

## **‘POWER TO THE POOR’: THE PENTECOSTAL TRADITION OF SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT**

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A recent survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life estimates that the Pentecostal Movement comprises one-quarter of the world’s 2 billion Christians, making 1 out of every 12 people on planet earth Pentecostal-Charismatic.<sup>1</sup> Pentecostalism is thus the fastest growing segment of Christianity today and on its way to becoming the predominant global form of Christianity in the twenty-first century.<sup>2</sup> This spectacular growth has aroused the curiosity of missiologists and social scientists who are not only concerned with Pentecostalism as a religious phenomenon, but also interested in evaluating its social impact.

The extraordinary success of the Pentecostal movement is largely due to its reach to those on the periphery of society. Some see the reasons for this success as due to sociological factors; others see it in essentially the ‘power’ factor associated with the Holy Spirit’s dynamic empowerment. Several recent studies have shown that the intervention of Pentecostal mission into severely deprived communities unleashed powerful redemptive forces resulting in upward social mobility of believers. The Pentecostal message was very good news among the poor: it answered their immediate felt needs and provided powerful spiritual impetus and community support for a better life. The genius of Pentecostalism has thus been its relevance to the powerless – its ability to penetrate the enslaving power structures of the socially and economically marginalized.

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<sup>1</sup>See <http://pewforum.org/Christian/Evangelical-Protestant-Churches/Spirit-and-Power.aspx>.

<sup>2</sup>This is no longer just an observation made by Pentecostals themselves or even Christian missiologists; Robbins provides an excellent summary review of the anthropological and other scholarly literature dealing with the global spread and impact of Pentecostalism, Joel Robbins, “The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 [October 2004]: 117-143.

But to what extent is the social impact of Pentecostalism integral to and consistent with its distinctive emphasis? Or is its social impact an occasional, incidental, or even accidental by-product of its essentially spiritual message. Is there - and is it appropriate to speak of - a Pentecostal *tradition* of social engagement?

### **Is there a Pentecostal Tradition?**

If the Pentecostal tradition has its roots anywhere, it must be in the dramatic, visible outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. This is not just an internal claim, but is clearly attested by researchers outside the movement, as for instance in the recent project of Miller and Yamamori who observe:

The major engine driving this transformation is Pentecostalism, an expression of Christianity that dates back to the first century, when the Holy Spirit is reported to have visited a small band of Jesus' followers who spoke in "other tongues" and subsequently healed the sick, prophesied, and established a network of churches throughout Asia Minor (see Acts 2).<sup>3</sup>

Thus when we attempt to define our Pentecostal tradition, in a sense we try to answer the same question that Peter responded to following the Pentecostal outpouring in Acts 2: *What does this mean?* And we have to begin it by saying: *This is that...!*

In India the Pentecostal tradition has its roots in an 1860 awakening in the Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu in South India in the ministry of an Anglican catechist named Aroolappen. Spiritual manifestations included unknown tongues and interpretations, prophecy, intense conviction of sin, conversion of unbelievers, prayer for the sick, concern for the poor, visions and people falling down under spiritual power.<sup>4</sup> This was followed by stirrings of revival in 1905, first in the Khasi Hills of North East India and then in the Mukti Mission led by Pandita Ramabai & Minnie Abrams in Western India. It then

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<sup>3</sup>Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* [Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007], 17.

<sup>4</sup>Gary McGee, "Pentecostal Phenomena and Revivals in India: Implications for Indigenous Church Leadership" in *IBMR* [July 1996], 113.

spread to other parts of India including Bombay, Madras, Kerala, Punjab, Gujarat and Bengal. Here's a description of how Pentecost came to my own city of Kolkata [Calcutta] in 1907 during revival meetings led by Azusa Street missionaries Alfred and Lillian Garr:

The deep sense of conviction of sin resulted in people falling to the floor, howling, shrieking, groaning "as if the judgment day had already come," sobbing, writhing, shaking "as if realizing that they were sinners in the hands of an angry God," and "wails of despair...so heart-rending that they might have come from the regions of the damned." Other features included the frequent reading of jubilant Psalms; vocal expressions such as "Praise the Lord," "Glory to God," "Hallelujah," in addition to "holy laughter." ...Under the inspiration of the Spirit, different voices blended creating "awe-inspiring" singing in tongues. ...Another time, a "strong current of wind" blew through a "seekers' meeting" making it seem as if they were reliving the Day of Pentecost themselves.<sup>5</sup>

Over one hundred years later, as we look back to the Pentecostal legacy handed down to us, we say again: *This is that...!* But how should we frame our *This is that...?* How do we go about defining our Pentecostal tradition?

The word 'tradition' has its roots in the Latin *trado/ tradere*, which means "to hand over, hand down, deliver, leave behind, impart", and commonly refers to the handing down of statements, beliefs, legends, customs, information and stories from generation to generation, especially by word of mouth or by practice. It can refer to beliefs, customs and practices taught or simply passed on by one generation to the next. It can also refer to a broad religious movement made up of religious denominations or church bodies that have a common history, customs, culture, and, to some extent, body of teachings. In Judaism it refers to an ordinance of the oral law not in the Torah but held to have been given by God to Moses. In the Christian sense it can denote a doctrine not explicit in the Bible but held to derive from the oral teaching of Jesus and the Apostles.

In a theologically creative and provocative work, Simon Chan seeks to address what he regards as "the problem of Pentecostal traditioning". While

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<sup>5</sup>Gary McGee, "The Calcutta Revival of 1907 and the Reformulation of Charles F. Parham's 'Bible Evidence' Doctrine", *AJPS* 6:1 [2003], 128-129.

acknowledging that Pentecostals already do have a tradition, Chan's own project is an attempt to advance the Pentecostal "traditioning" process.<sup>6</sup> A sustained critique of Chan's thesis is beyond the scope of this paper, but a brief comment is in order, even if only to clarify my own presuppositions in this paper.

John Carpenter's rejoinder quite plainly illustrates the implicit irony in Chan's "traditioning" exercise, which rather than capturing the essence of the Pentecostal faith tradition, in effect succeeds in transforming it beyond recognition. Carpenter rightly insists on the need for *historical integrity* if any "traditioning" process is to be authentic: it must take into account "the actual historical tradition of the movement". Chan theological strategy, however, introduces elements such as neo-orthodoxy, catholic mysticism, post-liberal hermeneutics and sacramentalism, all of which are far removed from the history and traditions of Pentecostals. As Carpenter points out we cannot with integrity say "...we are merely seeking to re-establish a tradition if we are, in reality, advocating entirely new doctrines and practices".<sup>7</sup>

My fundamental disagreement with both Chan and Carpenter is with a critical assumption underlying both their analyses. Both of them seem to treat Pentecostalism as though it were a single monolithic stream all over the globe. All such projects assume somewhat simplistically that the global Pentecostal Movement has a single epicentre in North America, and hence, the influences that fed into the North American Pentecostal Movement have shaped all of the streams of global Pentecostalism. It is impossible to deny the massive determinative influence that North American Pentecostalism has exercised on the global Pentecostal Movement. However, as recent studies have demonstrated repeatedly, in actual fact the Pentecostal movement is a complex

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<sup>6</sup>Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd, 2000], 20.

<sup>7</sup>John B. Carpenter, "Genuine Pentecostal Traditioning: Rooting Pentecostalism in its Evangelical Soil: A Reply to Simon Chan", *AJPS* 6:1 [2003], 304.

blend of heterogenous national, cultural, religious, socio-economic, theological and ecclesiastical sources and streams of influence.<sup>8</sup>

Andrew Walls' thesis is that the theological challenge in gospel transmission involves holding together in tension two opposing tendencies - the "Indigenizing" principle and the "Pilgrim" principle. The "Indigenizing" principle, rooted in the fact of the incarnation, keeps converts connected with the particulars of their local culture, so that Christ and Christianity are at home in any culture. The "Pilgrim" principle, also grounded in the gospel, is the universalizing factor which critiques the convert's local culture and unites him or her with the universal faith community, all the people of God at all times everywhere.<sup>9</sup> As Walls shows, these principles have been operative in the missionary expansion of Christianity all through its history, but these are also discernible in various local expressions of Pentecostalism that have emerged across the globe over the last century. Thus, while there are clearly some common elements across the different local expressions of Pentecostalism, African Pentecostalism clearly bears the marks of African traditional religions, Korean Pentecostalism has shamanistic influence, Indian Pentecostalism has been shaped by *bhakti* religion and other distinctly Indian influences, and so on.

Is there then a distinct "Pentecostal tradition"? I would argue that strictly speaking there is no one Pentecostal *tradition*: what we do have is multiple Pentecostal *traditions* which bear a certain family resemblance. I am, however, prepared to employ the term in a nuanced sense within Walls' framework, which both circumscribes the unique features of this family resemblance and keeps each local tradition vitally connected to the 'Pilgrim' sources of historic Christianity. We may thus speak of a Pentecostal tradition in this sense as expressing the common 'pilgrim' elements of contemporary Pentecostal movements that draw their distinctive family features from the Pentecostal

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<sup>8</sup>Miller & Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, 19, 211.

<sup>9</sup>Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* [New York: Orbis, 1996], 3-9.

outpouring experienced recorded in Acts 2. While Pentecostal faith affirms and seeks to be firmly grounded in Scripture, a fundamental premise of Pentecostals is that the immediate, manifested presence of the Holy Spirit experienced by the early church in Acts is normative for the Christian faith community today.

Pentecostals have thus always regarded the experience of the early church in the Book of Acts as normative for the theology and practice of the faith community, and view their appropriation of that experience as a vital hermeneutical key in their interpretation of the Bible and articulation of Christian doctrine. Consequently, the distinctive family features that mark Pentecostal movements across the globe centre around a `recovery' and emphasis of the Acts 2:4 doctrine of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, understood as a normative `charismatic' experience providing empowerment for ministry; and an emphasis on spiritual gifts, especially speaking in tongues, healing and prophecy.

### **Social Engagement in the Pentecostal Tradition**

With this vital clarification we move on then to our next task in this paper: to show that there is adequate support within the historical sources of the Pentecostal movement for a Pentecostal `tradition' of social engagement. This is especially important in the light of a perception in some quarters that the Pentecostal emphasis on spirituality is at odds with the development of a robust social ethic. There are two main reasons for this misplaced notion. Firstly, Pentecostals have been largely an oral community, and thus have not been good at documenting their experience. Secondly, the Pentecostal movement emerged at a time when conservative Christians as a whole were reacting to the excesses of the social gospel movement. Consequently, they did their best to distance themselves from liberal views of social concern which sought to reduce the Christian gospel to pure philanthropy. Recent studies have, however, sought to correct this misconception.

The Pentecostal tradition of social engagement has its roots in the work of many of the early Pentecostal pioneers, many of whom were actively involved in

social transformation and works of compassion. We observe this in the hallowed locations of Topeka, Kansas and Azusa Street, to where the origins of the Pentecostal movement are commonly traced. The Bethel Healing Home which Charles F. Parham (1873-1929) started in Topeka, Kansas in 1898 enlarged its activities to include rescue missions for prostitutes and the homeless, an employment bureau and an orphanage service.<sup>10</sup> The relationship between love and the baptism of the Holy Spirit was very crucial to William J. Seymour (1870-1922), the leader of the Azusa Street Mission. For Seymour, the Pentecostal experience of baptism in the Spirit is about immersion in love, with *...the power to draw all people into one Church, irrespective of racial, ethnic or social diversity.*<sup>11</sup> In Frank Bartleman's famous one-liner summarizing the impact of the Azusa Street revival: *"The color line was washed away in the blood."*<sup>12</sup>

In his *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, Allan Anderson observes:

Pentecostals in various parts of the world have always had various programs of social action, ever since the involvement of Ramabai's Mukti Mission in India in the early 1900s and the work of Lillian Trasher among orphans in Egypt from 1911. Early Pentecostals were involved in socio-political criticism, including opposition to war, capitalism and racial discrimination. African American Pentecostals have been in the forefront of the civil rights movement. Throughout the world today Pentecostals are involved in practical ways caring for the poor and the destitute, those often 'unwanted' by the larger society.<sup>13</sup>

Anderson suggests that the Mukti revival in Kedgaon, near Pune in India, led by the famous social reformer Pandita Ramabai [1858-1922] was as much a center of pilgrimage for propagating the Pentecostal doctrine of Spirit baptism as Azusa Street. It started in 1905, a year before the events in Los Angeles, when hundreds of young Indian women in her center were baptized by the

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<sup>10</sup>Gary B. McGee, "Tongues, The Bible Evidence: The Revival Legacy of Charles F. Parham", *Enrichment*, Summer 1999.

<sup>11</sup>Iain MacRobert, "The Black Roots of Pentecostalism," *Pentecost, Mission and Ecumenism Essays on Intercultural Theology* 75 [Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1992], 9.

<sup>12</sup> Frank Bartleman, *Azusa Street* [South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Publishing, original in 1925/republished in 1980], 54.

<sup>13</sup> Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, Cambridge, Uk: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 276-277.

Spirit, saw visions, fell into trances and spoke in tongues.<sup>14</sup> Most of these women were out-casted child-widows, who had come to Ramabai's *ashram* [community religious centre] to find shelter. The Ramabai Mukti Mission is still active today, providing housing, education, vocational training, and medical services, for many needy groups including widows, orphans, and the blind.<sup>15</sup>

In his editorial article on "Pentecostals and Social Ethics", Cecil Robeck draws attention to the charity works of early Pentecostal pioneers like Stanley H. Frodsham, George and Carrie (Judd) Montgomery and A.J. Tomlinson<sup>16</sup>. For many Pentecostal ministries, like Gerrit Polman in the Netherlands, the Salvation Army's non-political approach of Soup, Soap and Salvation served as a model for their social involvement.<sup>17</sup>

Petersen observes that in the course of his thirty year tenure, J. Philip Hogan, former Executive Director of the Division of Foreign Mission of the Assemblies of God, frequently emphasized the commitment and active involvement of the AG in alleviating suffering through its compassionate ministries. In responding to critics on one occasion he wrote:

We (have) invested millions of dollars and devoted countless lives to feed starving people, clothe poor people, shelter homeless people, educate children, train disadvantaged adults and provide medical care for the physically ill of all ages. We have always generously responded to the pleas of foreign nations after natural disasters, hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes. ...I want the world to know that the reason we do these things is because Jesus did them... We have no other motive than that.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Allan Anderson, "Spreading Fires: The Globalization of Pentecostalism in the Twentieth Century", *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* [January 1, 2007], 9. See also Allan Anderson, Pandita Ramabai, the Mukti Revival and Global Pentecostalism, *Transformation*, 23/1 [January 2006], 37-48.

<sup>15</sup>See also Edith L. Blumhofer, "Consuming Fire: Pandita Ramabai and the Global Pentecostal Impulse" in Ogbu Kalu [ed.] *Interpreting Contemporary Christianity: Global Processes and Local Identities* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008], 207-237.

<sup>16</sup>Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., "Pentecostals and Social Ethics", *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, Volume 9:2. [Fall 1987], 105-106.

<sup>17</sup>Cornelis van der Laan, *Treasures Out of Darkness: Pentecostal Perspectives on Social Transformation*, Paper presented to the Symposium 'Spirit and Struggle: Beyond Polarization', [Free University, Amsterdam, October 12, 2009], 2.

<sup>18</sup>J. Philip Hogan, *Mountain Movers* 31 [June 1989], 10-11.



It is especially interesting to note that as far back as 1980, Hogan was concerned that social relief and compassion efforts needed to be extended to social justice issues as well: “[Pentecostals] must strike at the depths of the structures of human culture and life”.<sup>19</sup>

Support for a social engagement ‘tradition’ may be found in the writings of the most respected AG missiologist of the previous generation, Melvin Hodges. While wary of allowing the missionary mandate to degenerate into a purely ‘social gospel’, in his *A Theology of the Church and its Mission* he carefully spells out his conviction concerning the Church’s social responsibility in the following words:

Christians are the salt of the earth. Their presence and influence do affect society... Christians by their very nature love righteousness and hate iniquity. They will, therefore, be championing every just cause and endeavoring to show “good will to all men”. ...We can do no better than follow the words of Jesus and the example of the early Christians. True Christians are a force for righteousness and social betterment. We have only to look at what is happening on the mission fields where the church has multiplied to see this process taking place. ...The proponents of the theology of liberation are correct in insisting that *the gospel is for the whole man and that Christians should not limit their interest to the souls of men and the future life. Christians must not be indifferent to oppression or injustice in the world* [italics mine].<sup>20</sup>

Two critical features which merit closer attention: a) Hodges’ observation regarding the positive impact of social engagement on effective church growth in AG mission fields; b) His appeal to this empirical data in support of his endorsement of a clearly holistic missiology. Hodges thereafter goes on to affirm both the Wheaton Declaration and Lausanne Covenant statements on Christian social responsibility, before stating his own position as follows:

It is evident that evangelicals do have a concern for the whole man. Nevertheless, the spiritual need of man is given primary importance as this opens the way to all else. Evangelicals consider their task to be communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ *both by proclamation and by*

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<sup>19</sup>J. Philip Hogan, *DFM Annual Report of 1980*, p.12.

<sup>20</sup>Melvin L. Hodges, *A Theology of Mission: A Pentecostal Perspective* [Springfield, MO. Gospel Publishing House, 1977], 96.

*deed* [italics mine], thus letting their 'light so shine that men can see their good works and be drawn to Christ' (cf. Matthew 5:16)<sup>21</sup>

As Petersen suggests, missionaries like Melvin Hodges who lived and worked in contexts of poverty and social oppression, and who witnessed first-hand the power of the gospel to transform every aspect of life, could never be comfortable with any missiology that made no room for a Christ-like response to the social realities of pain and suffering that surrounded them. I am convinced that it is the intrinsically missionary nature of Pentecostal movement that has helped shape its social conscience and resulted in the emergence of a genuine tradition of social response.

An honest assessment of the Pentecostal Movement confirms that, for the most part, Pentecostals have not always viewed people as "souls with ears", rather Pentecostals are not only preaching the good news of Jesus, delivering the demonized, making disciples of Jesus, planting new churches, taking the gospel to unreached people groups, offering hope to the hopeless - they are also healing the sick, uplifting the powerless, rescuing children at risk, fighting against AIDS and other deadly diseases, serving the needs of the poorest of the poor. A strong case can thus be made for Pentecostalism's close alignment with the poor from its earliest inception.<sup>22</sup> As a result of constantly living in the world of the Bible, Pentecostals have always intuitively practiced what we today refer to as "integral" mission - that the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel should go together. They have in fact done so from the very beginning as a natural extension of their evangelism and missionary efforts.

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<sup>21</sup>Hodges, *A Theology of Mission*, 118.

<sup>22</sup>Freston is among those who see its success as largely due to its essential quality as a counter-establishment movement which thrived among the poor and marginalized, by-passing the usual channels of wealth and power, Paul Freston, "Evangelicalism and Globalization", in Mark Hutchinson and Ogbu Kalu, eds. *A Global Faith: Essays on Evangelicalism and Globalisation* [Sydney: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 1998], 72-74.

## **Pentecostal Social Engagement Today**

Despite the existence of this live tradition of social tradition within the Pentecostal movement since its earliest years, some features of Pentecostal belief and practice - most of which were a carry-over from the fundamentalist antecedents of many early Pentecostals - mitigated against a well-articulated theology of social engagement.<sup>23</sup> It was thus only in the closing decades of the twentieth century that a robust Pentecostal theology of holistic mission began to emerge. The AG social ethicist, Murray Dempster's early proposal is a good illustration. Grounding his Pentecostal holistic mission theology in a sound kingdom theology framework, Dempster outlines an 'integrated' Pentecostal theology of mission which includes the church's *kerygmatic* ministry of evangelism, *koinoniac* ministry of social witness, and *diakonic* ministry of social service. He insists that all of these are essential for the integrity of the church's mission of proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom in word, life and deed.<sup>24</sup>

In August 2009 the General Council of the Assemblies of God, USA, responded to a strong appeal from General Superintendent George Wood and made a rare change in their Statement of Fundamental Truths, by adding "works of compassion" to the mission of the church (article 10) and ministry (article 11).<sup>25</sup> After the resolution was approved, Wood sought to dismiss the fear expressed by some that the Fellowship would drift toward a "social gospel" by saying "That fear is unwarranted because evangelism and compassion feed each other when joined at the hip."<sup>26</sup> Article 10 includes a fourth clause that says: "To be a people who demonstrate God's love and compassion for all the world (Psalms 112:9; Galatians 2:10; 6:10; James 1:27)". The experience of

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<sup>23</sup>Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., (Editorial), Pentecostals and Social Ethics, *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, Volume 9:2. Fall 1987, p. 106.

<sup>24</sup>Dempster, "Evangelism, Social Concern, and the Kingdom of God", 38-39.

<sup>25</sup> Rob Cunningham, Business session focuses on resolutions, Friday, August 7, 2009, [http://ag.org/top/Events/General\\_Council\\_2009/News/20090807/20090807\\_01\\_Business.cfm](http://ag.org/top/Events/General_Council_2009/News/20090807/20090807_01_Business.cfm)

<sup>26</sup> Rob Cunningham, Council wraps up business, Saturday, August 8, 2009, [http://ag.org/top/Events/General\\_Council\\_2009/News/20090808/20090808\\_BusinessDay3.cfm](http://ag.org/top/Events/General_Council_2009/News/20090808/20090808_BusinessDay3.cfm)

the Baptism in the Holy Spirit: "Enables them [believers] to respond to the full working of the Holy Spirit in expression of fruit and gifts and ministries as in New Testament times for the edifying of the body of Christ *and care for the poor and needy of the world* (Galatians 5:22-26; Matthew 25:37-40; Galatians 6:10; 1 Corinthians 14:12; Ephesians 4:11,12; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Colossians 1:29)." Clause 4 in Article 11 asserts that a divinely called and scripturally ordained ministry leads the Church in: "Meeting human need with ministries of love and compassion (Psalms 112:9; Galatians 2:10; 6:10; James 1:27)." The fact that social engagement is now explicitly accepted as a fourth distinctive ministry of the church is a significant development in the Assemblies of God.

As the Pentecostal movement has grown exponentially in recent years, its social impact has become increasingly more evident. After observing earlier that "*Pentecostals are increasingly engaged in community-based social ministries*", and seek "*a balanced approach to evangelism and social action*" Donald Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori launched a four-year field study of growing churches in the developing world that engaged in significant social ministries. Four hundred experts around the world were asked to nominate churches that satisfied four simple criteria: fast-growing; located in the developing world; with active social programs; indigenous and self-supporting. They were amazed to discover that nearly 85% of the nominated churches were Pentecostal or Charismatic.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the authors' somewhat artificial categorization of a so-called 'Progressive' segment within Pentecostalism, a number of their conclusions are extremely helpful. In the first place their work represents a strong validation of our claim that a concern for social engagement within the Pentecostal movement is not an innovation. They clearly affirm that there have always been Pentecostals who have sought a holistic understanding of their faith: "Throughout the history of Pentecostalism there have been examples of compassionate social service, so this is not a new phenomenon."<sup>28</sup> Their study

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<sup>27</sup>Miller & Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, 42-43.

<sup>28</sup>Miller & Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, 211-212.

also documents a wide range of types of social engagement by Pentecostals, from humanitarian responses to crises and human need such as floods, drought and earthquakes, to education, economic development, medical work and other projects that focus on community development.<sup>29</sup>

Thirdly, their empirical data indicates a wide and growing acceptance of this holistic understanding of the Christian faith within Pentecostal churches worldwide.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps one of their most valuable findings is the clear distinction their study observes between the Pentecostal approach to social ministries and Social Gospel or Liberation Theology frameworks of social engagement, in which they see the Pentecostal response as consciously derived from Jesus' pattern of ministry:

Unlike the Social Gospel tradition of the mainline churches, this [Pentecostal] movement seeks a balanced approach to evangelism and social action that is modeled after Jesus' example of not only preaching about the coming kingdom of God but also ministering to the physical needs of the people he encountered.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, in contrast to these older approaches, Miller and Yamamori observe that Pentecostals do not attempt to reform social structures or challenge government policies. They rather take "an incremental approach to social change" by addressing social problems, one person at a time.<sup>32</sup> To that extent the Pentecostal project engages social issues at a more subversive level, attempting to construct an alternative social reality grounded on certain core kingdom values: that all human beings are made in the image of God; that all people have dignity and are equal in God's sight; and consequently have equal rights whether they are poor, women or children.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Miller & Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, 213.

<sup>30</sup>Miller & Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, 3, 212.

<sup>31</sup>Miller & Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, 212.

<sup>32</sup>Miller & Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, 216.

<sup>33</sup>Miller & Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, 4-5.

Pentecostals today offer not only spiritual refuge from the problems of this world but concrete and authentic social engagement alternatives.<sup>34</sup> As Miller and Yamamori observe: "Instead of seeing the world as a place from which to escape, they want to make it better, especially by following Jesus, who both preached about the coming kingdom and healed people and ministered to their social needs."<sup>35</sup> Pentecostalism has, by its democratization of religious life, promise of physical and social healing, compassion for the socially alienated, and practice of Spirit empowerment, shown that it has the essential ingredients of a social movement that can reshape the painfully harsh social reality for millions of poor and marginalized in our world.

Although the mounting problems of global poverty and threats to human life are formidable, as Miller and Yamamori's study clearly illustrate, the Pentecostal movement has the theological resources and missionary passion for credible ongoing engagement with the global need. However, crucial to the effectiveness of this endeavour is the emergence of a model of missionary engagement that links various segments of global Pentecostalism together in a relationship of mutual interdependence. The global presence of Pentecostalism—north and south; rich and poor; red, yellow, black, white, and brown - provides a unique opportunity of a truly global movement of witness and transformative engagement with these forces of evil in our world.

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**Kolkata, India**

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<sup>34</sup>Douglas Petersen, *Not by Might Nor by Power: A Pentecostal Theology of Social Concern in Latin America* [Oxford: Regnum Books International, 1996], 233.

<sup>35</sup>Miller & Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, 30.