

“The Missional DNA of Global Pentecostalism”

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## **Introduction**

In just 100 years global Pentecostalism has become the fastest-growing, far-reaching movement in the 2,000 year history of Christian missions. This workshop examines the central core of Pentecostal missional beliefs and practices, and projects how they can be kept alive into the emerging generation of Great Commission believers. This paper is also posted as an online resource at [www.MissionsResourceGroup.org](http://www.MissionsResourceGroup.org), “Resources.”

## **Our Missional Mobilization**

Our past reveals that, from its inception, the mission of the Pentecostal movement was missions. The ultimate reason and goal for this Holy Spirit renewal was world evangelization among the unreached. Therefore, Pentecostalism cannot be properly or accurately described without understanding its *own self-identity as a missionary movement raised up by God to evangelize the world in the last days* (see Grant McClung, “Pentecostals: The Sequel,” Christianity Today April 2006).

Journalists and social commentators have noted the flattening demographic affect of early Pentecostal revivals. This new religious movement was definitely not from the ranks of the privileged but from the powerless and poor working classes, with little or no education. They were met with the scorn and ridicule of the press and the professional clergy alike.

“If they lacked the education to speak with authority on matters of doctrine, “said David du Plessis, “they certainly did not lack the power to cast out devils and heal the sick. If they could not argue with theologians whose terminology they could not understand, they were able to speak the language of the masses and understand their problems. The consequence was that from the unchurched masses, multiplied thousands were drawn into missions, chapels, and churches...” (Grant McClung, Azusa Street and Beyond: Missional Commentary on The Global Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement. Bridge-Logos Publishers 2011, p. 71).

The release and participation of the laity is one of the most oft-noted marks of Pentecostal/Charismatic growth cited by researchers:

Cerebral and clerical Christianity had, in the minds of many people, already failed them. What was needed was a demonstration of power by people to whom ordinary people could easily relate. This was the democratization of Christianity, for henceforth the mystery of the gospel would no longer be reserved for a select privileged and educated few, but would be revealed to whoever was willing to receive and pass it on (Allen Anderson, An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity, Cambridge Press 2004).

### **Our Global Missional Expansion**

With more than 600 million adherents (growing by 20+ million per year and 60,000 per day) what we have come to call the “Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement” has become the most globally pervasive, culturally diverse, and rapidly expanding expression of the worldwide Christian communion. At the current rate of growth, informed researchers predict some 1 billion adherents by 2025, an outgrowth of the dynamic diffusion throughout the “Southern world” of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

The mind-boggling research by David Barrett and Todd Johnson, annually updated and published in the International Bulletin of Missionary Research, reveals a composite view of the wide-ranging, global reach of the Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal:

- In three major streams and 59 diverse categories across Christianity.
- Within all 150 non-pentecostal church families, and traditions.
- In 9,000 ethnolinguistic cultures, speaking 8,000 languages.
- With membership more urban than rural, more female than male, more children (under 18) than adults, more Southern World (66%) than Western world (32%), more living in poverty (87%) than affluence (13%), more family- related than individualist.
- Active in 80% of the world’s 3,300 large metropolises.

Barrett and Johnson have concluded that, “The sheer magnitude and diversity of the numbers involved beggar the imagination” (“Global Statistics,” in the International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements, Stanley M. Burgess, Editor. Zondervan 2002, pp. 284-285).

Historian Philip Jenkins asks, “Since there were only a handful of Pentecostals in 1900, and several hundred million today, is it not reasonable to identify this as perhaps the most successful social movement of the past century? (The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity. Oxford University Press 2002, p.8). The missional success, widespread influence, and global presence of the Pentecostal/Charismatic family of churches have attracted the attention of outside observers who offer their projections for our future. Everyone from theologians to historians to sociologists to the media may seek

to impose a wide variety of their definitions and descriptions upon the churches in this movement. Competing agendas and social visions continue to be offered for our attention from politicians, political pundits, and power-brokers.

Our own self-definition and missional *horizon* will emerge, however, from our unique missional *heritage*. Reaching back to our missional roots, it will depend upon those of us who claim to be Pentecostal/Charismatic in doctrine and experience to determine our own destiny and decide whether or not we will be marked with the designation “missionary” as we move into a preferred global missional future.

### **Our Missional DNA: Basic and Broad**

The heart of our missional DNA is basic, Biblical evangelism -- a simple, yet powerful, straightforward evangelistic witness through a verbal proclamation of the gospel. That is the beginning point – but there is more. The following eight characteristics are generally representative of global Pentecostal mission. They are faithful to the witness of scripture and in harmony with *The Lausanne Covenant* and *The Manila Manifesto*, documents dear to those in the international “Great Commission community” who are committed to see the “whole church take the whole gospel to the whole world” (cf. [www.lausanne.org](http://www.lausanne.org)).

#### 1. Pentecostal mission is *Experiential*

*The Manila Manifesto* claims that, “Our proclamation that Christ died to bring us to God appeals to people who are spiritually thirsty, but they will not believe us if we give no evidence of knowing the living God ourselves...” (Section 7, “The Integrity of the Witnesses”). We believe that one must know God personally through Jesus Christ and that our evangelistic witness flows out of that personal experience.

The pursuit of a personal experience with God through the Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit must be followed by a corresponding passion to make Christ known to others. “The full experience of the Holy Spirit,” said Arthur Glasser, “...will not only move the Church closer to Jesus at its center, but at the same time, press the Church to move out into the world in mission” (Foreword to Paul Pomerville, *The Third Force in Missions*, Hendrickson Publishers, 1985).

#### 2. Pentecostal mission is *Exegetical*

Statements regarding Biblical authority are central to *The Lausanne Covenant* (Section 2, “The Authority and Power of the Bible”), and *The Manila Manifesto*. In both documents there are entire paragraphs on Biblical authority, supported heavily with a wide array of Biblical references for each of their other main sections. Because of their high regard for scripture, Evangelicals and Pentecostals have earned themselves the nickname of “people of The Book.”

Anthropologist Eugene Nida called Latin American Pentecostals, “The Church of the Dirty Bibles.” There, he observed, the Bible is used frequently in worship services being read along by the poor with their soiled fingers as a reading guide. We believe in the absolute authority of God’s word and are, therefore, committed to tell the Biblical story of salvation.

Whenever and wherever there is rising deterrence from non-Christian religions and secularization, along with the alarming drift toward theological “slippage” in the Christian community, the ballast and balance of Biblical exegesis and theological scholarship is needed in the task of evangelization. In fact, let it be asserted that, “*Exegesis and evangelism need not, and cannot, be mutually exclusive.*”

### 3. Pentecostal mission is *Expressive*

The truth of the gospel is meant to be verbally expressed with the expectation of a verdict on the part of the listener. Even an overview reading of scripture shows the *centrality of proclamation* in the ministry of evangelism, starting with our Lord Jesus Christ as the primary case in point (*italics mine*):

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me *to preach* good news to the poor. He has sent me *to proclaim* freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, *to proclaim* the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4.18 – 19).

George Peters asks the question:

What if Jesus had silently walked the paths of Galilee or the streets of Jerusalem? If He had only demonstrated the love of God and the compassion of His own heart, but had never proclaimed and expounded the motive, meaning and purpose of His life, service, death, and resurrection? If He had never informed us of the nature and mind of God? (Saturation Evangelism, Zondervan Publishing, 1970, p. 19).

The straightforward introduction of Jesus by the gospel writers shows him launching his public ministry with the ministry of proclamation (*italics mine*):

Mark 1.14 (King James Version), “Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, *preaching* the gospel of the kingdom of God” (“*proclaiming* the good news of God” NIV)

Luke 4.43-44, “I must *preach* the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent. And *he kept on preaching* in the synagogues of Judea”

In the ministry of Jesus and his early followers there is a direct connection between being filled and anointed with the Holy Spirit and the resulting verbal expression of the gospel (*italics mine*): “And Jesus returned to Galilee *in the power of the Spirit...He taught* in their synagogues...*his message had authority*” (Luke 4.14, 15, 32).

The New Testament pattern was, “filled with the Spirit and spoke boldly” (Acts. 2.4; 4.31; 9.17, 20; 12.9, 10; 19.6). After the Holy Spirit outpouring on *all* the 120 on the Day of Pentecost (cf. the language “all” and “each” in Acts 1.1-4), a rough-and-ready blue-collar fisherman went public with the gospel. Peter “*stood up*” (with eleven others) and “*spoke up*” into the face a hostile culture (*italics mine*).

*The Lausanne Covenant* gives prioritization to the defining role of proclamation in evangelism. While regarding Christian presence in the world as indispensable to evangelism and providing an opportunity for dialogue, it gives clear priority to gospel expression through proclamation: “...evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God” (see Section 4. The Nature of Evangelism).

#### 4. Pentecostal mission is *Exposure and confrontation*

Whether it was with John the Baptist, Jesus of Nazareth, or the early church throughout the Book of Acts, the work of evangelism ultimately exposed and confronted evil powers in spiritual warfare (note, for example, the confrontation of Paul and Elymas, the sorcerer, in Acts 13.6-12).

In the last two decades, there has been a proliferation of discussion and publication on the topics of spiritual warfare, power encounter, and signs and wonders in world evangelization, much of it reflecting the realities and front-line experiences from the burgeoning Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement in the Majority World. Simply put, *evangelism is spiritual warfare*. Both *The Lausanne Covenant* (Section 12, “Spiritual Conflict”) and *The Manila Manifesto* (Affirmation 11) provide extensive affirmations of the reality of spiritual warfare inherent in the process of evangelization.

True Biblical evangelism will also expose and confront the realities of evil that are displayed in unjust economic and political systems (spiritual warfare not always so recognized). It will cause Christ’s followers to prophetically address issues concerning freedom and persecution, and call for leaders of nations and governments to safeguard the protections set forth in The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (See Section 12 of *The Lausanne Covenant*, “Freedom and Persecution”). Affirmation 9 of *The Manila Manifesto* declares, “We affirm that the proclamation of God’s kingdom of justice and peace demands the denunciation of all injustice and oppression, both personal and structural; we will not shrink from this prophetic witness.”

## 5. Pentecostal mission is *Eschatologically urgent*

Jesus said, “As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work” (John 9.4). Following Christ today brings with that experience a built-in urgency because we know our time is limited. Again the words of our Lord, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24.14).

In Section 15 of *The Lausanne Covenant*, the expectation of the return of Jesus Christ is highlighted as a major motivational force in world evangelization:

We believe that Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly, in power and glory, to consummate his salvation and his judgment. This promise of his coming is a further spur to our evangelism, for we remember his words that the gospel must first be preached to all nations. We believe that the interim period between Christ’s ascension and return is to be filled with the mission of the people of God, who have no liberty to stop before the end...

Eschatological urgency was at the heart of the missionary fervor of early Pentecostals. When supernatural phenomena burst on the scene at the Azusa Street revival and other locations in 1906, Pentecostals felt sure that they were living in and directly experiencing the end-time restoration of New Testament apostolic power. Signs and wonders were a portent Christ’s imminent return. Everything else was put aside for the urgent business of world evangelization. Scores of Pentecostal missionaries, most of them ill-prepared in language/culture learning and without adequate financial support, took off for the far-flung corners of the globe, expecting to remain there until the rapture, which they believed was imminent. Pentecostal historian Vinson Synan characterized these early evangelists as, “missionaries of the one-way ticket” (*The Spirit Said ‘Grow,’* MARC Publications, 1992, p. 39).

“Proclaim Christ Until He Comes” was the entire congress theme at Lausanne II in Manila, reflected in the final lines of *The Manila Manifesto*, “...proclaiming Christ until he comes, with all necessary urgency, unity, and sacrifice” (“Conclusion: Proclaim Christ Until He Comes”).

## 6. Pentecostal mission is *Ecologically active*

Biblical evangelism is also ecologically active, that is, bringing the message and realities of the kingdom of God into the social affairs of human beings [i.e. “Human ecology”] and into responsible stewardship of all creation. Proclamation evangelism results in the emergence of church plants and communities of the kingdom of God who live out prophetic social activism and community transformation.

African church leader Gottfried Osei-Mensah is a former Executive Secretary of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LCWE). Osei-Mensah has said that four words state the different opinions held by Christians on the relationship between evangelism and social action. The words, “*is, or, for, and*” offer four options for definition and implementation:

1. Social action *is* evangelism – anything and everything done as a social action could be called evangelism.
2. Social action *or* evangelism – a choice of one over against the other.
3. Social action *for* evangelism – using social action/benevolence as a method or channel towards opening up an opportunity for evangelistic witness.
4. Social action *and* evangelism – acknowledging that scripture commands *both*. Most evangelicals and Pentecostals would emphasize at this point, the “prioritization of evangelization,” or, to use the language of *The Lausanne Covenant* and *The Manila Manifesto*, “evangelism is primary” (more from both documents are at [www.lausanne.org](http://www.lausanne.org)).

Over the years, after discussing Osei-Mensah’s categories with seminary students, local pastors and laity, and church leaders in various cultural settings, I have suggested a *fifth* option:

5. Social action *in* evangelism – evangelism in and of itself as an action and process is social action.

Another way to express this is to turn it around and formulate it as, “Evangelism *is* Social Action.” This is the conclusion of Evangelist Luis Palau and the title of his 1990 article in World Vision magazine (April/May 1990):

The people of this world create the problems of this world. If we can lead them to Christ, we will create a climate for other positive, practical changes to take place...Conversion leads to the greatest social action. As people’s lives are changed, they are different in their families, in their jobs, and in society (pp. 4-5). I am proud to preach the gospel, which is the power of God, because nothing helps people more than introducing them to Jesus Christ. Evangelism saves people not only from dying without Christ, but also from living without him. As they live with him, and for him, they become salt and light in a world lost in sorrow, injustice, violence, hunger, and disease (p.8).

The Biblical integration of evangelism and social responsibility is extensively discussed in *The Lausanne Covenant* (Section 5, “Christian Social

Responsibility”). *The Manila Manifesto* expresses “a continuing commitment to social action (i.e. an affirmation of the Lausanne statements) but adds a new and unique line of its own that deplores, “...all forms of exploitation of people and *of the earth*” (Section 4, “The Gospel and Social Responsibility”).

Evangelistic proclamation creates new church plants and a growing, “critical mass” of Christ followers who exert influence in policies of social justice and responsible care of the environment. Although urging social responsibility, *The Manila Manifesto* explains that, “Our continuing commitment to social action is not a confusion of the kingdom of God with a Christianized society.” It calls, however, for a proclamation of, “...the Lordship of Jesus Christ over all of life, private and public, local and global” (Section 4, “The Gospel and Social Responsibility”).

#### 7. Pentecostal mission is *Egalitarian in recruitment and leadership*

Note the recognition of ministry partnerships and equal involvement of women and men, laity and vocational clergy, youth and children, and all races and cultures in Affirmations 13 and 14 of *The Manila Manifesto*:

13. We affirm that we who claim to be members of the Body of Christ must transcend within our fellowship the barriers of race, gender and class.

14. We affirm that the gifts of the Spirit are distributed to all God’s people, women and men, and that their partnership in evangelization must be welcomed for the common good.

In Pentecostal/Charismatic history, experience, and evangelistic expression we have been marked by our recognition of human equality and interdependence. From the outset at Azusa Street and for the past 100 years, media observers and researchers have noted the flattening demographic affect of Pentecostalism. Pentecostal adherents, especially in the Southern World, have come not from the ranks of the privileged, but from the powerless.

In our history, most of our outstanding pastors, evangelists, and missionaries were laymen from the working classes, with little or no education. The release and participation of the laity (“laity” meaning men *and* women, boys *and* girls) is one of the most oft-quoted marks of Pentecostal/Charismatic growth cited both by inside participants and outside observers.

A large part of the dynamic growth of our movement has been our ability since our beginnings to mobilize and effectively deploy women into evangelistic witness and church leadership. In fact, seven of the twelve members of the interracial “Credential Committee” at the Azusa Street Mission in 1906 were women. This committee selected and proved candidates for ministerial licensing

and supervised the deployment of evangelists across the nation and around the world. Historian Vinson Synan has characterized the Pentecostal Movement as “An Equal Opportunity Movement” (in Harold Smith, Editor, Pentecostals From The Inside Out, Victor Books, 1990, pp. 43-50).

The empowerment experience on the Day of Pentecost broke the last barrier of separation between humanity, according to Pentecostal Ecumenist David J. du Plessis (1905 – 1987). On the Day of Pentecost, du Plessis stated in a 1983 interview, Jesus, “...baptized the women exactly like the men, and I say for the exact same purpose as the men are baptized so the women are baptized” (Theology, News, and Notes, Fuller Theological Seminary, March 1983, p. 6).

#### 8. Pentecostal mission is *Ecumenically interdependent*

The argument here is not for structural but *spiritual* ecumenism - a partnership of spirit among all who know and personally follow Jesus Christ, regardless of their particular Christian name brand or affiliation. Kingdom-oriented evangelism creates an environment of interdependence and collaboration. It brings with it an understanding that we all must work together in evangelism, especially when we confront hostility, marginalization, and persecution. David Shibley says it so aptly, “World evangelization can never be accomplished by Charismatics alone. Neither can it be accomplished without us” (A Force in the Earth: The Move of the Holy Spirit in World Evangelization, Strang Communications, 1997).

*The Lausanne Covenant* has devoted two entire sections toward global interdependence in evangelization (Section 7, “Cooperation in Evangelism,” and Section 8. “Churches in Evangelistic Partnership) and *The Manila Manifesto* has a lengthy statement on “Cooperating in Evangelism” (Affirmation 9).

People in our world are desperate. Receptivity to the gospel is unprecedented. Now is time to join hands together for evangelistic proclamation. We must embrace and maintain this basic *heritage* – as well as *all* aspects of a broadened, Biblically balanced, Pentecostal missional agenda - and make it our future *horizon*.

#### Author Information

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