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Critical Understanding of a Filipino Third Wave Signs and Wonders Theology: A Case Study of Hiram Pangilinan: Part 2

by Lora Angeline Embudo-Timenia

Introduction

In this part, a synthesis and critique of Rev. Pangilinan's theology of signs and wonders will be presented as well as providing a summary, the author's conclusions and further implications of this study

Synthesis: Hiram Pangilinan's Signs and Wonders Theology

Understanding Pangilinan's historical and theological influences allows us now to delve into his theology of signs and wonders with a proper backdrop. Pangilinan's theology is really an echo of Western Third Wave Neocharismatic theology. This theology has its basis in the belief that "ministry under the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit is the portal of entrance into the third wave of the Holy Spirit."¹ It is not a crisis experience subsequent to conversion as the First Wavers advocate, nor is it a spiritual experience for the renewal of Spiritual gifts and ministries as the Second Wavers embrace.² It is entering into a flow, or a stream, of the Holy Spirit's miraculous workings, often described by Third Wavers as 'entering into God's glory.' Flowing into this third wave of the Spirit is tantamount to flowing into a river of revival, which for them results in the acceleration of the Spirit's activities.³ Pangilinan writes, "When God comes in His glory, following His glory is a trail of supernatural manifestations. He opens us up to the things of heaven."⁴ These supernatural manifestations are what he refers to as signs and

¹Wagner, "Third Wave," in *TNIDPCM*, 1141.

²V. Synan, "Classical Pentecostalism," in *TNIDPCM*, 553; Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard Van Der Maas (eds.), "Introduction," *TNIDPCM*, xix.; P. D. Hocken, "Charismatic Movement," in *TNIDPCM*, 477-519.

³C. Peter Wagner, "A Third Wave?" *Pastoral Renewal* (July-August 1983): 46.

⁴Hiram Pangilinan, *Presence-Driven: The Blessings of Hungering for God's Presence* (Quezon City, Philippines: HG Pangilinan Books Marketing, 2016), 220.

wonders. He defines signs as miracles that point people to Jesus, while wonders are the natural products of the supernatural world invading our world.⁵

Suffice it to say, Pangilinan views signs and wonders as supernatural phenomena, which in his assumption, are byproducts of God's manifestation in glory and power. Based on his literature, Pangilinan believes:

1. God cannot be put in a box, and therefore there are unlimited possibilities of signs and wonders. Signs and wonders can be anything as long as it's for God's glory.⁶
2. Signs and wonders are the trail of glory that follows God's manifest presence during moments of revival.⁷
3. God does miracles to show his love for his people.⁸ And all supernatural demonstrations are God's way of wooing his people back to him.⁹
4. God wants to "wow" his people.¹⁰
5. The Church is the "sign-followed" Bride of Christ.¹¹

Perhaps the summary above only touches the surface of Pangilinan's theology, but they safely help us understand the backdrop of his teaching. Obviously, Pangilinan views signs and wonders as an expected norm for a church that he considers as "presence-driven."

Pangilinan's List of Present-day Signs and Wonders

To give us a further picture of his theology, below is a list of phenomena which he considers present-day signs and wonders. This list is adapted from his book, *Presence-Driven*.¹²

⁵Ibid, 222-223.

⁶Hiram Pangilinan, *What if God Comes* (Quezon City, Philippines: Revival Publishing, 2011), 207.

⁷Ibid, 194.

⁸Ibid, 24.

⁹Ibid, 211.

¹⁰Ibid., 19.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Pangilinan, *Presence Driven*, 220-235.

Table 1. Pangilinan’s List of Present-Day Signs and Wonders

Signs and Wonders	Description
1. Fire	The fire of God, either felt as a “burning” sensation during healing, deliverance, or power impartations; or seen as a “divine fire” swirling around people who have come to worship God.
2. Gold Dust	Gold dust from heaven that come in different colors: gold, blue (sapphire), red, and silver. This dust signifies that heaven is colorful.
3. Gemstones	These are gemstones from heaven. They come in different shapes, colors and sizes. These gemstones were mentioned in Revelation 21.
4. Orbs	Orbs are round clouds that appear during worship services, be it in times of preaching or worship. They believe that these are angels manifesting, sometimes allowing themselves to be caught on camera.
5. Mist	A mist falling over a believer, much like what Hosea 14:5 described as God being like a “dew” to his people. God can manifest himself as a refreshing dew or mist.
6. Oil	Literal oil flowing from the hands or dripping from the head of God’s people. This literal oil can also flow from the pulpit, altar, Bible, ceiling, walls, etc. Their basis is in Psalm 23:5.
7. Supernatural fragrance	It is a smell like no other earthly fragrance. It is sweet, yet not fruity. It can jump from one person to another, or it shifts from person to person.
8. Supernatural Information Download	These are instances when God just downloads information into our minds that we would otherwise not know.
9. Instant Height Increase	A person’s height miraculously increases by an inch or two—even as high as six inches.

10. Limbs grow	This is a creative miracle, where God creates something from nothing, or when he grows something that had not been there.
11. Gold Teeth	It's a miracle of receiving gold teeth in an instant on those who have lost their permanent teeth. It can also be received as gold fillings. It is "heavenly gold" that glistens more than earthly gold.
12. Snow	Much like the dew or mist phenomenon, snow suddenly falls down where it is impossible to have snow.
13. Manna	God gives "manna from heaven" which is food of the angels. It's the same manna the Israelites received in the Old Testament.
14. Hair Miracles	This is another creative miracle, where bald people instantly receive hair, and those with gray hair receive the original color of their hair without the use of dyes.
15. Food multiplication	It is God's supernatural provision of food, especially in times of ministerial need. The only requirement is lack and faith in God's ability to provide for that lack.
16. Instant Slimming	Obese people get 20, 40, and even 100 pounds fat in an instant. God sheds or "melts away" this unnecessary fat.
17. Raised from the Dead	Just like in the Bible, the dead are raised back to life.
18. Walking on Water	Mel Tari, Indonesian revivalist, testifies to having walked on water which was 30 feet deep, in order to reach an area of ministry. ¹³

Pangilinan admits that he has not experienced all the signs and wonders listed above. He cites them still because of the testimony of famous evangelists, missionaries, and revivalists.¹⁴

¹³Pangilinan admits to not having experienced this miracle. But he believes in its possibility because of Mel Tari's testimony. Pangilinan, interview by the author, February 27, 2018; c.f. Mel Tari and Cliff Dudley, *Like a Mighty Wind* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Press, 1971), 43-46.

¹⁴Hiram Pangilinan, interview by author, February 27, 2018, transcript in the Asia Pacific Research Center, Baguio City, Philippines.

Moreover, he categorizes signs and wonders as either common or extraordinary.¹⁵ Common signs and wonders have precedence in the Bible, like raising the dead, walking on water, food multiplication, and receiving manna from heaven. The rest are admittedly extraordinary (even wild) signs and wonders, which have as their basis the testimony of others.¹⁶ The list above shows an admixture of both Pangilinan's perceived common and extraordinary (unusual) signs and wonders. Pangilinan believes in the reality of these present-day signs and wonders because for him, "in an atmosphere of revival . . . the things of heaven can actually manifest on earth."¹⁷ He further states that the Bible does have proof texts for some of these extraordinary miracles.¹⁸

Table 2. Some of Pangilinan's proof texts for unusual signs and wonders

Proof Texts	Explanation
Exodus 24:10	God is surrounded by precious gems
Matthew 6:20	Treasures in heaven can be gems, gold dust, fire, and angel feathers; God is allowing us to have a foretaste while still on earth.
Colossians 2:2-3	When we love Jesus, we love the one in whom is hidden all the treasures of heaven. He returns the favor by loving us back through these treasures (gemstones).
Matthew 6:10	When you pray "Lord let your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven" you get exactly what you pray for—things of heaven come down to earth.
Revelations 21	We can read of the gemstones in heaven (gold, jasper, etc.)
2 Corinthians 3:10	God works in "ever increasing glory." This means that the things God did before he can do again, and we can expect new things and greater things because his glory is increasing.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Pangilinan, *What If God Comes*, 200.

¹⁸Proof texts for Pangilinan are biblical texts that serve as proofs of the possibility of these extraordinary signs and wonders. Ibid, 152.

Finally, Pangilinan appeals to John 14:12-14, where Jesus said, “¹²Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”

For him, since Jesus promised that believers would do “greater things than he did,” then his followers today can go for whatever—for anything—as long as it is done for his glory.¹⁹ In the final analysis, Pangilinan’s theology of signs and wonders is founded on the belief that the “greater things” Jesus promised includes even the most unusual signs and wonders.

Critique: From a Filipino Classical Pentecostal Perspective

Critically understanding the background and theology of Pangilinan allows us now to compare and contrast his purview to that of the classical Pentecostal stance. It is important to note that there are similarities between the two waves’ theologies. However, there are also crucial dissimilarities and points of caution worth mentioning.

Similarity: People of the Bible

First, the point of closest similarity between the two is their Continuationist view of God’s supernatural work through the Holy Spirit. The belief that God is immanent (or near) and that he continuously works by animating the Church in miracles, in signs and wonders, and in Spiritual gifts are shared by the two. One of the bases for their faith in this area is simply the Bible. Both read the miracle stories and Spirit-empowerment accounts in Scripture and declare their continuity and validity today. This straightforward reading of Scripture makes both classical Pentecostals and Third Wavers people of the Bible. With this view, both are open and flexible to miraculous phenomena.

Dissimilarity: Hermeneutics

However, the hermeneutics of the two waves vary considerably. In terms of exegesis, classical Pentecostals have been known to practice a historical-grammatical hermeneutic, stemming from their Evangelical roots. Textual meaning for Pentecostal Evangelicals is “that which the

¹⁹Pangilinan, *Presence Driven*, 207.

words and grammatical structures of that text disclose about the probable intention of its author/editor and the probable understanding of that text by its intended readers.”²⁰

Of course, this hermeneutic does not neglect the Holy Spirit’s illumination. French Arrington was cited to have described Pentecostal Hermeneutics as having three components: “an emphasis on pneumatic illumination, the dialogical role of experience, and biblical narratives.”²¹ Note that interpretation of biblical narratives is not taken out of its historical-grammatical context. Classical Pentecostals have so far done their best to maintain the mantra of ‘context is king.’ The importance of this purview lies in the avoidance of relativism in interpreting the Bible. Menzies and Menzies explain:

It is the concern for historical meaning that allows the text to confront and transform our preunderstanding, thereby making the spiral (or development in understanding) possible. If we lose the meaning of a text from its historical moorings, how shall we evaluate various and even contradictory interpretations? How shall we keep our own ideologies and prejudices from obliterating the text?²²

Thus, Menzies and Menzies point to the necessary Pentecostal Evangelical effort in remaining faithful to the authorial intent of a biblical text. This historical-grammatical hermeneutic is totally different from proof texting. The former strives to remain faithful to the biblical author’s intentions concerning how their texts should be read; the latter disregards historical context, grammar and syntax, and even the author’s use of figurative language in their interpretations.

As observed, Pangilinan and other Third Wave Neoecharismatics tend to practice proof texting. James Reese aptly defines proof texting as, “the practice of pulling an authoritative text out of its original context to impose upon it a meaning that advances the interpreter’s thesis.”²³ This practice is worrisome because one may impose meaning on a biblical text which may not be in line with the message of that text.

For example, a Third Waver understanding of “gold dust from heaven” stems from Revelation 21:18 and 21. It has led them to

²⁰William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, revised and expanded ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 133.

²¹William W. Menzies and Robert P. Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentecostal Experience* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2000), 63.

²²*Ibid.*, 64.

²³James M. Reese, “Pitfalls of Proof-texting,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 13 (October 1983), 121.

rationalize that the gold in heaven can manifest on earth through gold dust and gold teeth. However, this description of the new heaven was contained in apocalyptic language, such that it probably referred to the Jewish expression of “Jerusalem the Golden.”²⁴ David Aune explains that this Jewish expression probably came “from the uniform color of the yellow sandstone out of which most of the city was and is constructed.”²⁵ The vision also alludes to 1 Kings 6:30, where we read how “Old Testament priests ministered on a floor inlaid with gold.”²⁶ This allusion fits the explanation of the precious stones in Revelations 21:21, which functioned to emphasize the priestly status of the people of God in this eschatological Jerusalem.²⁷ Hence, with proper historical-grammatical analysis of the text, the idea of literal dust coming down on earth from the pavement of heaven sounds trivial. Instead, the figurative language used helps readers see the deeper sense of the passage, that is, the eschatological glory and majesty of the New Jerusalem, where God will dwell in the midst of his people.

Point of Caution: Weak Exegesis and Absence of Critical Thinking

The importance of having appropriate biblical support cannot be understated because when the Spirit’s work is separated from the Word, all kinds of unfounded human notions can influence believers. Abraham Friesen aptly states, “Our experiences conditioned by the times in which we live, our personalities, our culture, our positions in life, can never be absolute; they are always relative. That is the essence of being human and finite.”²⁸ Hence, experience alone is so subjective, it is dangerous to base doctrinal teachings on them. If one appeals to Scripture for support, proper exegesis is necessary.

In the absence of exegetical support, objective evidence that supports the claim may be acceptable. At least an objective proof (like medical certificates, documentation, etc.) should be presented for check and balance. Personal testimony is acceptable as proof, but it cannot be normative, because a person’s experience is subjective and cannot always be true for everyone. Only claims with apt biblical support can be considered normative, that is, it can be considered true always and for all, because it is founded on the Word of God, which is eternal.

²⁴David E. Aune, “Revelation 17-22,” *Word Biblical Commentary* vol. 52C, ed. Bruce Metzger (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1998), 1164.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶John Christopher Thomas and Frank D. Macchia, *Revelation. The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016), 382.

²⁷Aune, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 1187.

²⁸Abraham Friesen, “Wimber, Word and Spirit” in eds. Coggins and Hiebert, *Wonders and the Word*, 41.

Thus, to safeguard the message of God in their supernatural experiences, I encourage Pangilinan and other Third Wavers to present their theology with appropriate biblical support. It would also be beneficial for them to be open to a constructive, exegetical dialogue with the larger Pentecostal/Charismatic community. In the case which lacks biblical support, then they should be open to the possibility that one person's experience may not automatically be applicable and true for all.

Another Point of Caution: Wonders without the Word

Another problem with unusual signs and wonders with insufficient Biblical basis is the lack of a bridge from the effectiveness of the miracle to the God of that miracle. Signs and wonders are effective in capturing attention, in opening worldviews to the supernatural world, and in meeting felt needs. But on their own, they do not point to the Christian God and to the gospel of salvation.²⁹ In fact, other religions, especially those coming from animistic or supernatural backgrounds, have miracle stories too. Without a bridge from the miracle to the Christian God, these 'signs and wonders' only strengthen the supernatural worldview and do not lead to true faith. There should be a link from the miraculous sign to the Supernatural Being (God) of that sign, and then to Jesus, who is the ultimate way of being reconciled to that Supernatural Being (God).

The appropriate link is the Bible because it contains the historically attested revelation of God's dealings with man in the metanarrative of salvation.³⁰ Without the verbalization of a biblical message in coordination with that miraculous sign, true faith in the Christian God might not develop.³¹

²⁹For example, in a study done in the Philippines among the Warays, Dave Johnson explains that because the Filipino Warays are open to the supernatural, they are not always awed by a miracle. In fact, they are more concerned with the effectiveness of the miracle than the God behind the miracle. That is why, Johnson recommends the need for immediate teaching of God's truth after a supernatural event. Johnson, *Theology in Context*, 39.

³⁰Charles Kraft himself emphasized the importance of a truth encounter, aside from a power encounter, so that true allegiance (relationship) to Jesus develops. For a full discussion on this, read: Charles Kraft, *Appropriate Christianity* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2002), 99-116.

³¹For example, in Johnson's study, not every Filipino Waray who had a supernatural experience believed in the Christian God. Among the reasons for this phenomenon is inadequate follow up (especially with teaching of God's Word). Johnson, 37-40.

Similarity: Empowerment Theology

Another similarity between Pangilinan and Classical Pentecostals is their “empowerment” theology.³² Both views empower believers to be part of the continuing work of God. Both agree that the Holy Spirit is the great equalizer, because he works in and through all types of believers not just the spiritual elite or the clergy (Acts 2:14-21). Pangilinan’s idea of empowering children, as stated in his book, *What if God Comes* (also *Presence-Driven*), and releasing them into ministry is quite acceptable for classical Pentecostals, seeing that the Pentecostal tradition is known for mobilizing the laity, whether women, youth, or children.³³

Dissimilarity: Empowerment for Witness versus for Revival

The difference between Pangilinan and Classical Pentecostals lies in their definition of Spirit-empowerment. For classical Pentecostals, Spirit-empowerment is a prophetic anointing that ushers believers into “a charismatic community in mission.”³⁴ The primary purpose of this empowerment is for missionary service.³⁵ It is missiological and prophetic, in that Spirit-empowered believers stand as prophetic (proclamatory) witnesses of the exalted Christ, with signs and wonders following.³⁶ Thus, signs and wonders, for Classical Pentecostals, are best within the context of evangelism and missions.³⁷ On the other hand, for Pangilinan and other Third Wavers, Spirit-empowerment is an experience of renewal in God’s presence during seasons of revival. The Spirit renews believers and gives fresh and repeated infillings so as to animate their spiritual life and service to the Lord.³⁸ For them, signs and wonders can be expected in revival (worship) settings.³⁹

³²See Wonsuk Ma, “Doing Theology in the Philippines: A Case of Pentecostal Christianity,” in *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* vol. 8, no. 2. (2005): 219-220.

³³Pangilinan, *What if God Comes*, 182; cf. Ma, “Doing Theology,” 220-221.

³⁴Stronstad explains that “the gift of charismatic-prophetic Spirit on the day of Pentecost is paradigmatic for the experience of the eschatological people of God.” Furthermore, this Pentecostal gift is for the advancement of the kingdom, as the Acts narrative exemplifies. Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke: Trajectories from the Old Testament to Luke-acts*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 68, 71-72.

³⁵Menzies and Menzies define the gift of the Spirit as: “a prophetic enabling that empowers one for the participation in the mission of God.” Menzies and Menzies, *Spirit and Power*, 89.

³⁶Ibid, 89-90.

³⁷R. Paul and Wardine Wood, “Preparation for Signs and Wonders,” in ed. Aker and McGee, 61.

³⁸Wagner, “Third Wave,” in *TNIDPCM*, 1141.

³⁹Pangilinan, *Presence Driven*, 222-223.

Admittedly, the point of delineation is not as blatant as the previous, but the difference remains. For Classical Pentecostals, Spirit empowerment has a vocational/missional purpose (signs follow the preaching of the Gospel); while for Pangilinan and other Third Wavers, Spirit empowerment has a revival/renewal purpose (signs and wonders follow a church in revival). The danger with the latter is an overt focus on revival experiences rather than on vocational instrumentality. Signs and wonders are instrumental in drawing people to God, but they are not an end in themselves.

For example, in John 3 when Nicodemus approached Jesus, believing that his “signs” were from God, the latter turned his attention from signs and wonders and directed it to the miracle of regeneration.⁴⁰ Aker and Lee aptly explained, “Rather than indulging Nicodemus’s interest in miracles, which had now served its purpose in leading him to faith, Jesus turned his attention to an essential event, equally supernatural but never called a miracle, the new birth. So important is this quiet miracle that one cannot even see the kingdom of God without it.”⁴¹

Thus, signs and wonders are important because they lead people to Jesus. But proper teaching of God’s Word should not be lost in the overwhelming experience of the supernatural, so that true faith and Christian growth may develop.

Point of Caution: The Slippery Slope

Since both Third Wavers and classical Pentecostals have an openness to, and an expectation for, the miraculous, both need to be reminded of the importance of critical evaluation. Both need to be able to know where to draw the line. Too much openness and flexibility regarding the supernatural is a slippery slope, especially for Asian Pentecostal/Charismatics coming from animistic backgrounds. Hwa Yung warns of the danger of “slipping back into an animistic worldview, or of adopting that of the New Age or of post-modernity.”⁴² Though supernatural phenomena sits well with Filipino Christian spirituality, it can foster superstition and syncretism. Hence, both Third Wavers and classical Pentecostals need to be discerning.

⁴⁰Aker and Lee, “Naturally Supernatural,” in ed. Aker and McGee, 88.

⁴¹Ibid, 88.

⁴²Hwa Yung, “Pentecostalism and the Asian Church,” in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, rev. ed., Eds. Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 45.

Summary and Conclusion

Summary

In summary, the case study reveals that Pangilinan is a Filipino Neocharismatic whose theological roots were highly influenced by western theologies. His theology of signs and wonders evolved from an openness to the supernatural, to a wide acceptance of unusual manifestations. Furthermore, he accepts and promotes this type of theology because of his innate desire for both holiness and revival. Pangilinan believes that the way to achieving this is by entering into the Third Wave of Spirit renewal.

Conclusion

In the end, understanding a Filipino Neocharismatic perspective through the lens of Hiram Pangilinan allowed a classical Pentecostal like this author to assess and respond to claims of unusual signs and wonders in a well-informed manner. These findings lead me to conclude that confusion on this issue is lessened with a grounded understanding of theological claims and practices. It also has the additional benefit of fostering constructive dialogue between two different traditions and encourages further studies on the topic.

Further Implications

As a further implication though, I believe that there is a need to develop a framework for evaluating signs and wonders, especially one that would guide classical Pentecostals in their response to these phenomena. Since this study has already answered the ‘how and why’ of a Filipino Third Wave theology, the next step would be to answer the questions of ‘what and how.’ Specifically, what framework can be used to evaluate teachings of unusual signs and wonders? And how should classical Pentecostals respond to these phenomena?

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