I do not want to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, so that your joy may be made full" (2 John 12). "I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write them to you with pen and ink; but I

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[64]Dovich, "Digital Media Technology," 14. The growth of online churches is challenging the notion of "church" the *ekklesia* of God, as a physical gathering of persons, in a particular space. Thus, it is not surprising that for Graham Ward, for example, the opportunity of a computer-generated community represents a lamentable shift towards a less embodied Christian community (Graham Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice,* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 110).

[65]Ibid.

hope to see you shortly, and we will speak face to face" (3 John 13-14). These biblical writers understood that there were graces that ink and paper could not carry.[66] Can there be any other way to practice the "one another" commands besides being in person with other believers? Kaetler asserts, "Communication through bodies is God's chosen and best practice for Christian witness and Christian formation."[67] Also, Jay Kim, in his book *Analog Church*, observes that "Digital technology affords us brand new opportunities to share the gospel, as well as encourage and challenge one another." However, he strongly argues,

> Transformation in the life of a church is always an analog experience, as we journey shoulder to shoulder with other people, gathering in real ways as real people, to invite God to change us individually and collectively. We experience this transformation in a variety of ways . . . but all of these ways are in some form or fashion, tangible and physical.[68]

Exegetical Analysis of Hebrews 10:24-25

Hebrews 10:24-25
And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Having urged the community to faith (Heb.10:22) and hope (10:23), the writer of the book of Hebrews encourages the community, *let us*[69] *consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds* (Heb. 10:24), implying that the community cannot hold on to their confession alone.[70] F. F. Bruce notes that believers will be more inclined to confess their hope boldly and wholeheartedly if they are present to encourage other believers in the community. "Christian faith and witness flourish

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[66]Marshall Segal, "Why Don't We Have Good Friends?" *DesiringGod,* November 7, 2022, https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-dont-we-have-good-friends?fbclid=Iw AR3c5zNTbZn7vU67R0b-v1QGXxYk1C7j0tfwa1Uv0Kqo3iHy3GxIjE5oab0, (accessed May 2, 2023).
[67]Kaetler, "Enduring Significance," 101.
[68]Jay Y. Kim, *Analog Church: Why We Need Real People, Places, and Things in the Digital Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020) 96; see Giese, "Is 'Online Church,'" 352.
[69]Appearances of "Let us" in Hebrews: Heb 4:1,11,14,16; 6:1; 10:22,23,24; 12:1,28; 13:13,15.
[70]James Thompson, *Hebrews*: *Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008) 205.

the more vigorously in an atmosphere of Christian fellowship."[71] To *"consider how to stimulate one another" is* vital to the community since there is a great danger of losing their commitment and thus moving away from the community. As a result, it may bring discouragement to others. The same appeal is given in Heb. 3:12-13, "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." David Allen states, "Both here and throughout the epistle (4:1, 11; 10:24–25; 12:15–16; 13:1–3), the author challenged the community of readers to devote themselves to watching out for each other."[72] The purpose of the encouragement is to keep one another from having an unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God (cf. Heb. 4:1,11; 6:11). Because of the hardening of the heart caused by the deceitfulness of sin, believers are to look after one another and become accountable to one another. Believers are to see to it (NIV, 2011), to be careful (NLT, 1996), watch out (CEB, 2011), and take care (ESV, 2008) that none of them will have an unbelieving heart. Hence, the need for community is emphasized. Leon Morris sees a strong connection between having a vibrant Christian fellowship and resisting the tendency of apostasy that was prevalent at that time.[73] Thompson recognizes the community aspect of 3:13:

> Only by corporate solidarity will the church maintain its faithfulness. Indeed, the author is concerned not only that the community not fall away but also that unfaithfulness not be present in any one of you [Emphasis in the original] (3:12b). The author repeats this focus on "any" later in this homily (cf. 12:15–16), indicating his concern for the solidarity of the whole community. Thus it can retain its fidelity as members encourage one another each day [Emphasis in the original] (3:13).[74]

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[71]F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of the Hebrews: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* 14 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981) 252-253.

[72]David Allen, *Hebrews: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture.* Vol. 35 of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 263.

[73]Leon Morris in Frank Ely Gaebelein, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Hebrews - Revelation*, vol. 12 (London: Pickering & Inglis 1981, 34).

[74]Thomson, *Hebrews,* 93.

Moreover, the verb "Let us consider" is from the verb κατανοῶμεν (*katanoōmen*).[75] It may mean to notice, observe, look at reflectively, consider, contemplate, perceive, think about carefully and attentively.[76] The present tense of the verb calls for continual consideration of how believers should give careful attention to one another for the purpose of provoking one another to love and good deeds. Notice the Greek word order in the sentence "καὶ κατανοῶμεν ἀλλήλους εἰς παροξυσμὸν ἀγάπης καὶ καλῶν ἔργων." The main verb is *katanoōmen,* and it is immediately followed by ἀλλήλους (*allēlous*) "one another,"[77] which is the direct object of the verb. It is significant because the emphasis for the verb "consider" is placed not on the Christian mutual responsibility to provoke others to love and good deeds even though that is important but on *one another*.[78] They are to consider what? Consider one another. They are to give careful attention to one another, focus on one another, study one another, and be concerned with one another. To do so, they need to be with one another to take time to understand one another. This cannot happen in isolation. Learning each other's weaknesses and struggles does not happen overnight. It takes time, energy, involvement, and commitment. This may be why the writer of the Book of Hebrews exhorts, *do not neglect our meeting together*, for we need one other. The goal of the command is to focus on one another and think of ways to stimulate or provoke one another to love and good deeds. Perhaps, it is also important to note that the verb "consider" (*katanoeō*) is used only twice in Hebrews. The other account is in 3:1, "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, *consider Jesus* [emphasis mine], the Apostle and High Priest of our confession." Perhaps, *katanoeō* links the two verses 3:11 and 10:24, to the idea that Jesus and his community are inseparable. No one remains faithful to Jesus and concomitantly abandons his community. Instead, the one who is faithful to Jesus considers the others within the community for the purpose of provoking them to love and good deeds (see John 13:34-35).

The word for "stimulate" or "provoke" is παροξυσμὸν (*paraxusmon*). Orton Wiley finds *paraxusmon* as an intensely potent word.[79] Other Bible translations render it "spur" (NET, 2005; NIV, 2011), "encourage" (NLT, 1996), "provoke" (NRSV, 1989), and "Stir

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[75]κατανοῶμεν is the 1st pl. pres. act. subj. of κατανοέω. The present is progressive. Cf. Harris, *Hebrews*, 276. Perhaps the best rendering of Heb. 10:24 comes from the NKJV (1983), "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works."

[76]Danker, Bauer, and Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* 522.

[77]Interestingly, this is the only place where this word is used in Hebrews.

[78]Harris, *Hebrews,* 277.

[79]Orton H. Wiley and Morris A. Weigelt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed. (Kansas City, Mo: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1984) 304.

up" (ESV, 2008). It can also mean "rousing to activity" or "a state of irritation expressed in argument, sharp disagreement."[80] The only other use of this verb is found in Acts 15:39, where Luke refers to the intense disagreement between Paul and Barnabas. The context, however, suggests something positive.[81] Bruce notes, "But here love is provoked in the sense of being stimulated in the lives of Christians by the considerateness and example of other members of their fellowship."[82] Morris notes that "this kind of love is thus a product of community activity, for it is a virtue that requires others for its exercise."[83] So, how can we provoke other believers to love and good deeds? In Heb. 10:25, the writer gives two ways to do this task by providing us with contrasting expressions that mark out what the believers must not and must do.

Do not Forsake the Assembly

First, what they must not do is *forsake their own assembling together.* The particle ἐγκαταλείποντες (*egkataleipontes*)[84] carries the idea of "abandoning" (NET, 2005), "neglecting" (ESV, 2008), and "giving up" (NIV, 1985) someone or something. The particle negated by μὴ (*mē*) indicates means. And the particle in the present tense may be customary or habitual.[85] Thus, the phrase "as is the habit of some."

Interestingly, the same word is used when Jesus was on the cross crying before the Father, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46, NIV, 1985).[86] It is also used once more in Hebrews 13:5 where the Lord states "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (NIV, 1985; see Deut. 31:6, 8; Josh. 1:5). Even though we forsake God, he will not forsake us (see 2 Tim. 2:13). Apparently, there were members who were leaving their community. They may have been discouraged by their severe trials and suffering. In Heb. 10:32-34, many were experiencing persecution; some were imprisoned, others had their property confiscated, and others were abandoned by their family members because of their faith in Jesus.[87] These believers were facing a spiritual predicament. From a human perspective, we may say that they

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[80]Danker, Bauer, and Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* 780.

[81]Harris, *Hebrews,* 277.

[82]Bruce, *The Epistle of the Hebrews,* 253.

[83]Morris in Gaebelein, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 105.

[84]ἐγκαταλείποντες is the nom. pl. masc. of the pres. act. ptc. of ἐγκαταλείπω (*egkataleipo*).

[85]Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 521-522.

[86]The apostle Paul also uses ἐγκαταλείπω (*egkataleipo*) of Demas and others who abandoned him (cf. 2 Tim. 4:10,16).

[87]See Thomson, *Hebrews*, 206.

had a good reason for neglecting and forsaking their Christian assembly. However, Guthrie notes, "Whatever the reason, the author sees their discontinuance of common fellowship and worship as fatal for perseverance in the faith. Encouragement cannot take place in isolation. Thus, what they must do is gather for mutual encouragement."[88] Wiley also sees the need for public assemblies if Christians are to incite others to love and good deeds. He notes, "Corporate worship is a necessity in the Christian life, and fellowship with one another has been regarded as one of the chief means of grace."[89] DeSilva asserts that abandoning the assembly does not only hurt the person leaving but discourages those who stay.[90] This attitude and response to crises contradict the command, "Consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds." Christians shouldn't only think of themselves but also about others. If their actions hurt the faith of their fellow believers and their community, that's a sign that they are no longer walking in love. And thus, living contrary to the will of God.

The word for "assembling" is taken from the Greek word ἐπισυναγωγή (*episunagoge*). It is a compound word derived from ἐπι (*epi*), meaning upon or unto plus συνάγω (*sunagō*), to cause to come together. Combining the two words may imply a gathering of a group of people at some place or the gathered group.[91] The former is reflected by translating the verb as infinitive (e.g., to meet together (ESV, 2008)), and the latter is reflected with a noun (e.g., meeting (NIV, 1985)). Perhaps the verb ἐπισυνάγω (*episunagō*) can give us a more vivid picture of what it means to gather together. It depicts how the hen gathers her chicks under her wings (see Matt. 23:37; Mark 13:27; Luke 17:37).

Many scholars link ἐπισυναγωγή to συναγωγή (*synagoge*). [92] However, William Gouge asserts the concept of ἐπι as denoting emphasis. He notes that συναγωγή was a gathering together, and ἐπισυναγωγή was "to gather together unto a place."[93] Moreover, Stephen Atnip argues that these two are not equally the same. [94] For Atnip,

[88]George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*: *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998) 345.

[89]Wiley, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 305.

[90]David Arthur DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000) 343.

[91]See Danker, Bauer, and Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* 382.

[92]See Harris, *Hebrews,* 277.

[93]William Gouge, *A Commentary on the Whole Epistle to the Hebrews*, vol. 1 of *Nichol's Series of Commentaries* (London: J. Nisbet & Co., 1866) 355.

[94]Stephen C. Atnip, "'ΕΠΙΣΥΝΑΓΟΓΗ' as Christian Community" (PhD diss., Amridge University, 2021), 226-231, https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-

ἐπισυναγωγή is more than a sabbath gathering. It is more than a Sunday worship service. It is a communal and eschatological Christian community.[95] The other occurrence of ἐπισυναγωγή in the NT is found in 2 Thess. 2:1, "Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together (ἐπισυναγωγῆς) to him." Many scholars believe that this use of the word by the writer of Hebrews was intentional.[96] He may be referring to the eschatological gathering of God's people in 2 Macc. 2:7 RSV, "until God gathers (ἐπισυναγωγὴν) his people together again and shows his mercy." Moreover, it is also important to note that almost all of the appearances of ἐπισυνάγω (*episunagō*) in the NT (see Matt. 23:37; Mark 13:27; Luke 17:37) are similarly used with eschatological implications.[97] Christians should look to the future, fixing our eyes on Jesus as we await his return. The closer we get to that day (Christ's coming),[98] the more active we should be in meeting together to spur one another on to love and good deeds.[99] We gather here now because we will gather together there in the future. Our gathering as a church should manifest a foretaste of the kind of gathering God's people will have on the Lord's return. It will not be an abstract, disembodied, nonspatial gathering (see 1 Cor. 15:52; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Thess. 4:16-17). It will be a physical, embodied, spatial, and glorious gathering of God's people before his presence. All who have believed in Christ will receive from the Lord a resurrected body (see Phil. 3:20-21). Conversely, Thomson recognizes that the abandonment of the assembly may lead to apostasy (see Heb. 2:1-4; 3:12; 6:4-6).[100] He may be correct to see this connection. Without the support, care, and encouragement coming from other believers, we are very prone to succumb to the evil devices of the enemy that might lead to apostasy.

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theses/ἐπισυναγωγή-as-christian-community/docview/2642402312/se-2 (accessed April 28, 2023).

[95]Atnip, "ΕΠΙΣΥΝΑΓΟΓΗ as Christian Community," 230-232.

[96]Thomson, *Hebrews,* 206.

[97]See Thomson, *Hebrews*, 207, and Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews,* 528.

[98]The phrase "the day" may refer to "the day of judgment" (Matt. 25:13; Luke 21:34; Rom. 2:5; 1 Cor. 3:13) or "the day of the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:8; 2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 1:6; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10).

[99]Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 291; cf. William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9 – 13*, ed., David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker. *Nachdr, Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 47, B (Nashville: Nelson, 2008), 290.

[100]Thomson, *Hebrews,* 206; cf. Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text: The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids MI.: Carlisle [England]: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1993), 527.

Encourage One Another

Second, what believers must do is to *encourage one another.* The word used for "encourage" is παρακαλέω (*parakaleō*). In the NT, *parakaleō* denotes the idea of one person standing alongside another, giving appropriate counsel, comfort, and help.[101] Παρακαλέω can also indicate urgent insistence (also in Heb. 3:13)[102] in view of the day of the Lord. The present tense of the verb may carry the idea that encouraging one another should not only be limited to Sunday worship gatherings but must take place daily. Why is it necessary that Christians should encourage one another? The purpose is to protect one another from the deceitfulness of sin (see Heb. 3:13). The whole community must assume responsibility to watch that no one grows weary or falls away (see Heb. 6:6). Left to our own devices, we would probably grow weak and exhausted and eventually fall away. Our human tendency is prone to discouragement, and we easily give up. If the devil is looking for Christians to devour (see 1 Pet. 5:8), we should ensure that the enemy will not triumph in his attempts to destroy us. Thus, the necessity of having a community where believers encourage, rebuke, and protect one another is emphasized. Lastly, I want to stress the importance of this phrase, "and *all the more* as you see the day drawing near (καὶ *τοσούτῳ* μᾶλλον ὅσῳ βλέπετε ἐγγίζουσαν τὴν ἡμέραν).[103] The combination of τοσούτῳ (*tosoutō*), an adjective, and μᾶλλον (*mallon*), an adverb in the phrase, is marked for emphasis. There are only four other occurrences in Hebrews where τοσοῦτος is used (see Heb. 1:4; 4:7; 7:22; 12:1). But in this verse 10:25, it is combined with another comparative particle μᾶλλον, something the author did not use before, nor he did after. Ellingworth notes that the force of τοσοῦτος is ascensive,[104] stressing the necessity for mutual encouragement for believers in view of the pressing and difficult situations the Christian community is going through (see Heb. 10:34; 13:3).[105] This suggests that when persecution and trials come, Christians should not abandon their community; instead, they should *all the more* look for opportunities for meeting together to provoke one another to love and good deeds. This reminds us of the warning of Jesus in Matthew 24:12-13 NIV, "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be

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[101]Danker, Bauer, and Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* 764-765.

[102]Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews,* 529.

[103]See Danker, Bauer, and Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* 764-765.

[104]Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews,* 529.

[105]See Thomson, *Hebrews*, 207 and Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews,* 528.

saved." [106] Believers need each other. Every Christian needs a community where they will be encouraged to persevere in their faith and grow in their love for one another (see John 13:34-35).

Conclusion

There is much more to discuss about the importance of the church meeting together. But for now, let me conclude with the following important remarks on why believers should not forsake their physical gathering together as a community.

First, believers must gather together because media technology is incapable of nurturing and sustaining genuine human relationships. Praise God for technology! Media technology has been helpful in so many ways and it has become the epitome of human ingenuity. However, it also has an intrinsic and powerful ethos that can ruin our ability to enjoy healthy and deeply satisfying interpersonal relationships. Hence, the overwhelming infiltration and expansion of media technology into our world, particularly in the church, are compelling us to reexamine the quality of our interpersonal relationships, the intimacy and harmony of our faith community, and the effectiveness of our witness to the world. It is unfortunate that despite the tidal wave of having unlimited ways to connect and communicate with other people, one study shows that many of us are losing real friends. The majority cannot even name a friend for each of their fingers.[107] This only means that many of us are getting lonelier. When virtual meetings are becoming the norm in today's culture, we should remind ourselves that humans are not disembodied souls. Therefore, the best and most effective way of communication is achieved through face-to-face interaction. Should we let technology control our activities and limit the manifold expressions of our love? God forbid that this should be the case.

Second, believers must gather together because that is what the church is. We are a community where God's Spirit dwells. We are designed and called for fellowship. Our experience and intrinsic longing testify that it is not good for a man to be alone. We need others for survival and growth. Should we settle for virtual meetings? *No.* Due to the deceitfulness of sin, believers are commanded not to give up their gathering together for mutual encouragement and support "to stimulate one another to love and good deeds." Alone, we are weak. But together, we can be strong. As a proverb says, "Two are better than one . . . A cord of three strands is not quickly broken,"[108] so individuals in the church

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[106]NIV, 1985.

[107]Segal, "Why Don't We Have Good Friends?"

[108]Ecclesiastes 4:9,12, NIV (1985).

need each other for encouragement. As adversity and persecution arise, in view of the future, we should gather all the more as the day of the Lord approaches. The Lord promises not to leave us nor forsake us. May it be the same commitment we give to our fellow believers. Let us not forsake our assembling together lest we fall; instead, let us be devoted to one another (see Rom. 12:10). Every time believers gather in *his name*; it gives us a foretaste of the coming kingdom. The Christian community may have many weaknesses and deficiencies; nonetheless, this is the church Christ redeemed with his blood. He died for her so that he could cleanse her and prepare her for his return.

Third, believers must gather together because love is best expressed in person. God's love came to us in the person of Christ. He is the embodiment and exact expression of God's love. In other words, love is tangible. It is something that can be seen, touched, and experienced. Jesus loves sinners. That's why he came, ate, and walked with sinners. He came to die for sinners. Thus, we should not ignore the importance of the body. Our physical presence as a church serves as salt and light to this world (see Matt. 5:13-16). According to Jesus, we can shine our light best in darkness through our good deeds (see Matt. 5:16). Good deeds require embodiment.

Lastly, it might also benefit us if we ask ourselves why an increasing number of believers prefer to attend an online church than join an in-person fellowship. What are we missing? Do we care enough to look for answers to this problem? If we genuinely love enough and consider others' interests more than our own, we should quickly look for ways to address this problem. It could be a good topic for another research venture. I hope that through this paper, the church will be encouraged to love one another more deeply and sincerely and pursue our fellowship together as we look forward to the coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

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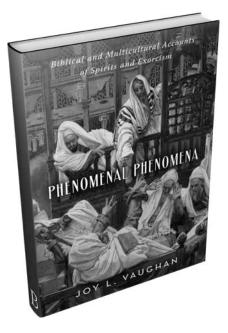_segments=&origin=&initiator= (accessed April 26, 2023).

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Megachurches as Spiritual Capital Centers in Metro Manila, Philippines: Evidence from Christ's Commission Fellowship (CCF)

By Joel Agpalo Tejedo[1]

Introduction

Megachurches attract congregants because they offer a strong deposit of spiritual capital and other capital that contribute to the overall well-being and happiness of an individual, organization, and perhaps even a nation. If spiritual capital can be defined as "the power, influence, and dispositions created by a person or an organization's spiritual belief, knowledge, and practice" (Palmer and Wong 2013, 8), how do mega-churches generate spiritual capital for their congregants? What attracts and predetermines vibrant, healthy, and growing Megachurches in the Philippines? While there have been increasing studies on spiritual capital, very few studies have been undertaken about the nature of the spiritual capital within mega-churches. While it remains an academic puzzle, when we know why and how Megachurches generate spiritual capital for their congregants, we could advance and use this study to unlock the enigma of why and how megachurches have grown in the Global South. This study asserts that megachurch leadership investing in spiritual capital empowers its congregants to acquire and attain individual happiness, organizational development, and a greater political voice. Megachurches, like Christ Commission Fellowship (CCF), are a symbolic representation of spiritual capital and other resource capitals because of their power and influence in the religious landscape. This study examines Christ's Commission Fellowship (CCF) to find out why and how CCF is growing as a megachurch in the religious landscape of the Philippines.

Defining Spiritual Capital and Its Implications to Religious Individuals, Organizations, and Nations

Berger and Hefner define spiritual capital as "a subspecies of social capital referring to the power, influence, knowledge, and dispositions

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created by participation in a particular religious tradition" (Berger and Hefner, 2003; Grace 2012, 9). However, most scholars reject this definition and see spiritual capital as an "independent form of value" rather than merely a subset of social, cultural, and religious capital. According to Palmer and Wong, spiritual capital can "generate and transform social and material relations" (Palmer and Wong 2013, 1). They find that religious and spiritual communities are leading in developing civil society organizations (Palmer and Wong 2013, 2). The most succinct definition of spiritual capital comes from Alex Liu: "Spiritual capital is the power, influence, and dispositions created by a person or an organization's spiritual belief, knowledge, and practice" (Palmer and Wong 2013, 8).

Resources are created when people invest in religion. Woodberry writes, "In the process, they build up spiritual, material, intellectual, and social resources that shape both themselves and society" (Woodberry 2005, 2). Iannaccone's research shows that religious communities have the "skills and experiences specific to one's religion, including religious knowledge, familiarity with church ritual and doctrine, and friendship with fellow worshippers, which produce religious resources that people define as valuable and explain religious behavior (Iannaccone 1990, 299). While Woodberry differentiates between spiritual capital and other forms of capital, he clarifies that religious people view "their relationship with God as central and that they emphasize and actualize that relationship in their group activities" (Woodberry 2005, 1). Woodberry's concept of spiritual capital among religious people is a "form of investment" with the hope of some return; in other words, people acquire various forms of capital—spiritual, social, cultural, and even financial. Spiritual capital is both a resource and a repository "that people draw on to meet various challenges—sickness, political oppression, ethical choices, or social problems. Religious organizations are also "sources of moral teaching and religious experiences that may motivate, channel, and strengthen people to reach particular ends" (Woodberry 2005, 2).

Woodberry first argues that highly religious people's investment in spiritual capital positively impacts their physical well-being: they live longer, have fewer mental problems, and recover more quickly from sickness. They exhibit less risky behavior, are more socially involved, have higher self-esteem, and have greater happiness (Woodberry 2005, 4-5). Second, while there are dark sides to religion in some parts of the globe, religion is generally instrumental in increasing democratization and obedience to the rule of law (Woodberry 2005, 5). Third, mounting empirical evidence shows that religious people who invest in spiritual capital become personally involved in helping. They "tend to volunteer more time and give more money to help people informally and to support

both religious and non-religious voluntary organizations" (Woodberry 2005, 5). Fourth, while religious people use religious ideals to convert people, religious education promotes literacy that has implications for a society's economic well-being. Woodberry acknowledges that these perceptions of religion might tempt some researchers to consider only the positive side of religion. However, these are general tendencies rather than a universal truth. Different researchers might focus on other factors that create a common good. Woodberry admits that religious and non-religious organizations can develop these general tendencies (Woodberry 2005, 7).

The Conceptual Mapping of the Role of Megachurches in Urban Metro Manila

Even before megachurches developed in Metro Manila, Christian churches had been recognized as prominent organizations with an important role in shaping a city's public life. Despite the increasing influence of secularization and modernization—antagonists that push religion out of the public discourse—Christian churches in the Philippines remain change agents for social and political transformation. Delotavo's analysis of the church's role in the Philippines points out that the church "remains at the forefront of moral empowerment, an agent of political change, a political refuge, and the most influential opposition against corruption" (Delotavo 2016, 225). In addition, Delotavo notes that "the church with its interrelated relationship with the state was instrumental for nurturing life and as a therapeutic institution that has a repository of transcendent values that heal an ill nation" (Delotavo 226; Elisha 2008, 154).

Megachurches nurture urban life as centers of great spiritual significance and hubs of community cohesion. The study of megachurches in Metro Manila was of significant interest to some Asian scholars in the 1990s. Julie Ma, an instructor in missions at the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary in 1997, identified some growing churches in Metro Manila that she considered megachurches (Ma 1997, 2). Her qualitative study showed that these megachurches arose from the Evangelical-Pentecostal-Charismatic tradition. The founding pastors of these megachurches had different histories and motivations. Some built big congregations based on signs and wonders experienced or performed by these founding pastors. Some pastors had visions and dreams. Some started Bible studies and fellowship meetings, while Western missionaries began others.

Megachurches in the Philippines have significantly changed the congregational life of their members. These megachurches own

campuses and multisite fellowship meetings. They have shifted from using TV media to web pages, Facebook, YouTube videos, and live streams at a fraction of the previous cost. Although they still adhere to mother organizations, they are becoming autonomous in branding, tailoring their programs, and avoiding bureaucratic delays. On-the-job training is more valued than seminary training (Dart 2010, 21-23). Worship services are contemporary with creative worship styles. Some megachurches are designed like shopping malls to attract and accommodate large crowds. A critique of megachurches indicates that this rationale is anthropologically rather than theologically based (Warner 2010, 26).

Another striking observation about megachurches is that they are like therapeutic, spiritual pharmacies for individuals. Wellman, Corcoran, and Stockly-Meyerdirk's 2014 study of twelve megachurches in the US from the perspective of ritual theory shows that megachurches produce positive emotional energy. Membership symbols are charged with emotional significance, feelings of morality, and a heightened sense of spirituality. Contrary to the criticism that megachurches are "superficial sources of entertainment that do not produce the significant feeling of belonging, moral responsibility, or spirituality," megachurches are perceived as good drugs that provide spiritual prescriptions for the betterment of life (Wellman, Corcoran, and Stockly-Meyerdirk 2014).

Ethnographic observations and interviews among members of megachurches in the US study done by Snow *et al*. show that megachurches attract and appeal to the masses for two reasons: at the personal level, megachurches provide a fine-tuning of a wide array of emotional problems and issues. At the organizational level, megachurches are major players in a self-help market economy (Snow *et al.* 2010, 165).

Filipino individuals attending megachurches today also find them sacred public spaces that enhance individual quality of life and happiness. Megachurches in the Philippines contribute rapidly to improving individuals' belief systems and boosting public morale. The establishment of megachurches like Christ's Commission Fellowship (CCF), Victory Christian Fellowship (VCF), and other Pentecostal megachurches in Metro Manila demonstrates the new face of Christianity emerging in the Philippine religious landscape. The critiques of social scientists and marketing theoreticians also confirm that the megachurch phenomenon successfully markets its witness, power, and influence in the business centers.

Joy Chin writes that megachurches like City Harvest Church in Singapore "display a striking similarity in their rationalization of production and consumption to those mass-production corporations of

which Mcdonalds' is the epitome" (Chin 2007, 1). Drawing from Ritzer (1993) and Cook (2002), Chin further argues that through this McDonaldization of megachurches, they "grow in size in a short period of time and acquire their unique identities and influences in the society" (Chin 2007, 2; Ritzer 1993; Cook 2002). Daniels and Ruhr, who critique megachurches from an economic perspective, argue that megachurches are attractive and successful because megachurches are "asserting their ability as consumers of religious products to engage in religious switching." That is to say that megachurches attract religious refugees because they "provide low cost and low commitment at the start, but the moment the attendees perceive a good fit in the church, they increase expectations and commitments" (Daniels and Ruhr 2012, 2).

Similarly, megachurches can create bonding and bridging capital that connects to their influence in the public sphere and transnational networks. Chong, an astute sociologist in Singapore, observes that the rise of megachurches in Asia was due to the influx of Protestant churches that detached themselves from the control of mother organizations for greater freedom of innovating and branding their worship style (Chong 2018, 407). He observes that the theology of the prosperity gospel and openness to charismata are associated with megachurches because of the upward mobility lifestyle of the middle classes. In addition, megachurches teach the integration of "sacred" and "secular" as a social space of Christian witness to encourage members to become change agents in society (Chong, 408). Chong also points out that the development of megachurches in Asia is a by-product of a growing "transnational" relationship with their Western counterparts. Although he acknowledges that some megachurches have an indigenous origin, the influence of international cooperation and globalization has opened an immense network between these megachurches. They share information, knowledge, resources, and leadership models to maintain their religious status as megachurches (Chong, 411; Rene Mendoza 1999, 1).

In the studies of Cornelio and Sapitula on the sociology of religion in the Philippines, three essential observations emerged as to why Christian religiosity in the Philippines is steadily vibrant, regardless of the decline of attendance at Catholic churches. First, the "missionizing zeal of Evangelical churches" promotes a "communal and highly experiential mode of spirituality available to other Christian churches." This attracts the Catholic youth to transfer their religious affiliation. Second, religious vibrancy is fueled by charismatic renewal movements in Catholic and Evangelical churches as they open up religious spaces for Filipinos to find personal meaning that affects spiritual discipline and the betterment of life (Cornelio and Sapitula 2014, 2, 3). Third, Cornelio and Sapitula observe that megachurches have begun to showcase their

successes and religious sites as a "grand global appeal" to demonstrate the gravitational shift of Christian mission from the West to the Global South. A case in point is the establishment of El Shaddai's International House of Prayer in Parañaque (Cornelio and Sapitula 2014; Cornelio 2018, 1).

A study by Cartledge *et al.* on megachurches in London in 2017 shows a variety of activities of social engagement. These include work with children and youth, older people, the homeless, families, couples, people with physical and health needs, the widowed and bereaved, and community development such as educational projects and social campaigning against human trafficking (Cartledge *et al*. 2019, 1). According to this study, megachurches are galvanizing civic engagement that positively impacts the lives of the city and its citizens and is working for real change in the communities they seek to serve (Cartledge *et al*. 2019, 1). Some essential findings from this study resonate with policymakers and social innovators to encourage collaboration between religious groups and civil society. While megachurch pastors, leaders, and congregants value beliefs, rituals, and values, the principal reason for their social engagement is their inherent personal and vibrant relationship with God. Megachurch members engage in social concerns because a relationship with God is the heart of their motivation (Cartledge *et al*. 2019, 2). The social engagement of megachurches is not primarily motivated by an agenda of proselytization and evangelism. Still, it is a product of a solid interpersonal relationship within the faith community and with other partners (Cartledge *et al.* 2019, 3). As a result, church social engagement provides a substantial deposit of spiritual and social capital to their members and the broader networks of the community (Cartledge *et al.* 2019, 5). According to this study, the diversity of forms of social engagement in these megachurches is based on each church's distinctive calling and conviction. There is no uniformity of social engagement but rather a diversity of expressions of Christian faith in the public sphere (Cartledge *et al.* 2019, 5, 6).

Cornelio's study of the Jesus Is Lord Church (JIL) headed by Eddie Villanueva shows that megachurches like JIL are prime players at the forefront of indigenizing Christianity and have "political leverage" in Philippine society. Although they experienced political harassment and an assassination attempt initially, JIL stood as a megachurch with a strong political voice in the Philippines (Cornelio 2018, 130-138). Cornelio admits this is not always the case for megachurches in the Philippines. His recent study reveals that some megachurches are branded as "apolitical" for failing to stand on what is morally right. According to this study, megachurches acknowledge that, although they have an important voice in the social space, they have failed to take a

position on crucial political and moral issues. A case in point is President Duterte's "war on drugs," where they failed "to recognize the structural causes and consequences of substance abuse in the country" (Cornelio and Marañon 2019, 224, 227).

A Case Study: Christ's Commission Fellowship, Ortigas, Pasig City
Sources of Spiritual Capital: Spiritual Leadership

Peter Tan-Chi, the founding pastor of CCF, came to know Christ through his father, who encouraged him to transfer to a Christian school that invites people to speak about the Bible. In his reflection on how he came to faith, he recalls:

> Someone told my father to transfer me to another school. In that school, they teach the Bible. One day we had a speaker, and he came and shared the gospel. So, finally, I understood that I needed Jesus. That day I gave my life to Jesus, my life began to change. Then one day, I was hospitalized, and the Lord spoke to me. He said, "Do you really want to be serious with me? What do you want to do with your life?" And that is when the Lord said in my heart, Start a Bible-believing church. And slowly and surely, the Lord told me and taught us. New Testament Church simply means, "keep it simple, focus on evangelism, focus on discipleship, teach people how to share the gospel," and that is what we did. That was thirty-two years ago. By the grace of God, we are what we are today. It is all because of him. (Tan-Chi 2016, at 0.32-1.11).

Tan-Chi started as a self-supporting pastor and businessman. He is the founder and chairman of AXEIA Group of Companies, one of the leading mass housing and subdivision developers. He also founded The Master's Academy—the first home school program accredited by the Department of Education in the Philippines in 2014. In addition, Tan-Chi, who holds a doctorate in ministry, is involved in various organizations such as the Asian Theological Seminary, International Graduate School of Leadership, and the Far East Broadcasting Company Philippines, all located in Manila. The University of the Philippines recognized him as a Distinguished Alumnus of the UP College of Business Administration. He was given the UPAA Distinguished Award in Entrepreneurship and Employment Creation.

Deonna, his wife, is a Caucasian American educated at the University of South Florida, majoring in Psychology and Sociology. Deonna is the founder of homeschooling in the Philippines and is known

by her family and friends as a conference speaker, mentor, discipler, and counselor for women. Peter and Deonna have five children and ten grandchildren.

In 1972, his father's company was sequestered by the government during the martial law period (1972-81). Peter, the vice president then, was removed and became jobless. In 1992, while he and his wife held Bible studies in Makati, gangsters ransacked his house and raped his 15-year-old daughter. Despite these two painful experiences, Tan-Chi and his family forgave the perpetrators (Mendoza, 2015, 17, 47, 106). In his interview with the 700 Club in the Philippines, Peter and Deonna recalled their response:

> I do not understand. I do not see any good coming out of this. But I will trust you. I pray you will help me understand. I saw evil that night. I cannot believe how people can go to your house, abuse people, steal things. I felt our rights were so violated. It is hard to explain. I think that is one of the worst tragedies a father can experience. I have never cried more in my life. I said, 'Is it worth it serving Him?' Who is in charge? Perhaps God is not in charge? Perhaps the truth about the sovereignty of God is not true … certain things are beyond Him? … And the amazing thing is how God moves in our hearts. Where will I turn to? I do not know what good will come out of this … BUT … I claim Your promise … something good will come out, and I said, 'Please, Lord, show me' (Tan-Chi *et al.*, 2014, 1:17 – 5:50).

Similarly, Deonna recalled: "If I turn away from God, where would I go? He is my life. He is my love. He is my everything. God loves Joy more than I love her. I said, 'Okay, God, I am going to trust you. I will hold You to your promise, and I won't let You go until I see the good that You promise me now at this tragedy" (Tan-Chi *et al.*, 2014, 2:03).

These challenges of megachurch pastors like Tan-Chi have motivated them to innovate and model successful parenting that establishes respect, credibility, and integrity in the family before their people (Tan-Chi, 2014, 29). The family's ability to forgive and ask forgiveness from others has become a hallmark. Tan-Chi once recalled his own experience with his son:

> A few years ago, my eldest son, Peter Jr., and I were riding in the car together. In my mind, everything was all right between us, but I casually asked him, "Son, how can I improve as a parent? Have I ever hurt you in any way?" To my surprise, he replied and opened his heart. "Yes, Dad, when I was in high

school, I felt bad that you did not allow me to play basketball with my friends on Tuesday nights at school." That hurt me. I did not realize that he had carried this in his heart for years. I told him that I was sorry, and I did not realize how it had affected him. We talked some more, and I apologized, and asked him to please forgive me. He graciously did forgive me. And our relationship now is even closer. I still ask him now and then how I am doing and how I can improve (Tan-Chi, 2014, 75).

Tan-Chi has crafted essential materials to empower families and small groups at CCF. (Tan-Chi, 2014, 3). As a father and pastor, Tan-Chi leads by example and modeling. Joy Tan-Chi Mendoza, the third among the children of Peter and Deonna, describes her parents this way:

The greatest modeling our parents have provided in our home was their intimacy with the Lord. This was the secret to their Spirit-filled testimonies. I knew with absolute certainty that my parents loved God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. And that is why they loved us too. My siblings and I made many mistakes while growing up, but my parents always affirmed we were loved and accepted. We did not have to earn their love. They pursued us relationally and often communicated and demonstrated that we were their priority and that we were special to them (Tan-Chi, 2017, 25).

History of CCF

CCF was among eleven megachurches planted in one of the business hubs of Metro Manila. A staggering membership of 110,000 is housed at the 10-story building in Frontera Verde in Pasig City. Pasig City is ranked as the eighth most significant city in the Philippines, with a population of 755,300. With three couples in 1982, Pastor Peter and Deonna Tan-Chi started a Bible Study fellowship in Brookside Subdivision in Cainta Rizal. As they grew, the Bible study was moved from the garage of Loreto Carbonel at Cainta Rizal to San Juan, Metro Manila. This Bible Study became a core group of 40 people comprised of business people and professionals with their families. They began their first Sunday worship at the Asian Institute of Management (AIM) and formed the Christ's Commission Fellowship in 1984. Transferring from one theatre to another bigger theatre in 1987 because of increased attendance, CCF occupied the 4,500 seats of the Philippines International Convention Center (PICC) in Pasay City in 1988. Then they moved to

the Country Club of Valle Verde in Pasig City until CCF found its new home in St. Francis Hall in Ortigas Center in 1997. CCF steadily grew as an influential megachurch in Metro Manila during this period.

CCF Parañaque was established as the first satellite congregation in 1994 with the influx of worshipers from south of Metro Manila. With the dawn of the new millennium in 2000, newly established satellite congregations of CCF began to emerge in Metro Manila and other provinces of Pampanga, Cebu, Bukidnon, and Davao. Concurrently, CCF congregations were established in Alabang, Pasig in Ever Gotesco, Malolos Bulacan, and Marikina. These spread CCF's influence in other major cities. In 2006, CCF established its first overseas congregation in Singapore.

For two decades, Tan-Chi and the leadership team had dreamed of a mega worship hall. In 2008 they held a groundbreaking ceremony to build a 10,000-seat auditorium in a ten-story permanent worship hall in Pasig City. They moved in five years later. They also started live-streaming worship services online. As a result, many CCF satellite churches were born in Metro Manila and other provinces. In 2012 CCF expanded its influence and aggressively planted satellite churches overseas in Auckland, New Zealand, Canada, and Los Angeles, California.

Celebrating its 36th anniversary in 2020, they revealed that CCF is regularly seen in 183 countries worldwide through TV broadcasts and social media networks with sixty satellite congregations in the Philippines. CCF also claims over 800 small groups and 118 campus missionaries. However, during the pandemic, they organized themselves into 3,000 small groups, adding another six local congregations in the country and overseas. Today, from its humble beginning, CCF has seventy-five satellite congregations and over 10,000 small groups, expanding its reach with forty satellite and over 33,000 house churches in over thirty countries worldwide. CCF patterned itself after the first-century church with indigenous leadership and ministries without foreign affiliations and financial support. It stands as a rising megachurch in the Philippines and Southeast Asia (CCF, 2020: 0.22-0.36).

Leadership, Governance, and Beliefs

The CCF leadership team comprises diverse leadership giftings. Leaders serve as full-time or bi-vocational pastors. The senior pastor and his children, their sons and daughters-in-law, are bi-vocational preachers and Christian workers at CCF, active in ministry and the corporate world. Ricky Sarthou, a former vice-president of an insurance company in

Makati, is the executive pastor of CCF and co-preaches with Tan-Chi in their morning services. He serves on the organization management committee of CCF. He and his wife lead the discipleship groups (D-Groups). JP Masakayan, from Georgetown University, is the central management director, chief of staff, and Management Committee member. Pastor Rito Bong Saquing, a former Bread of Life pastor, leads the Tagalog service on Sunday afternoon.

The church is governed by the board of elders and served by different pastors in the main church. However, CCF is organized by regional and satellite pastors in the Philippines and overseas. With a passion to disciple the whole world, CCF has a mission "to honor God and make Christ-committed followers who will make Christ-committed followers." CCF envisions "a movement of millions of committed followers of the Lord Jesus Christ meeting in small groups, transforming lives, families, communities, and all nationalities, all for God's glory." The church's mission and vision statements are based on the Great Commission of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 (Tan-Chi 2015, 4-7). Tan-Chi challenged his members during the 32nd anniversary of CCF:

> Christians ought to be like Jesus. Without discipleship, this will not happen. Without discipleship, Christians fail to be the salt and light of the world. An even greater tragedy is that their lives may turn off those who need Jesus. Without discipleship, the foundations of the family will not be rock solid, and children will not grow to follow Jesus and survive the temptations and deceptions of the world. The sad reality is that Christians who are not properly discipled can harm the cause of Christ (Tan-Chi, 2015, 5).

Core values define CCF's identity and the relationships around it. As committed Christ-followers, they are called to replicate the same values in other believers. The principle of servant leadership guides them. For CCF members, the word *servant* stands for sacrificial love for God and others, evangelism and equipping, reliance on the Holy Spirit and prayer, volunteer lay leadership, the authority of the Scriptures and leaders, nurturing of family relationships, truthfulness and integrity, and small group discipleship (Tan-Chi 2015, 8-9).

The church subscribes strictly to conservative evangelical doctrines, upholding the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures and the Trinitarian theology of the Godhead. Salvation is received only through Jesus Christ, who can freely offer forgiveness of sins. The church is composed of Christians who confess Jesus as Lord all over the globe, particularly as local believers in a specific locality. They take the mission of the church

seriously, including the command of Jesus to evangelize and disciple people who respond to the Good News. As to marriage and gender, CCF believes that marriage is the union of a biological male and female. Human life is sacred because people were created after the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-27) (CCF 2023).

Global Leadership Center

According to Campilan and Fong, at the heart of CCF is a passion to bring the good news of Jesus to the lost. Thus, CCF is motivated to equip and enable every member to become a witness of Jesus Christ, whose transforming power repairs broken lives and relationships (Campilan and Fong 2015, 10). Furthermore, CCF believes in training its members to become volunteer workers who will actualize the mission of CCF.

The CCF Global Leadership Center (GLC) was organized to make every member a servant leader. Through lessons from eight books, members are led from a small group into a Discipleship Group (D-Group). At the basic level, four modular classes train prospective leaders in character formation, biblical knowledge, and skills development. This program is intended to educate members to bridge the divide between sacred and secular so that everyone becomes a witness in the marketplace (Campilan and Fong, 10). Each member is required to complete two Essentials, contained in eight workbooks. The GLC 1 Essentials, a four-volume set, provides "foundational knowledge on salvation and church membership to help believers grow in a Discipleship Group" (D-Group). The GLC 2 Essentials, comprised of books 5 to 8, "builds on the top of core essentials of the faith" and helps members exercise spiritual discipline as they progress from a small group to a D-Group.

Then the new disciples progress to a GLC Upgrade (GLC 3 & 4). This modular training aims to give disciples further life training and skills development to become disciple-makers. This supplemental training continues to develop members in spiritual growth and multiplication. The fourth activity level is the GLC Catalyst, which deals with personal development, biblical stewardship, stress management, and other topics. While the GCL program provides this vital training for its members, GCL continues to "provide discipleship conferences that fuel that vision and passion for disciples and disciple-makers alike" (Campilan and Fong, 11).

The D-Group

The church leaders believe that they have to start small to grow big. According to Asuncion and Fung, this conviction is rooted in the model of Jesus. Jesus began his ministry with twelve disciples and then intended to disciple them so that they could make disciples (Asuncion and Fong 2015, 15). Patterned after the model of Jesus, CCF organizes the Discipleship Group (D-group) to transfer this legacy of Jesus to CCF members. A D-Group, according to Asuncion and Fong, "provides accountability and support to its members. Character is built through interpersonal relationships both inside and outside the groups. Moreover, in the D-Groups, the vision for creating more Christ-committed followers is communicated and followed through more consistently" (Asuncion and Fong 2015, 15).

How does CCF implement D-Groups for successful disciple-making? Members of a D-Group go to different stages of development. Asuncion and Fong say, "A person must hear the gospel of Christ first (Engage-Connect). When this person chooses to believe (Evangelize-Believe), then the D-Group will bring this person to spiritual growth through spiritual feeding" (Edify-Grow). This person now needs a mentor in the D-Group to bring them to regular accountability meetings in foundational Bible Study and modeling Christ-like behavior (Equip-Mentor). After this process, the D-Group leaders cast a vision of sharing Jesus with the next generation of believers in their homes, workplaces, and communities. Once the D-Group member is trained, they too "begin to mentor other new believers to be Christ Committed followers while still being discipled by their leader" (Asuncion and Fong 2015, 15). A sign that a D-Group leader reaches the multiple stages (Empower-Multiply) is when members of the D-Group start their D-Group. The D-Group attains its goal as a D12 group when each member mentors the disciples of their group.

Through these stages and processes of discipleship at CCF, according to Asuncion and Fong, "CCF sustains exponential growth and manages a healthy balance between quantity and quality spiritual growth in a small group" (Asuncion and Fong 2015, 15). Paolo Sanchez, one of the D-Group leaders, firmly believes that CCF small group discipleship is "like an incubator for believers in Christ. It is where we grow spiritually to undertake the greater work God has prepared for us. It is where our fears and failures go head-to-head with raw, unadulterated faith—not blind, unthinking faith, but faith that poses questions and pushes boundaries to grasp and live out God's truth" (Sanchez 2015, 16).

As for the procedure by which D-Group leaders assign members to their respective groups, Giannina Mendoza Tan says: "It was simple and

fast. First, people register with their basic information: age, interests, and group preference (single or married). Then the system assigns newcomers to a group that fits their demographics and preferences" (Tan 2015, 17).

Worship Services

Worship services are tailored and branded to attract and meet the members' various needs. With an astounding number of worshippers coming on Sundays, the worship services are a collective work effort of the dedicated and efficient CCF staff. The phases and sequences of worship services are patterned after Evangelical and Pentecostal worship services. All staff, volunteers, and pastors are assigned particular ministries. Three services are held on Sundays at 9:00–11:00 a.m., 12:00–3:00 p.m., and 6:00 p.m.

Minute attention is paid to detail, with the first volunteers and staff arriving as early as 5:00 a.m. to go about their duties. The second phase, at 8:45–9:00, is the prayer time for groups, teams, and warriors. Appointed pastors, leaders, and prayer warriors take this moment reverently. All prayer requests are posted on the big screen so everyone can see them. A third phase at 8:45–9:30 is devoted concurrently to prayer and praise. Live production and music team members take their respective posts onstage, backstage, and around the worship hall. The prayer team covers the church in prayer for the duration of the service.

At 9:00 a.m., the worship service begins. Backstage, live production team members keep an eye on the technical side of each segment and adjust the lights and sounds. CCF differs in its style of giving compared to other megachurches. CCF has no announcement or public information during a specified portion of the service. There is no time to pray for the giving or any biblical reference, acknowledgment, or mini-sermon. There are drop-off boxes with posted labels and instructions for anyone to put their offering. The only way for newcomers to know how to give is if they ask at the information desk or spot these areas in the lobbies.

The final phase of the service is the proclamation of the Word (the message) by the senior pastor or assigned speaker. Before preaching, Tan-Chi calls a celebrity, prominent person, or CCF member to testify. These few minutes of sharing their testimony by reading or speaking set the context of the preaching. Messages are combinations of expository, textual, and topical sermons. Sometimes messages are an application of the text to particular issues in society. During the sermon, Music Team members "huddle and practice some lines, then proceed backstage to prepare for the closing of the service. Welcome Center volunteers gather for prayer, reminders, and instructions." From 10:45 to 11:00 a.m., volunteers and staff of different ministries prepare to assist people

exiting the worship hall. Parents pick up their children from NextGen; members bring first-time guests to the Welcome Center; seekers inquire and sign up at the different booths or attend GLC classes (Jingco and Tuazon 2015, 12). These sequences of worship services are followed at all services every Sunday.

Music Ministry

The Music Ministry comprises trained professionals who draw the crowd to worship God Sunday after Sunday. According to Clarice Fong, Exalt Music Ministry is comprised of "volunteers, worship leaders, the band, the choir, all the way to the choir conductor. CCF music ministry consists of eight bands on rotation, and five choirs of twenty members each which serve on rotation throughout the year" (Fong 2015, 72). All services every Sunday are performed by only one team. Songs are selected by the assigned worship leader for the week and approved by the Exalt Ministry Pastor. Groups practice on Saturdays before they are assigned to their designated worship service. Songs are sent to the volunteers to rehearse independently and with a vocal coach on Saturdays, focusing on harmonies and tuning of voices.

A coach trains worship leaders while the choir is rehearsing. Band leaders work with the worship leaders in setting the tone and pace of the praise and worship time. After separate sub-team rehearsals where each group rehearses its parts, the worship team practices together (Fong 2015, 72).

CCF has three band rooms with instruments and sound equipment where the music team rehearses every Saturday. Band members undergo a panel evaluation before joining the ministry through the Musical Director. Choir members go through two auditions before they can serve. After the first audition, vocalists undergo five weeks of vocal training before the second screening. Choir members can be assigned to a worship team. Prompters or backup vocals go through another round of auditions. While leaders encourage musicians to play and sing skillfully, they emphasize the heart and the desire to worship God humbly. Exalt Music Ministry recruits new members in semi-annual auditions (Fong 2015, 72).

Facilities

The CCF building has a modern architectural design, and its facilities are top-of-the-line. Parking areas and security personnel meet vehicles with metal detectors and K9 units. The main entrance is guarded by security, with three more K9 groups who may roam the lobby. Its doors have X-ray machines for baggage and for human congregants. The

lobby is welcoming to congregants. They also have a bookstore, a sports complex, and a mall-type food court. Attendees enjoy well-functioning air conditioning systems, top-tier comfort rooms, and water fountains. There are elevators and escalators for persons with disabilities, the young, and the elderly. Three huge screens are visible to every attendee. As the church preaches discipleship, assigned seating in designated areas caters to new attendees and new converts' discipleship. They have Sunday School classrooms for children from K1 to K12. Nursing mothers are offered privacy in a secluded area where they can listen and participate in the service.

Traffic volunteers are essential to maintaining a safe, secure, and orderly facility. The CCF Traffic Ministry facilitates the orderly flow of 2000 vehicles every Sunday. Traffic volunteers arrive an hour before the worship service. Though they are responsible for logistic and practical matters, traffic volunteers are trained to manage their emotions and encouraged to demonstrate Christian leadership and character as they serve. Starting with three volunteers in 2013, this ministry has grown to six teams of ten to twelve volunteers per team. Each shift is planned around the worship schedules (Coloma and Fong 2015, 73).

Public Theology & Civic Engagement

Megachurches like CCF address issues of broad public concern outside the church community through various means.

Social Media Network

As a megachurch, CCF maximizes the power and potential of technology and social media in expanding its influence and mission locally and globally. Sermons, teaching materials, live-streamed services, and promotional videos are posted on its website, with podcasts, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter posts every week. CCF local satellite churches with their addresses, maps, and phone numbers are promoted on the website. Weekly and monthly activities, communications, and announcements are sent to congregants via websites and social media. D-Group meetings are announced in videos to attract and encourage congregants to participate actively, depending on which group they fit into. CCF enables its members to communicate through the website, emails, or phone calls.

While CCF does not collect offerings during their worship services, members are encouraged to donate and give to the church through PayPal, credit cards, and bank transfers. The church provides seven bank accounts and indicates local and international channels to receive money.

With social media and wireless connectivity, the world has become a global village with convenient communication. In 2007, CCF started a CCF Internet Church and Skypleship to extend its global mission. The goal of the Internet church is to promote evangelism in places where physical presence is difficult and to provide an avenue of discipleship to those who struggle to meet with a regular D-group because of time and location constraints. Because of the CCF Internet Church, the Skypleship program was born. It crosses borders and time zones to connect around the globe. By 2015, there were thirty Skypleship leaders and 204 members in thirty-one countries.

Family Ministries

Modern families today can be more connected than ever because of social media availability. Yet according to Young and Galarpe, families still deal with broken marriages, financial stress, jobs, unemployment, and absentee parents (Young and Galarpe 2015, 21). With these growing challenges, CCF Family was started in 2014 by Edric and Joy Mendoza. This ministry addresses three crucial issues within the family: marriage, parenting, and stewardship. It is rooted in the biblical teaching of Deuteronomy 6:5-7 to bring families closer to God and each other. CCF Family organizes SaturDATES to provide up-to-date transformational Bible study workshops about building a stable marriage and developing excellent parenting skills. As a result of this series of workshops, many families have formed D-groups (Young and Galarpe, 2015:21).

The largest demographic within the CCF is young single professionals. Their ministry, Be One with God (BIG), organizes conferences, retreats, and other events to reach their peers. BIG holds Bible studies for single professionals in strategic centers in Metro Manila and other cities. With creativity and innovation, they offer special interest groups for single professionals, organizing sports, fellowships, and conferences to encourage cross-pollination and collaboration across Metro Manila (Fong 2015, 68-69).

"Kool Solo Parents" serves a growing number of single parents. This vital ministry aims "to provide a supportive environment for single parents facing the challenges of raising the children alone." Embracing members and non-members, KSP allows single parents to share their struggles, triumphs, and concerns within the group without being judged by their past. Through this ministry, single parents learn to rebuild their families through their relationship with Jesus Christ (Villa 2015, 22).

In 2009, the Shepherds Staff Ministry was organized for senior citizens "to see a movement of committed senior adults united in faith and knowledge of the Lord and to share the Word of God and disciple others for the building of the Body of Christ." This service ministry is

based on the principle that Christians must become the practical expression of Jesus in word and works. The seniors conduct medical missions, prayer, counseling, and a feeding program at Smokey Mountain. This ministry of CCF has expanded to various cities in Metro Manila (Gutierrez 2015, 23).

Seniors have an important place and ministry in the church. Young and Dyquiangco say the elderly are in their "prime years of wit, grace, and love" (Young and Dyquiangco 2015, 24). This beautiful attitude toward the elderly, based on Psalm 92:14, says that elderly people can still yield fruit at their age. With creative and innovative programs designed by their assigned pastors, the number of active seniors is growing. They make significant contributions as prayer warriors and volunteer staff at the Welcome Center of CCF (Young and Dyquiangco 2015, 24, 25). Ester Pe-Bico, 78 years old, a retired dentist from the University of the Philippines, says, "No one will notice you, it is hard work, but I experience the joy of the Lord" (Jingco and Tuazon 2015, 25).

Education

One of the educational advocacies of CCF is an innovative school to transform Filipino children and youth from the inside out. Pastor Tan-Chi is passionate about education. His wife started Life Academy in 2014. The Department of Education approved a pre-nursery, nursery, elementary, and high school to provide learners with a holistic education. The goal is to create innovative and transformational leaders. With large and spacious facilities, Life Academy offers innovative programs for youngsters to discover, explore, and develop their talents and skills. Students engage in academic and curricular activities that enhance their gifts and physical, spiritual, and intellectual competencies. At the heart of this program is students' character development (Gutierrez 2015, 28).

Another avenue of the CCF engagement in education is through Elevate, their aggressive evangelization and discipleship program on campuses. Elevate stands for Experiencing a Life Empowered through Values, Excellence, and Leadership. CCF takes seriously the degeneration of moral values of the young generation manifested in unplanned pregnancies, minor crimes, and identity crises. At home, young people face parental problems, broken marriages, single parenting, and peer pressure. Young people are bombarded with promiscuous lifestyles advocated by the media. Elevate emphasizes a life-changing relationship with Jesus and life values grounded in Scripture (de Ocampo and Sollorano 2015, 29-31). According to de Ocampo and Sollorano, campus ministry "drives students to pursue excellence in every area of their lives. It contributes toward nation-building by mentoring and

empowering the youth to become campus leaders and catalysts. It also allows students to see beyond their immediate spheres and encourages them to extend their influence into the nation, and even into the rest of the world" (de Ocampo and Sollorano 2015, 31). CCF has appointed missionaries to sixty campuses nationwide to make disciples by holding weekly worship services within schools and colleges. Clarice Fong writes of one missionary:

> Reynaldo Morante never met his biological father. As a child, Rey grew up with anger and stubbornness, often disobeying authority. He spent his days in his uncle's house in Bulacan. On Christmas Eve 2008, his uncle shared the gospel with Rey. However, the gospel did not take root, and Rey lived a life filled with hatred, self-will, and sexual immorality. In 2011, Rey began to attend CCF Elevate. God gradually transformed Rey into a faithful follower of Christ Jesus (Fong 2015, 32).

Rey's spiritual journey did not end there. Six months later, Rey felt the Lord asking him to lead a D-group for men. The excuses came, but God continued to remind Rey of His all-sufficient grace. God has entrusted Rey with twenty-two high school and college students to disciple (Fong, 2015, 32).

Government

With a strong deposit of spiritual and social capital, CCF values its moral responsibility to influence public servants in the government so that a nation will be transformed. With 60 percent of the people in government in the AFP, PNP, and DepEd, CCF believes that mobilizing its members/volunteers to bring the values of the Kingdom of God into these government agencies can impact government agencies to change. Therefore, the Government Movers Enlightening the Nation (GMEN) was organized in 2005 through a Purpose Driven Life program conducted in the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). It spread to the Philippine National Police (PNP) in 2007 and to the Department of Education teachers in 2011. It aims to bring spiritual and moral transformation to government agencies. The GMEN program serves as a bridge to conduct values formation programs for these three powerful government agencies. Its holistic modules equip government officials, addressing moral and character formation, parenting, stress management, financial management, and pursuing excellence in the workplace.

GMEN also designed a Mentoring Leadership Module, training Christians working in government to teach the PNP and the AFP. All seminars are Bible-based. As a result, hundreds of people in the

government have experienced personal transformation. The goal of GMEN is to see the nation transformed for God's glory. Mariluna Mendoza, a former activist and now a member of GMEN, says, "If you want to have a good government, you want to make sure that the people governing over you know Christ" (Del Rosario 2015, 40).

Business and Marketplace Ministry

CCF believes that all Christians are God's witnesses. There is no divide between sacred and secular. All Christians are called to be witnesses wherever they are working. Pastor Bong Saquing believes that "the business world has its unique language and therefore the church must creatively bring the church to them" (Yang-Uy, 2015, 43). In 2010, CCF members, comprised of corporate professionals, organized the Workplace Winners to establish a community of worshippers within Philippine companies. This ministry seeks to bring the values of the Kingdom of God into the marketplace through value formation and team building. Planted, grown, and multiplying over the years, this marketplace ministry has established Bible study groups within companies. Their vision is transforming the business sector for God's glory in the Philippines (Yang-Uy, 2015, 43).

CCF organized the Lord's Attorneys at Work (LAW) to create a just and loving society. This group of legal practitioners, law students, paralegals, and others in the legal profession provide legal services, using their legal expertise and the Bible to ensure sound understanding and wisdom. This ministry offers legal counseling and consultation weekly and participates in various bridging events and legal forums to educate people on common issues. They also serve inmates in different jails with legal and mediation assistance, and in doing so, they share the gospel with the inmates (Co-Degras, 2015, 44). Christian legal practitioners aim to break the negative image of lawyers by displaying Christ as an advocate for those in need.

Another expression of Christian witness that combines the secular and the sacred is the Bronze Staff, an organization of medical doctors and practitioners. They offer medical services to the poorest and far-flung communities. Bronze Staff is engaged locally, regionally, and internationally (Fong 2015, 45). It was designed for two purposes: to bring the gospel message to poor communities and to disciple recipients of the medical mission to become followers of Jesus Christ.

Addressing Urban Poverty

More than half of Metro Manila's population cannot climb the economic ladder because of a lack of primary education, unemployment,

and the crowded population of Metro Manila. CCF, via UPLIFT Foundation, engages its Christian witness to the urban poor by helping students from low-income families complete their high school studies. CCF partners with the Alternative Learning System (ALS) Program of the Department of Education. Jake Sanchez, one of the scholars of the CCF foundation, acknowledges, "Education is a way for me to attain my dreams. If I have sufficient education, I will have an easier time getting a job. A good education is a solution to raise my family from poverty" (Reyes, 2015, 49). In partnership with the ALS program, the CCF Uplift Foundation provides spiritual and moral transformation through a personal relationship with Jesus, boosting students from physical poverty and addressing their spiritual condition. In addition, the CCF Uplift Foundation engages scholars in various CCF activities to instill the importance of the holistic development that the gospel can bring to students (Reyes, 2015, 49).

Another form of civic engagement among the poor is the ministry of restorative justice, which visits the inmates in various jail centers in Metro Manila. The BIYAHE (*Binigyang Laya ni Hesus*) Jail Ministry means "Toward Freedom in Christ" for criminals and offenders. For the past ten years, this has brought 1,000 inmates to experience personal transformation. BIYAHE volunteers visit three to four jails every week. They conduct centralized and Bible-centered worship services followed by breakout sessions that train Christian inmates to evangelize and disciple their fellow inmates (Jingco and Tuazon 2015, 50). This ministry also helps inmates leaving prison to readjust and reintegrate themselves into society. Follow-up activities train former inmates to find acceptance and become productive citizens.

CCF expresses its social concern among the street kids of Metro Manila through the Backstreet Kids Ministry (BSK), which started in 1998. They feed hundreds of children in various cities of Metro Manila. In 2007 they began *Gabay sa Landas* Foundation (GALA, Guidance for the Path). BSK and GALA cater to the growing number of underprivileged children, using a curriculum that develops long-term contact between volunteers and the kids. This ministry is expanding and extending to the families and communities of these children at risk in Metro Manila and other cities (Dyquiangco, Magpayo, Fong, Tamase, 2015, 51, 54). Gie Fernandez, the head of this ministry, says, "These marginalized children and families are the members of our society who are at the bottom of the [social] pyramid" (Dyquiangco *et al*., 51). They have a major impact on the economy and are influential in electing the nation's leaders. BSK and GALA, like two legs of a charitable organization, collaborate and partner with CCF satellite churches in

Metro Manila to serve and bring transformation to the poor children in Metro Manila.

Another notable expression of social engagement in urban poverty is the CCF Calamity Response (CCF CaRes), which responds to communities stricken by typhoons and floods. CaRes team has designed a disaster risk response that activates CCF ministries during calamities. This program is three-fold: Relief (providing immediate needs like food, hygiene kits, and clothing); Rebuild (getting people back into their homes); and Restore (assisting people to rebuild their lives). As a Christian organization, CaRes offers spiritual, physical, and economic forms of Christian witness to Christian and non-Christian families (Uy and Magno 2015, 52).

Wholistic Healing and Rehabilitation Ministries

CCF feels called to become a signpost of hope and a healing community to those in society who are battling addictions, alcohol, and gambling. CCF believes that these groups of people should not be disenfranchised. Instead, they were embraced and given a second chance to experience the gospel's transforming power.

At a Bible study in 1998 at the rehabilitation center, CCF volunteers started the Glorious Hope Ministry (GHM) to help drug dependents and alcoholics by equipping them to discover and address deep-seated hurts and hang-ups. Because drug dependents and alcoholics tend to show compulsive behaviors that affect the relationship, the GHM of CCF adopted a 12-step program. The program runs from April to October, helping clients identify the root causes of addictions. It provides survival training that reintegrates people into productive community citizens. This process includes group counseling sessions, debriefings, and other therapeutic activities. GHM maintains anonymity and confidentiality in counseling and study group sessions (Guerra 2015, 60).

Over the years, GHM has consistently ministered to hundreds of participants who receive therapeutic healing, forgiveness, and transformation. To further the ministry of transformation among drug addicts, Penuel Home was built and established through the initiative of Dodo Reyes. Its purpose is to bring drug addicts to a deeper transformation so that broken people are changed by God and have a new identity. Penuel Home provides worship services, small group meetings, retreats, and conferences for residents and their families. GHM and Penuel Home partner to bring healing and transformation to those victims of destructive vices (Acosta and Apostol 2015, 62-63).

The Living Free Ministry takes the issues of gay lifestyles seriously. In 2004, it was founded and led by Ronnie G. Aquino Jr., a former

homosexual freed from that lifestyle through Bible study and small group ministry. This educational arm of CCF exists to "educate the gay community with scriptural and non-scriptural truths of effeminate lifestyles." In addition, the church aims to equip former homosexuals who have become Christians to disciple people with gender issues and problems about identity and sexuality. With the multiple and varied needs of CCF members and families, CCF demonstrates pastoral care through child education, pre-marital counseling, weddings, funeral services, home and office dedications, hospital and home visitation, and prayer and deliverance ministries. Started in 2003, the pastoral care ministry comprises lay volunteers who impart biblical understanding for people to grow. This ministry has expanded to CCF satellite churches. It allows the gospel to be preached through acts of service.

CCF Doctrine of Success and Prosperity

Just like Jesus, who increasingly grew in wisdom and stature with God and people, Tan-Chi's doctrine of success is multi-faceted and holistic. Success is multidimensional. In his preaching and teaching series on success, Tan-Chi encourages his members to balance life in the family, workplace, business, and finances. Success for Tan-Chi, is "becoming all that God wants you to be, and doing all that he wants you to do, and hearing him say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your master'" (Tan-Chi, 2018, 2:59-3:14)

Success comes from God, but you have to work it out. Work for CCF is not a curse but to "advance the work of the Kingdom of God." Money should help a person become what God wants him to be. Successful people should be happy people. Leaving a godly legacy for children is better than leaving them plenty of money. Success is missional and also involves character formation. Personal success involves personal development. Success is becoming what God wants one to become and reaching their highest potential" (Tan-Chi, 2018, 5:24-35).

CCF Response to COVID-19

CCF believes that the first response to a global pandemic is prayer. In the middle of the national quarantine ordered by the President of the Philippines, CCF called its members to commit to prayer. They believe that the church must arise to be the hands and the feet of Jesus. During COVID-19, CCF opened its CCF Gym Center to accommodate frontliners from nearby hospitals. They helped supply frontliners with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and purchased food packs for distribution through various local government units.

CCF pastors contextually addressed issues by preaching messages of hope to their congregants and the Filipino people (Tan-Chi, 2020, 1:54). Tan-Chi's response to COVID-19 was twofold: from a spiritual point of view, he encouraged members of CCF to surrender their fear to God and trust him in their difficult circumstances, and he encouraged his people to use the global health crisis as an opportunity to spread the Good News and share the gospel of Jesus to people who were afraid to die.

Conclusion

In studying spiritual capital and how it best functions, we cannot overlook the significant contributions of megachurches. Megachurches are centers of spiritual capital. They provide a variety of platforms within their ministry activities for their people to acquire and share spiritual capital. They boost and empower their members to find meaning and purpose and enable them to behave wisely in their daily lives. CCF serves as a model of a megachurch that uses its power and influence to generate spiritual capital for its adherents. Their platform of individual empowerment consequently brings unprecedented growth to the organization and dramatically influences their nation. CCF carefully innovates and crafts its Christian witness as a megachurch to bring spiritual revolution among its members so that they become change agents in their spheres of influence. Platforms such as worship services, fellowship meetings, training for leaders, and D-group meetings are instrumental in accruing spiritual capital that shapes and molds good citizens. Members of CCF are attracted to the church because of the many good things that empower them to acquire spiritual capital. In the complex area of Christian witness in the public sphere, CCF is creatively applying this acquired spiritual capital in their civic engagement in the marketplace, education, government, and the difficult circumstances of everyday life.

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**Thailand Assemblies of God's Leadership Development Program:
A Way Forward in Ministerial Training**

By Mark Rodli

INTRODUCTION

With over 94 percent of its people adhering to Buddhism,[1] Thailand perceives itself as a custodian of the Theravada Buddhist tradition. Whether in rural life or urban life, the grip of Buddhism is clearly visible. Visitors will be awestruck with the nation's 30,000 temples; 200,000 Buddhist monks making daily rounds; millions of 'spirit houses,' popular shrines, and meditation centers, plus ubiquitous Buddhist iconography. On the other hand, Thai Christians number only 490,000 or roughly 0.75 percent of the population.[2] This comparatively small number of adherents coupled with just a 4 percent Christian conversion growth in Thailand[3] challenge Thai Christian denominations and churches to reflect on their current educational institutions and ministerial training.

Serving the Thailand Assemblies of God (TAG) as its Christian education center is the Thailand Assemblies of God Seminary (TAGS),[4] which provides training programs ranging from a diploma to a master's degree. Admittedly, TAGS' history has been marked by low enrollment numbers, occasional closures, and various issues inhibiting growth. However, a church-based ministry curriculum, such as TAGS' new diploma-level Leadership Development Program (LDP), holds promise of helping propel the TAG into future growth.

To explore how such a church-based ministry curriculum will transform the TAG, this paper sets out to do the following—(1) examine the current educational approach in Thailand and the cultural factors that drive it, (2) outline a brief history of TAGS' development, (3) discuss the way(s) that the LDP fits well for the TAG, and (4) spell out its implications for the TAG.

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[1]Central Intelligence Agency, last modified March 29, 2023, https://www.cia.gov/ the-world-factbook/countries/thailand, (accessed April 7, 2023).

[2]eStar Foundation, last modified April 13, 2022, https://estar.ws, (accessed April 7, 2023).

[3]Marten Visser, *Conversion Growth of Protestant Churches in Thailand* (Zoetermeer, Netherlands: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2008), 102-03.

[4]Formerly named the Thailand Assemblies of God Bible Institute (TAGBI).

PRESENT EDUCATIONAL APPROACH AND ITS CULTURAL DRIVERS

Thai history and culture simultaneously have shaped the current educational approach. History reveals several factors as to how that approach developed. Culture reveals the values that mold and contour education. This section will explore the current primary Thai approach to teaching and how culture shapes it.

Thai Teacher-Centric Approach and Cultural Values Behind It

Thailand, as a new nation-state, developed its national education system in the late 19th century. The pressures of potential colonization by Britain or France motivated its attempt to "promote the economic, educational, social, and cultural sovereignty through the modernization of the Thai state elite, specifically the aristocracy."[5] Then-King Mongkut even employed Western missionaries for educational purposes.

In 1898, King Chulalongkorn tasked his half-brother, Vachirayan, to develop primary education by expanding the traditional system of schooling carried out in the Thai temples.[6] The Sangha Act of 1902 further unified the educational system within Buddhist structures where temples still served as the primary teachers of boys. The nation also employed some Western educational models. In 1917, Thailand established its first institution of higher education—Chulalongkorn University—based on French and German models and emphasizing the humanities, law, and economics[7]

Although it may appear to have been bathed in a mixture of Buddhist and Western models, Thailand's educational system in reality reflects a blend more predisposed to an Asian model. It is an approach that attempts to maintain Thai identity while also borrowing from the West certain educational values deemed beneficial. The result is the teacher-centric approach.

Cultural Components Behind the Teacher-Centric Approach

Culture consists of putative norms among people groups that influence and shape how they behave, how they represent themselves, and their communication, emotion, values and worldview. James

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[5]Douglas Rhein, "Westernisation and the Thai Higher Educatiooon System: Past and Present," *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 48, no. 3 (2016): 262.

[6]Christopher John Baker, and Phongpaichit Pasuk, *A History of Thailand*, 2nd ed (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 66.

[7]Rhein, "Westernization," 264.

Plueddemann notes, "Cultural values powerfully influence expected educational objectives."[8] For the Thai educational system, two culture dimensions play integral parts in its teacher-centric approach—power-distance and collectivism.

Power-Distance

Geert & Gert Hofstede and Michael Minkov's influential work, *Cultures and Organizations,* explains the power-distance dimension as being "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally."[9] With a score of sixty-four on a scale of 1-100, with 100 being the highest, Thailand is regarded as a high power-distance nation where the people expect inequalities;[10] in essence, equality does not truly exist.

In high power-distance cultures, teachers command respect, honor, status, and are considered authoritative due to their knowledge, which means students must acknowledge their teachers' seniority and experience.[11] This indicates a strong hierarchical system common in high power-distance cultures. Accordingly, in the Thai context, power is created by position and the status associated with position and rank.[12] As a result, the Thai teacher commands the classroom, taking control and making decisions regarding the class. However, since the students often need the teacher to tell them what to do plus must show respect, honor, and appreciation, very little interaction takes place between teacher and students, the expectation being that the students remain quiet and learn from the teacher.[13]

Thai psychologist Sunatree Komin identified nine core values (in order of importance) in the nation's culture and refers to the first and most important as *ego-orientation*. She explains:

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[8]James E. Plueddemann, *Teaching Across Cultures: Contextualizing Education for Global Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 86.

[9]Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, and Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind: Intercultural Cooperation and Its Importance for Survival*, 3 ed. (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 2010), 61.

[10]Ibid., 58.

[11]Joko Gunawan, "Understanding Culture in Higher Education," *Education for Health* 29, no. 2 (2016): 160.

[12]Theerasak and Brian Corbitt Thanasankit, "Understanding Thai Culture and Its Impact on Requirements Engineering Process Management During Information Systems Development," *Asian Academy of Management Journal* 7, no. 1 (2002): 108.

[13]J. Kaya and Rachavarn Kanjanapanyakom Prpic, "The Impact of Cultural Values and Norms on Higher Education in Thailand," (The HERDSA Conference, Miri, Sarawak, Malaysia, 2004) 7-8.

The Thai people have big egos and a deep sense of independence, pride and dignity. Violation of this 'ego' self, even a slight one, can provoke strong emotional reactions. . . . Preserving one another's 'ego' is the basic rule of all Thai social interactions both on the continuum of familiarity—unfamiliarity in relationships, and the continuum of superior—inferior/subordinate in relationships, with differences occurring only in degree.[14]

Particular Thai cultural values—'face' and 'criticism-avoidance'—within the ego-orientation core value explain how it is played out in the teacher-centric model.

Regarding 'face,' which "is identical with the sensitive 'ego'"[15] or "a metaphor representing a type of interpersonal social honor and identity projection,"[16] face-saving is the first principle to consider in any kind of evaluative or judgmental action. One must avoid making a person 'lose face' (regardless of rank) at nearly all cost. Long-time missionary to Thailand Jim Hosack relates a story illustrating this. When a university student asked a question of a professor that he could not answer, the result was the professor losing face in front of the whole class and the student receiving a failing grade for the course.[17] Thus, the value of 'face' in the Thai culture makes it risky for students to ask questions, which is why they tend not to ask questions in the classroom.

Similarly, 'criticism-avoidance,' suggests that separating ideas and opinions from the person holding them is likewise very difficult in Thai society. This means that "criticism, particularly strong criticism, is usually taken personally. Criticism of whatever type is a social affront, an insult to the person. When necessary, indirect means are used."[18] Thus, criticism is a way in which someone loses face. Thai culture involves avoiding conflict so as to attain social harmony of the group. However, this too creates difficulties for the education system because change will likely create conflict; and if conflict must be avoided at all cost, then chance of change is stymied.

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[14]Suntaree Komin, "Culture and Work-Related Values in Thai Organizations," *International Journal of Psychology* 24 (1990): 691.

[15]Ibid., 691.

[16]Christopher L. Flanders, *About Face: Rethinking Face for 21st-Century Missions*, vol. 9 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 1.

[17]James Hosack, "The Challenge of Contextualizing Global University Curriculum," (unpublished paper, 2005), 5.

[18]Komin, "Culture and Work-Related Values in Thai Organizations," 691.

Collectivism

Collectivist societies are those in which the interest of the group prevails over the interest of the individual.[19] They value harmony, family honor, and communal success over individual success. In fact, such societies often hamper individuals who do not conform to the societal norms. Since Thailand is characterized as being a strong collective culture,[20] Thai students must conform to a collectivist ideal and change their perspective or face social ostracism. This implies that dissenting opinions will travel quickly, and an immediate response will occur to eliminate dissent. The consequence leads to the strengthening of top-down power culminating in a reduction and avoidance of accountability.[21] Lack of accountability perpetrated by collectivist cultural values articulates another reason why education in Thailand changes slowly.

Collectivism affects students in much the same way as high power-distance, via continued stress on a group, which trumps any action that might make a student stand out in the classroom. Consequently, students who may disagree with the decision of the group will thus remain silent so as not to bring discord. Therefore, collective cultures often limit the students' ability to think critically and debate issues, which remains a major challenge to the Thai education system.[22]

The synergy that often breeds collaboration in collectivism breeds much-needed positiveness in Thai education, as well. Cooperation among learners creates a collaboration of minds to discover, learn, invent, or create. This collaboration leads to achievement by the collective, which brings 'face' to the group. Relatedly, the group helps the struggling students. While social pressure can also come into play in this situation, often teachers will pair stronger students with weaker ones so that the weaker receive help from the stronger. This aids in the learning of both the stronger students (as teaching reinforces learning) and for the weaker students (as they receive more attention and help).

Key Methods to the Teacher-Centric Approach

Driven by historical and cultural factors, teaching to pass exams and rote learning are two key teacher-centric methods of learning utilized, which produces passive learners. Regarding the first, part of the issue originates from pressure the Ministry of Education puts on schools and

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[19]Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations,* 74.
[20]Ibid., 79.
[21]Rhein, "The Workplace Challenge," 46.
[22]Ibid., 50.

teachers for students to pass examinations. This, in turn, strengthens and intensifies the teacher-centric approach by forcing the teacher's lessons to focus on passing the exam. Additionally, the community expects teachers to teach via the traditional lecture method. This causes teachers to plan and manage all learning activities. Therefore, the students' participation in sharing control will be manifested in their doing only what the teacher asks.[23]

Rote learning, the other prevalent method in Thailand, seems to suit teachers well in preparing students to pass examinations. However, many Western educators tend to discard this mode of learning. Lingenfelter & Lingenfelter mention that "Modern educators have commonly rejected imitation and rote learning techniques. They have argued that these strategies limit creativity and innovation in learning."[24]

The teacher-centric mode of teaching, with its passive learning techniques based on passing exams and using rote learning, uncovers a very Thai style of learning. Even when the curriculum and structure of schools fit more Western styles, the modes of learning still tend to come from the broader Asian teaching methodology birthed from Confucianism and hierarchy. Lingenfelter & Lingenfelter express the difficulty in this, averring, "In a class that uses only 'out of context' instruction [meaning largely classroom instruction], students...may fail to transfer the principles and skills learned in the school context to real life."[25]

Anthropologist Neils Mulder observed that in the Thai education system, "It seems as if school knowledge occupies a separate segment of reality that needs to be mastered in order to acquire diplomas rather than that it functions to get an intellectual grip on the world, or to be able to evaluate what is happening there."[26] A by-product of this system is that education becomes "a 'means' to climb up the social ladder, rather than as an end-value in itself (as in knowledge-for-knowledge's sake)."[27] Consequently, getting an education in Thai society becomes more about moving up in status than learning for the sake of learning and growing.

With regard to Christian education in Bible schools, a real problem may be that some who enter these Bible schools in Thailand likely do not enroll for the purpose of learning to help them minister better, but

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[23]Panomporn Puacharearn, "The Effectiveness of Constructivist Teaching on Improving Learning Environments in Thai Secondary School Science Classrooms / Panomporn Puacharearn" (PhD diss., Curtin University of Technology, Sarawak, Malaysia , 2004), 106.

[24]Judith Lingenfelter and Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Teaching Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Learning and Teaching* (Baker Academic, 2003), 39.

[25]Ibid., 41.

[26]Mulder, Niels, *Thai Images: The Culture of the Public World.* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 1997), 61.

[27]Komin, "Culture and Work-Related Values in Thai Organizations," 693.

rather to move up in status (especially at the graduate level). Consequently, a push-pull effect occurs in which the mode of education influences cultural values, which, in turn, continue to influence the educational approach.

THE HISTORY OF TAG BIBLE SCHOOL

The Thailand Assemblies of God (TAG) was founded in December 1969 by Wirachai Kowae. Shortly thereafter, he established a ministry-training center at the Ban Chang Law Church, which served as headquarters for most TAG activities. One of the center's first efforts—the Discipleship Training Program—began at the church less than a year after the TAG's creation,[28] with four students enrolled. Although the program was under the oversight of missionary Loren McCrae,[29] it was Kowae who trained (and actually lived with) these future ministers.

All four students, who had left their jobs and committed to serving the Lord in full-time ministry,[30] directly connected with Ban Chang Law Church. They benefited greatly from their involvement in the church, from Kowae's hands-on training, and from their experiences in church planting. Even though this program proved valuable in the establishment of new churches in Thailand,[31] the TAG executive committee nonetheless considered it as only a stop-gap measure and resolved to establish a full-fledged Bible school within four years.[32]

By 1975, the four Discipleship Training Program students had completed their training and successfully developed their own ministries. That year, as pledged, the TAG launched the Bible school, which they named the Center for Theological Studies, with seven students enrolled and Kowae as its director. However, his role in training decreased.[33] This turned out to be a harbinger of the decline of TAG's education program as it began moving away from the connection it previously had with the local church.

A year later, in 1976, the TAG relocated the Center for Theological Studies to a facility previously used by the Thai military[34] and changed the name to Bangkok Theological Center—an action that further separated the Bible school from Ban Chang Law Church. Interestingly,

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[28]James Hosack, "A Survey of the History of the Thailand Assemblies of God, 1968-1998," (unpublished paper, 1998) 4.

[29]Ibid., 3.

[30] Sam Bowdoin, "Church Planting in the Thailand Assemblies of God from 1969-2009" (DMiss diss., Biola University, La Marida, CA, 2013), 40.

[31]Ibid., 40.

[32]Hosack, "A Survey of the History of the Thailand Assemblies of God, 1968-1998," 1.

[33]Ibid., 4.

[34]Bowdoin, "Church Planting in the Thailand Assemblies of God from 1969-2009," 53.

Kowae moved to the same location shortly thereafter to start a new church, subsequently reattaching his influence on the students. This was short-lived, however, as the pressures of shepherding the growing church limited the time he could dedicate to the students. In addition, lack of space was rendering the school's property inadequate.

In 1977, due to the need for more space, the TAG purchased land in the Bung Kum District of Bangkok which would be dedicated exclusively for the Bangkok Theological Center. The TAG Bible school remains there today, but now sharing land with the TAG headquarters which moved to the Bible school property in 1991. While this solved the space problem, such a move came at a price. Missionary James Hosack notes that, with the school now even more disconnected (by distance) from a specific church, the difficulty of providing full-rounded ministerial training grew. Furthermore, the focus on an academic three-year curriculum decreased the time and attention that could be given to practical ministry concerns.[35] This new focus on academics (primarily lectures) without the practical ministry opportunities became the catalyst for a growing discontentment and an etiolated sense of ownership of the school amongst many of the TAG churches it was meant to serve. Missionary Sam Bowdoin believes the move in 1977 of the Bible school away from the local church meant the Bible school students no longer had a model for practical ministry skills. As a consequence, the number of church plants directly connected with the Bible School fell significantly.[36]

In the mid 1980s, the Bangkok Theological Center changed its name to Thailand Assemblies of God Bible Institute (TAGBI). [37] Dissatisfaction, however, with the direction of the Bible school, due primarily to this perceived lack of practical training and 'great expense with little to show for it,' continued to build throughout the 1980s and 1990s. New data produced in 1996 painted this bleak picture—Of the Bible school's fifteen total graduating classes with eighty-two graduates,

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[35]Hosack, "A Survey of the History of the Thailand Assemblies of God, 1968-1998," 4.

[36]Bowdoin, "Church Planting in the Thailand Assemblies of God from 1969-2009," 118. James Hosack does point out that in 1981, the TAG Bible school director, Pradit Akraphram, encouraged the students to plant a church near the campus. Happy Land Church, located just a few miles from campus became the result of several of these students efforts. Hosack, "A Survey of the History of the Thailand Assemblies of God, 1968-1998," 11. To this date, Happy Land Church is the only church plant started by students near the Bible school campus, and there has been little to no connection with TAG Bible school students since the original students started the church decades ago.

[37]Hosack, "A Survey of the History of the Thailand Assemblies of God, 1968-1998," 7. The TAG Bible school name change was facilitated by missionary Dan Grubbs during his time as director of the Bible School from 1984-1986.

only thirty-one were ministering in TAG churches; that's an average of two from every graduating class.[38]

Sadly, the 2000s onward produced only more dissatisfaction toward the Bible school's track record of large expenditures and limited results. Sam Bowdoin's DMiss research reveals that many in the TAG executive leadership had little confidence in the TAGBI, feeling it lacked direction and that it faced geographical challenges as long as Bangkok remained its sole location.[39] This led to the school's closure in 2004. Although it was reopened in 2006, the TAG never actually addressed the underlining issues, leading to two subsequent closures, the first coming in 2015-16. In 2017, with the addition of the Bible school's first Master of Ministry cohort in connection with Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, which successfully graduated over 30 students in 2019, TAGBI changed its name to Thailand Assemblies of God Seminary (TAGS).[40] However, low enrolled continued to plague TAGS with the exception of the graduate degree, and that year TAGS fell prey to TAG structural disagreements, prompting the second closure in ten years in 2019. It was closed for nearly a year.

In summary, history shows that the TAG Bible school had successfully trained students in the early years through its focus on academic instruction coupled with practical learning because of its proximity to a local church. Once the school was moved, it lost much of its connection to that church and thus the direct link to the practical learning provided by ministry opportunities under the tutelage of experienced ministers. Disconnection with the local church and a focus solely on academic training left the Bible school etiolated, and it militated against any real growth.

Returning to a church-based ministry curriculum within local TAG churches, similar to what occurred in its infancy, may provide both the TAG and its training institution a panacea to a long-standing disconnection with local churches and to the low numbers of ministers trained.

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[38]Ibid., 7, 20-21. Most of the graduates who did not minister in TAG went back to their local churches and served as lay leaders. Some went to other denominations or started their own ministry group.

[39]Bowdoin, "Church Planting in the Thailand Assemblies of God from 1969-2009,"117.

[40]Thai government educational accreditation rules and requirements created problematic issues with the term "institute" for religious institutions of learning. On the other hand, the term "seminary" proved unproblematic. Also, many TAG leaders believed it described the school's addition of a graduate degree more accurately and sounded better than the previous name. It did not, however, change its mission away from training and undergraduate degrees.

CHURCH-BASED MINISTRY CURRICULUM
AS A SOLUTION

History reveals the backdrop that birthed TAG ministerial education, and cultural values illustrate challenges to educating the church's future pastoral and lay leaders. However, an educational methodology that utilizes both cultural norms and new forms of learning will inject new life into outdated models of education. This section focuses on how a church-based ministry curriculum that is shaped by an overarching educational approach of *spiritual formation* (being), *cognitive learning* (knowing), and *experiential/practical learning* (doing) will bring the TAG a fuller approach to learning.

In order to develop a learning platform that works in Thailand, that platform must build off current Thai approaches of learning methodology and culture within the TAG education system while also utilizing other approaches to learning. The new church-based ministry curriculum—called the Leadership Development Program (LDP)—that focuses on 12-course diploma-level lay leader and new pastor training, seeks to blend the old approaches with newer ones. In doing so, it incorporates cognitive learning techniques like rote and lecture with experiential learning through both practical ministry opportunities and with personal spiritual growth learning through a spiritual formation focus.

By employing the different approaches, the LDP invigorates students' learning. Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory seeks to recognize and nurture all of the varied human intelligences.[41] It consists of the following eight generally agreed-upon intelligences—linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, body-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist. These intelligences have more to do with "the capacity for (1) solving problems and (2) fashioning products in culturally-supported, context-rich, and naturalist setting".[42] Lingenfelter and Lingenfelter explain further that these eight confer "problem-solving and performance abilities, the combination of which varies from person to person and each person exercises intelligence in distinct ways."[43]

Thus, those who want to utilize Multiple Intelligence Theory in the classroom desire to incorporate many of the intelligences into the learning process because, while people possess all eight, they function

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[41]Thomas Armstrong, *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom*, 4th ed. (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2018), Loc. 83.
[42]Ibid., Loc. 98.
[43]Lingenfelter, and Lingenfelter, *Teaching Cross-Culturally,* 65.

together in ways that are unique to each person.[44] Thailand's educational system focuses on the linguistic and the logical-mathematical intelligences. Although both are essential to learning, focusing on just these two will severely limit a student's ability to learn from other intelligences, regardless if they rank higher in those intelligences or not.

The LDP incorporates the linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences primarily in the cognitive-learning component. However, it integrates other intelligences through practical learning and also spiritual formation. The practical-learning component provides each student with hands-on, experiential learning by doing ministry with a pastor, with a group, or by themselves. Lingenfelter and Lingenfelter advocate that "The power of experiential learning lies in experience, having learners reflect on the experience and through that reflection make decisions about changing their thinking and behavior."[45] The experience solidifies what cognitive learning impresses on them to embrace a more concrete learning experience. As a result, the students begin to get the 'full picture;' and the principles, skills, and knowledge they learned in the classroom begins making more sense in real life.

Borrowing from Kolb, Lingenfelter and Lingenfelter explain learning as a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. They hold that

> "Learning begins with concrete experience. . . . Reflective observations should lead to the formation of abstract generalizations . . . The last phase of the circle Kolb called active experimentation. After experiencing, reflecting, and abstracting, one tries again with new insights."[46] Fundamental to the whole process, experiential learning encompasses a wide variety of teaching and learning methods and incorporates several multiple intelligences.

Ministerial training (or any learning experience) should incorporate spiritual formation. Abiding in God serves as a catalyst that allows the Holy Spirit to shape a person's heart, mind, and body. It also speaks to several other multiple intelligences. Spiritual formation allows one to focus on God through music, body movement, nature, meditation in prayer or on God's Word, etc. Scripture memorization incorporates traditional modes of learning. Lingenfelter and Lingenfelter write that "Understanding occurs when a student suddenly finds memorized data

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[44]Armstrong, *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom*, Loc. 318.
[45]Ibid., 86.
[46]Ibid., 90-91.

relevant in a living context.[47] This is exactly why we are told repeatedly in scripture to memorize, hide the words in our heart, and meditate on them." Learning should be a dynamic experience through the Holy Spirit; and spiritual formation becomes that third encompassing mode of learning, helping one to navigate the processes through the Holy Spirit.

It is important that spiritual formation, cognitive learning, and experiential learning as modes become an intertwined learning approach. Minus one of them, the whole severely suffers. Much like a DNA strand, these three go together to create a learning experience that works on the heart, mind, and body. Similar to what James Plueddeman describes as holistic human development consisting of mental, physical, spiritual, and social components, the LDP seeks to build each student into the man or woman God intended through a holistic learning experience.[48] The LDP looks to integrate between ideas and practice, between truth and life, and between the biblical content and cultural context.[49]

Not seen since the TAG's first few years, the LDP's intertwined approach seeks real solutions to training for the TAG. The program pursues real-life learning activities and offers content-specific learning activities. Understanding that God wires each brain differently, it desires to help students discover their potential. This potential can be fulfilled through an intertwining mode that incorporates spiritual formation (being), cognitive (knowing), and experiential-practical (doing) in each student's learning experience.

IMPLICATIONS OF CHURCH-CENTER TRAINING

The development (or redevelopment) of a church-centered ministry approach based on the intertwining of being, knowing, and doing methodology, such as TAGS' Leadership Development Program, has major implications for the TAG. The program seeks to apply real-life learning to influence a new generation of learners. Not based purely on old patterns, it attempts to incorporate different modes of learning—modes that will influence each individual and church in numerous ways. The LDP allows for students to remain in their local churches, utilizing what they learn through ministry opportunities.

Power as an Overarching Implication

All organizational cultures, including Christian institutions, deal with the power issue. Anita Koeshall notes, "The distribution of power

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[47]Ibid., 40.
[48]Plueddemann, *Teaching Across Cultures,* 2.
[49]Ibid., 25.

lies at the heart of any human social organization and shapes all interactions and relationships."[50] Since its inception, the Church and its educational institutions have struggled with this issue. For example, the twelve disciples fought over who was the greatest (Luke 22:24-30). Koeshall avers that, "Church structures can rightly mimic the culturally-accepted hierarchy or egalitarian society, if they serve the church's mission well."[51] The TAG also retains much of its own culture and the power struggles that come from a culture of high power-distance and hierarchy.

Koeshall encourages the Church to develop (and follow) a 'theology of power,' which begins with recognizing God's omnipotence and humanity's lack of omnipotence. God's plan for humanity was that, at creation, He "entrusted humans with the power to make decisions (to eat or not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil), the ability to make a difference in their environments and to act 'otherwise,' or outside of a predetermined pattern."[52] Unlike robots, God created human beings to think and make decisions. However, with sin came the manipulation of power, which meant the desire to have dominion over other people (Genesis 3). Jesus. however, taught differently. Koeshall writes,

> The call to His followers consists of a life where the power that one possesses is to be expended that others can live. Employing power in a redeemed way is a true measure of the transformation of the heart and the submission of the will to Christ, whether by an individual or an organization. The church exists in this tension: as an earthly community, the church must structure, organize, and control; as a spiritual community, she is created to follow Christ, mirror His character, and live for the sake of the world.[53]

In other words, Jesus wants his followers not to allow power to corrupt their hearts but rather to build up people in a redeeming way. Christians must not strive for power but instead be 'power givers' who seek to use their power for the glory of God, not self. This unselfish (or redeemed) power goes against the wisdom of social power in this world. Instead, Koeshall advocates,

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[50]Anita Koeshall, "Navigating Power: Liquid Power Structures for Molten Times," in *Devoted to Christ: Missiological Reflections in Honor of Sherwood G. Lingenfelter*, ed. Christopher L. Flanders (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2019), 66.

[51]Ibid., 70.

[52]Ibid., 70.

[53]Ibid., 73.

Redeemed power is (1) the capacity and ability to act (dynamis) made possible by Spirit baptism, physical strength, talents, and intellectual and material resources that have been developed through discipline and maturity; and (2) the freedom (exousia) made possible when the community recognizes the Spirit's gifts in individual members and creates space for them to develop their gifts and to function in service to others. Redeemed power is embodied in redeemed agents invested in a lifestyle of self-emptying for the sake of others.[54]

In my opinion, the TAG and its Bible school (TAGS) would benefit by seeking such redeemed power in its own operational structure; and one way to do that comes through the LDP.

The Importance of Power-Sharing

The LDP takes much of the power from TAGS and puts it back into the hands of the local pastors and the students. This way, change ensues not from the top down but from the grassroots again. By locating it back in the churches, the program eliminates the disconnect that previously ensnared TAGS, where students received very little practical training. Now, TAGS serves as a covering and a structure for only part of the learning (cognitive understanding), with pastors and the students serving for the other two parts—experiential/practical and spiritual formation. At the outset, tensions are apt to occur; but if all parties seek a redeemed power embodied in redeemed agents through the biblical use of power to empower others, then the TAG will see change in its educational center (TAGS), its pastors, and its lay leaders. The result will be stronger existing churches and new church plants.

Conclusion

Despite a history awash with disappointment in its educational center, the TAG would do well to thrust forward with its new church-based ministry curriculum— TAGS' Leadership Development Program. With its emphasis on spiritual formation, cognitive understanding, and experiential/practical learning, the program serves as a part of the solution to TAG's educational and training woes. The LDP will help propel the TAG into future growth as it seeks new leaders to journey together through redeemed power to learn and impact the country of Thailand for Christ.

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[54]Ibid., 73.

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Overcoming Persecution as a Barrier to Christian Witness to Muslims in Indonesia

By Lew Belcourt

Introduction

An Indonesian Christian businessman was relating his feelings towards the majority Muslim population in Indonesia. As the owner of a small factory, he had done his best to show the love of Jesus to his Muslim employees by granting sick leave, loaning money for emergencies, obeying labor laws, and genuinely caring for his workers. In return, they took advantage of him, stole from him, lied to him, and generally made the factory a battleground. "I know I am supposed to love them," he said, "but honestly, I just can't."

Indonesia is home to 240 unreached people groups containing over 192 million people, almost all of whom are Muslim.[1] Many Christian organizations, both Indonesian and foreign, recruit evangelists and missionaries to evangelize these unreached people groups. The difficulties for these cross-cultural workers are well-documented. The cost to recruit, train, and support these workers is enormous. However, a minority Christian population exists in almost every village, town, or city where these unreached people groups live. These Christians migrated from other parts of Indonesia for various reasons. They experience persecution almost every day. Is it possible to mobilize these Christians who are already living among the unreached people groups to reach out to their neighbors? How can these persecuted believers overcome their trauma and begin to share the love of Jesus?

The Bible states that believers will be persecuted and offers spiritual support for those undergoing persecution. Is spiritual impact the only result of religious persecution? Or must the sociological, physical, psychological, and economic impacts of persecution on believers also be considered? Can spiritual support overcome all the effects of persecution which keep Christians from reaching out to their Muslim neighbors? It may be too simplistic to expect persecuted believers to share God's love with their Muslim neighbors without first addressing the full impact of persecution in their life.

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[1]"Country: Indonesia," *Joshua Project*, https://joshua project.net/countries/id, (accessed April 12, 2023).

This paper will first explore the issue of persecution in the Bible and then look at how the early Church faced persecution. It will examine persecution experienced by present-day Indonesian believers and explore responses to this persecution by Indonesian theologians. The sociological, physical, psychological, and economic impacts of persecution will be considered. The final section of this paper will suggest ways that Indonesian Christians can overcome the barrier of persecution, enabling them to reach out to their Muslim neighbors with the love of Jesus.

Persecution in the Bible

The Bible refers to various forms of persecution. Some forms, like stoning, the sword, and crucifixion, are fatal while others, such as expulsion, imprisonment, and scourging, are not.[2] The term martyr (Greek, *marturion*) originally described those who witnessed to their faith. It then came to be used for those who suffered persecution, whether or not the suffering was fatal. The exclusive use of the term for those who died for their faith began in the post-apostolic writings of the early Church.

Regardless of the form of persecution, Pobee notes three elements common to biblical examples of persecution. The first element is suffering, whether resulting in death or not. The second, more important element, is the witness of the martyr to God. A third element is the view of the martyr "beyond the world to God and his heavenly kingdom."[3] A relationship between persecution and eschatology begins to appear in apocalyptic literature during the intertestamental period.[4] We will explore these elements in the Old Testament, the intertestamental writings, and the New Testament.

Old Testament

The Old Testament book of Daniel contains two of the best-known stories of religious persecution: Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah in the fiery furnace and Daniel in the den of lions.[5] Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah refuse to bow down to the image of gold as commanded by King

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[2]J. S. Pobee, "Persecution and Martyrdom in the Theology of Paul,*" Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series*, vol. 6 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 1-11. EBSCO.

[3]Ibid., 24-29.

[4]Pobee, 14.

[5]The three are more commonly known by their Babylonian names, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Nebuchadnezzar. They are denounced and brought before the king. They are given the chance to obey the king's command or to be cast into a fiery furnace. Their defiant response to the king has inspired believers ever since (Daniel 3:16-18). After their miraculous deliverance, the king praises God and notes that the three Jews "trusted in [God], defied the king's command, and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God" (Daniel 3:28, All Scripture references are from the NIV).

Daniel faces a similar choice when political rivals ask King Darius to issue a royal decree forbidding praying to any god or human except the king (Daniel 6:7). Daniel chooses obedience to the God of Israel and continues his daily prayers to God. His obedience would have cost him his life had God not intervened (Daniel 6:26-27).

In these stories we see the three elements common to persecution: suffering, a witness to God, and a view beyond this world to God and his kingdom. The perseverance of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah become important examples to the Jews when they begin to suffer persecution during the intertestamental period.

Intertestamental Period

In 168 BC, the Seleucid King Antiochus Epiphanes issues edicts that forbid temple worship, the observation of the sabbath and other feasts, and circumcision. All this is an attempt to "replace Jewish national consciousness with Hellenism."[6] Jews under the leadership of Judas Maccabee rebel against the king's edicts. Many are arrested and eventually tortured to death.

The Maccabean martyrs appear in intertestamental works as "examples to posterity of total and uncompromising dedication to God, the Torah, and ancestral tradition, even though it meant sufferings and/or death for themselves."[7] References to the Maccabean martyrs frequently occur in apocalyptic literature, which reached its height between 200 BC and AD 135 and coincided with "the conflicts between the Jews and the Seleucids."[8] This eschatological view declares that "God is the Lord of History. All history is pointing towards the Day of the Lord when the wicked will be judged and the righteous will be rewarded."[9]

During this period, the concept of prophet and martyr is also changing, "making a move from historical to a more theological base."[10]

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[6]Pobee, 20.
[7]Ibid.
[8]Ibid., 14.
[9]Ibid., 38.
[10]Ibid., 28.

"Martyrdom eventually became necessary for a prophet."[11] Old Testament prophets are re-cast as martyrs. Elijah becomes "the prototype of zeal for the Lord" because he refuses to forsake the covenant (1 Kings 19:10).[12] A midrash from the period lists Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Saul, David, and Israel as persecuted prophets.[13] In a final development, not only is every prophet considered a martyr, but the utterance of a dying martyr takes on the form of prophecy.[14]

From the intertestamental period "grew a long tradition of martyr-theology."[15] The following section will explore persecution in the New Testament and follow the development of that tradition.

New Testament

In the New Testament, a martyr is one who is a disciple of Jesus, professing that Jesus is the Messiah and "being willing to suffer as he did."[16] This brief survey will examine the theme of persecution in the life and teachings of Jesus in the Gospels, the experience of the New Testament church in Acts, and the writing of the Apostles in the Epistles and Revelation.

Gospels

The Gospels are written "that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). The Gospels document the birth, ministry, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. The suffering of Jesus is documented in each gospel, as the Lamb of God becomes a sacrifice for the sins of the world. The gospels also record Jesus' teaching to his followers about the suffering they would experience.

The Synoptic Gospels warn believers that persecution is the price of becoming a disciple of Jesus. Jesus warns that persecution would come from one's family, authorities, and the world (Matthew. 10:17-8, 22; 24:13; Luke. 21:16-17, 19; John 12:25).

By their obedience, believers will accomplish three things: the Son will be glorified; their sacrificial death will result in eternal life; and the

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[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid., 26.

[13]Ibid., 28.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Ibid., 46.

[16]James A. Kelhoffer, "Withstanding Persecution as a Corroboration of Legitimacy in the New Testament: Reflections on the Resulting Ethical and Hermeneutical Quandary," *Dialog* 50, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 122, ATLA.

Father will be glorified.[17] John 16:1-4a notes different forms of persecution, the motives of the persecutors, and the purpose of Jesus' warning. Jesus tells the disciples they will be put out of the synagogue and some will be killed. The persecutors believe they are serving God by persecuting Jesus' followers, although Jesus says that they do not know God. The warning is given so the disciples will not fall away when they are persecuted.[18] In John 17, Jesus specifically prays for his disciples in light of the persecution they will face. Jesus asks for their divine protection and sanctification. He asks that they receive a full measure of joy. Lee notes that "in Johannine theology, it is not so much what the disciples do when they face persecution so as not to fall away, but divine providence that keeps them from falling away."[19] Jesus' victory over death, hell, and the grave will give the disciples courage, peace, and joy during times of persecution.[20]

In the Gospels, the elements of persecution are clearly seen. Jesus suffers and warns his disciples that they will suffer also. Jesus gives a clear witness to the Father and points the Jews to the kingdom of God. Jesus also links persecution to the end times. As Scaer notes, in the four Gospels "we have the words of the Lord that will help to guide us along the way through persecution, and in the age to come, eternal life."[21] Let us now follow the theme of persecution in the rest of the New Testament.

Acts

Acts 6 describes how Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit and power, is falsely accused by the Jews of blasphemy and brought before the Sanhedrin. Acts 6:15 records that "his face was like the face of an angel." In Acts 7, Stephen makes his defense and accuses the Jews of killing Jesus, the Messiah. As the Sanhedrin reacts in anger, Stephen has a vision: "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (v.56). As the Jews stone him, he prays, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (v.59). Before he died, he cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (v.60).

The three elements of persecution are clearly seen. Stephen suffers, he testifies that Jesus is the Messiah, and he looks past the world to God and his kingdom. Scaer observes that Luke uses the depiction of Jesus'

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[17]Chee-Chiew Lee, "A Theology of Facing Persecution in the Gospel of John," *Tyndale Bulletin* 70, no. 2 (2019): 192, ATLA.
[18]Ibid., 200.
[19]Ibid., 202.
[20]Ibid.
[21]Peter J. Scaer, "Passion and Persecution in the Gospels," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 83, no. 3–4 (July 2019): 261. ATLA, 265.

death as "a model for Christians to follow,"[22] noting the similarities between Stephen's prayers and the words of Jesus, who also forgives his murderers (Luke 23:34). In his depiction of Stephen's persecution, Luke portrays the ideal Christian martyr: falsely accused; faithful in confession; otherworldly in appearance; holding to a vision of God and his kingdom; and whose dying words inspire others. Pobee says, "Stephen in Acts gave the vision of the dying martyr the form of prophesy."[23]

After Stephen's death, the early Church experiences a great persecution (Acts 8:1). Luke relates Peter's miraculous deliverance from prison and describes in detail the persecution experienced by Paul on his missionary journeys. In Luke's accounts we again find the three elements of persecution: physical suffering; witness of Jesus as Lord; and a vision of God and his kingdom.

Epistles

Another effect of persecution is found in the Epistles. Kelhoffer writes that "assertions of standing, authority and power claimed on the basis of withstanding persecution" are evident in New Testament literature. [24]   Paul uses his persecution to validate his apostleship. Defending his authority to the believers at Corinth, Paul says he has "worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again" (2 Corinthians 11:23). To the Colossians, Paul writes that his sufferings "fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church" (Colossians 1:24). Paul clearly sees his suffering as a sign of his authority.

Persecution also validates the faith of the believers. Kelhoffer highlights the common theme of suffering (persecution) as a "corroboration of the believers' standing."[25] Paul writes in Romans 8:17 that believers are "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." The author of Hebrews also expects that believers would suffer for their faith. Some believers have been mistreated and imprisoned (13:3). Noting that Jesus has endured suffering "outside the city gate," the author exhorts believers to "go to Jesus outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore" (Hebrews 13:13). Kelhoffer concludes that believers must accept some

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[22]Scaer, 259.
[23]Pobee, 28.
[24]Kelhoffer, 120.
[25]Ibid., 123.

suffering "as part of identifying with Jesus. If they do, they will be confirmed in their faith."[26]

Revelation

The theme of persecution runs throughout the book of Revelation. The beginning of Revelation refers to the suffering of John. The letters to the seven churches reference opposition to the Christian faith. The remainder of the book portrays the suffering of believers during the apocalypse. Each will be addressed in turn.

John pens Revelation from the island of Patmos. He writes to the seven churches that he is their "companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus" (Revelation 1:9a). His reason for being on Patmos is "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (Revelation 1:9b). He is exiled due to opposition to the gospel message. Bandy suggests that John is officially banished to Patmos after a legal proceeding instituted by the local Roman authority, most likely the proconsul of Ephesus.[27]

John is also aware of persecution suffered by Christians in the seven churches. His message encourages them to hold fast to their faith. Although most of Revelation looks to the future, DeSilva remarks, "we should not dismiss the evidence of conflict and crisis in the seven oracles as generic topics having no bearing on the realities faced by their audiences."[28] The Christians in Ephesus are commended for "enduring hardships" for the name of Jesus (Revelation 2:3). The Christians in Smyrna are warned of suffering, imprisonment, and even death (Revelation 2:10). The church in Pergamum has suffered persecution and one of the congregation, Antipas, has been executed for his faith (Revelation 2:13). The church in Thyatira is commended for its perseverance and encouraged by Jesus "to hold on to what you have until I come" (Revelation 2:25). The church in Sardis has only a few faithful members, but it is implied that they have acknowledged Jesus before the authorities, as Jesus says he will acknowledge them before the Father and the angels (Revelation 3:5). The church in Philadelphia is commended for keeping God's word and not denying Jesus (Revelation 3:8). Only the church in Laodicea has not faced persecution but is condemned for gathering worldly rather than spiritual wealth (Revelation 3:17-18). Although scholars have not been able to place the

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[26]Ibid., 122.

[27]Alan Bandy, "Persecution and the Purpose of Revelation with Reference to Roman Jurisprudence," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 23, no. 3 (2013): 382, ATLA.

[28]David A. DeSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 52.

writing of Revelation with a period of intense persecution by a Roman emperor, it is clear that local churches each face opposition, either from Jews or other local sources. Notes Bandy, "Their uncompromising monotheistic devotion to the exclusive worship of Jesus repeatedly placed them at odds with the social, religious, and political conventions of the day."[29]

In Revelation chapters 4-22, John looks to a future persecution of the church. Scholars see the original source of persecution as the imperial cult, noting allusions to it in Revelation 13:4,15-16; 14:9-11; 15:2; 16:2. Bandy says, "John envisions a time when the imperial cult escalates to a point of mandatory participation by all inhabitants of earth."[30] The term προσκυνέω ("worship"), commonly used in the imperial cult, is used by John in direct connection with the beast (Revelation 13:4, 8, 12, 15).[31] Christians who refuse to worship the beast are summarily executed (Revelation 13:15). Justice is served when the beast is cast into the lake of fire by Jesus after his second coming (Revelation 19:20). Those who are martyred by the beast will rule with Christ during his millennial reign (Revelation 20).

In the book of Revelation, we again see the three elements of persecution: suffering, the witness of Jesus as the Son of God and a vision of God and his kingdom. We also see the eschatological conclusion of persecution, as the saints receive justice when Jesus comes again and defeats the beast. The persecution of the saints serves as a "corroboration of the believers' standing," as "they overcame by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony" (Revelation 12:11).[32] Although the final fulfilment of Revelation has yet to come, it offers guidance, strength and comfort to believers who stand for Jesus in times of severe persecution. The persecution of the early Church under the Roman Empire is one of those times.

Persecution and the Early Church

Through the mid-first century, the Church mostly suffers at the hands of Jews. Roman authorities intervene only when public order is threatened. The Roman legal system protects Christians from false accusations and extra-juridical killing. Gallio, proconsul of Achaia, refuses to listen to complaints against Paul and drives the Jews away (Acts 18:14-16). The Roman officials conducting the trial of the Apostle

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[29]Bandy, 381.
[30]Ibid., 394.
[31]Ibid.
[32]Pobee, 123.

Paul remark on his innocence and says he could have been freed except for his appeal to Caesar (Acts 26:32).

The eventual conflict between the early Church and Rome is perhaps inevitable. The Roman empire contains a multitude of different religions and cults. As the emperor consolidates power, religion becomes a tool of politics. The rise of the emperor cult requires the worship of Roman gods and elevates the emperor to the level of a deity. Worship of the emperor and sacrifice to the gods of Rome becomes a test of fidelity. Christianity, however, is exclusively monotheistic, and therefore "incompatible with any other religious system."[33] A convert is required to abandon all other gods and religious practices. Christians leave "a community that shared one religious identity in order to enter in another with a new identity and boundaries. This was not just 'another' religion in the varied religious panorama of the Roman Empire, but an alternative to the traditional cults."[34] Roman officials begin to view Christians as a threat and to look for ways that "a self-avowed Christian might be executed."[35]

The second and third centuries witness a conflict between the Roman Empire and the growing Christian church. Lovin says, "The opposing powers were rather closely balanced, despite the overwhelming physical force in the empire's hands."[36] The Roman Empire chooses to use legal means to overcome the Christians. This leads the emperor to pass laws that target Christian beliefs. These laws, from which Jews are exempted, require Christians to sacrifice to Roman gods. Failure to do so results in torture and execution. Roman officials target the leaders of the Church, the deacons, presbyters, and bishops. Rather than submit, many of these leaders become martyrs. Their writings encourage the Church to persevere despite persecution.[37] Several of these leaders will be considered next.

Ignatius

Ignatius is Bishop of Antioch at the end of the first century. Tradition says that the infant Ignatius is held by Jesus, who blesses him.

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[33]Mar Marcos, "Persecution, Apology and the Reflection on Religious Freedom and Religious Coercion in Early Christianity," *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 20, no. 1 (2012): 40, DOI 10.1515/zfr-2012-0003.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Robin W. Lovin, "Authority, Legitimacy and Sovereignty: Religion and Politics in the Roman Empire before Constantine," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 29, no. 2 (2016): 180, doi:10.1177/0953946815623133.

[36]Ibid., 184.

[37]Oliver Nicholson, "Preparation for Martyrdom in the Early Church," in *The Great Persecution: The Proceedings of the Fifth Patristic Conference, Maynooth, 2003*, ed. D. Vincent Twomey and Mark Humphries (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009), 64. EBSCO.

Ignatius converts after receiving the gospel from the Apostle Paul.[38] In his "Epistle to the Romans," Ignatius' most personal letter, he speaks about his approaching martyrdom. "Let there come on me fire, and cross and struggles with wild beasts, cutting, and tearing asunder, racking of bones, mangling of limbs, crushing of my whole body, cruel tortures of the devil, may I but attain to Jesus Christ!" (Romans V.3).[39] According to Cobb, Ignatius "regarded salvation as one being free from the powerful fear of death and thus to face martyrdom bravely."[40]

Ignatius' "Epistle to the Romans" becomes the most popular of his writings and is used by the early Church as a manual for martyrs.[41] During the persecution of Trajan, Ignatius is taken to Rome. He "boldly vindicated the faith of Christ before the Emperor," and then was tortured and finally killed by wild beasts.[42]

Justin Martyr

Justin is a famous Christian philosopher of the first century. Born in AD 103, Justin is trained in Greek philosophy before converting to Christianity at the age of thirty. He becomes an evangelist to both the Gentiles and the Jews. Justin later moves to Rome and opens a school. During one period of persecution, he writes *The First Apology*, defending the Christian faith. After reading it, the Roman Emperor Antoninus issues an edict halting the persecution. Later, Justin writes *The Second Apology*, critical of the execution of a Christian in Rome.[43]

In *The Second Apology*, Justin says the fearlessness of Christians he sees facing death convinces him of their innocence. Noting that Christians are being unjustly accused of terrible crimes, he writes, "Be ashamed, be ashamed, ye who charge the guiltless with those deeds which yourselves openly commit, and ascribe things which apply to yourselves and to your gods to those who have not even the slightest sympathy with them. Be ye converted; become wise." He says that Christians should follow Virtue and hold death in contempt, even if it is

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[38]John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs, or, The Acts and Monuments of the Christian Church: Being a Complete History of the Lives, Sufferings, and Deaths of the Christian Martyrs . . . to Which Is Added an Account of the Inquisition . . . with the Lives of Some of the Early Eminent Reformers,* (Philadelphia: J.B. Smith, 1856), 20-21. https://www.ccel.org/f/foxe/martyrs/home.html.

[39]Andrew Louth, ed., *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1988), 85-89, Global DTL.

[40]L. Stephanie Cobb, *Dying To Be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (Columbia University Press, 2008), 3, Global DTL.

[41]Scaer, 258.

[42]Foxe, 21.

[43]Ibid., 25-26.

possible to flee: "Death is a debt due by every man that is born. Wherefore we give thanks when we pay this debt."[44] Creseus, a rival philosopher, betrays Justin to the Emperor. Justin is tried, condemned to death, and executed in AD 165.[45,46]

<p style="text-align:center">Tertullian</p>

Tertullian is a church leader and a prolific writer to the new Church in matters of theology and church practice. He is born in Carthage in AD 155 and dies in AD 220. Although he does not die a martyr, Tertullian writes to encourage martyrs in their faith. He is most famous for saying "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." Two of his works about persecution, *To the Martyrs* and *Flight in Time of Persecution*, are examined below.

In *To the Martyrs*, Tertullian offers spiritual encouragement to Christians who are in prison, either awaiting trial or awaiting execution for their confession of faith.[47] He uses the metaphors of soldier and athlete to show that they are engaging in spiritual battle. "We were called to service in the army of the living God," and "consider whatever is hard in your present situation as an exercise of your powers of mind and body. You are about to enter a noble contest."[48] Sider notes that for Tertullian, the "confession of the Name played a climactic part in the Christian's warfare against the demonic, for the struggle to death was both combat and contest with Satanic power, and the Christian's death, like the death of Christ itself, was a decisive and major victory over the devil."[49]

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[44]Justin Martyr, *The Second Apology 11-12*, in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, trans. Philip Schaff, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 2004), 192. https://ccel.org/ccel/justin_martyr/second_apology/anf01.

[45]Foxe, 25-26.

[46]J. Quasten, *Patrology, Volume 1: The Beginnings of Patristic Literature* (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1983), p.197.
> "The Prefect Rusticus says: Approach and sacrifice, all of you, to the gods.
> Justin says: No one in his right mind gives up piety for impiety.
> The Prefect Rusticus says: If you do not obey, you will be tortured without mercy.
> Justin replies: That is our desire, to be tortured for our Lord, Jesus Christ, and so to be saved, for that will give us salvation and firm confidence at the more terrible universal tribunal of our Lord and Saviour. And all the martyrs said: Do as you wish; for we are Christians, and we do not sacrifice to idols. The Prefect Rusticus read the sentence: Those who do not wish to sacrifice to the gods and to obey the emperor will be scourged and beheaded according to the laws. The holy martyrs glorifying God betook themselves to the customary place, where they were beheaded and consummated their martyrdom confessing their Saviour."

[47]Robert Sider, ed., *Christian and Pagan in the Roman Empire (Selections from the Fathers of the Church, Volume 2)* (Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 107, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt284v2g.8.

[48]Ibid., 111.

[49]Ibid., 108.

Through his or her confession and death, the martyr imitates Christ and crushed the power of evil.[50]

In *Flight in Time of Persecution*, Tertullian asks the question, "Is it right for Christians to run away from persecution?"[51] Some believers are fleeing persecution, basing their actions on Jesus' teaching that the persecuted should "flee from town to town" (Matthew 10:23). [52] Tertullian also noted that some Christians are buying false certificates saying they have sacrificed to the gods, while others are paying bribes to avoid exposure.[53] Tertullian writes that persecution is "willed by God," because the result of persecution is "the glory of God."[54] He observes that some good comes from persecution, including that believers become more careful in their preparations and give more attention to fasting, praying, mutual charity, and holiness.[55] Tertullian emphasizes that the believer is neither allowed nor able to flee from persecution, because it is God's will. [56] Tertullian encourages the leaders of the churches (deacons, presbyters, bishops) to stay and face persecution as examples to their congregations: "When those in authority take flight . . . who of the common crowd can hope to persuade anyone to stand firm in battle?"[57]

Cyprian

Cyprian convertes to Christianity and is baptized in AD 246 at the age of thirty-five. In recognition of his virtuous lifestyle, he is elected bishop of Carthage two years later. He flees Carthage during the Decian persecution in AD 250 but returns eighteen months later.[58] During the Valerian persecution in AD 256, Cyprian writes his *Exhortation to Martyrdom*. Cyprian uses the faithfulness of past martyrs to encourage Christians. He relates the stories of Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, and Daniel as they defy the king and proclaim their allegiance to God. He shares how the seven sons of the Maccabees were tortured and executed by King Antiochus. He notes the multitude of martyrs in Revelation who have died during the great tribulation. "But if the assembly of the Christian martyrs is shown and proved to be so great, let no one think it

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[50]Ibid., 109n10.
[51]Ibid., 137.
[52]Ibid.
[53]Ibid., 137-138.
[54]Ibid., 141.
[55]Ibid..
[56]Ibid., 143.
[57]Ibid.
[58]Foxe, 34.

a hard or a difficult thing to become a martyr, when he sees that the crowd of martyrs cannot be numbered."[59]

Cyprian preferrs to give believers scriptures upon which they could reflect and be strengthened, rather than prescribing guidelines for behavior. He encourages them not to depend on human teaching but on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to endure persecution. In his *Exhortation,* Cyprian also emphasizes that believers are part of the greater body of Christ that is faithfully obeying God. Cyprian is tried, convicted and executed by Roman authorities on 14 September, AD 258.[60,61]

Origen

Origen is a presbyter and catechist from Alexandria. He later establishes a school in Caesarea. He is considered one of the great scholars of the early Church. At the age of sixty-four, near the end of the Decian persecution, he is imprisoned and tortured.[62] After the death of Emperor Decius, Origen is released from prison but dies of his wounds in AD 254.[63]

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[59]Cyprian, *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, https://www.ewtn. com/catholicism/ library/exhortation-to-martyrdom-addressed-to-fortunatus-ad-fortunatum-de-exhortatione-martyrii-11416, (accessed April 12, 2023).

[60]Foxe, 34.

[61]W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 319.

"*Galerius Maximus*: 'Are you Thascius Cyprianus?'
Cyprian: 'I am.'
Galerius: 'The most sacred Emperors have commanded you to conform to the Roman rites.'
Cyprian: 'I refuse.'
Galerius: 'Take heed for yourself.'
Cyprian: 'Do as you are bid; in so clear a case I may not take heed.'
Galerius, after briefly conferring with his judicial council, with much reluctance pronounced the following sentence: 'You have long lived an irreligious life, and have drawn together a number of men bound by an unlawful association, and professed yourself an open enemy to the gods and the religion of Rome; and the pious, most sacred and august Emperors . . . have endeavoured in vain to bring you back to conformity with their religious observances; whereas therefore you have been apprehended as principal and ringleader in these infamous crimes, you shall be made an example to those whom you have wickedly associated with you; the authority of law shall be ratified in your blood.' He then read the sentence of the court from a written tablet: 'It is the sentence of this court that Thascius Cyprianus be executed with the sword.'
Cyprian: 'Thanks be to God.'"

[62]Foxe, 31.

[63]Ibid.

In *An Exhortation to Martyrdom*, Origen encourages the practice of separating oneself from the world as preparation for the ultimate separation at death. "I think that God is loved with the whole soul by those who through their great longing for fellowship with God draw their soul away and separate it not only from their earthly body but also from every corporeal thing. For them no pulling or dragging takes place even in putting off their lowly body."[64]

Origen views the persecution of believers as "a testing and trying of our love for God." [65] He encourages those facing persecution to remember the eternal rewards promised to the saints who persevere. He holds to the promise that those who confess God until the end will be confessed by Jesus before the Father (Matthew 10:32).[66] Commenting on Mark 8:34-37, Origen writes, "If we wish to save our soul in order to get it back better than a soul, let us lose it by our martyrdom. For if we lose it for Christ's sake, casting it at His feet in a death for Him, we shall gain possession of true salvation for it."[67]

The persecution of the early Church continues until AD 313 when Western Roman Emperor Constantine I and Emperor Licinius of the Balkans issue the Edict of Milan. The Edict recognizes Christianity as an "officially sanctioned traditional imperial religion." [68] For over two centuries the early Church has endured persecution. The writings of Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen, and others provide strong guidance for believers to persevere in their faith. The themes of salvation, fearlessness in the face of death, spiritual warfare, leadership, separation from the world, and the promise of eternal reward strengthens the believers. The stories of biblical and intertestamental martyrs become examples to those facing persecution. Finally, the need for a deep relationship with God and a reliance on the indwelling Holy Spirit are seen as essential to bringing the believer through martyrdom and into their eternal reward.

In the last two millennia, Christianity has spread beyond the Roman Empire into the entire world. Wherever it has been the minority religion,

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[64]Origen, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom: Prayer, First principles: Book IV, Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs, Homily XXVII on Numbers,* trans. Rowan. A. Greer (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 42. www.EBSCOsearch.net. (Accessed April 12, 2023).

[65]Ibid., 45.

[66]Ibid., 48.

[67]Ibid., 49-50.

[68]Jason A. Whitlark, "Restoring the Peace: The Edict of Milan and the Pax Deorum," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 37, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 316, ATLA.

Christians have been persecuted, even in countries where religious freedom is supposedly guaranteed by the government. One such country is Indonesia, where Christians are persecuted by the Muslim majority population. In the next section, we will see if the themes about persecution common to the biblical, intertestamental, and early Church writings are also found in the writings of the persecuted Indonesian church.

Persecution and Theological Response in Indonesia

Indonesia gained its independence in 1945 after 350 years of Dutch colonization and four years of Japanese occupation. Before becoming a nation, Indonesia was divided into many kingdoms located throughout the archipelago. These kingdoms adopted Hinduism and Buddhism as traders from India and China came to Indonesia during the first millennium AD. Muslim traders brought Islam to Indonesia in the thirteenth century and the religion quickly spread throughout western and central Indonesia. [69] Spanish and Portuguese traders brought Christianity to Indonesia in the sixteenth century, but it primarily spread in the islands of eastern Indonesia where Islam had not penetrated. The Dutch colonizers were mainly interested in Indonesia's natural resources. Evangelism was not a priority. There were few conversions from the majority Muslim population and Christianity continued to be a minority religion.

Currently, Christians comprise fifteen percent of Indonesia's population, or about thirty million believers. Most of these Christians are found in Christian-majority areas in eastern Indonesia or in urban centers like Jakarta, Surabaya, and Medan. In majority Muslim provinces like South Sumatra, Christians comprise only 1.5 percent of the population.[70]

After Indonesia's independence in 1945, the government needed to unify a diverse population consisting of hundreds of ethnic groups and every major world religion. To this end, the Indonesian government adopted the philosophy of *Pancasila*. Enshrined in the Indonesian constitution, *Pancasila* consists of five pillars, or *sila*. The first pillar concerns religion: "*Ketuhanan yang maha esa* (Belief in the one and only God). Through this philosophy, the government taught Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists that they all worshipped the same God, reducing the potential for religious conflict. The strong centralized

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[69]Mohammad Zariat Abdul Rani, "The History of Hinduism and Islam in Indonesia: A Review on Western Perspective," *Makara, Sosial Humaniora* 14, no. 1 (July 2010): 53, https://doi.org/10.7454/mssh.v14i1.571.
[70]Joshua Project.

government under President Suharto (1965-1998) enforced peace between ethnic groups and religions. The Christian church grew rapidly during this period, primarily among ethnic Chinese Indonesians from a Buddhist background.

After the resignation of Suharto, Indonesia entered a new era of reform.[71] The strong centralized government backed by the Indonesian military gave way to regional autonomy. The military's authority to intervene in domestic affairs was taken away. Radical Muslim groups that had been suppressed under Suharto grew in number and began a movement to establish a Muslim caliphate in Southeast Asia. Terrorist acts against the government and persecution of the Christian minority started to rise. A religious conflict in 1999-2000 between Muslims and Christians in the province of Maluku claimed over 10,000 lives and led to the displacement of both Christian and Muslim communities. Christmas Eve bombings in the year 2000 targeted thirty-eight Christian places of worship in nine cities, killing eighteen and injuring eighty-four.[72] Physical violence against Christians and their places of worship has continued to rise since 2000, with frequent reports of Christians being beaten and killed for their faith.[73] A "Religious Unity" law passed in 2006, intended to simplify the registration of buildings as churches, has instead been used by Muslims to prevent new churches from being built and resulted in the closing of over 1,000 existing places of worship.[74]

Theological Response

How has the Indonesian church responded to religious persecution in the reform era? In this section, we will examine seven theological articles addressing persecution, evangelism, and suffering. Following a summary of these articles, we will look for common themes, and then compare these themes with those from the early Church Fathers to see if

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[71]Jock Cheetham, "The Role of Morality in Religious Persecution in Indonesia during Yudhoyono's Presidency (2004-2014)," (Master's thesis, University of Sydney, 2017), 31, oai:ses.library.usyd.edu.au:2123/16964.

[72]Paul Barber, "Chronology of Christmas Eve Bombings and Acts of Terror in 2000," *Joyo Indonesian News,* January 25, 2001, http://lists.topica.com/lists/indonesia-act@igc.topica.com/read/message.html?sort=d&mid=702557008.

[73]"2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Indonesia," Office of International Religious Freedom, https://www.state.gov/reports/ 2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/indonesia/. (Accessed April 19, 2023).

[74]Morgan Lee, "How Indonesia's 'Religious Harmony' Law Has Closed 1,000 Churches," *Christianity Today*, November 10, 2015, https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2015/november/how-indonesias-religious-harmony-law-has-closed-1000-church.html.

the theological response from Indonesian theologians mirrors their writings.

Tarore

Tarore's article "Strategy to Evangelize the Poor" emphasizes the need for churches to fulfill the Great Commission and says that churches should have answers for the poor. Tarore says evangelism requires sacrifice, defined as "a decision to do God's will and evangelize those who haven't heard the gospel, including radical Muslims who oppose Christianity."[75] The strategy of evangelizing the poor must incorporate contextualization so that teams are not immediately rejected by intolerant Muslim communities. Tarore also says that Christians must be prepared to face persecution, that evangelism is "a life or death task, and will result in persecution."[76] Tarore recommends that Christians make long-term preparations to face persecution, but does not identify those preparations. [77] Of note is Tarore's assumption that ministry to the poor in Indonesia will involve religious persecution, as Muslims comprise eighty-five percent of the population.

Siswanto

Siswanto's article "The Church's Response to Persecution Based on Matthew 10:17-33" says that every Christian will suffer persecution as a test of faith and that persecution is a sign of the end times.[78] A person's faith can be shaken if they are not prepared to face persecution. [79] Siswanto gives five responses of a believer to persecution. First, remain vigilant. Second, bravely testify, because persecution will bring opportunities to share the Gospel, and the role of the Holy Spirit is to help the believer testify. Third, don't deny the faith. Christians will be persecuted even by their own family members, but Jesus will confess faithful believers to the Father. Fourth, endure pressure. Here Siswanto uses John the Baptist, Stephen, and James as examples of those who were faithful until death. Fifth, do not be afraid. Jesus has conquered death,

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[75]Renita Novia Tarore, "Strategi penginjilan dalam wilayah masyarakat di bawah garis kemiskinan," (2020): 14, https://osf.io/dt8y9/download, (accessed April 21, 2023).

[76]Ibid.

[77]Ibid.

[78]Krido Siswanto, et al., "Respon Gereja terhadap penganiayaan berdasarkan Matius 10:17-33," *Skenoo: Jurnal Teologi dan Pendidikan Agama Kristen* 1, no. 1 (2021): 12, https://journal.sttia.ac.id/skenoo.

[79]Ibid.

and Satan cannot hurt believers who are faithful. Believers are precious in the eyes of the Lord, and God will not let them fall.[80]

Chao

Chao's article "A Strategy of Evangelism Born During Persecution" looks for lessons from the experience of the persecuted church in China during the 1980s to help Indonesian believers face persecution. Chao evaluates a spiritual training program that was conducted weekly to strengthen Chinese Christians and train them to share the gospel. The training program had seven main teachings: knowing the gospel, being willing to suffer for Christ, being able to correct false teachings, building the local church, discipling new believers, fellowshipping with other churches, and sending those with the gift of evangelism to places where the gospel has not been heard. Evangelists were trained for three years and were then sent out in pairs. They were expected to suffer for the gospel just as Jesus suffered, believing that God would reward them with future glory.[81]

Situmorang

Situmorang's article "Internal and External Factors in a Strategy to Evangelize Unreached People Groups" acknowledges that minority believers who share their faith will always experience persecution. However, persecution for Christian witness should be considered a victory, not a defeat. Because Indonesian Christians trying to reach unreached people groups will face physical and mental persecution, a strategy must be developed before evangelism begins.[82]

Situmorang says that Christian evangelists can develop internal attitudes and take external actions that will help the evangelist face persecution or even reduce persecution. The internal factors consist of practicing humility, self-denial, prayer, and awareness. [83] External actions that may reduce persecution include learning to love the target ethnic group, working to improve their well-being, and providing job skills training for economic development.[84]

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[80]Ibid., 11-19.

[81]Jonathan Chao, "Gereja bertumbuh di tengah penganiayaan," *Momentum* 3 (October 1987): 1-2, https://misi.sabda.org/edisi-e-jemmi/e-jemmi-no45-vol102007.

[82]Elizabeth Situmorang, "Faktor eksternal dan internal strategi penginjilan menghadapi penganiayaan di suku terabaikan," *Teologi Kristen* 3, no. 2 (October 2021): 134, https://doi.org/10.36270/pengarah.v3i2.74.

[83]Ibid., 127-130.

[84]Ibid., 130-134.

Silalahi

Silalahi's article "The Concept of Persecution in Matthew 10:16-33 and Its Relevance for Christians Today" begins by reviewing the recent history of religious persecution experienced by Christians in Indonesia. The author compares the persecution of Christians in Indonesia to the persecution of the early Church under Nero. Silalahi states, "Sadly, persecution has brought a false understanding of the essence of persecution among Christians. A misunderstanding of the word of God is the primary cause of this confusion . . . and eventually becomes a barrier to spiritual growth."[85]

Silalahi notes five positive outcomes of persecution presented in Matthew 10:16-33. First, Christ is glorified when we are faithful when persecuted. Second, the faith of believers grows under persecution. Third, the Gospel spreads when the Church is persecuted. Fourth, the Church will grow when persecuted. Fifth, the unity of the Church is strengthened under persecution. When the positive outcomes of persecution are kept in mind, persecution itself will no longer cause confusion or become a barrier to the spiritual growth of Indonesian Christians.[86]

Suwito, Hermanto, and Tanama

Suwito, Hermanto, and Tanama explore the relationship between evangelism and persecution in their article "Suffering in the Context of Evangelism." The authors note that evangelism is commanded by Jesus in the Great Commission and Christians must obey. After defining suffering, martyrs like Stephen and Polycarp are presented as models of those who suffered martyrdom for being witnesses of Jesus. Suffering for Jesus is not a sign of failure but of victory.[87]

The Apostle Paul is portrayed as the primary example of one who obeys the command to evangelize while suffering persecution. The authors see Paul's calling as an apostle and his suffering as inextricably linked.[88] The authors see suffering as a test of the depths of one's faith, so evangelists must be prepared to deny themselves and take up one's cross.[89] A list of the original disciples is presented along with each of

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[85]Junior Natan Silalahi, "Konsep penganiayaan dalam Injil Matius 10:16-33 dan relevansinya bagi orang percaya pada masa kini," *Voice of HAMI* 2, no. 1 (August 2019): 1-2, http://stthami.ac.id/ojs/index.php/hami/article/view/2.

[86]Ibid., 11-12.

[87]Tri Prapto Suwito, Yanto Paulus Hermanto, and Yulia Jayanti Tanama, "Penderitaan dalam konteks penginjilan," *Phronesis*. 4 no. 1 (June 2021): 89, https://jurnal.sttsetia.ac.id/index.php/phr/article/view/139/106.

[88]Ibid., 93.

[89]Ibid., 93-94.

their fates as martyrs for the gospel. The authors conclude by noting that the gospel portrays Jesus as not of this world, and therefore the world will reject those who witness about Jesus. This rejection is the reason evangelists suffer.[90]

Nessy

Nessy's article "The View of the Apostle Paul Regarding Suffering Experienced by Christians" also begins with a summary of religious persecution in Indonesia in the reform era. Nessy notes the 2000 Christmas Eve bombings and the closing and burning of many churches. [91] He presents a biblical overview of persecution, listing Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, Daniel, and Jeremiah from the Old Testament and the Apostle Paul from the New Testament as believers who were persecuted. Ignatius is presented as the early Church example of a martyr.[92]

Nessy says that persecution has four benefits: it results in victory for the believer, it brings glory to Jesus, it promotes the spread of the gospel, and it promotes church growth. [93] Nessy concludes by saying that Christians have always suffered persecution, but that we should not be afraid of the one who can kill the body but not the soul. He quotes the Apostle Paul, "To live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).[94]

Common Themes

The first common theme in these articles is that Indonesian Christians will suffer persecution. Most authors link persecution to those who share the gospel with Muslims, but Siswanto says that all Christians will suffer persecution as a test of faith. Two of the articles detail incidents of persecution during the reform era, both citing the Christmas Eve bombings in 2000 and the closing of churches under the Religious Unity law.

The second common theme is using Old Testament, New Testament, and early Church martyrs as examples of how to persevere under persecution. Three of the seven articles provide names of martyrs. These

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[90]Ibid., 98.

[91]*Jeffry Octavianus* Nessy, *"Pandangan Rasul Paulus terhadap penganiayaan yang dialami orang Kristen,"* *Teokristi* 1, no 1 (May 2021): 26, https://doi.org/10.38189/jtk.v1i1.121.

[92]Ibid., 29.

[93]Ibid., 34-36.

[94]Ibid., 37.

martyrs are all identified as those who were faithful to the end. A fourth article cites the persecution of the early Church under Emperor Nero.

A third common theme is the need for Christians to prepare to face persecution. Tarore and Situmorang each note the need for a training program, while Chao evaluates the training program for Chinese evangelists. A training program will help Christians persevere during the inevitable persecution and will address both the spiritual maturity of the believer and their attitude towards the lost.

A fourth common theme is encouraging Christians to see persecution as a blessing. Silalahi and Nessy both list multiple benefits of persecution, including increased spiritual growth, opportunities for evangelism, and church growth. Silalahi says that recasting persecution in a positive light will remove a barrier to a believer's spiritual growth.

A fifth common theme is fearlessness. Siswanto and Nessy both encourage believers not to be afraid of death. Both point to the power of God to preserve the believer, even if the persecution results in martyrdom. Chao notes that believers who persevere will receive future glory.

Other themes from these articles include the role of the Holy Spirit in the witness of persecuted believers, persecution as a sign of the end times, and the role of the local church and church networks to strengthen believers in times of persecution.

How do these articles compare with the writings of the early Church? There are several common themes. Both assume that Christians will be persecuted for their faith. Both cite the need for training to prepare Christians to face persecution. Both use examples of biblical and subsequent martyrs to encourage believers to persevere. Both teach that persecution is a testing of faith and a blessing, with the promise of eternal rewards for those who are faithful. Both highlight the role of the Holy Spirit in aiding persecuted believers when they testify. Additionally, both see persecution as a sign of the end times and the local church as a source of strength for believers facing persecution.

The theological response of the Indonesian church to persecution may contribute to developing a theology of persecution that will help Indonesian believers overcome the spiritual impact of persecution as a barrier to evangelism. However, there are other impacts of persecution besides spiritual. In the following section, the sociological, physical, psychological, and economic impacts of persecution are considered. Any program to help Indonesian believers overcome persecution must also address these issues.

Sociological, Physical, Psychological, and Economic Impacts of Persecution

Current research describing the impact of persecution primarily focuses on those who are refugees. Losing one's home and going through a resettlement process results in physical and psychological trauma. However, most Indonesian Christians who experience persecution are residents of a community. Although we have seen the theological response of the Indonesian Christian community to persecution, little research has been done on the sociological, psychological, physical, and economic impacts on believers. This section will survey research on the impact of persecution on established populations and suggest that persecuted Christians in Indonesia have similar experiences. We start with the issue of the sociological impacts of persecution.

Sociological Impacts

The way individuals and groups view each other has been the object of extensive research. Mutual understanding reduces the distance between individuals and groups. Research indicates that individuals tend to have a better understanding of each other when they engage in daily interaction. However, moving from the individual to the group brings a level of misunderstanding.

In research related to our discussion of the impacts of religious persecution, Seger divides individuals into two groups, the ingroup and the outgroup.[95] In the Indonesian context, the persecuted Christian minority are considered the ingroup and the majority Muslims in their communities are the outgroup. Research shows that individuals in the same group can generally identify the emotional climate of that group. And individuals in the ingroup can generally identify the emotions of individuals in the outgroup with whom they frequently interact. However, these individuals are not adept at identifying the emotions of the collective outgroup. This lack of perception leads to misunderstanding of the emotions and motivations of the outgroup. In fact, members of the ingroup tend to attribute the emotions of high-profile members of the outgroup (often fanatics) to the entire outgroup.[96]

Seger examined three hypotheses regarding the ability of an ingroup to correctly discern the emotions of an outgroup. The results of his study are useful when discussing the interaction between a Christian minority

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[95]Charles Seger, et al., "Knowing How They Feel: Perceiving Emotions Felt by Outgroups," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 45, no. 1 (2009): 80-89, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2008.08.019.

[96]Ibid.

ingroup and the Muslim majority outgroup that persecutes them. First, research confirms that individuals within a group accurately discern the emotions of their group. Second, there is a correlation between the emotions expressed in the ingroup and the emotion expected in the outgroup. This correlation exists whether the actual measured emotions of the two groups are similar or not. Finally, there is an "evaluative intergroup bias in estimates of group emotion, with the outgroup being estimated to experience more intense negative emotions and less intense positive emotions than the outgroup reports experiencing." [97] The research shows that while the ingroup (e.g., persecuted minority Christians) understands the outgroup on a personal level (assuming frequent individual interactions), the ingroup erroneously assigns emotions and motivations to the outgroup based on exposure to high-profile members of the outgroup. Fallacies of this type perpetuate stereotypical interactions between groups.[98] Exposure of the ingroup to high-profile individuals who are more moderate could help bridge the gap between the two groups.

Physical Impacts

The trauma and scars of physical violence are an obvious impact of persecution. But researchers have discovered another physical impact of persecution. A study shows that prolonged exposure to conflict and violence during childhood results in "elevated rates of morbidity and mortality from chronic diseases of aging."[99]

The research was conducted among children who experienced significant stress during childhood, including maltreatment and poverty. It further noted that childhood was a "sensitive period for effects of stress to become embedded in some physiological systems for the long term."[100] Miller notes that "early stress has direct and lasting influences on some disease-relevant biological processes," and that "various forms of childhood stress presage the clustering of risk factors for coronary heart disease in adulthood."[101]

The research notes that various factors contributed to the overall levels of stress among children. These factors contribute to what the researchers called "chronic stress," and noted that the research was

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[97]Ibid.

[98]Ibid.

[99]Gregory Miller, Edith Chen and Karen Parker. "Psychological Stress in Childhood and Susceptibility to the Chronic Diseases of Aging: Moving Toward a Model of Behavioral and Biological Mechanisms." *Psychology Bulletin* 137, no. 6 (November 2011): 959. doi: 10.1037/a0024768.

[100]Ibid., 967.

[101]Ibid., 959.

applicable to children regardless of the specific stress factors.[102] The study also observes that the physical impact of this chronic stress is not the result of a lifetime of stress, but the result of the childhood exposure. The study shows that, as adults, these children "tended to have poor health practices, high levels of inflammation, and be at risk for coronary heart disease."[103]

The implication of this research is significant for persecuted Christians in Indonesia. The physical impact of persecution was previously thought to be limited to those exposed to physical violence. It is possible that persecuted Christians in Indonesia are experiencing more inflammation, a higher incidence of coronary heart disease, and shorter life expectancy because of the chronic stress they experienced during their childhood. Additional research in this area is required.

Psychological Impacts

Not only does persecution have sociological and physical impacts, but research has shown that persecution also affects the mental well-being of individuals. Symptoms experienced by the victims of persecution include denial, fearfulness, a feeling of vulnerability, depression, and alcohol or drug abuse.[104] Those who have suffered physical violence often suffer from forms of post-traumatic stress disorder.[105] Other research shows that the family and friends of the persecuted may also suffer. A study from the Netherlands discovered that nine years after eight hostage-taking incidents involving five-hundred victims, fifty percent of the victims and twenty-nine percent of the families displayed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, including "anxiety, phobias, and psychosomatic symptoms."[106]

Significant psychological effects are found in those who suffer persecution during their developing years. Recent research into class persecution in China has concluded that "early-life negative experiences generate life-long psychological trauma."[107] A study by Qian researched the adverse outcomes of negative interventions in early childhood. He

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[102]Ibid., 990-991.

[103]Ibid.

[104]Abdu'l-Missagh Ghadirian, "Psychological and Spiritual Dimensions of Persecution and Suffering," *Journal of Baha'i Studies* 6, no. 3 (1994): 3, https://bahai-library.com/pdf/g/ghadirian_psychological_dimensions_suffering.pdf.

[105]"Religious Issues," Good Therapy, https://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-therapy/issues/religious-issues (accessed April 29, 2023).

[106]Ghadirian, 3.

[107]Xuechao Qian, "Long-term Effects of Childhood Exposure to Persecution: Human Capital, Marriage Market, and Intergenerational Outcomes," (Department of Economics, The Ohio State University, 2019), 22. https://www.aeaweb.org/conference/2020/preliminary/paper/3nhRDF78.

studied children in three age groups: early childhood (0-6), primary education years (7-12), and adolescence (13-18). His results show that children are most impacted by persecution experienced during their early childhood years.[108] Qian notes that people attain less formal education, have lower cognitive skills, and earn less income if they experience prolonged persecution in early life.[109]

Specifically, Qian finds that adults who have experienced persecution in their early childhood years on average are twenty percent less likely to attain a higher education degree than their counterparts who did not experience persecution. Further, he notes that "the impact of childhood exposure to persecution on highest education level is almost linear with education degrees." [110] Not only does early childhood persecution impact achieved education levels, but it also adversely impacts cognitive skills. Those persecuted during early childhood score 4.9 percentage points lower in math skills and 3.4 percentage points lower in verbal skills. Finally, those suffering early childhood persecution in Qian's study earned 15.9 percent less income than their non-persecuted peers.[111] Qian concludes that "individuals with longer exposure to persecutions in early childhood (0-6 years old) completed less formal schooling, have worse verbal and math skills, and earn lower incomes in the long-term."[112]

Research is needed to determine if these impacts are also found among persecuted Indonesian Christians.

Economic Impact

The final impact of persecution to be considered is the economic impact. Without persecution, economies can grow. Studies have shown that religious freedom is one of three factors vital to economic development. Religious freedom historically results in reduced conflicts and a more stable society, essential for economic growth. A study of the early United States by Alexis de Tocqueville found that the growth of Christianity resulted in the establishment of institutions of higher education, the founding of hospitals, prisons, and schools, and the promotion of literacy. A former director in the World Bank's Asia and Africa regions notes that faith communities not only help develop

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[108]Ibid., 1-2.
[109]Ibid., 4.
[110]Ibid., 11.
[111]Ibid., 12.
[112]Qian, i.

education and health services but also provide a social safety net that many governments are not able to provide.[113]

On the other hand, religious persecution and discrimination against Christians "create climates that can drive away local and foreign investment, undermine sustainable development, and disrupt huge sectors of economies."[114] Qian's research in China, besides finding a 15.9 percent decrease in income for those persecuted in early childhood, also showed "the life-long impact of early life exposure to persecutions on individual human capital development, which is highly associated with individual economic achievement and social economic development."[115] A study of the persecuted Christian church in Ethiopia finds that persecuted Christians were discriminated against in job openings, found it hard to find gainful employment, and had their businesses boycotted by the majority Muslim population.[116] Religious violence in Egypt "has adversely affected the tourism industry, among other sectors. Perhaps most significant for future economic growth, young entrepreneurs are pushed to take their talents elsewhere due to the instability associated with high and rising religious restrictions and hostilities."[117] In general, where religious persecution and discrimination are found, economic development suffers.

Research has clearly documented the lasting sociological, physical, psychological, and economic impacts of persecution.[118] These include misunderstanding the attitudes and motives of the outer group, shortened life expectancy, a shortfall in educational advancement and cognitive ability, and even a reduction in expected income. The impacts of persecution appear greatest when they are experienced by the very young. Studies in Indonesia have primarily focused on the extent of religious persecution and have documented the effects of trauma and violence during periods of active persecution. The long-term impacts of the systemic persecution which affects the thirty million Christians living in

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[113]"Socioeconomic Impact of Religious Freedom," Religious Freedom & Business Foundation, https://religiousfreedomandbusiness.org/socio economic-impact-of-religious-freedom (accessed April 12, 2023).

[114]Ibid.

[115]Qian, i.

[116]Aweis Ali, "Persecution of Christians and Its Effect on Church Growth in Somalia" (PhD diss., Africa Nazarene University, Nairobi, 2021), 102-104, https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.12642.45769.

[117]Religious Freedom & Business Foundation.

[118]Mauricio Drelichman, Jordi Vidal-Robert, and Hans-Joachim Voth, "The Long-Run Effects of Religious Persecution: Evidence from the Spanish Inquisition," Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, August 13, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.20228811.

Indonesia have not been adequately researched. These are areas in which future studies may bear fruit.

Overcoming the Barrier of Persecution

Indonesian Christians have suffered both violent and systemic persecution at the hands of the majority Muslim population, discouraging believers from sharing the gospel with their Muslim neighbors. If Indonesian believers are going to function as an evangelism force, they must be prepared to face persecution. But the Church must also explore ways to reduce the persecution experienced by most Indonesian believers. In this final section, we will discuss how Indonesian Christians can overcome the barrier of persecution, first, by preparing individuals and churches to face persecution, and second, by attempting to reduce systemic persecution through human rights education and interfaith dialogue.

Preparing for Persecution

A common theme running through the writings of the early Church Fathers and Indonesian theologians is the need for what Cyprian called "methodical preparation" before persecution begins.[119] Both individuals and churches need to be prepared to endure persecution.[120] Chinese Christians reported that knowing that persecution was coming allowed them to be mentally prepared, which eased the impact of persecution.[121] Christians in the early Church who were spiritually unprepared, like those who suffered persecution in Lyon in AD 177, "were manifestly unready and untrained and still weak" and fell away into apostasy.[122] Lactantius, observing Christians suffering during the Great Persecution of AD 303-313, notes that they displayed *inspirata patientia*, or an inspired capacity to suffer.[123] What preparation can be given to Indonesian Christians to inspire such strength?

The first step of preparation is to develop a strong theology of persecution. Ali, writing of the persecuted church in Somalia, says their theology of persecution "serves as the glue that holds the Somali Christians together."[124] Christians who understand biblical teachings

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[119]Nicholson, 78.

[120]Ibid., 76-77.

[121]Rachel Sing-Kiat Ting and Terri Watson, "Is Suffering Good? An Explorative Study on the Religious Persecution among Chinese Pastors," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 207–208, https://doi.org/10.1177/009164710703500303.

[122]Nicholson, 75.

[123]Ibid., 65.

[124]Ali, 172.

about persecution "can make sense of all the sufferings they face because of their Christian faith." [125] A theology of persecution also helps persecuted believers "maintain a right attitude towards their persecutors" and helps them glorify God through their actions.[126] This theology of persecution will allow the Indonesian church to thrive by living for Christ despite facing persecution.[127]

A theology of persecution will include relevant scriptures from the Old and New Testaments that highlight biblical examples and teachings about persecution. Stories from Daniel, Jeremiah, and Acts show perseverance in the face of persecution. The teachings of Jesus in the gospels and Paul in the epistles will guide believers through persecution and toward eternal life. [128] The book of Revelation shows the participation of the martyrs in the ultimate victory of Jesus. A theology of persecution will also include Moltmann's eschatology of hope, which inspires divine hope in the hearts of believers during times of persecution.[129]

Spiritual preparation for persecution must also encourage Indonesian believers to develop a deep relationship with God and to depend on the Holy Spirit for anointing and guidance. Notes Nicholson, "True martyrs were sustained by their relationship with God; anyone attempting to survive such tortures in any other way would find them intolerable." [130] St. Gordius, centurion of Caesarea, retreated to the mountains in preparation for his confession of faith. When he came down, he was "like an athlete who is sufficiently trained, anointed for the struggle by fasts, vigils, by prayer and ceaseless meditation on the oracles of the Holy Spirit."[131] Believers must be taught that persecution is spiritual warfare, and perseverance brings victory to the believer and eternal rewards. Persecuted Christians must realize that suffering for their faith is not a punishment from God, but a blessing as they share in the sufferings of Christ.[132]

Indonesian churches must also be prepared for persecution. The early Church was organized to endure persecution. Duties of believers towards the persecuted included showing hospitality to Christian refugees, providing food, money, and spiritual support for prisoners, and

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[125]Ibid.

[126]Ibid.

[127]Ibid.

[128]Scaer, 265.

[129]Ali, 42.

[130]Nicholson, 74.

[131]Ibid., 78.

[132]Rachel Sing-Kiat Ting and Terri Watson, "Is Suffering Good? An Explorative Study on the Religious Persecution among Chinese Pastors," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 35 No. 3 (Fall 2007): 207, https://doi.org/10.1177/009164710703500303.

traveling to other cities to visit and provide support for persecuted Christians.[133] According to Lovin,

> Christians developed a network of disciplined and interconnected communities that sustained the faithful against official, and sometimes popular, opposition . . . It was also during this time that the leadership role of the bishop came to be defined, along with the subsidiary tasks of presbyters and deacons—an effective, logical and hierarchical division of labor that survives in some form in many Christian communities to this day.[134]

Chinese pastors interviewed after release from prison report that "the companionship of other church fellows or family members also helped alleviate the sense of isolation and loneliness in facing imprisonment."[135]

Indonesian churches play a key role in helping believers endure and overcome persecution. Pastors, elders, and deacons are examples to their congregations of faithful perseverance. The church is a place of mutual support and provision for those suffering the physical and economic impacts of persecution. Pastoral care and counselling will help those suffering psychological trauma. Ministry to suffering congregations in other parts of Indonesia can be organized by district and national church officials.

Churches and denominations can also keep historical records of persecution suffered by their members. Just as Riccardi's *Century of Martyrdom* records the suffering of believers in the twentieth century, documenting the persecution of Indonesian Christians will strengthen the faith of believers. Says Riccardi, "Because so much of the Christianity of yesterday and of today is the history of martyrdom, each of us and each community must gather in a glass cup the tears and blood of the persecuted, preventing it from being lost or trampled into the ground."[136]

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[133]Nicholson, 76.

[134]Lovin, Robin W. 2016. "Authority, Legitimacy and Sovereignty: Religion and Politics in the Roman Empire before Constantine." *Studies in Christian Ethics* 29 (2): 185-186. doi:10.1177/0953946815623133.

[135]Ting and Watson, 207-208.

[136]Huibert van Beek and Larry Miller, ed., "Witness, Martyrdom, and Persecution: Following Christ Together. Report of the International Consultation, Tirana, Albania, 2-4 November 2015" (Germany: Global Christian Forum, 2018): flyleaf, https://global christianforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Tirana_Report_DPM_Consultation-1.pdf.

Human Rights Education

One method to reduce systemic religious persecution in Indonesia is through human rights education. Cotler says, "Freedom of religion remains the most persistently violated human right in the annals of the species."[137] Indonesia is a signatory of the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 18 of the UDHR states, "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."[138] Human rights in Indonesia are frequently abused, and the level of persecution against Christians in Indonesia has grown significantly since the reform era began in 1998. A Pew Research Center report published in 2019 noted that hostility towards Indonesian believers ranked as 'high or very high', along with other countries such as China, India, and Pakistan.

Mack suggests that collaboration between human rights organizations and religious institutions can lead to "the notion of religious freedom as a shared value in society."[139] A United States Institute for Peace report notes that one solution to the problem of persecution was "educating youth about human rights and pluralism." The report made recommendations to help education systems eliminate "stereotyping, false narratives and prejudices from curricula and include training in human rights, including freedom of religion or belief."[140] A Ministerial to Advance Freedom of Religion or Belief was convened by the United States in 2018 to address the issue of religious persecution. The diverse nations who attended the meeting emphasized education as a solution to religious persecution, noting "the importance of creating global citizens who respect human rights and pluralistic societies." A second emphasis was achieving the United Nations' Sustainable

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[137]Irwin Cotler, "Jewish NGOs, Human Rights, and Public Advocacy: A Comparative Inquiry," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 11, no. 3/4 (1999): 63, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25834458.

[138]Thomas K. Johnson, "A Case for Ethical Cooperation between Evangelical Christians and Humanitarian Islam," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 44, no. 3 (August 2020): 206, https://worldea.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Humanitarian_Islam_Report_with_ERT_cover.pdf.

[139]Michelle L. Mack, "Religious Human Rights and the International Human Rights Community: Finding Common Ground – Without Compromise," *Notre Dame Journal of Ethics, Law & Public Policy* 13, no. 2 (February 2014): 465, https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1372&context=ndjlepp.

[140]Knox Thames, "Human Rights Education as the Solution to Religious Persecution," United States Institute of Peace, https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/11/human-rights-education-solution-religious-persecution (accessed April 12, 2023).

Development Goals, including Goal 4, which highlights the need to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."[141]

As previously noted, the impacts of persecution are significant during the early childhood years. Including human rights awareness in the Indonesian primary school curriculum could reduce persecution and mitigate its impact on Christian children. The Indonesian Ministry of Education develops curricula at the national level for all primary and secondary schools. The following recommendations from the 2019 Abu Dhabi Guidelines on Teaching Interfaith Tolerance could be implemented by the Ministry of Education. First, develop strong partnerships between government and other organizations and religious leaders "to ensure expansion of interfaith knowledge among students and the effective equipping of teachers." Second, provide sufficient resources to support teacher training and develop curricula about interfaith tolerance and understanding. Third, combat intolerance with better teaching methodologies and textbooks. Fourth, encourage parents to be involved in the education of their children. Involvement reflects their right "to transmit their religious values to their children and promotes freedom of religion or belief." Finally, encourage engagement by national and international partners with formal and informal educational institutions "to advance interfaith understanding and knowledge about human rights and religious freedom."[142] As the Abu Dhabi Guidelines state, "Education is the most effective means of preventing intolerance."[143]

Interfaith Dialogue

The final section of this paper recommends overcoming the barrier of persecution through interfaith dialogue. Previously we saw that the sociological impact of persecution led the ingroup (Christians) to erroneously assign emotions and motivations to the outgroup (Muslims) based on exposure to high-profile members (radicals) of the outgroup.[144] We suggested that exposure of the ingroup to high-profile individuals who are more moderate could help bridge the gap between the two groups. Mustaqim, an Indonesian Muslim scholar, is one such moderate.

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[141]Ibid.

[142]"Abu Dhabi Guidelines on Teaching Interfaith Tolerance," *Freedom of Religion or Belief Learning Platform*, 5-6, accessed April 12, 2023, https://www.forb-learning.org/uploads/1/1/3/5/113585003/abu_dhabi_guidelines_on_teaching_interfaith_t olerance.pdf.

[143]Ibid., 1.

[144]Seger et al., 80-89.

In his article "Theological Conflict and Religious Violence through the Lens of Koranic Interpretation," Mustaqim argues the Koran seeks to resolve conflict and encourages people of different faiths to live in peace.[145] Mustaqim distinguishes between religion itself and man's practice of religion and claims that no religion promotes conflict and that persecution arises from a misunderstanding of religion.[146]

Mustaqim lists seven ways the Koran can help resolve conflicts between religious groups. These include clarifying the issues, promoting mediation efforts, building community action, asking for mutual forgiveness, promoting peace and good works, pursuing justice, and guaranteeing religious freedom.[147] He encourages Indonesians to resolve religious conflicts in their multicultural society by "changing enemies into brothers, moderating extreme views, replacing intolerance with tolerance, and being inclusive rather than exclusive."[148] Inviting moderate Indonesian Muslim scholars like Mustaqim to an interfaith dialogue could lead to greater understanding and relationship between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia.

At the international level, a significant interfaith dialogue has begun between the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), representing 600 million Christians worldwide, and the *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), the largest Muslim organization in Indonesia with 90 million members. NU has traditionally held moderate views and was led from 1984-1999 by Abdurrahman Wahid, the grandson of the NU founder who later became Indonesia's fourth president. In response to the rise of ISIS in 2014 and the indiscriminate killing of Muslims and non-Muslims, the NU issued a statement rejecting the radical religious views of ISIS. Later, in 2017, the NU released a theological framework called 'Humanitarian Islam.'[149] Humanitarian Islam "supports religious freedom and human rights for Christians and people of other faiths."[150] Humanitarian Islam also "contains a serious assessment of universal moral norms, the relation between faith and reason, fundamental human goods, the laws (both civil and religious) needed to protect those human goods, and the role of religions in societies."[151] Bishop Dr. Thomas Schirrmacher, now

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[145]Abdul Mustaqim, "Konflik Teologis dan Kekerasan Agama Dalam Kacamata Tafsir Al-Qur'an," *Epistemé* 9, no. 2 (June 2014): 156, https://doi.org/10.21274/epis.2014.9.1.155-176.

[146]Ibid., 157.

[147]Mustaqim, 167-173.

[148]Ibid., 174.

[149]Thomas K. Johnson and C. Holland Taylor, eds., *God Needs No Defense: Reimagining Muslim–Christian Relations in the 21st Century,* (Germany: CPI Books, 2021): 1-4, https://worldea.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Festschrift-for-Thomas-Schirrmacher-web-color.pdf.

[150]Ibid., 206.

[151]Ibid.

Secretary-General of the WEA, travelled to Indonesia in November 2019 and engaged the leaders of Humanitarian Islam in a dialogue. As a result of this engagement, a Humanitarian Islam/WEA Joint Working Group (JWG) was established.[152]

Thomas Johnson, the WEA Special Envoy for Engaging Humanitarian Islam, suggests several ways for Christians to foster cooperation with Humanitarian Islam. These include holding joint events where leaders discuss religion's role in society, producing joint publications, gathering political leaders from both religions to develop civil laws based on a common moral understanding, providing information to business, government, and education sectors promoting interactions between people from different religions, and addressing humanitarian problems such as homelessness, human trafficking, and other problems.[153]

Interfaith dialogues at national and international levels will allow Indonesian believers to meet and understand moderate Muslim leaders. During these dialogues, Christians will also be able to share their own views and influence Muslim perceptions of Christians. Continued interactions will allow both sides to find common ground, and to then work together to solve humanitarian problems. The safe space created by interfaith dialogue will help Indonesian Christians overcome the barrier of persecution in sharing their faith with their Muslim neighbor. Dialogue and respect between followers of the two religions will help to "establish greater social integration, avoid conflict, alleviate mistrust and improve the social climate."[154]

Conclusion

The persecution experienced by Indonesian Christians has become a barrier that keeps these believers from sharing the gospel with their Muslim neighbors. The purpose of this paper was to identify ways in which Indonesian believers could overcome this barrier. The first section studied persecution in the Bible and intertestamental writings and identified three elements common to all persecuted witnesses: physical suffering, a clear testimony of God, and a view beyond this world toward God and his kingdom. We then turned to a study of the early Church to

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[152]Johnson and Taylor, 8.
[153]Ibid., 217.
[154]Lucia Boccacin and Linda Lombi, "Religious Persecution, Migrations and Practices in Faith-Based Organizations: Some Recommendations from a Qualitative Study," in *Migrants and Religion: Paths, Issues, and Lenses*, ed. Laura Zanfrini (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 499, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004429604_015.

see how it faced persecution. The writings of Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Origen brought us face to face with martyrs who chose death rather than deny their faith. Their writings echoed the biblical themes regarding persecution and emphasized the need for spiritual preparation before facing persecution. A review of the theological response by Indonesian Christians to rising persecution followed, noting many common themes with biblical and early Church writings, including the need for spiritual preparation to endure persecution.

With the spiritual impact of persecution examined, a review of four other impacts of persecution was undertaken. Research on the sociological, physical, psychological, and economic impacts of persecution was presented, and a picture of how persecution affects the whole person was developed. The final section of the paper described three methods to overcome the barrier of persecution in the lives of believers. The first method is to prepare individuals and churches to face persecution. The preparation includes developing a theology of persecution and practical ways for churches to strengthen and support their congregations during times of persecution. Two methods to reduce systemic persecution in Indonesia were presented. The first is for the Indonesian Ministry of Education to develop and implement human rights education in the Indonesian school system. The second is to encourage interfaith dialogues between Christians and moderate Muslims, including those promoting Humanitarian Islam. Human rights education and interfaith dialogue will increase tolerance and ultimately reduce the level of persecution in Indonesia.

Over 192 million Indonesian Muslims are waiting to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. Over thirty million Indonesian Christians must overcome the barrier of persecution to reach them. This is possible through preparation, education, and dialogue. Then Indonesian believers will be able to share the good news with their Muslim neighbors, and Indonesia will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.

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Contemporary Spirit-Empowered Engagement with the Great Commission[1]

By Rebekah Bled

Introduction

Pentecostal mission is fueled by Pentecostal eschatology.[2] The conviction that Spirit baptism and subsequent ongoing empowerment of the Spirit is for the purpose of mission propels Pentecostals into crossing all kinds of barriers including national, economic, socio-political, and language.[3] The Pentecostal understanding of Christ as the soon-coming King [4] propels this eschatological urgency to fulfill the Great Commission. This article will survey how Spirit-empowered communities in the Global South are living out strategies to complete the remaining tasks of the Great Commission. Recently published volumes stemming from Empowered21's Scholars' Consultations will serve as the primary resource for this article as they represent current research in this area.[5] Other sources include seminal works on the theme of Spirit-empowered mission and social action, including *Mission in the Spirit* by Ma and Ma, and *Global Pentecostalism* by Miller and Yamamori.

This paper will look first at the biblical mandate to go and make disciples, then briefly look at the broad categories of proclamation and social action as a response to this mandate. It will then highlight insights and encouragement from Asia, Africa, and Latin America regarding the Spirit-empowered movement's unique contributions and contextualized approaches for engagement with the remaining tasks of the Great Commission.

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[1]Portions of this article are adapted from Rebekah Bled, "Almost, Not Yet, Already: Postscript," in *The Remaining Task of the Great Commission & the Spirit-Empowered Movement*, Wonsuk Ma, Opoku Onyinah, and Rebekah Bled, ed., (Tulsa, OK: ORU Press, 2023). Adapted for publication with the publisher's permission.

[2]Julie C. Ma and Wonsuk Ma, *Mission in the Spirit: Towards a Pentecostal/Charismatic Missiology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 5.

[3]Ibid, 154.

[4]Daniel D. Isgrigg, *Imagining the Future: The Origin, Development, and Future of Assemblies of God Eschatology* (Tulsa, OK: ORU Press, 2021), 3.

[5]Wonsuk Ma, Opoku Onyinah, and Rebekah Bled, ed., *The Remaining Task of the Great Commission & the Spirit-Empowered Movement* (Tulsa, OK: ORU Press, 2022).

The Great Commission and Great Consummation

Jesus gave his disciples the Great Commission, instructing them to make disciples of every nation, baptizing those disciples in the name of the trinity, and teaching them obedience to his commands (Matt 28:19–20). Christ then promised his continual presence, which he had endued with "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt 28:18) until the end of the age; that is, until the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matt 28:20; Matt 24:14) (Quotations are from that version unless otherwise indicated). Thus began the era of the church. The mandate set forth in Matthew 28 is not yet complete, and the era of the church continues. As Trevor Grizzle notes, the disciples originally tasked with making disciples would have given the mandate to new believers, who would, in turn, make disciples. Thus, the mandate is passed from generation to generation until Christ's return.[6] Between the bookends of the Great Commission in Matthew 28 and the great consummation described in Revelation 7:9, the church is called into a process of obedience and faithfulness which spans culture, language, geography, and generations. It is called into full participation in a mandate whose outcome it does not control, but whose promised fulfilment is continuously anticipated.

While the day and hour of Christ's return are unknown, he has promised that he is indeed returning. It is yet unknown how many generations the era of the church will include, but it is certain that it is the church's calling to preach, baptize, and teach all nations in concert with the Spirit in every generation. Furthermore, it is a certainty that every nation will be present before Christ's throne in glory, where the "multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-cultural" family of God, "united in being his" will worship together (Rev 7:9).[7] God's good creation, begun in a garden, finds joyful fulfillment in an urban banquet in which "a great multitude" (Rev 7:9) lifts unified voices "with the sound of many waters . . . and the sound of mighty thunder peals" (Rev 19:6) crying out the consummation of the Great Commission (Rev 19:6–8). The Great Commission is a mandate sweeping across human history, encompassing every tribe, tongue, nation (Isa 25:6–7; Phil 2:10–11; Rev 5:9–10), and age (Ps 78:6–7;102:18; Dan 4:3; Luke 1:50). Indeed, the participation in the Great Commission mirrors its fulfillment.

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[6]Trevor Grizzle, in "Spirit Empowerment and Service to the Poor in Acts," in *Good News to the Poor: Spirit-Empowered Responses to Poverty*, Wonsuk Ma, Opoku Onyinah, and Rebekah Bled, ed., (Tulsa, OK: ORU Press, 2022), 54.

[7]John Odom, "God's Multiracial Vision," (sermon, Cornerstone Church, Tulsa, OK, May 8, 2022).

Matthew's Missiology

David Bosch notes several key themes embedded in Matthew's gospel which serve as hermeneutical keys to "interpreting his missionary consciousness."[8] These themes include God's sovereignty, his justice, and his commands to pursue holiness, to bear fruit, and to teach.[9] Though some of these themes are more reminiscent of Pentecostalism's holiness roots, others are at home in classical Pentecostalism.[10] Still others, such as justice and the reign of God as interpreted through a lens of eschatological liberation find a home in the larger family of the Spirit-empowered movement. [11] Bosch notes that where Luke and John emphasize the role of the Spirit in missions—Luke with emphasis on proclamation with a preferential option for the poor, and John with an emphasis on the intimacy of the Spirit—Matthew's Great Commission seems, at first glance, to shift away from this Spirit focus. Indeed, as Bosch describes, "The Matthean Jesus sounds extremely didactic and legalistic and is an embarrassment, particularly to Protestants, who would prefer to hear about proclamation rather than teaching, about the forgiveness of sins and the power of the Holy Spirit, rather than the keeping of commandments."[12] However, Bosch quickly elaborates, describing Matthew as strategic and intentional in his missiological viewpoint rather than embarrassingly recalcitrant, giving "the extremely sober vocabulary of the Great Commission" as a distinctive and incisive strategy. Matthew divides the word "teach" into teach and proclaim, using 'proclaim' when the message is focused on unbelievers or outsiders, reserving the word 'teach' for instructing believers or insiders in the way of Christ.[13] Here, what the disciples teach is submission to Christ in the Spirit lived in the context of the world.

Pentecostal Proclamation and Social Engagement

Since the context of disciple-making is the broken world, the question of proclamation or social action immediately arises, presenting

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[8]David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 66.
[9]Ibid.
[10]Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 7.
[11]Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 182.
[12]Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 67.
[13]Ibid.

an issue which has long divided Protestants, especially in the West.[14] As Gene Green notes, "The questions that have conditioned Western discourse about the Bible and society are different than those germane to [minority group] communities. . . . And as the Majority World church self-theologizes, the attention turns to the meaning of the gospel in relationship to its context."[15] Ivan Satyavrata reflects on the experience of the founding missionaries of the Assemblies of God Church and Mission, Kolkata, which well illustrates this tension. Satyavrata describes North American missionaries, Mark and Huldah Buntain arriving in Kolkata and "be[ginning] their ministry by doing what they knew best to do: preaching the gospel and conducting evangelistic services."[16] However, the year was 1947, and India was suffering the social and economic consequences of the recent partition with Pakistan. One day, an impoverished man called out during the Buntain's sermon, "First, feed our bellies, then tell us there is a God in heaven who loves us!"[17] The Buntains responded to the man's plea by establishing a feeding program which remains active to this day.

Recent studies show Pentecostals in the Global South on the leading edge of social engagement and proclamation.[18] These Pentecostal believers refuse to fall into the binaries of either proclamation or social engagement that have so long plagued their evangelical cousins and simply do both.[19] Charles Kraft calls this "wrapping power in love,"[20] 'power' here being salvation in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Pentecostal worldview, encompassing a present spiritual reality whose good end is assured, gives tenacious courage and hope in the face of grim material and spiritual circumstances. An interview with a non-Pentecostal pastor in the Global South speaks to the witness of this bold tenacity: "Pentecostals will go where no one else has the courage to go.

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[14]Cecil M. Robeck Jr. "Ecumenism," in *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, Allan H. Anderson, Michael Bergunder, André Droogers, and Cornelis Van Der Laan, ed., (Berkley: University of California Press, CA 2010) , 286; Wonsuk Ma, "Spirit, Mission, and Unity: A Personal Journal," in *Mission in the Spirit: Towards a Pentecostal/Charismatic Missiology*, Julie C. Ma and Wonsuk Ma, ed., (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 264.

[15]Gene L. Green, "The Challenge of Global Hermeneutics," in *Global Theology in Evangelical Perspective: Exploring the Contextual Nature of Theology and Mission,* Jeffrey P. Greenman and Gene L. Green, ed., (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 50, 52.

[16]Ivan Satyavrata, "A Church with a Heart: Spirit and Praxis in Pentecostal Social Engagement," in *Good News to the Poor*, Ma, Onyinah, and Bled, ed., 90.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Miller and Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*.

[19]Ma and Ma, *Mission in the Spirit*, 10.

[20]Charles H. Kraft, "A Third Wave Perspective on Pentecostal Mission," in *Called & Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective,* Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen, ed., (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 312.

The universities, the desperately poor, places that are just a mess. Pentecostals are already there ministering. If the people in these situations had to wait for the mainline denominations to have enough courage to go. . . ." Here the pastor trailed off with a shrug of the shoulders indicating the wait would be long indeed.[21] Each community and culture of believers offers unique giftings and witness, which becomes interwoven into the tapestry of God's grand redemption of the world. Spirit-empowered communities hold among their missiological distinctives: power encounters, healing evangelism, vibrant and expressive prayer and worship, and grassroots discipleship.

Spirit-Empowered Witness in Asia

In her overview of Pentecostal approaches in Asia, Connie Au makes use of Arjun Appadurai's various "scapes" that characterize globalization.[22] Regarding the urban context, for example, Au notes, "Urban Asian Pentecostal churches embrace a diverse ethnoscape characterized by multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-racial congregations constituted by a significant component of migrants."[23] On one end of the financial spectrum, these urban congregations with their professional affiliations, flows of financial capital, modern worship styles, and ethnic diversity can be "partners with modernity."[24]

The urban enthnoscape is no less active on the other end of the financial spectrum in Asia, however, because of the vast numbers of South-South migrant workers.[25] Indeed, Eric Newberg notes that "in the Arab states six in ten women are employed as migrant domestic workers." [26] Newberg summarizes Bina Fernadez's findings on Pentecostal mission to South-South migrant workers in the Middle East region of Asia: "Pentecostal churches have created a safe space for migrant workers, in which forms of mutual support create a counterculture, empowering their members to navigate the world of

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[21]John Hamilton, interview by author, August 24, 2021. Hamilton, was located in Montevideo, Uruguay and the author was in Tulsa, OK. The interview took place via Zoom.

[22]Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," *Theory, Culture and Society* 7:2–3 (June 1990), 297–299.

[23]Connie Au, "Asian Pentecostal Mission and Spirituality: The Dual Quests in the Globalized World," in *The Remaining Task*, Ma, Onyinah, and Bled, ed., 106.

[24]David Reed, "From Bethel Temple, Seattle, to Bethel Church of Indonesia: Missionary Legacy of an Independent Church," in *Global Pentecostal Movements: Migration, Mission and Public Religion*, Michael Wilkinson, ed., (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 103.

[25]Au, "Asian Pentecostal Mission and Spirituality," 101.

[26]Eric N. Newberg, "Global Poverty and Transnational Pentecostalism in the Middle East," in *Good News to the Poor,* Ma, Onyinah, and Bled, ed., 365.

undocumented workers."[27] At each end of the financial spectrum, urban Pentecostals in Asia are embracing an ethic of "urban missions," reaching out to the multitude of nations present in the city centers.[28] These Pentecostals offer counseling, vibrant prayer and worship experiences, cell groups, divine healing services, and worldview instruction through Spirit-focused sermons, often with an emphasis on prosperity.[29] The intentionally missional paradigm of these urban congregations means that there are often pastors from various nations and language groups represented and that the services and offerings extended to the community are offered in multiple languages.[30]

The reality of urban life brings disparities up close.[31] Writing from the context of the Philippines, Joel Tejedo notes that ". . . the widening gap between the rich and the poor remains as the prime challenge facing Filipinos."[32] Tejedo gives an urban slum called Lower Rock Quarry (LRQ) in Baguio City, the Philippines, as one such example. An area affected by regular flooding, much of the city's garbage is also dumped here, worsening an already desperate living environment. Tejedo writes: "Although the city is populated by Catholic, Protestant, and Pentecostal churches, as well as paganism, no religious groups [have] dare[d] to build a chapel in the village because of recurring floods. . . . So, the spirituality of the people in this village is dependent on the church centers and fellowships in the city."[33] Pentecostal students and professors from Asia Pacific Theological Seminary stepped into this gap, going to LRQ with regular proclamation and social engagement outreaches and networking with local government, NGOs, and churches in the area in order to both proclaim the good news and relieve the effects of material poverty. This marriage of approaches "expand[s] the capability [of LRQ inhabitants] to experience human dignity and wholeness."[34]

The rural Asian context is also diverse and multi-layered. Au describes a revival in the jungle that: "transform[ed] this tribal area into

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[27]Bina Fernandez, "Degrees of (Un)Freedom: The Exercise of Agency by Ethiopian Migrant Workers in Kuwait and Lebanon," in *Migrant Domestic Workers in the Middle East: The Home and the World*, Bina Fernandez and Marin de Regt, ed., (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 51, 57–61, 64–68, referenced in Newberg, "Global Poverty," 371.

[28]Au, "Asian Pentecostal Mission and Spirituality," 100.

[29]Ibid, 100–102.

[30]Ibid, 100.

[31]R. Wade Paschal, "God in the City: Poverty," God in the City Lecture Series, The Culture Lab, Tulsa, OK, September 2019.

[32]Joel Tejedo, "Pentecostal Civic Engagement in the Squatter Area of Baguio City, Philippines," in *Good News to the Poor*, Ma, Onyinah, and Bled, ed., 333.

[33]Ibid, 334.

[34]Ibid, 335.

a multi-ethnic, multi-national, and multi-denominational carnival."[35] Thang San Mung notes the relevance of Pentecostal worship in the rural Asian context. Mung describes the extroversion of prayer and worship seen taking place in Revelation 19 as a present-day missional strategy that Spirit-empowered worshipping communities are well-poised to embrace.[36] Mung locates this strategy in part in the Lord's Prayer, noting that this liturgy "has a global perspective in view, action steps in the project, and inclusive tones in practice."[37] Extroverted Pentecostal worship as a missiological strategy includes manifestations such as speaking in tongues and divine healing,[38] and can lead to power encounters, inviting the Holy Spirit into confrontation with other spirits.

Au describes power encounters in geographically specific places known to "belong" to evil or contrary spirits. These places thus become potential spiritual battlegrounds for the Spirit-empowered church. In contexts where the spiritual realm is considered part of everyday life, there is a focus on the particular uniqueness of Christ's commands and the Spirit's authoritative power. In these contexts, one might argue for "believing before belonging" as a path to discipleship where the specifics of Christ as a unique savior and his specific salvation are worked out in the believing community of the Spirit-empowered church. Au makes the significant observation that it is charismatic experiences that empower believers to engage in power encounters with contrary spirits, confronting them "in a way consistent with their culture."[39] Power encounters provide evidence in the physical world that demonstrates the authority of the Holy Spirit over forces and powers both seen and unseen, systemic and personal. Emboldened and empowered by the Spirit, Pentecostals "intentionally increase and intensify their prayer," practicing fidelity with their actions to their fervent belief that the Spirit is at work winning the battle.[40] Julie Ma urges Pentecostal pastors and missioners to "pay attention to the community dimension of a power encounter," describing rural settings in which a single divine healing was "jointly owned by the entire community."[41] Ma also urges theologizing in the area of Pentecostal pastoral care for long-term suffering, when prayers for divine healing do not seem to be heard. Ma describes the open

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[35]Au, "Asian Pentecostal Mission and Spirituality," 108.

[36]Thang San Mung, "Extroversion of Worship: Spirit, Worship, and Witnessing," in *The Remaining Task*, Ma, Onyinah, and Bled, ed., 237–250.

[37]Ibid, 242.

[38]Ma and Ma, *Mission in the Spirit*, 156, 159.

[39]Au, "Asian Pentecostal Mission and Spirituality," 111.

[40]Miguel Alvarez, "Focusing on the People of the Margins in Latin America: A New Approach to Social Concern," in *The Remaining Task*, Ma, Onyinah, and Bled, ed., 146.

[41]Ma and Ma, *Mission in the Spirit*, 192.

door for Asian Pentecostal theologizing in the areas of power encounter, noting that this is a gift Asian Pentecostals can bring to the body of Christ.[42]

Spirit-Empowered Witness in Africa

Power encounters and healing evangelism can also frequently be seen in African Pentecostalism as people seek spiritual protection from what Harvey Kwiyani describes as "contrary spirits."[43] Paul Hiebert positions power encounters within the search for agency and control, calling this quest "the central concern of our day."[44] Beyond prayer as a missional strategy, prayer has urgent, personal implications as well. Harvey Kwiyani notes that Pentecostals in Southern Africa "pray like their lives depend on it—and usually, their lives actually do."[45] In Africa, as in Asia, divine healing seamlessly integrates into an already spiritual worldview, which takes seriously the presence and activity of the spirit world in human life. Daniel King notes, "The gospel of healing has always been an essential part of the ethos of Pentecostal spirituality. . . . There is no artificial bifurcation of salvation and miracles; rather, they are two sides of the same coin."[46]

Ogbu Kalu describes healing "as the heartbeat of the life of the church," which Cephas Omenyo concurs "is not in any way an overstatement." [47] Omenyo continues: "Spiritual explanations of causation and healing are so vibrant, entrenched, and central in the Akan/African worldview that any caring African church has no choice but to address it."[48] One of these churches, Northmead Assembly of God (NAG) in Lusaka, Zambia, has been active in holistic healing ministry since 1992. Partnering with the Zambian government, NAG provides HIV/AIDS testing, and ongoing care for thousands of people annually, many of whom are street children who have been orphaned by the same

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[42]Ibid.

[43]Harvey Kwiyani, "The Great Commission and Pentecostalism in Southern Africa," in *The Remaining Task*, Ma, Onyinah, and Bled, ed., 84.

[44]Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 237.

[45]Kwiyani, "The Great Commission," 85–86.

[46]Daniel C. King, "Mass Healing Evangelism: The Unique Contribution of the Spirit-Empowered Movement to the Practice of Evangelism," in *The Remaining Task*, Ma, Onyinah, and Bled, ed., 308.

[47]Cephas N. Omenyo, "New Wine in and Old Wine Bottle? Charismatic Healing in the Mainline Churches in Ghana," in *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing* Candy Gunther Brown, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 236.

[48]Ibid, 238.

disease.[49] NAG understands that addressing issues of healing and disease includes long-term, dignified, care for those who are not immediately healed and has steadfastly directed their resources and creativity to this endeavor. As of 2013, Banda and NAG's HIV/AIDS ministry has tested over 7,000 people, with continuing care for each person who tests positive (nearly 72 percent of those tested as of the 2013 report).[50] The scope of the holistic work Banda spearheaded resulted in his invitation to lead the National AIDS Council in Zambia in 2007.[51] For Banda, proclamation is intertwined with care for the physical body. As Julie Ma states, ". . . the proclamation of the gospel and responding to the immediate needs of the vulnerable have [gone] hand in hand from the very beginning."[52]

Like their Asian counterparts, African Pentecostals are also often on the move because of South-South migration. Jehu Hanciles states that as of 2008, "one in every thirty-four people in the world is an international migrant."[53] Indeed:

> The vast proportion of global migration takes place within the non-Western world in the form of South–South migration. The impact of such massive people movements and displacements on the impoverished economies and dilapidated infrastructures of societies in the developing world beggars the imagination.[54]

One effect of migration is the in-breaking of enchanted worldviews into materialist countries and cultures. Viewing secularism as a pressing danger,[55] the first-generation African diaspora maintains strong and vibrant spiritual community wherever they go. Consider, for example, Samson Fatokun's description of missionaries from a highly spiritual worldview bringing this worldview into a secular society:

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[49]Julie C. Ma, "Holistic Ministry of the Pentecostal Church," in *Pentecostal Mission & Global Christianity: An Edinburgh Centenary Reader*, Younghoon Lee, Wonsuk Ma, and Kuewon Lee, ed., (Oxford: Regnum, 2018), 285.

[50]Joshua Banda, "Engaging with the Community: The Fight Against AIDS," in *Good News from Africa: Community Transformation Through the Church*, Brian Woolnough ed., (Oxford: Regnum, 2013), 41.

[51]Ma, "Holistic Ministry," 285.

[52]Ibid, 286.

[53]Jehu Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and the Transformation of the West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), EPUB location, "Part I: The Limits of Experience and Experiencing the Limits."

[54] Ibid, EPUB location, "Part I: The Limits of Experience and Experiencing the Limits."

[55]Harvey Kwiyani, "Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire: Stories of Young African Pentecostals Engaging Secularism in Europe," in *Proclaiming Christ in the Power of the Holy Spirit: Opportunities and Challenges*, Wonsuk Ma, Emmanual Anim, and Rebekah Bled., ed., (Tulsa: ORU Press, 2020), 355.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed a new form of Spirit-empowered evangelism in Europe and North America with the emergence of neo-Pentecostal churches in Nigeria whose members carried a new Evangelical zeal to European nations in their quest for fulfilling the mandate of the Great Commission . . . today several Nigerian pioneered Pentecostal church denominations are found in virtually every city in Europe, North America, Australia, and the Caribbean.[56]

Whether these churches are able to evangelize beyond ethnic boundaries remains an open question and will take skill and require an adaptability reminiscent of Joseph of the Old Testament who was able to move from the position of slave to prophet to civic leader second only to the Pharoah. J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu sees the resiliency of the African faith as God's strategic providence:

For Africa in particular, it is worth pointing out that Christian growth currently being witnessed in the continent may be God's way of preserving the heart of the message – the lordship of Jesus Christ – for a fresh advance in mission in the Northern continents where the faith has been in recession since the years of the Enlightenment.[57]

Spirit-Empowered Witness in Latin America

As in Asia and Africa, prayer is a defining characteristic of Pentecostal mission in Latin America. Indeed, Miguel Alvarez states, "Pentecostals have learned to depend on prayer and fasting for most of their actions."[58] Emphasizing the communal nature of prayer, Mireya Alvarez describes community prayer as "foundational to the Pentecostal worldview"[59] and, by extension, a primary "engine" of courageous missiological engagement that Julie Ma states as the "key to the crucial elements for revival."[60] Prayer in, with, and through the Spirit integrates well with themes of liberation in Latin American culture. "Prayer has an

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[56]Samson A. Fatokun, "Evangelism Home and World: Nigerian Church with Islam and Internationalization," in *The Remaining Task*, Ma, Onyinah, and Bled, ed., 186.

[57]J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "God Has Made Him Both Lord and Messiah . . .': An African Perspective on Christology and the Pentecost Day Message," in *Proclaiming Christ*, Ma, Anim, and Bled., ed., 188.

[58]Alvarez, "Focusing on the People of the Margins," 145.

[59]Mireya Alvarez, "The Impact of Evangelism and Prayer: Pentecostals in Central America with Emphasis on Guatemala and Honduras," in *The Remaining Task*, Ma, Onyinah, and Bled, ed., 319.

[60]Ma, "Theology."

empowering quality since shared burdens are no longer individual struggles. The results are left to God. The believer is liberated to continue with the daily tasks of life."[61] Alvarez describes worship services as unbounded, following the emotional and sometimes ecstatic flow of the Spirit.[62] In prayer, believers are equal before God regardless of their socio-economic status or gender. Mireya Alvarez notes the liberative corrective this sense and practice of equality gives to the element of machismo. As women gain confidence and take on significant leadership and discipleship roles in the context of the church, this has a discipling effect in the home and society.[63]

Julie Ma states, "If Christ liberated all humanity, including women, on the cross, Pentecostals should endeavor to liberate women in every area of ministry."[64] In Korea, Yoido Full Gospel Church's thousands of cell groups are led by women, for example.[65] Richard Harding and Manuela Harding describe the Bogota, Colombia's G12 network of missional discipleship, stating, "evangelism plus discipleship equals missions."[66] Scholars, pastors, and other traditional experts have significant, even potentially prophetic roles to play in discernment; however, their role is to offer insight, encouragement, and support rather than to be the head of the funnel through which discipleship efforts flow. Indeed, in current discipleship movements across the globe, including Latin America, what can be seen is the democratization of "experts."

Children, too, experience the emboldening effects of Spirit-identity through holistic mission efforts on their behalf. Mary Mahon describes the image of God being "marred" in the lives of vulnerable children because of the powerlessness of poverty.[67] However, Mahon also describes the transformation made possible through Spirit-empowered education, which includes teachers' belief in student potential, students' own assertations of agency and destiny, experiential spirituality, and empowering sacred stories.[68] Children given consistent, holistic, identity-

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[61]Mireya Alvarez, "The Impact of Evangelism," 319.

[62]Ibid, 318.

[63]Ibid, 319.

[64]Ma and Ma, *Mission in the Spirit*, 206.

[65]Darrin J. Rodgers, "Yoido Full Gospel Church: How Women Ministers Fueled the Growth of the World's Largest Church," November 2, 2017, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center, https://ifphc.wordpress.com/2017/11/02 /yoido-full-gospel-church-how-women-ministers-fueled-the-growth-of-the-worlds-largest-church/, date of access October 28, 2022.

[66]Richard Harding and Manuela Harding, "Missional Spirituality of the Global G12 Network," in *The Remaining Task*, Ma, Onyinah, and Bled, ed., 342.

[67]Mary Kathleen Mahon, "Todo lo Puedo: The Empowerment of Children Born Into Poverty through ChildHope: A Case Study," in *Good News to the Poor*, Ma, Onyinah, and Bled, ed., 209.

[68]Ibid, 207–208.

transforming and skill-building education, can thrive in the power of the life-giving Holy Spirit. Giving the example of Spirit-empowered children praying for (and receiving!) divine healing,[69] Mahon describes an alternative narrative: "I am a child of God; it doesn't matter what statistics about poverty predict for my life. I am a child of God, and I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."[70]

Conclusion

This article has looked at examples of Spirit-empowered communities' approaches to making disciples of all nations. Though examples from Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America have been discussed, this article has barely scratched the surface of the courageous and creative agency of contemporary Spirit-empowered missions in concert with the Spirit. Julie Ma states that Spirit-empowerment is "Pentecostalism's treasured experience"[71] which leads directly to mission. Yet, this treasure is held in tension. Spirit-empowerment invites individuals and communities into the paradox of weakness and powerlessness. Christ's global family is invited into the tension of bearing witness to the one who spoke the galaxies into being and who gives and sustains all life, yet remaining grounded in full humility, accepting that without the Spirit's enlivening, witness alone cannot bring transformation. Andrew Walls gives the pertinent reminder that the story of God's rescue through global missions is a long one, with a good end:

> Abraham is waiting for 'us' before he receives everything that was promised him. He must wait until the whole story of the people of God is complete. The generations belong together. They form one story that is not complete until every power that resists God's kingdom is destroyed. Each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming, those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, so that God may be all in all.[72]

Daniel Isgrigg poses the question, "What if the goal of reaching the whole world is not a prediction but rather a challenge to every generation

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[69]Ibid, 220.
[70]Ibid, 221.
[71]Ma, "Theology."
[72]Andrew Walls, "Eschatology in the Western Mission Movement," *Studies in World Christianity* 22:3 (2016), 199.

to take responsibility for reaching the world they have inherited?"[73] This challenge invites believers into an ongoing process of creative and courageous discovery in order for faith communities to continually ask the question, "how might the next group of people (culture, generation) best hear the gospel so that they have a fair chance of responding?"[74] The Spirit's centrality is a gift, requiring ongoing dependence and submission to the Spirit for the sake of each believer's ongoing transformation and for the transformation of the world.

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[73]Daniel D. Isgrigg, "The Unfinished Task in North America and Its Impact on Spirit-Empowered Christianity," in *The Remaining Task*, Ma, Onyinah, and Bled, ed., 165.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Robert Banks, *The Versatility of Paul: Artisan Missioner, Community Developer, Pastoral Educator* (Baguio City, Philippines: Asia Pacific Theological Seminary Press, 2022). ix + 122 pp. $9.99 Kindle. $15.99 paper. ISBN 978621835007

Robert Banks, a native of Sydney, Australia, received his Ph.D. in New Testament at Cambridge University. He has taught at the Australian National University, MacQuarrie University, and Fuller Theological Seminary. He has written over twenty books including *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition*, *Paul's Idea of Community* (three editions), *Lessons from Reel Life: Movies, Meaning and Myth-Making*, and *Reconciliation and Hope: New Testament Essays on Atonement and Eschatology* (editor). This book was adapted from Banks' lectureship in the Annual William Menzies Lectureship at the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, Baguio City, Philippines, in 2021.

In *The Versatility of Paul*, Banks' thesis is that Paul's apostleship included all five of the gifts mentioned in Eph. 4:11—apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher—not just apostle. (He believes that pastor and teacher are two separate gifts rather than one gift of teaching pastor.) Thus, he sees Paul as a generalist, not as a specialist. Words such as "flexibility," "elasticity," and "versatility" appear throughout the book. In this book, Banks explores Paul as an apostle, teacher, and pastor. Much of the basis for his thesis comes from the book of Acts, the accuracy of which is presupposed. The New Perspective on Paul is not mentioned in the book, nor is it the perspective from which the book was written. The authenticity of all the thirteen letters attributed to Paul in the New Testament is accepted.

In Part I ("Artisan Missioner") Banks gives two chapters: "Cross-cultural Innovator" and "Flexible Response Planner." In "Cross-cultural Innovator" Banks shows how Paul had multiple purposes for his missionary journeys: evangelizing areas where the gospel had never reached, planting churches, revisiting those churches and individual converts, and developing links between the churches he founded. Banks calls Paul "the first missionary," but not a full-time missionary as we might think of today. Paul supported himself by making tents, probably using that vocation as a means of evangelism. In his basic evangelistic strategy, Paul varied his presentation according to his audience, and in doing so, "Paul became the first genuinely multi-cultural Christian" (p.17).

In terms of his pastoral practice, ". . . Paul lives his life and shares his message from *inside* rather than just *alongside* the non-Jewish cultures in which he spent time" (p. 18, italics original), again an indication of Paul's flexibility. He was able to "become all things to all people" to win some.

The second chapter, "Flexible Response Planner," focuses on Paul's missionary journeys. Paul didn't have a grand scheme for his journeys. Rather, he was led by the Spirit. But this leading came in many different ways such as a word from the Spirit, an inner conviction, and other seemingly less "spiritual" ways.

Part 2 is "Community Developer." Chapter 3, "Mutual Ministry Advocate," expresses Paul's method of building small urban communities in the areas around the Mediterranean. The word that could summarize the method is "relationships." The people in these communities related to one another as family, expressing agape love to one another. In terms of ministry, it was mutual as the church functioned as a body and as each person used their gifts for mutual edification. This also involved caring for each other's welfare, whether it was physical, material, or spiritual.

In Chapter 4, "Distinctive Lifestyle Exemplar," Banks shows how Paul instructs the members of the Pauline communities to live with "dual citizenship"—the earthly citizenship and the heavenly citizenship (Phil. 3:20). Although Paul uses the horizontal analogy of the already/not yet, he primary writes from the perspective of the vertical dimension of the "living in two times" (two citizenships) (p. 55). He shows how these interact in terms of both those within the community and those outside. The death and resurrection of Christ gave birth to a new humanity where the old human divisions no longer applied.

The setting for Paul's teaching was often his place of work. Workspaces were also living spaces, so those people Paul lived with those with whom he worked. It was a perfect setting for sharing the gospel. Paul was not hostile to the Roman government. In fact, he used his Roman citizenship to his advantage. But the formation of Christian communities that accorded the same status to all—rich and poor, slave and free, male and female, old and young—was a tacit affront to Roman society with all its hierarchy, the privilege for the wealthy, slavery, and the exploitation of the poor. When the two citizenships conflict, Christians must live in alignment with their heavenly citizenship. Paul's teaching on the two citizenship says that in some sense, believers are "already in heaven" (p. 56). Central to Christian behavior is the imitation of Christ.

Paul's versatility is shown in the way he conducted his life and in the way he instructed his converts about their behavior. Their conduct was based on their understanding of the Jewish Scriptures, the teaching

of Christ, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The context determines what would be the proper action, which means that sometimes Paul's admonitions seem contradictory. But they were proper actions to be lived out in different contexts.

The setting of Paul's ministry, other than the initial preaching in the synagogue, was normally the household. When Paul rented the Hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus, it was not for edifying the church, but for sharing the gospel with unbelievers.

Part 3 of *The Versatility of Paul* is entitled "Pastoral Educator." In chapter 5, "Life-Shaped Theologian," Banks brings out the relationship between theology and experience for Paul. Although revelation was primary for Paul, his theology was also "informed, deepened, and enhanced by significant aspects of his own life journey" (p.75). His teaching must not be taken as propositions apart from his personal mission and experience. His theology was missional theology. "We should see Paul as the missionary and pastor who does theology, instead of the theologian who engages in missional and pastoral work" (p. 77). We see Paul's life and feelings most clearly in 2 Corinthians which should receive more attention when studying Paul's theology.

One aspect of Paul's life that impacted how he perceived his theology was suffering. As he experienced the death of Christ in his sufferings, so he also experienced the life of Christ.

Paul's response to the situations of the churches was deeply emotional, and not just theological. His life was the prism through which he understood the revelation of God. His life gave him metaphors by which he saw the Christian life. For example, we have Paul's use of "walk" to describe the Christian life. Paul on his journeys, walked approximately 12,000 kilometers (7,450 miles). This was an apt analogy for the Christian life. Banks says:

> Like the wise men in the Old Testament, Paul found God speaking to him through experiences of the most ordinary kind. This reminds us that encounters with God that have theological consequences are not confined to so-called "religious" experiences. Any activity or aspect of life may become a prism through which God reveals something of himself. (87)

Banks says that in response to Paul's pattern, we need to get away from the seminary model of education and adopt "a more down-to-earth approach Paul modeled with people like Timothy and Titus" (89).

Chapter 6 is entitled "Learning-Oriented Teacher." There he says that Paul taught through stories as well as ideas, conversation as well as instruction, experience as well as knowledge, emotions as well as

thoughts, imagination as well as information, and practice as well as reflection. Paul shows us that there is a lot more to learning and teaching than just the communication of data and facts. His is a holistic approach that encompasses all the above aspects.

Banks' conclusion is entitled "Leader or Servant?" This chapter stresses Paul's servanthood in ministry. "…he was more concerned that his converts 'imitate' him as he imitated Christ, rather than 'obey' him" (p. 106). The ultimate authority was the gospel itself. Rather than being called a "servant leader," Paul should be called a "leading servant."

The Versatility of Paul, while not stressing Paul's theology, gives us a good presentation of Paul's life and values. I found very little that I would disagree with other than minor details. Although it is a short book (122 pages), it is a concise yet detailed introduction to the life and ministry of Paul from a noted New Testament scholar. I would highly recommend it for a college or seminary course on the Apostle Paul.

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L. William Oliverio, Jr., *Pentecostal Hermeneutics in the Late Modern World: Essays on the Condition of Our Interpretation* **(Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2022). xiv + 252 pp. $50.00 hardcover; $35.00 paper; $35.00 eBook.**

L. William Oliverio, Jr., associate professor of public theology at Northwest University, Kirkland, Washington, and co-editor of *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, has, over the last decade, established himself as one of the more important voices in ongoing discourse regarding Pentecostal hermeneutics. This volume is a compilation of twelve essays previously published in 2009–2020, which have here been lightly revised for this project (ix–x). These essays build upon and advance the hermeneutical project begun in Oliverio's published PhD dissertation, *Theological Hermeneutics in the Classical Pentecostal Tradition: A Typological Account* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), completed at Marquette University in 2009. Much like the earlier monograph, the present set of essays represents focused and deeply thoughtful philosophical-theological engagement with its subject matter.

The book divides into three parts, each of which consists of four chapters. Part One, "Historical-Constructive Hermeneutics," consists of

chapters 1–4. Chapter 1, "Toward a Hermeneutical Realism," reproduces the final chapter of the author's dissertation, serving here as a fitting point of departure and an introduction to his further contributions to the topic at hand. Chapter 2, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics and the Hermeneutical Tradition," presents the author's introduction to a set of essays (co-edited by the author and Kenneth Archer) exploring diverse Pentecostal approaches to constructive, pneumatologically oriented hermeneutics. Chapter 3, "Pentecostal Theological Hermeneutics," describes the earliest Pentecostal hermeneutic as "a hermeneutic of revelation and origination" (50) that then necessarily began to receive stabilization through subsequent developments within the tradition: "The three other types of Pentecostal theological hermeneutics [i.e., evangelical-Pentecostal, contextual-Pentecostal, and ecumenical-Pentecostal] … have each stabilized Pentecostal interpretive approaches in a general area" (51). Oliverio notes the contributions to contextual-Pentecostal hermeneutics of scholars like Amos Yong, James K. A. Smith, and those within the Cleveland School (Kenneth Archer, Lee Roy Martin, John Christopher Thomas). Within the ecumenical-Pentecostal approach, he highlights the work of Simon Chan, Frank Macchia, Steven Studebaker, and Wolfgang Vondey. This chapter also explains what constitutes theological hermeneutics and details how Pentecostal theology, which "has itself been a family of implicit theological hermeneutics of life since its origins" (46), has more recently developed explicitly Pentecostal theological hermeneutics with Amos Yong leading the charge (48). Oliverio observes that advocates of this approach "almost always consider multiple theological approaches as at least potentially illuminating rather than a single doctrinal perspective," and "multiple vantage points [are] considered advantageous as opposed to a single interpretive standpoint as superior to others" (48). While adherents of such a hermeneutic, according to the author, maintain orthodoxy and differentiate between "theological accounts as truthful and faithful" as opposed to "false or inadequate" (48), one wonders how such adjudication can be reached without in fact privileging some interpretive standpoint or theological approach over others. Chapter 4, "Contours of a Constructive Hermeneutic," provides the most throughgoing and recent (2020) elucidation of Oliverio's own vision for a constructive philosophical-theological Pentecostal hermeneutic. In addition to the previously utilized theological grid of the "full gospel," Oliverio proffers the "nexus of Creation-Incarnation-Pentecost-Eschaton" as "provid[ing] the major acts through which the many stories of Scripture might emerge into an epochal narrative for a Pentecostal theological hermeneutic" (70). He further suggests a "spiritual-moral aspect" and the continued use of the trialectic Spirit-Word-community

(71–72). Oliverio here sharply criticizes those continuing "the search for a 'right' or 'correct' hermeneutic" as "mix[ing] up the interpreter's authority with the authority and givenness of God's Word and Spirit and embody[ing] modern overconfidence far more than Christian orthodoxy" (73). It may strike some as rather ironic that, apparently for Oliverio, those who strive for *correctness* and *certainty* in their hermeneutic are *most certainly incorrect* in attempting to do so.

Part Two, "Ecumenical Hermeneutics," consists of chapters 5–8. Chapter 5, "Spirit Baptism in the Late Modern World," affirms the ecumenical-Pentecostal interpretation of Spirit baptism championed by Frank Macchia and utilizes this in formulating the author's Pentecostal response at the WCC's document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. Oliverio regards this as a development of the implicit theological potential latent within the tradition itself, and the ecumenical appeal of this tack is obvious. It remains unclear to me, however, how this expansive understanding of Spirit baptism does not constitute a departure from a classical Pentecostal interpretation of Spirit baptism. Yet, according to Oliverio in another chapter, this interpretive move by Macchia "has deepened, rather than watered down, the Pentecostal doctrine" (55). Chapter 6, "Scripture, Experience, and Community," traces the historical development of Pentecostal hermeneutics, utilizing the author's fourfold typology (early, evangelical, contextual, ecumenical), stressing the central theological importance of the trialectic interplay of Scripture, Spirit, and community, and giving ample consideration to contributions of the ecumenical-Pentecostal approach. Chapter 7, "Religion and Holy Affections," compares the biblical hermeneutics of Jonathan Edwards and Pentecostals, both of whom place strong emphasis upon the affective elements in interpreting Scripture, suggesting ways in which Pentecostal theology might draw resources from Edwards' theological thought in its own further development. Chapter 8, "Breaking Out of the Immanent Frame," reviews James K. A. Smith's *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*. Oliverio regards Taylor's *A Secular Age* as possibly "the most significant book written so far this century on religion in Western culture" (153), and Smith's book offers important guidance, summation, and dialogical supplement on this work (153). Oliverio discerns here a call for Pentecostals to "unpack the ontologies implicit in what we claim to have experienced" (164).

Part Three, "Interpretations of Pentecostal Hermeneutics," consists of chapters 9–12. Chapter 9, "Spirit-Word-Community," presents, in review-essay format, a synopsis and evaluation of Amos Yong's *Spirit-Word-Community*, which, as Oliverio observes, serves as "paradigmatic to [Yong's] theological project" and "is perhaps the best entry point into

Yong's thought as it sets out his original vision." I would add that Oliverio's summation and reflective evaluation of the book in this review essay provides perhaps the best entry point into this dense theological book, which is certainly not for the theologically and philosophically faint of heart. Chapter 10, "The One and the Many," explores Yong's attempt to address pluralism and the dissolution of meaning in late modernity, elucidating how the "many tongues" of Acts 2:11 are pressed to include many perspectives, practices, disciplines (187–90) and thus point to a unifying trinitarian center for the seemingly disparate realities of our world (177). Chapter 11, "The Theological Hermeneutic of Amos Yong," as an article originally published in 2020, sets forth the most up-to-date engagement with Yongian thought found among this collection of essays. Here Oliverio points out and explicates central trajectories in Yong's theological hermeneutic, including sections expounding Yongian pneumatological imagination, hermeneutical trialectic, pneumatological interpretation of Scripture, interdisciplinary theology, and his "many tongues" principle. The chapter also "adds a comparative twist" in that it relates Yong's theological project to those of Karl Rahner and Thomas Aquinas (192). Chapter 12, "Reading Craig Keener," interacts with Keener's *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in the Light of Pentecost*.

One highlight of the book is how Oliverio provides a theologically and philosophically rich engagement with Amos Yong's work throughout the essays, several of which specifically focus on evaluating, responding to, and building upon Yongian methodology and theology. A few examples of the kind of insightful engagement found throughout these essays will have to suffice. First, interacting with *Spirit-Word-Community*, Oliverio observes that Yong "contends that the given objects of interpretation are no[t] static but fluctuate in time and space in their biological, natural, cultural, and ecclesial worlds, thus necessitating the need for dynamic categories of understanding. This requires that the mediation of the cultural with biblical and theological traditions goes both ways. Social, natural, economic, political, and other forces *influence*, *shape* and, at times, *even dictate* interpretation" (172 n. 14; italics mine). This observation facilitates understanding of Yong's work in that it encourages the reader to inquire as to what may prompt, or even drive, Yong to make a particular interpretive move. The hermeneutical point of departure makes all the difference. Some balk at Yongian interpretations of Scripture, for example, precisely because they approach the scriptural text from a very different hermeneutical perspective: denying, for instance, that contemporary social, economic, or political realities can ever properly dictate a faithful reading of the biblical text; affirming, rather, that meaning remains anchored to the

original author and that Scripture stands as the authority even when it directly clashes with contemporaneous socio-cultural sentiment. My point here ought not to be construed as an attempt to disprove or dislodge Yong's approach as opposed to my own more evangelical-Pentecostal orientation (something a short review could never accomplish anyway), but rather simply to highlight the importance of hermeneutics as determinative of the trajectory and final product of our interpretations. If we are to engage meaningfully, we must first understand accurately what is going on, hermeneutically speaking.

Second, the author insightfully highlights the necessity of observing the Peircean philosophical orientation of Yong's approach if one is to correctly understand his work (204). Also beneficial is Oliverio's discussion of whether Yongian theology falls more naturally within a contextual-Pentecostal or ecumenical-Pentecostal classification (125–26). In short, while I have hardly scratched the surface here, the detailed summaries and probing analysis of Yong's work that one finds in this volume offer much help for anyone wanting to more fully comprehend and more meaningfully engage the complex and ever-broadening theological corpus of Amos Yong.

Those already well-versed in ongoing discussion and debate surrounding Pentecostal hermeneutics will find here a convenient compilation of Oliverio's various contributions to such dialogue brought together in a single volume for easy reference and use. One drawback of this is the resultant repetitiousness and disjointed feel of the book. And while the review copy that I received did have a surprising number of typographical errors throughout, this will no doubt be corrected in future printings. Those who are new to this dialogue will find an informative and thorough introduction to much of the literature. Anyone wishing to seriously engage Pentecostal theological hermeneutics will want to read this volume.

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Macchia, Frank D. *Introduction to Theology: Declaring the Wonders of God*. Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2023. ISBN: 9781540963376. xii + 193pp. $17.49 paperback.

For several reasons, I am convinced that Vanguard University professor Frank D. Macchia's 2023 *Introduction to Theology* book is the

new defining benchmark for a college-level or seminary/graduate school introductory textbook in systematic theology from Pentecostal perspectives. For while we have many requisite voices presently shaping the world Pentecostal theological tradition, this book currently stands as the most promising single-volume for effectively initiating people into the topic of systematic theology from Pentecostal perspectives.

To begin, following his Introduction and first chapter describing a Pentecostal approach to theology (ch. 1), Theology, Scripture, and Context, through the next five chapters Macchia surveys the main topics of systematic theology through the lens of trinitarian narrative lens that structures the Apostle's Creed: God (ch. 2) Jesus Christ (ch. 3) Holy Spirit, Creation, Salvation (ch. 4) Church (ch. 5) Final Purposes (ch. 6). To fully appreciate pedagogical implications this structure affords, note that another core methodological strategy Macchia uses is constant engagement with patristic sources and that era's doctrinal/theological challenges for showing how core Christian beliefs emerged through the early centuries of Christianity. Yet he does this while explicating this history's relevancy to contemporary challenges of Pentecostalism worldwide. Macchia thus brilliantly situates Pentecostal experience, spirituality and sensibilities within the apparatus of patristic creedal confessions and relevant themes from within the broader Christian church's historical theology. By doing so, he ecumenically grounds this Pentecostal reading of systematic theology, directly onto the Apostle's Creed. He has thus demonstrated to the reader how a Pentecostal theology with its unique spirituality and theological reading of Scripture—squarely rises from historic Christian confession (13-14)!

Another valuable facet methodically permeating Macchia's book is his programmatic stress on the polyvalently linguistical phenomena characterizing the Pentecost event (1-2; see also p. 158). From this he argues that Pentecostal theology necessitates a global conversation (3)! Explicitly drawing on Amos Yong's "'many tongues' of Pentecost" dictum (p. 2), he thus consistently retrieves throughout his prose, globally diverse voices (26) for delineating every discussed theological topic and their implications towards many cultural contexts (3). Yet again, he achieves this while explicating a definitive Pentecostal reading of each topic (30-32). Third to note is how throughout his first chapter that focuses on theological method (15f.), he reviews major 19-21st century theological methods albeit in ways that inculcate an ecumenical spirit (12-15) towards other theological traditions, noting strengths and contributions, yet also weaknesses and limitations (15-30). Yet he does so in ways that wisely clarifies themes and issues too often woefully miss-understood at the grassroots or rudimentary comprehension-levels

with past and present formal scholarly trends and theological traditions that shape the global face of systematic theology.

This book builds on Macchia's previously published books, comprising constructive theologies on Spirit baptism (2006), justification (2010), Christology (2018) and ecclesiology (2020). It is conversely a briefer version of his new published *magnus opus* work, *Tongues of Fire: A Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Cascade Books, 2023). As more foundationally developed in those volumes, another core theological method especially working within this book's exposited topics, is his argued portrayal of "Pentecost" as their centering/orientating *telos* (35, 65-66, 94, 97, 140, 153, 158). He thereby regularly derives the following methodological nuance from the symbolic potency of *Pentecost* for explicating this richly trinitarian-shaped systematic theology (8-9, 30). Namely, its implied summons towards a globally-expansive conversation on the "wonders of God" (2, 4, 183-184), perpetually being mediated through ever-expanding diversities of human cultural settings (2-3, 26, 30, 32, 184). Yet in ways that morally preferences marginalized voices within its broadening discourse (184). As its inaugural publication, his book thus effectively catalyzes the globally-attending aims that the Foundations for Spirit-Filled Christianity envisions for its subsequent textbooks (xi-xii).

Another compelling feature of this exposition is how in response to commonly inadequate attention given within the broader Protestant tradition to the Spirit's role in the divine economy, Macchia *pentecostally* strives at correcting this underplay throughout all his discussed theological topics. This further demarks his work as a definitive Pentecostal approach to systematic theology. For instance, note that this approach consequently: 1. places love at the apex of the divine attributes (45-46); 2. accentuates a Spirit-Christology (68-71) for clarifying Christ's saving role as Spirit baptizer (93-94); 3. thus the gift of the Spirit as the greater aim of Christ's atonement and resurrection (69, 92-94); and 4. the church as God's missionary people sent out through his exhaling breath that is his Spirit (125-126, 149). Macchia thus also surveys theological issues regarding Spirit baptism, while granting a concise yet helpful description of typical Pentecostal understandings (119-121).

Macchia foreshadows his final chapter on eschatology ("Final Purposes") in his chapter on the "Holy Spirit, Creation, and Salvation" (ch. 4). For there he stresses against early church and ongoing expressions of the Gnostic heresy, the Spirit's aims towards redeeming material creation (104, 162). Thus on one hand he surveys common Pentecostal and broader Christian beliefs on eschatology and grassroots issues/controversies (e.g., heaven, millennial and rapture theories/doctrines)

often falling within or comprising speculations about "end-times" (163-178). He moreover does so in manners empathically congenial towards popular Pentecostal end-time beliefs, while critiquing common doctrinal and date-setting speculations coupled with overly-extended otherworldly preoccupations counter to biblical visions of new creation (157, 160-165). On the other hand, Macchia stresses that "Christian salvation, broadly conceived, is not an escape from creation to heaven, but rather–in tandem with the Christian hope of bodily resurrection from the dead, and thus a new creation, comprising of a new heavens and earth, that is bringing heaven to earth (162). He thus concludes stating, "Eschatology is not fundamentally about 'end times', but rather about hope in Christ" that cause us to transcend the status quo and move forward in the direction of his mercy and justice in the world (179).

I also find Macchia's book adequately geared for congregational use as a Christian education resource. Though perhaps its brevity naturally signals its limitations. For notwithstanding my preceding affirmations towards the book's coverage on pneumatology and eschatology, it may not adequately respond to many pressing grass-roots questions within these theological topics. Yet given my acquaintance with Macchia's broader publications, I would therefore urge readers to familiarize themselves with his other publications; particularly his just published *Tongues of Fire* monograph.

To concludingly reiterate, this work models for the Pentecostal academy, theological educators and all forms of theological education and training within the congregational level, more excellent ways towards introducing Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians to the field of systematic theology. For it demonstrates a highly ecumenical, congenial and hospital engagement with other Christian traditions and orientations; drawing on their gifted insights while brilliantly weaving those conversations into a passionate affirmation of Pentecostal spirituality, and its own uniquely gifted theological readings of Scripture. Macchia moreover exemplifies a theological conservatism wholly minus a dogmatic sectarian spirit that too often plagues commonly popularized, approaches to systematic theology at the grassroots level of Pentecostal tradition.

I would state that here is a scholarly erudite, ecumenically engaging yet definitively Pentecostal construction of systematic theology that can, I believe, best indoctrinate readers into traditional Pentecostal beliefs while enabling their acquisition of critically judicious comprehension of doctrine. For all these reasons, I believe this introductory text can marvelously deepen resonance between global Pentecostal theology within its lived grassroots expressions and indeed—the many tongues of Pentecost, that we become all the more willed towards the fruitful flourishing Pentecost signifies.

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Daniela C. Augustine and Chris E.W. Green, eds. *The Politics of the Spirit: Pentecostal Reflections on Public Responsibility and the Common Good* (Lanham, MD: 2022). 244 pp. $24.95 paperback. ISBN: 978-1-938373-67-1

In *The Politics of the Spirit*, seventeen Pentecostal scholars engage a wide range of topics on what Pentecostal political theology has been in practice and its possibilities moving forward. This collection is divided into four main sections covering historical analysis, biblical and theological reflections and sociological/political engagement. Contributions include the perspectives of Black and Latino men and women. This collection will serve both ministers and scholars within and outside Pentecostalism in understanding the challenges and gifts of Pentecostal political engagement.

In the historical analysis section, scholars provide critical commentary on Pentecostal political (in)action. One central contribution of this section is its elucidating analysis of racism within U.S. Pentecostalism. Estrelda Alexander examines the Church of God's (Cleveland, TN) response to the civil rights movement, frequently characterized by a fear of communism and an overidentification of earthly political authorities with divine authority (9-10). In response to protests, fear and political idolatry often came in calls for "law and order" by white COG ministers. Simultaneously, COG ministers showed little regard for the violence enacted upon Black protestors (14). On a similar note, Chris Green unveils the logic of white supremacy perpetuated in Pentecostal teachings on sanctification and Spirit baptism

(52-70). Green documents the pattern among white Pentecostals to correlate moral purity with racial purity (52-53). For example, Green highlights that renowned COG minister and former overseer T.L. Lowery publicly opposed desegregation and interracial marriage as antithetical to God's order (60).

This section also provides the story of faithful Pentecostal witness from a single woman minister. Kimberly Alexander tells the life of Margaret Gaines as she navigated her calling to ministry overseas. Because she was a single woman, the Church of God missions board did not initially support her in 1951 (23). She moved to Tunisia and began ministering. She studied Hebrew, Arabic, and French. After several years of ministry, she received some support from the denomination (28). She served as a missionary in what is now Jordan where she served as pastor over two congregations and started an elementary school (31-2). Gaines avoided the Zionism of her denomination and ministered contextually to the people of Jordan (38).

The biblical reflections section covers the book of Judges, the legal and prophetic literature of the Old Testament, and the book of Acts. As Casey Cole notes, there has been a historic tendency to interpret the book of Judges as a series of violent acts ordained by God. Instead, Cole describes Judges as a narrative that elicits our response and thus judges the content of our hearts. Her suggestion is that we read the text through the lens of our desires. Though there is no clear common good in the narrative, the book of Judges offers the possibility of directing us towards "the God who is good" (85). Jacqueline Grey and Edward Helmore show how God's covenant reveals a concept of justice that is inherently relational and that destabilizes political powers that become tyrannical (91). Beginning with the Exodus, Israel's imagination of the common good is shaped by their liberation from Egypt, which becomes codified in their laws (92). This is reflected in Deuteronomy's set of legal instructions including cancellation of debt, release of slaves, rules against usury, justice for the working poor, and protection of foreigners, widows, and orphans (93). The prophets called for caring for the poor (96-97). The prophet speaks a message of justice throughout all sectors of society. The king is held accountable by the prophet to rule in accordance with the Torah (98). Grey and Helmore take this prophetic imagination to be prescriptive for Pentecostal political engagement. As such, Pentecostals must speak out against Pharaoh-like structures that inhibit the common good (100). Martin Mittelstadt dissects the politics of Rome and the church in Acts (103-6). While both Herod and the church provide for public needs out of their resources, Herod does so ostentatiously in order to bolster his claims to divinity (103). Herod recourses to violence when his guards fail to hold Peter in prison. In

contrast, Paul and Silas prevent the prison guard over them from committing suicide. Mittelstadt suggests that the political imagination of Acts portrays liberation both for prisoners and prison guards (105-106). According to Acts, Pentecostal witness functions best when Pentecostals are not siloed off from their neighbors. Christians are empowered by the Spirit to orient the earthly city towards the heavenly city through a prophetic critique of the powers (110).

The theological reflections in this collection cover vast topics from ethics, aesthetics and environmental concern. Regarding ethics, Daniela Augustine reflects on the ethical concept of the "face" in the context of Bosnia. Face mutilation—literal effacement of another human—is a common occurrence in Bosnia. Augustine notes how this act conceals the image of God in the other person from the perpetrator (118). Humanity shares this "face" with the divine and reflects the divine countenance to the rest of creation. Sin is the human face turning from the creator towards creation as its end goal. Sin, therefore, can be rightly understood as both idolatry and iconoclasm (123). Augustine believes that hagiographies are one way to bridge the disconnect between theory and practice (124). This may also serve those who seek to bridge the gap between liturgy and ethics. Saints give out of lack rather than abundance, their very lives being transformed into Eucharist (124-5). Steven Félix-Jäger explains how art can contribute to the common good (130-1). Art has the ability to communicate the pre-cognitive and post-cognitive, reveal aspects of a culture, and represent minority voices (131). Pentecostal music and dance are also resources for understanding Pentecostal spirituality (138). Lastly, Jeffrey Lamp and Andrew Williams address the ongoing environmental crisis. Lamp highlights the primary role that race plays in the decisions that corporations make about their pollution sites (144-5). Williams invites us to expand our Pentecostal concept of healing to care for nonhuman creation (151).

The sociological/political engagement section seeks for what faithful Pentecostal public witness might look like. Deborah Joy Allan discusses depression among Pentecostals. Allan utilizes case studies of Pentecostals with depression for her reflection. The most common belief among Pentecostals is that faith is most effective cure for depression (166). This often leads to feelings of shame for those who struggle with depression because they tend to think Spirit-filled Christians should not have a problem with it (169). Allan notes the importance of communal response for those struggling with depression (171). Regarding theology, she believes Pentecostals need to rethink our understanding of flesh and spirit (172). In practice, Pentecostals should value authenticity of Christian community. Pentecostal liturgy should make room for lament (173). Pentecostal narratives of testimony can include stories of

faithfulness even while suffering depression (174). Not least, Allan encourages readers not to fear helping others with depression in the community by being present (174-5). Joan M. Cartledge and Mark J. Cartledge discuss how often social engagement among Pentecostals in the United States is subject to individualism and "political bundling", grouping together certain political ideals because the "right side" holds them (180). HOPE Charitable Services is a concrete example of a ministry that challenges that polarization. This COG nonprofit focuses on youth and educational support (184). Bishop Frank Allen, who is over the nonprofit, has realized the need to be more political in order to speak for the voiceless. During the pandemic, he spoke out against the stress put on parents in poverty to be involved in online education of their kids. He also advocated for mask-wearing to protect the health of his community members (187). Rodolfo Estrada addresses the U.S. negative church's response to Mexican immigration. Estrada begins with the history. U.S. labor shortage led to Mexican immigration. Businesses hired them because they needed them (192). Yet there are also stories of these employers calling border patrol before payday (193). The Spirit baptism scenes in the book of Acts provide a counter-narrative to xenophobia. In Acts 2, the Spirit speaks in foreign languages among Jews and Gentile God-fearers. Samaritans receive the Spirit even though they were viewed with suspicion by Jews for their lineage. interesting enough, Spirit baptism does not occur among Philip's Galilean friends (197). The Roman centurion Cornelius and his household also receive the Spirit (198).

As several authors of this collection demonstrate, Pentecostal witness has sadly portrayed social concern as antagonistic to personal salvation and has opted for the latter. But readers may be gladly surprised to find stories of "counter-witness" scattered throughout this collection (1). Kim Alexander tells the story of how Margaret Gaines navigated her calling to ministry in Jordan as a single woman in a patriarchal COG. Rather than acquiescing to her denomination's Zionistic tendencies, Gaines was able to minister to the people of Jordan with respect of their culture (23, 38). Chris Green describes the Pentecostal minister R.C. Lawson's public opposition towards white supremacy (67). As Daniela Augustine reminds us, these hagiographies serve as a bridge between our theory and practice (124). We must attend to both the genealogies of unfaithfulness and the glimpses of hope scattered throughout the Pentecostal movement.

<div align="right">
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(Continued from front inside cover)

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