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The Nature and Mission of the Postmodern Church

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1. Introduction

This presentation will seek to link Edinburgh 2010: Witnessing to Christ Today, Lausanne III: Cape Town 2010 – World Congress on Evangelization, the Global Mission Consultation & Celebration - From Edinburgh to Tokyo, and other centenary observances of the historic 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference. Among the notable contrasts between Edinburgh 1910 and 2010 is that Edinburgh 1910 complained that only 1/3 of the world was Christian whereas Edinburgh 2010 seemed relieved to report that 1/3 of the world remains Christian.

I was a presenter at the 2-6 June 2010 conference known simply as Edinburgh 2010. During the summer of 2009, I was part of the Edinburgh 2010 Commission VII that produced a study report commissioned by Edinburgh 2010. Today's study will provoke questions about how Pentecostals around the world might navigate the 21st Century in the light of discussions about cyberchurch while revisiting the perennial conciliar quest to relate "unity" to "mission" of the Church.

In light of the fact that there is no agreement on global Pentecostal identity, it would be ludicrous to expect a presentation on ecclesiology that could speak authoritatively for even those Pentecostals that make up the Pentecostal World Fellowship. The wide diversity of ecclesiology found among Pentecostals around the world is easily measured by the number of official documents available now on cds and dvds. In terms of scholarly analysis, we need

look no farther than the works on ecclesiology by Shane Clifton (Australia), Wolfgang Vondey (Germany), and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (Finland).¹

There is in fact no uniform ecclesiastical polity embraced by Pentecostals around the world as was clearly illustrated in the founding of the Pentecostal World Conference itself.

Pentecostals bring to life the admission in the Lima document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* that the 'New Testament does not describe a single pattern of ministry which might serve as a blueprint or continuing norm for all future ministry in the Church'. This view of the essence of the church differs from that of those who insist that we really cannot talk about the nature of the church without making certain fundamental assumptions about how the church is to be constituted. Is it an episcopate, a council of presbyters, or simply a congregation? The Assemblies of God in the U.S.A. have in the past officially used the word 'fellowship' as their corporate self-designation as some sort of sign that intends to resist the notion that they are a full-fledged denomination.

In contrast to ecclesiological voids noted by Frank Macchia, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen and other like-minded scholars, Dale Coulter and I have published in *Pneuma: The Journal for the Society for Pentecostal Studies* that the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) paid a lot of attention to ecclesiology particularly in the formative years at the opening of the 20th Century.² One could also argue that "Free-Churches" speak from a pre-determined ecclesiology even if such has not been clearly articulated in print.

Sadly I must say that most of what will be covered here will come from the Global North which is unfortunate given the shift of Christianity and Pentecostalism in particular to the Global South. This is not for lack of interest but rather evidences limited research opportunities and the absence of appropriate materials in English.

My primary dialogue partners will be the conciliar working document *Nature and Mission of the Church* and the Edinburgh 2010 Commission III report on postmodernity in addition to Neil J. Ormerod and Shane Clifton's *Globalization and the Mission of the Church. Ecclesiological Investigations* (London: T&T Clark, 2009). In fact I found this book by a Roman Catholic mentor of an emerging Pentecostal scholar in Australia so compelling that at some points I thought to quote large sections ad nauseam but that would be unfair to them and to what we need to do together today.³

¹ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002); Shane Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition: Analysing the Developing Ecclesiology of the Assemblies of God in Australia* (Leiden ; Boston : Brill, 2009); Wolfgang Vondey, *People of Bread: Rediscovering Ecclesiology*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2008).

² Dale Coulter, "The Development of Ecclesiology in the Church of God (Cleveland, TN): A Forgotten Contribution?" in *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 29:1 (2007) pages 59-85; Harold D. Hunter, "A.J. Tomlinson's Emerging Ecclesiology," accepted for publication in *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*.

³ *Edinburgh 2010: Witnesses to Christ Today*, Volume 2, edited by Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2010); *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, Faith and Order #198 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005); Neil M. Ormerod and Shane Clifton, *Globalization and the Mission of the Church: Ecclesiological Investigations* (London: T&T Clark, 2009).

2. Edinburgh 2010 Commission III Report on Postmodernity

I must say that reading the Edinburgh 2010 Commission III document on postmodernity was an authentic postmodern encounter. The framers of this document concede that their report is not “structured” but rather “flashes and glimpses of the issues” which is not simply a commentary on their process but their version of postmodernities.⁴ Speaking metaphorically, my first reaction was how would this team manage the cross-cultural dimensions of Noah’s Ark? However, I read later in the document that they are theoretically capable of rebuilding a Bosnian Mosque.

Is hope irreconcilable with postmodernity? When one goes to the Edinburgh 2010 Commission III report 4:1, one has to reckon with the possibility that postmodernity may surrender hope. I, for one, am not willing to do this and was glad to see a course correction later in the document where hope was invoked as necessary for transformation. However, earlier in the document they dismissed the related comments by David Kettle as modern not postmodern.⁵

Please note that while the Edinburgh 2010 Commission III report may often be quite fluid, it yet firmly rejects Christian mission that is not “holistic” a requirement it is said if it is to be “valid and relevant”. “It is always proclamation, dialogue and action in service for justice; it is always word and deed.” In reality these are hallmarks of Pentecostal spirituality. Notice the warning about abuse of scripture when pitting John 3:16 for the Lausanne Movement over against the WCC attraction to Luke 14:18-19.⁶ This is of interest in part because Pentecostals have been quite literal about bringing in the “poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame” (Luke 14:21, NRSV) as well as going “out into the roads and the country lanes and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled” (Luke 14:23, NRSV).

The Edinburgh 2010 Commission III report has this to say about Pentecostals:

Pentecostalism ... although having strong pre-modern characteristics, might be said to be in part a postmodern phenomenon, insofar as it has existed on the fringe of modernity, frowned upon by the established church as well as secular society. Nevertheless, it proved adaptable, not the least due to its fluid or plastic nature, antedating the whole discussion around postmodernities. It may, therefore, be more successful than most churches in addressing postmodern concerns.⁷

I should say that in the sense that Classical Pentecostalism has been ridiculed, marginalized and suppressed by colonizers from Magisterial Christianity and in the USA by particular

⁴ “Mission and Postmodernities,” Section 7, *Edinburgh 2010: Witnesses to Christ Today*, Volume 2, edited by Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2010), p. 83.

⁵ “Mission and Postmodernities,” 4:1, p. 72, 6:3, p. 81, Section 3, p. 71.

⁶ :”Mission and Postmodernities,” 5:4, p. 79.

⁷ “Mission and Postmodernities,” 5:2, p. 77.

Evangelicals that there is some merit to the concept that we seek liberation. It was no small challenge for me to do a Ph.D. on Pentecostal pneumatology in the 1970s. When I tried to start a Pentecostal group at the American Academy of Religion in 1984, I was told that we were not allowed to have our own voice but others could speak for us. My early ecumenical work in the 1980s was drowned out by voices from outside the Pentecostal Movement.

Then again, perhaps the idea in the report about a positive role in postmodernity by Pentecostals is like trying to square a circle because on the one hand the Pentecostal church of my youth broke new ground in breaking Jim Crow Laws yet we very much lived in a sub-culture given many names like Victorian, Puritanical, pre-Chalcedonian, sub-modern, etc. The label varied according to the outside 'expert'. However, in terms of technology we were quick to adapt to loudspeakers on the top of cars, radio, tv and even distributed tracts by throwing them out of little airplanes. And today during a Sunday morning worship service, some are emailing, texting, tweeting, and facebooking even if they are not watching a hologram, making their own virtual church or viewing a cyberchurch on an iPhone or iPad. I am quite sure the latter is not being true to our heritage from Azusa St., the Welsh Revival, Pandita Ramabai in India, and our fathers and mothers from around the world.

Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement have unwittingly been radically influenced by Gutenberg's invention making possible the world-wide parade of Bibles, along with the proliferation of defiant commentators, spawned, in part, by Luther's idea of direct access to God. Thus this group helps define the expression from "Gutenberg to Google" that explores concepts like cyberchurch and even cyber-Eucharist⁸ – see www.postthehost.net - which prompts the question of whether we would be well served by a compassionate version of "China's Great Firewall".

I appear to some to be a living dinosaur. My father's generation knew about brush arbors and graduated to the sawdust trials with tent revivals. They faced threats by people with guns, knives, fire, hangings, poison, whips, brute force, etc., although this does not compare to what is still going on with Pentecostals around the world as we still have martyrs. However, it is possible that the first Pentecostal martyr in the U.S.A. was killed by police in 1918 due to his commitment to pacifism.⁹

Have you ever met someone raised in Pentecostal revival services where 'everything was moving but the pews'? Well, sometimes I saw the pews move. *The Live Coals of Fire* started in 1899 shows that B.H. Irwin appointed African-American W.E. Fuller a ruling elder. In 1904 Fuller wrote to J.H. King's *Live Coals* praising God for "the blood that cleans up, the Holy Ghost that fills up, the fire that burns up, and the dynamite that blows up." By 1905, Fuller, age 30, was one of three assistant general overseers to Fire-Baptized Holiness Church General Overseer J.H. King.

⁸ Cyber-Eucharist like PosttheHost is mentioned in "Mission and Postmodernities," 4:2, p. 72.

⁹ See Paul Alexander, *Peace to War: Shifting Allegiances in the Assemblies of God* (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2009), pp. 136-137. Also, email (6/04/2010) from Jay Beaman.

The ‘radical’ Pentecostal church in which I was raised kept us in church all the time from early in the morning and past midnight. We prayed, sang, preached, testified of miracles, etc. In terms of evangelism, we evangelized our own families and people who came to our churches which was true if they had already been baptized even by us.

My early years were spent witnessing on the streets, going house to house, handing out tracts at any opportunity, preaching revival services night after night, and so on that was not for the faint of heart. We were told that this was a sign of the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit and were driven with a sense of urgency so that the ‘world may believe’. Notice, however, this contrasts with “believe” when used in the Edinburgh 2010 Commission III report 5:2 where one can be an exclusivist, inclusivist, pluralist or whatever yet “earnestly desire all to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4).”¹⁰

Did we get support from my other Christian brothers and sisters? Usually not. What I heard was “They are illiterate”. Well, we memorized more Bible verses than many of them had ever read. I guess they never heard of a “sword drill”. Did they not go to the funeral of the likes of Bishop B.E. Underwood and see the worn out Bible in the casket? I heard them say, “They don’t have cathedrals”. Okay, so we had brush arbors and hit the sawdust trail but this means only that we have something in common with the ‘tree-churches’ of Africa or the house churches of China, none of which it has been argued were foreign to churches of the 1st century. “They’re weird!” Yes, we were taught that it was okay to be “peculiar” and that was worn as a badge of honor. Now even my Orthodox friend from Crete said we are really in post-postmodernity where people are returning to what has been proven true through the ages.

3. Miroslav Volf’s Participatory Ecclesiology

With the aid of Monsignor Peter Hocken, I put together the first global conference for Pentecostal scholars known as the Theological Track of Brighton ’91. Our presenters were Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and Pentecostal. Everything possible was done to strike a balance between the Global North and Global South.

Our keynote speaker for the conference was Professor Jürgen Moltmann. Professor Moltmann reserved a chapter of his *The Spirit of Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) until after the delivery of his presentation at Brighton ’91. In the aftermath of the conference, Moltmann invited me to contribute “We Are the Church: New Congregationalism,” in Jürgen Moltmann and Karl-Josef Kuschel, editors, *Concilium: Revista Internazionale di Teologia*. This volume was devoted to the topic “Pentecostal Movements as an Ecumenical Challenge”. Jürgen Moltmann – or at least Miroslav Volf as seen in his response to my article – wanted me to argue that the ‘democratic presence of the Holy Spirit’ among Pentecostals accounted for more congregational autonomy than in magisterial traditions, but I cited evidence to the contrary as part of the story in addition to what they expected.

¹⁰ “Mission and Postmodernities,” 5:2, p. 77.

I argued that that despite our several differences, yet one common feature distinguishes Pentecostal churches. Even with the most rigid control from the top down, the local churches are constantly exhorted to be alive and on fire. Each member is expected to be active and carry the flame. To bend a familiar image, Pentecostals believe in the transformation not of elements or buildings, but of believers. It is in the context of determining the nature of worship — though in a forum sometimes labeled the ‘sacred theatre of the spirit possessed’ — that Pentecostals go on to the question of the church dispersed in the world - that is, the witnessing and serving people of God.

I would like to briefly elaborate on this by illustrating that I stayed tied to a local church and the state and general church while working on my Ph.D. I support Pentecostal students going anywhere in the world for graduate degrees but if they are not actively participating in a faith community then I fear they may betray a fundamental point of Pentecostal ecclesiology. I am not trying to limit academic freedom of teachers, scholars, or students because hard questions are not to be avoided.

In 2010, Dr. Arlene Sanchez Walsh called for an alternative to the Society for Pentecostal Studies (SPS). She proposed organizing such during the upcoming November 2010 edition of the American Academy of Religion in ATL. She came to view her abbreviated term on the SPS executive committee as a time when others on the committee too readily gave in to demands from Pentecostal executives. In the name of academic freedom she went on to classify sexuality as a ‘culture war’ rather than a theological issue. Of course many other traditions have followed this path, but is this where the Pentecostal Movement wants to go? Have not heresies worse than those spawned by wayward Pentecostals come from 19th century German universities that I had to study as a seminary student in the 1970s?

If one returns to the special issue of *Concilium*, it is here we first read about Miroslav Volf’s formulation of “participatory ecclesiology”. Volf¹¹ reduced my article to three points:

1. The local church is central due to emphasis on worship
2. Structures of the church are pluriform
3. The life of the church is participatory

In terms of being participatory, not only can we use my phrase about every member should carry the flame but things like group prayer aloud, gifts of the Spirit that erupted during worship services, spontaneous spiritual dance, vigorous singing, constant earnest prayer, observe strict discipline, engage in diligent study and memorizing of the scripture, constant affirmation of the faith and their faithfulness, evangelize at every opportunity, etc. In short, there was no room for those who were complacent. I was raised on a slogan that was reportedly printed on a poster carried around by A.J. Tomlinson that said “A work for every member and every member a worker”.

¹¹ Miroslav Volf, “A Protestant Response,” *Pentecostal Movements As An Ecumenical Challenge*, edited by Jürgen Moltmann and Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Concilium: Revista Internazionale di Teologia* 3 (1996), p. 37.

This concept of participatory ecclesiology gained a wider hearing in Volf's *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*. Here Volf's dialogue partners are Pope Benedict who then was Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and the Orthodox authority John Zizioulas. Volf utilizes the category of Free Church ecclesiology to engage Baptist theologian John Smyth as well as feminist theologians.

Volf soundly rejects what he labels the "episcopocentric" ecclesiology of Ratzinger and Zizioulas in favor of a 'polycentric community': "Paul seems to envision such a model of ecclesial life with a polycentric participative structure when he tries to reestablish peace within the enthusiastic and chaotic congregation in Corinth (see 1 Cor. 14:33)".¹²

Volf also makes clear that he disowns what he terms the Catholic and Orthodox notion of the soteriological significance of the church. It is here where he suggests that the "mediation of salvation occurs not only through office-holders, but also through all other members of the church".¹³ This is linked to his notion of a "polycentric community" that leads to talk of a "polycentric participative" model. So at the end of the day the church does have soteriological significance but not of the sort associated with Magisterial Christianity.

"Ratzinger and Zizioulas understand the Trinity hierarchically and ground the hierarchical relations within the church in part of this basis" Volf continues "In following Jürgen Moltmann, I by contrast take as my premise the symmetrical relations within the Trinity". "Relations between charismata, modeled after the Trinity, are reciprocal and symmetrical, all members of the church have charismata, and all are to engage their charismata for the good of all others."¹⁴

There is certainly more to be said about how Volf fleshed out this ecclesiology but at this point I want to comment on the paradigm that allows Volf and Kärkkäinen to speak of Free Church ecclesiology. This kind of language works well when drawing a contrast to what can be called a descending ecclesiology over against an ascending ecclesiology. This concept is used in the unique 2009 book co-authored by a Roman Catholic and Pentecostal scholar, both from Australia that will be consulted in the next section.

We will return to this momentarily, but let me interject a simplistic paradigm that I first published in 1992¹⁵ which goes as follows:

¹² Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 224.

¹³ Volf, *After Our Likeness*, p. 223.

¹⁴ Volf, *After Our Likeness*, p. 226.

¹⁵ Harold D. Hunter, "The Reemergence of Spirit Christology," *EPTA Bulletin* 10:1 (1992), pp. 50-57.

APOSTOLIC

Succession	Teaching	Restoration⁶
Catholic	Magisterial Reformation	Enthusiastic Pneumatomania ⁷
Orthodox	Lutheran	Believer's Church: ⁸
Anglican	Presbyterian	Baptists
		Landmark, Missionary
	American Baptists	Wesleyanism ⁹

The short version is that advocating a participatory ecclesiology does not require an exclusive affirmation of the Free Church idea that limits the Church to a local assembly. Volf's idea of "interecclesial minimum"¹⁶ falls short on many accounts as should be evident in this study.

In *After Our Likeness*, Volf contends that "diachronic plurality is even more important than synchronic" and observes that "the charismata with which these members serve in the congregation can change, certain charismata come to the fore at certain times, while others become unimportant. Members who are 'passive' are not truly 'charismatic' even though "there are no members without charisma".¹⁷

⁶ See Garry Dale Nation, "The Hermeneutics of Pentecostal-Charismatic Restoration Theology: A Critical Analysis," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, December, 1990, pp. 1ff,16,19,28,30; *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, ed. by Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), pp. 113ff,35,42,64,67,70. Nation notes [p.97] that current restorationists identify with Paulicians, Bogomites, Albigenses, Waldensians, etc. He himself rules out Montanists in this category. Cf. Edith L. Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Edith L. Blumhofer, "Restoration as Revival: Early American Pentecostalism," *Modern Christian Revivals* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), edited by Edith L. Blumhofer and Randall Balmer.

⁷ This is my current alternative to the general term Spirit Movement. I used Spirit Movement for several years before discovering that Martin Marty appropriated it in a similar way when addressing the 1973 session of the Society for Pentecostal Studies. See Martin Marty, "Pentecostalism in the Context of American Piety and Practice," *Aspects of Pentecostal-Charismatic Origins*, ed. by Vinson Synan (Plainfield: Logos, 1973) p. 200. The term is found also in the 1974 Tübingen dissertation by John J. McNamee, "The Role of the Spirit in Pentecostalism: A Comparative Study," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (University of Tübingen, 1974).

⁸ See: Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Believers' Church* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1985); Paul Gritz, "'Church' in the History of Pentecostalism," paper read to 1991 Pentecostal-NCC Faith & Order Dialogue, p. 2; Eric H. Ohlmann, "Baptists and Evangelicals," *Variety of American Evangelicalism*, p. 149. Nation, "Restoration Theology," agrees [pp. 117, 61, 7,95], but is quick to remind that not all believers' churches are restorationists.

⁹ See: Durnbaugh, *Believers' Church*, chapter 5; Gritz, "'Church' in the History of Pentecostalism," p. 2ff; Richard T. Hughes, "Are Restorationists Evangelicals?" *Variety of American Evangelicalism*, p. 112. Dick Iverson connects Luther, Mennonites, Baptists, Wesley and A.B. Simpson in restoration according to Nation, "Restoration Theology," p. 100f.

¹⁶ Volf, *After Our Likeness*, p. 157.

¹⁷ Volf, *After Our Likeness*, p. 233.

Finally, I can sympathize with Volf's point that the *BEM* document or *Baptist, Eucharist, Ministry* gives too much away to ordained ministers¹⁸ but then again I don't want to dismiss the concept of leadership that goes beyond the local church. To do otherwise would betray well known Pentecostal ecclesiologies like the Pentecostal version of ascending ecclesiology of my youth as well as that embraced by Roman Catholics and the Orthodox.

4. An Australian Shared Intra-Ecclesial Mission

Neil Ormead and Shane Clifton refer to their book as an example of "shared intra-ecclesial mission" and among the precedents cited and labeled "common witness" is the work of the North American Renewal Service Committee (NARSC) once led by Dr. Vinson Synan and the International Charismatic Communion (ICCOWE/ICC) originally led by Fr. Michael Harper who passed away earlier this year. My exposure to such groups comes first-hand as a board member of NARSC, ICCOWE then ICC.¹⁹

Pentecostalism is offered as an illustration of a "healing vector of the scale of values at work". They continue:

Pentecostalism is an excellent example of the impact of globalizing processes on Christian faith, since it is constituted not by top-down authorities or national structures, but as a global coalescing of the various streams of voluntarist and revivalist Christianity. On a global scale it has no fixed ecclesial structure, no single form of doctrinal statements and no common liturgy or style but, rather, a shared vision of the charismatic spiritual life. While not easily pinned down, this vision nevertheless enables mutual recognition and provides the movement with the capacity to transcend geographical boundaries and, at the same time, to morph its community life in ways that are thoroughly indigenized. Pentecostalism is thus shaped by the processes of globalization, but it can also be argued that the movement reciprocates by shaping and directing those same processes.²⁰

I want to look next at their intriguing treatment of the intersection of unity and mission of the Church.

... the ecclesiological question of church unity (or church division) is of prime importance, since ecumenical unity is essential to the proclamation of the gospel. No doubt this has always been true, but the very nature of globalization brings this matter to the fore. In a globalized world, it is no longer possible for churches to ignore diversity and to go on presuming that their version of faith is 'the' true expression of Christianity.

¹⁸ Volf, "A Protestant Response", p. 40; Volf, *After Our Likeness*, p. 228 and note 28.

¹⁹ Ormead and Clifton, *Globalization and the Mission of the Church*, pp. 176-177. Cf. Vinson Synan, *An Eyewitness Remembers the Century of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2010).

²⁰ Ormead and Clifton, *Globalization and the Mission of the Church*, p. 194.

How can a gospel be believed when it seems unable to accomplish love and peace between Christians and Christian churches?²¹

They continue with this reflection saying:

The potential for division (and its actuation) between Christians adhering to different traditions and living in different places becomes one of the prominent themes of the New Testament record, and it is only the repeated affirmation of the central religious value of diversity in the overall unity of faith, located in the headship of Christ and the power of the Spirit, that preserved the ‘oneness’ of the Church.

What is in play here is not the view that all the churches of the 1st century were united organically. Rather the authors were seeking to highlight a concept of unity that was able to accommodate diversity. Thus some clarity comes to the notion of how they would distinguish diversity from division.²²

Our interest is stirred as the authors continue:

Indeed, in many cases unity was accomplished only by way of excluding the Church’s discontents.

Of course such a strategy was not without precedent. Even in the New Testament there is evidence of the use of such exclusion.²³

The authors mean by this that on the one hand the early church resisted pressure to exist as a ‘monolithic Jewish/Christian culture’ while at the same time removing those who lost their way in terms of immoral behavior and aberrant teachings.²⁴ This is followed by provocative comments on Luther, sovereign nation-states, denominationalization and Free Churches.

Then there is an interesting discussion using Joseph Komonchak about what can be called descending ecclesiology which they say is true of the Roman Catholic Church. By contrast, an ascending view would characterize those “with a trinitarian or pneumatological view of the Church, in which ‘each local self-realisation manifests the full spiritual reality of communion in Christ’s Holy Spirit ... the church universal *is* the communion of local church’”.²⁵

The latter (i.e. ascending ecclesiology) would be more characteristic of Protestant and especially Free Church ecclesiology they say but immediately qualify by pointing out that both models are not restrictive of either grouping. They quote Cardinal Walter Kasper then

²¹ Ormerod and Clifton, *Globalization and the Mission of the Church*, pp. 171-172.

²² Shane Clifton email on June 21, 2010.

²³ Ormerod and Clifton, *Globalization and the Mission of the Church*, p. 197 and note 14.

²⁴ Clifton email on June 21, 2010 mentions that Arians and Nestorians are later examples while cautioning that the common portrait of the Nestorians is actually a caricature. I have made the same point about the Montanists.

²⁵ Ormerod and Clifton, *Globalization and the Mission of the Church*, p. 173.

Miroslav Volf.²⁶ The Volf reference is from *After Our Likeness* which was used earlier in this paper.

This discussion is followed by a reference to the mandate of Pentecost to proclaim the gospel to the world.

This missionary mandate necessitates ecclesial relationships and centralized structures. Not just ‘spiritual unity’, but concrete ways in which local churches relate to one another and work together for the spread of the gospel. In this way one is able to affirm the priority of the local church, all the while recognizing the vital role of centralized ecclesial structures. At the same time, it is possible to affirm the importance of such structures, without insisting on their singularity. That is to say, a grassroots ecclesiology can value traditional authorities all the while recognizing and even appreciating that, in the context of a globalized world, such structures are numerous and diverse.²⁷

And finally, this insightful comment that uses a trifold framework not unlike my chart that was introduced earlier:

This grounding of ecclesiology in local assemblies, therefore, paves the way for reconceiving broader notions of ‘the Church’. Of course, in addition to hierarchical institutional strictures, there is the added complication that both the Catholic and Orthodox churches (along with High Church Anglicanism/Episcopalianism) also have a sacramental and Eucharistic ecclesiology that differs from that of most Protestant churches who locate ecclesiality in the preaching of the word, and Free Churches, who locate ecclesiality not in the Eucharist, but in the gathering of the two or three by the power of the Spirit in the name of Jesus (Matthew 18.20). In all cases, however, the Church (of God) is understood to be constituted by the Spirit under the headship of Christ, so that Kasper can note that all of the ecumenical dialogues undertaken by the Roman Catholic Church: converge in the fact that they revolve around the concept of *communio* as their key concept. All dialogues define the visible unity of all Christians as *communio*-unity, and agree in understanding it, in analogy with the original trinitarian model, not as uniformity but as unity in diversity and diversity in unity.²⁸

They go on to discuss grassroots level interaction and on to national or global dialogues²⁹ but in reality one can rarely move forward on such things precisely due to issues that surface on the local level.

5. Nature and Mission of the Church 100 Years After Edinburgh 1910

²⁶ Ormerod and Clifton, *Globalization and the Mission of the Church*, p. 174.

²⁷ Ormerod and Clifton, *Globalization and the Mission of the Church*, p.174.

²⁸ Ormerod and Clifton, *Globalization and the Mission of the Church*, pp. 174-175.

²⁹ Ormerod and Clifton, *Globalization and the Mission of the Church*, p. 176.

The centennial of the historic Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference is being marked this year with important celebrations in Edinburgh, Cape Town, Japan, and elsewhere around the world. It is often said that global Pentecostalism is barely a century old so this means that now is an appropriate time to review ecclesiology with an emphasis on mission of the church. I have chosen as a dialogue partner the World Council of Churches Faith and Order working document known as *Nature and Mission of the Church*.

Unlike previous reports such as *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry* or *BEM* and *Confessing the One Faith*, *Nature and Mission of the Church* has lagged in terms of official responses. To my knowledge, there has never been an official response to any of these conciliar documents by a member church of the Pentecostal World Fellowship which in and of itself is a commentary on our myriad ecclesiologies. In fact, even member churches of the World Council of Churches have been slow in responding to *Nature and Mission of the Church*.³⁰

There is no evidence of Pentecostal influence on the text despite the remote connection to the likes of Miroslav Volf, Mel Robeck and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen. I worry that at this stage the only way we will show up is in those gray boxes of “divergences” since we seem to have little constructive input given the nature of the document. This provokes the question of whether these gray boxes are more a commentary on Pentecostals or the drafters of the document in question.³¹

However, I published my own reflections on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* then *Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as it is Confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)* in *Pneuma*.³² So I come with this background and the added benefit of being on the study commission working on *Nature and Mission of the Church* in the NCCCUSA Faith and Order Commission. Our report will be sent to Geneva at the end of our 2011 quadrennium. I hope to be able to bring to bear a Pentecostal perspective on our draft would could become the first such direct impact on this particular conciliar text.

Wolfgang Vondey had this to say about Pentecostal interaction with *Nature and Mission of the Church*:

For Pentecostals, church is a reflective, discerning reality that finds consensus about its nature and mission not only in formal statements but in an often painful process of repentance, forgiveness, conversion, and renewal in and among the churches *while* the

³⁰ *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper 198 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005).

³¹ For constructive input see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “The Nature and Purpose of the Church: Theological and Ecumenical Reflections,” and Frank D. Macchia, “The Nature and Purpose of the Church: A Pentecostal Reflection,” in *Pentecostalism and Christian Unity: Ecumenical Documents and Critical Assessments*, edited by Wolfgang Vondey (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010).

³² Harold D. Hunter, “Reflections by a Pentecostalist on Aspects of BEM,” in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 29:3/4 (Summer/Fall 1992), 317-345; Harold D. Hunter, “Musings on *Confessing the One Faith*,” in *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 14:2 (Fall 1992), 204-208.

church proclaims the gospel to the world. I suggest that this form of evangelistic, contextual, critical, non-triumphant, and pragmatic Pentecostal ecclesiology has much to say to what often appears as an idealistic, romantic, and authoritarian ecclesiology in the text of the NMC.³³

Having no illusions about the concrete reality of how ecclesiology works out in the real world from Cleveland, Tennessee to Rome and on to Istanbul, I rather think that Vondey's take on the Pentecostal stance is idealistic.

To clarify what I mean, let's move on to some specific points in *Nature and Mission of the Church*. Unfortunately, space limitations will limit this section to a few examples of the discourse.

The phrase regarding some "unfortunate divisions" in tandem with the idea that this can be attributed in part "to a sincere attempt of Christians to be faithful to the truth" raises the question of whether the framers of this document were considering a postmodern reading of 'truth'.³⁴

The question of apostolicity (# 56) has been hinted at in my chart used earlier but this is such a complex issue that I must defer comments to a paper I am preparing for a dialogue that will convene late in 2011. Reacting to apostolic succession known to magisterial Christendom, here is a telling snippet from A.J. Tomlinson's annual address delivered to the November 2-8, 1914, Church of God (Cleveland, TN) general assembly:

Although we do not claim a line of succession from the holy apostles, we do believe we are following their example.³⁵

An extended quotation from the same address reveals more of what is at stake for Tomlinson and echoes what was heard from the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church in 1900:

The one at Nicaea was disorderly and resulted in division, shame and disgrace, while the one at Jerusalem was orderly and resulted in a closer fellowship and union of the multitudes and brought consolation and joy to all who were interested. And when the decrees (not creed) were delivered to them the churches were established in the faith and increased in number daily. Bear in the mind that the council at Jerusalem was conducted under theocratic form of government which honored God and the Holy Scriptures in the final settlement of the matter in question, while the one at Nicaea

³³ Wolfgang Vondey, "Pentecostal Contributions to *The Nature and Mission of the Church in Pentecostalism and Christian Unity: Ecumenical Documents and Critical Assessments*, ed. by Wolfgang Vondey (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), p. 268.

³⁴ *Nature and Mission of the Church* II:A:56, p. 32.

³⁵ *Historical Annual Addresses*, compiled by Perry Gillum (Cleveland: White Wing Publishing House & Press, 1970) 1:34. Spurling's 1897 "An Appeal" (p. 8) dismissed those who teach apostolic succession and Baptists who make laws and binding rules. This is contrasted to the law of Christ which he termed "the lost link".

was operated under episcopal government and not a word of Scripture was given as authority for the creed and nothing said about it being pleasing to the Holy Ghost. We are certainly following in the footprints of the noble and ever-to-be-revered apostles and elders of the early Church when we declare that in all of our deliberations the final decision and settlement of every question must be in harmony with God's Holy Word, and a 'Thus saith the Lord' or 'It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us,' at the end of the decision.³⁶

The casual use in *Nature and Mission of the Church* of a phrase like "restoration of unity"³⁷ implies that there is universal agreement about an organic unity among Christians in the first century. Such a position requires a harmonization of texts that appears to escape many biblical scholars and theologians. I would not propose that the Montanists had predecessors rather than the various 'heterogeneous communities'³⁸ were never one whole unit despite what one makes of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15.

6. Conclusion

The Edinburgh 2010 Commission III report suggests that for some 9/11 may have destroyed much of the stuff of postmodernity. This seems unlikely as the USA in particular is a mixture of so many different contexts although many are not well represented in our national media. Notice the move of Harvey Cox from *The Secular City* (1965) to *Fire from Heaven* (1994) once he realized Pentecostals ignored the thesis of his famous book.

Enrique Dussel has argued that the 1492 discovery of Amerindia moved Europe from being a periphery of the East to the centre of the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. Dussel's 'trans-modernity' finds the Other not only diachronically, but also synchronically. Tensions between Pentecostalism and modernity have given rise to labels such as 'pre-critical' and 'sub-modern'. With the advent of postmodernity, we can celebrate this as an accomplishment, not an embarrassment.

David Carter's study of Edinburgh 2010 concludes that "In the end unity and mission are one." This UK Roman Catholic says unity based on the John 17:21 should move to "so they may believe". Would this not be a compelling argument for Pentecostals who claim evangelism is a top priority and perhaps even the fifth mark of the Church? Carter is captivated with Christian Churches Together in England (CTE) even making flattering parallels to the intent of Edinburgh 2010.³⁹

³⁶ *Historical Annual Addresses* 1:40-41. See also page 39. See *Constitution and General Rules of the Fire-Baptized Holiness Association of America* (1900), 2, under Article II, Object and Design: "It is our intention that the Fire-Baptized Holiness Association shall embody all the essential characteristics and perform all the functions of an Apostolic church."

³⁷ *Nature and Mission of the Church* II:B:57, p. 34.

³⁸ Vondey, *People of Bread*, p. 199, who argues that unity was based on principles of equality and justice.

³⁹ David Carter, "The Edinburgh Missionary Conference Centenary," *Ecumenical Trends* 39:3 (March 2010), pp. 4-5.

Many of the Pentecostal movement's pioneers in the USA exerted considerable energy in removing what they saw as the debris of skillfully worded yet irrelevant, if not damaging, creeds which had led most of Christendom astray. However, when current Pentecostal leaders examine documents like the Apostles' Creed, they often find themselves unable to fault the contents. They at times affirm publically and at other times unconsciously give credit to the description of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed as providing the church 'East and West, Catholic and Evangelical alike, with its one authentically ecumenical confession of faith'.

A certifiable Pentecostal ecclesiology – postmodern or otherwise - must cope with the remarkable summation captured in the original Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed when it gives the marks of the church as 'one, holy, catholic, and apostolic'.