

Our Global Missional Future
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Our Missional History

When we celebrate an anniversary point in our history, we do well to remember the claim of British historian E.H. Carr, “You cannot look forward intelligently into the future unless you are also prepared to look back attentively into the past.” Our past reveals that, from its inception, the mission of the Pentecostal movement *was* mission. 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.*

When supernatural phenomena exploded on the scene, early Pentecostals were certain that they were living in the end-time restoration of New Testament apostolic power. They reasoned that signs and wonders were a portent of Christ’s imminent return. Little wonder, then, that they took off with such explosive dynamism. Many departed immediately, without adequate financing and missionary training, to far-flung destinations on a one-way trip! They were expecting to remain in distant lands until the rapture, which they believed was very near at hand.

Vinson Synan characterized these men and women, most of them laity, as “missionaries of the one-way ticket” (*The Spirit Said ‘Grow:’ The Astounding Worldwide Expansion of Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches.* MARC/World Vision International 1992). They had received the gift and there was a story to tell, with no time to waste. They had, says Harvey Cox, “a religion made to travel” (in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made To Travel.* Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen, Editors. Regnum Books, 1999).

Our Missional Mobilization

Journalists and social commentators 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. The majority of the outstanding pastors, evangelists, and missionaries were simple laymen from the ranks of the 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...” (quoted in 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, in the relatively short period of one century, the fastest growing and most globally diverse 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.

Their conclusion: “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).

Distractions to Our Missional Destiny

With this growing diversity, there are potential distractions and competing definitions - both within and beyond our circles - to answer the question, “Who are we?” Pentecostal/Charismatic churches have been probed and described from a variety of categories – theological, sociological, historical, phenomenological, psychological, and other. We’ve been called a revitalization movement, a movement of social transformation, a millenarian movement, a movement of racial integration – and the list goes on and on!

We have endured the anathemas of adversaries and enjoyed the accolades of the academics. The strength of our success has also created our weakness toward self-congratulation, our breakneck pace toward upward mobility, and our craving for social respectability. Unfortunately, compliments such as the following by Philip Jenkins may tend to be favorites among Pentecostals:

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).

They now talk about us (and even *to* us!) on CNN and in the halls of Harvard (Note books such as Harvey Cox, Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century (Addison-Wesley 1995).

With the pervasive growth, widespread influence, and global presence of the Pentecostal/Charismatic family of churches, everyone from theologians to historians to sociologists to the media will seek to impose a wide variety of their definitions and descriptions upon the churches in this movement. Competing agendas will continue to be offered for our attention from politicians, political pundits, and power-brokers.

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

Prayers Toward Our Global Missional Future

Many, especially those who have developed an entire evangelical industry around the prediction of trends, would love to offer “projections” for the future of Pentecostal churches and denominations. Rather than predictions, let us offer prayers. Rather than projections, let us make our pleas to God. Here are some ways we can begin praying toward a global missional future.

1. That we may keep Christ and His commission at the center.

May we remember to lift up Christ because, “God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear” (Acts 2.32-33 NIV).

2. That we maintain the dual dynamics of Word (exegesis) and Spirit (experience) as the necessary equipping for mission.

“There is no need to choose between a passion for souls and a desire for spiritual gifts,” said Donald Gee (one of Pentecostalism’s most respected leaders), “They are mutually inclusive, not exclusive... Therefore we must hold fast to rightly understanding the gifts of the Spirit as a divine equipment for the work of world evangelization” (Spiritual Gifts in the Work of the Ministry Today. Gospel Publishing House, 1963).

3. That we get the life-giving, socially transforming gospel of Jesus Christ out of our sanctuaries and into the streets.

In an introspection that was both self-critical and self-affirming, Vinson Synan stated in preparation for the 1987 General Congress on the Holy Spirit and World Evangelization in New Orleans, “We’ve been in the upper room with our spiritual gifts. But we are supposed to go to the streets with our tongues and healings and prophecies. We believe the Pentecostals and Charismatics have been raised up by God as the shock troops for the greatest final assault on the enemy” (cited by Grant McClung, “Salvation Shock Troops” in Harold B. Smith, Editor. Pentecostals From the Inside Out. Victor Books 1990, p. 89).

4. That we humble ourselves and acknowledge all partners in the harvest.

Pentecostals and Charismatics are neither the sole possessors of the gift nor the Giver. Together with all of the global Christian community, may we prayerfully unite in prayer for the power to witness (Acts 1.8). Together with other Great Commission believers, let us set aside times for solemn reflection upon the awesome task remaining before us and humbly petition heaven for yet another great move of God in our time.

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