

Reconciliation and Renunciation of Status as God's final aim for Humanity: New Testament Thoughts on the Church's Mission and Unity

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1 Introduction

It is tautological to mention that the Pentecostal movement is a missionary movement.¹ It is, however, something else to define the nature of the church's mission, a question that has not received too much attention among Pentecostals.² I shall, therefore, proceed to provide a working thesis for the mission of the church (the task) as well as a preliminary definition of the New Testament's understanding of unity within and among churches. The main part of the paper will then focus on mission and unity in the New Testament. Some observations and implications for a Pentecostal theology of missions will conclude the paper.

1.1 Definition of the Mission of the Church

Formulated in a nutshell, the church's mission is to be the visible demonstration of God's healing and restoring work in this world (Mt. 5.14³; Acts 13.47⁴). This is virtually the same as saying that the church is to embody Christ on earth, since Christ is the visible manifestation of God's healing and restoring work in this world (Rm.

¹ Cf. the references in M. Wenk „Light: A Pentecostal Reading of a Biblical Metaphor“, *JEPTA* (26.2), 2006, pp. 168-171; K. Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology. A Theology of Encounter* (London: T & T Clark, 2008), pp. 246-264.

² Issues such as the role of the Spirit, eschatology, the importance of experience, the holistic approach to missions etc., have been in the foreground in discussion Pentecostal missiology. The nexus between the church's mission and her care for social justice has recently also received more attention. (Cf. L. Grant McClung, „Salvation Shock Troops“ in H.B. Smith, *Pentecostals from the Inside out* [Wheaton: Victor Books, 1990], pp. 81-92; V.M. Kärkkäinen, „Missiology: Pentecostal and Charismatic“ in S.M. Burgess et. al., *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements. Revised and Expanded Edition* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan: 2002, pp. 877-885; Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology*, pp. 246-264)

³ For the argument of the church as the new Zion where the nations gather, cf. B. Charette, *Restoring Presence. The Spirit in Matthew's Gospel* (Sheffield: SAP, 2000), pp. 105-106.

⁴ For a discussion that the statement „I have made you light for the gentiles“ represents the collective, the members of the synagogue in their experience of God's saving intervention, see W. Stegemann, „Licht der Völker bei Lukas“ in C. Bussmann and W. Radl (eds), *Der Treue Gottes trauen. Beiträge zum Werk des Lukas* (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 1991), pp. 84-87.

15.7; 1 Cor. 12.27; 2 Cor. 3.3). Hence the church is the continuation of Christ's ministry (Jn. 20.21⁵; Acts 1.1⁶).

This one task is defined by the New Testament authors in various ways: For Luke the church is to visibly demonstrate God's love and care for the poor, the marginalized and the sick (Acts 2,42-47; 3;1-10; 4,32-37; 6,1-7, etc.) in the same way Jesus did,⁷ while for Matthew God becomes visible on earth through a community that is "light", which means manifesting God's kingdom of heaven here on earth by way of following Jesus; mission is discipleship.⁸ Paul's understanding of mission is perhaps best summed up in 2 Cor. 5.19-20: "... God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ ... and he has committed to us the message of reconciliation..." – "But we have this treasure in jars of clay..." (2 Cor. 4.7).⁹ Hence, for Paul the church, defined as the eschatological people of God, is the demonstration of God's reconciling power in this world. In the Johannine writings the community of faith is to reflect, and thereby bring God's revelation and salvation to the world (Jn. 20.21; cf. Jn. 13.15; 15.4-5; 15.20; 17.23).¹⁰

⁵ "Im Sendungsbefehl verschränken sich die Gegenwart des Erhöhten und die aktuelle Situation der Gemeinde in der Welt. Die Gemeinde weiss sich durch den Erhöhten selbst zur Mission und zum vollmächtigen Umgang mit den Sündern berufen..." Udo Schnelle, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (THkNT, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1998), p. 305.

⁶ Cf. M. Wenk, *Community Forming Power: the Socio-Ethical role of the Spirit in Luke-Acts* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), pp. 242-257.

⁷ Cf. the canticles in Lk. 1-2; the programmatic quotations in Lk. 3.4-6 and 4.18-19 as well as Luke's emphasis on the poor and the marginalized throughout his Gospel. For further discussion, see: J.B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995, pp. 76-101; David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006, 22nd reprint), pp. 84-122.

⁸ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, pp. 56-83; Charette, *Restoring Presence*, pp. 108-113; Wenk, „Light“, pp. 177-181.

⁹ Bowers has thus summarized Paul's theology of missions as: "What has now already been made available at the end of time in the Messiah is to be made available by Paul himself in a geographically defined outreach to the nations, in fulfilment of the OT eschatological promises, and it is to be realized in representative communities which demonstrate the life of the new age." (W.P. Bowers, "Mission", in G.F. Hawthorne, R.P. Martin and D.G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 618). Bosch summarizes Paul's theology of mission as „Invitation to join the eschatological community“ (Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, pp. 123-178). What has now already been made available at the end of time in the Messiah is to be made available by Paul himself in a geographically defined outreach to the nations, in fulfilment of the OT eschatological promises, and it is to be realized in representative communities which demonstrate the life of the new age." Similarly Klaus Berger: "Rechtfertigung der Sünder besteht darin, dass Gott die Menschen akzeptiert, und zwar in seine Gemeinschaft hinein. Diese Gemeinschaft ist nicht nur die zwischen dem einzelnen und Gott, sondern sie besteht, wenn es sie überhaupt gibt, von Anfang an in Gottes Familie (K. Berger, *Paulus* [Munich: C.H. Beck, 2008³], p. 47.

¹⁰ Cf. M.M. Thompson, „John, Gospel of“, in J.B. Green, S. McKnight and I.H. Marshall, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 382.

1.2 Definition of Unity

For a working thesis of unity I shall depend upon Paul's argument in Romans 14. For the apostle, unity is not achieved when all the believers share the same convictions or confess the same creed but rather when they accept each other as Christ has accepted them; more precisely, when they stop condemning (Rm. 14.1+3) or treating one another contemptuously (Rm. 14.3). Unity is a matter of love and not of mere mutual agreement, or as Colossians 3.14 could be translated: "Above all this put on love, which means the bond that ties together perfectly."¹¹

For the moment it suffices to note that this definition locates the concern for unity in the area of the church's ethics – and thereby links it to soteriology, as will be demonstrated below (cf. Eph. 4.1-3).

2 New Testament Perspectives on God's Mission for a renewed humanity by reconciliation

As noted above, the concern for unity in the New Testament writings is part of the ethical discourse and primarily sustained with the call to love, the centre, so to speak, of biblical ethics. Since in our Western society love has become such an inflationary term, mainly associated with emotions, it needs some special attention.

2.1 Love and Unity as solidarity

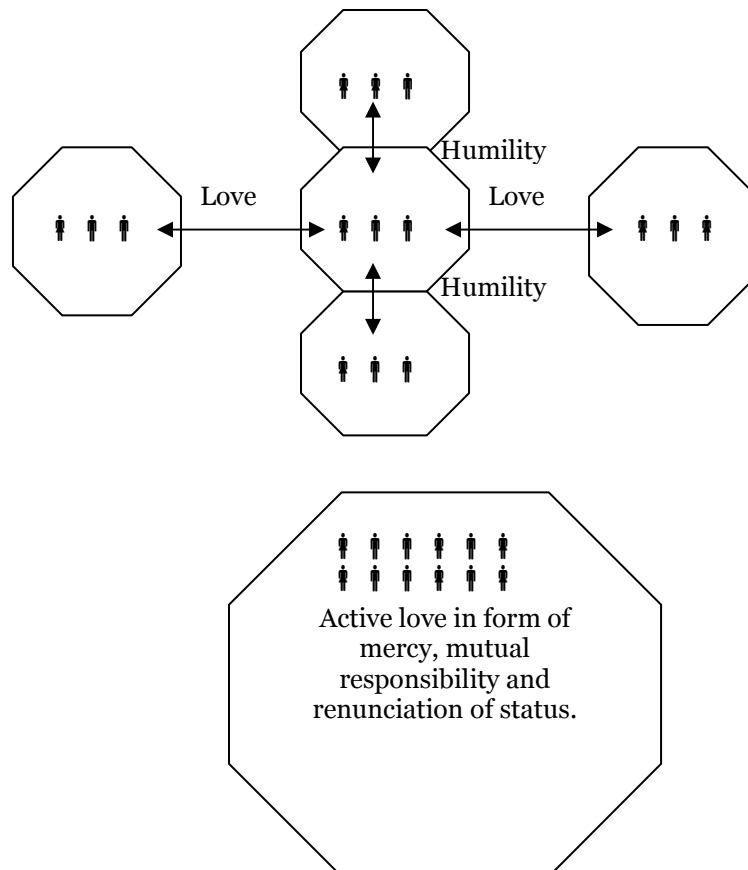
Gerd Theissen has argued that in Israel an ethics of solidarity was developed, contrary to the Greek approach of an ethics of self-control. Hence, at the centre of biblical ethics is not the concern for the autonomy or self-discipline of a person, but rather the care for one's neighbour, expressed in acting love.¹² Biblical ethics thereby is primary social ethics and has its focus on interpersonal relationships rather than on an individual's virtues and duties.

Based on Leviticus 19,17-18, Theissen further argues the Jewish understanding of love went beyond an ethics of social behaviour as evinced in antiquity, since the command to love includes the enemy. Even more, by introducing humility, the renunciation of status, into the discussion of love, Jewish ethics actually contradicts

¹¹ For the argument of translating Col. 3.14 in this way, see E. Schweizer, *Der Brief an die Kolosser* (EKK, Zürich: Benziger Verlag), pp. 153+155.

¹² G. Theissen, *Erleben und Verhalten der ersten Christen. Eine Psychologie des Urchristentums* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007, pp. 408-409).

any ethics of autonomy and assertion of status as endorsed in antiquity. Based on Leviticus 19.17-18, love overcomes social barriers on a horizontal level between those that are inside and outside the peer group, and the renunciation of status, humility, overcomes the barrier between groups of „higher“ or „lower“ social status:¹³



Love always overcomes barriers between individuals and/or groups both on a horizontal as well as on a vertical level. It is lived solidarity among people that formerly excluded one another from their respective groups, and it is also lived solidarity among people that formerly shun one another due to different social status.

Placing the discussion of unity into this context of love, both as mutual responsibility as well as the renunciation of status, makes us aware that what is at stake is nothing less than Old Testament eschatological vision of the messianic age (Joel 3.1-5; Isaiah 2.1-5; 11.1-9; 32.15-20, 65.25; etc.. See also *1 En* 52; *2 Bar.* 73). At this point we may thus far conclude that the mission of the church is inseparably linked to the topic of unity, and division cannot take place without harming the church's mission to be a visible demonstration of God's renewing power in this world.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 412-419. For a more detailed argument, see G. Theissen, „Nächstenliebe und Statusverzicht als Grundzüge christlichen Ethos“, in W. Härle/H. Schmidt/M. Welker (editors), *Das ist christlich. Nachdenken über das Wesen des Christentums* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 2000), pp. 119-142.

2.2 Jesus and the renewed Community

As noted above, one source of the New Testament authors' vision for a renewed community is rooted in the eschatological hopes of the Old Testament. Yet another source of their vision is rooted in the teachings and acts of Jesus:¹⁴ Contrary to many other renewal movements of his time, Jesus' call to holiness was never exclusive or marked by an "intra-cultural differentiation".¹⁵ In the Gospel of Mark one of the first things Jesus is doing, is calling the tax-collector Levi (Mk. 2.13-17; *par.* Mt. 9.9-13; Lk. 5.27-32), in Matthew the gentile magicians are the first ones to worship Jesus (Mt. 2.1-11), in Luke the crippled woman is called "a daughter of Abraham" (Lk. 13.16¹⁶), the Gospel of John tells us about Jesus' talk with a Samaritan woman, the result being "many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him" (Jn. 4.39) as well as the Greeks that came to Jesus (Jn. 12.20-23), and both in Matthew and in Luke Jesus was called by his opponents "a friend of tax-collectors and sinners" (Mt. 11.19; Lk. 7.34)¹⁷.

If there is any agreement in contemporary scholarship regarding Jesus, it is that he radically promoted a renewed community characterised by inclusiveness and acceptance of those formerly marginalised and excluded. However, this radical inclusiveness also prompted conflict and schism with those that did not share his vision of a reconciled community in the same way. All four Gospels know of divergences caused by Jesus: Mark places several stories of Jesus' conflicts with the religious leaders and his family right at the beginning of his Gospel (Mk. 2.1-3.35), Luke records Jesus' saying about hating one's family members (Lk.14.26), according to both Matthew and Luke, Jesus did not come to bring peace but rather strife and conflict (Mt. 10.34-39; Lk. 12.51) and John knows about the division between the synagogue and the followers of Jesus (Jn 9.13-34) as well as of divided families due to Jesus' healing ministry (Jn 9.18-23). It seems that the renewed community brought about by Jesus threatened the privileges of the elite and those well off during his time, hence the very message and ministry of reconciliation and

¹⁴ Cf. R. A. BurrIDGE, *Imitating Jesus. An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), pp. 73-78; F. M. J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984), pp. 125-127.

¹⁵ Borg, *Conflict*.

¹⁶ For the significance of this expression, see T.K. Seim, *Double Message: Patterns of Gender in Luke and Acts* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), pp. 44-47; R.F. O'Toole, "Some Exegetical Reflections on Luke 13,10-17", *Bib* 73 (1992), pp. 96-97.

¹⁷ Cf. BurrIDGE, *Imitating Jesus*, pp. 62-68. However, it seems that Jesus spoke less about sex, and that Jesus' "rigorous ethic in the areas of key human moral experience" (p. 68) is less "virtues-oriented" than as might perhaps be indicated by BurrIDGE.

unity also caused schism and separation. The New Testament authors do not present an idealist picture of the results of both the mission of Jesus and the church, yet Jesus' inclusiveness as well as the eschatological hopes of the Old Testament was the soil that nurtured their vision of a renewed community as a visible demonstration of God's reconciling power. To three of the main New Testament authors we shall turn now.

2.3 The Pauline Corpus

As trivial as it might be, one needs to remember that Paul hardly ever calls his churches to missionary work or evangelism. Other themes are much more predominant, one of which is the church's character as a renewed community that is characterised by reconciliation.¹⁸ For Paul, the church is the proleptic anticipation of the eschatological community of God: "For all of you who were baptised into Christ have been clothed with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3.27-28; cf. 1 Cor. 12.13). This "unity that prevails among believers has its basis in the fact that they are all, through baptism, incorporated into Christ ... Baptism thus consciously brings about a change in social relationships and in self-understanding."¹⁹ The new community of peace²⁰ (Rm. 14.17+19; 1 Cor. 7.15; Eph. 2.14-15; 4.3, etc.), does neither unite simply Jews of various social positions, nor only Jews or Greeks, but different people from different ethnic groups, genders and social positions. It crosses boundaries among various groups both on the horizontal and vertical level (1 Cor. 12.13). And since this renewed community is brought about through the Spirit (2 Cor. 13.13), to violate it is to grieve the Spirit (Eph. 4.29-32).

Among the Pauline corpus, the letter to the Ephesians is perhaps the one writing that reflects best the interrelatedness of the church's unity and mission. The letter starts with a great eulogy (Eph. 1.3-14), and in verse 10 the author summarises the work of Christ with "ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα". Schnackenburg and Turner

¹⁸ „Reconciliation is the Pauline concept in which enmity between God and humanity, or between human groups is overcome and peaceful relations restored on the basis of the work of Christ.“ (S.E. Porter, "Peace, Reconciliation" in G.F. Hawthorne, R.P. Martin and D.G. Reid [eds], *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* [Leicester, InterVarsity Press, 1993], p. 695. Cf. also Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 167.)

¹⁹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 167. Cf. A.J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 49.

²⁰ Εἰρήνη and its cognates is another word group Paul often applies in speaking about the church as a renewed community (cf. Porter, "Peace", p. 695).

have convincingly argued that it is best to translate the verb with “to bring back into unity” (rather than “to bring under one head”).²¹ Turner, building upon the work of Hanson²², points to the Old Testament background of this verse, rooting in the belief that the universe “was the creation of God who was One, without peer or rival, and all was initially in harmony with him ... [and that] the day of the Lord was to be seen as the day when God subjects all competing powers to himself and thus restores the universe to harmony.”²³ As noted above, for Paul this final and cosmic reunification is guaranteed in Christ, and proleptically made manifest now in the church (cf. Rm. 5.9-11; 2 Cor. 5.17-21; Gal. 3.27-28). The new community, characterised by reconciliation and peace, is then the focus of Paul’s argument in 2.11-22:

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility ... His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of two, thus making peace, and in this body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. (Eph. 2.14-16; cf. Eph. 3.6; 8-10).

Relating the unity of the church, as described in Eph. 4.14-16, to her mission, Turner concludes: “This wisdom is thus partly ‘made known’ ... *by the very existence* of a universal church where Jew and Gentile live and worship together as one body.”²⁴

Ephesians chapters 4-6 then spell out the consequences for the church as the new and reconciled community.²⁵ This section is opened with the exhortation to live a life worthy of God (4.1-6), which means to be humble, gentle, patient and “bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit²⁶ through the bond of peace. There is one body, one Spirit ...”. Not to live accordingly is for the author of Ephesians to “threaten the very essence of the church’s mission to exemplify God’s grand purpose to reunify the cosmos in the love of Christ.”²⁷

These all too short observations on the unity of the church in the Pauline corpus support the initial thesis that the church’s mission is primarily to be a visible demonstration of God’s reconciling power; in Christ and through the Spirit, God the

²¹ R. Schnackenburg, *Der Brief an die Epheser* (EKK, Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1982, p. 43; M. Turner, „Mission and Meaning in Terms of ‚Unity‘ in Ephesians“, in A. Billington *et al.* (eds), *Mission and Meaning: Essays presented to Peter Cotterell* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995), p. 139.

²² Stig Hanson, *The Unity of the Church in the New Testament: Colossians and Ephesians* (Uppsala: Alqvist, 1946), p.56.

²³ Turner, „Mission“, p. 141.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 146. According to Turner, Paul speaks in Ephesians of a mission to the powers (rather than to the world (p. 147).

²⁵ Cf. Schnackenburg, *Epheser*, pp. 102; 160-161; Turner, „Mission“, pp. 140-157.

²⁶ Probably best understood as a genitive of the subject (as in 2 Cor. 13.13): “keep the unity that comes from /through the Spirit.”

²⁷ *Ibid.* P. 149. All the subsequent exhortations (Eph. 4.7-6.20) follow the same line of reasoning.

Father is building a community that includes those that formerly excluded one another and that unites those that were formerly separated by having a different social status within society. Hence, this new community is the result of a Trinitarian process and builds upon mutual acceptance (Rm. 12.13; 14.1-3; 15.7).

2.4 The Lukan Writings

The argument that the Spirit is presented in Luke-Acts as overcoming boundaries between people in a horizontal and in a vertical way shall not be repeated at this point.²⁸ Only two aspects that are of direct interest for the topic of mission and unity shall be highlighted:

Firstly, both volumes of Luke's writings introduce the plot and the main character with an Old Testament quotation. In the Gospel, Isaiah 61.1-2 introduces the mission and ministry of the anointed servant of God (Lk. 4.18-19), and in the book of Acts, Joel 3.1-5 introduces the ministry and the mission of the anointed community (Acts 2.17-21) as the continuation of Jesus' ministry (Acts 1.1). Both quotations agree in their eschatological as well as in the pneumatological vista, and in both passages the anticipated renewal is described in social terms; a renewal of social life that includes those that were formerly excluded and that gives a voice to those that had formerly none due to their social status. Hence, in both volumes, the mission of either Jesus or the community is described as restoring unity among humankind on a horizontal and vertical level. The renewed community is not simply a by-product of the mission of Jesus and/or the church, but it is its very aim. Therefore, the summaries in Acts present the community life in such a way as to subvert the Greek ideal of friendship and to cross the boundaries between people of lower and higher social status and of people that were formerly marginalised and considered as outsiders.²⁹

Secondly, while the Pauline letters reflect mainly struggles and conflicts within local church communities, Luke knows about conflicts and possible schisms among churches, particularly between the Jewish-Christian church of Jerusalem and the Gentile-Christian church / mission of Antioch. The resolution of this conflict (Acts 11.19-30; 15.1-35) comes closest to what may today be called "ecumenical work". For

²⁸ M. Wenk, "Community Forming Power: Reconciliation and the Spirit in Acts", *JEPTA*, Vol. 19 (1999), pp. 17-33; idem, *Community*. Bosch has summarized Luke's theology of missions as "Practicing Forgiveness and Solidarity with the Poor", Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, pp. 84-122.

²⁹ Cf. A.C. Mitchell, "The Social Function of Friendship in Acts 2.44-47 and 4.32-37", *JBL* 111 (1992), pp. 255-272; B. Capper, "Reciprocity and the Ethics of Acts", *AICS*, VI, pp. 497-518.

the moment it may suffice to note that the unity attained was of “pneumatological origin” (Acts 15.28³⁰; Acts 11.24 states explicitly in the context of Barnabas’ ecumenical work, that “he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith”) and that it was of such nature that it still allowed a certain “pluralism” among the churches; not unlike Paul’s argument in Romans 14. The result was not a unified church in the sense of that all believed and acted exactly the same, but that all were considered of one another and did not violate one’s religious feelings. The Jewish-Christian believers seemed to have continued practicing circumcision and regarding the food laws, while the Gentile Christians were not obliged to do likewise. While the unity achieved agreed on a minimal factor of common practice, it allowed at the same time certain pluralism in other areas and thus built upon mutual acceptance of existing differences,³¹ without one condemning or treating the other one scornfully. In addition, the gentile Christian church became more and more a self-theologizing church; Christianity had, at its very beginning, various forms of expression.

2.5 The Johannine Writings

Much has already been said and written about missions and unity in the Johannine writings and the significance of John 17.21-23³² in early Pentecostalism has received due attention.³³ The discussion of this passage shall, therefore, be restricted and summarised with Culpepper’s assessment that:

The unity of the church with the Father empowers its mission to the world. That mission is the inevitable consequence of the church’s union with the lord. When the mission is sidetracked by divisions within the church’s fellowship, it is a sign that the branches are not abiding in the vine and that they are in danger of being cut off and cast into fire. Commitment to Jesus Christ inevitably means commitment to his redemptive mission to make

³⁰ For a discussion on the exact role of the Spirit in this process, cf. Wenk, *Community*, pp. 304-305.

³¹ For a discussion on the relation of Acts 15 to Galatians 2, cf. R. Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte (EKK* Zürich: Benzinger Verlag, 1986). Vol. 2, pp. 84-90, and J. Roloff, “Konflikte und Konfliktlösungen nach der Apostelgeschichte, in C. Bussmann and W. Radl, *Der Treue Gottes trauen. Beiträge zum Werk des Lukas für Gerhard Schneider* (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 1991), pp. 120-124.

³² For a detailed discussion of Jn 17.20-26, see: Marie-Therese Sprecher, *Einheitsdenken aus der Perspektive von Joh 17. Eine exegetische und bibeltheologische Untersuchung von Joh 17,20-26* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1993).

³³ “As early as 1908 Piper has preached a sermon, “The Prayer of Jesus Must be Answered: His Body Must be United: The Gifts and Offices of the Early Church must be Restored” (cited by P.D. Hocken, “Church, Theology of the”, in *Dictionary of Pentecostal Movements*, p. 546. For further references to Jn. 17.21-23, cf. C.M. Robeck, “Taking Stock of Pentecostalism”, *Pneuma* 15.1 (1993); pp. 37-40.

the name of God known to every man, woman, and child on earth.³⁴

When it comes to John's vision of a renewed community marked by reconciliation, and the disciples' mission in the fulfilment of this vision, we may note the following four observations:

1. For John the very mission of Jesus is to gather *one* flock including both Jews and Gentiles (Jn. 10.16³⁵; 11.52). John 11.52 is of special interest, since the gentiles are called "the scattered children of God" and the purpose of Jesus' death is defined as "to bring them together and make them one" (Jn 11.52). Hence, unity is, at least in this text, the primary soteriological effect of Jesus' salvific work on behalf of humankind.³⁶ This does in no means conflict with John's opening statement that the Lamb of God is to take away the sin of (Jn 1.29) and to bring everlasting life (Jn 3.16) to the world, since to take away the sins of the world and to bring life to it is to overcome all forms of division and separation within it. The sins of the world, according to John, are not simply the moral problems of an individual, but the state of corruption and of alienation of the entire world: John 11.52 serves as a definition of John 1.29 and 3.16. Further, according to John, reconciliation between God and a person and reconciliation among people cannot be separated from one another; not even in the sense that one is the result of the other. John's thinking is neither not so much causal but rather holistic (cf. 1 Jn 2.9-11; 4.19-21).
2. The new community not only crosses barriers between Jews and Gentiles, but also between genders:

the Gospel of John is remarkable for its intentional presentation of women as models of faith ... our maverick Gospel goes its way without regard for the social customs of the time. It honors female characters with major roles in the narrative and through them tantalizes the reader with a variety of models of faith. ... The fourth

³⁴ R.A. Culpepper, "Inclusivism and Exclusivism in the Fourth Gospel", in J. Painter, R.A. Culpepper and F.F. Segovia (eds), *Word, Theology, and Community in John* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002, p. 94.

³⁵ J.L. Martyn has argued that the reference to the „other sheep“ in Jn 10.16 refers to Jews that are not yet part of the Johannine community (J.L. Martyn, "A Gentile Mission that Replaced an Earlier Jewish Mission?" in A. Culpepper and C.C. Black (eds), *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996], pp. 124-44. However, there is good reason to maintain the view that both Jn 10.16 as well as 11.52 refers to the Gentiles and that the language that reflects the language of the Jewish expectation of the end-time salvation of diaspora Jews, has already been transformed in the fourth Gospel into the concept of the people of God comprising both Jews and Gentiles; cf. Udo Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes (ThHkNT)*, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1998), pp. 180 + 195; Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel according to Saint John (BNTC)*, London: Continuum, 2005), pp. 298; 330-331).

³⁶ For a discussion of the interpretation, going back as far as Jerome, of Jn 21.11 that understands the reference to the 153 fishes as implying universal election, cf. R.E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John (AB)*, Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), vol. II, p. 1074.

Evangelist knows no other tradition – no other way of telling the Jesus story – than in the context of equality of women and men in Christ.³⁷

3. When talking about the realisation of the church's unity, John always talks about love (Jn 13.34-35; 15.9.12; 1 Jn. 2.7-8; 4.7-12), and this love becomes visible in mutual care, responsibility and acceptance (1. Jn 2.9-11; 3.10; 3.11-24; 4.19-21). If one follows the strand of scholarship which assumes that the Johannine community lived in and with the large church, without being identical to it,³⁸ this unity of love comes closer to the contemporary call for ecumenical unity, than the unity that is called for in the Pauline corpus, which mainly addresses schisms and quarrels within local churches and not among different church communities.
4. At the centre of the church's unity is her unity *in Christ* (Jn 15.1-8; 17.21), hence this unity is a divine gift rather than a moral obligation or an organisational construct:³⁹ unity with Christ not merely enables the believers for brotherly love, rather unity with Christ *is made manifest in brotherly love*.⁴⁰ Hence, unity in Christ is nothing mystic, purely spiritual, but the actual realisation of relationships characterised by love, care and mutual responsibility (1 Jn 2.9-11; 4.19-21).

In one regard the Johannine writings differ slightly from the Pauline and Lukan writings which stress more “directly” the pneumatological origin of the church. For John the Spirit guarantees on the one hand the church's unity with Jesus (Jn 13-17), and thereby the unity among one another, and on the other hand the Spirit ensures the unity of the disciples' mission with the restoring and life giving ministry of Jesus (Jn 20.19-23).

³⁷ R. Kysar, *John, the Maverick Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1993, rev. ed.), p. 147, 154, 153. In the story of the Samaritan woman (Jn 4.1-37) Jesus crosses even two social barriers: gender and ethnic wise.

³⁸ C. Link, U. Luz and L. Vischer, *Sie aber hielten fest an der Gemeinschaft... Einheit der Kirche als Prozess im Neuen Testament und heute* (Zürich: Benzinger Verlag, 1988), p. 170; G. Theissen, *Das Neue Testament* (Munich: Ch. Beck Verlag, 2002), pp. 106-107.

³⁹ Cf. J. Bank, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (GSL 4/2, Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1977), p. 282. For the difference between Paul's concept of the church as body of Christ and John's understanding of the vineyard, cf. C. Link, U. Luz and L. Vischer, *Einheit der Kirche als Prozess*, p. 171.

⁴⁰ Link, Luz, Vischer, *Einheit der Kirche*, p. 172.

3 Conclusions and Implications for a Pentecostal Theology of Missions

This quick reading of unity and mission in the New Testament bears some implications for the Pentecostal movement, if it continuously wants to be a missionary movement:

1. Since the *Missio Dei* is to “bring back to unity” (Eph. 1.10) all aspects of life in a world suffering from division and alienation, and since the church is both subject and object of this mission, she is to fulfil her mission in unity. This “unity in mission” is reflected in the story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10 + 11: Because of a vision Peter went into a gentile’s home, but arriving there, he enquired: “May I ask why you sent for me?” (Acts 10,29c). It is only after Cornelius shared his experience that it starts to dawn on the apostle what was taking place, and so he begins to preach. However, only at the end, when the Spirit falls upon Cornelius and his household Peter concludes: “Can anyone keep these people from being baptised with water?” (Acts 10.47), meaning: is there any reason why these people cannot become part of God’s eschatological people? Peter’s statement implies that even during his sermon he did not yet assume that Cornelius, being a gentile, could become a full member of God’s people. It is only after Peter and Cornelius shared with each other what they each heard and knew from God that the *Missio Dei* was accomplished; it was not simply Peter bringing the good news to the gentile Cornelius, but it also was the gentile Cornelius that added to this missionary process. At the end, not only did Cornelius turn from being a gentile to a Christian, but the church turned towards the gentiles – and this was probably by far the more difficult move.
2. Theologically speaking, unity within and among the churches is part of the soteriology, it is part of Christ’s redemption accomplished, it is part of God’s vision for this world. This makes the church both recipient and bearer of God’s resorting mission on behalf of humankind. In experiencing God’s reconciling power in her midst, the church fulfils her mission in this world; hence, unity is both a divine gift and mandate. Ecumenical work and social activity are thus not to be seen simply as the hobby horse of some incorrigible idealists, but as imperative for the church to fulfil her mission.
3. While the New Testament speaks relatively little about what is today called ‘ecumenical work’, it clearly spells out a vision of a renewed humanity and

provides clear guidelines for how to live in such a community in which there is room for different expressions of the Christian faith, but no place for condemnation or contempt.

4. For all three, Paul, Luke and John, different beliefs and expressions of spirituality were no reasons for splitting up, rejection, condemnation or contempt. A church that is truly pentecostal will reflect a certain pluralism within its ranks, for the work of the Spirit leads to love and care among people of different gender and of diverse social and ethnic backgrounds; the church is a community of peace and of freedom, and not of orderliness and uniformity.
5. All three authors looked at agree on a direct – or even very direct – link between the work of the Spirit and the unity of the church.⁴¹ Hence, in spite of all activities and programmes, Pentecostals, together with all other churches, will not adequately fulfil the mission of God for this world, as long as their witness is spoiled by separations, strife and dissention.
6. The whole focus of church planting among “peer groups”, people of the same cultural or sub-cultural group, is, at least in the long run, critical since any such church does not adequately reflect God’s reconciling power in this world – which in turn is the very mission of the church.
7. Crossing boundaries among people, both in a horizontal as well as in a vertical way, will always cause opposition and conflict. The call for and the actual living out of a unity that overcomes cultural, ethnic, social, gender, generational and denominational barriers will not get everybody’s applause but it will be perceived by some as a threat to current power structures.
8. The concept of the *Missio Dei* as “bringing back into unity” (Eph. 3.10) what is divided could also be applied on an individual level to all that is “divided” within a person (Rm. 7.14-8.4); the restoration of a traumatized or disturbed personality. Hence, what has traditionally been defined as “counselling” is another way in which the church fulfils her mission and makes visible the reconciling and restoring power of God in peoples’ lives.
9. And this brings us to the nexus between the church’s mission, unity, and power: In her unity the church is to be a powerful demonstration of God’s final reconciling work on behalf of this world. Hence, the power of the church is a

⁴¹ According to Blaine Charette, this is also true for the Gospel of Matthew (Charette, *Restoring Presence*, pp. 98-139).

healing and reconciling power that fosters freedom, peace, mercy and justice,
because such are the powerful manifestations of the kingdom of God.