

Pentecostal Ecclesiology: A Review

Andy Lord. March 2007. andylord@freenet.co.uk

This is a draft of Chapter 3 of my thesis, outlining existing pentecostal ecclesiology following the methodology of 'Spirit-Word-Community' of Amos Yong.¹

3.1 Early Pentecostal Ecclesiology

Azusa Street remains key to pentecostal origins, even if it wasn't the only centre.² The essence of early pentecostal ecclesiology deriving from Azusa focuses on experiences of Spirit baptism, reflecting those seen at Pentecost.³ These experiences in assemblies of people, churches, filled with the Spirit's presence brought holiness and spiritual gifts.⁴ The eschatological framework within inherited traditions was reworked through fresh appreciations of Acts and passages such as Rev. 14.6-7 and Mt. 24.14 and gave urgency for churches to share the 'everlasting gospel of the kingdom' before Christ returned.⁵

This perhaps remains as a common understanding of pentecostal ecclesiology, yet it is important not to neglect other less explored aspects. The experience of the Spirit was not only personal but led to the forming of communities, and in this context Douglas Jacobsen has suggested that the ultimate sign of the Spirit's presence was the communal love generated by the experience.⁶ This was seen in how the 'color line' was 'washed away' and in "a new, deep fundamental unity in spirit" between Christians.⁷ There were also ecumenical implications as unity across churches was linked with Spirit baptism. Charles Parham's Beth-el ecumenical Healing Home is of note here, but more significantly was the development of church networks across the world through the 'creative chaos' of pentecostal growth and later organisation of mission agencies.⁸ There are also hints of the social implications of Spirit baptism in the work of Parham and others.⁹ The global spread of pentecostalism with its diversity also hint at the contextualisation inherent in its ecclesiology, a point later developed by Melvin Hodges from the 1950s.¹⁰

3.2 Contemporary Pentecostal Ecclesiologies

It would be possible to trace the development of these themes in early pentecostal ecclesiology through the years (and continents) up to the present time, but here I want to focus on current pentecostal scholars who provide a lead for the future development of ecclesiology. I want to suggest that current pentecostal ecclesiologies explore themes related to: (1) local church congregations; (2) ecumenical relations; and (3) links with the world.

3.2.1 Steven Land

Steven Land has developed an influential reading of the pentecostal tradition at the heart of which is an understanding of the local church as a 'missionary fellowship.' His starting point is an understanding of spirituality as theology centred on the theme of pentecostal experience as a 'passion for the kingdom.' This future-directed longing is also seen as a desire for the Holy Spirit and for Christ to come.¹¹ This 'not yet' of the kingdom is longed for and experienced 'now' through justification, sanctification and Spirit baptism.¹² These experiences are integrated by Land into what he terms Christian 'affections' which motivate the heart to action and are shaped by pentecostal biblical beliefs and practices.¹³ The Pentecostals affections that characterise the early pentecostal churches experience are those of gratitude, compassion and courage. These also link with the idea of a church characterised by faith, holiness and power.¹⁴ The affections particularly come together in the experience of prayer and result in witness, hence the missionary nature of such a church.¹⁵ The key biblical basis of the church is seen in 1 Corinthians 12, illustrating the lived reality of faith, but Land pioneers a narrative-praxis approach both to Pentecost and to the pentecostal tradition. The Bible as drama is taken alongside an oral-narrative approach to pentecostal origins as seen in testimonies, songs and journals.¹⁶ Whilst devoting more space to local church life Land also challenges the "ecclesiological fragmentation" of pentecostalism and urges work on a trinitarian understanding of God's working in history and hence a more holistic approach to mission.¹⁷

3.2.2 Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen

Ecclesiology is at the heart of Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's theology and seems to spring from experiences of the Spirit that have moved him beyond pentecostalism to embrace wider ecumenical insights alongside those of his roots. These insights focus around the themes of *koinonia* and the gifts of the Spirit for all believers for which Kärkkäinen, like Land, looks to the Pauline corpus for support, especially the Corinthian letters and Philippians 2.¹⁸ He sees the central pentecostal contribution to ecclesiology in terms of a 'lively spirituality' and thus his proposal starts with this, noting the link between Spirit baptism and *koinonia* that makes all life in the Spirit linked to participation in local fellowships. Underlying this is a trinitarian outlook that sees Word and Spirit working equally with the Trinity *pro nobis*, 'for us.'¹⁹ There is also a reappraisal of the sacraments as the link to charismatic presence and gifts. Kärkkäinen goes beyond the local to consider the work of the Spirit striving for unity and opening windows on the world.²⁰ A drawing together of differing views on subjects is a characteristic of Kärkkäinen's work that challenges pentecostals to look further ecumenically and through history.²¹ His involvement in pentecostal-Roman Catholic dialogues has resulted in a suggestion for a charismatic (bottom-up) model of church institutions to complement the traditional pentecostal focus on charism, but the concrete realisation of this is not yet developed.

3.2.3 Simon Chan

Simon Chan has developed an ecclesiology within the pentecostal and evangelical traditions, which has the experience of the triune God in worship at its core.²² Using the biblical images of the church as the 'people of God', the 'body of Christ' and the 'temple of the Spirit' his concern is to overcome what he sees as a pentecostal tendency to adopt a "very weak, sociological concept of the church."²³ Thus he argues that we need to think in terms of an "*ecclesial* pneumatology rather than an individual pneumatology."²⁴ He is particularly critical of the 'voluntaristic' concept of the church as seen in parachurch organisations and missionary organisations.²⁵ Chan develops an understanding of the ontology of the church based on an understanding of the church as the *end* of God's purposes rather than as a *means* of God's purposes for creation. Thus he argues against the approaches of Dan Hardy, N.T. Wright and Miroslav Volf in favour of viewing creation in the service of the church: "What the world is there to do is to provide the raw materials out of which God creates his church"²⁶ Chan sees church in terms of the 'total Christ' and since Christ came before the world so the church is a *koinonia*, a divine humanity, created by the Spirit of God "before the creation of the world" (cf Eph. 1:4).²⁷ He draws on the view of Cyprian who speaks of the church as our "mother" with clear links here with Roman Catholic ecclesiologies although Chan's focus is on the church as a 'truth traditioning' community. Focusing on worship Chan notes its fundamentally sacramental nature, linked to Christ as the "primordial sacrament" and its missiological orientation in terms of the church being formed by worship separate from the world but sent into the world.²⁸

3.2.4 Amos Yong

Amos Yong develops an ecclesiology arising out of what he sees as the key pentecostal experience of the Spirit of salvation who brings triumphs over "sin, sickness, and Satan."²⁹ It is this pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit that constitutes the church and enables us to see it as the "charismatic fellowship of the Spirit."³⁰ This is rooted (rather loosely) in the "Acts of the Apostles and of the Holy Spirit."³¹ Within the wider ecumenical debates Yong is particularly conscious that pentecostalism has adopted uncritically forms of free-church ecclesiology, centred on personal confession of Christ. Whilst valuing this, Yong admits that it leads to accusations of proselytism by other churches and there is a need for ecumenical engagement. Yong seeks such engagement through a re-consideration of the marks of the church seen in the Nicene Creed as interpreted by the catholic charismatic theologian Yves Congar.³² The 'one catholic' church is realised through the shared contextual gift of the Spirit who brings diversity. Unity comes through the reconciling work of the Spirit from this shared basis, through which congregations and

denominations may be brought together. The ‘holy’ church congregation is one that receives the eschatological gift of holiness by the Spirit and so is set apart for the work of the kingdom. Such an ‘apostolic’ church thus conforms to the apostolic message and is given a message to testify to as people join in the mission of Christ by the Spirit. As well as these marks, Yong explores sacramental encounters within the church which transform through Word and Spirit, through the Scriptures and prophetically.

3.2.5 Clark Pinnock

Clark Pinnock has constructed a systematic theology rooted in a large vision of the Spirit at work across the world and through time.³³ He speaks of the “history of the Spirit” which gives meaning to a wide variety of experiences. The two key biblical events that shape this meaning are the baptism of Jesus and the baptism of the church at Pentecost, both experiences of the Spirit’s anointing. These point forward to the coming kingdom of God, illustrate its realisation in the present and emphasise the link between the work of the Spirit and Christ. The church is defined through a Pentecost participation in the divine life and a Christ-baptised life.³⁴ Confession of Christ, as witnessed in baptism, initiates people into the community of God’s people. And as Christ is a sacrament of God so is the church a sacrament of Christ, sharing in his living, dying and rising.³⁵ In particular the church reflects Christ’s life of loving suffering service. This participation in the divine life is seen in a baptism in the Spirit that points to the Spirit as the source of human fellowship reflecting the Spirit as the bond of love between Father and Son. The ontological basis of the church is found in this link with the communion of the Trinity and in this Pinnock points to the work of Jürgen Moltmann.³⁶ The sacrament of the Eucharist renews the churches participation in the divine life and spiritual gifts demonstrate the reality of God’s presence and power in the church. They also point forward to the mission of the church which is seen as a participation in the apostleship of Christ. This mission joins us with the work of the Spirit in bringing transformation to the whole world. Through the ever widening community of the church the world becomes more and more “christomorphic.”³⁷

3.2.6 Frank Macchia

Frank Macchia’s recent ecclesiology is based on a rediscovered emphasis on the experience of Spirit baptism. This is seen as the ‘crown jewel’ of pentecostal distinctives that brings personal renewal, spiritual life and mission.³⁸ Macchia wants to take Spirit baptism further as a metaphor that embraces much more of the New Testament witness than is usually allowed for. He particularly draws on the testimony of John the Baptist to extend Spirit baptism as an inauguration of the eschatological kingdom that comes before the church.³⁹ Macchia sees two movements through the New Testament: from Mary to Pentecost we see the Father sending the Son in the Spirit; from Pentecost we see the Spirit poured out through Christ to draw us to the Father.⁴⁰ The latter is key to seeing Spirit baptism as the means of forming the people of God as a Holy Temple and as a ‘living flame’ of witness (cf. Acts).⁴¹ This becomes divine infilling and cosmic transformation of the whole of creation, as the Spirit is poured out on ‘all flesh’ and as the ‘whole universe’ is filled.⁴² Spirit baptism provides an orientation toward the world and yet keeps the church as the focus of God’s working. Macchia picks up on the outlook of Gregory of Nyssa who saw Christ as the king and the Spirit as the kingdom, with the kingdom present when the redemptive presence of God is exercised. Alongside this emphasis on the kingdom is placed an appreciation of ‘communion’, that the goal of the kingdom is ‘union with God’, i.e. love. Here it is divine presence more than simply a ‘historical-political’ kingdom that is in mind with Spirit baptism, and hence the kingdom and church, have a “Christformic goal and direction.”⁴³ Macchia draws much on Barth for his rooting of the Trinity in the inauguration of the kingdom in the world.⁴⁴ He interacts with other traditions in considering the marks of the Spirit baptised church, notably the Nicene and Reformed marks. Macchia suggests that the distinctive pentecostal marks are charismatic and missionary nature, its 5-fold gospel and its discipleship, all culminating in the mark of love.

3.2.7 Miroslav Volf

Miroslav Volf remains a theologian influenced by his pentecostal background despite having moved out of the pentecostal sphere. His ecclesiology is rooted in what he sees as the ecumenical consensus that the church is constituted by the experience of the Spirit of Christ within the eschatological reign of God.⁴⁵ The question is as to how this experience is discerned, to which Volf wants to point to a “lively faith” seen in the profession of the “pluriform faith of Christ”, and an openness to all churches and human beings. Volf starts by discerning keys to ecclesiology within the American context and suggests the need for an ecclesiology that reacts against individualism and hierarchical holism.⁴⁶ The key biblical text throughout is Matthew 18:20 which speaks of a church that goes beyond individualism but also excludes hierarchical constructs.⁴⁷ He mentions the importance of the “scriptural narrative of the triune God” which is worked out in terms of the trinitarian and ecclesial nature of baptism.⁴⁸ Volf articulates a Free Church ecclesiology that is given a more thorough trinitarian grounding through interaction with Ratzinger and Zizioulas. Volf argues that the local church is the true church based on a doxological understanding of the Trinity that draws on the work of Jürgen Moltmann.⁴⁹ The catholicity of the church is seen in eschatological terms, as belonging to the end rather than the historical present.⁵⁰ There are thus limits to the ways in which the present church reflects the Trinity, with a perichoretic understanding applied to people within a congregation but not between congregations.⁵¹

3.3 Evaluation of Pentecostal Ecclesiology

It is important to evaluate these pentecostal ecclesiologies in the light of the understanding of mission adopted in this thesis: that involving two movements, from the church outwards into creation and from creation towards the church. Pentecostal experience of the Spirit is one that moves people outwards from the church, but the extent to which this is integral to ecclesiology is questioned: most pentecostal scholars now agree that the movement is more than individual and pentecostal experience implies a belonging to a local fellowship. Yet there is clearly also an ecumenical movement, seen in Kärkkäinen and Yong, and the first movement in mission implies a movement into creation, as reflected particularly by Pinnock and Macchia. Questions also need to be raised about the use of the Word in ecclesiology: should the focus be on Luke-Acts (Yong), Pentecost-baptism (Macchia), ecclesial themes (Chan), a few texts (Volf) or Pauline texts (Kärkkäinen)? Supporting the view seen in the last chapter, surely there is a need for a narrative approach, developing that of Land and applied to Jesus’ life, death and resurrection and to Acts as a whole. All the ecclesiologies aim to be trinitarian, but should the Trinity be seen in a social way (Volf) or can there be structure within the Trinity (as suggested by Chan and Yong)? This links with the question over whether the church can have structures beyond the local congregation? Given the missionary nature of this thesis it is impossible to avoid the need for wider structures, given their centrality to mission (see Max Warren and the need for ‘middle term’ structures⁵²). Our second movement in mission poses the question as in what ways the Spirit is linked with the Church and with creation. In such questions pentecostals have drawn on the work of Jürgen Moltmann and this needs further consideration.

Thus there is a need to develop a pentecostal ecclesiology that embraces ecumenical concerns, that draws inspiration from the narrative of Luke-Acts (supported by wider biblical reflection), that gives a trinitarian basis for church mission structures, and that links God’s working in the world to that in the church. This thesis aims to develop a pentecostal ecclesiology that addresses this. In the following two chapters we look at an understanding of the Trinity that is appropriate for mission and expressed concretely through mid-term network structures and see the implications of this for the unity and catholicity of the church. In the following chapter we examine the neglected second movement in mission to develop a ‘world challenged’ church. The implications of this ecclesiology is then seen through the particular example of the charismatic movement within the Church of England.

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Notes

- ¹Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2002).
- ²For a review of the place of Azusa in contemporary pentecostal understanding see Edith Blumhofer, L., "Revisiting Azusa Street: A Centennial Retrospect," *IBMR* 30, no. 2 (2006): 59–64.
- ³Douglas Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 68.
- ⁴in these regards see P.D. Hocken, "Church, Theology of The," in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. van der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 547; W.J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1997), 264–67.
- ⁵D. William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 20.
- ⁶Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit*, 79.
- ⁷Frank Bartleman quoted in Blumhofer, "Revisiting Azusa," 61 Later comment on unity by Donald Gee, *The Pentecostal Movement* (London: Elim, 1949), 30 quoted in L. Grant McClung Jr., "'Try to Get People Saved' : Revisiting the Paradigm of an Urgent Pentecostal Missiology," in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel*, eds Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Peterson (Carlisle: Regnum Books, 1999), 40.
- ⁸ On Parham see Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit*, 23–24. Faupel talks of 'creative chaos', Faupel, *Everlasting Gospel*, 222.
- ⁹Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit*, 42.
- ¹⁰Melvin L. Hodges, *The Indigenous Church*, reprint, 1953 (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1976); Melvin L. Hodges, *A Theology of the Church and Its Mission: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1977).
- ¹¹Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*, JPT Sup, vol. 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press,

1993), 66.

¹²Ibid., 82 cf 14.

¹³Ibid., 23,44,183.

¹⁴Ibid., 23,75.

¹⁵Ibid., 165.

¹⁶Ibid., 71.

¹⁷Land, *Spirituality*, 193, 221, 222. Land is particularly appreciative of the work of Jürgen Moltmann on the latter.

¹⁸Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Toward a Pneumatological Theology*, ed. Amos Yong (New York: University Press of America, 2002), 100–03.

¹⁹Kärkkäinen, *Toward*, 108 cf 98. Significantly absent here is a consideration of the Father.

²⁰Kärkkäinen, *Toward*, 76,95.

²¹for example, see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Baker Books, 2002); Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical and Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002); Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Christology: A Global Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

²²Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshipping Community* (Downers Groves: IVP, 2006), 43.

²³Simon Chan, “Mother Church: Toward a Pentecostal Ecclesiology,” *PNEUMA* 22, no. 2 (2000): 178; Ibid., 12–13.

²⁴Chan, “Mother Church,” 180.

²⁵Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, 14.

²⁶Chan, “Mother Church,” 207.

²⁷Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, 23.

²⁸Ibid., 63, 82–83.

²⁹Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 31.

³⁰Ibid., 122,156,151.

³¹the title of his chapter on ecclesiology, although biblical study is rather sparse through the chapter, Yong, *Spirit Poured Out*, Chapter 3.

³²Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Smith, 3 vols. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983).

³³Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996), 113.

³⁴Here there is a move towards salvation understood as “union with Christ and as intimacy with God” rather than “juridical conceptions” Clark H. Pinnock, “The Recovery of the Holy Spirit in Evangelical Theology,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 13, no. 1 (2004): 14.

³⁵Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 121.

³⁶Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 117. More detail given in Pinnock, “Recovery of the Holy Spirit,” 8 Moltmann here is used as a consistent support for Pinnocks theology.

³⁷Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 118.

³⁸Frank D. Macchia, *Baptised in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 20.

³⁹Macchia, *Baptised in the Spirit*, 106. Here Macchia continues the line of thought of Blumhardt who moved from church to kingdom and to whom Macchia has devoted study.

⁴⁰Macchia, *Baptised in the Spirit*, 117.

⁴¹Ibid., 100–01.

⁴²Acts 2 and Ephesians 4.7-10, seen as Paul’s understanding of Spirit baptism.

⁴³Macchia, *Baptised in the Spirit*, 106.

⁴⁴Ibid., 122ff.

⁴⁵Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998), 158.

⁴⁶Ibid., 3.

⁴⁷Ibid., 197.

⁴⁸Ibid., 194.

⁴⁹Ibid., 154, cf 44–46,78.

⁵⁰Ibid., 207.

⁵¹Ibid., 208.

⁵²Max Warren, *The Christian Mission* (London: SCM, 1951), 85.

