

Pentecostal Ecclesiology: a view from the Global South

Mathew Clark, Director of PG Studies, Regents Theological College, UK

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1. Introduction:

In August 2007 I moved from South Africa to the United Kingdom, to take up a position at Regents Theological College, the training arm of the Elim Pentecostal Church. Despite frequent visits to the UK and interaction with some UK Pentecostals in Southern Africa, I was not prepared for the reality of the differences in essence and context between African Pentecostalism and UK/Europe. My 38 years of ministry and research had involved living, working, ministering and/or teaching in numerous African countries. My major theological and research links were with Pentecostals from Asia, Africa and Latin America. I was obviously acquainted with published Pentecostal theological works stemming from the North (as most of them do) but this did not prepare me for a significant change in environment, experience and outlook. I would summarise this as follows:

- a) UK/European Pentecostalism is numerically tiny, it's public profile relegated to near obscurity by the established churches;
- b) UK Pentecostalism is theologically impoverished and inarticulate, at church leadership and local ministry level in particular. Elim and the AOG have only a handful of PhD graduates, few if any of them operating in positions of denominational influence;
- c) Charismatic and evangelical groups and streams within established churches provide more erudite theological and devotional material than do the classical Pentecostal groups;
- d) The UK academic and research environment populated by Pentecostals is non-intensive and rather undemanding in its scope and rigour.
- e) As in many Northern contexts, Pentecostal liturgy in the UK communities (indigenous, not immigrant) demonstrates few of the "traditional" Pentecostal markers such as open mutual ministry, sustained prayer meetings, public demonstration of *pneumatica*, rousing singing or dynamic preaching. The sense of collective and extended family and community, as well as of festival and celebration, is noticeably less than in many Southern contexts.

My interest in the topic of this topic and paper was aroused on attending a conference at Bangor University in June 2010¹. Northern contributors were primarily from the USA (with strong Church of God representation) and the UK. What struck me was the difference between 2 papers in particular, and the rest of the presentations. Daniela Augustine's contribution which related to her own experience of Pentecostalism in Bulgaria, where the Christian milieu is dominated by Orthodoxy; and Opoku Onyinah's paper on ecclesiological issues in Ghana. Both of these papers broke the dominant trend of descriptive/prescriptive contributions by (and in conversation with) Northern seminarians that by and large accepted the Northern Pentecostal church and churches as the normative "default" – and often a model of church that has not been seen much in the North since the 1960's or even

¹ Papers subsequently published as Thomas 2010.

earlier². Augustine and Onyinah brought a freshness and passion to the topic that resonated with my own experiences of being and doing church in Africa. This has inspired me to turn my attention to the topic of ecclesiology, as a Pentecostal from the global South.

The Bangor experience also helped me articulate a perception that has been obvious for some time to most non-Northerners involved in Pentecostal research: the disparity in published theological research between the numerically tiny, largely moribund and publicly low-profiled Pentecostalism of the North Atlantic region, and the numerically huge, fast-growing and high-profiled Pentecostalism of most of the global South. In detail this disparity might be articulated as follows:

- a) The North, where probably less than 10% of Pentecostals now reside, produces more than 90% of published research on Pentecostalism.
- b) Doctoral graduates in the North tend to gravitate toward teaching and further research; in the South they gravitate into leadership and public ministry³;
- c) Theological societies are relatively well-populated in the North; in the South they are difficult to establish and maintain because on-going theological research is a minor interest (or occupation) of many graduates.
- d) Theological graduates in the North rarely enjoy a high profile in their denominations; in the South the opposite is true.
- e) Seminaries and training ministries in the South utilise published material from the North as their primary prescribed material, despite the fact that such material often has little resonance with the rubber-meets-the-road environment of their own context – this presents the danger that academically-trained ministers in the South might find little relevance for their studies in their ministry environment.

2. Sources and methodology

In the light of this situation, exploring a Pentecostal ecclesiology for the South will not adopt the traditional research methodology of accessing books and journals on the topic “ecclesiology” under the discipline “theology” or “systematic theology.” The expansion of Pentecostalism in the South has been relatively recent, and most of it is still finding articulation in terms of narrative and testimony rather than in literature studies. Any attempt to arrive at the theological essence of what “ecclesia” means in the South will have to incorporate this fact into its search for sources and a relevant

² Recent examples of publications addressing “global” Pentecostal matters include: Warrington 2008, who offers a more multicultural approach to Pentecostal theology (and a very useful overview of contributions in this particular area over the last 10-15 years), although his section on ecclesiology (pp. 131-179) reflects primarily the experience and literature of North American and UK Pentecostals. Studebaker 2008 reflects a similar trend, almost every defining issue being a typically Western concern addressed in his collection by a typically Northern scholar. Kay & Dye’s (2004) reader on Pentecostalism is exclusively Northern in interest and contribution. Anderson’s (2004) introduction to Pentecostalism as part of global charismatic Christianity includes a much broader perspective but with limited detail.

³ The leader of Ghana’s Church of Pentecost, Opoku Onyinah, offered a response at the Bangor conference to my question “What have you published recently?” that resonates with my own experience of learning and leadership in the South: “I am too involved in leadership and pastoral matters, and most of my writing is pastoral or for local teaching purposes, in church magazines, circulars and websites.”

methodology. For this reason useful information is mainly derived using an eclectic approach in which descriptive and narrative sources play a major role⁴.

The aim of this paper will be to hopefully provide material and insights that might form a basis for further research and articulation of the topic, primarily by researchers and practitioners of the South. However, I also hope to present a perspective that will enable theologians of the North to revisit their own articulation of Pentecostal ecclesiology and produce published material that would be more representative of global Pentecostalism. The disparity in published research between North and South is unlikely to change anytime soon⁵, and one of the urgent tasks of thinkers from the South is therefore to influence its content as much as possible.

This research will be primarily phenomenological, attempting to articulate what *is* rather than what *ought to be*. It will reflect a typology of perspectives, trends, contexts and challenges⁶. Focal points of interest will be liturgy, governance and leadership, ministry philosophies, generational factors, social environment, theological *propria*, and notions of vision and mission. The perspectives of practical theology and of the social sciences are reflected in much of this study.

3. Pentecostal ecclesiology as seen from the South

The Pentecostal movement in the South comes to ecclesiastical expression in widely disparate forms. Before investigating these forms and their underlying models it is useful to note the social settings in which they occur.

3.1 The social environment

The largely middle-classed (economically if not always socially), professional, welfare-providing post-Christian environment of the North – especially Europe - is rarely reflected in the South. People of European descent in e g South Africa may reflect some of these aspects singly or in community and in some parts of South and East Asia and Latin America there is be a burgeoning middle-class developing. However, this group is often surrounded by larger groups of pre-modern or modernising communities, with all the social and economic challenges one might expect. The modernising effect of Pentecostalism itself, with its promotion of upward social mobility, is an area of sociological and anthropological interest in itself. Class distinctions in the South are also notable more in terms of the contrast urban-rural than of the traditional divisions of capital-labour or upper-lower. The role and dignity

⁴ LaPoorta 1996, Clark 2006, J Ma 2000, and Onyiah 2002b are just a few examples of such Pentecostal narrative approaches.

⁵ The excellent work done at some centres in the North, such as Oxford Centre for Missionary Studies in the UK, and the various GloPent initiatives and projects, does something to correct the imbalance. However, the general tendency in the North remains to present material which acknowledges the movement in the South, or discusses it as e g “missions”, but which does not originate from the experience of those who have lived in and known only the South for all of their lives. There is also considerable interest in Pentecostalism imported from the South by diaspora groups.

⁶ Anderson, Bergunder, Droogers & van der Laan (2010) present an excellent attempt at an interdisciplinary approach to understanding global Pentecostalism: sociologically, anthropologically, psychologically and theologically. Martin (2002) also offers a useful sociological perspective on Pentecostalism, including various typologies e g pp. 1-7.

of women in particular is often radically different to their emancipated situation in the North⁷.

The religious background of Pentecostal growth and self-expression is usually in a non-Christian environment, although in Latin America it is against a predominantly Roman Catholic foil. In some regions the predominant local spirituality demonstrates strong historical continuity and literary expression (e.g. Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism) while in others it is expressed as a folk-religion with oral and narrative forms (e.g. shamanistic tribal religions, folk-Islam and –Buddhism.)

In many regions and nations, not only does Pentecostalism operate in a pagan environment, it is also challenged by implicit or explicit persecution. There are still places where accepting Christian baptism implies a prison or death sentence. China and the Islamic states are the most overt persecutors, but hostility might spring up in many other local contexts as well⁸. Persecution might also occur in regions where the dominant religion is an established Christian church, Latin America and Eastern Europe providing examples of this⁹.

Pentecostal Christians and communities in the South often bear witness within contexts of extreme deprivation. This offers all the obvious challenges, including “rice-bowl conversions” and a preference for prosperity-gospel preaching. In some places (e.g. Korea and parts of West Africa) a simple equation is maintained by the wider public: to be a Christian is to be prosperous.

Because Pentecostalism presents itself as a holistic spirituality without the tensions of the faith-reason and body-spirit dichotomies, it resonates with people who maintain the traditional holistic spiritualities found in many parts of the South. While this expedites evangelism, it may also provide opportunity for syncretistic confusion. In many regions where Pentecostal forms of Christianity are burgeoning there is an accompanying spread of syncretistic forms¹⁰. Onyinah (2002a) has noted this in relation to Christian deliverers in Ghana who operate effectively as Pentecostal shamans, diagnosing the spiritual causes of human hardship and prescribing a spiritual remedy viz deliverance at their hand.¹¹

In many places in the South, Pentecostal-Charismatic expressions of Christianity have become the predominant form. The public profile of Pentecostalism is therefore often correspondingly high in much of the South and much more acceptable to the wider public. This is certainly the case in much of sub-Saharan Africa, parts of Latin America, and even in some Asian nations e.g. Korea and China. The natural ease with which Zambia accepted a Pentecostal leader is in strong contrast to the

⁷ Shaul & Cesar's (2000) description and critique of Brazilian Pentecostalism offers a fascinating case study of Pentecostal development in an “emerging” scenario.

⁸ Jang 2003 provides a Pentecostal evaluation of growth under persecution by the Japanese in Korea from 1910-1953. Marshall 1997 highlights the ongoing persecution of Christians in many parts of the global South, noting how little interest is shown by governments and churches in the North.

⁹ This has been true under dominant Roman Catholicism in Southern Europe and Latin American nations, and under Eastern Orthodox domination in Eastern Europe. In these regions Pentecostals have often enjoyed more freedom under Marxist regimes than under governments that reflect the dominant form of Christianity.

¹⁰ This is particularly true of many African Initiated Churches in Africa, and is very evident in Brazil, the Caribbean and the Philippines.

¹¹ The North has its own syncretisms: much of the Faith Teaching that has originated in the North based on the thinking of Mary Baker Eddy and E W Kenyon seems to assume a pagan (Buddhist) subjective world-view rather than the Judaeo-Christian worldview of the Bible.

consternation in both the religious and secular communities in the USA over the possibility that a tongues-speaking Pentecostal woman from Alaska might become President of the United States¹². In parts of the South there is the very real possibility of Pentecostals becoming the largest single social unit, perhaps even a majority of the population.

Democratic and religiously tolerant governments do occur in the South, but there are many notable exceptions (and ongoing challenges in areas where such ideologies are relatively new) that mean that Pentecostalism is often forced to operate within the framework of political systems that are inimical to its own basic thrust of liberty in Christ. This might not find expression in overt persecution, but may well entail limitations on Pentecostal access to public space and debate.

In the light of the contrast between the social environment of the South and that of the North, the ecclesiastical expression of Pentecostal forms of Christianity is not surprisingly correspondingly different.

3.2 Mission churches and indigenous churches

Christianity arrived in the South from elsewhere. In most nations in this region, so too did the Pentecostal expression of Christianity¹³. For much of the South the first experience of Pentecostalism was the arrival of Pentecostal missions and mission churches.

At present the distinction between Pentecostal mission churches and indigenous Pentecostal groups is not always usefully made. At times it is demonstrated as being ludicrously anachronistic – the general statement presented at the conclusion of the international centennial celebrations of the AOG is a case in point: little of the content was relevant to any other context than mainland USA, despite the fact that the US membership of the AOG is scarcely 10% of its total international membership¹⁴. Most Pentecostal groups in the South are independent of financial support from the North, and the structural forms of the original founding group are often observed reluctantly or carelessly, if at all.

The provision of resources by “sending” groups plays an ambivalent role in the South: it may in some places still foster dependency, but in many it is simply irrelevant. The generosity of Northerners toward regions of great deprivation has at times been exploited and abused by local opportunists, a reality with which some Pentecostal mission groups in the North are slowly coming to terms¹⁵.

¹² A simple web-search on Palin and “tongues speaking” reveals the almost hysterical level of concern at public and popular level that such a person might rule from the White House.

¹³ However, in many regions in the South there were pre-Pentecostal revivals e.g. Murray and Zionists in RSA, revivals in Korea, and pre-missionary manifestations in e.g. Botswana. Some stress even earlier roots: Native Pentecostalism in India understands itself as historically continuous with the early Syrian church of the first century AD (Pulikottil 2009).

¹⁴ I was in Baguio, Philippines in 2003, when the Principal of APTS read out the statement to the assembled school. The response was underwhelming, as none of the so-called “challenges” listed at the close of the document reflected in any way the concerns or context of the church in the Asia-Pacific region.

¹⁵ Chris Jones, Director of Missions of Elim Pentecostal Church in UK warned local churches in 2008 about scams involving rent-an-orphanage rogues in Uganda. A pastor of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Mozambique was disciplined in 1994 for selling second-hand clothes donated by European churches, instead of distributing them freely.

3.3 Pentecostal communities: “cause” or “effect”?

The full spectrum of controlling and releasing ministries in Pentecostalism is encountered throughout the South¹⁶. The strong centrally governed, entrepreneurial, programme-based and leader-driven ministries with a clearly articulated ministry-philosophy (type A), often reaching mega-church size, are encountered particularly in larger cities in regions where religious toleration exists (Manila, Bangkok, Singapore, Lagos, Accra, Johannesburg, Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires – but not Teheran, Karachi, Istanbul or Beijing.) These groups are excellent at occupying the public space, often wielding directly or indirectly real social influence and even political power. The model of church here is very much that of active subject, agent, influencer and instrument – the church as *cause*.

In rural areas and in regions where Pentecostal Christianity is not well-tolerated by local secular or religious authorities, Pentecostalism’s growth tends to occur in more Anabaptist-style communities (type B.) These are usually smaller non-commuter communities, coalescing where the gospel spreads “like a rumour” (similar to “buzz” in marketing parlance.) Ministry here depends largely on laity, including evangelism that often takes place in homes and workplaces on a one-to-one or small-group basis. They are marked by informality of structure and style, and take shape very much as an *effect* of the presence of the gospel in the mouth and hands of everyday people.

In type A groups the peculiar Pentecostal genius of a powerful encounter with God is located primarily in the words and deeds of powerful leadership figures. It is these personalities that give the movement its dynamic and character. Encounter generally takes place within the liturgy. In type B communities the Pentecostal encounter is in the words and deeds of often nondescript individuals, for whom the gathering and structure of the Christian community is merely a “refuelling stop”, providing them with the comfort and assurance to continue with promoting the powerful encounter with God in their wider community.

In the South, as indeed is the case in many places in the North, the relationship between these two models is dynamic. In the densely populated Gauteng province of South Africa, for instance, the membership of many mega-churches consists primarily of people who first encountered Christ powerfully in a type B community. In the same region there is also a noticeable growth of smaller Pentecostal communities around local mega-churches, consisting of people from the mega-churches who seek a more relational and accountable expression of Christian community and which even limit their own size by splitting into smaller groups once they reach a set membership level. However, this symbiotic relationship in large urban areas is obviously less viable in remote rural areas, where often hostility from local indigenous spiritualities is the major challenge faced by each individual in the Pentecostal community.

The Pentecostal theological community in the North has yet to show any sustained interest in leadership theologies or styles among Pentecostals¹⁷. However, in the

¹⁶ E.g. Agyemang-Baduh’s MTh dissertation submitted to Regents Theological College in 2009 entitled “The impact of Independent Charismatic ministries on Classical Pentecostalism in Ghana” provides a useful historical and typological overview of Pentecostal-type ministries in that country.

¹⁷ Elim Pentecostal Church’s change to an quasi-Apostolic form about 10 years ago was accompanied by little theological or even Biblical debate. Mel Roebeck’s critique of the

South this is becoming a matter of crucial interest. In South Africa, where the largest Pentecostal denomination has more than 50 doctoral graduates in theology, the greater part of their Pentecostal research has been conducted as empirical studies rather than as historical or exegetical. Much of this has focussed on issues of leadership and ministry philosophy and its impact among and assessment by the local westernised Pentecostal community¹⁸ Nevertheless, it would appear that a pragmatic reality of the South is that the governance and structure of Pentecostal communities will be determined by opportunity and location rather than by any other factors such as the Biblical, theological or historical.

3.4 Alternative, marginal and creative communities

The South is a global region in which many forms of Pentecostal community that are merely theorised in the North can become local reality. These include the following:

- a) Communities which exist or minister purely because of direct and explicit divine intervention and direction¹⁹. Many of these echo the origins of Teen Challenge in the USA when David Wilkerson responded to such direction and went to New York's ganglands. The evidence for such divine intervention is so strong that 2 non-Pentecostal sociologists indicate that it argues for the acceptance of the category "God" in sociological research and of the "S" (Spirit) Factor in the origin of some Pentecostal social ministries²⁰.
- b) Basic communities which exist purely because of the clearly evident ongoing dynamic intervention of God via the *pneumatica* in their regular gatherings and in the testimony of their members. This type of community is illustrative of the type B form discussed above, and in many ways approaches the classical Pentecostal ideal where the primitivist motif of the Early Church example is maintained. In rural Africa it is often found in a very informal setting, and is reliant upon regular healings, exorcisms, discernments and miracles. This is true for many regions in Asia and Latin America as well²¹.
- c) In a global region in which patriarchal forms of domestic and community structure predominate, Pentecostalism with its informal structures and liturgies provides an ideal vehicle for expression for many voices from the margin. These include women, people of lower-caste or similar untouchable status, the poor, and oppressed ethnic groups. At times and in places this has taken an overt socio-political aspect (e.g. Latin America) but often it is more subtle in subverting internal communal barriers rather than in revolutionising social structures.
- d) Pentecostalism has demonstrated the viability of Christianity and Christian expansion under persecution. While majority Marxist, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist communities with their literary traditions and political domination are

leadership style developing in the American Assemblies of God (Roebeck 2004) however raised the ire of the movement's leadership and led to a delay in its publication because of their influence with the first selected publishers.

¹⁸ E.g. my own paper at a conference in Kuala Lumpur in 2006 (Clark 2006), which the leadership of my S African denomination attempted to prevent being presented, and an earlier widely-spread occasional paper on the New Apostolic Paradigm (Clark 1999).

¹⁹ Sociologists Miller & Yamamori (2007) describe a number of such ministries around the world – ministries which exist solely because of Divine command or intervention.

²⁰ The two authors accept that even their tenure could be at risk for making such a suggestion, but believe that empirical evidence demands it be said (Miller & Yamamori 2007:37-38,158-159)

²¹ For instance the ministry of W Ma and J Ma in northern Luzon as described in J Ma 2000.

difficult to evangelise philosophically, there being little space granted for the rational Christian voice to be heard, Pentecostals demonstrate that any person of any religion can be touched by the power of God through Pentecostal ministry of the *pneumatica*. Even the most aggressive established religions and spiritualities find it difficult to negate this subtle and informal subversion.

- e) Pentecostalism in the South also demonstrates an ability to occupy the public space of art, music, media and drama. In modernising and emerging communities, where established forms are still fluid in these spaces, Pentecostals have shown an ability to utilise all of these aspects for the sake of evangelism as well as personal fulfilment.

This final comment leads to the next point of discussion:

3.5 Occupation of the public space

Public space entails local and national media, politics, culture and ethics. Kalu observes that African Pentecostals in particular have evidenced an ability to come to grips with this aspect of ministry, testimony and influence²².

However, equality of opportunity to achieve this is not evident throughout this global region. Brazil and West Africa, where large Pentecostal ministries occupy public space easily and originally, are not the same as Iran, Pakistan or the PR of China, where Pentecostals are part of a persecuted, banned or disadvantaged Christian community. Even in more tolerant non-Christian democracies such as Korea and Japan, opportunity for such ministry is not the same. The relative insignificance of Pentecostal groups in the UK in relation to the established Church of England also means that very rarely are Pentecostals admitted as such into the public debate. However, the charismatic presence in the C of E does ameliorate this somewhat, with especially African and Asian bishops demonstrating charismatic evangelical values and practices.

Evangelical Christians, including Pentecostals, have always found themselves at home with their Pietistic heritage of embracing and utilising literacy for proselytising purposes. In the modern era they reveal themselves as adept at appearing not only in print but also in audio and visual media. In developing societies, where large institutions are still fluid, Pentecostals in particular have found a way to influence social dynamics. In the same way that James Dobson's evangelical radio talks clearly influence Republican politics in the USA, the Universal Church in Brazil has demonstrated huge influence in the most recent presidential elections in that country²³.

However, in the area of public morality the rapid growth and influence of Pentecostalism in the South has not always been successful. The depredations of

²² Kalu (2008:169-246) demonstrates in detail how this has taken place in Africa, and West Africa in particular. Gifford (2004) demonstrates how effective this has been in Ghana, and Maxwell (2006) does the same for Zimbabwean Pentecostalism.

²³ Informal sources imply that the preferred presidential candidate was forced to endure a 2nd round of voting, when many had predicted a majority vote for her in the first round, because the Universal Church through its public media objected to her perceived support for abortion on demand.

the culturally-accepted practice of corruption in Africa and many Asian countries are not always noticeably affected by the high conversion rate to Pentecostal forms of Christianity. This may well be because of the high value placed on money in many of the prosperity forms of proclaimed Pentecostalism in these regions, or because of the movement's inherent pragmatism that simply accepts the reality of corruption and moves on with its "spiritual" agenda.

National and religious debates in the South on abortion, homosexuality and HIV/AIDS have at times and in places not been able to proceed without input from Pentecostalism, and in many countries in the South the movement's voice is quite significant in these areas²⁴.

3.6 Leadership

Some issues relating to leadership have been dealt with above. However there are some pertinent regional issues which can be mentioned here.

The global South is a region in which many states are ruled by authoritarian figures, many of whom have proved difficult to remove from office. In a region where democracy and its processes are often seen as a foreign import and where they receive lip-service rather than whole-hearted acceptance, the rise of authoritarian Pentecostal leadership is an obvious corollary. To the Northern eye the amount of authority and power, public dignity and even adoring adulation granted to many spiritual leaders in the South may seem excessive. However, egalitarian forms of governance are not always easily understood by local cultures. Indeed, in best-case scenarios paternalistic figures often provide essential aid and service to Pentecostal communities, using their own social maturity and erudition to facilitate the access of their people to the benefits of modernisation²⁵. However, the abuse of such power is an equal reality and an area in which the Pentecostalism of the South still needs to learn to police itself.

The North is not necessarily sending any useful signals in this regard. The emphasis in recent years on the so-called Five-Fold Ministry (the apostolic ministry in particular) has permeated Pentecostalism in the North and spread from there to the South. The rediscovery of such gifts is beneficial to the church, but the emphasis on power and authority, and Old Testament-type claims for unquestioned revelational authority of leaders, has produced spiritual abuse on a massive scale throughout the Pentecostal world. The huge proliferation of AIC's (African Initiated Churches) in Southern Africa owes much to this linking of Old Testament notions of spiritual leadership with the present-day African community ethos, and the combination of Five-fold thinking and such Old Testament categories has permeated the African Pentecostal church.

The relationship between critical theological research and training, and the leadership of Pentecostal churches around the globe, is also challenged today by the typical politician-intellectual tension. Pentecostal teachers will affirm that anti-

²⁴ In South Africa public hospitals have difficulty finding staff who will perform abortions, Uganda's turn-around of the AIDS pandemic preferred to stress abstinence over condoms – much of this is due to the proportion of the population that is Pentecostal and/or evangelical-charismatic.

²⁵ In Latin America such paternalistic figures are very evident in the *barrios*, and in rural parts of Africa trained Pentecostal ministers increasingly represent their members to State officialdom.

intellectualism is not intrinsic to wider Pentecostal membership, but rather that it is authoritarian Pentecostal leaders who often present a barrier “protecting” their members from intensive or challenging Pentecostal teaching, training or research. In cultural contexts where Pentecostal membership is drawn from upper-middle class and professional classes this creates a faith-reason tension in churches where it appears that “we check our brain at the door.” In the global South, where leadership and membership are generally-speaking more broadly aspirational than in the North theological training may not receive such a poor reception, but it is noticeable that some training contexts operate in a leader-driven context rather than in one of academic freedom²⁶.

The nature of Pentecostal community, with its totally egalitarian experience of the rich outpouring of divine power and blessing, has always been to facilitate the rise to significance of previously insignificant people. This is demonstrated today in the South in both a macro and a micro context. In smaller communities very often it is a Pentecostal minister or church-member who comes to the fore in situations of change or crisis.

3.7 Theology

3.7.1 An articulation of Christological dynamics rather than a rediscovery of Pneumatology

Working as a Pentecostal theologian, teacher, researcher and leader in Southern Africa, I operated within an environment in which Pentecostal theology understood itself as a holistic discipline, turning its attention to the full spectrum of theological enterprise and offering a distinctively Pentecostal perspective on any given area. I was surprised to discover in the UK that “Pentecostal” is usually understood as “Pentecostal/Charismatic”, and that its distinctive lies in its *pneumatological* focus. Taught modules and research topics are not considered to be Pentecostal unless the terms “Pneumatology” or “Holy Spirit” (or the closely-related terms “Pentecostal” and “Charismatic”) appear in the title²⁷. Pentecostal publications often proceed more as pneumatological studies than as Pentecostal studies.

This narrow focus may owe something to the rather minor role Pentecostalism plays in church and society in the North, or (as is more likely) it demonstrates the strong influence of the Charismatic group’s experience and theology on the movement’s theology and theologians – in the UK and Europe at least. While in the 1970’s and 1980’s Pentecostalism’s theological enterprise was that of an experiential movement seeking an adequate theological expression of its *proprium*, the Charismatic movement was taking place in established churches that had their own long history of theological articulation – now challenged to find a place for “experience” in its theological self-understanding and expression. They appear to have managed this by locating the experiential aspects under the heading “pneumatological studies” and thereby leaving much of the rest of their theological superstructure untouched²⁸.

²⁶ Oral Roberts University, Jimmy Swaggart’s Bible school, and many Korean schools planted by Yoido Full Gospel Church have at times been examples of this tendency.

²⁷ E.g. the titles of Masters modules offered at Regents Theological College almost without exception followed this rule. Exegesis is apparently only Pentecostal exegesis when it investigates a pneumatological theme, and the term “the role of the Holy Spirit” is ubiquitous in module and prescribed research paper titles.

²⁸ This is spelled out clearly in Clark & Lederle 1989:21.

Classical Pentecostalism could not do this. While the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the working of the gifts of the Spirit have had obvious pneumatological implications from the beginning, the self-understanding of early Pentecostalism appears to have been overwhelmingly Christological – as Dayton (1987) has demonstrated. Kraus's (1979:173-175) description of Anabaptism is a very apt descriptor of classical Pentecostalism: a radical, alternative, Jesus-centred, witnessing movement. Pentecostalism saw itself as a latter-day manifestation of the saving, healing, baptising and returning Christ – a Christ whom people encountered in a powerful experience rather than in an articulate theological expression or confession²⁹.

Pentecostalism in the South shares this Christo-centrism for at least two reasons:

- a) Pentecostalism in the South is often a relatively new religion, in places resembling more nearly the classical Pentecostalism of the first and second generations after Azusa Street in its forms, dynamic and articulation. In such a milieu the message of Jesus seems to come to the fore more readily than does the message about the Spirit. Indeed, Spirit-centred thinking is more likely to lead to syncretism because of the spirit-centred nature of the religious context in much of the South.
- b) In the South Pentecostalism is often that powerful form of Christianity that is on the cutting-edge of the interface with other major religions or spiritualities. Its message is therefore less about the crucial importance of the Holy Spirit for the existing people of God (an Acts 1-8 context) than it is about the sovereignty of Jesus the King and Champion who is able to heal, deliver and redeem (a Colossians 1-2 and Acts 13-21 context.) While recognising that the dynamic witness to Jesus is facilitated by the Holy Spirit, converts recognise that their choice has been for Jesus – often because they have become convinced that he is greater and more powerful and effective than the other spiritual entities and forces that surround them.

3.7.2 Pentecostal liturgy – the reason for the gathering of the community

While most forms of liturgy discerned in Northern Pentecostalism since its inception are discovered in the South today, including the globalised Contemporary Christian Worship model, for most Pentecostals in the South the crucial aspect of their gathering together is located in their communal, mutual and personal encounter with God. While in the North it is often possible to attend local Pentecostal services for weeks and months without noticing anything other than one would encounter in many Protestant or Evangelical churches, this is not the situation in the South. Possibly because it is still a relatively young movement in the region, Pentecostalism still maintains and insists on the single major distinctive of classical Pentecostalism: among these people you encounter the transforming Christian God in a dynamic and often clearly observable way³⁰.

The role of prayer in the Pentecostal liturgy illustrates the difference between North and South in this regard: most Pentecostals moving to the North from the South are immediately struck by the low profile that communal prayer has in the North. Prayer

²⁹ David Du Plessis' metaphor of the steak on the grill is apposite here (Du Plessis 1977:183-184)

³⁰ I am not sure that this does not remain our only real distinctive, the heart of the Pentecostal *genius*, now widely emulated in other Christian traditions. When we take on other forms with other identifiers we are often but a pale shadow of others who do such other-than-Pentecostal things much better than we do.

meetings are not only an integral part of the Pentecostalism of the South – they are very much a primary part. The opposite is true in the North – while prayer is not necessarily disparaged, formal group prayer activities are rarely prominent in local ministries, and the amount of time devoted to such prayer is a fraction of what one encounters in most of Africa, Asia and Latin America. (While the dominance of consumer culture and private leisure activities may explain this in the North, the Korean example of intensive prayer appears to have thrived well into a generation of upwardly socially mobile Pentecostals.) The conversational and brief nature of occasional and spontaneous prayer in the North also differs sharply from the sustained, passionate and intense prayers usually encountered in other regions. Many Pentecostals in the South will testify that it is in this atmosphere of sustained communal prayer that they most regularly encounter God in a dynamic manner, and where they have learned to give expression to the liturgical gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In a private conversation a well-known South African Reformed theologian, Adrio Konig, commented in response to the publication of Clark & Lederle 1989: “I would note the difference between Pentecostals and Reformed Christians in the prayers the elders pray before the morning service. Where the Reformed elder prays ‘Lord, we want to *learn* more of you today’ the Pentecostal elder would pray ‘Lord, we wish to *experience* more of you today.’” This comment from a critical outsider encapsulates the essence of the Pentecostal *proprium*: it is about encounter, and encounter often occurs intensively in the context of prayer.

Jan Hattingh, principal of one of a large Pentecostal seminary in the South, investigated in his doctoral research the relationship between Pentecostal liturgy and pastoral counselling (Hattingh 1984.) His argument is that Pentecostal celebration and proclamation actually provides a therapeutic event where genuine change is facilitated in human character, need and spirituality. On the basis of this thesis perhaps the growing need for appointing Christian counsellors in Pentecostal churches in the North might be seen in inverse proportion to the experience of real encounter with God in the Pentecostal liturgy in that region.

3.7.3 Theological training

Formal theological training and the practice of Pentecostal ministry often demonstrate a surprising degree of alienation in the North. Most Pentecostal denominations in the UK require minimal formal training for their ministers, and across the Atlantic formal requirements might be more stringent but theological training has a very low profile in most movements. Indeed, it is precisely this alienation of the “thinking class” that was a stimulus for the development of some theological research societies in the North – places where thinkers, teachers and researchers could be appreciated, and hopefully earn recognition from other theological streams in the absence of any meaningful appreciation from their own community.

In the South the relationship is much less strained, although many of the more authoritarian figures prefer to keep a firm grip on the appointment of teachers and on the curriculum – as happens too in the North at times. However, education, training, and the value of proficient and educated leaders and teachers are far more positively viewed in the South. Extrapolation into the next generation may indicate that the Pentecostal churches of the South might outpace their Northern counterparts in

terms of maturity of their denominations, and in the competence of their leaders and ministers to relevantly address the challenges of their time³¹.

Training for “missions” and in “leadership issues” are among the most popular and prestigious aspects of Pentecostal education in the North. This is ironic, since it occurs at a time when mission outreach from North to South is at its most un-needed, and when emphasis on leadership issues is occurring at precisely the time that Northern Pentecostalism could quite validly be declared moribund.

The theological training environment in the South is often severely constrained by lack of resources, particularly published material from both regions. As noted above, the North enjoys massive resources and publishing opportunity, while the South suffers from currency weakness and the intensive need to throw teaching resources into wider ministry rather than into training institutions. Certainly the ready availability and affordability of theological books in the UK stands in stark contrast to even well-developed environments in the South such as South Africa, Brazil and Singapore. Theological research and training as a result seems in the North to be at its strongest in the library but most challenged in the classroom – the exact opposite to what one encounters in much of the South. I am not sure that the movement in the South needs to seek to emulate the North in this regard.

3.7.4 Other issues

There are many other areas that might enjoy scrutiny in a comparison such as this, but space does not allow for detailed investigation into these. Each would make a fascinating and worthwhile study in itself.

The role of women in church and ministry would be one such area. The nature and extent of ecumenical relations and attempts bears investigation, both among Pentecostal denominations and between Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals. The occurrence and extent of Pentecostal schisms and factionalism, Biblical and social hermeneutical models implicitly or explicitly applied in the two regions, and intercultural dynamics, the practice of the sacraments – these and many others may provide detail with which the broader picture I have attempted to address might be illustrated.

4. Conclusion: A Pentecostal ecclesiology from the South

This is a work that has much yet to be written. I have attempted to enumerate some of the major factors in its development, in contrast and continuity with the churches of the North. As a summary observation I would note that the context of the South is more dynamic, extrovert, classically Pentecostal, challenging and exciting than that of its Northern counterpart – although often more risky and “flaky”, as the dynamic aspects cannot hide the warts-and-all nature of Pentecostalism in the South. It is precisely this contextuality that researchers in the North need to investigate, and hopefully in meaningful discussion between North and South a theologically

³¹ My own purely personal observation, based on experience, is that the average leader and minister in denominations such as Church of Pentecost in Ghana and Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa demonstrates a professional maturity of a higher level than their counterparts in the UK Pentecostal churches. The new leader of the Apostolic Church in the UK may be an exception – a man of African extraction.

responsible understanding of the nature of being and doing church as Pentecostals might eventuate – a global Pentecostal ecclesiology.

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