

# *PENTECOSTAL* EDUCATION

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*the World Alliance for Pentecostal Theological Education*

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### **Aims and Scope**

*Pentecostal Education* (formerly *The Pentecostal Educator*) semiannually e-publishes scholarly and practical articles related to theological education within the Pentecostal tradition to encourage the continuing maturation of Pentecostal theological education. It is intentionally practical, applied, and international.

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Use two levels of **headings**. They should be flush left, and not numbered.

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## **Index**

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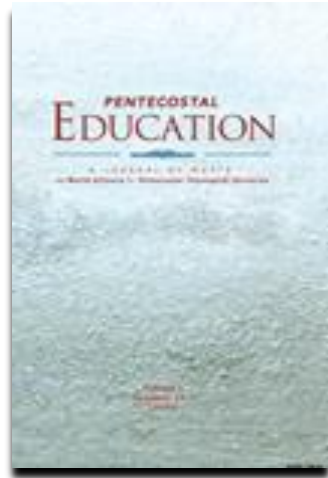
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## Conference Edition of

### *Pentecostal Education*

To mark and serve the upcoming 26<sup>th</sup> Pentecostal World Conference (Seoul, Korea, Oct 10-15, 2022), the Fall 2022 issue will feature the historical development of the Fellowship and the work of its Commissions.

The printed copies will be available at the Conference, while the digital texts are available for your reading and sharing at



<https://wapte.org/resources/pentecostal-education/>.

If you have inquiry on the special conference issue, contact the guest editor ([wma@oru.edu](mailto:wma@oru.edu)). For any general inquiries on the journal, including submission, please, contact the Executive Editor ([moalvarez@msn.com](mailto:moalvarez@msn.com)).

We appreciate your support.

*PE* Editorial Team



## Editorial

We are pleased to offer you the latest version of *Pentecostal Education*. I am grateful to the editorial board for another outstanding effort.

You will note a slightly unusual collection of articles. There are several important factors to consider when evaluating these. Firstly, it is noteworthy that Pentecostal scholars are engaged in a very wide range of research topics. From the challenges presented by drug abuse in the Philippines to the issues arising from the caravans of migrants arriving at international borders, Pentecostal scholars are involved.

The second factor to consider is how this journal is increasingly addressing the wider issues facing those who make up the Pentecostal World Fellowship. This large and representative body of believers is diverse but strongly connected by means of our shared Pentecostal distinctives. This more comprehensive representation of subject material is intentional and our editors and contributors are to be commended for offering a broader perspective. Of course, our primary commitment to Pentecostal education can only be enhanced by our scholars courageously dealing with these very relevant subjects.

As this version is published, the Board of Directors of the World Alliance for Pentecostal Theological Education (WAPTE) will be in session for the annual meeting. This year the meeting will be hosted by the Caribbean Theological College in Puerto Rico. Included in the schedule will be the important task of planning for the Pentecostal World Conference (PWC) that takes place later this year. Other initiatives such as certification programs, continued expansion of membership and the continued trajectory of this journal will be matters for discussion.

In each version of this journal, I invite your participation. The instructions for publishing are clearly available but, just as important, the invitation to become involved with the work of WAPTE is reiterated. I look forward to your emails or other communication and trust that we can grow the circle of influential people who share our passion for effective Pentecostal education and training around the world.

Paul R Alexander  
Senior Editor, WAPTE Chair

# See you in Seoul, Korea

## For the 26<sup>th</sup> Pentecostal World Conference

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## A Global Vision: Editorial

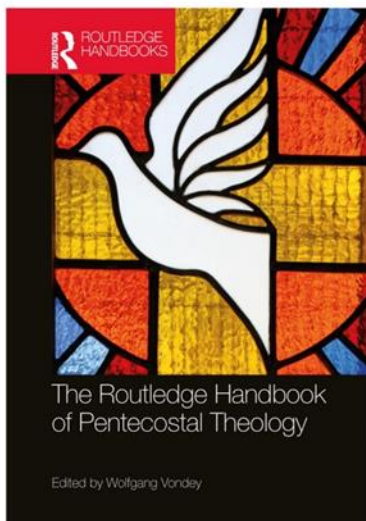
In this edition *Pentecostal Education* offers a global perspective of the formation of the Christian mission. The authors contribute their articles from their mission posts in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It is a transversal dialogue in the Global South that offers new ideas and alternatives for the advancement of God's work in our world. For example, the reader may be interested to know how East African theologians explain Jesus' purpose in his encounter with the Canaanite woman according to the narrative in Matthew 15:21-28. If this were not enough, perhaps you would be interested in learning more about the social problem of the war on drugs in the Philippines and the image of healing and restoration that ponders the value of the human being. There is also another article that explains how to overcome the boundaries of identity among classical Pentecostals in the Philippines.

Another topic that seems fascinating in this issue is the theological response of Pentecostals to the migrant caravans that travel from Central America to the north of the continent. This has been a much-discussed topic among Christians in recent years. Further, the reader will be able to appreciate a European Pentecostal perspective on the epistemological idea of learning as “doing” by considering experience and reflection. Finally, the reader will be interested in studying how Pentecostalism, which some have considered to be a very young movement, has now become the largest global Christian bloc. These topics and more are found in this volume.

As we have pointed out before, one of the objectives of this *Journal* is to make Pentecostal thought known in different regions and venues. It is necessary to know the reality of what is practiced by scholars from other parts of the world. This issue attempts to meet this objective by including articles that look at the activities of the church from numerous theological and cultural perspectives. The authors have documented the ideas of those who teach at seminaries and universities around the world, especially in the Global South. It is worth saying this to affirm that *Pentecostal Education* fosters and stimulates healthy theological dialogue.

Pentecostalism is international and multi-ethnic.

Miguel Alvarez  
Executive Editor



# The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology

Edited by  
Wolfgang Vondey

*The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology* is the first collection of its kind dedicated entirely to Pentecostal theology. Over forty chapters by an international team of contributors contextualize Pentecostal thought, outline its theological methods, explain doctrines and practices, and identify current conversations and challenges. This book is essential reading for students and scholars in Pentecostal studies and theology, Christian thought, World Christianity and Religion.

Wolfgang Vondey is Professor of Christian Theology and Pentecostal Studies at the University of Birmingham, UK.

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# Have We Missed the Main Point? The Purpose for Jesus' Encounter with the Canaanite Woman (Matthew 15:21-28)

Douglas P. Lowenberg

**Keywords:** Canaanite, inclusive, literary context, prejudice, oscillating

## Abstract:

Many have provided explanations for Jesus' startling response to the Canaanite woman as recorded in Matthew's Gospel (15:21-28). This article attempts to attend to the immediate and extended literary context of the passage, note the character development needed in the hearts of the disciples, and consider Matthew's target audience for his Gospel to offer a different explanation of Jesus' comments that is more consistent with the character of Christ which we know to be compassionate, welcoming, powerful, and open to all.

## Introduction

Much ink has been spilled writing articles regarding "the notoriously difficult passage"<sup>1</sup> which recounts Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman from Syrophenicia. Many of these studies propose principles such as: 1) those who hold onto their faith when facing God-ordained tests and adversity will see their prayers answered; 2) Jesus' missional ministry prior to the resurrection focused almost exclusively on the people of Israel; and 3) the disciples of Jesus were taught lessons about themselves, Jesus, and his mission through this encounter.

Oscillating between this pericope and Matthew's entire Gospel raises questions about the validity of the wide array of lessons generated from the story when one considers the purpose for which the author included this account in his Gospel.<sup>2</sup> It could be that preconceived ideas have so

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<sup>1</sup> C. Richard Wells, "New Testament Interpretation and Preaching," in *New Testament Criticism & Interpretation*, ed. David A. Black and David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 575.

<sup>2</sup> Jeannine K. Brown advises, "During much of the exegetical process, the most important literary unit to attend to when reading a specific text is the entire

affected the interpretations of the text that Matthew's intentionality has been skewed resulting in misunderstandings of why Jesus traveled to the region of Tyre and Sidon and encountered the Canaanite woman. The proposed motives for Jesus' words and actions with her could be quite misleading from what Matthew intended to communicate about the person, mission, and ministry methods of Jesus. A fresh examination of Matthew's account of Jesus' meeting the Canaanite woman is merited to reconsider what the inspired author may have been saying to his first century audience.<sup>3</sup>

This study will examine each verse in the pericope commenting on issues that shape the overall meaning of the passage, consider the literary context of the story, discuss the importance of its historical and cultural setting, and reflect on the possible location and composition of Matthew's audience. Attention will be given to Jesus' ministry strategy based on this text and the contribution this episode makes to Matthew's Gospel. Lessons learned by Matthew and his fellow disciples from this experience will be proposed and evaluated.<sup>4</sup>

## **Matthew 15:21-28**

### *Verse 21 and the Literary Context*

There seems to be a continuity of thought as Matthew moves his narrative forward from the preceding discussion on ritual cleanness (15:1-20) to the story of the Canaanite woman using the conjunction

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book of the Bible in which it is found. For exegesis to stay true to what an author has communicated, the whole book must remain in view." Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 14.

<sup>3</sup> David Hill sums up the traditional perspective on Matthew's overall intentions: "Matthew's Gospel is written from a Jewish Christian standpoint in order to defend Christianity, to make acceptable to Jewish-Christian readers, and to prove that Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews." David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NCBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 40.

<sup>4</sup> Bailey observes, "The training of the disciples is a prominent feature in all four Gospels" and this certainly is the case with this story. He adds, "Jesus is not simply dealing with the woman, he is also interacting on a profound level with the disciples." Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 217, 219.

“and” (καὶ).<sup>5</sup> Matthew is known for arranging his biography<sup>6</sup> around theological themes.<sup>7</sup> Another indicator of a continuation of the theme of “cleanness” for these two pericopes is Matthew’s reference to geographical locations. The previous discussion took place in Gennesaret (14:34). Now in 15:1, he reports that Jesus departed from there (ἐξελθὼν ἐκεῖθεν) and withdrew to the regions of Tyre and Sidon (τὰ μέρη Τύρου καὶ Σιδῶνος).<sup>8</sup> Some scholars note that Jesus had a pattern of withdrawing from one location to another more secluded when controversies arose with the Pharisees and teachers of the law (12:15; 14:13). To avoid conflict with the opposition, as well as to find rest for himself and his disciples from the demands of public ministry, and to secure time for private discourse with the twelve, he retreated to

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<sup>5</sup> Hill states, “The question of clean and unclean (verses 1-20) is closely related to the matter of Jewish attitudes towards Gentiles . . . It is therefore likely that this pericope was employed for the guidance of the Matthean church in its relations with Gentiles.” Hill, *Gospel of Matthew*, 253.

<sup>6</sup> Keener identifies the Gospels as ancient biographies. For discussion, see Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 37-38.

<sup>7</sup> Wright says that this story happens “in the wake of the dispute between Jesus and the Pharisees, and teachers of the law regarding clean and unclean food.” He observes, “The clean-unclean distinction in Israel was fundamentally symbolic of the distinction between Israel and the nations. Accordingly, if Jesus abolished the distinction in relation to food (the symbol) then he simultaneously abolished the distinction in relation to Jews and Gentiles (the reality that the symbol pointed to). This makes it all the more significant that both Matthew and Mark follow the dispute with two miracles for Gentiles for Gentiles (the woman of Tyre and the man in Decapolis) and probably a third (if the feeding of the four thousand took place on the Decapolis side of the lake).” Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 508-509. Also see Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 38, 155.

<sup>8</sup> Rather than considering Tyre and Sidon as remote villages, and while the people were followers of the fertility god, Eshmun, Sidon was renowned as a center of philosophical learning and both cities continued to have maritime and economic influence. See Bastiaan Van Elderen, “Sidon,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 5, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 428; D. J. Wiseman, “Sidon” and “Tyre,” in *New Bible Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, ed. D. R. W. Wood (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1996), 1099-1100, 1215-1216.

remote places.<sup>9</sup> However, in Matthew's story there is no mention of Jesus' motivation for withdrawing nor explanation for his going an extreme distance to a foreign location. Extending the same theme, it appears that Jesus intentionally traveled to a ritually unclean region inhabited by impure, "pagan" people.<sup>10</sup>

Several observations from the preceding pericope help inform one's understanding of Matthew's intention for the inclusion of the Canaanite woman's story. In the preceding account, the Pharisees criticized Jesus for condoning his disciples' neglect of observing traditional, ritual washings before eating, thus disqualifying them from approaching God for worship and intercession and excluding them from table fellowship with those determined to be "clean."<sup>11</sup> Jesus responded to the Pharisees' challenge by criticizing their misleading emphasis on "the traditions of the elders" to the neglect of the "command of God" and "the word of God" (15:2-6 NIV).

Jesus, calling the crowd, drew attention to their hypocrisy (15:20) and explained what it was that brought about moral and spiritual defilement, which was far more important to God than ritual, external impurity.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Craig S. Keener comments that Jesus "needed a short vacation to rest with and teach his disciples." Craig S. Keener, *Matthew*, IVPNTCS (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 263. Myron S. Augsburger sees no reference to a respite but claims that Jesus traveled to the region of Tyre and Sidon "to provide opportunity for persons to hear and respond." Myron S. Augsburger, *Matthew*, CC (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 195.

<sup>10</sup> D.A. Carson, *Matthew: Chapters 13 Through 28*, EBC (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan, 1995), 354. Jeremias holds the view that even in this distant region, Jesus moved among "the Jewish population." Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 35-36. Craig L. Blomberg believes that Jesus turned from those who rejected his message and ministry to those more receptive. "Jesus revealed himself as the Bread of life for Jews and Gentiles alike." Craig L. Blomberg, "Matthew," in *Holman Bible Handbook*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: Holman, 1992), 554.

<sup>11</sup> Moore explains that the Pharisees were committed to separation from anything, any person, situation, food, or conduct that compromised their separation unto God, his law, and his holiness. Their efforts were not to earn salvation but to keep them in the place where God's approval and blessings rested. George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, vol. 1 (New York: Schocken, 1971), 59-62. Ablutions were intended to remove ceremonial defilement caused by contact with anything considered unclean. See Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 251.

<sup>12</sup> For further discussion on the significance of Jesus' comments related to ritual versus moral defilement, see Carson, *Matthew 13-28*, 352.



The former brought God's disapproval and disqualified people from receiving his blessings and answers to prayer. Jesus stated, "What comes *out of the mouth*, that is what makes him 'unclean'" (15:11). He repeated this same phrase a few moments later: "The things that come *out of the mouth* come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean'" (15:18). While explaining that the heart was the source for many spiritually contaminating thoughts and actions, he twice mentioned the close association between the heart and what flowed out of the mouth referring to one's words. In his list of sins that originate in the heart, he specifically itemized two aspects of speech: false testimony and slander (15:29). Jesus' instruction about the matters that defile one in the presence of God called attention not only to inner motivations, but to the outer expressions of the heart measured by one's conduct as well as one's words. One's speech was a clear indicator of the state of the heart.

What seems to be overlooked by interpreters is the disciples' reaction to Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees' teaching. Upon Jesus' exposing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees in the way they honored human tradition to the nullifying of God's law, and erroneously emphasized external cleansing while ignoring the state of the heart, the Twelve responded: "Do you not know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?" (15:12). While it was Jesus' disciples who triggered the critical judgment of the Pharisees, it was these same Twelve who sided with the Pharisees in their theology and practice in terms of ritual cleansing.<sup>13</sup> They criticized Jesus for his negative assessment of their religious leaders and defended the position of the Pharisees against Jesus' revelatory perspective. At this juncture in their spiritual development as future apostles of Jesus, they were more conformed to and in agreement with the beliefs and practices of the Pharisees than those of Jesus.

With a one sentence parable, Jesus asserted that what the Pharisees taught, which did not originate from his heavenly Father, would one day be destroyed (15:13). This parable could refer back to his earlier, more extended one about the enemy who planted weeds among the wheat (13:24-30, 36-43). The final judgment in both stories was the same.

Based on the discussion between Jesus and his disciples, it appears that the Twelve were deeply influenced by Pharisaic teachings and had adopted their worldview.<sup>14</sup> To correct his followers' perspective, which

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<sup>13</sup> Carson observes that their response shows that the disciples held the Pharisees in high regard. Carson, *Matthew 13-28*, 350.

<sup>14</sup> Regarding the Pharisees, Harlow purports that "a key element of their social program was to extend the priestly regulations of ritual purity mandated in

included the Pharisees’ views on ritual cleanness, qualifications for table fellowship, the identity and purpose of the Messiah, and requirements for entrance into God’s kingdom, along with other beliefs, Jesus commanded his disciples, “Leave them” (ἄφετε αὐτούς) (15:14). Mirror reading would indicate that his disciples had not yet abandoned the beliefs and practices of this religious sect. Jesus continued his warning: “They are blind guides; and if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a ditch” (Matt. 15:14 KJV). In the immediate historical context of this statement, Jesus indicated that not only were the Pharisees blind, his own disciples were blind failing to grasp the truth about his kingdom. And if they continued following these religious leaders, they too would stumble and fall in their pursuit of God’s will and kingdom. They struggled to grasp the new perspective Jesus was introducing. Their confusion is emphasized in Jesus’ address to Peter who expressed his bewilderment over the parable. Jesus said, “Are you still so dull?” (15:16).

Later in Matthew’s travel narrative, as Jesus was attempting to reshape the faith, values, and practices of his followers, the topic of the Pharisees arose again. He said, “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (16:6). Slowly the disciples were recognizing the deeply rooted influence the Pharisees had on their thinking. Matthew comments, “Then they understood that he was . . . telling them to guard against . . . the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (16:12).

If one considers the audience to whom Matthew wrote, this passage could serve as a strong warning to the New Testament church in the latter half of the first century to be on guard and distance themselves from the persistent, misleading influence of Pharisaism, which came from Pharisaic Jews or Pharisaic Christians (see Acts 15:5). The conflicting worldview propagated by a Pharisaic perspective—adherence to the Mosaic law, circumcision, Sabbath Day observances, ritual cleansing, and a restrictive diet—practices that impeded the inclusion of Gentiles into God’s kingdom, destroyed the unity of the church, and subverted salvation through faith in Jesus alone.

Returning to the issue of geographic location, Matthew reports that Jesus went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. No details are given as to the precise location he visited, but it is noteworthy to recognize the

Pharisaic non-Christian Jews (add "non-Christian")

Leviticus to all Jews in all spheres of life.” Daniel C. Harlow, “Jewish Context of the NT” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 375.

distance from Gennesaret to Tyre and Sidon and to identify the people living in that region. Gennesaret was located on the northwest shore of Lake Galilee, approximately 4 kilometers west of Capernaum. To travel from there to Tyre, the route required one to journey east approximately 8 kilometers to the Jordon River Valley, north 15 kilometers to Lake Huleh, then follow a circuitous northwestwardly route 50 to 55 kilometers through the North Galilee highlands to Tyre. The trip would have covered a distance of almost 80 kilometers. Based on Mark's account of this same incident, after Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman, he went further north to Sidon, an additional 40 kilometers (Mark 7:31). The overall expedition would have covered over 120 kilometers one way. Did Jesus travel this extreme distance simply to avoid the Pharisees and the crowds? Journeying to this region, Jesus left behind the province of Galilee and entered a foreign land dominated by Gentiles. Could it be that this journey was intended to introduce his disciples to the global mission of God being fulfilled in his Son, the Messiah?<sup>15</sup>

Verse 22

To emphasize the non-Jewish nature of the vicinity, Matthew records his surprise when Jesus was approached by a Canaanite woman (literally, “and behold a woman, a Canaanite”; καὶ ἰδοὺ γυνὴ Χαναναία). While Mark refers to her as “a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia” (Mark 7:26 NIV), Matthew described her with an old, anachronistic term that had fallen out of use in the first century—“Canaanite.”<sup>16</sup> The Canaanites

<sup>15</sup> Keener reports that Matthew believed that “a call to missions work demands that disciples first abandon ethnic and cultural prejudice.” Yet Keener believes that this stage of Jesus’ ministry “was for Israel alone.” Keener, *Matthew*, 172, 263. Jeremias points out that Judaism considered itself a missional religion. But the premise of conversion of the Gentiles to faith in the one God, YHWH, was not dependent on the sending out of emissaries, but the presence of the Jewish Diaspora. Conversion required that Gentiles become religious and cultural Jews through the confession of one God, circumcision, observing the food laws, and keeping the Sabbath. Jeremias, *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations*, 12-17. In agreement with Jeremias’ understanding of the missionary nature of Judaism, McKnight writes, “Jews were essentially uninvolved in such a thing as ‘evangelism.’” Scott McKnight, *A Light among the Gentiles: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1991), 107. Also see J. Julius Scott, Jr., *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 343.

<sup>16</sup> Blomberg states that this label was intended to “conjure up horrors of Israel’s enemies of old.” Blomberg, “Matthew,” 555.

." add a single quote mark

were an ancient, resistant enemy of Israel opposed to Israelite occupancy of the land. They led the people of God into idolatrous and immoral behavior which brought God's judgment on Israel. This woman came seeking help from Jesus for her demon-possessed daughter. According to traditional Jewish and Pharisaic sensibilities, this woman represented the epitome of uncleanness and defilement: a woman, a Canaanite, the mother of a daughter as opposed to a son, having a child who was demonized (the demonization could have resulted from the idolatrous practices of the family and tribe).

From one perspective, she is the one who instigated the encounter; she approached Jesus. This is the view taken by those who hold the opinion that Jesus did not actively engage Gentiles during his earthly ministry.<sup>17</sup> And only on rare occasions did he accept the advance of a Gentile. Keener comments, "The Gentile mission was at most peripheral to Jesus' earthly ministry: he did not actively seek out Gentiles for ministry, and both occasions on which he heals Gentiles he does so from a distance (8:13; 15:28)."<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Jesus approached her; he traveled over 80 kilometers to place himself in her proximity. And unlike Mark, Matthew makes no reference to Jesus seeking anonymity by entering a house (Mark 7:24).<sup>19</sup> Jesus seemed to be moving into a public space where he was accessible.

Her appeal is surprising and yet filled with familiar words: "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession" (κύριε υἱὸς Δαυίδ· ἡ θυγάτηρ μου κακῶς δαιμονίζεται). What would she have known of Jesus that would cause her to employ such honorific titles? What did she believe about Jesus that emboldened her to approach him for help? From Jesus' earliest days of public ministry, news about him had spread throughout the provinces of Israel and beyond, as far as Syria, the region north of Syrophenicia (Matt. 4:24-25). Crowds with every type of sickness and spiritual condition came to him and were healed. As Jesus and his companions traveled north from Gennesaret, the report of their movements would have been noticed and circulated. She heard of his coming, believed, and came to him with her request.

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<sup>17</sup> Jeremias reports, "The initiative is not taken by Jesus" who "limited his activity to Israel." Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations*, 31.

<sup>18</sup> Keener, *Matthew*, 171.

<sup>19</sup> Jeremias says that Jesus wished to remain in concealment. Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations*, 32.

The NIV places her honorific titles before her request. However, the Greek text begins with her request for mercy, followed by the titles, and concludes with the explanation of her need (Ἐλέησόν με, κύριε υἱὸς Δαυὶδ· ἡ θυγάτηρ μου κακῶς δαιμονίζεται).<sup>20</sup> Following this order, the woman would have first expressed her lowly, dependent status as she approached Jesus. She came to Jesus asking for help she did not deserve. Then she declared his exalted state: Lord and Son of David. The term “Lord” (κύριε) could be understood as a statement of respect equivalent to “sir.” But coupled with the next epithet, “Son of David,” a messianic title, the first expression should more aptly be interpreted as an expression of lordship and worship. Following her declaration of his identity, she appealed for mercy on herself (Ἐλέησόν με). The explanation for her need was the description of her daughter’s condition. The needs of her daughter had become her own.

In a pagan culture, the normal response of the local people to demonization would have been to consult sorcerers to determine the cause and solution for the demonic assault then pay the price exacted by the spiritual practitioner hoping for some degree of relief. One might assume this mother had exhausted her resources attempting to find a cure but experienced no deliverance. Having heard the reports of people who “brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them” (Matt. 4:24), her knowledge that he had journeyed all the way to her region, her faith in Jesus’ power,<sup>21</sup> and her confidence in his compassion inspired her to come out from her home and ignore the cultural norms to request his intervention. “Matthew views compassion as a primary motivation in Jesus’ acts of healing.”<sup>22</sup> “Clearly the woman has prior knowledge of Jesus and of his compassion for all, be they Jews or Gentiles, male or female.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ἐλέησόν is a second person singular aorist imperative indicating that her request for mercy was to Jesus alone.

<sup>21</sup> Much like the leper who boldly approached Jesus for healing assured that he was able to heal his disease, his only question was if Jesus was willing (Matt. 8:2-3). The Canaanite woman seemed confident of both Christ’s power and his willingness. She overstepped all normal cultural prohibitions to approach him publicly driven by her faith in his ability and compassion.

<sup>22</sup> Keener, *Matthew*, 170.

<sup>23</sup> Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 220. Bailey further notes, “Thus far in his ministry Jesus’ compassion for all was constantly on display and the disciples could not have missed it” (223).

The terms she used are found on the lips of others approaching Jesus for help. “Lord” was the title used by the leper seeking healing (Matt. 8:2) and the Gentile centurion interceding for his servant (Matt. 8:6). A father with a demonized son cried, “Lord, have mercy on my son” (Matt 17:15). Two blind men desiring healing called out to Jesus, “Have mercy on us, Son of David” (Matt. 9:27). Two other blind men requesting healing from Jesus used the same, exact expression, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” (Matt. 20:31). In all these cases, Jesus was moved with compassion and was willing to heal. This Canaanite came to Jesus with expectations of supernatural intervention. While some scholars report that she was being manipulative, there is no indication in the text of any attitude other than desperation, humility, and hope. Thus, Jesus’ response to her seems shocking and inconsistent with his usual response to those coming to him with desperate needs and with words of honor and faith.

### *Verse 23*

“But he [Jesus] did not answer her a word” (ὁ δὲ οὐκ ἀπεκρίθη αὐτῇ λόγον). Why the silence? At this juncture in the narrative, scholars provide a host of explanations for Jesus’ silence including: he was indifferent or reluctant to help her because she was a Gentile;<sup>24</sup> helping her ran contrary to his mission to the Jews; he was aghast at her sinful uncleanness; he was shocked by the aggressive attitude of a despised Canaanite; he was perplexed and did not know what to do; and he was testing her to see her level of faith and determination.<sup>25</sup> Matthew,

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<sup>24</sup> Jeremias says that Jesus’ attitude towards her was “one of definite refusal”; he replied “extremely harshly”; his response was a “last revulsion.” Jeremias, *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations*, 26, 29, 32. France comments, “Jesus’ initial reluctance to respond is overcome by the faith of the suppliant which refuses to be put off and which . . . draws Jesus’ admiring comment.” R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 309. Keener indicates that “Jesus simply snubs her. . . . It is possible that he is testing her . . . but he is certainly reluctant to grant her request and is providing an obstacle for her faith.” Keener, *Matthew*, 263. Jusu comments that “for some unexplained reason, Jesus did not respond to her request immediately.” John Jusu, *Africa Study Bible* (ed.; Chicago, IL: Oasis International, 2016), 1404.

<sup>25</sup> Bailey asserts, “Jesus chooses to give her a critical test.” Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 220. Keener, referring to the centurion, the Canaanite woman, and the rich young ruler (chapters 8, 15, 19), claims that initial rejection like this was a common ploy for demanding greater commitment. Keener, *Matthew*, 173.

however, reports that out of the deafening silence the first voices heard were those of the disciples. It is not until this moment in the narrative that Matthew mentions the presence of the disciples. They persistently urged Jesus to send her away. The reason for their dismissal, “She is crying out after us” (καὶ προσελθόντες οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ἠρώτουν αὐτὸν λέγοντες· Ἀπόλυσον αὐτήν, ὅτι κρᾶζει ὀπισθεν ἡμῶν). Jesus’ “indifference . . . was no doubt seen by the disciples as acting in an entirely appropriate manner.”<sup>26</sup> Is it possible that Matthew was providing a concrete example of Jesus’ instructions in the previous pericope: “The things that come *out of the mouth* come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean’” (15:18)? When touring a foreign region and facing an unclean Canaanite woman with a demonized daughter, did their request reveal the state of their hearts, their assessment of such people, and their readiness, or lack thereof, to minister to her need?<sup>27</sup>

“Send her away” (Ἀπόλυσον αὐτήν). Scholars provide two different interpretations of the disciples’ request. Some view this request as one of utter rejection showing the contempt of Jewish men towards a Gentile woman.<sup>28</sup> Possibly they felt cultural discomfort because a foreign, pagan woman had publicly approached them which in their culture was completely inappropriate. This Gentile woman was obviously unclean; any contact with her would defile them and their esteemed rabbi.<sup>29</sup> Others propose that the disciples were asking Jesus to honor her request, heal her child, so she would leave them alone.<sup>30</sup> This second perspective is dubious in light of the disciples’ previous request for Jesus to send the crowds away (ἀπόλυσον τοὺς ὄχλους) when faced with the impossible situation of providing food in a remote area for such a vast multitude (Matt. 14:15). In the pericope immediately following the

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<sup>26</sup> Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 221.

<sup>27</sup> While Bailey does not note any connection between this pericope and the previous one, he does observe, “Jesus was voicing, and thereby exposing, deeply held prejudices buried in the minds of his disciples.” Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 222.

<sup>28</sup> Hill asserts that this statement made by the quarrelsome, fault-finding disciples represents the Jewish Christian church who were opposed to the entry of Gentiles into the NT church. Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 254.

<sup>29</sup> As with the account of the leper, a Jewish teacher with a proper concern to maintain ritual purity would be expected to refuse to have anything to do with him. The same was assumed by the disciples for Jesus. See France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 307.

<sup>30</sup> For discussion on the nuances of the disciples’ request, see Carson, *Matthew* 13-28, 354.

encounter with the Canaanite, which quite likely took place among Gentiles in the Decapolis (Matt. 15:29-39; Mark 7:31), to preempt the disciples once again requesting Jesus to send the crowds away for similar reasons, Jesus said, “I have compassion for these people . . . I do not want to send them away hungry (Σπλαγχνίζομαι ἐπὶ τὸν ὄχλον . . . ἀπολῦσαι αὐτοὺς νήσσεις οὐ θέλω), or they may collapse on the way” (Matt. 15:32). When faced with impossible situations or “unclean” people, it seems the tendency of the disciples was to dismiss the needy without a solution for their physical or spiritual predicament. Concerning the Canaanite, it is more probable that they simply wanted Jesus to dismiss her.

Their request also revealed something about their self-centered perspective. While her pleas for help were aimed solely at Jesus, they reported she was crying after “us” (ὄπισθεν ἡμῶν). When did the woman mention the disciples? Their self-centered outlook and words were an attempt to preempt Jesus from responding to the woman and showed their callousness towards her dire predicament.

*Verse 24*

Since it was the disciples who proposed the request to send her away, it seems that Jesus’ response was to their petition: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Οὐκ ἀπεστάλην εἰ μὴ εἰς τὰ πρόβατα τὰ ἀπολωλότα οἴου Ἰσραὴλ). Most scholars view this assertion as Jesus’ affirmation of his earthly mission—to the lost sheep of the house of Israel—only and exclusively.<sup>31</sup> They reinforce this statement with Jesus’

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<sup>31</sup> Stein observes that Matthew recorded Jesus’ journey outside the confines of Israel to predominantly Gentile territories to demonstrate to his Gentile readers that “even during his lifetime Jesus was concerned for them. He came to bring the good news not just to the children of Abraham but to Gentiles as well.” Robert H. Stein, *Jesus the Messiah: A Survey of the Life of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity 1996), 156. Wright reports, “The Gospels record that Jesus deliberately limited his itinerant ministry and that of his disciples for the most part to ‘the lost sheep of Israel.’ But they also show some significant engagements with Gentiles . . . it is simply false to say that Jesus had no interest in the world beyond his own Jewish people.” Wright, *The Mission of God*, 507. Carson states that Jesus “recognized that his own mission was to Israel” and that his target audience was all Israel who were “regarded as lost sheep.” Carson, *Matthew 13-28*, 355. Hill comments, “Jesus insisted that his call was to the children of Israel.” Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 253. Also see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (rev. ed.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 29.



previous restriction given to the Twelve: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Εἰς ὁδὸν ἐθνῶν μὴ ἀπέλθῃτε καὶ εἰς πόλιν Σαμαριτῶν μὴ εἰσέλθῃτε· πορεύεσθε δὲ μᾶλλον πρὸς τὰ πρόβατα τὰ ἀπολωλότα οἴκου Ἰσραὴλ, Matt. 10:5-6).<sup>32</sup> Was Jesus declaring the rationale for which the woman should be sent away—he had not come for Gentiles, at least not at this time in his earthly ministry? Given the context, one might assume the disciples were in hardy agreement with this statement. Bailey rightly notes, “Jesus here gives concrete expression to the theology of his narrow-minded disciples.”<sup>33</sup>

With this assertion, what did Matthew intend to convey about Jesus, his ministry focus, and his attitude towards this marginalized woman with her desperate need?<sup>34</sup> By these words was Jesus delineating his ministry priority which then dictated how he should respond to the woman’s request? Or was he verbalizing the views the disciples had for his messianic ministry, much like Peter would do later when he told Jesus that the way of the cross was not acceptable (Matt. 16:22)? Do these words accurately represent Jesus’ primary ministry or did this statement encapsulate the perspective formulated in the hearts of the Twelve for the ministry of the Messiah: he came to save the people of Israel and their nation? Bailey’s insights are instructive: Jesus was “irritated by the disciples’ attitude regarding women and Gentiles . . . He decide[d] to use the occasion to help her and challenge the deeply rooted prejudices in the hearts of his disciples . . . Jesus’ approach to the education of his disciples [was] subtle and powerful.”<sup>35</sup>

One should consider the consistency of this statement in comparison with the entire Gospel of Matthew. Does his Gospel confirm an

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<sup>32</sup> In Luke’s parallel account, Luke 9:1-6, there is no record of this restriction on the evangelistic commissioning of the Twelve. The absence of the prohibition in Luke serves to highlight the unique agenda of Matthew as he includes these limits on the early ministry of the disciples. And Matthew does note in these same instructions that there would be a time when the disciples would stand before Gentiles to proclaim the gospel (Matt. 10:18). However, scholars like Jeremias interpret this statement meaning that “Jesus forbade his disciples during his lifetime to preach to non-Jews.” Jeremias, *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations*, 19-25.

<sup>33</sup> Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 223.

<sup>34</sup> Mark’s Gospel account of this encounter does not include this saying (Mark 7:24-30). The reader must assume Matthew had a specific intent, distinct from the other Gospel writers, for recording Jesus’ response to the disciples’ request.

<sup>35</sup> Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 222.

exclusive focus of Jesus' messianic, compassionate, and saving ministry for the people of Israel?<sup>36</sup> Matthew began his Gospel portraying Jesus, the Messiah, as the son of David and the son of Abraham (Matt. 1:1). The reference to David reminded his readers of the promise God made to David, and later the prophets, that he would establish the house and kingdom of one of David's offspring forever and this kingdom would extend to the ends of the earth (2 Sam. 7:13-16, 29; Psalms 2:8; Isaiah 9:6-8; 42:1-6; 49:6). As the son of Abraham, Jesus the Christ came to fulfill God's promise to Abraham that one of his seed would bring blessings to Abraham's descendants and bless all the peoples of the earth (Gen. 12:1-3; 26:4; 28:14).

Unlike Luke's Gospel and unique from most Jewish authors who recorded genealogies to legitimize one's lineage and legal authority, Matthew included four women—this step alone is a unique characteristic for a genealogical listing. In addition, the common characteristic of these four is they are non-Jews or married to a Gentile (Matt. 1:3-6; Tamar, a Canaanite [Gen. 38:18]; Rahab, a Canaanite from Jericho [Josh. 2:1]; Ruth, a Moabitess [Ruth 1:3]; and an unnamed woman who was the wife of Uriah, a Hittite [2 Sam. 11:3]). It is possible that Matthew wanted to demonstrate that Jesus the Messiah was the legal heir of David, in spite of his mixed lineage, whose throne would be established forever, and that Christ fulfilled God's promises to Abraham as the one who came to bless all humankind including all nations and both genders.

Matthew recorded the coming of the Magi from the east, a group of foreigners who recognized the one born to be the "king of the Jews" (Matt. 2:1-11). Not only did they recognize his kingly sovereignty over the Jews, they identified a divine aspect to his nature and worshipped him.<sup>37</sup> While King Herod, the priests, and teachers of the law heard their testimony and identified the location where the child was to be born, only the Magi sought to find him and worship him.

When the rulers of his own people tried to murder him, God provided a safe haven in the foreign country of Egypt (Matt. 2:13). After returning to the land of Israel, Jesus chose to relocate from Nazareth to Capernaum to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy: "Galilee of the Gentiles—the

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<sup>36</sup> Guthrie notes the universalistic, missional emphasis of Matthew's Gospel, "unbounded by the restricted environment out of which it emerged." See Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 30.

<sup>37</sup> Jusu comments that Matthew "shows clearly this King came not only for Jews but for everyone." Jusu, *Africa Study Bible*, 1375.

people living in darkness have seen a great light” (Matt. 4:15-16). The good news of his words and deeds circulated far beyond Israel’s borders (Matt. 4:24). The crowds that came to hear his message and receive healing included Jews and Gentiles (Matt. 4:25).

At the conclusion of the first of five teaching blocks recorded by Matthew (the Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 5-7), Jesus demonstrated his compassion and healing power for a diverse group of people—a Jewish leper,<sup>38</sup> a Gentile centurion, a Jewish mother,<sup>39</sup> the demonized, and the sick (Matt. 8:1-16). Some scholars propose that the healing interaction with the Gentile centurion was one of the few exceptions of Jesus ministering to a non-Jew.<sup>40</sup> Further, they suggest that Jesus was willing to heal the man’s servant because of his extraordinary faith; however, Jesus was not willing to go with the man and enter his defiled, Gentile residence. Some interpreters have turned Jesus’ response into a question. The text reads, “Jesus said, ‘I will go and heal him’” (Εγὼ ἐλθὼν θεραπεύσω αὐτόν [Matt. 8:7]). The assertion becomes a question: Should I go and heal him?<sup>41</sup> This transposition seems to be motivated by the preunderstanding that Jesus came only to reveal himself and minister to the Jewish people. The Greek text could be read as an emphatic: “I, having gone, will heal him,” or “Having gone, I myself will heal him.” Rather than Jesus questioning whether he should go, or sending someone else to bring the healing, Jesus wanted his audience to know

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<sup>38</sup> France observes, “By recounting Jesus’ response to the most feared and ostracized medical condition of his day, Matthew has thus laid an impressive foundation for this collection of stories which demonstrate both Jesus’ unique healing power and his willingness to challenge the taboos of society in the interests of human compassion” France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 306. Hill states, “To touch a leper was considered a violation of the ceremonial law of uncleanness (Lev. 5:3).” Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 156.

<sup>39</sup> Hill reports that Jesus’ touching the woman was an action banned by Jewish legalism. Hill, *Gospel of Matthew*, 160.

<sup>40</sup> Keener maintains this view. Yet he comments, “This narrative challenges prejudice in a number of ways . . . Jesus is not satisfied by our treating an enemy respectfully; he demands that we actually love that enemy.” And he asserts that this incident endorsed the Gentile mission in advance. Keener, *Matthew*, 172, 174.

<sup>41</sup> This perspective is held by Keener, *Matthew*, 173; Hill, *Gospel of Matthew*, 158; and France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 313. While France notes that the I (*egō*) makes Jesus’ statement emphatic so that it could read, I myself will come and heal him, he interprets the statement as a question of surprise: “You want *me* to come and heal him?” (Italics his).

that he, himself, was willing to go to the centurion's house and heal his servant.<sup>42</sup> The implications of Jesus' response to the centurion run countercultural to common Jewish and more extreme Pharisaic sensibilities which were also held by his own disciples. Peter stated to a Gentile centurion: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him" (Acts 10:28).

Matthew recorded Jesus' reaction to the centurion's faith: "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith" (Matt. 8:10). He followed his commendation by describing the future messianic banquet when people from the east and the west would feast with the patriarchs while "subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside" (Matt. 8:11-12).<sup>43</sup> This Matthean passage reveals that Jesus' messianic banquet in the eschaton would include people from every part of the earth while some of those descended from the Jewish patriarchs would be excluded. The depiction of those excluded from the banquet resonates with John the Baptist's earlier warning to Jews who assumed their descendancy guaranteed salvation: "Do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham" (Matt. 3:9). Race and nationality were no guarantee of entrance into God's kingdom.<sup>44</sup>

The deliverance of the two demoniacs in the region of Gadarene, which resulted in the drowning of a herd of pigs, was a record of the spiritual liberation for two Gentiles (Matt. 8:28-34). In the midst of his teaching and travel narratives, Matthew quoted from the Suffering Servant passages of Isaiah to describe the character and ministry focus of Jesus, God's Messiah: "He will proclaim justice to the nations

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<sup>42</sup> Wright comments that "a Gentile believed that the compassion and healing of Jesus could reach across the divide between Jew and Gentile." Wright, *The Mission of God*, 507. Taking a different tact, Keener explains that the centurion, in offering for Jesus to not come under his roof but rather heal his servant from afar, was the Gentile's concession to Jesus' mission to Israel. He recognized that for Jesus to come under his roof would contradict the Messiah's primary purpose for his earthly ministry. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 65.

<sup>43</sup> Keener suggests that the reference to the west would be the great power of Rome; the east was the region from which the Magi had come. These "pagans" would join the messianic banquet with "the patriarchs—the messianic banquet Israel expected for itself." Keener, *Matthew*, 175.

<sup>44</sup> Keener indicates that there were Jewish people who expected salvation based on their descent from Abraham. Keener, *Matthew*, 174.

(Gentiles, κρίσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἀπαγγελεῖ) . . . In his name the nations (Gentiles, ἔθνη) will put their hope” (Matt. 12:18-21; Isaiah 42:1-4).<sup>45</sup>

The Gentiles of Nineveh and Ethiopia set an example for the Jews of faith, repentance, and worship, but the people of Israel refused to recognize their time of divine visitation (Matt. 12:38-45). In explaining the parable of the weeds sown in the field by an enemy, Jesus explained that the sower of the wheat was the “Son of man”; the field was the world (*kosmos*; Matt. 13:37-38). Jesus’ parable of the unfaithful tenants concluded with Jesus’ eschatological announcement: “The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit” (Matt. 21:23, 43). Before the eschaton would arrive, the gospel had to be preached in all parts of the inhabited world as a witness to every nation (ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ εἰς μαρτύριον πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν; Matt. 24:14). The Roman centurion supervising the crucifixion of Jesus, at the moment of his death, declared, “Surely he was the Son of God!” (Matt. 27:54). The conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel, which recorded the great commission without reference to Christ’s ascension, was intended to leave Jesus’ command to disciple all the nations (μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) reverberating in the ears of his followers and those hearing Matthew’s Gospel being read (Matt. 28:18-20).

Rather than an exclusive focus on the lost sheep of the house of Israel, Matthew described an intentional inclusiveness in Jesus’ ministry and his offer of good news to the Gentiles as prophetic fulfillment demonstrating that he was the one prophesied to bring blessings to the descendants of Abraham and to all nations.<sup>46</sup> Surveying Matthew’s introduction (1:1) and conclusion (28:19-20), one could identify a grand *inclusio* emphasizing the missional thrust of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Matthew’s Gospel biography narrates the story of the promised King and Savior who came to provide salvation for all people and inaugurated his kingdom accessible to any who would repent and believe. While the disciples initially held the position that Jesus came only for the lost

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<sup>45</sup> See Georg Bertram, “ἔθνος, ἔθνη, ἔθνος” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (vol. 2; ed. by Gerhard Kittel; trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 364-369.

<sup>46</sup> Jeremias interprets the Great Commission as “the eschatological hour has arrived. God no longer limits his saving grace to Israel, but turns in mercy to the whole Gentile world . . . the closing passage of the Matthaean gospel indirectly establish[es] the fact that the earthly ministry of Jesus has not yet embraced the Gentiles.” Jeremias, *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations*, 39.

sheep of the house of Israel, they gradually learned from Jesus' teaching and example<sup>47</sup> that he offered salvation to the world.

#### *Verse 25*

The Canaanite woman had already identified Jesus as the Son of David, the promised Messiah who came to rule over an eternal kingdom that extended beyond the cultural and geographical borders of Israel to the ends of the earth. At Jesus' assertion about the purpose of his ministry, she seemed to grasp the irony of the statement. Following his words, she drew nearer and worshipped him (ἡ δὲ ἐλθοῦσα προσκύνει αὐτῷ). She repeated the title "Lord" with an abbreviated plea: "Lord, help me!" (Κύριε, βοήθει μοι). The verb, προσκυνέω, appears 12 times in Matthew. On eight of these occasions the word clearly means "worship." While the word can be translated "kneel down," it seems worship best fits in this setting.<sup>48</sup> She acknowledged Jesus as both Lord and the Son of David. She was filled with faith in him. There was no hesitation on her part in approaching him for help. And there is no inference from the text that Jesus ignored or resisted her or was obstinate with her in order to test her faith.

#### *Verse 26*

Jesus' statement found in this verse, even if it was a well-known proverb, seems to be extremely inconsistent with the way he is presented throughout Matthew's Gospel. Where he is repeatedly moved with compassion, accessible to anyone who comes to him, reaches out and touches the unclean, and eats with tax gatherers and sinners, his words here seem insulting and racist: "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." Jeremias comments, "The term 'dog' is the supreme insult."<sup>49</sup> Dogs were viewed as unclean and

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<sup>47</sup> Keener notes that the early church "naturally looked to accounts of Jesus' life for examples of ministry to the Gentiles," yet he holds the opinion that Jesus did not intentionally pursue ministry to Gentiles during his earthly ministry. Keener's perspective seems to be contradictory when he claims that Jesus' ministry avoided Gentiles except on rare occasions yet believes that Jesus provided an example for Gentile ministry for the NT church. Keener, *Matthew*, 171.

<sup>48</sup> The verb form is imperfect emphasizing the continuous action of her adoration.

<sup>49</sup> Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations*, 29. Kapolyo proposes that this term of abuse was somehow conveyed to the women from Jesus with humor. Joe

dangerous scavengers who roamed the streets and alleys.<sup>50</sup> If employed as a guard dog, they brought fear with the possibility of a violent attack on a stranger. They did not move about one's home as pets. Making this comparison to a person would be humiliating and insulting. While some scholars suggest that the term dogs (κυνᾶριοις) is the diminutive of dogs and best translates "little dogs," making the slur less abrasive, it still was an extremely derogatory comparison to make with a human being.

Some explain that this disdainful speech was Jesus' way of testing the commitment, persistence, and resilience of the woman in terms of her faith in Christ.<sup>51</sup> But one must ask if there is any other example of Jesus testing and insulting sincere seekers who humbly came to him for help? He tested the unbelieving disciples and resistant Pharisees, but there is no evidence of such a methodology towards the sincere and desperate. Some propose that Jesus was using the terms "children" and "dogs" to refer to the Jews and Gentiles with the purpose that this Canaanite woman needed to acknowledge the historic distinction between the two groups and acknowledge that she was a "Gentile 'dog,'" unworthy of "Israel's covenanted mercies" and "divine election."<sup>52</sup>

Could there be another explanation for this language and clarification of what Matthew intended to convey to his readers? If one recalls the previous pericope and the stress on words that flowed out of one's mouth which revealed the state of the heart, and if the assertion of Jesus about his mission was actually intended to objectify the thoughts of the disciples, it would be consistent to view this statement as another step where Jesus exposed the prejudiced and racist attitudes of his Jewish

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Kapolyo, "Matthew," in *Africa Bible Commentary*, ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Nairobi: WordAlive, 2006), 1142.

<sup>50</sup> Bailey reports that "dogs in the Middle Eastern traditional culture, Jewish and non-Jewish, are almost as despised as pigs. . . . Dogs are never pets." Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 224.

<sup>51</sup> Bailey claims that Jesus used this insulting term to test her grace towards haughty Jews and to discover if her resolve to see her daughter healed and her faith in Jesus' compassion and power would enable her to "absorb the insult and press on." Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 224. This perspective that Jesus intentionally insulted her yet expected her to show grace towards his humiliating utterance and maintain confidence in his love, compassion, and power seems contradictory to the caring nature of Jesus and run counter to the attitudes in the disciples that he was attempting to transform.

<sup>52</sup> Carson, *Matthew 13-28*, 355. Jeremias explains, "Jesus does not grant her request until she has recognized the divinely ordained division between God's people and the Gentiles." Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations*, 30.

disciples towards other peoples whom they viewed as unclean and unworthy of the Messiah's intervention.<sup>53</sup> Jesus' proverb was consistent with the general view of Jews, and especially Pharisees, towards Gentiles. Was Jesus articulating the inner thoughts of his disciples towards this woman and themselves? In terms of those who deserved of the food, they likely saw themselves as the children, descendants of the privileged family, destined to receive Christ's provisions.

For those who view this statement as Jesus' way of challenging the woman's faith, to belittle and insult her seems cruel and inconsistent with the character of the divine Son of God. And if his comment accurately reflects the perspective he had towards her and all Gentiles during his earthly ministry, it would seem extremely difficult to suddenly pivot concerning a mission focused exclusively on the house of Israel to include all nations.<sup>54</sup> Not only would Jesus have to significantly change the content of his teaching about the kingdom during the 40 days between resurrection and ascension, it would be extremely difficult to present a new message which challenged the narrow, racist opinions of his disciples which he had condoned during the previous 3 ½ years of discipleship. When Jesus was born as a Jewish boy and grew up in a Jewish cultural milieu, was he so culturally and racially shaped by his society that he was no different than the Jewish people around him? If he was inculcated by a traditional Jewish, male, worldview, how could he prophetically speak throughout his lifetime against their prejudices and misunderstandings regarding religious traditions, the mission of the Messiah, God's love for all people, and the way of salvation?<sup>55</sup> One must remember, concerning the identity of Jesus, that he was not simply a Jewish boy shaped by Jewish culture and Jewish worldview. He is "Emmanuel, God with us"—the Lord of all creation and all people who came to dwell among humankind (Matt. 1:23).

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<sup>53</sup> Hill reports that "dogs" was a Jewish way of referring to Gentiles. Hill, *Gospel of Matthew*, 254.

<sup>54</sup> Keener comments that "it is unlikely that Christians would lightly attribute to Jesus a view they no longer held" to defend his view that Jesus was resisting her request because of her Gentile ethnicity. However, if one recognizes the lesson Matthew is teaching about Jesus' inclusiveness in the face of the disciples' racial narrowness and exclusiveness, Keener's comment could reflect the transformed perspective needed in the early church. Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 415.

<sup>55</sup> As E. P. Sanders notes, "The idea of a universal God of love is completely opposed to the views of Jesus' contemporaries." E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 213.



## Verse 27

The woman agreed with Jesus' proverb ("Yes, Lord"; *Ναί, κύριε*). One should not take bread given to children and toss it to dogs. Her answer is filled with wisdom, wit, and faith. She adds, "And even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table" (*καὶ γὰρ τὰ κυνάρια ἐσθίει ἀπὸ τῶν ψιχίων τῶν πιπτόντων ἀπὸ τῆς τραπέζης τῶν κυρίων αὐτῶν*).<sup>56</sup> Even despised and filthy dogs benefited from crumbs that involuntarily fell from the table where their masters were feasting. The implication was that there was an abundance of food on the table. Those at the table had plenty to eat. The generous portions resulted in crumbs involuntarily falling to the ground where they were consumed by the hungry dogs. Both the people at table and the dogs under the table were fed. The master of the table provided enough so that all were fed.

The woman replaced Jesus' word "children" with "masters." Whether she was honoring the disciples by referring to them as masters, perhaps Jewish masters, or using sarcasm to refer indirectly to their harsh, superior attitudes towards her, one can only speculate. But noting her consistent humility in coming to Jesus and agreeing with Jesus' proverb, it seems she was graciously giving them honor as members of Jesus' discipleship team. She did not imply that they were the ones giving food to the dogs. She did not condone their condescending attitude towards her and her people. Crumbs were falling to the ground involuntarily and being consumed by the dogs. While the masters—the disciples—enjoyed the bread, the dogs were nurtured as well because there was such an abundance. Both parties were supplied what they needed by the one supplying the bread, the master of the disciples.<sup>57</sup>

Her answer did not demand of Jesus an either/or mentality which would require Jesus to either minister to the disciples or to her; to the Jews or to the Gentiles. Her faith in Christ's abundant provision and mission to all enabled her to have a both/and mindset. She grasped that Jesus came for all, and there were no limits to his bounteous provisions. Jesus provided for both the children and those denied this privilege

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<sup>56</sup> For the argument that *καὶ γὰρ* should be translated as "and even" rather than with the adversative, "but even," (which is used in the NIV), see Carson, *Matthew 13-28*, 356 n 27.

<sup>57</sup> The idea of Jesus miraculously providing an abundance of food for all those present while encircled by incredulous disciples is found on both sides of this pericope: Jesus' feeding of the 5000 men plus their families (Matt. 14:19-21); Jesus' feeding of the 4000 (Matt. 15:36).

because of prejudice, racism, and gender bias. The Lord, the Son of David, had come to bless all and was true to his inclusive mission.

Some scholars hold to a different interpretation of the woman's response to Jesus' proverb. Their perspective is that Jesus demanded that she acknowledge that the disciples, and with them the people of Israel, deserved to be offered the gospel and blessings provided by the Messiah prior to any spiritual provisions coming to the Gentiles. Only after the woman accepted the "divinely ordained division between God's people and Gentiles" and the preferential ministry of Jesus to the people of Israel did he grant her request.<sup>58</sup> This view seems to be based on a literal understanding of Jesus' words as a truth assertion in verse 24, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

As has been shown in the discussion above, there does not seem to be evidence provided by Matthew himself that Jesus exclusively ministered to Israel. And one cannot find support in Matthew's Gospel for the view that Jesus expected non-Jewish believers to confess to their own racial-spiritual inferiority when compared to the Jews before they could receive help from the Messiah. It is possible that Matthew was arguing the very opposite for his readers who consisted of both Jews and Gentiles, and he was undermining the claim that either group had racial superiority.<sup>59</sup> Neither group had the right to assert spiritual or racial authority over the other;<sup>60</sup> through the grace of Jesus all people

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<sup>58</sup> This view is advocated by Hill, *Gospel of Matthew*, 254; and Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations*, 29-30. Keener adds, "He is surely summoning her to recognize Israel's priority in the divine plan." Keener, *Matthew*, 264.

<sup>59</sup> Manson advanced the idea that Jesus came to create a new community of faith rather than promulgate the religious ideals of Jews, a group of believers "set free from chauvinistic nationalism, from the ambition to impose Israelite ideals of faith and conduct on the rest of the world . . . men and women who learned in apprenticeship to Jesus how to accept the rule of God." T. W. Manson, *Jesus and the Non-Jews* (London: Athlone Press, 1955), 18. Similar concerns are found in Paul's epistle to the Roman church. Paul addresses Jewish arrogance in Romans 2:17-24 and Gentile superiority in Romans 11:18-20, 25-26; 12:3, 16. However, for a perspective that Matthew is certainly unPauline, see Benjamin L. White, "The Eschatological Conversion of 'All the Nations' in Matthew 28:19-20: (Mis)reading Matthew through Paul" *JSNT* 36 (2014): 353-382.

<sup>60</sup> While Paul affirms that God established his covenant with Abraham and the people of Israel, and that Jesus came to Israel as a Jewish person to be their Messiah and fulfill God's promises to the patriarchs and prophets—the promise that he would bless them with his unchanging love, his persistent offer of salvation, and his continuous plan to use them as instruments to bring

were saved by faith in Jesus alone (Acts 15:11). Both groups needed to recognize their spiritual defilement, repent, and come by faith to the only one who could make them true sons of Abraham. He alone provided entrance into his kingdom that included descendants of the patriarchs and those coming from the east and west.

### Verse 28

Where Jesus had not addressed the woman when she first approached him, he now spoke directly to her with an exclamation: “Oh woman, great is your faith! May it be to you as you desire”<sup>61</sup> (ὦ γύναι, μεγάλη σου ἡ πίστις· γενηθήτω σοι ὡς θέλεις).<sup>62</sup>

Even without a word of deliverance, the Canaanite’s demonized daughter was set free and made whole. Charette notes, “His exorcisms, effected as they are through the power of the Spirit of God, signify that the kingdom of God has come.”<sup>63</sup> Christ’s kingdom had come to Gentiles in Syro-Phoenicia (Matt. 12:28; 4:16).

She demonstrated great faith in him as a loving, powerful Messiah for all people. She approached him with confidence that he would do something to help her tormented daughter. She was not distracted by the attitudes of Jesus’ disciples. Throughout Jesus’ indirect instructions aimed at his prejudiced disciples, she continued to focus on and worship him.<sup>64</sup>

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salvation to all humankind—Christ came to be the Savior of all. There is no favoritism when it comes to his blessings and judgment (Romans 2:9, 11). Throughout Christ’s life, he fulfilled his mission to be the Savior of the world (John 4:4, 42; consider the implications of Jesus’ first public message; Luke 4:24-30). Matthew showed how difficult it was for Jesus’ Jewish disciples and Jewish Christians in the early church to grasp the fact that their descendancy provided no guarantee of salvation. Anyone who came to Christ with faith in his Lordship and saving purposes, whether it was during his earthly ministry, after the resurrection, or following the Day of Pentecost, experienced his welcome into his kingdom.

<sup>61</sup> My translation.

<sup>62</sup> Daniel B. Wallace comments, “Here the presence of the particle ὦ is used in contexts where deep emotion is to be found.” Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 68.

<sup>63</sup> Blaine Charette, *Restoring Presence: The Spirit in Matthew’s Gospel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 67.

<sup>64</sup> Each of the three time she addresses Jesus, it is as “Lord” (κύριε, the vocative of κύριος).

Jesus' words to her sound extremely different from his statement to his disciples about their faith. To them he said, "Oh you of little faith" (Matt. 14:31; 17:20). The Lord commended her before their onlooking eyes, "You have great faith." As with the centurion, Jesus' assessment of her faith must have shocked his Jewish audience (Matt. 8:10; 15:28). Matthew did not indicate how the disciples reacted to Jesus' words: "Your request is granted." They were ready to send her away. Jesus transformed her life and situation while using her presence and undistracted faith to expose the calloused, prejudiced hearts of his disciples. His acceptance of her and the healing of her daughter were steps in preparing them to eventually fulfill their role as apostles to all nations.

The fact that "her daughter was healed from that very hour" (καὶ ἰάθη ἡ θυγάτηρ αὐτῆς ἀπὸ τῆς ὥρας ἐκείνης) must have been verified either by ensuing reports that came to Jesus and the Twelve as they moved onward in their journey. Or perhaps, Jesus and the disciples went to the woman's home and testified to the girl's deliverance and healing. One might suspect that this entire experience had a profound impact on the disciples. While harboring prejudice, exclusiveness, and a self-centered perspective, their Master exposed their heart condition by taking them to places and people they had previously despised. He modelled love, acceptance, and inclusiveness and displayed his transforming power to change her and them.

### Matthew's Audience

It is possible that Matthew penned his Gospel for the believers in Antioch, a church consisting of Jews and Gentiles, neither exclusively Jewish nor Gentile (Acts 11:19-21; 15:1).<sup>65</sup> There was racial and religious tension among these Christians which divided them and obscured the

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<sup>65</sup> Regarding the original recipients of Matthew's Gospel and the makeup of the church, Keener proposes, "The best (though far from certain) and most common case for provenance fits some urban center in Syro-Palestine (often thought to be Antioch) where Greek was spoken, which included a sizable Jewish community residentially segregated from Gentiles—Jews who perhaps remained bitter about the recent massacres of 66-70 and remained in contact with theological issues in Judea." Keener, *Matthew*, 33. Also see Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 42-44. Guthrie views the original audience as a "mixed group" most likely in Antioch. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 38-39. France expresses doubts about the original audience being Antioch. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 15.

true message of the gospel to outsiders. The Syrian church was struggling with the ongoing influence of Pharisaism.<sup>66</sup> The apostle wrote to expose the struggle he and the other disciples had undergone to recognize their skewed understanding of Jesus and his mission. It was not easy to transform their worldview and admit that that they should label no one unclean or defiled and that table fellowship must include all. Their views of others had to be healed so they could fellowship at table together,<sup>67</sup> demonstrate the acceptance and unity required for the body of Christ, and continue to advance the discipling of the nations. What Matthew had learned about being a true disciple of Jesus, the New Testament church he served had to learn the same lessons.

### Conclusion

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If Jesus came not only for the lost sheep of the house of Israel but to offer salvation and healing to individuals from every tribe and nation, why did he limit his original commissioning of the disciples to the house of Israel (Matt. 10:5-6)? Jesus knew their racial and religious prejudices. If his emissaries brought the good news to Gentiles and Samaritans without love and compassion, without relationship, the message of the gospel would be tainted in the delivery (see Luke 9:54-55; Acts 10:28; 11:2-3).<sup>68</sup> As a concession to their present, prejudiced state, his starting point for their evangelistic efforts was to order them not to go to the Gentile nations. He knew their attitudes would

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<sup>66</sup> Keener believes that Matthew was “engaged in polemic against Jewish authorities . . . the successors of Pharisaism, probably the founders of what became the rabbinic movement at Jamnia and those Jewish leaders throughout Syro-Palestine who may have been aligned with them.” Keener, *Matthew*, 34. Guthrie notes a “strongly anti-Pharisaic tone to the gospel.” Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 33. Harlow claims that in the decades after 70 CE, the Pharisees attained true predominance in their influence over the Jewish society. Daniel C. Harlow, “Jewish Context of the NT,” 375.

<sup>67</sup> Wright comments that for the early Christians, “The importance of eating together as a sign of unity in Christ was highly visible and very significant. Such table fellowship within the early church cut right across both the Jew-Gentile and also the social divide of economic status.” Wright, *The Mission of God*, 510.

<sup>68</sup> According to France, the social interaction of conservative, orthodox Jewish Christians with Gentiles of any faith persuasion, as demonstrated in Acts 10–11, shows “the repugnance felt by even a relatively open-minded Jew to such ‘defilement’; for a Jewish teacher in the public eye, it would be an even more defiant breach of taboo than even Jesus’ controversial mixing with ‘tax-collectors and sinners’ (Matt. 9:10–11).” France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 313. Yet Jesus set the example of breaking these restrictive taboos to bring the gospel to all people.

have to be significantly transformed before they could effectively make disciples among the nations. He did not condone their prejudices but recognized with time and through his own example, they would arrive at the place where he would commission them to go and disciple every nation under heaven. The uncleanness of the hearts and mouths expressed through prejudice, racial slurs, religious pride, and intolerance for others required forgiveness, their own spiritual deliverance, training, and transformation provided by Christ alone.

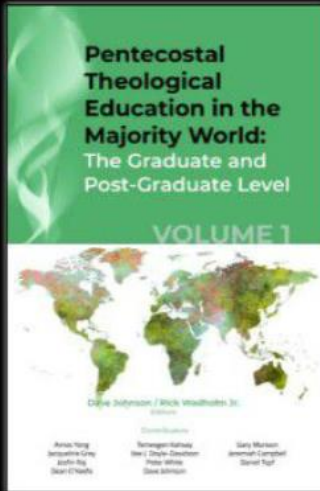
To demonstrate the unilateral faithfulness of God to his covenant with Israel, Jesus came as a Jew to extend to the people of Israel the offer of salvation and the privilege of knowing God as Savior and Lord. With this special relationship came the responsibility of serving God as a kingdom of priests, a holy nation (Exodus 19:6), to mediate his grace to the nations of the world. While most members of the house of Israel struggled to accept their Messiah, particularly because he did not fulfill their expectations in the way he provided salvation and for whom he offered this gift, Jesus Christ continued with his saving plan of provide forgiveness, transformation, and a personal relationship with himself and with fellow believers to all who approached him with humility and faith. In word and deed throughout his life of ministry on earth, Jesus modeled for his disciples and his church the content and methodology of the all-inclusive nature of his gospel.<sup>69</sup> The Canaanite woman provides an outstanding example of this truth which needed to be understood by the disciples of Christ and by his New Testament church.

In a day of divisiveness, anger, and intolerance, followers of Christ need to allow the Holy Spirit to examine their hearts and words when it comes to their thoughts and deeds towards others from different racial, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Acceptance, understanding, love, and unity must begin with his church and flow into one's immediate social context and beyond to the entire world bringing healing, hope, and deliverance through the love, power, and holiness of the gospel.

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<sup>69</sup> Stein states, "They would learn both from him and of him. They were uniquely chosen to witness his actions and deeds and to master his teachings. Only by remaining with him would they be able to observe who Jesus was and master the gospel teachings Jesus would entrust to them." Stein, *Jesus the Messiah*, 119.

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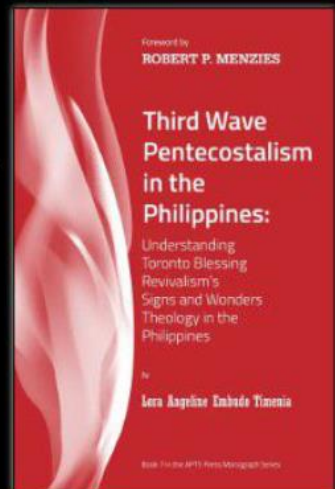
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# The War on Drugs in the Philippines and the Image of Healing and Restoration in Mark 5:1–20: Contrasting Perspectives on the Worth of the Human Being<sup>1</sup>

Doreen Alcoran-Benavidez and Edwardneil Benavidez

## Abstract

Rodrigo Duterte's war on drugs in the Philippines has criminalized and dehumanized drug dealers, pushers, and users, resulting in a bloodbath. In this paper, we look at the narrative Duterte seems to espouse and propose a counter-narrative through which to view and respond to the issue of drug users in the Philippines.

**Keywords:** war on drugs, Rodrigo Duterte, biblical narrative, alternative stories

## Introduction

Before the 2016 Presidential election, Rodrigo Duterte had already declared during his campaign that one of the problems that he would solve once he won is the Philippine drug problem. He promised to solve it in six months' time. Even at that time, he promised that he would use any means necessary, even killing all the 3 million people involved in illegal drugs, to achieve his goal. We foresaw that there would be a bloodbath. Our fear came to pass. What saddens us is the support of the majority of Filipinos on Duterte's war on drugs, even though thousands have already fallen victims to it. We feel that the value of human life has been reduced to almost nothing. In this paper, we acknowledge the power of stories. We believe that this may explain this phenomenon that we are wrestling with. We also hope to provide a way to regain the dignity of people trapped in drug addiction.

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<sup>1</sup> The original version of the study was presented at the 2019 Scholars' Consultation of Empowered 21, Bogota, Colombia, June, 2019. The study will appear in Wonsuk Ma, Opoku Onyinah and Rebekah Bled, eds., *Good News to the Poor: Spirit-Empowered Responses to Poverty* (Tulsa, OK: ORU Press, 2022).

## The State of the War on Drugs in the Philippines

President Duterte's "war on drugs" has claimed thousands of lives from poor communities, mostly male breadwinners, leaving children as orphans and families at much greater risk.<sup>2</sup> According to the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA), 5,281 suspects involved in illegal drugs were killed during the 123,441 operations conducted from July 2016 to February 2019.<sup>3</sup> These deaths, PDEA claims, were casualties of their operations, explaining that drug suspects were killed because *nanlaban*—they "resisted arrest" and were involved in a shootout against police officers.<sup>4</sup> However, the Philippines Commission on Human Rights (CHR) has documented hundreds of cases where witnesses and evidence point to summary execution by the police rather than death caused by a shootout.<sup>5</sup> Human rights groups also assert that the number of victims during police operations is higher than what PDEA claims, reaching up to 12,000.<sup>6</sup> This number does not include the close to

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<sup>2</sup> Zigor Aldama, "How Rodrigo Duterte's War on Drugs Has Become a War on the Poor," *South China Morning Post*, January 20, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/long-reads/article/2129538/how-philippines-war-drugs-has-become-war-poor>, accessed April 7, 2021; Reuban James Barrete, "Children Paying Grim Price for Duterte's War on Drugs," *South China Morning Post*, April 16, 2017, <https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/2087714/dutertes-war-drugs-leaving-children-pay-price-not-asking-why>, accessed April 7, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Anna Felicia Bajo, "Latest Drug War Death Toll: 5,281 Killed, 176,021 Arrested as of Feb. 2019," *GMA News*, <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/nation/689368/latest-drug-war-death-toll-5-281-killed-176-021-arrested-as-of-feb-2019/story/>, accessed June 2, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Vina Salazar, "War on Drugs: 'Nanlaban,'" *Rappler*, <http://www.rappler.com/nation/144592-war-drugs-nanlaban>, accessed June 3, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Krixia Subingsubing and Mariejo S. Ramos, "'Nanlaban' Victims Unfazed by Legal Hurdles," *Inquirer News*, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1012901/nanlaban-victims-unfazed-by-legal-hurdles>, accessed June 2, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Roy Narra, "Death Toll in Duterte Drug War up to 5,176: Real Numbers PH," *The Manila Times*, <https://www.manilatimes.net/death-toll-in-duterte-drug-war-up-to-5176-real-numbers-ph/518667/>, accessed February 28, 2019

23,000 deaths related to the war on drugs which the Philippine National Police (PNP) labels as “homicides under investigation” (HUI).<sup>7</sup>

Human rights groups, however, believe that these were extrajudicial killings (EJKs) rather than HUI. They explain that when drug-related police operations came under scrutiny, execution-style deaths, including torture by unidentified men in plainclothes of those suspected to be involved in illegal drugs, became reoccurring.<sup>8</sup> CHR believes that these are police officers who became involved in vigilante killings or extrajudicial killings (EJKs).<sup>9</sup> Rights groups also identify that seventy-four minors were among those who have been killed during police operations and vigilante killings (as of December 2017).<sup>10</sup> While authorities claim that they were collateral damage, the Children’s Legal Rights and Development Center asserts that the children victims were targeted suspects, as was the case of Kian delos Santos.<sup>11</sup>

On August 16, 2017, Kian delos Santos, seventeen years old, was shot dead in an alley by three policemen who claimed that Kian shot them during an operation (*nanlaban*), forcing them to shoot back.<sup>12</sup> They also claimed that they recovered a .45 caliber gun and two sachets of suspected shabu from the boy.<sup>13</sup> However, CCTV footage showed that Kian was dragged by the cops to a dark alley and a witness stated that Kian was on his knees begging for his life before the series of gunshots.<sup>14</sup> This evidence created a public uproar calling for justice for Kian. On November 29, 2018, more than one year after Kian’s death,

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<sup>7</sup> “World Report 2019: Rights Trends in Philippines,” Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/philippines>, accessed December 28, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Subingsubing and Ramos, “Nanlaban.”

<sup>9</sup> Subingsubing and Ramos, “Nanlaban.”

<sup>10</sup> Jhesset O. Enano, “Group Finds 74 Minors in Drug War Body Count,” *Inquirer News*, April 6, 2018, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/980513/group-finds-74-minors-in-drug-war-body-count>, accessed June 3, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Enano, “Group Finds 74 Minors.”

<sup>12</sup> Jodesz Gavilan, “TIMELINE: Seeking Justice for Kian Delos Santos,” *Rappler*, November 28, 2018, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/timeline-justice-trial-kian-delos-santos>, accessed November 18, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Gavilan, “TIMELINE.”

<sup>14</sup> Jessica Bartolome, “The Kian Delos Santos Case: A Timeline,” *GMA News*, November 29, 2018, <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/specials/content/24/the-kian-delos-santos-case-a-timeline/>, accessed November 18, 2020.

the three cops were convicted of murder and were sentenced to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole.<sup>15</sup> However, as observed, Duterte's drug war continues, and no other police officer has been convicted other than those in Kian's case.<sup>16</sup>

These killings paint a horrifying picture of the war on drugs. However, according to a survey in 2017, eighty-eight percent of Filipinos support the President's war on drugs, even though seventy-three percent believe that EJKs are taking place.<sup>17</sup> In the same survey, fifty percent of Filipinos do not believe the police accounts that the victims were involved in illegal drugs or that they "resisted arrest"—*nanlaban*. Further, respondents felt "many victims were falsely identified by their enemies as drug users and pushers, and then killed by police or shadowy vigilantes."<sup>18</sup> In addition, some believe that the drug syndicates are the ones killing each other and not the police. In an interview with a supporter, the respondent stated, "They (the killings) aren't really EJKs. . . . It's the *narcos* who are killing their own people."<sup>19</sup> Others consider the news reported by the mainstream media to be an exaggeration or even fake news because they are controlled by elites and by political opposition who want to discredit the President and regain power and influence.<sup>20</sup> In another survey in 2018, the majority of Filipinos (seventy-eight percent) are satisfied with the anti-illegal drugs campaign of the government and classified it as "very good."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Bartolome, "The Kian Delos Santos Case."

<sup>16</sup> Rambo Talabong, "3 Years After Kian's Death Killings Continue Under Duterte," *Rappler*, August 16, 2020, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/third-death-anniversary-kian-delos-santos-killings-continue>, accessed November 18, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> "Nine out of 10 Filipinos Support Duterte's Drugs War," *South China Morning Post*, October 16, 2017, <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/2115585/nine-out-10-filipinos-support-dutertes-drugs-war>, accessed April 7, 2021.

<sup>18</sup> "Half of Filipinos Dispute Police Accounts of Drug War Deaths," *South China Morning Post*, September 27, 2017, <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/2113111/half-filipinos-dont-believe-police-accounts-drug-war-deaths>, accessed April 7, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> "Why so Many Young Liberal Filipinos Support Duterte's Drug War," *South China Morning Post*, April 19, 2017, <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/2088621/dutertes-drug-war-horribly-violent-so-why-do-many-young>, accessed April 7, 2021.

<sup>20</sup> "Why so Many Young," *South China Morning Post*.

<sup>21</sup> Helen Flores, "78% of Pinoys Satisfied with Drug War – SWS," *The Philippine Star*, September 24, 2018,

In a news article attempting to understand why the majority of Filipinos support the drug war, a pro Duterte interview respondent stated, “It really hits a nerve when I hear about those deaths. It’s painful. But I think that violence of that kind is unfortunately inevitable when there’s a struggle for power, especially when drug gangs are involved.”<sup>22</sup> This statement echoes the President’s claim that the drastic measures and violence were necessary and unavoidable. In the same article, another respondent said, “Criminals are using human rights groups as a shield. . . . They were given fair warning, and if they want to avoid violence, they can just turn themselves in.”<sup>23</sup> In this mindset, the deaths were the victims’ fault. The then Justice Secretary Aguirre, when asked to comment on the Amnesty International report, said, “The criminals, the drug lords, drug pushers, they are not humanity. They are not humanity . . . In other words, how can that be when your war is only against those drug lords, drug addicts, drug pushers. You consider them humanity? I do not.”<sup>24</sup> A pro-administration Senator Sotto, defending Sec. Aguirre’s statement said, “Humanity, which is about 7 billion people, cannot be compared against a hundred, or 200, 300 million people involved in drugs. You cannot compare that. . . . Humanity is greater than those involved with illegal drugs. That is the interpretation that I understand.”<sup>25</sup> Both these statements of high-ranking government officials place drug addicts, drug pushers, and drug lords in the same category, describing them as not human.

## **The Power of Stories**

The above characterization of people involved in illegal drugs resonates with how President Duterte characterizes them in his stories in his speeches (elaborated below). Police and police actions toward drug addicts, drug pushers, and drug lords also resonate with Duterte’s characters in his stories, within which the views and actions expected of

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<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2018/09/24/1854162/78-pinoys-satisfied-drug-war-sws>, accessed June 3, 2019.

<sup>22</sup> “Why so Many Young,” *South China Morning Post*.

<sup>23</sup> “Why so Many Young,” *South China Morning Post*.

<sup>24</sup> “Criminals Are Not Human – Aguirre,” *Inquirer News*, February 1, 2017, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/867331/criminals-are-not-human-aguirre>, accessed June 4, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> “Sotto Explains Why Drug Users ‘Not Part of Humanity,’” *ABS-CBN News*, February 5, 2017, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/video/news/02/15/17/sotto-explains-why-drug-users-not-part-of-humanity>, accessed June 4, 2019.

law enforcers and law-abiding citizen are to kill them.<sup>26</sup> Barrera points to the power of stories in explaining the effects of Duterte's stories. For Barrera, "Stories compel actions. They act as selection/evaluation systems that hail people to assume identities, and they make life social – grouping and disconnecting people."<sup>27</sup> Acknowledging that Duterte is also caught up with the stories he has heard and told, Barrera argues that "they are responsible for why Duterte declared his war on drugs, adopted identities that outraged some, and connected and disconnected him from alliances."<sup>28</sup>

## **The Story of the War on Drugs in the Philippines**

Barrera argues that "Duterte has been caught up in a heroic saga characterized by apocalyptic stories."<sup>29</sup> Barrera observes that in Duterte's heroic saga story, he characterizes himself as the hero and the only savior fighting against the dark forces of the evil of society – drug and the addicts, pushers, and drug lords. However, Barrera points out that Duterte's story does not follow a romantic genre in which the hero brings salvation through legal means, but rather, it is an apocalyptic one, "where legal means must be set aside to restore order."<sup>30</sup> Barrera explains that an apocalyptic genre, while having the same upward plot progression of events with the romantic genre, deviates from it in terms of "its extreme polarization between the protagonist and antagonist, ideal motivations of the hero, and extraordinary objects of struggle."<sup>31</sup>

### *The People Involved in Illegal Drugs*

Drugs and people involved in illegal drugs are characterized as "the persona of 'evil' and 'enemy'" who is destroying the lives of the children

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<sup>26</sup> Christina Mendez, "Duterte to PNP: Kill 1,000, I'll Protect You," *The Philippine Star*,

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/07/02/1598740/duterte-pnp-kill-1000-ill-protect-you>, accessed June 4, 2019, "Go Ahead and Kill Drug Addicts": Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte Issues Fresh Call for Vigilante Violence," *South China Morning Post*, July 2, 2016, <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/1984193/go-ahead-and-kill-drug-addicts-philippine-president-rodrigo>, accessed April 7, 2021.

<sup>27</sup> Dan Jerome Barrera, "Drug War Stories and the Philippine President," *Asian Journal of Criminology* 12 (2017), 341-359.

<sup>28</sup> Barrera, "Drug War Stories," 359.

<sup>29</sup> Barrera, "Drug War Stories," 359.

<sup>30</sup> Barrera, "Drug War Stories," 352.

<sup>31</sup> Barrera, "Drug War Stories," 353.

and youth, families, and the future of the Filipinos.<sup>32</sup> Duterte's stories characterize drug addicts as "worse than slaves,"<sup>33</sup> hopeless in the sense that they cannot be rehabilitated,<sup>34</sup> and he says they are not his countrymen. They are instead criminals, a menace to society that will destroy the future of the Filipinos,<sup>35</sup> and are therefore outside of the protection of the state and deserve to be killed.<sup>36</sup>

This characterization of people involved in illegal drugs was intensified by the spectacle of violence of the war on drugs. Reyes explains that in Duterte's spectacle of violence, people involved in illegal drugs are humiliated, not only while living, but also when dead.<sup>37</sup> Killings happen in the homes of suspects, traumatizing their family and their community. Bodies of drug suspects are found dumped in alleyways, garbage collection bins, bushes, and rivers, with placards strapped around their necks or laid beside the bodies that read *pusher ako* ("I am a drug pusher"). Add to these the media coverage and depiction of the dead suspects. According to Reyes, the bodies of suspects are objectified and utilized for political purposes sending a strong message that those that the president decided were "the persona of 'evil' and 'enemy'" will be killed.<sup>38</sup>

### *Law-Abiding Filipinos and the Police*

The law-abiding Filipinos are characterized as victims of the evils of drugs and the people involved in illegal drugs. Duterte's stories describe the drug predicament as an extraordinary object of struggle; one so severe in its depth and scope that it affects the whole country and the

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<sup>32</sup> Barrera, "Drug War Stories," 355.

<sup>33</sup> Rodrigo Duterte, "Drug Addicts Are Worse than Slaves," ABS-CBN News Channel Youtube, January 17, 2019, Youtube video, minute 0:36, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJ\\_wNC-B944](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJ_wNC-B944), accessed May 21, 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Rodrigo Duterte, "Rodrigo Duterte on Drugs, Death and Diplomacy: Talk to Al Jazeera," *Al Jazeera English*, October 15, 2016, Youtube video, minute 2:46-23:09, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2KtLTXXej8>, accessed 22 May 2019.

<sup>35</sup> Rodrigo Duterte, "Full Video: Rodrigo Duterte's State of the Nation Address (SONA) 2018," Inquirer.net, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGkRWHwT2JE>, accessed 22 May 2019.

<sup>36</sup> Danilo Andres Reyes, "The Spectacle of Violence in Duterte's 'War on Drugs,'" *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 35 (December 2016), 111–137.

<sup>37</sup> Reyes, "The Spectacle of Violence," 120–123.

<sup>38</sup> Reyes, "The Spectacle of Violence," 117.

future of the nation.<sup>39</sup> As the protagonist, Duterte commissions the law-abiding citizens and the police “who are just doing their job” to be with him as his main supporting protagonists against the antagonists – drugs and people involved in illegal drugs. Duterte empowers them to kill the criminals, the antagonists, if given the opportunity, and promises to have their backs and even reward them for it.

### *President Duterte*

Duterte, as the hero in his stories, characterized himself as a law-abiding and God-fearing Filipino who is going to save his country. He is the protector of the police, which he characterizes as “just doing their job.” Duterte claimed that his war on drugs is motivated by his love for his countrymen and that he is willing to die (or kill) to save and protect the Filipino people. Barrera observes that Duterte’s stories are “peppered with internalized motivational fidelity to higher ideals, which are given more importance than legal procedures.”<sup>40</sup> These ideals may provide justification for the sacrifice of the many lives in Duterte’s war on drugs. Barrera observes that Duterte characterizes himself as having been endowed with the power to neutralize the drug problem and protect his countrymen, while at the same time claiming powerlessness because of the depth of the drug problem.<sup>41</sup> Barrera points to this as an example of a power paradox; “power permits while powerlessness compels violent interventions.”<sup>42</sup>

### *Response of Law-Abiding Filipinos*

In spite of international pressure from the United Nations and the European Union as well as criticisms from the Catholic Church in the Philippines and human rights groups, President Duterte pledged to continue his war on drugs and is even willing to kill more. The majority of Filipinos support Duterte’s campaign against drugs and believe that there has been an improvement in law and order. However, in surveys taken in 2016, seven out of ten Filipinos want suspects to be alive,<sup>43</sup> and

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<sup>39</sup> Barrera, “Drug War Stories,” 355.

<sup>40</sup> Barrera, “Drug War Stories,” 354.

<sup>41</sup> Barrera, “Drug War Stories,” 355.

<sup>42</sup> Barrera, “Drug War Stories,” 355.

<sup>43</sup> Eimor P. Santos, “Filipinos Satisfied with Duterte’s Drug War, But Want Suspects Alive - SWS,” *CNN*, October 7, 2016, <http://cnnphilippines.com/news/2016/10/07/SWS-Duterte-war-on-drugs-survey.html>, accessed June 4, 2019.



eight out of ten Filipinos fear being killed because of the drug war.<sup>44</sup> While the families left behind of the victims of the drug war can be considered law-abiding citizens, they are excluded in Duterte's stories.

### *What Filipinos Lost*

While the victims of the drug war can be considered lost, people under the spell of Duterte's stories see them as hopeless criminals who are not humans, therefore deserving of their fate. In this perspective, what was lost is the sense of humanity.

### **Alternative Stories**

Mohammad and Fulkerson suggest that if people would change their existing paradigms on the drug problem, the dominant drug policies can be changed.<sup>45</sup> To do this, Frank proposes that alternative stories may be provided to stand in contrast with the other.<sup>46</sup> Barrera explains, "People can orchestrate a narrative ambush on dominating stories. As people are capable of narrative inflation – from low mimesis to the apocalyptic genre—they are also capable of narrative deflation: talking down the risk associated with the apocalyptic genre by using low mimetic discourses."<sup>47</sup> The succeeding two sections present two stories that stand in contrast to the war on drugs narrative. These two stories may have the potential to ambush the dominant story. Faith/religion has a strong influence upon Filipinos, and the first story is drawn from scripture, an authority in matters of faith/religion. The second story is a success story, something that the war on drugs cannot claim, because of the fact that the problem of drugs has not been solved three and a half years after the six months promised by the Duterte administration.

### *The Gospel Story: Mark 5:1–20*

There are basically three prevailing interpretations of the story of Jesus and the Gerasene demoniac. One is "traditional" in that it demonstrates

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<sup>44</sup> "8 of 10 Pinoys Fear Dying in Drug War," *The Philippine Star*, December 20, 2016, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/12/20/1655209/8-10-pinoys-fear-dying-drug-war>, accessed June 4, 2019.

<sup>45</sup> Fida Mohammad and Gregory Fulkerson, "The 'War on Drugs': A Failed Paradigm," in Marten W. Brien and Jonathan D. Rosen, eds., *New Approaches to Drug Policies: A Time for Change* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), 229–249.

<sup>46</sup> Arthur W. Frank, *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

<sup>47</sup> Barrera, "Drug War Stories," 359.

Jesus as a miracle worker. The second interpretation suggests that the story was Mark's subversive manner of uniting the people to stand up and reject the Roman occupation; that this story in particular and Mark's Gospel, in general, were political manifestos aimed at reminding the Jewish community that Jesus had come to free them from the bondage of the Roman occupation. Meyers has taken this Markan story and used it to turn the entire gospel into what is basically a liberation theology position.<sup>48</sup>

The other liberation view of this story focuses on the mental state of the possessed man. A number of recent journal publications have focused on this aspect of the story. One of the more compelling articles relates the story to broken lives caused by mental illness.<sup>49</sup> O'Day notes that the community demonstrated a lack of compassion and that they had given up on this man.<sup>50</sup> In modern terms, the possessed man had "suicidal tendencies," he was beyond hope, and his suffering was unabated. By yielding to the grace present in God's mercy through Jesus, the man acknowledges his lack of independence. It is by that same grace and mercy that he is able to live again. Jesus' power to expel hatred and re-establish love is the most extraordinary power there is; its power overcomes death with life.<sup>51</sup> It is this reading of Mark that perhaps comes closest to what we want to focus on in this paper.

It is our contention that Jesus had crossed the Sea of Galilee intentionally in order to begin his mission to the Gentiles. The episode begins as Jesus has stilled the storm and rebuked the disciples for their lack of faith as they crossed the lake and encountered a storm (Mark 4:35–41). Jesus has stilled the seas, demonstrating his control over the chaotic forces of nature, and his actions become a symbol of divine power.

They have crossed the boundary, landing on "the other side" (5:1) in the land or region of the Gerasa. There has been a great deal of scholarly debate over the name of the town or village to which Mark is referring to. Regardless of the location, Mark is more interested in "articulating geo-spatial 'space' in terms of narrative symbolic than actual place

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<sup>48</sup> Ched Myers, *Binding the Strongman: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 191.

<sup>49</sup> Gail R. O'Day, "Hope Beyond Brokenness: A Markan Refection on the Gift of Life," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 15:3 (1988), 244–251.

<sup>50</sup> O'Day, "Hope Beyond Brokenness," 244.

<sup>51</sup> Susan Garrett, *No Ordinary Angel* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 134–135.

names.”<sup>52</sup> The point of the narrative is that Jesus has purposefully entered Gentile territory.

### *The Demoniac Man*

As Jesus leaves the boat, he is approached by a man who has been living among the nearby tombs. The man is possessed by an unclean spirit. The man lived among the tombs (v. 3), he cut himself, and he lived among unclean animals (v. 11). The text would lead the reader to conclude that the man had been exiled from his community to the tombs. Repeated attempts to shackle him with chains had all been unsuccessful; nobody had been able to subdue him (v. 4). This man is physically strong, and the spirit that has possessed him has made him even stronger.

The possessed man is also bruising himself or cutting himself with stones. This is often seen as an indication that the man suffered from some type of mental illness, and ultimately his healing is a sign of hope for those who suffer from a similar illness. Mark has carefully painted a bleak outlook for the possessed man that evokes a great sense of sympathy, even empathy, toward him. The man personifies self-destruction and social isolation.<sup>53</sup> No matter how you want to diagnose the condition of this man, it is evident that here was a man who is wretched and hopeless; human abnormality at its worst.

### *The People of Gerasa*

The problem of the people of Gerasa is that they do not know what to do with the man. How hopeless the people of Gerasa were! How hopeless we always feel in the presence of a wretched person. We examine the conditions and concluded that nothing could be done with such people. This resulted in repressive actions. They tried chains and shackles. If we cannot cure abnormality, we can shackle it. This is what the people of Gerasa did to the man. What society does is to lock people in prison and asylums. What enormous effort has society spent in the task of preventing the abnormal from doing harm to others?

### *Jesus*

As Jesus and the twelve advance up the shore, they see this poor man rushing to meet them. The man, or the demon possessing him, knows

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<sup>52</sup> Meyers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 190.

<sup>53</sup> Brendan Byrne, *A Costly Freedom: A Theological Reading of Mark's Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 96.

who Jesus is. Jesus and the disciples are facing the same problem that of the people of Gerasa, which is, in some form or other, the supreme problem of society: human abnormality. In contrast to how the people of Gerasa treated the man, this story shows the method of Jesus.

Jesus is fully aware of the problem before him. How does he meet the case? Jesus sees himself as the agent of the cure, and he believes that the man is deserving of that cure. In Jesus, there is no such thing as a hopeless case. The man, seeing Jesus from afar, runs to him and prostrates himself before Jesus. The man cries out to Jesus, repeating the same statement made by the demon in 1:24. Mark is clearly using this to parallel the two exorcisms, the first on Jewish soil and the second on Gentile soil.<sup>54</sup> Addressing Jesus as “Son of the Most High God” further represents an acknowledgment by the man that Jesus is of superior power and he is expecting to be subject to punishment. Jesus never showed fear of the man. He was calm and inquired of the man’s name, giving a name to the face. Then Jesus commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man.

In 5:9, Jesus speaks for the first time in the narrative. Engaging the demoniac, he asks the possessed man, “What is your name?” The answer is, of course, “My name is Legion; for we are many.” The man is possessed by a great number of demons. The demons beg and bargain with Jesus not to drive them out of the land. They beg Jesus to let them inhabit a group of pigs grazing on a nearby hillside. Therefore, unclean spirits enter unclean animals. Jesus grants their request, sending them out to the pigs. As the demons leave the man and enter the pigs, eventually killing themselves, we see the full restoration. The man is clothed, seated with Jesus, speaking normally, and he has left the tomb. He is fully restored.

### *The People of Gerasa and their Response*

The people tending the pigs leave the area and begin telling, or announcing, what had happened in the city and the surrounding countryside (v. 15). The people of the region come to see what has happened; two thousand pigs jumping off a cliff didn’t happen every day. The crowds see Jesus and the once-possessed man who is now clothed and speaking normally. It is obvious to them that he has been cleansed of the demons. Unlike those near the exorcism in Capernaum who were “amazed” (1:27), these people are afraid. So frightened are

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<sup>54</sup> John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Mark* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 164.

they that they plead with Jesus to leave the area. The people of Gerasa plead with Jesus to leave the area because of the destruction of their property, i.e., the pigs. By asking Jesus to leave, they are saying that they are comfortable with their lives and are rejecting the life that Jesus offers, even if it means living with demons.

The disregard of the cost is an important element in the method of Jesus. Jesus did not apologize for the loss of the pigs. It did not matter to him how many pigs were killed. A man was saved. Jesus did not count the cost, but people do. The people tending the pigs fled to the city with the news, and the people who had tried to restrict the man saw a wondrous sight. There was the man, clothed, restored, and in his right mind. When the people heard what happened, they pleaded for Jesus to leave. It is the only instance in Jesus' ministry where people asked him to go away. It is the only instance where his ministry cost the people everything because Jesus left. Society is ready for reforms, but they cost too much. At Gerasa and today, people like the demoniac man will continue to exist because a property is esteemed above humans. This halts all possible reforms. This story of the pigs demands that we ask the question – are we willing to pay the cost of salvation and reform? There is really a cost.

#### *What the People of Gerasa Lost*

That day, the people of Gerasa lost a strong, good man who has more worth than pigs. The man became a social being. He is ready to go with Jesus. The man an hour before would have attacked Jesus. He has not only ceased to be a menace to society but desires to enter into social relations. Jesus obliges the people, and as he is about to leave, the formerly possessed man pleads with Jesus to allow him to “be with him” (v. 18). The man begs to be part of the group following Jesus in the same tone when the demons begged not to be sent out of the region and that the people of the region used to plead with Jesus to leave the area.<sup>55</sup> Jesus denies the man's request. Instead, the man is instructed to go back home and tell his family what Jesus had done for him and how the Lord had bestowed his mercy upon him (v. 19). The man goes throughout the Gentile region proclaiming what had happened to him just as Jesus had instructed him. Apparently, the man was quite a successful missionary as well, as the story concludes by noting that “all were amazed,” presumably by the story he told about Jesus' work and God's mercy (v. 20). The man becomes an apostle of salvation. He is willing to take the

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<sup>55</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *Sacra Pagina*, 167.

ministry among his friends. He becomes active in the undertaking of which he was himself the beneficiary.

The healing of the demoniac may suggest possibilities of meeting the misery of people today. It warns us that we must be prepared for the costs and, when we are willing, it cheers us with the assurance of untold gain. Jesus is indeed a liberating figure through exorcism or healing. The once-possessed man in Gerasene bears witness that each of us, whether possessed by demons or whatever other baggage we might have, are capable of restoration through the extraordinary power of Christ's love that leads us from death into life.

### **The Story of the War on Drugs in Bogo City<sup>56</sup>**

Amid widespread claims that police have been killing suspected drug users, one police officer has taken a different track and proven that a bloodless campaign can help solve the country's drug problem. Chief Supt. Byron Allatog of the Bogo City Police Station in the Province of Cebu chose to give drug pushers and addicts a chance to live and change their ways.

The Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) conferred a drug-free status on Bogo City in July 2017. What is noteworthy is the fact that this was achieved with zero deaths. While ordinary police officials conducted their war against drugs with a high level of harshness, Chief Supt. Byron Allatog, with the help of the city mayor, other local officials, and the community, preferred the humane way by focusing on rehabilitating drug addicts. His strategy apparently worked, as this city had not recorded a single killing since the 39-year-old policeman assumed his post in December 2016 until the city was declared drug-free in July 2017. Bogo also became the first city in Central Visayas and the second in the country to be declared drug-free by the PDEA.

#### *People Involved in Illegal Drugs*

In 2016 when Chief Supt. Byron Allatog was assigned in Bogo City, almost all *barangays* were infested with drugs. But in just eight months, the city was declared drug-free. According to Allatog, "Human life is

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<sup>56</sup> See, Ador Vincent S. Mayol, "Bloodless: This Cop Chief Gives Pushers, Addicts Chance to Live," *The Inquirer*, October 15, 2017, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/937947/war-on-drugs-drug-killings-extrajudicial-killings-bogo-city-police-station-byron-allatog-pdea#ixzz5pqH3yENa>, accessed April 7, 2021.

important. Some people may say, ‘He’s a drug addict, nothing but trash.’ But do these people even consider the fact that these drug addicts have families? I want people to know that killing is not the final solution to the problem of illegal drugs,”<sup>57</sup> he explained. For him, drug addicts need help to change.

### *The People in Bogo City*

Allatog recalled going to every *barangay* in Bogo City to get people behind what he calls the “whole-of-community” approach.<sup>58</sup> He said that he told one group after another that the drug war is not just a matter for the police but for every *barangay* captain and all the members of the community.<sup>59</sup> He told them that they all had to acknowledge that there was a problem and that everyone must help to fix it.<sup>60</sup> He said, “It is a shared responsibility, sharing and sacrificing time and resources because it is our moral obligation and responsibility to protect our town because my family lives here, I work here, and my children study in this community.”<sup>61</sup>

### *Chief Supt. Byron Allatog*

Chief Supt. Byron Allatog considers human life sacred and believes that everyone, even the worst criminal, deserves a second chance. His respect for life may be traced to his parents’ teachings and his roots as a member of the Bontoc tribe of Mountain Province, a province in the northern part of the Philippines. In his tribe, anyone who kills another human being, he said, must offer prayers and three pigs to atone for this sin in a ritual called “*cham-es*.”<sup>62</sup> When he became a policeman in 2001, Allatog lived by what he learned as a child—the value of human life. But the government’s brutal war on illegal drugs tested his beliefs, he admitted.<sup>63</sup> He was with the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group as assistant regional chief of Calabarzon in July 2016, when President Duterte took over the reins of government. He recalled, “I told my men, if it is not necessary to kill, then why do it? Of course, we

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<sup>57</sup> Mayol, “Bloodless.”

<sup>58</sup> “A Start Up Approach to the Drug Problem,” *Makati Business Club Forum* 2 (2018) 3.

<sup>59</sup> “A Start Up Approach,” *Makati Business Club Forum*, 3.

<sup>60</sup> “A Start Up Approach,” *Makati Business Club Forum*, 3.

<sup>61</sup> “A Start Up Approach,” *Makati Business Club Forum*, 3.

<sup>62</sup> Mayol, “Bloodless.”

<sup>63</sup> Mayol, “Bloodless.”

have to defend ourselves when the call arises. But as much as possible, I want the suspects to live,”<sup>64</sup>

### *The People in Bogo City and their Response*

The people of Bogo city were convinced that the community-based rehabilitation program is still the best approach to dealing with the drug problem. The Mayor of Bogo city, the city officials, the *barangay* officials, and the community people joined and supported the vision of Allatog.

### *What the People in Bogo City Gained*

In July 2017, the PDEA declared all twenty-nine *barangays* in Bogo City “drug-free.” From July 2016, at least 1,955 users in the city had surrendered to the police, while forty-five drug pushers had been arrested in different police operations. The city had been rid of drug pushers, yet no one was killed.

The police chief is also active in the local government’s community-based drug rehabilitation programs that have so far helped more than 200 drug surrenderers. Included in the three-month rehab programs are seminars and physical activities.

The Center for Family Ministries (CEFAM) of the Catholic Church launched “The Lost Sheep Initiative” (TLSI). The Lost Sheep Initiative aims to provide centralized support to independent community-based rehab initiatives by way of funding, soliciting volunteers, and coordinating curriculum development. TLSI believes that those who have had trouble with drugs are our brothers and sisters who may have lost their way but not their humanity. They need to be gently guided to find their way back onto their own paths, with dignity and respect, rather than being forced onto someone else’s like prisoners.

TLSI believes that addiction is a disease of the mind and spirit and must be treated as such, using a combination of science and spirituality, as global best practice suggests. TLSI has been collaborating with the Philippine National Police (PNP), the Department of Health (DOH), and Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA), and local government officials in the community. TLSI volunteers include church officials, priests, businessmen, and laypersons.

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<sup>64</sup> Mayol, “Bloodless.”



## Conclusion

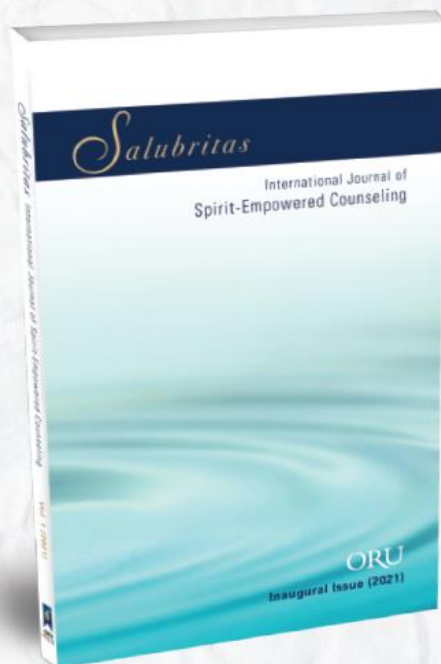
Other countries who have fought their own costly drug wars have found a public health-based approach to be the only sustainable long-term solution, notably Colombia, and most radically, Portugal. No country has succeeded in entirely eradicating drugs from their societies, but with public health approaches, some countries have reduced drug use significantly, and perhaps more importantly, reduced drug-related crime even further.

In this paper, we described the bloody scene of the war on drugs in the Philippines. Drawing from Barrera, we explained how President Duterte, his government, the police, his supporters, and the people involved in illegal drugs and their families have been caught up in a heroic saga characterized by apocalyptic stories. In this story genre, the people involved in illegal drugs were dehumanized and objectified, and illegal forms of action were justified. With the hope of orchestrating a narrative ambush on the dominant story, we propose two stories that may be considered as alternatives, the story of the demon-possessed man in Mark 5:1–20 and the story of Chief Supt. Byron Allatog. In both stories, we learn that if we acknowledge the value and dignity of every human being, however wretched he or she is, there is no hopeless case. Also, both stories show how non-violent approaches can work, resulting in transformation. In the biblical story, the power of Jesus to transform lives, and in the story of Allatog, the power of collaboration and community participation is clearly evidenced.

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# Pentecostal Response to the Migrant Caravans

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## Abstract

Migrant caravans have caused great panic in the collective mind of the US. A realistic response to the undocumented immigrants and migrant caravans requires a posture of hospitality and mercy by people of faith. Faith leads to two types of responses; that of hospitality and that of concern for law and order. It also seeks to walk the tension between these two realities including both in a responsible approach to the issue of migrant caravans. I look at two faith traditions present among immigrants coming to the US from Central America: Roman Catholicism and Pentecostalism. I put these traditions that are characterized as being in contention in dialogue. Faith gives the church many rich resources to address the issue of immigrants seeking asylum. First, there is the theological theme of the *Imago Dei*. Second, the Scriptures invite people of faith to wrestle with the notion of neighbor. Third, the Holy Family's plight during the Nativity provides rich material for theological reflection and discussion in light of the issue of migrant caravans. All this is framed within a concern for law and order.

**Keywords:** immigration; migrant caravans; *Imago Dei*; neighbor; the Holy Family; Pentecostalism; Roman Catholicism

## Introduction

This essay seeks to understand the theological basis for a response to the issue of migrant caravans traveling to the US. While there are obvious political interests, there are other things at stake in the Christian faith that one must consider in order to work through the issue of migrant caravans. Pope Francis, quoting Vinicius De Moraes, said, "Life, for all its confrontations, is the art of encounter."<sup>1</sup> The Pope further stated:

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, "Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* of The Holy Father Francis on Fraternity And Social Friendship," accessed March 22, 2021,

I have frequently called for the growth of a culture of encounter capable of transcending our differences and divisions. This means working to create a many-faceted polyhedron whose different sides form a variegated unity, in which “the whole is greater than the parts.” The image of a polyhedron can represent a society where differences coexist, complementing, enriching and reciprocally illuminating one another, even amid disagreements and reservations. Each of us can learn something from others. No one is useless, and no one is expendable. This also means finding ways to include those on the peripheries of life. For they have another way of looking at things; they see aspects of reality that are invisible to the centres of power where weighty decisions are made.<sup>2</sup>

This is sorely needed among my tribe, the Pentecostals. Pentecostals are not known for having a social ethic or for their activism in social issues. There have been Pentecostals that have cared for issues of social justice, but this is an exception rather than the norm. Pentecostals must work to transcend difference and to intentionally include the other in their ethos and way of life. Pentecostals have a lot of potential to do so as the places of fastest growth around the world are outside Europe and North America.

Currently, Pentecostals have divided responses about how to address undocumented immigrants in the US. For example, the Latina Pentecostal church extends a natural hospitality to many of these immigrants, if not intentionally, then at least intuitively. Other Pentecostals adamantly stand against changes in the culture of the United States and see immigrants as a threat to their way of life. It seems that they are not willing to consider the complexity of the issue at hand and that the US is a complex society composed of several different immigrant cultures. US Christians must consider that, on the one hand, people migrate because of many factors that “pull” them. On the other hand, there are also many factors that “push” them out, such as hunger, natural disasters, corruption, lack of work, violence, and death threats. The particular issue of migrant caravans calls for nuanced and intentional responses from the church, not oversimplified stereotypes. A

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[http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html). I am indebted to Christopher D. Tirres for this observation. Also see Christopher D. Tirres and Melanie C. Schikore, “Faith in Action, Adult Learning, and Immigrant Justice: Bringing Mission to Life,” *The Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities*, December 18, 2020: [www.cumuonline.org](http://www.cumuonline.org) DOI 10.18060/23993.

<sup>2</sup> Tirres and Schikore, “Faith in Action.”

Pentecostal response to the issue will consider the people themselves and then will reflect biblically and theologically about the issue of migrant caravans.

In what follows, I first describe the situation that has led to the formation of migrant caravans traveling across multiple countries to the United States. I give a broad overview of migrant caravans and the push-pull factors that create such a situation. I also describe the response of the US government toward these immigrants. The predominant image for this issue is the children immigrants in cages in detention facilities around the US. One wonders if there is a better way forward. These people are not animals. It is for this reason that the second half of this paper tries to give a Pentecostal response towards the migrant caravans and the troubled people knocking at the gates of the US-Mexico border. The methodology that I follow is more related to an ecclesial response to this issue and the specific question of the common good. There has been much work trying to reflect on Scripture and the situation of immigrants. M. Daniel Carroll R., for example, wrote *Christians at the Border*, where he considers scriptural foundations for Christians and the alien.<sup>3</sup> Matthew Soerens and Jenny Hwang wrote a book together focusing on immigration, *Welcoming the Stranger*.<sup>4</sup> Soerens and Hwang give historical accounts and suggest feasible responses for the issue of undocumented immigration. In trying to craft a Pentecostal response, I am mindful that the study of Scripture is important for Pentecostals. I will reflect on the issue using Scripture, but I also research statements produced by the Roman Catholic Church and by Pentecostals to try to provide a way forward in this dilemma. As such, I seek a different level of reflection which works through the ethical dilemmas of migrant caravans.

An important reminder to the reader is that one must also look at both sides of the issue, but there is a strong moral imperative to give special consideration to human beings undergoing precarious situations. These strangers are coming to the US seeking asylum because, for many, the issue is a matter of life and death. Their decision to emigrate must not be considered lightly. In light of such circumstances, people of faith must have well thought responses that consider the enormity and gravity of the situation among those walking 4,349 kilometers, or 2,702 miles,

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<sup>3</sup> M. Daniel Carroll R., *Christians at the Border* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Soerens and Jenny Hwang, *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion & Truth in the Immigration Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

from San Pedro Sula, Honduras, to Tijuana, México, and then to the US-México border.

As a Pentecostal theologian, my concern is in the theological response toward the stranger and the possibilities within my own Pentecostal tradition. In order to prepare an adequate response, I examine both Pentecostal statements on human rights and also Roman Catholic teachings on the common good and social teaching. In seeking a foundation and a response, I then compare this to what a particular denomination, the Church of God (Cleveland, TN), a Pentecostal Church, has stated about immigration in its official documents. It is through a dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and this particular Pentecostal denomination that I hope to provide a Pentecostal response to the disconcerting issue of migrant caravans.

In many ways this is an imaginative work in the sense that it has to be creative because Pentecostals are not well-known for making public policy statements. There has been Pentecostal reflection about immigration, but the work among immigrants and migrant caravans is more of an intuitive response. I must mention that this falls in line with Pentecostal spirituality and the theology of being led by the Holy Spirit. One sees a need; one is sensitive to that need; and one acts to help meet that need. Another aspect of this essay that is important to me is that I hope to provide necessary dialogue between Catholicism and Pentecostalism. The people of the Spirit must learn from the centuries of tradition established by the Roman Catholic Church. On the other hand, the strong institution of the Roman Catholic Church could use the freedom of the Spirit to infuse life in its structures. Finally, in what follows, I ask the reader to maintain an open mind to ideas that may seem controversial. My hope is to foster respectful and enriching dialogue that may move the church to proper action towards the sojourner, immigrant, and stranger.

## **Background on Central American Immigration to the US**

In the 1990s and early 2000s, many immigrants started arriving in “non-traditional” towns, cities and states in the United States.<sup>5</sup> The conservative *Center for Immigration Studies* calculated that at that time one

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<sup>5</sup> Steven A. Camarota and John Keeley, “Examining Non-Traditional Areas of Immigrant Settlement in the 1990s: The New Ellis Islands,” in *Backgrounder* (Center for Immigration Studies) September 1, 2001, accessed January 28, 2021, <https://cis.org/Report/Examining-NonTraditional-Areas-Immigrant-Settlement-1990s>.

out of fourteen counties in the US met criteria to be described as a New Ellis Island.<sup>6</sup> This terminology intentionally compared these non-traditional places to the illustrious Ellis Island in New York Harbor. Ellis Island was the main port of entry into the United States from 1892-1924. Because many US citizens can trace their heritage to someone in their ancestry arriving at Ellis Island, it is now a national park and museum where many people can go to search the records and trace their ancestry. During its thirty-two years of operation, Ellis Island processed and received approximately twelve million immigrants into the US. These were mostly but not exclusively from Europe. Many of those who arrived in New York traveled later to other parts of the US seeking work and family reunification.

In a similar manner, large cities like New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami have traditionally been the first landing places for many immigrants. However, the trend has been sustained migration to new areas of the US in non-traditional places. Cities like Nashville, Atlanta, and Louisville have attracted a whole new set of immigrants.<sup>7</sup> Many of these places had not seen this type of immigration. It has led many to state that “the border is now everywhere.”<sup>8</sup> The border is ubiquitous. It is found in small scale interactions in small towns in the US. It is found in rural farms and dilapidated factories. It is found in restaurant chains and in public schools. This ubiquity of the border creates many uneasy tensions with US citizens.

The border is also ubiquitous because of a spike in the number of people from Central America migrating to the US. For example, among Latinos in the US, immigrants from El Salvador have recently surpassed Cubans in number and are now the third largest Latino national or ethnic group in the US, after Mexicans and Puerto Ricans.<sup>9</sup> The number of Central American immigrants from the Northern Triangle (Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador) has dramatically increased so that there are more than 3.5 million Central Americans residing in the

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<sup>6</sup> Camarota and Keeley, “Examining Non-Traditional Areas.”

<sup>7</sup> Camarota and Keeley, “Examining Non-Traditional Areas.”

<sup>8</sup> Ken Ellingwood, *Hard Line: Life and Death on the US-Mexico Border* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2005), 8.

<sup>9</sup> Luis Noe-Bustamante, Antonio Flores, and Sono Shah, “Facts on Hispanics of Salvadoran origin in the United States, 2017,” accessed February 19, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/fact-sheet/u-s-hispanics-facts-on-salvadoran-origin-latinos/#:~:text=Salvadorans%20are%20the%20third%2Dlargest,2.3%20million%20over%20the%20period.>

US.<sup>10</sup> The total number of Central Americans present in the US still lags behind Mexico, but has now surpassed the second largest Latino group - Puerto Ricans. It is difficult to place all Central Americans under one large subset because each Central American nation is unique and different from the others. While these nations share a common colonial history, that history diverged with the collapse of the Federation of Central America after 1821.

Central America has a strong link to the Caravans. These migrant caravans arrive mainly composed of people from Central America and more specifically, what is called the Northern Triangle. The Central Americans seeking entry in the US have tried to do so through many means: visas, Temporary Protected Status, family reunification, etc. Moreover, those in the caravans come to the US to request asylum.<sup>11</sup> A major reason that these immigrants choose to travel in caravans is because of the dangerous conditions of the journey. There are documentaries that chronicle the immigrants' journey to the US before there were caravans, such as "Mexico: La Bestia," by Alex Gohari and Léo Mattéi.<sup>12</sup> They demonstrate the pernicious nature of the journey. While there are no official numbers, it is apparent that most of them never arrive in the US. Some turn back; others are turned back and deported; others stay along the way; some die in accidents, like falling off the train (*La Bestia*); some are forced into service for drug cartels; some become drug mules; some die in the desert; and many are murdered by delinquents and criminals. These are some of the many reasons that caravans have become a reasonable strategy for the Central American immigrants. People perceive that there is strength and protection in numbers.<sup>13</sup> The caravan that arrived at the US-Mexico border in 2018 was estimated to be around 7,000 people, with many

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<sup>10</sup> Allison O'Connor, Jeanne Batalova, and Jessica Bolter, "Central American Immigrants in the United States," Migration Policy Institute, August 15, 2019, accessed February 19, 2021, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-american-immigrants-united-states-2017>.

<sup>11</sup> Amelia Cheatham, "US Detention of Child Migrants," accessed February 19, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-detention-child-migrants>.

<sup>12</sup> Alex Gohari and Léo Mattéi, "Mexico: La Bestia," ARTE Reportage, France, 2018. Available from 04/12/2018 to 09/11/2021 at <https://www.arte.tv/en/videos/083369-000-A/mexico-la-bestia/>.

<sup>13</sup> "Migrant Caravan: What It Is and Why Does It Matter?" *BBC News* (November 26, 2018), accessed March 1, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-45951782>.



stragglers along the way. The total number of people that started out on this journey was estimated to be at least 10,000 people.

The situation at the southern border appears desperate. The US Border patrol apprehended 76,020 unaccompanied minors at or near the US-Mexico border in 2019; it was a 52 percent increase over 2018.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, migrants traveling with family members reached 473,682.<sup>15</sup> For the first time, unaccompanied minors and families accounted for more than half of border crossers at the US-Mexico border. Once at the other side of the border families were separated. The parents were sent to different camps from the children. In some reports, the immigration authorities lost track of hundreds of parents and their children. There have been numerous conflicting accounts about the situation at these refugee camps in the US and the inhumane conditions in some of these places, such as forced hysterectomies on immigrant women and the sexual abuse of minors.

It is important to note that the reason immigrants in migrant caravans seek asylum is because US law permits due process for asylum seekers. This policy allows immigrants to enter the US and wait for a hearing for their asylum case. The law specifically states:

Any alien who is physically present in the United States or who arrives in the United States (whether or not at a designated port of arrival and including an alien who is brought to the United States after having been interdicted in international or United States waters), irrespective of such alien's status, may apply for asylum in accordance with this section or, where applicable, section 1225(b) of this title.<sup>16</sup>

Nonetheless, the process is more complex than appears in this statement. Asylum seekers must prove in the court of law that they live under credible fear of persecution. Detractors to this law think immigrants unfairly use this as a strategy to gain entrance in the US. However, there are very real reasons Central Americans decide to leave everything behind, walk over 2,700 miles, and risk life and death to attempt an entry to the US. Many times, the parents send their own children alone and that is another reason why they chose this strategy. Caravans are seen as offering protection to the weak. Unaccompanied minors are present in these caravans because their family members

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<sup>14</sup> "Migrant Caravan."

<sup>15</sup> "Migrant Caravan."

<sup>16</sup> "8 U.S. Code § 1158 – Asylum," accessed March 1, 2021, [https://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/training/xus/crcl/asylumseekers/crcl\\_asylum/pdfs/Immigration%20and%20Nationality%20Act%202008.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/training/xus/crcl/asylumseekers/crcl_asylum/pdfs/Immigration%20and%20Nationality%20Act%202008.pdf).

judged that it was their best decision in light of the activity of criminal gangs, such as MS-13 and the 18th Street Gang.<sup>17</sup> These rival gangs actively recruit minors for their organizations to carry out many illicit activities, such as drug trafficking, extortion, and even becoming hitmen for the gangs. Those who refuse to join a gang are murdered by the recruiters. This includes the children who have been sent to the US. Parents send their children because it truly is a life and death situation. No parent wishes their child to be killed or murdered. In order to ensure that their children do not engage in illicit gang activities this is the best decision they can make.

Another reason parents will send their children is because of hunger and economic hardship. In the most recent example, two powerful hurricanes, Eta and Iota, slammed into Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala in the months of October and November of 2020. These natural disasters disrupted the agrarian way of life. Many lost their homes and their livelihood. This frustration led many of them to send their children in a caravan in the early part of January 2021.

Another reason for leaving their home is inflation. As a result of the pandemic, the minimum wage does not guarantee a person will meet *La Canasta Básica Alimentaria* or the Basic Food Basket. For example, in 2019 the cost of the basic food in Honduras was L 8,677.15 or \$360 USD.<sup>18</sup> The average minimum wage was L 9443.24 or \$391 USD. It is said that the actual cost of Basic Food Basket now exceeds the average monthly wage in Honduras.

One final reason many families send their children is due to corruption. In Honduras, President Juan Orlando Hernández came to power through dubious means. He has remained in power even though the Honduran constitution prohibits reelection. He also has been linked to the ransacking of the Honduran Institute of Social Security which cares for the health and wellbeing of the Honduran people. Also, during the COVID-19 pandemic, President Hernández has been heavily criticized for not spending funds to provide health care services for his own people. In a stunning turn of events, Hernández's brother was arrested on charges of trafficking drugs to the US. And, as if things

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<sup>17</sup> Reuters, "Terror of gang violence drives migrant caravans northward," *ABC News*, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/terror-gang-violence-drives-migrant-caravans-northward/story?id=59341147>.

<sup>18</sup> Luis Rodríguez, "Costo de la Canasta Alimenticia es de L 8677.15 al Mes," *El Heraldo* (December 7, 2019), accessed March 1, 2021, <https://www.elheraldo.hn/economia/1340283-466/costo-canasta-alimenticia-es-del-867715-al-mes>.

could not get worse, Hernández has also been linked to drug trafficking and taking bribes from cartels and drug lords. In a recent trial, a drug trafficker facing justice in the US alleged that President Hernández said, “We’re going to stuff drugs up the gringos’ noses.”<sup>19</sup>

I must clarify that Honduras is a beautiful country with beautiful people. The issue is that for those on the margins of society, the situation is so difficult that they have nothing left and no other option but to try to leave and find another place where they can make a decent living. The migrants have thought this through. It is not an easy decision to break with cultural and social norms, knowing how difficult the journey is. The decision to try and make it to the US is both dramatic and traumatic. Furthermore, sending unaccompanied minors *al Norte* is even more gut-wrenching. The nature of the journey is so perilous that many women and young ladies are willing to take on this journey knowing that they will more than likely experience some form of sexual assault. The caravan strategy offers a way of protection, but it continues to be a high-risk strategy for many immigrants because of the unreliability of the coyotes – individuals who prey on the weak – and the violent drug cartels.<sup>20</sup> One necessarily must consider these things in light of a response to the migrant caravans. At the very least, there are sensible reasons why the Central American people choose to seek asylum in the US.

## Responses

I have described the caravans in order that the reader may understand the complexity of the issue. In this next section, I look at responses to the migrant caravans in the US from the point of view of the host (or for many, an invaded) nation. In the United States, it appears that the system is overwhelmed by “the crush of troubled humanity from around

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<sup>19</sup> Jimena Sánchez, “Vamos a meter droga en las narices de los estadounidenses”, Juan Orlando Hernández es vinculado con un narco,” *Centra News Guatemala* (January 10, 2021), accessed February 22, 2021, <https://centranews.com.gt/internacionales/4499-vamos-a-meter-droga-en-las-narices-de-los-estadounidenses-juan-orlando-hernandez-es-vinculado-con-un-narco>. Translation mine. The Spanish says, “meterles drogas por las narices a los gringos.”

<sup>20</sup> Jerry Kammer, “David Martin Saw the Asylum Crisis Taking Shape in the Early 1980s” (June 24, 2019, accessed January 28, 2021, <https://cis.org/Kammer/David-Martin-Saw-Asylum-Crisis-Taking-Shape-Early-1980s>).

the world.”<sup>21</sup> On the one hand there is the need for law, order, and due process. On the other hand, there is a need for humane, workable, and sustainable reform in immigration and asylum policies. These two different thoughts are polarized and affect political voting in the US. Considering these pressing concerns, Christians must measure their response to migrant caravans intentionally, carefully, and meaningfully.

It is here that Christians must creatively walk in the tension of, first, being good stewards of our land and resources; and second, to somehow offer meaningful hospitality to suffering humanity. In the case of Pentecostals, this conversation is meaningful because immigrants make up a part of a growing segment of Latino Christians in the US. A 2004 survey stated that most immigrants are either Roman Catholic or Pentecostal *Evangélicos*.<sup>22</sup> Jaqueline Hagan puts the *Evangélico* number at around 25%, though this number also includes Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses. In an interview with Krishna Ramsundar, President of SEBIME (now Instituto Atkinson), in Hermosillo, Mexico, he stated that in his interactions with the migrant caravans, 80% of the migrants he encountered were Pentecostal Christians.<sup>23</sup> At the very least, the immigrants appear to be familiar with Christianity and a Pentecostalized version of it.

Latino Pentecostals, in particular, have offered a sort of de facto hospitality to many immigrants. Otto Maduro chronicled many of the Latino Churches in Newark, NJ.<sup>24</sup> He describes how Pentecostalism seems to fill an important void in the lives of the Latino immigrants. One important discovery is that most of the Roman Catholic immigrants who leave the Roman Catholic Church do so for Pentecostalism.<sup>25</sup> He points to different items in Pentecostalism that may contribute to this. But one of the things that is easily discernible is the fact that these immigrants can express their culture and their deepest fears in the service. In this sense, Pentecostals have provided an intuitive hospitality for the immigrants. The issue is that Pentecostals need to think about the caravans in a more intentional manner. In the midst of

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<sup>21</sup> Kammer, “David Martin Saw.”

<sup>22</sup> Jacqueline Hagan, ‘Faith for the Journey’, in Daniel G. Groody and Gioacchino Campese (eds.), *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 16.

<sup>23</sup> Krishna Ramsundar, interview by author, December 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Otto Maduro, “Religión y exclusión/marginación: Pentecostalismo globalizado entre los hispanos en Newark, Nueva Jersey,” *Revista Cultura y Religión* 3:1 (2009).

<sup>25</sup> Maduro, “Religión y exclusión/marginación,” 28.

the political struggles in the States, there are real-world constraints on immigration policy; but there are also deep values that demand due process for all.<sup>26</sup> In popular politics, the tension seems to be between two groups: one wishes to preserve societal norms; the other wishes to offer protection to those who request it. The question becomes how people of faith navigate these two options.

Under the Trump administration, there was a significant decline in immigration. Steven Caramota notes that from 2016-2020 apprehensions at the border dropped from 653,000 per year to 203,000 per year.<sup>27</sup> The reason for this decline was a tough policy discouraging immigration. For conservatives like Camarota, this strong posture limiting immigration benefits the American worker and facilitates the assimilation of families into the American way of life. Furthermore, it reduces the strain of immigrants on public services, like health care and education.

In the aftermath of 9/11 and in the post-Trump age, there is strong anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States. Conservative Christians are some of the most vocal anti-immigrant voices, and they tend to back candidates with strong anti-immigrant rhetoric. This is not a phenomenon unique to the United States.<sup>28</sup> Rafal Cekiera discusses this issue in Poland, a country that claims to be over 80% Roman Catholic. He observes that in Poland, there is an instrumentalization of religion by populist political movements. He also states that there are similar phenomena in several countries around the world, including the US, Great Britain, Macedonia, Greece and Kazakhstan. For Cekiera, these countries display an anti-immigrant rhetoric that actually appear to be examples of “unobvious indicators of secularization processes”<sup>29</sup> and the reduction of the influence of the church upon the life of its people. For the church, this phenomenon provokes questions about its place in society and the moral and ethical formation of its people. In recent years, it appears that a large number of believers regard particular

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<sup>26</sup> Kammer, “David Martin Saw.”

<sup>27</sup> Steven A. Camarota. “There Really Has Been a ‘Trump Effect’ on Immigration. And some American workers seem to have benefited.” (October 28, 2020), accessed February 3, 2021, <https://cis.org/Oped/There-Really-Has-Been-Trump-Effect-Immigration>.

<sup>28</sup> Rafal Cekiera, “Anti-Refugee Attitudes of Polish Catholics and the Teaching of the Catholic Church: The Surprising Paradox and its Reasons” in *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* 10:4 (2020), 11.

<sup>29</sup> Cekiera, “Anti-Refugee Attitudes,” 11.

political parties, and not the church, as “defenders of religious identity.”<sup>30</sup>

Consequently, for Cekiera, religion is used by politics “foremost as a marker of identity, enabling them to distinguish between the good ‘us’ and the bad ‘them.’”<sup>31</sup> Cekiera describes this as a populism whose “political style that sets ‘sacred’ people against two enemies: ‘elites’ and ‘others.’”<sup>32</sup> It leads to xenophobia and anti-immigrant rhetoric. However, Christian faith requires us to think through these difficult issues. As such, the church must stand in contrast to mass political movements because its identity is grounded in different ethical expectations and dimensions that contrast a pragmatic and conventional response to the issue.

I suggest here that numbers are disassociated with faces, with real life, and with real individuals. As such, numbers give an individual the illusion that one is objective. One can cite the numbers of a caravan being 5,000 or 7,000. This seems like a large number, but 7,000 is .00021% of the 328 million estimated to be living in the US. This objectification distances and ignores the reality of the migrant caravans and ultimately ignores the factors that push people out of their own countries. The issue is that there are situations that force these people to leave their homes. In the case of the migrant caravans from Central America, these individuals are being pushed out by many factors. These include violence and real-life threats. People of faith have a different response when faced with the poor huddled masses knocking at their door. Below, I suggest a few theological principles that underscore the moral imperative of helping refugees and people seeking asylum.

## **The Imago Dei and an Understanding of Neighbor**

Because of the complexity of immigration, the Roman Catholic Church has addressed matters related to immigrants and refugees throughout its history. During past people movements, the Catholic Church realized that many of their own constituents were immigrants. For example, many European immigrants that arrived in Ellis Island were Roman Catholic and consequently needed some kind of pastoral care. During that time, Roman Catholics were a minority in the US and the Vatican moved to try to recognize the need to help its constituency. In recent years, Pope Francis has called the church not to forget its roots and the

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<sup>30</sup> Cekiera, “Anti-Refugee Attitudes,” 11.

<sup>31</sup> Cekiera, “Anti-Refugee Attitudes,” 11-12.

<sup>32</sup> Cekiera, “Anti-Refugee Attitudes,” 12.

less fortunate. He stated: “The culture of comfort, which makes us think only of ourselves, makes us insensitive to the cries of other people, and makes us live in soap bubbles which, however lovely, are insubstantial; they offer a fleeting and empty illusion which results in indifference to others; indeed, it even leads to the globalization of indifference.”<sup>33</sup> Pope Francis suggests that Christians move beyond xenophobia, which can be defined as defensiveness, fear, indifference, and marginalization that lead to mistrust, rejection, and the exclusion of the other.<sup>34</sup> Immigrants do not have to be feared.

In Roman Catholic teaching, this has important consequences. While it draws from the wealth of the Bible, patristic studies, theology, and the ecclesial magisterium, Roman Catholic social teaching begins with the basic idea of human dignity based on the *imago Dei*.<sup>35</sup> In such a posture, the Roman Catholic Church stands for the inalienable rights of every child of God because they are created in the image of God.<sup>36</sup> This steers the church away from distancing the other, but rather moves them towards the other. We have more in common than that which differentiates us.

The Roman Catholic Church also experienced the influence of liberation theology. One of the controversial teachings of this doctrine was a conversion to the poor. Pentecostals may be able to relate to this because in this faith tradition, there is an emphasis on post-conversion experiences. One such experience is sanctification. Sanctification is not merely a moralistic therapeutic deism. Rather, sanctification seeks to steer human beings into proper relationship with God *and* with their neighbor. The Christian faith is a relational faith where sanctification moves a person to have concern for one’s neighbor. While Pentecostals question a conversion to become poor because of connotations that make them fearful of Marxism, the concept of post-conversion experiences includes dreams, visions, tongues, and a conversion to serve fellow human beings. We see this as a calling to ministry.

Another way Pentecostals can relate to the conversion to the poor is through a Pentecostal discussion of the affections. One of those things that sanctification produces is the right orientation towards others. The New Testament, for example, refers to “neighbor” and not “the other.”

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<sup>33</sup> Jorge E. Castillo Guerra, “Contributions of the Social Teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on Migration,” *Exchange* 44 (2015): 404.

<sup>34</sup> Guerra, “Contributions of the Social Teaching,” 405.

<sup>35</sup> Guerra, “Contributions of the Social Teaching,” 416.

<sup>36</sup> Guerra, “Contributions of the Social Teaching,” 416.

Everyone is our neighbor. In a discussion on immigration, Pentecostals must create a holy space for a conversation to speak to the other, or the neighbor, in more just and nuanced way. The matter of the issue is a change in posture so that one may approach one's neighbor and not run away in fear from the stranger. It seems that the US church is asking, "Who is my neighbor?" much like the lawyer asked Jesus. Through the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus highlighted a different approach to the other.

The issue of *imago Dei* has been addressed by Pentecostals, albeit in limited ways. In the 1960s, Pentecostals were wrestling with many issues related to civil rights. The Church of God (Cleveland, TN) adopted a resolution in 1964 that addressed the issue of Human Rights.<sup>37</sup> The immediate context of the resolution was turbulent. On June 11, 1963, Gov. George C. Wallace blocked a doorway to prohibit two Black students from registering at the University of Alabama. On August 28 of the same year, Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. On September 15, the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, was bombed, killing four young Black girls: Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Carol Denise McNair. The following year, in 1964, the Church of God passed a resolution for human rights. That same year, there were several marches and protests for civil rights. The most notorious was in St. Augustine, Florida, where many members of the Ku Klux Klan counter protested a civil rights march. There were other marches in and around New York City, where Martin Luther King, Jr. reiterated his stance on nonviolent peaceful resistance.

The resolution states the following:

#### HUMAN RIGHTS (1964)

**WHEREAS** the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is relevant to the problem of human rights; and,

**WHEREAS** the issue of human rights focuses upon the integrity of our democracy; and,

**WHEREAS** Christian obedience to the law of love requires a concern for one's neighbor is plainly enjoined in Scripture; and,

**WHEREAS** no Christian can manifest a passive attitude when the rights of others are jeopardized;

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<sup>37</sup> <https://churchofgod.org/resolutions/>



**BE IT RESOLVED** that the Church of God continue to create a climate of informed and spiritual opinion, and,

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that we identify a basic premise on which concerned opinion must rest. That premise, undergirded by the dignity and worth of every individual, assures all Americans the right to full citizenship. In particular this means that no American should, because of his race, or religion, be deprived of his right to worship, vote, rest, eat, sleep, be educated, live, and work on the same basis as other citizens; and,

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that Christian love and tolerance are incompatible with race prejudice and hatred; and,

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Church of God—recognizing that moral problems are ultimately solved by changing the heart of the individual by the power of the Holy Ghost, resulting in a love for all men—supports that which assures all people those freedoms guaranteed in our Constitution; and,

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the church be urged to continue to practice the love and brotherhood it preaches (50th A., 1964, pp. 67, 68).

The resolution is based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in line with Pentecostal sentiments of the authority of Scripture and the primacy of Divine Revelation. But the resolution points to an affective dimension towards human dignity: Christians must obey the law of love, especially where it requires the love of one's neighbor. The resolution repeats that no Christian can manifest a passive attitude when the rights of others are jeopardized. It also exhorts the membership that they must be informed and that they must continue to express love among all people.

This resolution demonstrates thinking about the issue of human rights, but it is limited to the context that all *Americans* are ensured their right to full citizenship. We now live in an increasingly globalized world and migrant caravans lead us to think about the limits and non-limitations of US citizenship compared to non-US citizens. Nevertheless, the basic assumption that this resolution describes is the dignity and worth of every individual. If the dignity and worth of every individual is extended to all human beings, then we must also discuss how this is applied across national, cultural, and ethnic boundaries. Furthermore, this also speaks to the issue that every individual deserves due process if they come to the border and petition for asylum.

## The Holy Family

Another important theme for consideration is the flight to Egypt of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus in Matthew 2. In Roman Catholic theology, there is a publication called *Exsul Familia Nazarethana*, a Papal Encyclical by Pope Pius XII of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>38</sup> This statement regards emigration as a natural right. For theologians like Castillo Guerra, the experience of the holy family “makes them a comforting model for all of those who, ‘whether compelled by fear of persecution or by want, are forced to leave their native land, their beloved parents and relatives, their close friends, to seek a foreign soil.’”<sup>39</sup> Pope Francis picked up on this and stated: “Our theology is a theology of migrants. Because we are all, since the call to Abraham, with all the migrations of the people of Israel, and Jesus himself, was a refugee, an immigrant, and existentially, by virtue of our faith, we are migrants.”<sup>40</sup>

*Exsul Familia Nazarethana* presents the holy family as an archetype for every refugee and, in this case, the migrant caravans. The passage in Matthew 2 highlights persecution and one’s safety as legitimate reasons to emigrate. Castillo Guerra further states that this passage implicitly demonstrates that crossing borders is a right when a life is being threatened.<sup>41</sup>

Another important reflection on the *Exsul Familia Nazarethana* is Christological in nature. Jesus partook of the immigrant experience. This immigrant experience applies to different parts of Jesus’ identity. For example, Jesus emigrated from the Father as a part of his plan of salvation. In this manner, Jesus Christ bore all sorts of difficulties, sorrows and grief through his *kenosis* and incarnation. Furthermore, Jesus’ humanity was real and, as such, is able to identify with all of humanity’s sufferings. Since he was present in the suffering, through his emigration, he paved the way for humanity for salvation because he precedes humanity in it.<sup>42</sup> It can be stated that in his *kenosis*, Jesus shared the pain of those who forcefully left their own territory and those who are in the midst of a migratory journey.<sup>43</sup> This is something that

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<sup>38</sup> Pius XII, “*Exsul Familia Nazarethana* Apostolic Constitution,” (1952), accessed March 17, 2021, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius12/p12exsul.htm>.

<sup>39</sup> Guerra, “Contributions of the Social Teaching,” 417.

<sup>40</sup> Cekiera, “Anti-Refugee Attitudes,” 13.

<sup>41</sup> Guerra, “Contributions of the Social Teaching,” 418.

<sup>42</sup> Guerra, “Contributions of the Social Teaching,” 418.

<sup>43</sup> Guerra, “Contributions of the Social Teaching,” 418.

Hebrews communicates to us: “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16, NIV).

### **Resolution of 1990**

The Church of God (Cleveland, TN) also produced a resolution on immigration in 1990. In this resolution it recognized social, political, and economic circumstances that have caused strife in various nations around the world. For the church, immigration presents an evangelistic and discipleship challenge. The resolution also states that the church must exemplify love and compassion towards the newcomers and, furthermore, these new arrivals were to be received with open fellowship. In this resolution it also states that the Church of God had to be aware of the needs of immigrants, both physical and spiritual. It even suggests building a liaison between sending and receiving countries.

Through this resolution and this liaison, there should be dialogue and conversations about the causes of immigration and working for a better future in the sending countries. There must be continued and sustained dialogue about the conditions which force people from their own home. The resolution states that the church must develop leaders from each culture, be sensitive to language, and plant churches among immigrants, all the while acknowledging and recognizing cultural differences.

### **Resolution of 2012**

The Church of God produced another resolution on immigration in 2012. In this affirmation, every human being is created in the image and likeness of God. It also recognized different biblical passages that are related to immigration. For example, Abraham, Sarah, and the patriarchs were strangers and pilgrims on earth (Hebrews 11:9,13). It also recognized that people in the biblical narratives lived as immigrants, whether they were deported or in exile. When God led His people of Israel out of Egypt, he specifically instructed them that they were never to forget that they had been strangers in Egypt (Exodus 22:21; Leviticus 19:33, 34). The biblical passages remind us that God “loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.” Therefore, the resolution reminds the

church that God's redeemed children were told what God had done for them in exile, and they were to "therefore love the stranger" (Deuteronomy 10:18, 19). The story of the immigrant also provides a typology for the redemption of believers in the New Testament. The Israelites fled Egypt, and this foreshadows the redemption for believers in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 10:1-11).

The resolution reminds the reader that the New Testament opens with Matthew 2 where the Holy Family fled to Egypt with their newborn son. Jesus himself was a wandering alien, and a refugee because his own land was not safe.<sup>44</sup> Jesus' own teaching reiterated the command to love and care for the stranger, a criterion by which we shall be judged: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt 25:35). Paul also stated an absolute equality of all people before God: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). In Christ, the human race is one before God, equal in dignity and rights.

But the Church of God also made a connection with the sanctuary that the Holy Family sought in Egypt.

WHEREAS, the family of Jesus sought sanctuary in the foreign nation of Egypt when Herod determined to kill the child who was born to be the Christ (Matthew 2), and Jesus revealed that He will judge His brothers and sisters by his words, "I was a stranger, and you took me in," and, "inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:35, 40);

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT, the Church of God reaffirms its commitment to the following principles of a just process for immigration: "that immigrants be treated with respect and mercy by churches; that governments develop structures that safeguard and monitor national borders with efficiency and respect for human dignity; that governments establish more functional legal mechanisms for the annual entry of a reasonable number of immigrant workers and families; that governments recognize the central importance of the family in society by reconsidering the number and categories of visas available for family reunification; that governments establish a sound, equitable process toward earned legal status for currently undocumented

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Betz, United Conference of Catholic Bishops. "Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration and the Movement of Peoples," accessed January 28, 2021, <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/catholic-teaching-on-immigration-and-the-movement-of-peoples>.

immigrants; that governments legislate fair labor and civil laws for all; and that immigration enforcement be conducted in ways that recognize the importance of due process of law (from Memo on “Immigration Concerns,” April 30, 2010).

This last statement reflects the difficulty of the issue. First, there must be efficiency and respect for human dignity. However, the resolution also shows the hope for legal mechanisms for the annual entry of a reasonable number of immigrant workers. At the same time, there is a hope that governments establish a sound, equitable process toward earned legal status for undocumented immigrants. This is the place of tension that there is more need for creativity. There is the need for due process and the rule of law, but there are mechanisms in the US for asylum that have produced a backlog at the border that denies people due process.

## **The Common Good**

According to Castillo Guerra, there is a third locus of reflection for Roman Catholic theology. In this locus, theological reflection appears to take a step back and see a greater panorama that undergirds concern for immigrants in the common good. It considers a theology of creation which itself is a gift for the wellbeing of all.

Castillo Guerra then underscores the way this theology informs a Christian understanding of the state. First, there are positive aspects of migration that must foster welcoming policies. Second, the state has authority to dictate policy as need be, but they must “exercise their authority in such a way to strike a balance between the satisfaction of their own needs and the needs of the foreigners, so access is not denied to impoverished persons born in other places.”<sup>45</sup>

When it comes to the migrant caravans, in the eyes of Roman Catholic social teaching, “The right to state sovereignty is relativized by the tradition’s primary commitment to protecting human dignity.”<sup>46</sup> In other words, nations may set limits and look at numbers. But powerful nations also have an obligation to accommodate migrant flows. The

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<sup>45</sup> Guerra, “Contributions of the Social Teaching,” 418.

<sup>46</sup> J. D. Long García, “The Migrant Caravan through the Eyes of Catholic Social Teaching” (October 23, 2018), accessed January 28, 2021, <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2018/10/23/migrant-caravan-through-eyes-catholic-social-teaching>. See also, Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano (CELAM), Puebla: La evangelización en el presente y en el futuro de América Latina, Madrid: bac 1979, no. 470, 474-475..

right to asylum must not be denied when people's lives are genuinely threatened.<sup>47</sup> This is precisely the core issue: most of the migrants that are now arriving in caravans are fleeing violence and situations that have produced genuine fear of losing one's life. There are inhumane conditions that have produced choking poverty and hunger. The countries the immigrants are coming from are beset by the world's highest murder rates, deaths linked to drug trafficking, organized crime, and endemic poverty.<sup>48</sup> For these reasons, the value of securing borders must be weighed against the rights of asylum seekers to find protection and the obligations of a humane approach to fellow human beings. There is a primordial and critical assumption that must be made about the migrant caravans: these are human beings created in the image of God.

I must also state that undocumented immigration is not to be celebrated. There are desperate circumstances that led people to make a difficult choice. Immigrants are created in the image of God and their cultures are beautiful; but there must also be work so that people do not have to leave their homelands. In the case of Central America, poverty, violence, and misery continue to fester. As a consequence, people will be on the move as adverse conditions exist in their countries.

## **A Final Concern**

As I have made the case for due process for migrant caravans, I want to also take a look at the other side of the issue. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops stated: "While people have the right to move, no country has the duty to receive so many immigrants that its social and economic life are jeopardized."<sup>49</sup> Through this statement, the US Bishops made their point that immigration control in itself is not evil. There are many Christians in the US that wish to have secure borders out of a genuine concern for the common good and compassion for the poor already in their own country. However, I add the caveat that this thought cannot collapse to inaction, nor should it become a closed system where there is no room. An enduring image about what is done

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<sup>47</sup> García, "The Migrant Caravan."

<sup>48</sup> García, "The Migrant Caravan."

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Betz, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops "Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration and the Movement of Peoples," accessed March 3, 2021, <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/catholic-teaching-on-immigration-and-the-movement-of-peoples>.

to “the least of these” is when the Holy Family was turned away because there was no room for them at the inn.

This brings us to the final point: a country must regulate its borders with justice and mercy.<sup>50</sup> A nation does not exist solely for the benefit of its own people. There must be a commitment to the needs of all human beings. Human beings need shelter, food, medical services, and basic wellbeing.<sup>51</sup> A nation can limit immigration, but it must seek to do so with justice, mercy, and the common good, and not merely from self-interest.<sup>52</sup> It must also keep in mind the value of family and not force married couples and children to be separated.<sup>53</sup> Again, Scripture tells us that our judgment will be based on our treatment to what we did to the least of these (Matthew 25:40-45). We cannot excuse the inhumane treatment of immigrants by claiming that their lack of legal status deprives them of basic human dignity and decency bestowed by God.

## Conclusion

We live in difficult times. It is a day and age where people and groups of people arrive on the margins, and we decide how to encounter them. We *must* be willing to dialogue about those issues that divide us. The problem in the United States is that the only choices at the moment are open borders without scrutinization or completely closed borders. Both of these options are extremes to be avoided. There must be more creative options for the church to address migrant caravans.

For example, many who come here are late adolescent or young adult males. Perhaps these individuals can earn their citizenship through service options in the United States. Also, many cities in the Rust Belt are in decline. Perhaps these cities can take in immigrants in order to rebuild their economies. There are options, and there are conditions for citizenship. But there need to be creative ways to think about earning citizenship even for those who have come in a migrant caravan. The issue now is due process. Perhaps the borders can begin processing asylum applications and quickly make decisions on cases based on their merit. Perhaps other countries can be charged from their foreign aid the expenses of deporting immigrants who do not have defensible cases.

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<sup>50</sup> Betz, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

<sup>51</sup> Betz, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

<sup>52</sup> Betz, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

<sup>53</sup> Betz, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

There are many options to be discussed, but it is blocked in the political arena by extremist forms of thinking. The migrant caravans are composed of human beings created in the image of God. Many of them are already Roman Catholic and/or Evangelical Christians. Culturally, they have similarities to the North American way of life. Their track record shows lower levels of crime, the willingness to work, and the capability to become contributing members of North American society.

There are ways to work through these issues. How we encounter the stranger, and what we do in their presence is of utmost importance. Migrants traveling in caravans are created in the image of God. They are examples that harken us back to the exile of the Holy Family. Let us encounter the least of these with justice, love, mercy, grace, and compassion. May the Spirit of Truth lead us as we encounter our neighbor.

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## **Pentecostalism: A New but Big Kid on the Global Christian Block**

### **Part II of “Global Christianity Today, the Locus of Pentecostal-Charismatic Faith, and Theological Education for Tomorrow”**

Wonsuk Ma

**Abstract:** As the second part of the series, this study surveys five major Christian families and their position in global Pentecostalism in the wider Christian context. The next discussion presents an overview of Pentecostal Christianity in each continent, observing the widening gap between the global North and South. The last major part probes the causes of the exponential growth of Pentecostal Christianity.

**Keywords:** global Pentecostalism, denominations, Pentecostal expansion

### **Introduction**

Through the previous study, the following two global trends emerged:

- In its two-millennium history, global Christianity has made almost a three-quarters circle around its starting point: Jerusalem. Its counter-clockwise move of the statistical center has accelerated dramatically since the sixteenth century. It has grown steadily, despite three setbacks, toward the one-third of the world population;
- Roughly in every thousand years, global Christianity oscillates between the South and the North. Since the early 1980s, more Christians have lived in the global South for the second time. In the previous century, the churches in the North (or West) have declined while those in the South have increased. The exponential growth in Africa and Asia has contributed to the net gain of global Christianity.

The present study explores the unique locus of Pentecostal-Charismatic faith and communities in the context of global Christianity. I will use the same time frame for the examination of this growing ecclesial family:

from 1900 to 2050. The period works well as the modern Pentecostal-Charismatic movement began around the beginning of the twentieth century. The study, after a recap of the first survey, will begin with an overview of each of the major ecclesial families today. The main focus will be how each community has fared in the twentieth century and where the trend will bring us by 2050. It is followed by a close look at the growth of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity. The final section explores several key factors that cause such growth.

Before moving forward, however, it will be helpful to clarify how this study uses several terms. Up to this point, I have been using “Pentecostal-Charismatic” as an umbrella term to encompass the full spectrum of Spirit-centered Christianity. The commonly accepted categorization, despite disagreements in details, of this Christian mega-block, includes: Classical or denominational Pentecostals; Charismatics or Neo-Pentecostals found both in the existing churches and independent; and Neo-Charismatics ranging widely from the Third Wave, post-denominational, and many independent churches such as the African Initiated Churches and Chinese house churches.<sup>1</sup> I will use “Pentecostal” or “Pentecostalism” as an encompassing expression, almost interchangeably with Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity. I am aware of the challenges of this three-prong categorization and its designations. However, being an overview study, they will serve the present purpose.

## **Christian Families in Our Days<sup>2</sup>**

There are various ways to categorize the major Christian groups today, but most follow what the *Encyclopedia* has adopted: Catholic, Protestants, Independents, Orthodox, Evangelicals, and Pentecostal/Charismatics. This section will examine the present-day state of each major Christian family (or mega-block) by numbers, except Pentecostal/Charismatics. In the course of analysis, the discussion will include the distribution of the particular church tradition between the global South and North.

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<sup>1</sup> For the categorization, Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 26.

<sup>2</sup> A helpful book to trace the historical development of each ecclesial tradition is Douglas Jacobsen, *The World's Christians: Who They Are, Where They Are, and How they got There*, 2nd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021).

### *Catholicism*

In 2020, the Catholic faith claimed 1,240 million adherents worldwide, representing 16.0% of the world population and almost half of the world's Christians (49.2%).<sup>3</sup> The church achieved a surprising growth throughout the twentieth century from 266 million in 1900 to 1.2 billion in 2020. Its 1.36% annual growth rate in the century was higher than that of the world population (1.34%) and of global Christianity (1.28%).

However, the Catholic annual growth rate between 2000 and 2020 slipped to 0.96%, way below the world population growth (1.20%) and the overall Christian growth (1.19%). The gap between the global North and South consistently widens: in 1900, 72.6% of Catholic believers were found in the global North (hence, 27.4% in the South). In 2050, it is projected that only 20% of Catholics will reside in the North (thus, 80% in the South). The *Encyclopedia* notes that the Catholic Charismatic movement flourishes in the South, such as Brazil, Nigeria, and the Philippines. The El Shaddai, a Catholic Charismatic group in the Philippines, claimed over eleven million members throughout the country and more than a dozen nations among Filipino immigrants, exerting significant influence on society.<sup>4</sup>

### *Independents*

This group, defined as “Christians who do not self-identify with the other major traditions” and characterized as either “breakaway movements from existing denominations or entirely independent of Western Christianity,” numbered 391 million (or 15.5% of the world Christians) in 2020.<sup>5</sup> As a recent phenomenon, in the first half of the twentieth century, this category was dominated by Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses. But in 2050, 85.5% of Independents will be found in the global South. During the twentieth century, its annual growth rate was 3.53%, second only to Pentecostals/Charismatics (6.3%). But by the end of 2020, it slipped to 1.61%, after Pentecostals/Charismatics (1.89%) and Evangelicals (1.80%).<sup>6</sup>

The most prominent changes include: the rise of the African Independent (or Instituted) churches and the re-appearance and

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<sup>3</sup> Figures are from *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 21.

<sup>4</sup> *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 642. For an in-depth study, see Katharine L. Wiegale, *Investing in Miracles: El Shaddai and the Transformation of Popular Catholicism in the Philippines* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Figures are from *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 22.

<sup>6</sup> *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 20.

explosive growth of Chinese Christianity. By 2050, most of the 236.7 million African Independents (or 38.1% of the world's Independents) will consist of African Independent believers. The three largest independent churches are also found in Africa today. Chinese Christianity, resurrected from the brutal Cultural Revolution and its continuous growth, has stunned the world. Although notoriously difficult to count, the *Encyclopedia* projects 115 million of 200 million Chinese Christians will be Independents by 2050.<sup>7</sup>

### *Orthodox*

The smallest among the five mega-blocks of global Christianity, the Orthodox, numbered 292 million (or 11.6% of world Christians) in 2020. Its annual growth rate lags behind all other groups (0.63% for 2000-2020, compared with 1.19% for whole Christianity). The church has been chiefly identified with ethnicity and language, developing unique traditions apart from other Orthodox groups. By its territorial nature, it has been hesitant to evangelize (or proselytize).<sup>8</sup> It has been subjected to a stream of global and local challenges, including the onslaught of Islam and socio-political pressures such as the Armenian genocide (1914-23) and the Communist rule over Eastern and Central Europe, including Russia. Its challenging future is also illustrated by the contexts of the three largest Orthodox nations: Egypt, Cyprus, and Syria, two of which are found in the majority of Islamic states. The Middle East, the largest Orthodox region, has been losing its members to immigration due to socio-religious pressures. Despite its significant presence in the global South, Orthodox Christianity remains as the only majority Christian family with 73.1% in the northern continents in 2020. By 2050, the global gap will narrow to 61.8 for the North and 30.9% for the South.<sup>9</sup> In recent years, however, Orthodox mission academics and practitioners across different Orthodox traditions added “mission” to the list of Orthodox theology, spirituality, and church life.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 195.

<sup>8</sup> *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 23.

<sup>9</sup> *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 23.

<sup>10</sup> Petrous Vassiliadis, ed., *Orthodox Perspectives on Mission*, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2013). The full text is available on [https://www.ocms.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Orthodox\\_Perspectives\\_on\\_Mission-Final-WM.pdf](https://www.ocms.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Orthodox_Perspectives_on_Mission-Final-WM.pdf), accessed on March 26, 2021.

## *Protestants*

Tracing its root to the sixteenth-century Reformation, the historic Protestant Churches include Reformed, Anglican, Lutheran, and various “united” churches, but exclude Pentecostals, Evangelicals, and Independents. They numbered 586 million or 23.2% of the world’s Christians in 2020, ranking the third-largest after Catholics and Pentecostals. Its 2000-2020 annual growth rate (1.6%, vis-à-vis 1.2% for the Christian average) is higher than that of the twentieth century (1.17%), which is encouraging. This upward trajectory in recent decades has contributed to the rapid southward shift: at the beginning of the past century, the North-South distribution was 92.7% to 7.3%. In 2020, the ratio changed to 24.7% and 75.3%, further widening to 15.9% and 84.1% by 2050.<sup>11</sup>

At the center of the radical shift are two factors: the growth of African Protestantism and the decline in Europe. The Protestant population in Africa is expected to reach 55% of the world’s Protestant population by 2050, while Europe accounts for less than 9% (radically slipping from 63% in 1990). Also notable is the fast internal shift from Catholicism to Protestantism in Latin America. In 1990, Latin American Protestant believers accounted for only 1.2% of the world’s Protestant population, which grew to 10.9% in 2020. The European and North American Protestants were the main missionary force in the nineteenth and twentieth century, organizing the historic Edinburgh Missionary Conference (1910), which resulted in the International Missionary Council and eventually the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches. Against the prevailing ecumenical theology in the North, many Protestants in the global South maintain a more conservative theological stance. The Nigerian Anglicans, for example, now provide leadership for the world’s evangelical Anglicans, standing against same-sex marriage, which the majority of Western Anglicans have adopted. Through immigration and mission activities, the Protestant churches in the global South have expanded their influence on global Christianity.

## *Evangelicals*

Evangelicalism is a product of eighteenth-century Europe through a series of revivals. It is theologically conservative and evangelistically committed. Pentecostals, often considered to be part of Evangelicalism, are treated separately in the *Encyclopedia*. Claiming 297 million (or 15.4%

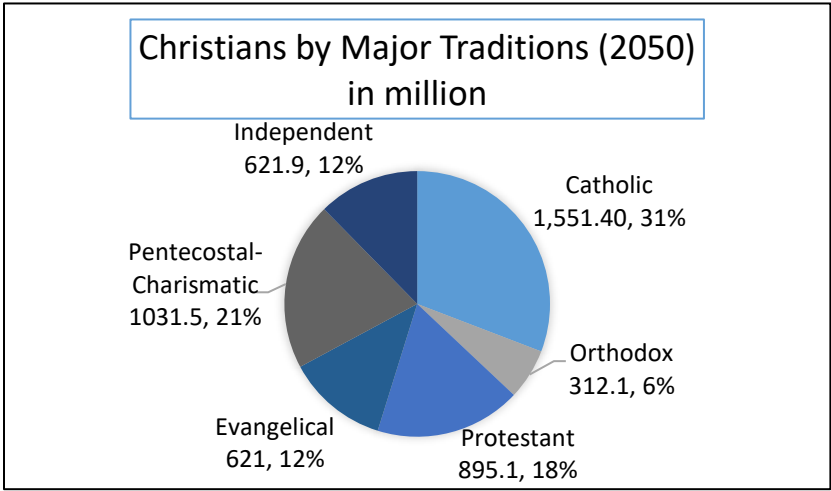
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<sup>11</sup> Figures are from *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 24.

of the world’s Christians) in 2020, Evangelicals are the fifth largest among the Christian families. However, its annual growth rate in the first two decades of the century was the second-highest (1.80%) after the Pentecostal-Charismatics. Naturally, the group is expected to continue its growth to reach 621.0 million by 2050 (or 6.4% of the world’s population, compared to 5.0% in 2020).<sup>12</sup>

Like most global Christian church families, the southward shift of Evangelicals has been steady. In 1900, the global South amounted to only 7.8% of the world’s Evangelicals, which dramatically increased to 72.3% in 2000, and is expected to reach 82.3% by 2050. Like Pentecostal-Charismatics, Evangelicals in theological orientation are found in many ecclesial bodies. For example, the largest Evangelical believers in Great Britain were found within the Church of England. Many historic Protestants maintain Evangelical theology in the global South, thus, exercising Evangelical spirituality and mission. At the heart of the growth and expansion of Evangelicalism lies a commitment to evangelism. The Lausanne Movement has brought Evangelicals together for mission and evangelization from the last quarter of the twentieth century.

*Summary*

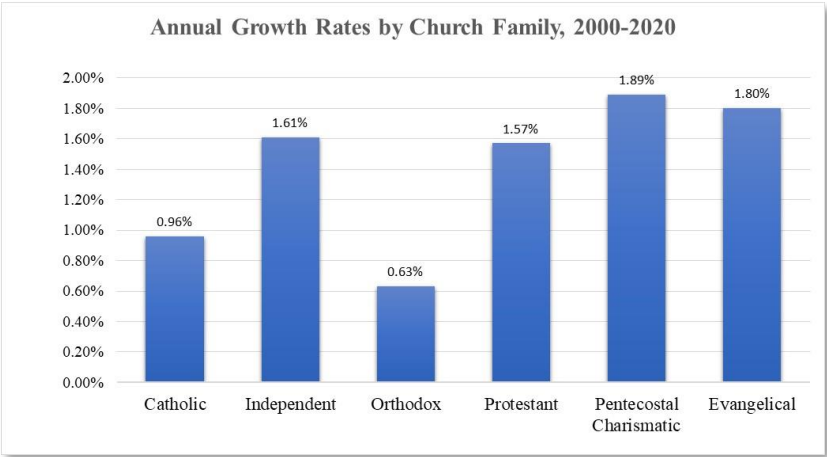


The 2050 projection of the major Christian traditions still puts Catholics (31% of the world’s Christians) as the largest family, followed by the Pentecostal-Charismatic group (21%), then Protestant (18%),

<sup>12</sup> Figures are from *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 25.

Independent (12%), Evangelical (12%), and Orthodox (6%).<sup>13</sup> One may divide global Christianity into two simple blocks, Historic (including Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant) and Evangelical (including Pentecostal-Charismatic and most Independents).

By comparing the annual growth rates, two conclusions may be reached. Firstly, the Historic churches’ annual growth rates, except Protestants, fared below the average Christian growth rate of 1.19% between 2000-2020. Its simple average of the annual growth rates was 1.05%, well below the Christian average. The “Evangelical” group recorded the simple average of 1.77%, serving as the growth engine of global Christianity. That means the latter’s growth must more than compensate the losses by the former. Secondly, the southward tilt of Christianity is attested to in every Christian tradition from the twentieth century forward. Today more adherents of each tradition are found in the global South except for the Orthodox Church. And this southward shift is expected to continue in the foreseeable future, impacting theologization, mission, and leadership.



**Pentecostalism in Our Time**

Empowered21 commissioned the Johnson-Zurlo team of the latest edition of the *Encyclopedia* to put the relevant data to produce *Introducing Spirit-Empowered Christianity*.<sup>14</sup> Hence, this section utilizes both

<sup>13</sup> *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 6.  
<sup>14</sup> Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, *Introducing Spirit-Empowered Christianity: The Global Pentecostal & Charismatic Movements in the 21st Century* (Tulsa, OK:

publications to draw a global and continental picture of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity in our time.

### *Growing in All Three Segments*

Johnson-Zurlo reports that Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity, which began at the turn of the last century, is “found in nearly every country of the world and span all Christian traditions.”<sup>15</sup> Its growth has been phenomenal: from about a million in 1900 to 442.7 million in 2000, 644.3 million in 2020, and expected to reach 1,031.5 million by 2050. Its 1.89% annual growth rate in the first two decades of the century is the highest among Christian traditions (as seen in the chart above), although sadly lower than that of Islam (1.93%). Pentecostalism is also the most “south-heavy” Christian family, with 86.2% of the world’s adherents being found in the global South in 2020, compared to 66.9% for world Christianity. To put this growth into perspective:

Over the period 1900–2020, Spirit-empowered Christianity grew at over four times the growth rate of both Christianity and the world’s population. From 2020–2050, it is expected to grow twice as fast as both.<sup>16</sup>

Accordingly, its share in global Christianity has significantly increased: 25.6% of the world’s Christians in 2020 and is expected to reach 30.2% by 2050. It is a staggering reality that close to one in every three Christians in the world will belong to this family. (But one should remember that a large number of Pentecostal/Charismatics are double-counted with various church traditions.)

The same book reports on the three Pentecostal segments and their developments. Classical Pentecostals commonly trace their origin to the turn of the twentieth-century outbreak of the Holy Spirit in North America.<sup>17</sup> Organized in various denominations with the Pentecostal World Fellowship as their global network as their global networks, they commonly consider speaking in tongues as the evidence of the Spirit baptism. Understandably, they have developed institutional structures, including for education and mission. However, they are the smallest among the three siblings. Charismatics began in the 1960s as believers in

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ORU Press, 2020). The references are from the special edition for the Ph.D. program, and the final printed version is expected in 2021.

<sup>15</sup> *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 26.

<sup>16</sup> Johnson and Zurlo, *Introducing*, 34.

<sup>17</sup> For an elaborate description and major denominations, see Johnson and Zurlo, *Introducing*, 49–73.



the existing (especially historic) denominations and experienced the work of the Holy Spirit similar to that of Classical Pentecostals. But they remained in their churches. Catholic Charismatics were by far the largest with the institutional support of the church.<sup>18</sup> The third segment is called by various names, Neo-Charismatics, Independent Charismatics, or Third Wave. Clustered among those who share similar historical and cultural roots, such as African Independent Churches, their spirituality and theology vary from one group to another.<sup>19</sup> By far the largest among the three, this segment is also the fastest growing. What binds these three into a global Christian tradition? Johnson and Zurlo contend for “family resemblance,” despite differences, which include the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, and the experiential nature of the Pentecostal tradition.<sup>20</sup> Empowered21, a global relational network embraces all the three streams of the Spirit-empowered movement.<sup>21</sup>

	1900	2020	2050	2020-50 annual growth rate
Classical Pentecostals	20,000	123.7 million	268.3 million	1.68%
Charismatics	12,000	203.7 million	393.2 million	1.28%
Neo-Charismatics	949,400	252.3 million	434.6 million	1.83%

### Continental Pictures

The Johnson-Zurlo book also presents the continental distribution of Spirit-empowered Christians,<sup>22</sup> another term they used to refer to Pentecostal/Charismatics. I also found the Edinburgh Companions to

<sup>18</sup> Johnson and Zurlo, *Introducing*, 74-90. Pope Francis celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the Catholic Charismatic movement in June 2017. See “On 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Catholic Charismatic Renewal, Francis focuses on ‘Reconciled Diversity’,” *The Catholic World Report* June 5, 2017 (<https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2017/06/05/on-50th-anniversary-of-catholic-charismatic-renewal-francis-focuses-on-reconciled-diversity/>), accessed on June 14, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Johnson and Zurlo, *Introducing*, 90-125.

<sup>20</sup> Johnson and Zurlo, *Introducing*, 14-33.

<sup>21</sup> Vinson Synan and Billy Wilson, *As the Waters Cover the Sea: The Story of Empowered21 and the Movement It Serves* (Tulsa, OK: Empowered Books, 2021), 71-148.

<sup>22</sup> Johnson and Zurlo, *Introducing*, 36-37, as well as *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3ed ed., 26.

global Christianity Series extremely rich and informative. Out of the projected ten volumes, ones in Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and West Asia, South and Central Asia, and East and Southeast Asia are now available. To appear in the near future are the volumes of Oceania, Latin America, North America, Western and Northern Europe, and Eastern and Southern Europe, as well as the compact version of the *Atlas*. Each volume includes a substantial study on Pentecostals/Charismatics,<sup>23</sup> and readers would benefit greatly from them. The following overview is to trace the growth of Spirit-empowered Christianity in each continent, the projections in 2050, and relevant issues.

As in global Christianity, Africa has excelled in leading the growth of global Pentecostalism. In 2020, its 230.2 million Pentecostals represented 17% of the total population. By 2050, with 450.7 million Pentecostal believers vis-à-vis the total African population will increase only 0.8% (that is, 17.8%). Between 2000 and 2020, the annual growth rate of African Pentecostalism was 2.80%. Although its annual growth rate between 2020-50 will slow down to 2.26%, it is still the highest among all the continents.<sup>24</sup> The general challenge is the reduction of African indigenous religionists, among whom Christian conversion has taken place. By 2050, 93.4% of Africans will be either Christian or Muslim, and Pentecostal growth will take place more by transfers between Christian denominations than conversion from other religions. At the same time, the increasing Pentecostalizing of various Christian traditions will bring renewal in vigor and missionary zeal, both within and without the continent.

Asian Pentecostalism is a relatively tiny minority in its vast population and overwhelming religions. In 2020, its 195.2 million Pentecostals-Charismatics accounted for only 2.7% of the population. By 2050, they are expected to grow to 214.6 million, representing 4.1%

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<sup>23</sup> All appearing in the Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity series published by Edinburgh University Press: Michael Adeleke Ogunewu and Ksaac Deji Ayegboyin, "Pentecostals/Charismatics," in *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. Kenneth R. Ross, J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, and Todd M. Johnson (2017), 314–26; Eric N. Newberg, "Pentecostals/Charismatics," in *Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*, ed. Kenneth R. Ross, Mariz Tadros, and Todd M. Johnson (2018), 293–300; Ivan Satyavrata, "Pentecostals and Charismatics," in *Christianity in South and Central Asia*, ed. Kenneth R. Ross, Daniel Jeyaraj, and Todd M. Johnson (2019), 287–300; Julie C. Ma, "Pentecostals and Charismatics," in *Christianity in East and Southeast Asia*, ed. Kenneth R. Ross, Francis D. Alvarez, and Todd M. Johnson (2020), 335–47.

<sup>24</sup> *WCE*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 8.

of the continent's population. The Pentecostal annual growth in the twentieth century was a staggering 10.43% (in part due to the rise of Chinese Christianity from the late 1970s), while that of the 2000-2020 period was 1.80%. The projected 2020-50 annual growth rate is 1.81%, a slight improvement from the 2020 figure.<sup>25</sup> A comparison between Asia and Africa (and later Latin America) is intriguing. With more than half of the African population expected to be Christian by 2050, the majority of the Pentecostal growth will take place either through biological growth or inter-church transfers. The drop in the annual growth rate suggests this. On the other hand, Asian Christianity (and Pentecostalism) lives with room for maximum growth, although the challenge of the organized and dominant religions remains formidable. As in Africa, the prevailing "evangelical" tendency of Asian Christianity helps the churches to become increasingly missional both within and without the continent. For example, the missionary activities of Chinese house church networks have been encouraging despite the harsh restrictions they face.

Latin America is the most "Christianized" continent, with 92.1% in 2020 in the global South. Therefore, one would expect that the Pentecostal growth takes place primarily through inter-church transfers. In 2020, its 195.2 million Pentecostals, including Catholic Charismatics, represented 29.4% of the total population. By 2050, with 243.2 million adherents, it will make up 31.2% of the population. This growth is taking place in the larger context where the Christian proportion in the population is steadily shrinking, 95.2% in 1900, 92.5% in 2000, and 90.2% in 2050.<sup>26</sup> For this reason, the contribution of Pentecostalism is crucial in renewing churches. The Latin American Catholic Church is an example. The Church lost a large number of its members to Protestant, Pentecostal, and Independent churches. Its 1900 share of 89.9% dropped to 76.4% of the continent's population in 2020. The number is expected to decrease further in 2050 (to 69.0%).<sup>27</sup> At the same time, the Catholic Charismatic movement has grown steadily. In a 2014 Pew survey, in every country, at least 20% of Catholics self-identified as Charismatic.<sup>28</sup> Also, for example, Brazil had the largest group of

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<sup>25</sup> *WCE*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 8.

<sup>26</sup> *WCE*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 14.

<sup>27</sup> *WCE*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 14. Also, Pew Research Center, "Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region" (November 13, 2014), 26, <https://www.pewforum.org/2014/11/13/religion-in-latin-america/>, accessed on July 1, 2021.

<sup>28</sup> "Religion in Latin America," 62, 64.

Pentecostal-Charismatic believers (108.0 million) in the world in 2020.<sup>29</sup> Latin American Christianity faces a formidable challenge, either to remain vibrant or to erode to a post-Christian era. And Pentecostals and Charismatics (including those in the Catholic Church) hold the key to the future.

Oceania is the smallest area in the global South. In 2020, with 4.5 million, Pentecostal-Charismatic believers accounted for 10.7% of 42.4 million people. This segment is expected to continue its growth to 6.6 million (or 11.6%). The region, however, follows the Western pattern rather than that of the global South. The Christian share of the population has steadily declined: from 92.6% (in 1970) and 78.0% (2000) to 65.1% in 2020. By 2050, Christians (34.5 million) will represent 60.5% of the population. This disappointing trend is well illustrated by the 2000-2020 annual growth rate of 0.63%, to be compared to the 1.54% population growth rate. Hence, the 2.08% annual growth rate of the Pentecostal-Charismatics in the same period places them as the leading player for future Christianity in the region.<sup>30</sup>

European Christianity has steadily declined in its share of the population. All the historic churches lost their members, except Independents and Pentecostals/Charismatics. For example, the Catholic Church declined from 44.7% of the population in 1900 to 34.0% in 2000, and to 30.1% by 2050. Pentecostals, however, tread an opposite trajectory: 0.8% in 1970, 2.5% in 2000, and 2.8% in 2020, and to reach 3.8% by 2050. This is an impressive performance. However, the overall picture of future Christianity is extremely challenging. While Christianity has consistently lost its members (94.5% in 1900 to 76.1% in 2020), Islam gained from 2.3% in 1900 to 7.2% in 2020, and to further claim 10.4% of the continent's population by 2050. Its annual growth rate in the 2000-20 period was 1.43% (to be compared to 0.11% for the population, 0.03% for whole Christianity, and 0.58% for Pentecostals/Charismatics.)<sup>31</sup> As in Islam, the majority of Pentecostals and Independents may be found among the fast-growing immigrant communities. Although still lagging far behind Islam in both the size and growth rates, these two groups (including Charismatics in the historic churches) still hold the future of European Christianity.

North America appears to repeat the European path. The Christian proportion of the population has consistently declined from 97.1% in

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<sup>29</sup> Johnson and Zurlo, *Introducing*, 27.

<sup>30</sup> The statistics are from *WCE*, 3ed ed., 18.

<sup>31</sup> *WCE*, 3rd ed., 12.

1900 to 81.2% in 2000, and 72.6% in 2020. The figure is expected to go down to 65.7% in 2500 further. Its 2000-2020 annual growth rate of 0.27% is less than one-third of the population growth rate of 0.83%. However, Pentecostals/Charismatics have fared encouragingly well. In 1970, they accounted for 6.3% of the population, 17.2% in 2000, and 18.4% in 2020 with 67.8 million adherents. In 2050, the rate is expected to reach 20.5% with 89.9 million. Its annual growth rate in 2020 (1.17%) is much higher than the population growth (0.83%). Indeed, only two Christian families recorded a higher growth rate than the population: Pentecostals/Charismatics and Orthodox (1.07%) in 2020. The growth rate of Evangelicals (0.83%) was by far with the population.<sup>32</sup> Historically, North America was a major birthplace of various Pentecostal “waves.” The Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles (1906-1909), along with other revivals in different parts of the world, developed the movement as an international phenomenon. The Charismatic movement among historic churches was birthed in this continent in the 1960s, and so was the Third Wave movement (1980s) as part of the Neo-Charismatic type of Pentecostalism. Thus, North American Pentecostalism has impacted the global shaping and spread of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity.

The following table presents the development of Pentecostalism in each region from 1900 through 2050.

	1900	2000	2050	2020-50 annual growth rate
Africa	901,000	132.5 million	450.7 million	2.26%
Asia	4,300	87.8 million	214.5 million	1.82%
Latin America	10,000	146.9 million	243.2 million	0.74%
Oceania	0	3.0 million	6.6 million	1.27%
Europe	20,000	18.8 million	27.4 million	0.88%
North America	46,100	53.7 million	89.0 million	0.91%
<b>World Total</b>	<b>981 million</b>	<b>442.7 million</b>	<b>1,031.5 million</b>	

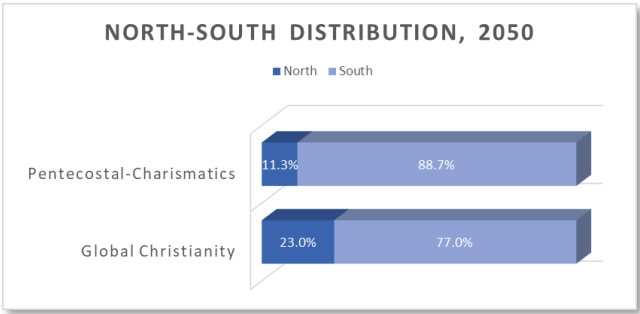
An observation may be made by comparing the 2050 projected annual growth rates. For the future of Christianity and Pentecostalism, Africa, Asia, and Oceania will lead the growth. They serve as the main

<sup>32</sup> *WCE*, 3ed ed., 16.

growth engine of Christianity and Pentecostalism both in the global South and the world. By and large, Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in these regions strive in religiously plural and socially challenging contexts. Any number below the continent’s population growth rate is considered a decline.

*North-South distribution*

One final note before we move to the next section is the North-South parity. In the earlier discussion, we observed that about one-third of global Christians are in the global North, and the other two-thirds in the South in 2020. By taking the 2050 projected figures, the global North will amount to 23.0% of the world’s Christians and 77.0% in the South. On the other hand, for global Pentecostalism, the North represents only 11.3%, while the South 88.7%. Pentecostal-Charismatic worship and spirituality have found incredible reception in the global South, including Latin America, which will enlarge this North-South disparity in the future.



**The Growth of Pentecostal Christianity: Meaning and Causes**

Much could be said about the contribution of Pentecostalism to global Christianity. But we limit the discussion according to our interest: its role in the growth of global Christianity, which will also inform the agenda-setting for Pentecostal theological education.

The single and most valuable contribution of Pentecostal Christianity is its numerical growth. By 2050, more than 30 percent of Christians will be Pentecostals/Charismatics. Taking a close look at global Christianity in the twentieth century would reveal that it reached 34.8% of the world’s population in 1910.<sup>33</sup> However, until 2015, it hit bottom (or

<sup>33</sup> Figures for this section are from *WCE*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 7.

32.2% of the world's population) before recovering to 32.3% in 2020 and increasing to 35.0% in 2050. During the last century, Catholic (1.36%), Protestant (1.17%), Orthodox (0.80%), and Evangelical (1.21%) Churches recorded lower annual growth rates than the population (1.34%). On the contrary, the Independent (3.53%) and Pentecostal/Charismatic (6.30%) Churches grew three and more than five times, respectively, than the Christian average growth rate (1.28%) during the same period. Had not the two Christian blocks been outpacing every religious group, including Islam (1.88% per annum), global Christianity in the beginning of the twenty-first century could have gone below the 30% line. However, Agnostics (5.66%) and Atheists (6.65%) topped the impressive growth rate of Pentecostal/Charismatic churches, presenting a common challenge for all religious groups. Their “growth” is more than new believers in local congregations of Pentecostal Christianity on the global scene. The Charismatic faith has spread deep and wide among non-Pentecostal denominations, renewing and revitalizing them. Many agree that the Charismatic movement in the Roman Catholic Church played an essential role in its growth in the twentieth century (1.36%, compared to the population growth rate of 1.34%). With the alarming 0.96% annual growth rate for the first two decades of this century, rekindling Charismatic spirituality may be one answer to the Catholic's future. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration that Pentecostals/Charismatics have a decisive role to play in the future of global Christianity.

There are several characteristics of Pentecostal Christianity that fueled the exponential growth as we observed.<sup>34</sup> They form the unique gift to the continuing growth of global Christianity in the coming years. Later, when we discuss the future of Pentecostal theological education, the preservation and development of these unique characteristics will be a main task.

### *One Basic Lesson: “Where Christians Are, so is Christianity”*

The number-crunching exercise that this study has engaged with reminds us of one unchanging truth: “Without followers of Christ, there is no religion called Christianity.” Thus, the numbers matter; it concerns life and death for any belief system. Christianity in the Middle East (or West Asia) and North Africa is a telling historical lesson. West Asia was

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<sup>34</sup> For a full treatment, see Allan Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity*, Oxford Studies in World Christianity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

the birthplace of Jesus, his disciples, the church, and the Christian faith. From Jerusalem, the faith spread in every direction through the main arteries of the Roman Empire. North Africa was one region where this new faith reached in the first century. By the fourth century, Christianity was the majority religion. And the region was a theological center that shaped Christian faith through such figures as Augustine of Hippo, Origen and Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian and Cyprian of Carthage. However, the birth and expansion of Islam from the sixth century has impacted Christianity in the region with a steady decline. The notable deterioration of the situation occurred between 1970 and 2015. It decreased from 6.8% of the region's population in 1970 to 5.2% in 2015. During the same period, Islam increased from 87.3% to 91.5%.<sup>35</sup> Despite the region's essential role in the development of Christianity, its presence is only minimal except for historical traditions. The churches in the global North also remind us that the empty churches mean no more Christianity, even if the rich legacy and historic buildings remain. In the same vein, the more people are in the church, the stronger becomes the Christian religion. Only when there are "warm bodies" in the church can we talk about its mission, community service, and public theology. The church, theologically speaking, is the gathering of people with Christ as its head. Reversely, without people, Christ is not present, and thus, no church. Thus, Christian numerical growth is the priority for its future existence and mission.

### *Empowerment: Power for Witnessing*

At the center of unique Pentecostal spirituality is the belief that the Holy Spirit fills or baptizes the believers with "power" to be effective witnesses (Acts 1:8). This distinct belief among Pentecostals/Charismatics is considered a watershed moment of their faith, often clearly distinguishing between the "before" and "after" of it. Many testify to a whole-person effect and transformation through the baptism or infilling of the Holy Spirit. Unlike the historical teachings of the Holy Spirit as a "shy member" of the Trinity, illuminating the believers with truth, for the Pentecostals, this experience is accompanied by radical experiences such as speaking in tongues, healing, deep repentance, elated joy, and many more. Among them, tongue-speaking

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<sup>35</sup> Gina A. Zurlo, "A Demographic Profile of Christianity in North Africa and West Asia," in *Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*, edited by Kenneth R. Ross, Mariz Tadros, and Todd M. Johnson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 3-4.



stands out to the point that most Classical Pentecostal denominations adopted it as the “initial physical evidence” of the Spirit baptism.<sup>36</sup> Beyond its impact on the believers in their Christian life, Pentecostals/Charismatics believe that this experience is for all believers, and its purpose is for “the enduement of power for life and service.”<sup>37</sup> The Book of Acts chronicles the spread of the Christian faith throughout the Roman Empire through the Spirit-empowered apostles, leaders, and ordinary believers. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is also the occasion for many to experience various spiritual gifts. The Church of Pentecost of Ghana believes that the Spirit baptism brings “the operation of the gifts and fruit of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>38</sup> This experience and belief affect the believers to develop a positive outlook for their life, with meaning, purpose, and discipline. One example is Miller and Yamamori’s observation of the active social engagement among Pentecostals in the global South.<sup>39</sup> However, the most evident outcome is the enthusiastic evangelism by Pentecostal believers.

### *Everyone’s Called to Witness*

This missionally oriented pneumatology has radically expanded the players in ministry from the exclusive few (or the clergy) to every believer (or laity). This democratization is a natural consequence of the experience of and belief in the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Its empowering effect presumes that the recipients have been called, and they are sent out with the Spirit’s empowerment. This grassroots nature results in millions of enthusiastic evangelists, both in word and work. Equally significant is the entrepreneurial spirit of the empowered believers opening up their homes for Bible studies and home church. Many storefront churches throughout Africa are often led by school teachers, business people, and government workers with no formal theological education. For example, Christ’s Commission Fellowship in Manila was founded in 1984 by Peter Tan-Chi, a prominent

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<sup>36</sup> Assemblies of God, “Assemblies of God 16 fundamental Truths,” <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Statement-of-Fundamental-Truths#8>, accessed on July 23, 2021.

<sup>37</sup> “Assemblies of God 16 fundamental Truths”

<sup>38</sup> Church of Pentecost, “Tenets,” <https://thecophq.org/beliefs-tenets/>, assessed on July 23, 2021.

<sup>39</sup> Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

businessman. Now, with a membership of 75,000, the church is reaching a large audience through its online and TV outreaches.<sup>40</sup>

This link between empowered evangelism by ordinary believers and church planting is crucial. While Pentecostalism is known for its megachurches, less featured is the millions of home or small churches penetrating almost every community with Christian witness. My earlier study compared the Assemblies of God and the Catholic Church in Burkina Faso. Based on the 2010 statistics, “the Assemblies of God adds a new congregation with just 155 people, while the Catholic Church would add one congregation when there are 785 people.” The Brazilian case was even more telling: it would take 135 people for the Assemblies of God to have a new church, while the Catholic Church would wait to have 11,221 people!<sup>41</sup> This “saturated” presence of the active faith in communities has fueled the growth of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement.

### *Story-Bearers*

Then what is the message that the empowered believers spread? The primary message is their experiences of God’s work in their lives. Sharing testimonies has been a long tradition of the Pentecostal faith, not only in gatherings for worship but also in print and now digital media. They range from answered prayers and conversion experiences to God’s unusual work such as healing, miracles, restored families, and the like. Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea is known for its mega-size and home cell groups. In the weekly home cell meetings, members share such testimonies freely, often in the presence of the invited neighbors. Pentecostal believers, thus, have stories to tell, and they are eager to do so. In other settings, changed lives through the Pentecostal faith become a powerful witness to God’s love and power. In social circumstances where open evangelism is prohibited, Spirit-empowered Christians “preach aloud” through their presence in the community. Their testimonies proclaim God’s attention to the everyday needs of people. Thus, people in need gravitate to the Pentecostal message.

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<sup>40</sup> Al Raposa, “Protestantism in the Philippines: Megachurch Fever,” *Filipino Historian International*, January 20, 2017 (<https://history-ph.blogspot.com/2017/01/megachurch.html>), accessed on Sept 9, 2021.

<sup>41</sup> Wonsuk Ma, “Pentecostal Gift to Christian Unity: Its Possibility in the New Global Context,” *International Review of Mission* 107, (July 2018): 38.

Naturally, the signs and wonders have been a critical part of evangelism. For example, the growth of the Christian faith among the Bhojpuri people in northern India, the hot seat of Hinduism and Buddhism, is a case. The Bhojpuri Breakthrough, as now known, grew the Christian presence from almost nil to 12 million (of an estimated 90 million people), is attributed to many healings opening new doors for discipleship and church planting.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the Pentecostal way of evangelism is dubbed as “power evangelism,” as it is often accompanied by the manifestation of God’s power.<sup>43</sup> Such grassroots movements can easily evolve into large-scale and sustained revivals, which further increase the number of believers.

How does the growth, influence, and nature of Pentecostal Christianity inform, affect, and direct theological education, both formal and informal? This is the next question we will probe.

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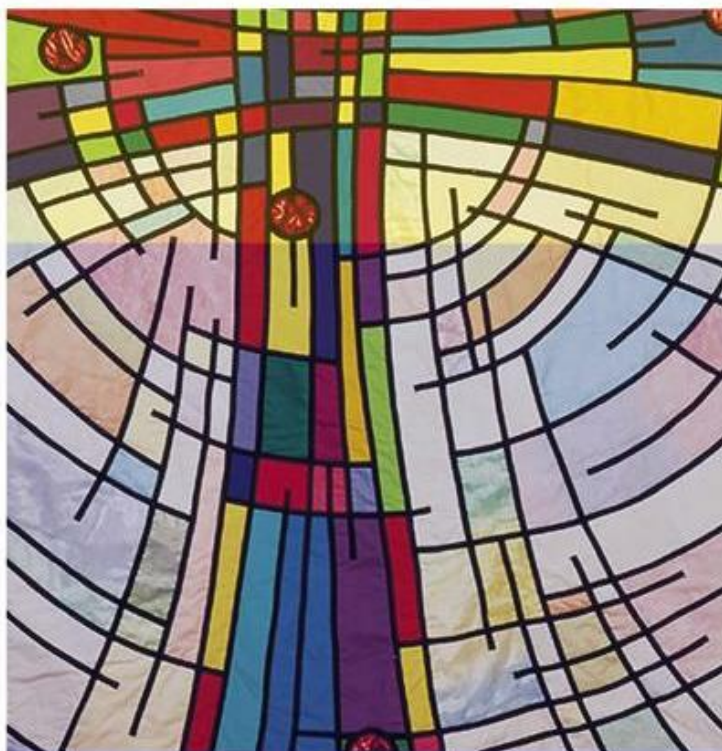
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<sup>42</sup> Victor John and Dave Coles, *Bhojpuri Breakthrough: A Movement That Keeps Multiplying* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2019), especially xiii.

<sup>43</sup> As popularized by John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism*, Revised and Updated (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2009).

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# Practitioners and Pentecostalism: An Epistemological Investigation into Learning as Doing, Experience, and Reflection

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## Abstract:

In this article we undertake an epistemological investigation into how effective learning is formed through the interplay between doing, experience, and reflection. With this general aim in mind, we focus in on the manner by which learning is understood and functions within the educational environment of the Pastor and Leader Program offered through the Swedish school of higher education, in the Academy for Leadership and Theology (ALT). To draw out in greater detail the connection between this educational dynamic and ALT's underlying ties to Pentecostalism we also place our investigation into dialogue with four current Pentecostal thinkers and their epistemological views. The goal of this dialogue is ultimately to display the intimate relation between practitioners and Pentecostalism at the heart of ALT's educational philosophy as well as to provide an academic articulation of this relation.

**Keywords:** learning, practice, Pentecostalism, epistemology, Academy for Leadership and Theology

## Introduction: When Does One Really Know Something?

By the time that a child has learned to ride a bicycle there remains no question concerning her competency in this activity.<sup>1</sup> Despite any scrapes and bruises that she may have received along the way, once she is confidently poised on the seat with her feet firmly rooted in the

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<sup>1</sup> This article draws on the ideas and research that the authors have previously explored in a book chapter entitled “Praktiker och Pentekostalism: En epistemologisk utforskning av lärande som handling, erfarenhet och reflection,” in Carl-Magnus Carlstein et al, eds., *Barmhärtighetens gemenskap* (Malmö: Spricka förlag, 2021).

pedals, the knowledge she has acquired has become thoroughly embodied. Later in life she will learn the multiplication table—knowledge that she acquires through simple repetition. Moreover, in her adult years this same youth throws herself into the study of theology with the goal of one day becoming a pastor or a church leader. What becomes apparent from this brief narrative is the multifaceted nature of learning. Although certain things such as riding a bicycle require embodied habituation and other things such as multiplication require rote memorization, much of what we would call learning is precisely that which emerges in the ongoing interplay between doing, experience, and reflection. With regards to this latter point, a relevant question to ask is therefore the following: When does one really know something, and moreover, how does the process of coming to know something look?

A central idea for Swedish scholar and educator Roland Spjuth is that “theology needs to clarify the rich content of claims to faith by means of displaying the manner by which these claims are rooted in church practice and ‘within’ faith’s own life-world.”<sup>2</sup> By extension, Spjuth suggests that theological education must thereby also ground itself in the same type of practices and contexts. In other words, a crucial component of such theological education is that of concrete experience. Spjuth’s view is reflective of a pedagogical movement towards a broader view of knowledge set in motion already in the 1990s by the Swedish Ministry of School Pedagogy. In the report *Education and Knowledge*, which was a part of the curriculum work preceding *Lgr94*, educators and researchers landed on four foundational concepts intended to encompass the breadth of knowledge that schools should offer through the educational process: facts, understanding, familiarity, and proficiency.<sup>3</sup> The implication of this report is that knowledge acquisition ought to be understood more broadly than simply cognitive ability, but also as the ongoing process that plays out through experience, training, and reflection.<sup>4</sup> As we argue below, this epistemological characterization

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<sup>2</sup> Roland Spjuth, “Teologi och studiet av praktiker,” in *Praktiker med mening* (unpublished text within ALT, 2015), 11. See also Wittgenstein’s emphasis of *Lebensform* in the process of meaning creation. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953).

<sup>3</sup> *Bildning och kunskap* (Stockholm: Statens skolverk, 1994), 25–29.

<sup>4</sup> See Liz Grauerholz, “Teaching Holistically to Achieve Deep Learning,” *College Teaching* 49, no. 2 (2001): 44–50. This shift towards holism is consistent with the movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century towards more holistic epistemological accounts such as those of pragmatism (Peirce, Dewey), phenomenology

carries significant implications for how we are to understand and to approach theological education.

The general aim of this article is to highlight how effective learning is formed through the interplay between doing, experience, and reflection. To carry out this general aim, we focus on how learning is understood and functions in the educational environment within which both authors operate, namely the Pastor and Leader Program offered through the Swedish school of higher education, Academy for Leadership and Theology (ALT). Moreover, so as both to clarify and to draw out in greater detail the connection between this educational process at play in ALT and ALT's underlying Pentecostal roots, we place our investigation as a dialogue with four current Pentecostal thinkers and their epistemological views. The goal of this dialogue is ultimately to display the intimate relation between practitioners and Pentecostalism at the heart of ALT's educational philosophy as well as to provide an academic articulation of this relation.

## Learning in Practice

### *Practice and Learning*

One broad claim this article develops is that learning cannot be reduced to a theoretical cognitive process, and perhaps neither should learning be construed *primarily* as such. To the contrary, learning takes form to a large degree in the interplay between the concrete and the theoretical, between doing, experience, and reflection. As a first step towards making sense of this interplay, we may begin by sketching a conceptual apparatus to which we appeal throughout this article, namely the concept of practice.

Practice is closely related to another concept—praxis. These two concepts, however, are differentiated with respect to their divergent intellectual backgrounds. Praxis, on the one hand, emerges from within the world of Marxist materialistic sociology and has entered the realm of pedagogy through Paulo Freire, among others, as well as the realm of theology through traditions such as liberation theology. The concept of practice, on the other hand, takes form in relation to a different intellectual background, one anchored more in postmodern thought in which context, tradition, and particularity are afforded special emphasis

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(Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty), and the linguistic-hermeneutical tradition (Wittgenstein, Gadamer).

and weight.<sup>5</sup> For Spjuth, despite the differences in these respective intellectual backgrounds, the concepts of praxis and practice can nevertheless be understood as overlapping and thus be employed in a more or less synonymous fashion.<sup>6</sup> In our reflections we follow Spjuth's lead in allowing these two concepts to blend into one another and, as such, we largely limit our attention to a discussion of practice in relation to learning.

A practice can be described as an action that is formed within and through a community that itself shares beliefs and commitments as well as a cultural and social context. Communal activity contributes to the formation of a social body where actions serve as expressions of convictions while such actions are involved in shaping these same convictions.<sup>7</sup> In this respect, practices and convictions are intimately intertwined with one another. As Miroslav Volf notes, convictions create a space in which practices become bearers of meaning and where practitioners thereby contribute to "open[ing] our eyes to how core beliefs are to be understood and re-formulated as Christians live in ever-changing situations."<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps the most established definition of the concept of practice comes from philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre. According to MacIntyre, practices find their basis within a community that shares a certain kind of agreement about these practices. Such practices in turn become established within the community and are to a certain degree both regulated and regulative activities. Moreover, these practices are ultimately tied to a particular kind of conviction that not only affords these practices their goal, but also provides those who undertake such practices with a sense of shared value.<sup>9</sup> In following the lead of MacIntyre, Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra describe practices from a Christian perspective as those activities that Christians "do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the

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<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

<sup>6</sup> Roland Spjuth, "Teologi och studiet av praktiker," 11.

<sup>7</sup> Jonas Idestrom, *Lokal kyrklig identitet: En studie av implicit ekklesiologi med exemplet Svenska kyrkan i Flemingsberg*, Bibliotheca Theologiae Practicae 85 (Skellefteå, Sweden: Artos & Norma, 2009), 65–69.

<sup>8</sup> Miroslav Volf, "Theology for a Way of Life," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, eds. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 258.

<sup>9</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 176.



light of God's active presence for the life of the world."<sup>10</sup> It is precisely this understanding that undergirds Bass' and Dykstra's own discussion regarding how effective learning can be formed in general as well as the significance that such effective learning can carry for training Christian leaders.<sup>11</sup>

The essential connection between concrete practices along with their concrete contexts and learning is something that many within pedagogical research have long recognized. For example, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, two of the greatest pedagogues of the twentieth century, have both pointed to the extent to which knowledge and learning are dependent upon their concrete contexts.<sup>12</sup> Piaget, in particular, has emphasized that learning ought to be seen as a totality where earlier knowledge is tested through the process of reflecting over new practices and experiences.<sup>13</sup> Phenomenologists have pushed this idea even further by insisting that without the concrete context and our concrete embodied engagement within such a context, learning is utterly unthinkable. As Merleau-Ponty aptly puts it, "Knowledge [is] in the hands, which is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made and cannot be formulated in detachment from effort."<sup>14</sup>

Catholic researcher Thomas Groome has likewise assumed a practice-based understanding of learning as a multi-faceted process and applied this understanding within the realm of religious pedagogy. Moreover, Groome expands this discussion in an interesting fashion by discussing the nature of learning in light of experience. Much like Habermas and Freire before him, who locate learning in the midst of its cultural and material context as well as advocate for how awareness of this context serves as the catalyst for both leaning and contextual change, Groome argues for an account of the human person as a subject

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<sup>10</sup> Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, eds. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 18.

<sup>11</sup> See Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> See Anastasia Tryphon and Jacques Vónèche, eds., *Piaget – Vygotsky: The Social Genesis of Thought* (Hove, England: Psychology Press, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Jean Piaget, *Sociologiska förklaringar*, trans. Lill-Inger Eriksson (Lund, Sweden: Studentlitteratur, 1974), 31–41.

<sup>14</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge, 2002), 166. See also Hubert Dreyfus, *Skillful Coping: Essays on the Phenomenology of Everyday Perception and Action*, ed. Mark A. Wrathall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

in community who, through his or her experience of the present, becomes a co-creator of the future. As such, it is crucial for Groome that one both individually and collectively becomes aware of his or her experiences in order to learn from them so as both to understand them and to employ them in the service of concrete change and development.<sup>15</sup>

With this short overview we see how reflection over practice and learning has entered an exciting and creative phase where historical forerunners have laid the foundation for us to pick up anew the same recurring epistemological questions. Towards this end, we may now turn our attention first to a specific discussion of practice in the Pastor and Leader Program at ALT followed by a more general discussion of Pentecostalism and Pentecostal epistemology.

### *Practice in the Pastor and Leader Program of ALT*

The Pastor and Leader Program, which has taken form within the Academy for Leadership and Theology, is appropriately characterized as *congregation-based*. What this means in concrete terms is that upon entering the program, every student is assigned a local church that, together with the school environment, serves as the foundational context in which student education unfolds. The congregational milieu operates as a crucial setting for learning, for receiving hands-on training, for becoming familiar with church practice and structure, and for preparation for eventual service. Moreover, the congregational setting functions much like an experimental lab to which students bring new ideas to test them out and thereby to reflect over these ideas in a way that then contributes back to the school-based learning process. The goal of this is to create a pedagogical environment where theory and practice can be held together to the greatest possible extent, and where doing, experience, and reflection find a productive interplay that enriches both the individual and collective learning process. Put in another way, the goal is that “knowledge-how” and “knowledge-that” ultimately both inform and enhance one another.

Underlying this congregation-based pedagogical model is a particular view of knowledge that has been formed by the ideals already mentioned above in this article. More than any other person, the one who is most

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<sup>15</sup> Rune Larsson, *Livets berättelser: Introduktion till Thomas H. Groomes religionspedagogik* (Stockholm: Verbum, 2005). See also Thomas Groome, *Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent* (Allen, TX: Thomas More, 1998).

responsible for these ideals and their development within the educational structure of the Pastor and Leader Program is ALT's long-term academic leader, Roland Spjuth. Perhaps most indicative of this influence is how Spjuth, in a 1997 article of groundbreaking importance for ALT, laid the foundation for ALT's particular view of knowledge in relation to his account of theology as "reflective practice."<sup>16</sup> In addition to Spjuth's influence on the epistemological categories of ALT, we should also mention the influence of the work done by Johan Arvidsson in the area of liberation pedagogy in collaboration with the practical theology of Sune Fahlgren. Such collaboration has resulted in, among other things, Arvidsson's and Fahlgren's influential book, *Knowledge without Walls*.<sup>17</sup>

The aim of the view of epistemology described here, and that which is operative within ALT, is to strive to hold together theory and practice to allow learning to emerge in the transitions and intersections between school and congregational environments. The goal of all of this is to train reflective practitioners whose knowledge is formed through and finds expression in the practical. Moreover, it is precisely this goal that determines the underlying value of theological education. As Spjuth nicely puts it, "A description of Christian faith also needs to explain how Christian convictions find expression in concrete deed and fellowship . . . To a large degree, that which is determinant of the content and quality of these convictions is precisely how they are embodied in practical actions."<sup>18</sup>

### **Pentecostalism: Experience, Pragmatism, and Action**

In addition to the task of discussing both practice and learning in relation to the concrete context of ALT, another crucial task of this article is to engage with the question of Pentecostal epistemology. Before arriving here, however, it is fitting first to make a few general remarks about Pentecostalism.

To begin with, it is important to note that Pentecostalism is by no means a homogenous movement, but rather throughout its history it has

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<sup>16</sup> Roland Spjuth, "Teologi som reflekterande praktik – på väg mot en församlingsbaserad teologi," *Tro och liv* 4 (1997): 19–29.

<sup>17</sup> Johan Arvidsson and Sune Fahlgren, eds., *Kunskap utan väggar: Perspektiv och metoder för fältstudier i grupp* (Lund, Sweden: Studentlitteratur, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> Roland Spjuth, *Om Gud och allt annat: Grunddrag i kristen tro* (Oxie, Sweden: Spricka Press, 2020), 16.

developed through a variety of expressions.<sup>19</sup> Classical Pentecostalism, nevertheless, has deep roots within Methodist-influenced revivalism,<sup>20</sup> which in turn has taken form in relation to John Wesley's theological emphasis on the role of experience within knowledge. Wesley himself elevated experience as one of the cornerstones of his four-part epistemology as a reflection of his belief that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within the human person was so integrated with her nature that her experience could consequently be considered a truth-witness about reality.<sup>21</sup> On this point Wesley parted ways from certain other Pietist thinkers such as Zinzendorf. Although both Wesley and Zinzendorf emphasized the crucial role played by experience, Zinzendorf understood experience as the human reaction to the presence of the Spirit whereas Wesley interpreted experience primarily as an expression of the movement of the Spirit. Due to its Methodist roots, Pentecostalism in general has thereby followed the lead of Wesley in how experience is portrayed within the tradition.<sup>22</sup>

In descriptions of Pentecostalism as a movement, emphasis on experience often comes to the fore as a defining characteristic. For example, James K. A. Smith succinctly asks, "Indeed, what could be more Pentecostal than experience?"<sup>23</sup> Further examples of this include both early and more recent studies of Scandinavian Pentecostalism in

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<sup>19</sup> Allan Anderson, "Varieties, Taxonomies, and Definitions," in *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, eds. Allan Anderson et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 13–29.

<sup>20</sup> Donald Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1987).

<sup>21</sup> This is what James K. A. Smith identifies as knowledge as "storied experience." See *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 48–85.

<sup>22</sup> Steven Land argues that this applies to Pentecostalism in general and by connection to any associated movements that share the same Methodist roots. Among Methodist theologians the notion of experience is greatly emphasized, not least of all in relation to the concept of the affections. Steven Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (London and New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 131–161. See also Randy L. Maddox, ed., *Aldersgate Reconsidered* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1990) as well as Don E. Saliers, *The Soul in Paraphrase: Prayer and the Religious Affections* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980); Robert C. Roberts, *Spirituality and Human Emotion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); Henry H. Knight III, *The Presence of God in Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace*, *Pietist and Wesleyan Studies* 3, ed. David Bundy and J. Steven O'Malley (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 1992).

<sup>23</sup> Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, 71.

which emotion and experience-based theology were identified as the movement's defining traits.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, Walter J. Hollenweger has pointed to emotional orality as one of Pentecostalism's foundational characteristics,<sup>25</sup> Harvey Cox has written about Pentecostalism as an "*imago-Dei* experience,"<sup>26</sup> and Russell Spittler has pointed to how experience, verbal expression, and spontaneity are at the core of Pentecostal identity.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, contemporaneous to the growth of Pentecostalism as a movement was the emergence of the intellectual tradition of pragmatism. One of the most important forerunners of the burgeoning pragmatic philosophy was John Dewey with his sustained work in the areas of pedagogy, democracy, and learning. Dewey was an advocate for what he would describe as a living knowledge that carries practical consequences for both the professional and the personal aspects of life. The basis for education aimed at such a living knowledge, argued Dewey, was training, experience, and reflection in relation to practical exercises. One of the more well-known epithets attributed to Dewey, "learning by doing," provides a nice summary of this central pragmatic idea.<sup>28</sup>

To what degree Pentecostalism in general and the Swedish Pentecostal movement in particular have been influenced by the philosophy of pragmatism or by the pedagogical thought of Dewey remains unclear. Despite this, it is nevertheless apparent that the Pentecostal movement has possessed, and likely continues to possess, a

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<sup>24</sup> Emanuel Linderholm, *Pingströrelsen: Dess förutsättningar och uppkomst* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers, 1924), 3–6; Nils Bloch-Hoell, *Pinsebevegelsen* (Oslo: University Press, 1956), 412–416.

<sup>25</sup> Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 1–5.

<sup>26</sup> Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (Reading, PA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1995), 81.

<sup>27</sup> Russell Spittler, "Spirituality, Pentecostal and Charismatic," in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 1096–1102.

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., *The Oxford Handbook of Dewey*, ed. Steven Fesmire (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020). Consider the similar formulations "We learn to do by knowing ... We learn to do by doing ... We learn to know by doing" in Joseph Baldwin, *Psychology Applied to the Art of Teaching*, International Educational Series 19, ed. William T. Harris (New York: D. Appleton, 1892), 327.

strong sense of pragmatic entrepreneurialism. For example, bringing ideas to concrete realization is in many cases seen as more important than the task of thinking through all possible aspects of a particular idea before taking action. Within the Swedish context, such an action-oriented approach was a defining characteristic of the early Pentecostal movement.<sup>29</sup>

For Lewi Pethrus, leader and forerunner of Swedish Pentecostalism, action-oriented pragmatism served as a vital component of both the human person and theology. As Carl-Gustav Carlsson has pointed out, this action-oriented approach is grounded in a particular form of voluntarism.<sup>30</sup> Thus, according to Pethrus, it is of crucial importance to take the human will seriously and to allow the will-based power-to-act to find clear expression in theology, and even more so in theologically based practices. In addition to his views of God and society, it is precisely this account of human will and power-to-act that operates as the basis for how Pethrus understood the church, its members, and the role of Christians in the world.<sup>31</sup> Faith, according to Pethrus, became visible first and foremost through action. As such, he did not afford much value to faith understood in terms of intellectual reflection. Instead, faith assumes the form of practical expression and through such means it is thereby ultimately manifested and understood. This mentality pioneered by Pethrus has become deeply incorporated into the spirituality of Swedish Pentecostalism, with one concrete result being that the message of practical Christianity assumes a prominent place within the preaching of contemporary Swedish Pentecostal leaders.<sup>32</sup>

From the discussion above, we can formulate a clear picture of Pentecostalism in both its international and Scandinavian expressions as a movement for which experience, pragmatism, and action are paramount. Construed in this fashion, the value of faith is thereby measured in large part by how it functions through lived experience to guide believers into practical activity as well as by how its teaching and academic engagement ultimately lead to concrete pragmatic results. Given this conclusion, the task for the remainder of this article is to

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<sup>29</sup> Ulrik Josefsson, *Liv och över nog* (Skellefteå, Sweden: Artos, 2005), 323–336.

<sup>30</sup> Carl-Gustav Carlsson, *Människan, samhället och Gud: Grunddrag i Lewi Pethrus kristendomsuppfattning* (Lund, Sweden: Lund University Press, 1990).

<sup>31</sup> Carlsson, *Människan*, 63–82.

<sup>32</sup> Ulrik Josefsson, “Nutida svensk pingstpredikan: Analys av tre pingstledares predikningar på Nyhemsveckan,” in *Gudstjänstens mening: Årsbok för svenskt gudstjänstliv* 94, ed. Borgehammar et al. (Skellefteå, Sweden: Artos, 2019), 165–166.

display how the notions of experience, pragmatism, and action find expression in several prominent Pentecostal thinkers with respect to their own views of epistemology. Once again, the purpose of this survey is to highlight the intimate relation between practitioners and Pentecostalism, which is at the heart of ALT's educational philosophy, as well as to provide an academic articulation of this relation.

## **Pentecostal Epistemology: A Brief Survey**

For this section we shift our focus to four Pentecostal theologians who serve as representative voices within the Pentecostal tradition and who have also formulated accounts of Pentecostal epistemology particularly relevant for our current investigation. Along with the views of two professors, Wolfgang Vondey and Cheryl B. Johns, we also look to the insightful reflections of two Scandinavian theologians, Simo Frestadius and Stian Eriksen. Each of these thinkers and his or her respective view will be addressed briefly in turn with special attention paid to what each of their views reveals regarding the notions of knowledge and learning.

### *Wolfgang Vondey – Pentecostal Theology*

Wolfgang Vondey is a well-published scholar who is also head of the Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies at the University of Birmingham. The book that will serve as our jumping-off point for what follows is *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel*.<sup>33</sup> With this text Vondey offers in part a systematic engagement with several central Pentecostal themes and an epistemological paradigm that can provide the basis for the formation of Pentecostal theology.

For Vondey, the story of Pentecost functions as “the core theological symbol of Pentecostal Theology” in that such theology “is an experiential spirituality rooted in the day of Pentecost and believed by Pentecostals still to be available as a continuation, or repetition or expansion (sometimes all three) of that original experience.”<sup>34</sup> Moreover, Vondey speaks of Pentecostal theology as “an invitation to the altar, the altar is an invitation to the full gospel, and the full gospel is an invitation to Pentecost.”<sup>35</sup>

The Pentecostal view of knowledge, according to Vondey, takes form through the interplay between experience, convictions, and practices

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<sup>33</sup> Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel* (London: T&T Clark, 2017).

<sup>34</sup> Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 1–2.

<sup>35</sup> Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 5.

where corporate activity plays a crucial role, but where story and testimony also prove essential. In that Vondey understands spirituality to be the foundational component of learning, knowledge, and theological thought, he thereby argues that the abstract cognitive structures within Pentecostal theology thereby presuppose their grounding in practices and experiences.<sup>36</sup> Recognition of this dynamic is vital for avoiding the risk of reducing Pentecostal theology to “propositional ideas of salvation, sanctification, Spirit baptism, divine healing and the coming kingdom” whereby one loses touch with dynamic notions such as “experience, reflection, practice and transformation.”<sup>37</sup>

### *Cheryl B. Johns – Pentecostal Formation*

Cheryl B. Johns is professor of practical theology at Pentecostal Theological Seminary in Cleveland, Tennessee. In addition, she has become one of the more prolific voices within Pentecostal theology regarding discipleship and learning. In her groundbreaking book *Pentecostal Formation*, Johns builds upon the pedagogy of Paulo Freire to develop a particular Pentecostal account of knowledge. Two of Freire’s concepts prove particularly salient for Johns’ analysis, which we will touch upon each in turn.

The first concept Johns gleans from Freire is that of praxis. By making use of this concept, Johns attempts to avoid the unnecessary dichotomy that is often drawn between theory and practice. For her, reasoning is precisely the interplay between experience and reflection that occurs on the background of praxis. Despite this conceptual appropriation, Johns remains critical of Freire’s account for what she sees as its problematic roots within Hellenistic philosophy that risk creating an artificial division between the subject that experiences and the object that is experienced. In contrast, Johns points to how a theological epistemology based upon the biblical concept of *Yada*, by which the object of experience is at the same time a subject, provides a more adequate and holistic account of knowledge as that which plays out within a relational process.<sup>38</sup>

The second concept Johns appropriates from Freire is that of consciousness raising. As she points out, the intention behind employing this concept is to locate the starting point of the process of gaining knowledge with those who are suffering under oppression. This stands

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<sup>36</sup> Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 14–20.

<sup>37</sup> Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 34.

<sup>38</sup> Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 37–41.



in contrast to what many critics have pointed out to be clear aspects of academic power dynamics in which the perspectives of the oppressed are not taken into full account. For Johns, it is crucial that everyone involved in the learning process makes an effort to strive after the expansion of consciousness in a manner reflective of Gadamar's account of the fusion of horizons.<sup>39</sup> One important conclusion Johns draws is that a Pentecostal account of knowledge ought to be able to learn a great deal from liberation pedagogy by pushing Pentecostals beyond fixation with the intellect of the single individual and instead fixing one's eyes upon the goal of bringing about the kingdom of God in the world.<sup>40</sup>

Relevant to this discussion is the argument Johns makes in a separate article in which she, by drawing on David Kelsey's classic work, *Between Athens and Berlin*, discusses the relationship between different paradigms of knowledge. In addition to Athens and Berlin, however, Johns adds a third paradigm, what she identifies as "Azusa."<sup>41</sup> Whereas the paradigm of "Athens" represents classical education, the search for the good, and freedom of thought (not to mention a good dose of elitism), and "Berlin" represents the positivism of European Enlightenment with its emphasis on exactitude and methodological precision, Johns points to "Azusa" as representing a Pentecostal transrational worldview with an account of knowledge built upon the dynamic interplay between "cognition, affection, and behavior."<sup>42</sup> By introducing this third paradigm, Johns attempts to carve out a space for an epistemology that is experience-based and practical at the same time that it is theocentrically relational. Moreover, as she argues, it is here with this third paradigm that one ultimately encounters the possibility of "a synergy of the human spirit with that of the Creator Spirit and an emerging 'Christian mind' that participates in trinitarian relationality."<sup>43</sup>

### *Simo Frestadius – Pentecostal Rationality*

Simo Frestadius is deeply rooted in the Pentecostal tradition, serving as ordained minister in the Elim Pentecostal Church, Dean of Research at Regents Theological College, and chair of the European Theological Association. In his book, *Pentecostal Rationality*, Frestadius raises several

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<sup>39</sup> Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 41–45.

<sup>40</sup> Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*, 111–130.

<sup>41</sup> Cheryl B. Johns, "Athens, Berlin, and Azusa: A Pentecostal Reflection on Scholarship and Christian Faith," *Pneuma* 27, no. 1 (2005): 136–147.

<sup>42</sup> Johns, "Athens, Berlin, and Azusa," 143.

<sup>43</sup> Johns, "Athens, Berlin, and Azusa," 145.

important questions one of which concerns what it would mean to speak of a distinctive Pentecostal epistemology.<sup>44</sup>

Frestadius situates his project within the trajectory of the post-Cartesian critique of modernity and its “view from nowhere”<sup>45</sup> while still attempting to steer clear of the shortcomings of postmodernity.<sup>46</sup> What this means, more concretely, is that Frestadius rejects an intellectualist starting point to his epistemology in favor of an embodied and embedded narrative account. But he also retains a robust realism regarding truth meant to prevent his position from sliding into relativism.<sup>47</sup> With this aim in mind, Frestadius engages in a critical dialogue with Pentecostal theologians Amos Yong, James K. A. Smith, and L. William Oliverio Jr.<sup>48</sup> As he sees it, these thinkers ultimately land in expressions of rationality that are far too ahistorical and acontextual to be comfortably at home in the Pentecostal tradition for which history and context are paramount. In contrast, Frestadius draws on MacIntyre’s tradition-based approach to the ethical and political<sup>49</sup> to embed his discussion within the rich narrative of the Elim Foursquare Tradition. As he remarks, the theological and philosophical task of formulating a “truly narrative Pentecostal rationality”<sup>50</sup> requires that one first and foremost carry out the task of “providing a historical narrative and exemplification of a particular Pentecostal tradition.”<sup>51</sup>

From this point of departure, Frestadius argues for an account of Pentecostal epistemology based upon the interplay of tradition, the Bible, and experience which he identifies as “Pentecostal biblical

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<sup>44</sup> Simo Frestadius, *Pentecostal Rationality: Epistemology and Theological Hermeneutics in the Foursquare Tradition* (London: T&T Clark, 2020). The concepts of rationality and epistemology are here employed interchangeably.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>46</sup> Frestadius, *Pentecostal Rationality*, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Frestadius here draws on Aristotle: “I assume with Aristotle that the perceived order of things (ontology) should determine how things are known (epistemology).” *Pentecostal Rationality*, 2.

<sup>48</sup> Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002); James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); L. William Oliverio Jr., *Theological Hermeneutics in the Classical Pentecostal Tradition: A Typological Account* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

<sup>49</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.

<sup>50</sup> Frestadius, *Pentecostal Rationality*, 8.

<sup>51</sup> Frestadius, *Pentecostal Rationality*, 61.

pragmatism.”<sup>52</sup> As he notes, all three aspects are interwoven in a manner that not only mutually reinforces them all, but at the same time holds all three in check. In the end, however, justification of this particular “tradition-constitutive rationality” falls most squarely on the pragmatic question: Does this rationality ultimately lead to constructive “results” such as the expansion of the Holy Spirit, the transformation of lives, the renewal of culture, and the glorification of God—all of which are themselves essential components of what it means “to live the full gospel”?<sup>53</sup>

Frestadius’ account of epistemology encompassed in his “Pentecostal biblical pragmatism” raises several important questions for us to take into consideration regarding the issue of practice and learning. For example, to what degree is such practice and learning grounded and to what degree do they play out on the background of a particular concrete, embodied, and communal spiritual tradition? Moreover, to what extent is such practice and learning both informed by and tempered by a realist account of truth in which the Bible, as the authoritative word of God, assumes a central role? And finally, in what manner is such practice and learning tied to and justified by the pragmatic considerations of what they lead to with respect to their positive and constructive impact upon the world and the life of faith?

*Stian Eriksen – The Epistemology of Imagination and Religious Experience*

Stian Eriksen serves as a lecturer at the VID School in Stavanger where he has focused his research on questions of religion and migration with particular emphasis on Pentecostalism. In one of his more recent projects, “The Epistemology of Imagination and Religious Experience,”<sup>54</sup> Eriksen thrusts himself into the topic of Pentecostal epistemology.

Eriksen’s central aim in his article is to discuss several main tenets of what he characterizes as Pentecostal epistemology and hermeneutics to raise the question of whether or not these can serve as a valuable lens by which to inform the contemporary study of religion. More specifically, Eriksen wants to hone in on Pentecostal interpretations of both religious experience and the role of imagination. The motivation behind

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<sup>52</sup> Frestadius, *Pentecostal Rationality*, 103.

<sup>53</sup> See Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology*.

<sup>54</sup> Stian Eriksen, “The epistemology of imagination and religious experience: A global and Pentecostal approach to the study of religion?” *Studia Theologica* 69, no. 1 (2015): 45–73.

this project comes not only from what Eriksen perceives as a shortcoming in how religion is currently approached and studied within the academy, but also in large part from what has proven to be the growing relevancy of Pentecostalism due to its global explosion in growth within the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Much like Frestadius, Eriksen distances his project from the “reductionistic cognitivism” characteristic of modernity.<sup>55</sup> Instead, to ground his epistemology he turns to concrete spiritual experience, experience that emerges from within the embodied context of particular spiritual communities as well as within the particular worldviews that these communities afford.<sup>56</sup> In making this move, Eriksen, following the lead of Vondey, is not interested in the anti-intellectual refutation of the importance of the mind for spirituality,<sup>57</sup> but is concerned rather with dethroning the intellect as an idolatrous power so as to make room for other epistemically-relevant aspects of humanly lived existence including the affects and the imagination.<sup>58</sup>

These aspects in turn, argues Eriksen, have a great deal to contribute to both the construal and study of religion, and thereby to religious pedagogy in general. In response to the cold and distanced manner by which much of the scientific study of religion is carried out as well as the risk of methodological arbitrariness inherent to such study by which the parameters for investigating religion negatively impact what one ultimately perceives as relevant, Eriksen’s Pentecostal account of affective imagination leads him to develop five criteria for what a more appropriate epistemological framework for engaging religion could look like:

- 1) exploratory, open, and flexible
- 2) experiential and empirically based
- 3) relational, communal, and normatively oriented
- 4) contextual, empowering, and non-elitist
- 5) practically oriented and transformative

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<sup>55</sup> Eriksen, “The epistemology of imagination,” 51.

<sup>56</sup> Eriksen, “The epistemology of imagination,” 51. See also Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, 11.

<sup>57</sup> Eriksen, “The epistemology of imagination,” 52. See also Vondey, *Beyond Pentecostalism*.

<sup>58</sup> Eriksen, “The epistemology of imagination,” 52. See also Vondey, *Beyond Pentecostalism* and Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 129.

If not entirely embraced by the scientific community, these five criteria should serve at minimum as an important voice that challenges scholarly presuppositions while attempting to inspire a new spirit of academic openness.<sup>59</sup>

In the same fashion as with Frestadius, Eriksen's Pentecostal reflections on epistemology raise important questions regarding the issue of practice and learning. For example, to what extent do our practice and learning operate within a broader anthropological framework that includes the affects and the imagination as crucial aspects of what it means to be embodied knowers? In addition, do our practice and learning take into adequate consideration notions such as flexibility, experimentality, relationality, contextuality, inclusivity, and transformation to allow our epistemological projects to be as robust, honest, and open as possible?

### *Pentecostal Epistemology – A Summary*

From this brief survey of the views of four central Pentecostal thinkers, we are afforded a picture of Pentecostal epistemology characterized both by an emphasis on experience and by being fundamentally grounded in practice and the lived religious life that emerges from within concrete fellowship. Despite the different departure points and emphases assumed by each of the four thinkers, they are nevertheless all in agreement regarding their desire to broaden our account of learning beyond the mere cognitive to allow other dimensions within the learning process to come to the fore. It is important to note that this point is not meant as a refutation or abandonment of the cognitive, but rather a goal-directed broadening of the epistemological project. In this respect, the cognitive is afforded its proper place as *one* epistemological aspect among others that is itself interwoven into experience and practice as these play out on the background of concrete, lived fellowship. And it is precisely here, in this epistemological broadening, that both ALT and Pentecostalism not only operate, but also have an ongoing role to play in helping learners come closer to achieving the ideal of becoming interpersonal, experience-based, and reflective practitioners.

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<sup>59</sup> Eriksen, "The epistemology of imagination," 65. Eriksen's account here reflects aspects of Smith's Pentecostal philosophical project that the latter identifies in terms of "radical openness to God." See Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, 12.

## Conclusion

In this article we have engaged in an epistemological investigation into the nature of learning in which we have discussed the notions of practice, ALT education, and Pentecostal epistemology. One recurring theme that has emerged is the holistic nature of knowledge as the interplay between doing, experience, and reflection that occurs within the communal context. Moreover, we have pointed to how this theme ought to affect both the development and implementation of pastoral leadership training such as that which is operative in the Pastor and Leader Program of ALT with its goal of training reflective practitioners. This latter point is particularly important considering the one-sided nature of what Johns calls the “Berlin” paradigm with its focus on exactitude and methodological precision that is characteristic of much of Western academia. It is precisely here, in challenging a reductionistic presentation of knowledge and learning in favor of a broader and more open learning process, that Pentecostalism and Pentecostal epistemology are afforded an incredible opportunity and faced with an incredible task. In the introduction to this article, we raised the question of when is it that one really knows something, and we quickly reframed the question in terms of theological knowledge. Although a definitive answer to this question will remain elusive, it nevertheless strikes us that following the model of ALT and Pentecostalism in encouraging the interplay between doing, experience, and reflection that plays out on the background of the communal context, is a good first step in formulating a promising response.

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# **Bridging the Distance: A Microcosm of Filipino Classical Pentecostal Identity**

Lora Angeline Embudo Timenia

## **Abstract:**

As a Filipino Classical Pentecostal, I propose that my theological identity is a spiral construct of the Filipino Christian consciousness with the Classical Pentecostal theology of Spirit empowerment. However, this theological identity can be challenging to describe without presenting a grassroots narrative of the socio-religious developments that contributed to its formation. Hence, this paper shall present a microcosm of Filipino Classical Pentecostal identity through an autobiographical theological method. The study asks the following questions: what socio-religious developments contributed to the formation of my Filipino Classical Pentecostal identity? How can I present the construction of these formative factors as a cohesive theological identity? The research will provide a critical narrative highlighting formative experiences and theologies that contributed to my Filipino Classical Pentecostal identity development, analyze identity formation through the lens of epistemological constructivism, and present a proposed Filipino Classical Pentecostal gospel as a means to communicate the cohesiveness of this theological identity contextually.

**Key words:** Filipino Classical Pentecostalism, theological identity, identity development, autobiographical theological method, critical narrative, epistemological constructivism, Filipino religious consciousness, Filipino Pentecostal gospel.

## **Introduction**

Filipino Classical Pentecostal identity can be difficult to describe due to the complexities of its socio-religious development. Some scholars would say it is but a transplantation of North American Pentecostalism. Joseph Suico, for instance, notes that the Philippine Assemblies of God, the most prominent classical Pentecostal denomination in the nation, “merely adopts” the theological affirmations of the USA Assemblies of

God.<sup>1</sup> This “mere adoption” may be a contributing factor to the current the vagueness of Filipino Classical Pentecostal identity.

As a Filipino Classical Pentecostal, myself, I recognize that merely adopting a western theological identity can only result in identity confusion. For classical Pentecostal identity to effectively integrate into the Filipino religious consciousness, one must understand theological identity development at the grassroots level and use that understanding to communicate Pentecostal theological affirmations in a contextually relevant manner.

Hence, in an attempt to meet the abovementioned concern, I will present a critical narrative of my Filipino Classical Pentecostal identity to analyze the socio-religious developments that contributed to its formation and offer a proposed means of contextually communicating its theological affirmations. The study intends to help readers understand Filipino Classical Pentecostalism using an individual as a microcosm of the Filipino Classical Pentecostal identity.

At the outset, I pose the following questions: what socio-religious developments contributed to the formation of my Filipino Classical Pentecostal identity? How can I contextually communicate the cohesiveness of this theological identity?

As an initial thesis statement, I propose that although theological identity can be hard to describe, Filipino Classical Pentecostal identity is a spiral construct of the Filipino Christian consciousness with the Classical Pentecostal theology of Spirit empowerment. Three reasons support this assertion:

- 1) An epistemological constructivist framework can trace my Pentecostal identity's amalgamation of Roman Catholic and North American Protestant elements.
- 2) Classical Pentecostal worldview shares some contact points with the Filipino worldview, providing bridges for contextualization.
- 3) A proposed contextualized gospel may demonstrate the cohesiveness of this theological identity

This study will utilize the autobiographical theological method. The research will observe the following steps:

- 1) Provide a critical narrative highlighting formative experiences and theologies that contributed to my identity development

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Suico, “Pentecostal Churches in the Philippines,” *Studies in World Christianity* 10, no. 2 (October 2004): 224, <https://doi.org/10.3366/swc.2004.10.2.223>.



- 2) Analyze the narrative through the lens of epistemological constructivism.
- 3) Present a proposed Filipino Classical Pentecostal gospel to communicate its theological identification contextually.

## **Epistemological Constructivism as a Theoretical Framework**

The use of epistemological constructivism as this study's analytical framework stems from the assumption that individuals can use their personal learning experiences to actively construct their identity. Epistemological constructivism refers to a theory that posits that knowledge is constructed over time and contingent on biological, psychological, and social changes.<sup>2</sup> As a psychological learning theory, it can help describe how identity (as a developmental structure) is formed and conceptually understood.

Learning and identity are inextricably linked because involved in identity development are intrapsychic processes of organizing experience through one's rational constructions or meaning-making structures. Jane Kroger explains:

What all [identity] approaches have in common is the awareness of a developmental process in which the intrapsychic organizations (ego structures), through which one interprets and makes sense of the world, change in important ways over time. Movement from childhood through adolescence through adulthood is not just a matter of adding more and more information to an already existing structure of meaning making, but rather of changing the basic meaning-making structures themselves.<sup>3</sup>

The development of theological identity then is not gained through a piling up of previous knowledge but rather a reorganizing of the self into a coherent, meaningful structure. This development can only progress when identity crises occur.<sup>4</sup> Kroger explains:

It is through such an identity crisis or key turning point, that the identity formation process can proceed. At such a turning point, one is propelled to seek answers or resolutions to questions of life's meaning and one's purpose in it. During an identity crisis one searches to integrate or reintegrate earlier interests, talents, and values into a

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<sup>2</sup> Catherine Twomey Fosnot, *Constructivism: Theory, Perspectives, and Practice* (2nd ed.; (New York: Teachers College Press, 2005), 8–30.

<sup>3</sup> Jane Kroger, *Identity Development: Adolescence through Adulthood* (2nd ed.; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), 16.

<sup>4</sup> Erik Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968), 16.

coherent personality structure that can find suitable forms of social expression and recognition.<sup>5</sup>

Hence, identity development, along with theological identity development, involves a constructive process of crisis-reflection-integration and proceeds towards developing coherent structures expressed in meaningful contexts.

With this theory in mind, the study will use a proposed constructivist schema to analyze my theological autobiography.<sup>6</sup> This schema proposes that identity develops after a person undergoes a crucial learning episode that triggers an identity crisis. During crises, an individual goes through a process of reflective abstraction whereby deep thinking and reflection result in the reconfiguration of mental structures.<sup>7</sup> The process is culminated by the person's commitment to this new configuration by integrating it into the whole self.

The figure below illustrates the proposed schema underlying identity formation:

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<sup>5</sup> Kroger, *Identity Development*, 11.

<sup>6</sup> This schema was developed by the current researcher based on the proffered theories of various sources including Erik Erikson's theory on identity development, Jane Kroger's explanation on the development of intrapsychic meaning-making structure, Jean Piaget's concept of reflective abstraction, and the use of episodic memory as adapted from narrative self approach theory. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, 16; Kroger, *Identity Development*, 16; Eunil David Cho, "Constructing Multi-Religious Identity: A Narrative Self Approach," *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 28 (2018): 175–80, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10649867.2018.1553358>; "Reflective Abstraction – APA Dictionary of Psychology," accessed December 8, 2021, <https://dictionary.apa.org/reflective-abstraction>; Fosnot, *Constructivism*, 8–30.

<sup>7</sup> The idea of Reflective Abstraction was postulated by Jean Piaget. In Psychology it refers to the "ability to arrive at new knowledge by reflecting on knowledge one already possesses without the need for additional available information." See "Reflective Abstraction – APA Dictionary of Psychology."

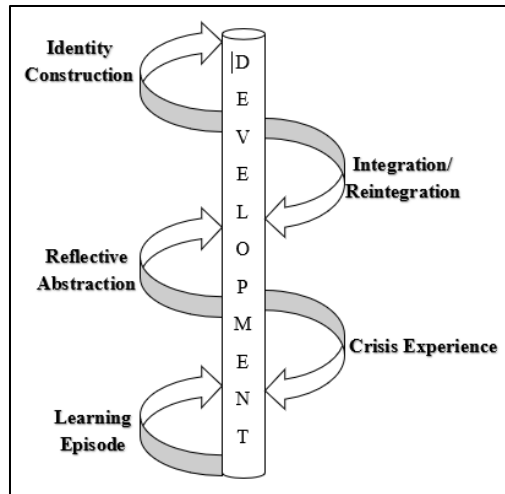


Figure 1. Proposed Constructivist Schema of Identity Development

The schema presupposes that critical shifts in the formation of theological identity occur during paradigm-shifting episodes (termed here as a learning episode).<sup>8</sup> The term, episode, is used herein as reference to episodic memory, which is “people’s narrative sense of self-in-time.”<sup>9</sup> Narrating episodic memory helps connect remembered events to imagined future episodes<sup>10</sup> and links abstractions unconsciously reflected in the past to the conceptions held on to today. This study hopes that the overall process will help retrace the identity’s spiral construction.

## Narrative of a Filipino Classical Pentecostal

To begin, the narrative below highlights learning episodes in my life, which when in retrospect, were crucial to the cultivation of my current theological identity. It starts with my native religious consciousness, then moves to specific episodes of my life as one born into Roman Catholicism, my conversion into Protestantism, and finally, my decision to join Classical Pentecostalism (Assemblies of God).

<sup>8</sup> Charles Kraft defines paradigm as “a perspective on a sizeable segment of reality.” Each person’s worldview is made up of numerous paradigms. Though a person’s whole worldview does not change, paradigms within a worldview can change over time. Charles H. Kraft, Christie Varney, and Ellen Kearney, *Christianity with Power: Your Worldview and Your Experience of the Supernatural* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 82.

<sup>9</sup> Cho, “Constructing Multi-Religious Identity,” 178.

<sup>10</sup> Cho, “Constructing Multi-Religious Identity,” 178.

## *Filipino Religious Consciousness*

### BORN A ROMAN CATHOLIC

I was born to an institutionally Roman Catholic clan in 1987. I say “institutionally” because a second popular type of Catholicism existed in the country, which is folk Catholicism. Folk Catholicism is a form of syncretism where Christian themes intermingled with animism. This two-tiered Catholicism in the country was partly due to being colonized by Spain for 333 years.<sup>11</sup> As history goes, Roman Catholic friars imposed a non-contextualized Christianity of the Iberian variety during those colonial years. It led to the development of Roman Catholicism at the institutional level and folk Catholicism at the popular level. Jaime Bulatao considers this two-tiered religious system a form of “split-level Christianity.”<sup>12</sup> However, Melba Maggay explains that the existence of such syncretism is not simply due to a split in the Filipino consciousness; rather this is “a function of the culture divide, where a strong, subterranean indigenous consciousness runs parallel to the ready accommodation to external religious influence.”<sup>13</sup> As such, these two systems run parallel to each other without issue, that is, a Filipino can believe in a God that satisfies their supreme need for salvation and rescues from damnation, while at the same time consult spirit-mediums for their mundane needs. I and my family were typical examples of such a two-tiered religious consciousness.

### INHERENTLY SUPERSTITIOUS

My family was, on the surface, institutionally Roman Catholic, but in reality, we practiced folk Catholicism. For instance, in my younger years, I was inherently superstitious. I would say “tabi-tabi po” (excuse me) when passing through a dark alley or a massive tree for fear that I would disturb the spirits in the area. Members of our clan would consult *albularyos* (faith healers), *spiritistas* (spirit communicators), and *mangbuhulas* (fortune tellers), believing that these individuals could communicate to

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<sup>11</sup> Melba Maggay explains that the “liturgical synthesis between Catholicism and indigenous consciousness was unaccompanied by shifts in religious paradigm. The indigenous mind for the most part, simply assimilated the new elements into their system.” As such, syncretism resulted. Melba Padilla Maggay, *Filipino Religious Consciousness: Some Implications to Missions* (Diliman, Quezon City: Institute for Studies in Asian Church and Culture, 1999), 14.

<sup>12</sup> Jaime C. Bulatao, “Split-Level Christianity,” *Philippine Sociological Review* 13 (1965): 119–21.

<sup>13</sup> Maggay, *Filipino Religious Consciousness*, 23.

the spirit world and/or facilitate the acquisition of power for blessing, protection, and healing. I still remember how the rituals of these folk Catholic spirit mediums included the intermingling of Catholic prayers (like the Apostles' Creed, The Lord's Prayer, etc.) with animal blood sacrifice.<sup>14</sup>

This folk religiosity is common among Filipinos. Melba Maggay explained that “as is usual in cultures with strong animistic roots, religion is bent towards the more pragmatic problem of appeasing and having access to the powers.”<sup>15</sup> Filipino indigenous religion is inherently a religion of spirit and power, which is why folk Catholicism is the popular religion in the country.

#### USHERED INTO CHRISTIAN THEISM (TRINITARIANISM)

Roman Catholicism ushered me into Christian Theism, particularly Trinitarianism, despite the syncretism. I firmly believed in God, a Triune Godhead—The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Catholic church taught the doctrine of the Trinity in words (through rote memorization of the Apostle's creed) and actions (through the sign of the cross). I was also taught about the proofs for God's existence through a philosophy course I took at a Jesuit University. Our course textbook, *Anaa ba ang Ginoo? (Does God Exist?)*, was a compendium and contextualized explanation of the philosophical arguments for God's existence written by professors of the University's philosophy department. The fact that they translated these arguments into my native dialect and used local metaphors allowed me to grasp how the existence of God was entirely undeniable. I owe my robust theism and Trinitarianism to my Roman Catholic education.

However, amid my firm belief in God's existence, I experienced an agnostic crisis at age 15. The insidious feeling that God was dead or distant crept into my mind. The Roman Catholic emphasis on the Suffering Christ (Jesus on the Cross or lying on a deathbed) was

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<sup>14</sup> In his book, F. Landa Jocano, cites more examples that illustrates folk Catholicism as an admixture of Catholic prayers and symbols with animistic rituals. F. Landa Jocano, *Folk Christianity: A Preliminary Study of Conversion and Patterning of Christian Experience in the Philippines* (Quezon City, Philippines: Trinity Research Institute, Trinity College of Quezon City, 1981), 26.

<sup>15</sup> Melba P. Maggay, *Filipino Religious Consciousness: Some Implications to Missions* (Philippines: Institute for Studies in Asian Church and Culture, 1999), 22.

prevalent.<sup>16</sup> The most famous folk Catholic feast in the country is the feast of the Black Nazarene, where a blackened image of Jesus carrying the cross would cause hundreds of Filipinos to follow its wake in the hopes of getting a healing miracle. For a time, I thought that God was either dead or distant. I knew he existed, but I didn't know who he was. I had to go through the priests, the Virgin Mary, and the Saints to get to him. It seemed that layers of mediators distanced him from me.

### *North American Protestantism*

#### SCARED OF DEMON POSSESSION

The distance between me and God made me fearful of evil spirits. However, this fear changed into wonder when a deliverance ministry shook our neighborhood. A Presbyterian pastor exorcised a demon-possessed woman. The demon-possessed woman said to the pastor: "Do you think you can handle me?" The pastor replied: "I can't. But Jesus who is in me can!" The demon-possessed woman fainted and then returned to a normal state.

The encounter made me realize that Jesus was powerful. Afterward, a Bible study opened in our neighborhood and resulted in the conversion of my entire family to Protestantism. My conversion was not a mystical experience but a voluntary assent and acceptance of the proposition of the gospel: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). It wasn't too difficult to believe because I already had a basic understanding of God and Jesus. After the power encounter of the demon-possessed woman being delivered, I finally had confidence in the reality and power of Jesus. He wasn't an abstract person in my mind. He became the Lord of the spirits.

#### GOD DIDN'T SEEM SO FAR

What made Protestantism inviting was the Bible studies. In Roman Catholicism, I never opened a Bible. I only listened to the Sunday sermons of the priests. But in Protestantism, I was taught to read and study the Bible. My favorite song was: "Read your Bible, pray every day, and you'll grow, grow, grow." As I joined Bible studies, sang Christian songs, and participated in small fellowships, I grew in my faith. God didn't seem so far.

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<sup>16</sup> A complete discussion of the portrayal of a Suffering Christ in Filipino folk Catholicism can be read in Julius Bautista, *The Way of the Cross: Suffering Selfhoods in the Roman Catholic Philippines* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2019).

The denominational switch from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism (Presbyterian at that time) was not easy. We experienced a lot of persecution from our relatives and neighbors because of the notion: “Born a Catholic; Die a Catholic.”<sup>17</sup> Catholicism espoused that true salvation could come from the Holy Catholic Church (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*),<sup>18</sup> while Protestantism emphasized salvation in Christ alone (*solus Christus*).<sup>19</sup> However, because we had personally encountered the power and truth of Jesus, our family remained firm in our conversion.<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately, the Protestant (Presbyterian) worship was hymnal-based and non-charismatic. I gradually became bored and reverted to being a nominal Christian.<sup>21</sup> My mother, recognizing her children’s spiritual dryness and began looking for a church that valued the study of the Word and practiced charismatic experiences in the Spirit. That was when we discovered one of the biggest Pentecostal churches in our city, First Assemblies of God (AG) Church.

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<sup>17</sup> Studies have shown that Catholics indeed find it difficult to leave the church they were raised in. Irene Ann Smolik, “Denominational Switching: A Filipino Experience” (Unpublished Master’s Thesis, Calgary, University of Calgary, 1998), 37, doi:10.11575/PRISM/23735; D. E. Sherkat, “Leaving the Faith: Testing Theories of Religious Switching Using Survival Models,” *Social Science Research* 20 (1991): 184.

<sup>18</sup> Francis Sullivan traces the development of the concept of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* in his book. Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?: Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 5–6.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Wellum, *Christ Alone—The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior: What the Reformers Taught...and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2017), 32.

<sup>20</sup> The terms, denominational switching and conversion, are quite important in the narrative. The switch from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism is technically a denominational switch (or a switch from one organized Christian body to another). For the Filipino experience, the switch is akin to a conversion (complete self-transformation and exchange of communities). I. A. Smolik’s thesis points out that Catholics who’ve switched or converted to a different Evangelical denomination were more religious, more committed, had higher self-esteem and a stronger social self. It’s a major transformation not just in religious/theological beliefs but also in religious expressions and communities. Smolik, “Denominational Switching,” 186.

<sup>21</sup> Nominal Christianity is defined as inauthentic Christianity. “Lausanne Occasional Paper: Christian Witness to Nominal Christians among Roman Catholics,” Lausanne Movement, June 10, 1980, 1. definitions, <https://lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-10>.

In retrospect, what our family experienced spiritually should be understood as non-Pentecostal Protestantism's weakness in recognizing the importance of Filipino "spirit-power" religiosity. In studying religious structures in the Greater Manila Area of the Philippines, Kim Jong Fil recognized that Pentecostal/Charismatic churches tend to grow faster than the non-Pentecostal Protestant churches because of the former's capacity to connect with the Filipino worldview.<sup>22</sup>

### *Classical Pentecostalism*

#### ENTHUSED BY PENTECOSTAL WORSHIP

The First Assemblies of God (AG) Church in my hometown was called Holy Ground Family Fellowship. By the time we joined the church, my family had gone through a pilgrimage of finding the right church that could satisfy our hunger for a "living" God instead of a seemingly "absentee" God. From our perspective, institutional Roman Catholicism and Charismatic Catholicism were insufficient in their biblical teaching; non-Pentecostal Protestant hymnal-based worship, on the other hand, was a bit bland. Our family yearned for a church that could give us sound biblical teaching and a charismatic style of worship. The denomination that met our yearnings was the AG.

#### WITNESSING A TRILINGUAL PROPHECY

I still remember a key experience that convinced me that the AG was my home church. After a wonderful concert-style worship one Sunday service, someone in the audience spoke in tongues. A few seconds later, someone interpreted the tongues-speech in English followed by another person interpreting it in Tagalog (the national language). Another person interpreting it in Bisaya (a minor Filipino language). I am fluent in all three languages, and I could verify that they all said the same thing. Amazingly, the interpretation of tongues was spontaneous, edifying, and consistent—qualities of Spirit-inspired utterance.<sup>23</sup> That experience in the church edified me and verified the nearness of God. It was then that I was introduced to the prophethood of all believers.<sup>24</sup> In Protestantism,

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<sup>22</sup> For a complete discussion, read Kim Jong Fil, "Contemporary Pentecostal/Charismatic Movements : On a Double-Structured Religious System in Greater Metro Manila" (2004).

<sup>23</sup> William W. Menzies and Robert P Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundations for Pentecostal Experience* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 107.

<sup>24</sup> The elaboration of theology of Spirit empowerment as a the prophethood of believers can be read in Roger Stronstad, *The Prophethood of All Believers: A Study*



I had only heard about the priesthood of all believers.<sup>25</sup> However, in Pentecostalism I learned that God did not just make us “a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9) but also eschatological prophets (Acts 1-2).<sup>26</sup> After witnessing prophetic utterance, I agreed with Pentecostals that both priesthood and prophethood are available for believers. I held that I had direct access to God and had the responsibility of sharing the grace of God through prayer and the sharing of the Word. Also, that God makes available a *donum superadditum* (a charismatic gift) which, when received, enables me to move in prophetic ministries as an eschatological witness to Christ.<sup>27</sup> The knowledge that I was both a priest and prophet of God gave me a sense of value, belongingness, identity, and mission.

Hence, from 2002 onwards, I committed myself to the AG, the largest Classical Pentecostal denomination in the Philippines, planted with the help of the USA AG.<sup>28</sup> In 2003, I submitted to water baptism by immersion. In 2008, I experienced Spirit Baptism with the initial evidence of tongues-speech.<sup>29</sup> Today, I am an ordained minister of the

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in *Luke's Charismatic Theology*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology. Supplement Series 16 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke: Trajectories from the Old Testament to Luke-Acts*, (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> The priesthood of believers is described in this paper as “a believer’s sharing in Christ’s royal priesthood through faith and baptism.” This means that a believer has a direct access to God and has a responsibility for ministering to others especially through prayer and the sharing of the Word. Uche Anizor and Hank Voss, *Representing Christ: A Vision for the Priesthood of All Believers*, Illustrated edition (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 18.

<sup>26</sup> Roger Stronstad posits that in Lukan theology, the restoration of prophecy upon the coming of Jesus the Messiah was a precursor to the fulfillment of a promised community of prophets. This eschatological prophetic community was established by Jesus himself and actualized at Pentecost (Acts 1-2). From Pentecost onwards, the prophethood of all believers has been inaugurated. Stronstad, *The Prophethood of All Believers*, 40.

<sup>27</sup> Menzies and Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, 75–76.

<sup>28</sup> Dynnice Rosanny D. Engcoy, *Pentecostal Pioneer: The Life and Legacy of Rudy Esperanza in the Early Years of the Assemblies of God in the Philippines*, Pentecostalism Around the World Series 4 (Baguio, Philippines: APTS Press, 2014), 31–47.

<sup>29</sup> The AG doctrine of Spirit Baptism states that the second reception of the Spirit’s power is subsequent to and distinct from conversion because it is not the source of covenant existence (contra Dunn), nor is it for soteriological necessity. Rather it is a *donum superadditum* (charismatic gift) granted to believers

Philippines General Council of the Assemblies of God, and I can say that I am firmly a Filipino Classical Pentecostal.

*Constructivist Narrative Analysis*

From the narrative above, one can see that my identity did not develop overnight. It went through a few paradigm-shifting encounters set in different times and contexts. The table below summarizes my constructivist analysis of the narrative presented.

Learning Episode	Crisis Experience	Reflective Abstraction	Resulting Construct
Folk Encounter	Institutional Catholicism vs. Folk Catholicism	Through rituals and mediums, one can access power (for healing, blessing, and cursing).	Folk Catholicism
Theistic Encounter	Catholic Theism vs. Agnosticism	God is the Christian God, a Triune Godhead (Father, Son, and Spirit). However, one can know him by going through the layers of priests, the Catholic Saints, and the Virgin Mary.	Catholic Theism (Trinitarianism)
Power Encounter	Malevolent spirits (spiritism) vs. Jesus' power (Christo-centrism)	Jesus is more powerful than any spirit. Jesus is the Lord of the spirits.	Christo-centrism
Truth Encounter	Salvation is in the Holy Catholic Church (Roman Catholicism) vs. Salvation in Christ alone (Protestantism)	Salvation is in Jesus alone. The Bible teaches us about Jesus. Through Christ, believers entered into a spiritual priesthood.	Protestantism
Pentecostal Encounter	The priesthood of Believers (Protestantism) vs. Priesthood and Prophethood of	We can encounter God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, who has ushered us not just into the	Classical Pentecostalism

for prophetic/missiological empowerment. The initial evidence of such gift is tongues-speech. Menzies and Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, 91–110.

	Believers (Classical Pentecostalism)	priesthood of believers but also the prophethood of believers. The church is a community of eschatological prophetic witnesses to Jesus.	
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Table 1. Summary of Constructivist Narrative Analysis

The summary above illustrates that specific episodes in my life caused paradigm shifts because they triggered crisis experiences, wherein I had to go through reflective abstractions and a mental reorganization to resolve my internal theological crises.

The first paradigm shift occurred when I struggled to identify between institutional Catholicism versus folk Catholicism. In this crisis, the short catechism and the influence of my immediate community simply led me to what felt native to me—folk religiosity. Folk Catholicism was weightier because it could give me access to power in the spirit world.<sup>30</sup> As crucial as salvation and heaven were in my young Filipino mind, it could not heal sickness or protect from evil spirits. Heaven was an abstract concept; disease and evil spirits were more concrete. It is no wonder that folk Catholicism was my default religion.

The second paradigm shift occurred when I was vacillating between Christian Theism and agnosticism. The perceived distance and abstractness of God, salvation, and heaven made me feel that God was dead, absent, or distant. I knew he existed, but I did not know if he was real.<sup>31</sup> Fortunately, in this crisis, the Catholic emphasis on God as Father, Son and Spirit, and their philosophical training on theism led me to choose Christian theism over agnosticism. My inherent supernatural worldview also contributed to my easy acceptance of a supreme being. I identified that supreme being as the Christian God.

<sup>30</sup> The pan-Filipino indigenous religious consciousness is more engrossed in the acquisition of beneficial powers than in the concept of guilt and sin. Maggay, *Filipino Religious Consciousness*, 21.

<sup>31</sup> This idea of an absentee God may not necessarily just be due to the depiction of Jesus as the Suffering servant in Roman Catholicism. A deeper root of this ideation would be the indigenous Filipino view that after creation, the creator, who is father god, retired from the earth and stayed in heaven. Mercado writes about this theme of *dei otiosi* (idle gods) or an impersonal god in the Filipino ancient worldview. Leonardo N. Mercado, *Inculturation and Filipino Theology* (Manila, Philippines: Divine Word Publications, 1992), 74.

The third paradigm shift occurred in a power encounter between evil spirits and Jesus. Personally, encountering the power of Jesus' name over evil spirits made me loyal to him. Again, this allegiance was due to an inherent supernatural worldview that predisposed me to be devoted to higher powers. Fortunately, my firm Catholic Trinitarianism had already identified this higher power as the Christian God, Father, Son (Jesus), and Spirit. Later on, this made it easier for me to accept Jesus, who is more powerful than any spirit/s in this world.

Fourthly, I had a major crisis about my ecclesial commitment. The more I knew about Jesus, the more I realized that he was the faithful Savior. I rejected my understanding of salvation as something gained through the Holy Catholic Church and replaced it with the view that salvation is through Christ alone. Having witnessed the power of Jesus and having learned about him through Bible studies, I could no longer retain a church-centric view of salvation. This switch was a significant shift in my religious life since it meant I had to transfer religious communities from Catholicism to Protestantism.

Finally, in my crisis between the Protestant conception of the priesthood of believers versus both the priesthood and prophethood of believers through Classical Pentecostalism, I retained the latter. I agreed with the premise that the whole biblical experience of the Holy Spirit included a double reception of spiritual power, that is, with the first reception of the Spirit at conversion/initiation and the second reception of prophetic power after conversion.<sup>32</sup> Once again, my indigenous religious paradigm predisposed me to desire the empowerment offered by God through the Holy Spirit.<sup>33</sup>

In the final analysis, I find myself going full circle, where my indigenous religious paradigm connected to the Christian worldview, specifically in the tradition of classical Pentecostalism. Classical Pentecostalism had all the components that made sense to my religious consciousness: a supernatural worldview, Trinitarianism, Christocentrism, and spiritual empowerment for priesthood and prophethood.

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<sup>32</sup> Menzies and Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, 75–76.

<sup>33</sup> Since the Philippines has strong animistic roots, Filipino religiosity is more predisposed to religions of power, that is “religion here is bent toward the more pragmatic problem of appeasing and having access to the powers.” Maggay, *Filipino Religious Consciousness*, 22.

## Bridging the Contextual Distance

Looking back, I recognize that my identification as a Filipino Classical Pentecostal has to do with constructive epistemological links in my worldview. As Charles Kraft says, “People never change their whole worldview. Yet worldviews change because people change parts of them.”<sup>34</sup> The parts of my worldview that changed were certain paradigms that no longer made sense as I wrestled with new encounters. The elements retained were those that made sense to my core identity and could find a link in my religious consciousness. As a whole, I can now say that my religious paradigm is that of a Filipino Classical Pentecostal. To articulate the cohesiveness of this identity, let me share my version of a Filipino Pentecostal gospel.

### *Towards a Filipino Pentecostal Gospel*

In the beginning, there was a triune God, *Diyos ama* (father god), his son, *Bathala* (the heir of the sky/heavens, sent to earth to be the mediator of father god and humans), and *Laon*, the spirit force of the entire created world.<sup>35</sup> *Diyos ama* (father god), *Bathala*, and *Laon* have existed since the beginning of the world but are distant, unknowable, and hard to reach.<sup>36</sup> To connect with god, one had to approach the lower deities or spirits such as the *anitos* (ancestral spirits or nature spirits).<sup>37</sup> But the lower deities were not always benevolent; some helped lowly humans, but others harmed them.<sup>38</sup> You had to consult a powerful medium like the *babaylan* (female shaman) who could communicate to these spirits and acquire spiritual power for specific tasks.<sup>39</sup> These spirit mediums were

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<sup>34</sup> Kraft, Varney, and Kearney, *Christianity with Power*, 82.

<sup>35</sup> Filipino historian, Pedro Paterno, recorded that when Christianity was being introduced to the Philippines, beliefs that paralleled to the Christian concept of the Trinity existed. Pedro Alejandro Paterno, *El Cristianismo En La Antigua Civilización Tagalog* (Madrid, Spain: Nabu Press, 1892).

<sup>36</sup> Proposed as the Philippine Trinity, the supreme deity was considered as the creator who retired after creation and sent his son, Bathala (known by other names in other tribes), to earth as the mediator between humans and god. Laon was a type of pantheistic spirit. “Indigenous Religious Beliefs,” accessed December 9, 2021, [http://www.seasite.niu.edu/tagalog/modules/modules/philippinereligions/article\\_indigenous\\_beliefs.htm](http://www.seasite.niu.edu/tagalog/modules/modules/philippinereligions/article_indigenous_beliefs.htm); C. F. Mercado, *Inculturation and Filipino Theology*, 75–76.

<sup>37</sup> Mercado, *Inculturation and Filipino Theology*, 76.

<sup>38</sup> In the Filipino worldview, supernatural beings are either benevolent or malevolent. F. Landa Jocano, *Filipino Worldview: Ethnography of Local Knowledge*, Anthropology of the Filipino People, V (Metro Manila, Philippines: Punlad Research House, Inc., 2001), 145.

<sup>39</sup> Jocano, *Filipino Worldview*, 146.

powerful and scary. You had to obey their rituals and demands because only they had access to higher powers.

Furthermore, one had to sacrifice to get the attention of the spirits. To appease them, one bowed in fear and sacrifice. There was no absolute protection against the spirits; there was no definitive way to get their blessing; only a never-ending cycle of appeasement suffices.

Then good news came! More than two thousand years ago, *Diyos Ama* (Father God) wanted to draw near his created beings. He sent his Son, *Bathala*, to come to earth and be with lowly humans. *Bathala* walked among lowly men and saw how scared they were of the spirits. He saw how the never-ending cycle of divine appeasement did not give them peace and security. He saw how power was abused and monopolized by the spirit mediums. Finally, he saw how people wanted to draw near to God but couldn't. Lowly humans had no peace. No sense of security. No rest from sacrifice. So, they repeatedly surrendered their fate to whatever this distant God wanted for their lives. Whatever happens, happens.

Seeing the hopelessness and helplessness of his created beings, *Diyos ama* (Father God) told *Bathala* to bridge the distance so his created beings could connect with him. He told *Bathala* to make a way by offering his life as the ultimate sacrifice. *Bathala*, in obedience to the *Diyos ama* (Father God) and because of love for helpless humans, offered his life as a sacrifice for all. He died on a wooden cross and was buried for three days. Then on the third day, he rose again appearing before humans and proclaiming: "The curse is broken. You are free to draw near to God and receive his blessing. You are no longer lowly human beings. You can be sons and daughters of God. As God's children, you no longer need to fear the spirits nor sacrifice for blessings and curses. You just need to have faith in me and walk the way I have shown you, for I am the Lord of all."

Those who heard it could not believe it. They wondered, "Why did *Bathala* say the curse is broken? Why did he say that we are no longer lowly beings?" To answer them, a book was given. It was called the *Bibliya* (Bible). It was the true story of how *Diyos Ama* (Father God) created everything and how he has been trying to reconnect with his created beings throughout history.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> The first fundamental truth of the AG states that the Bible reveals God to humankind. William W. Menzies and Stanley Horton, *Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective*, Revised (Springfield, MO: Gospel Pub. House, 2012), 16, 20–21.

In this book, God was called Father, his Son was named Jesus (not *Bathala*), and his Spirit, the Holy Spirit (not *Laon*).<sup>41</sup> God, the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit existed before the world's creation and were in a good relationship with the first humans, Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve lived with God for they were part of his family (Genesis 1-2). God blessed them abundantly and loved them deeply. But then they chose to offend God and consequently earned a curse (Genesis 3).<sup>42</sup> The curse led to suffering, sickness, and death. It also led to eternal death in a fiery place called *impiyerno* (hell). There was no way out for them nor their descendants (Romans 3:10-18, 5:12; 1 John 1:8-10).

Fortunately, God loved his created beings (John 3:16). They were meant to be his children so he would not let them be eternally cursed. He sent his Son, Jesus, to save humans by dying in their place. Jesus obeyed God's law and provided salvation by dying for humans (Romans 5).<sup>43</sup> His death was a substitute for the death of human beings so they had a way to escape the curse.<sup>44</sup> He broke the curse of suffering, sickness, and death with his power.

Once victorious, Jesus bodily resurrected and started a new line of humanity (1 Corinthians 15:21). Those who follow him can receive forgiveness from the original offense, freedom from the curse of the offense, and re-entry into the family of God. No longer are humans helpless and hopeless; they have a way out of the curse and a way into the family of God. The spirits no longer have power over them; sacrifice no longer need to be made; people are given a new chance at life and can go directly to God for all their needs (whether heavenly needs or earthly needs).

But wait there's more! God does not stop with giving humans freedom from the curse. He wants to provide them with his power (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit can grant them the power needed to walk the way

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<sup>41</sup> The second AG fundamental truth is about the one true God who is a Triune God (Father, Son and Spirit). Menzies and Horton, *Bible Doctrines*, 42–45.

<sup>42</sup> The fourth AG fundamental truth is about the voluntary transgression of man against God. Menzies and Horton, *Bible Doctrines*, 76.

<sup>43</sup> The third and fifth AG fundamental truths are about Jesus, the Son of God, who is the God-Man whose substitutionary atonement for humanity on the cross opened the way for humans to receive God's forgiveness and reconciliation. Menzies and Horton, *Bible Doctrines*, 60, 96.

<sup>44</sup> Jesus' death on the cross satisfied the claims of God's law and justice, thereby removing the curse of sin and death. Menzies and Horton, 100.

of Jesus.<sup>45</sup> They no longer need spirit mediums to access God, they only need to follow Jesus, the Lord of all. They too can be priests of God because they can have direct access to God and be used in different ways to serve God's people.

Also, through the Holy Spirit, they can be a medium of God's prophetic power. To do this, they have to receive God's promised "power from on high" (Acts 1:4-8). They'll know they've received this gift when they start to speak in other tongues as the Holy Spirit grants them the ability.<sup>46</sup> God grants the priesthood and prophethood to believers through Jesus and the Holy Spirit.<sup>47</sup> See, his people are not lowly beings because the Triune God himself gives them the power to live as his children on earth (John 1:12-13).

The people who heard this were glad! They rejoiced that they could receive freedom from the curse because of Jesus (whose name they once mistook as *Bathala*). They also rejoiced because the Holy Spirit (whose name they once mistook as *Laon*) was not some indistinct force but rather the third person of the Trinity. More importantly, they rejoiced because they are now part of God's family. Being a member of God's family meets all their psychospiritual and social needs.<sup>48</sup> With joy, they can proudly say: "I am a child of God; I serve as his priest and prophet in this world. Though he was unknowable and far at first, Jesus and the Holy Spirit bridged the distance and revealed God's identity, intention, and heart to us. Now, I no longer need to fear because I am loved, honored, and empowered by God."

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<sup>45</sup> The seventh AG fundamental truth states that believers can receive a promised gift of the Father through the command and outpouring of Jesus. This gift is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit's power for witness and service. Menzies and Horton, 122.

<sup>46</sup> This promised gift of Spirit empowerment is initially evidenced by speaking in other tongues. Menzies and Horton, *Bible Doctrines*, 134.

<sup>47</sup> The 11<sup>th</sup> AG fundamental truth talks about the various ministries of a believer which include being both priest and prophet in the service of God's ministry. Menzies and Horton, *Bible Doctrines*, 174.

<sup>48</sup> Sunday Aigbe writes that the two needs of a people with tribal animistic roots are the need for social security and the need for deeper psycho-spiritual commitment. Sunday Aigbe, "Pentecostal Mission and Tribal People Groups," in *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective* (ed. Murray A. Dempster and Byron D. Klaus; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 171.



## Conclusion

In conclusion, my identity is that of a Filipino Classical Pentecostal. The socio-religious developments that contributed to my identity formation included Spanish colonialism in both governance and the non-contextualized imposition of Roman Catholicism. Through this, folk Catholicism, the syncretism of Roman Catholicism and animism, developed in the country and became the popular religion of most Filipinos, including me.

Secondly, Protestantism also entered the country after the Spanish rule and resulted in the ecclesial conversion of some Filipinos. However, this ecclesial conversion was more inherited than voluntary resulting in nominal Christianity and triggering the denominational switching from Catholicism and Protestantism. My family and I were one of those who left Roman Catholicism after a power and truth encounter with Jesus; moreover, we switched from non-Pentecostal Protestantism to Pentecostal Protestantism.

Thirdly, the entrance of classical Pentecostalism provided Filipinos access to the Pentecostal message. Interestingly, Pentecostalism grew faster than other Protestant church traditions because its religious worldview had many contact points with the Filipino worldview. The theology of Spirit empowerment (priesthood and prophethood of believers) resonated with the Filipino religious consciousness. This can be seen in my personal preference for Pentecostal worship and spirituality.

How these socio-religious developments contributed to my theological identity was narrated by episodic memory in my autobiography. They were analyzed through the constructivist scheme of crisis-reflection-integration and respectively termed as folk encounter, theistic encounter, power encounter, truth encounter, and Pentecostal encounter. These crisis encounters contributed to forming a Filipino Classical Pentecostal identity. A proposed Filipino Pentecostal gospel demonstrates cohesiveness.

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## Review

**The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology.** Edited by Wolfgang Vondey. New York, NY: Routledge, 2020. 464 pp.

Book Review

By Robert D. McBain

*The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology* is a multi-authored work edited by Wolfgang Vondey. Vondey serves as a Professor of Christian Theology and Pentecostal Studies and is the Director of the Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies at the University of Birmingham. Contemporary Christianity and Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies are his teaching and research areas. He integrates his research with pneumatology, ecclesiology, ecumenical theology, and the intersection of theology and science. His recent book, *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel*, received the Pneuma Book Award of the Society for Pentecostal Studies in 2018. He is currently the editor of the *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association*.

*The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology* brings together a global list of contributors, including Allan H. Anderson, Amos Yong, Kenneth J. Archer, Wonsuk Ma, Frank Macchia, and Simon Chan, to name but a few. The handbook's goal is to provide readers with a snapshot of the current state of Pentecostal theology. The text contains forty-two chapters divided into five parts. Each part speaks toward different theological themes: contextualizing Pentecostal theology, theological sources, theological methods, doctrines and practices, and conversations and challenges. Although the reader can approach each chapter as an individual work, Vondey intends the chapters to be read as part of an unfolding narrative belonging to that section's theme.

The first part discusses the contextual nature of Pentecostal theology. The section begins with Christopher A. Stevenson identifying some approaches Pentecostal scholars use to pursue the theological task. He argues that Pentecostal theology is never purely Pentecostal because theologians are products of their context. Allan H. Anderson's chapter follows. He argues that the common denominator between all the different types of Pentecostal theologies is their focus on the contextualized experience of the Spirit. Anderson's focus on experience leads to Daniel Castello's chapter on spirituality. Castello argues that spirituality plays a significant role in theological method, epistemology, and praxis. Kenneth J. Archer's chapter ends the first part of the book. Archer argues that Pentecostal theology exhibits narrative

qualities rooted in an experiential, oral, and lived tradition that shapes, forms, and communicates personal and social identity.

The second part discusses Pentecostal theological sources. The section expands upon the Wesleyan Quadrilateral to include revelation, culture, and worship. As with the first section, the chapters flow into each other following this order: revelation, scripture, reason, experience, tradition, culture, and worship. The way Vondey has ordered these chapters in this section provides insight into how he prioritizes the theological sources and how he sees them relate to and build upon each other.

Part three explores the different theological methods used in Pentecostal theology (i.e., biblical hermeneutics, theological hermeneutics, the pneumatological imagination, practical theology, and the full gospel). Jacqueline Grey's chapter on biblical hermeneutics reinforces the role of scripture, experience, Spirit, and community within the Pentecostal hermeneutical process. In the theological hermeneutics chapter, L. William Oliverio, Jr. argues that theological hermeneutics provides insightful and constructive ways for Pentecostals to understand God, humanity, and the world. Amos Yong's chapter on pneumatological imagination argues that Pentecostal theological logic is foundational for all Christian theologizing. Mark Cartledge's chapter defines the basic contours of a pneumatological practical theology. Vondey's chapter on the full gospel ends this section by arguing that the "full gospel" is a theological narrative that emerges from participation in the biblical Pentecostal experience.

The chapters in parts four and five depart from the narrative structure of previous sections and are easily read as individual units. Part four contains fourteen chapters: trinitarian theology, oneness theology, pneumatology, Christology, salvation, sanctification, Spirit baptism, healing, eschatology, mission, ecclesiology, spiritual gifts, the sacraments, and spiritual warfare. The authors reflect on the internal debates, the historical development, and offer constructive proposals on each topic. These chapters illustrate how the contexts, sources, and methods discussed in the previous sections operate in practice. Part five contains twelve chapters reflecting on some prominent discussions at the margins of Pentecostal theology and its self-understanding. This section covers arts and aesthetics, disability, ecology, economics, ecumenical theology, feminist theology, philosophy, prosperity theology, race, social justice, theology and science, theology of religions, and theology and science.

*The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology* is a monumental work that certainly fulfills its goal of providing a snapshot of Pentecostal theology. However, because the text offers a "snapshot," it does not break new ground. I assume that a seasoned Pentecostal scholar would probably already be aware of much of the discussions in Pentecostal theology taking place within their specific research context. This assumption seems especially true considering that the themes of Pentecost, Spirit, experience, Scripture, community, and narrative emerge throughout the chapters so repeatedly that at times it seems

that the chapters were saying the same thing again and again but in different ways. Therefore, I see this text mainly benefiting students, non-Pentecostal scholars, and those Pentecostal scholars looking for reference material for a course they are teaching or wishing to expand into other research areas. This text certainly has helped me immensely as a Ph.D. in Theology student, and I cannot praise it enough.

The first three sections are particularly illuminating. It is valuable for the reader to read sections one, two, and three sequentially to get the most benefit. However, the chapters in the last two sections stand by themselves and can be read individually. Each chapter's excellent referencing of other sources only adds to the text's appeal and contributes towards the solid Pentecostal theological foundation the text offer readers. The chapters are easy to read, and while being academically rigorous, they are simple enough to provide an entry point into the topic. The text's user-friendliness is a strong point and makes the text readily accessible. Vondey and his colleagues certainly have created a landmark volume.

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