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TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF SOCIAL CONCERN: A PENTECOSTAL PERSPECTIVE

Dhan Prakash

Introduction

We live in a world full of social oppression, poverty, injustice, war, caste/racial, sexual discrimination and so on. The list can go on and on, but as Christians we need to pause and ask ourselves about our responsibility. As a community of believers and representatives of God's kingdom here in this world what should the church be doing in response to these social evils? When it comes to social responsibility, the church has often come under criticism both from within and outside. The church is accused of "not doing enough, if indeed it is doing anything at all."¹

The Pentecostal church is often criticized for being indifferent to social concern.² Modern Pentecostal scholarship, however, does not agree with these accusations. The basis of this denial is that historically

¹ Larry Christenson, *A Charismatic Approach to Social Action* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), 9.

² This paper assumes that readers are well aware of the definition of *social concern* and difference between *social service* and *social action*, as well as accusations of Pentecostals being indifferent to social action. For the definition of social concern and difference between *social service* and *social action*, see, Heidi Rolland Unruh and Ronald J. Sider, *Saving Souls, Serving Society: Understanding the Faith Factor in Church-Based Social Ministry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 28-29; Murray W. Dempster, "Evangelism, Social concern and the Kingdom of God," in *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*, Eds. Murray Dempster, Bryon D. Klaus and Douglas Petersen (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1991), 33-38; and Joseph Suico, "Social Concern in Theological Education" *Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology* 15/2(December 2007): 37-52.

Pentecostals have viewed social concern not in terms of changing social structures but in terms of personal transformation. Because Pentecostals were not so keen on *social action*, their *social service* is largely gone unnoticed within the larger body of Christ for whom *social action* is also equally important.

Pentecostals may deny the charges of being socially indifferent, but the movement has struggled to find a balance not only between evangelism and social concern, but also within social concern (social service and social action) itself. The lack of theological understanding of social concern within early Pentecostalism led to a dichotomy between their beliefs and practices. The basic argument of this paper is, while one should not discredit the early generation of Pentecostals for not developing a theology of social concern, or confining themselves only to popular written communications such as tracts, magazines or sermon books. Maybe this kind of literature was appropriate for that generation or their cause, but the need of the present time is a well developed theology of social concern. The theology of social concern today has become a necessity in Pentecostalism for various reasons. The unprecedented growth of the movement,³ the enormous demand and need for social concern within society, and growing interest and involvement of pentecostals in society in recent times, all calls for a thought-out response from the church. Dempster, while acknowledging that Pentecostals in recent times have been greatly involved in social welfare of the poor and oppressed, also warns that in order to have a staying power these social programs will have to find support from the theology of the movement.⁴

After providing a brief introduction and statement of problem, the paper in chapter two focuses on some of the key issues that theology of

³ The success of Pentecostal revival according to MacDonald calls for "continuous searching for the scripture, careful scholarship, competent shifting of the oral tradition, and comparative study with other Christian traditions." See, William G. MacDonald, "Pentecostal Theology: A Classical Viewpoint," in *Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism*, ed. Russell P. Spittler (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976), 60.

⁴ Dempster, "Evangelism, Social Concern, and the Kingdom of God," 22-23; See also, Murray Dempster, "Christian Social Concern in Pentecostal Perspectives: Reformulating Pentecostal Eschatology," *Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 2 (1993): 52-3; and Shane Clifton and Neil Ormerod, "Pentecostals and Politics," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 10/2 (July 2007): 229.

social concern will have to address, chapter three attempts to suggest a theological framework for social concern, and finally in conclusion, the summary of the paper is presented.

The term *social concern* in this paper is used in the broad sense which includes both aspects of ministry, namely *social service* and *social action*. The terms *social concern*, *social engagement* and *social responsibility* are used interchangeably, while the terms, *social service* and *social action* are used more specifically. The term *evangelism* is basically used for verbal proclamation of gospel which involves a call to repentance from sin and accepting Jesus as Lord and savior of one's life.

BACKGROUND

This section does not seek to provide historical survey for the theology of social concern. The attempt here is to look at some of the key theological issues that have had negative influence on social concern in the past. In order for the movement to be effective in the future, its theology will have to address these areas.

Dichotomy between Social Concern and Evangelism

The movement from its inception has found it difficult to integrate its ministry of evangelism and social responsibility. There exists a false dichotomy between spiritual and secular, eternal and temporal. Dichotomization of spiritual with secular not only resulted in "a split Christian mind,"⁵ as Buening puts it, but it also brought a fierce debate about how Christian mission should be carried out.

Especially in early twentieth century America, the church was faced with a variety of social challenges such as, cultural tension due to

⁵ One of the key figures that influenced the theology of the church according to Debra Buening, was Augustine (354-430 AD.), who "popularized the idea that Jesus' earthly purpose was to release souls of light from the prison of their bodies." See, Debra Buening, "Evangelicals and Social Action: YWAM'S Adoption of Kingdom Mission," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 26/1 (Jan-March 2009): 14. (Debra Buening, Ph.D Regent University, is a communication specialist working with Youth with a Mission. She also teaches online graduate courses at Spring Arbor University.)

massive immigration, urbanization, racial discrimination, industrialization, social injustice, poverty and great economic disparity. The church was basically split in two groups. On one side there were churches that engaged themselves in trying to reform society through their works of social service as well as social actions such as feeding the homeless, helping the needy, fighting poverty and trying to change the unjust social structure of the society that were the cause of oppression and social injustice.

However, in the process of trying to bring social change, their message, as Buenting states, “often neglected important Christian themes of personal responsibility, repentance and a relationship with God. Individual change they thought, would result from corporate change.”⁶ These were called *social gospellers*. On the other hand there were churches that promoted hyper individual spirituality. Their primary concern was to save souls, concerned only with personal evangelism and establishing the churches. They were named fundamentalists or conservative Christians. The problem with both groups was that they both got one side of the mission right but missed on the other side.

Understanding the Mission

The crisis of Christianity in recent decades according to Cho “may be summarized theologically as the problem of the definition of the mission of the church.”⁷ Since it is impossible to define mission in this short section, the focus here is to have a working definition of mission appropriate for the purpose of the paper.

In its quest to define mission, the church has basically swung between two extremes. One extreme, known as the old, traditional view, focuses exclusively on verbal proclamation of the word.⁸ The

⁶ Ibid, 15.

⁷ Chongnahm Cho, “The Mission of the Theology and Practice,” in *In Word and Deed: Evangelism and Social Responsibility*, ed. Bruce J. Nicholls (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985), 216.

⁸ John Stott *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 15-34; See also, Cho, “The Mission of the Theology and Practice, 215-238; David J. Bosch, “In Search of a New Evangelical Understanding,” in *In Word and Deed: Evangelism and Social Responsibility*, ed. Bruce J. Nicholls (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985), 63-83; According to Johnston “Historically the mission of the church is

other extreme, known as the standard ecumenical viewpoint, or social gospel, the focus shifted to bringing social renewal by liberating people from oppression and economic exploitation. In its quest to bring social renewal, little or no room was left for evangelistic concerns. Both of these extremes according to Stott are unbiblical. The church needs to have a more balanced and biblical view of mission. Mission according to Stott includes everything God wants His people to do in the world He sends them to. This means that both evangelism and social concerns are an integral part of mission. He argues that both, the great commission (Mt.28:18-20), and great commandment (Mk12:31) must be seen together.⁹ The true Biblical mission therefore, must include both social concern, and evangelism as an integral part of its mission. Evangelism and social concern are so intertwined practically that to pull them apart according to Sider “will be silly and fruitless, [and] indeed destructive.”¹⁰ One needs to however, understand that even though both, evangelism and social concerns are inseparably interrelated, they are not identical. The following discussion offers some light on it.

The distinctions, first, they both are distinct in their purpose. While the sole purpose of evangelism is to bring people to Jesus, the basic purpose of social concern, even though it may have evangelistic dimension, is to improve socioeconomic, psychological, physical and political condition of the people here on this earth. Second, they are distinct in their nature. Evangelism is personal in the sense that it is directly related to individuals. Social concern (social action

evangelism alone.” See, Arthur P. Johnston, *The Battle for World Evangelism* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.,1978), 18; McGarvan defines mission as “*an enterprise devoted to proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ, and to persuading men to become His disciples and dependable member of His church.*” see, Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing co.,1980),26.

⁹ Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 15-34. The International congress on World Evangelization held in Lausanne in 1974 declares that “evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty... the salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities.” quoted in, Cho, “The Mission of the Theology and Practice,”217.

¹⁰ Ronald Sider, *Good News and Good Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 180.

specifically), on the other hand, can be termed as impersonal in the sense that it basically deals with unjust social structures, laws, or corrupt political systems. Even though all these structures are related to humans they in themselves are not human. These structures can be changed but they, by themselves are incapable of responding to any call. According to Sider “only people can be addressed and only people can respond.”¹¹

The interesting aspect of evangelism and social concern is, in spite of these distinctions, they are interrelated, one leads to other. First, Biblical evangelism according to Sider “both results in and aims at social action.”¹² By preaching repentance from both individual and social sins the evangelist is directly dealing with the root of all social evil. Unjust social structures are not the root of the problem. They are simply the fruit. The root is man’s sinfulness. Every evil in the world is rooted in sin. When a person repents and accepts Jesus, it brings not only spiritual transformation but his/her physical, moral and socio-political life is also transformed. A biblically faithful evangelist, according to Sider, “will call on people to repent of involvement in unjust social structures [because] racism, sexism, and economic oppression are an affront to God.”¹³ Thus one can argue that social concern in a sense is a result of evangelism. Second, social concern also produces fruits that are evangelistic in nature. Even though the intentions of social concern are not to convert people to Christianity, when one stands up for the poor by fighting against unjust social structures on their behalf unselfishly, it definitely leaves an impact on their lives. Social action done in true love of Christ will definitely help people to open their hearts to listen to the message and even to respond to it by accepting Jesus in their lives. This leads us to another important issue, the question of priority.

Priority

Where should the church focus the most, evangelism or social concern? Based on his arguments that without having Christians you cannot have Christian social concern, Sider argues that even though “evangelism and social concern are both important aspects of Christian

¹¹ Ibid, 160.

¹² Ibid, 174.

¹³ Ibid, 173.

mission, evangelism nonetheless is primary.”¹⁴ Ideally it might look an easy answer but practically it does not work that way. With the question of priority also comes the question of resources. If evangelism is the primary task of the church does it mean that the church should use its limited resources of time, money and people toward evangelistic activities and social activities are carried *only if* there is spare time and resources?¹⁵

The key to answer this question lies not in the question of importance or priority but in the individual calling. While every believer must be a true witness to the gospel, all are not called to be evangelists. Every one should work within his/her own calling and gifting. We live in a time of specialization. If one is a professionally trained doctor, lawyer, politician, businessperson, social worker or evangelist, s/he does not have to leave his/her profession and be a fulltime evangelist, or social worker. By being effective in his/her field one can be an effective witness of Christ. It is not one's profession, be it religious, such as, evangelist or pastor, or secular such as, politician, teacher or doctor, which makes one more important than other, but it is one's faithfulness to the calling that makes the difference. In God's sight a Christian businessperson who is faithful to his work is of no less value than a pastor or evangelist.

It is also not the question of choosing one from another; neither does it mean that all Christians must engage in both all the time. One must act according to his/her calling. As Stott says, “the doctor must not neglect the practice of medicine for evangelism, nor should the evangelist be distracted from the ministry of the word by the ministry of tables, as the apostles quickly discovered (Acts 6).”¹⁶

A look at the life and ministry of Jesus will reveal that He always gave equal importance to both. He ministered to whole person. For him one was not more important than another. In his teachings Jesus taught that gaining eternal life was more important than gaining anything in this world, but Jesus in his ministry never suggested that inviting people to the kingdom should be the primary task, while attending to their material needs should be done only if there is spare time or

¹⁴ Ibid., 165.

¹⁵ Ibid, 168-71.

¹⁶ Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 28.

resources.¹⁷ Siders argues, “if God incarnate thought he could—no, *must*—devote large amount of potential preaching time to the healing of sick bodies, then surely we are unfaithful disciples if we fail to follow in his steps.”¹⁸ So the church needs to come to a place of balance. On one hand, evangelism should not take precedence over social concern but at the same time the church needs to be careful enough that it does not become another social service agency.¹⁹ The only way to achieve this balance is if the church moves beyond what Yung calls “the inherent dualism of the existing dichotomous understanding of evangelism and sociopolitical concerns, and see[s] these as dimensions of the one indivisible mission of the church.”²⁰

Purpose

Understanding the purpose of social concern is very crucial. Why do we do what we do? Social concern within Pentecostalism often is seen as pre-evangelism. One of the common accusations against Christians is that they use social ministry to allure poor and needy to Christianity or they trick people to Christianity. Social concern according to Clifton often is seen as “a method of selling the ministry of the church to individuals and society as a whole, rather than something intimately connected to the gospel.”²¹ Sider argues that even though social concern often has powerful evangelistic impact, it is not merely pre-evangelism. When it produces evangelistic results we should rejoice in it, but our social concern should not become a psychological manipulation to lure people to Christianity producing ‘rice Christians.’²² There are many other valid reasons for social concerns but due to lack of space we will consider only three of them.

¹⁷ Sider, *Good News and Good Works*, 169.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori. *Progressive Pentecostals: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 60.

²⁰ Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas? : The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (Oxford, Eng: Regnum Books International, 1997), 66.

²¹ Clifton, “Pentecostals and Politics,” 233-4.

²² Sider, *Good News and Good works*, 141.

Firstly, God's love. Hogan argues that the only reason we should do social concern is because Jesus Christ did.²³ The sole motivating factor behind the ministry of Jesus in which he healed the sick, delivered the demon possessed, helped poor, orphans and widows, and fed hungry was his unconditional love. In the same way the church, called to emulate Jesus, needs to understand that Christian love should be one of the top motivations for its social concern. Christian love, according to Yung, "cannot be reduced to evangelism alone, but must find concrete expression in midst of the sociopolitical realities of life."²⁴ Hogan states, "if our providing social assistance opens doors that would otherwise be closed to our missionary endeavors ...good! But if not, we will still continue to provide relief."²⁵ Christian love cannot also be restricted to the church alone but it is boundless. Jesus commands his followers to love their enemies. The acid test of the genuineness of our love according to Padilla "is the doing of justice to the poor and oppressed."²⁶ The ministry of social concern of the church must be available to all people irrespective of their religious, socio-political or cultural background, because Christ also loves the church unconditionally.

Secondly, God's grace. Mott argues that "Christian social action, indeed all Christian conduct, properly understood, is grounded in the grace of Jesus Christ."²⁷ This grace of God is manifested to sinful humanity through Jesus Christ. Through obedience to God, repentance from a sinful life by believing in the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus, one not only is justified before God but also becomes the recipient of God's grace. This grace of God through Jesus should not only work *for* us, but *in* and *through* us as well. God expects our ethical

²³ J.Philip Hogan, "Because Jesus did," *Mountain Movers* 31/6 (June 1989):11. Hogan argues, if the motive of our social concern is to get access into the countries that are closed to gospel, than it is not them (those hurting people we claim to help) but "we are the one that need help."

²⁴ Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas?* , 66.

²⁵ Hogan, "Because Jesus did,"11.

²⁶ C. Rene Padilla, "A Message for the Whole Person," *Transformation* 10/2 (July/September 1993): 3.

²⁷ Stephan C. Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1982), 22.

behavior, and Christian social conduct to correspond to that of Christ Himself. God's grace according to Mott works "as God's power in us, [it] gives us strength to be what we cannot be ourselves."²⁸ The realization of one's sinfulness and God's grace reaching down and forgiving one of his/her sinfulness, and being adopted into God's family not only creates an inner affection, feeling of gratitude or a desire to worship and have closer fellowship with God, but it also empowers and motivates one to show the same love and concern for others as well. Grace, according to Mott "is the power which frees one for love and action."²⁹

Thirdly, God's creation. The very fact that every single human being is created by God in His own image (Gen. 1:27-30, 2:15) means that every single human being is entitled to enjoy God's blessings and the privileges alike. The creation doctrine provides a universal base for justice. Since every human being is the divine-image bearer, it means that all humans are of equal value to God and they deserve to be treated with respect, dignity, with all fairness and equality. The concept of *Imago Dei*, according to Dempster, is a key ingredient in the Old Testament concept of Justice. This "parameter of Justice extends to all people, including the displaced farmer, the widow, the orphan, the alien, the stranger, the hired servant, the debtor, the poor and the needy."³⁰

Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus ministered to the needs of all humans whether they followed him or not. Sider argues, "if God continues to shower the good gifts of creation on all, regardless of their faith or unbelief, then Christians too should work for physical, social, economic, and political well-being for all."³¹ Helping the needy with the expectation of receiving something from the recipient, be it conversion or any other means is "a violation of the spirit of Christian gospel in which God's grace is unconditional, provided without any reference to our good works."³² All Christian social concern should be

²⁸ Ibid, 27.

²⁹ Ibid, 28.

³⁰ Murray Dempster, "Pentecostal Social Concern and the Biblical Mandate of the Social Justice," *Pneuma* 9/2 (Fall 1987):133. see, Ex. 22:21-27; 23:9-11; Deut. 10:18; 15:1-2; 23:19-20; 24:14-22; Lev. 19:9-34; 25:2-7.

³¹ Sider, *Good News and Good works*, 141.

³² Miller and Yamamori. *Progressive Pentecostals*, 59

carried out unconditionally without expecting anything from the recipients.

A FRAMEWORK FOR A CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY OF SOCIAL CONCERN

It is not difficult to find Pentecostal believers struggling to connect their faith with social concern. In many cases even their pastors and leaders find it difficult to help them out. There exists a certain tension between the beliefs and practices. In order to resolve this tension, social concern has to find a strong foundation within the theology of movement. So the purpose of this section is to propose a theological framework for social concern. This relatively small section does not claim to cover all the areas that are foundational for theology. The focus here is narrowed only to theological factors that the present author feels, are at the core of Pentecostal identity.

The Bible

There are two basic reasons why a theology of social concern should be biblical in nature. First, to develop an appropriate, objective, strong and relevant theology of social concern, one will have to see social concern from God's perspective which can only be found in the Bible. Second, like any other structure, theology also needs to be developed on a solid foundation that is reliable and firm. Making the Bible a foundation is like constructing our faith and practices of social concern "on the eternal and unchanging truth that God has revealed about himself, humanity and the world."³³ The Old and New Testament, both provide a strong foundation for social concern.

³³ Benjamin Pwee, "Values Creation: A Practical Theology for the Marketplace," *Church & Society in Asia Today* 12/1 (April 2009): 39-40.

The Old Testament³⁴

Does the Old Testament offer any model for dealing with social issues? Or does God care about the problems of those oppressed and marginalized by the unjust social structures of the society? The answer is yes. One of the central themes that run through the Old Testament is God's concern for the poor and oppressed and His desire for peace and justice within the society. The story of Exodus is classic example of God's desire for justice. When God saw that the Israelites were being oppressed and treated unjustly (Exodus 3), He decided to come down and deliver his people through Moses. Exodus according to Massey "was not a religious action but a political act, which included economic and social dimensions as well."³⁵ Throughout the Old Testament one can see God being directly involved in human history.

The Old Testament, according to Dempster, "presents social justice as the will of God for society and mandates the people of God to pursue it."³⁶ One's theology and views of life be it social, political, economical, moral, or ethical are always influenced and shaped heavily by one's view of God. So the true vision of God and knowledge of His nature and character is very important. The Old Testament is the story of God's self disclosure in which through His mighty acts He made Himself known to Israel. This complete understanding of God's nature and character works as a motivating force for social concern. Kaiser claims "the character, will, word, and works of God supply the determining principles and central organizing tenets of the Old Testament ethics."³⁷ Social concern as Dempster points out, is "brought

³⁴ It is impossible to describe in details what the Old Testament says about God's concern for humanity in this section. So the attempt here is to briefly show that God of Old Testament is a loving God who cares for the wellbeing of the Humanity, created in His own image. For a detailed explanation of Pentecostal social concern from Old Testament perspective, See, Murray W. Dempster, "Pentecostal Social Concern and Biblical Mandate for Social Justice," *Pneuma* 9/2 (Fall 1987): 129-153.

³⁵ James Massey "Oppressed Communities and a Need for Contextual Theologies," *Indian Theological Journal* 2/1 (Jan-June 2008): 9. (Dr. Massey is Director of the Center for Dalit/Subaltern Studies, New Delhi and Faculty of Protestant Theology, the Johann Wolfgang Goethe—University, Germany.)

³⁶ Dempster, "Pentecostal Social Concern," 129.

³⁷ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academic Books, 1983), 38.

into existence and kept alive by a deep moral conviction that acts of charity and the pursuit of social justice give tangible witness to God's own ethical character and to God's will for society."³⁸ Dempster outlines five ethical principles of the Old Testament social ethics namely, its theocentric foundation, its concept of the *Imago Dei*, its portrayal of covenant people, its prophetic tradition of social criticism and its Jubilee teachings. These principles according to him can instigate and nurture social concern in the Pentecostal community.³⁹ All five principles portray God's love and concern for those oppressed by the powerful of society.

Based on the biblical understanding of God who has a special concern for the poor, destitute, oppressed, marginalized and weak, Sider argues that "any one who wants to love and obey this Biblical God must share the same concern."⁴⁰ In everything one does, s/he either works with/for Him or against Him. There is no neutral ground. Sider argues that the "Bible says more about God's concern for the poor than it does about prayer, or the atonement, or Jesus' resurrection."⁴¹ Placing great emphasis on God's concern for the poor, the second Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization declared, "the law, the prophets, and the wisdom books, and the teaching and ministry of Jesus all stress God's concern for the materially poor and our consequent duty to defend and care for them."⁴² There is no doubt that

³⁸ Dempster, "Pentecostal Social Concern," 131.

³⁹ Dempster, "Pentecostal Social Concern and the Biblical Mandate of the Social Justice," 130-146. Theocentric foundation according to Dempster "links theology, ethics, and social life together." *Imago Dei*, the fact that everyone is the divine image-bearer means that everyone is entitled to be treated justly. As the covenant people of God, Israel was to have a Social Concern for the fair treatment of the hired servant, the stranger, the widow, the orphan and the poor." (Ex. 20:3-11, 20:22-23:33; Lev. 17-26, and the book of Deuteronomy. Prophets by identifying justice as fundamental moral quality of God's character warned the covenant people against their unjust social practices. E.g. Amos 8:4-6; 5:11, 21-24; 6:1. While, "institutions of the Jubilee year, the Sabbath year, the law of tithing, and law of gleaning were established to guarantee a path toward justice for the poor and needy." Lev. 25:2-7, 25-28,33; 19:19-18; Ex. 21:2-3; 23:10-11, Deut 15:1-18, 5:12-15; 26:12-15; 24:19-24.

⁴⁰ Sider, *Good News and Good Works*, 139.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 139.

⁴² quoted in Sider, *Good News and Good Works*, 140.

the Old Testament is a story of God's concern for the poor and oppressed and His desire for peace and justice within society.

The New Testament

The Old Testament theme of God's desire for peace and justice within society runs throughout the New Testament as well. The New Testament is full of examples of and commands for social concern. Since time and space do not allow for many details, this section will glance through three factors in the life and ministry of Jesus that reveal his heart for mankind. These three factors are *His incarnation*, *His ministry* and *His teachings*.

The incarnation of Jesus is the climax of God's involvement in human history. Jesus identified himself with the poor and oppressed of the society, because he himself was born, not among elite of the society but among the poorest of poor. The incarnation of Jesus presents a challenge to the church. If by his incarnation, God the creator of everything including man, was willing to get his hands dirty by involving himself in human history and problems in the world, then the church as the body of Christ has no other option but to follow the example of Christ. Rahtjen rightly says "if the church is truly the Body of Christ, she has no choice but to become involved in the problems of humanity, no matter how sordid they may be."⁴³

The ministry of Jesus is best summarized by Luke in Acts 10:38.⁴⁴ In the Nazareth manifesto (Luke 4:18) Jesus Himself summarizes his mission.⁴⁵ The gospels inform us that He was a friend of the poor, sinners, tax collectors, and those rejected and oppressed by the society.⁴⁶ The hallmark of Jesus' ministry according to Miller and

⁴³ Bruce D. Rahtjen, *Scripture and Social Action* (Nashville, New York: Abingdon Press, 1966), 95.

⁴⁴ "How God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power, and how *he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil*, because God was with him." (NIV italics mine)

⁴⁵ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the 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." (NIV, italics mine)

⁴⁶ Luke 15: 1-2.

Yamamori “was compassion for the poor and marginalized in society, including interacting with tax collectors and sinners.”⁴⁷

The ‘kingdom of God’ , was no doubt the central theme of His teachings. His teachings were often manifested in his ministry by healing and compassion for the poor, outcast of society, children and prostitutes. Jesus often used stories and parables to teach ordinary people. One of the focal points of Jesus’ teachings according to Massey, was that all persons are equal. Through his teaching, Jesus empowered those religiously outcast and socio-economically poor and marginalized of society. Jesus according to Massey “challenged the dominant groups belonging to every area of life and made clear that claims to consider themselves superior or higher than others has no foundation and is contradictory to the divine will.”⁴⁸ There is no doubt that the poor and oppressed were always at the heart of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit

Given the fact that Pentecostalism is a missionary movement with emphasis on baptism of Holy Spirit one of the most distinctive feature of Pentecostal theology,⁴⁹ one could expect a distinctive Pentecostal theology of mission with special emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit. But this, according to Karkkainen, has not been the case. In fact, Karkkainen goes on to argue that any standard theology of mission, be it David Bosch’s *Transforming Mission, Called and empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*, “the major compendium of Pentecostal missiology,” or the recent Dictionary of Mission by Catholic and other writers, “and you are quite sure not to find much

⁴⁷ Miller and Yamamori. *Progressive Pentecostals* ,59

⁴⁸ Massey, “Oppressed communities and a Need for Contextual Theologies,”10.

⁴⁹ Edin Villafane, *The Liberating Spirit: Toward an Hispanic American Pentecostal Social Ethic* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Erdmanns Publishing Co., 1993), 202, see also Howard Kenyon. “An Analysis of Ethical Issues in the History of Assemblies of God (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 1988), 408ff; Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Ad Ultimum Terrae: Series in Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity*; Vol. 117(Frankfurt, Germany: Peter Lang, 1999), 160; and Veli-Matti Karkkainen, “Truth on Fire: Pentecostal Theology of Mission and the Challenges of A New Millennium,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 3/1 (2000): 37-38.

about the role of Holy Spirit.”⁵⁰ One can argue that Pentecostals by nature have been more ‘doers’ than ‘thinkers,’ so instead of reflecting on and developing the doctrine of Holy Spirit, they were satisfied with relying on the supernatural dynamics of the Spirit.⁵¹ But Pentecostal theology through its belief in the availability of God’s supernatural power and presence, which is foundational for Pentecostal faith, can actually make a great contribution to the church at large.

Pentecostal experience of baptism of the Holy Spirit is not mere emotionalism⁵² as understood by many, but an encounter with God, in which God through His Spirit “practically invades the believer, takes possession of him or her, as he fills his or her life with new meaning.”⁵³ It brings spiritual sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit, the word of God comes alive, prayer becomes more of a relationship with God than daily routine, there is conviction of sin, a passion for holy life, and a greater hunger for mission. One needs to however, understand that the experience in itself cannot equip one for the task of mission, it has its own limitations. This is where theology can play a greater role. One of the tasks of theology would be to provide a theological framework that will help Pentecostals to interpret their experience in relation with the world, and help them to understand the limitation of their experience especially in relation to social concern.

Relationship with the World

For many Pentecostals it is difficult to relate their ‘pneumatological spirituality’ as Wenk calls it, with socio-political

⁵⁰ Karkkainen “Truth on fire,” 38-9. see also, Wonsuk Ma, “Toward an Asian Pentecostal Theology,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 1/1 (1998): 29.

⁵¹ Karkkainen, “Truth on fire,” 37; God according to Wenk “is not so much ‘systematically studied’ among them [Pentecostals] but rather encountered.” see, also Veli-Matti Karkkainen, “Pentecostal Theology of Mission in the Making,” *Journal of Belief & Values*, 25/2 (August 2004):167; and Wenk “The Holy Spirit as transforming Power,” 139.

⁵² Emotionalism according to MacDonald “consists of the seeking and stimulation of emotions as ends in themselves, and not as the by-products of real experience in truth and in God.” MacDonald, “Pentecostal Theology,” 65.

⁵³ Juan Sepulveda, “Reflections on the Pentecostal Contribution to the Mission of the Church in Latin America,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 1 (1992): 100.

realm. Works of the Spirit for them relate only to the spiritual realm. Both spiritual and socio-political realms are perceived as mutually exclusive. The domain of the Spirit is often considered the 'inner person,' while the socio-political realm deals with issues of the external world.⁵⁴ Johns' statement, "Pentecostal experience does not cause men and women to withdraw from the world in which they live"⁵⁵ portrays the very fact that Pentecostals tend to see their experience as individual spiritual experience. In their quest to individualize their experience, Pentecostals according to Macchia, actually "confine the Spirit's work to miraculous activity that is unrelated to the liberating affects of God's grace in the context of social liberation."⁵⁶ But the fact that both conversion experience and Spirit baptism take place in a social context, one cannot interpret them as individual otherworldly experiences.⁵⁷ Pentecostal experience, according to Sepulveda, "is not a solitary experience; it is given in the framework of a community."⁵⁸ Moberg's argument that "religion is never purely personal," leads to a logical conclusion that spirituality can never be limited to relationship with God alone; it always involves relationship with other humans.⁵⁹ The church, according to Kock is both a sign and instrument of the presence of God in the world. "Christ is present in the church and the church is

⁵⁴ Matthias Wenk, "The Holy Spirit as Transforming Power Within a Society: Pneumatological Spirituality and its Political/Social Relevance for Western Europe," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 11/1 (2002): 130-31.

⁵⁵ Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy among the oppressed* (Sheffield, Eng: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 96.

⁵⁶ Frank Macchia, "The Spirit and the Kingdom: Implications in the Message of the Blumhardts for a Pentecostal Social Spirituality," *Transformation* 11/1 (January/March 1994):5 [1-5]

⁵⁷ Macchia, "The Spirit and the Kingdom," 5. "true spirituality according to Hogan, is physically lived and tangibly demonstrated." Hogan, "Because Jesus did,"¹⁰.

⁵⁸ Sepulveda, "Reflections on the Pentecostal Contribution to the Mission,"¹⁰².

⁵⁹ David O. Moberg, *Inasmuch: Christian Social Responsibility in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), 13.

present in the world through the empowerment of Holy Spirit.”⁶⁰ So the church has a mission to represent Christ in the world. The only way the church can fulfill this mission is by engaging itself in the world, not by being an obscure entity on the fringe of the society.

The illusion of living a pure Christian life in isolation or in a convent or hermitage, according to Ellul, is not possible. No one can claim that s/he lives outside of the world. Every Christian “is in solidarity with others, whether he wants to be or not, and this fact is much more true materially speaking, in the current world than in the past civilizations.”⁶¹ Living in solidarity also means that “*everyone lives with the consequences of the failure of all the rest.*”⁶² Neutrality toward social issues is both impossible and unbiblical. Impossible, because all Christians make their living and raise their family in society.⁶³ Unbiblical, because many Bible passages either imply or clearly state that Christians must be concerned and involved in societal issues.⁶⁴ Being in solidarity with others also means that all Christians are part of social structures directly or indirectly.⁶⁵ This awareness should not only keep Christians from spiritualizing their experience but force them to ask of their responsibilities in the society. The following recommendations can be of some help.

Firstly, the Church needs to play a prophetic role in the society. The prophets, according to Ramachandra, brought a word of

⁶⁰ Wynand J. de Kock, Pentecostal Power for a Pentecostal Task: Empowerment through Engagement in South African Context,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 16 (2000): 113.

⁶¹ J. Ellul, *Presence au Monde Moderne* (Geneva: Editions Roulet, 1948), 19. Quoted in Robert Davis, “What about Justice? Toward an Evangelical Perspective on Advocacy in Development,” *Transformation* 26/2 (April 2009):93.

⁶² quoted in, Davis, “What about Justice? 93.

⁶³ John H. Yodder, *The Christian Witness to the State* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1964/2002), 20, quoted in Davis, “What about Justice?” 96.

⁶⁴ Moberg, *Inasmuch*, 14.

⁶⁵ Based on Ellul’s argument on Christian solidarity with others Davis argues that “we all participate in the sinful structures that lead to the poverty, oppression and exclusion that our development efforts seek to remedy.” Davis, “What about Justice? 93. (Dr. Robert Davis teaches at Eastern University and has over 20 years experience in Maternal and Child Health with a focus on West Africa and South Asia.)

condemnation against sin, injustice and oppression in society and a word of encouragement from Yahweh when people repented of their sins, but they also identified with the people when they were going through suffering.⁶⁶ The church should reflect its concern for the poor not only in its message but by living out that message among the poor and oppressed on an everyday basis. Our call for social concern should reflect the way we live as a community of faith among our larger society.⁶⁷

Secondly, the movement needs to receive what Johns calls a 'true vision of reality' that sees spiritual as well as social needs of humankind. This vision can be received only by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit energizes the church for evangelism and social justice.⁶⁸ The concept of empowerment for mission is the heart of Pentecostal pneumatology. Pentecostals depend heavily on Luke-Acts for their concept of empowerment.⁶⁹ The focus of this section is not to discuss

⁶⁶ Vinoth Ramachandra, "The Prophetic Role of Christians in Society: Some Reflection," *Church & Society in Asia Today* 12/1 (April 2009):7. (Dr. Ramachandra is an Anglican lay theologian, writer, teacher and human right advocate) He argues that The prophets condemned when people lived a lifestyle "of indifferent or openly contemptuous of Yahweh's passion for justice," but when people suffered under Yahweh's judgment the prophets did not "run away into heavens of private security," but identified themselves with the people. In the same way the church "is called to bring before the public gaze the 'forgotten' people in our world—the poor the unemployable, the refugees, the disabled, the unwanted fetus and the unproductive elderly—both in its public proclamation of a different humanness and its demonstration of it in the church's own social practices." see pg 7.

⁶⁷ Arguing that the church have a right to speak to others regarding any given problem within the society only, if the church demonstrates it by ethically working in that direction in society Davis stats, "the agency that is not walking with and engaging deeply in an identification with the poor has no basis for witness to the state about structural injustice that keep the poor in poverty." See, Davis, "What about Justice?" 97

⁶⁸ Johns, *Pentecostal Formation*, 97. see also Veli-Matti Karkkainen "Spirituality as a Resource for Social Justice: Reflection from the Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 6/1 (2003):84.

⁶⁹ Luke according to Robert Menzies "consistently portrays the gift of the Spirit as a prophetic endowment which enables its recipient to participate effectively in the mission of God." see, Robert P. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke—Acts* (Sheffield, Eng: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 45;

the soteriological or empowerment dimension of the Spirit, but to show that the concept of empowerment within Pentecostalism is understood narrowly. The ‘empowerment’ more often is understood for evangelism, while social concern, the equally important dimension of mission is often neglected.

Based on Stronstad’s concept of transfer of the charismatic Spirit from Jesus to disciples which is basically the transfer of Jesus’ mission to the church,⁷⁰ one can argue that Pentecostals would be on the forefront of social concern, because they have access to the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit played an important role both in Jesus’ and early church’s ministry. Mission of Jesus (as seen earlier) was not only to proclaim the good news to the poor but it was a holistic mission (Luke 4:18-19). If the transfer of the Spirit really means the transference of Jesus’ own mission to the church, as Stronstad states, then Pentecostals need to be more holistic in their approach to the mission. The role of the Spirit in Luke-Acts according to Wenk is not limited only to inspiring to missionary proclamation, but Spirit manifestation had a direct bearing on the social structure.⁷¹ Luke has

Penney argues that Acts is more than a history for Pentecostals. “It [Acts] is a missionary manual, an open-ended account of the missionary work of the Holy Spirit in the church, concluding not with ch. 28, but with the ongoing Spirit-empowered and Spirit-directed gospel preaching today.” See, John Michael Penney, *The Missionary Emphasis of Lukan Pneumatology* (Sheffield, Eng: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 11. While both Menzies and Penney have been criticized for limiting the role of the Spirit only to empowerment aspect, Karkainen contends that “basic argument of Menzies and Penney is valid: Luke-Acts points to the role of the Spirit in empowering the church believers into mission.” See, Karkainen, “Truth on fire,” 40 n.31. For the criticism of Menzies and Penney see, Max Turner, *Power From on High: The Spirit of Prophecy in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield, Eng: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

⁷⁰ Pentecost narrative according to Stronstad “is the story of the transfer of the Charismatic Spirit from Jesus to the disciples. In other words, having become the exclusive bearer of the Holy Spirit at His baptism, Jesus became the giver of the Spirit at Pentecost ... By this transfer of the Spirit, the disciples became the heirs and successors to the earthly charismatic ministry of Jesus; that is, because Jesus has poured out the charismatic Spirit upon them the disciples will continue to do and teach those things which Jesus began to do and teach.” See, Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984) 49.

⁷¹ Wenk, “The Holy Spirit as Transforming Power within a Society,” 134-36.

special concern for the poor, the marginalized, helpless and outcast of the society which can be seen in different Lukan narratives.

Thirdly, Wenk argues that there is a need to have “theocentric outlook of a Pneumatological spirituality.” The fact that God, the sovereign ruler and creator of everything in the world, has chosen to show His favor to oppressed, marginalized, helpless and the poor of society, can actually free Pentecostals from their commonly felt political and social powerlessness because they have access to the ultimate ruler of the world. Pentecostals, Wenk argues, “can discuss with him [God] all their concerns, be they of social or political nature, related to their health or the politics of their country, or to any other aspect of life.”⁷² Their sociopolitical involvement however, should be based on their experience of God and not on any other source.

Fourthly, Pentecostal social concern should be grounded in a clear sense of identity. When it comes to Christian identity, two positions according to Kenyon have found varying favor within Pentecostalism. First, that Christians are primarily citizens of heaven which commands their foremost loyalty which means all other commitments, “including commitment to earthly authority are secondary and subservient.” Second position, that Christians are dual citizens of heaven and earthly state. “As dual citizens, Christians are responsible for both God and country.”⁷³ Being a dual citizen, a Christian needs to know his/her responsibility in each city and live according to the norms of those cities.

With dual citizenship comes the question of loyalty. This is where one needs to find a true balance. On one hand a Christian must know s/he is not *for* or *of* this world, but at the same time s/he must not forget that s/he is still living in this world. Living in this world also means that one has a social life and responsibility.⁷⁴ One must always live in

⁷² Wenk, “The Holy Spirit as Transforming Power within a Society,” 138.

⁷³ Kenyon, “An Analysis of Ethical issues in the History of the Assemblies of God,” 297-98.

⁷⁴ A Christian according to Ellul “is a citizen of a nation, she has a family, she has a job and must work to earn money. She lives her life according to the same rules as other men and women and with them. She is of the same natural state and lives in same condition. Everything she does in the word she must do seriously, because she is in solidarity with others and cannot neglect the responsibilities of any women because she is like all the others.” Davis, “What about Justice,” 95-96.

realization that s/he is an alien and stranger, traveling through this world (I Peter 2:9-11, Hebrews 11:13) from which God has rescued him/her and transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son (Colossians 1:13-20), but this realization must not become an excuse to escape from the responsibilities of this world. Paul's statement that we are ambassadors of Christ (II Cor. 5:20), adds an interesting dimension to this identity. As an ambassador of Christ we represent policies, practices and interests of the kingdom, but we do so by living in obedience of the laws of the nation we are living in, unless the laws of the nation we are living are against the interests of the kingdom we are representing. The life of obedience gives us right to plead with people of nations to be reconciled and become the citizen of the kingdom we represent.

It also helps broaden our understanding of spirituality and takes out any fear about this worldly dimension of our spirituality. We realize that our spirituality or salvation, freedom, peace and justice in Christ are not merely otherworldly realities but they have this worldly dimension also. This realization further provides "a strong rationale for walking with and speaking out on their behalf: we understand their plight because it is our own."⁷⁵ Christ being our peace (Eph. 2:14), Wenk argues, is not mere "inward tranquility" but it includes a socio-economic dimension as well.⁷⁶

Limitation of the Experience

Idealistically "the confession of being Spirit baptized should lead to a passionate concern about justice, enhancing public morality and changing the plight of the underprivileged and marginalized,"⁷⁷ but in reality it does not work that way. Every new convert needs to be taught what the Bible expects from his/her spiritual, moral, ethical and social aspects of life. To expect new believers to automatically get involved in

⁷⁵ Davis, "What About Justice," 96.

⁷⁶ Wenk, "Holy Spirit as Transforming Power, 141. Jesus, according to Wenk, "did not project salvation, freedom, peace and justice only as otherworldly reality."

⁷⁷ Murray Dempster, "The Structure of a Christian Ethic Informed by Pentecostal Experience: soundings in the Moral Significance of Glossolalia," in *The Spirit and Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Russell P. Spittler*, eds. Wonsuk Ma and Robert P. Menzies (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 109.

social concern according to Sider is “naïve nonsense.”⁷⁸ One needs to understand that experience has its limitations. Pentecostal experience according to McDonnell “will not, by and of itself, supply one with socio-political awareness... it does not endow people with a new passion for political and social justice.”⁷⁹ The limitation of experience actually calls for an intentional approach to develop its theology and ongoing process to teach and disciple its adherents in regard to social responsibility.

Arguing that Spirit baptism is an “independent variable,” Quebedeaux states, “if the newly baptized Pentecostal believer is socialized (that is, taught and ‘discipled’) in a group committed to social change, he too, will probably move in that direction... but if the new pentecostal is socialized in a conservative community of faith, he or she will most likely come to share *its* position there.”⁸⁰ A Pentecostal theology of social concern will have to provide what Dempster calls “an interpretive framework” for the Pentecostal experience, providing the essential connection between social concern and baptism of the Holy Spirit. It will also need to create a social conscience that will encourage social engagement in such a way that it reflects God’s work in the world. Lack of essential theological framework according to Dempster will lead people to interpret their Pentecostal experience and its significance including the socio-ethical significance either by the “theological frame of reference they bring into Pentecostal experience or by a theological system that they adopt after the fact.”⁸¹ Every human experience needs to be interpreted because no human experience according the Dempster is, self-interpreting.

⁷⁸Sider, *Good News and Good Works*, 174.

⁷⁹ Kilian McDonnell, “Catholic Pentecostalism: Problems in Evaluation,” *Dialog* 9 (winter, 1970): 51. quoted in Dempster, “The Structure of a Christian Ethic Informed by Pentecostal Experience,” 109.

⁸⁰ Richard Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics II* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row Publishers, 1983), 166-67.

⁸¹ Dempster, “The Structure of a Christian Ethic Informed by Pentecostal Experience,” 109.

Eschatology⁸²

This section does not seek to define Pentecostal eschatology,⁸³ but focuses on the role of eschatology in social concern. The doctrine of the imminent return of Jesus has often been criticized for its negative influence on the ministry of social concern. In spite the movement's claim of coming of age, the emphasis on social ministries according to Dempster still raises uneasy tension within the movement. The doctrine of the imminent return of Jesus is "still very much at the core of Pentecostal identity at the conceptual level."⁸⁴ One's eschatological view has direct effect in one's conception and practice of social involvement. One's view of eschatology according to Kuzmic "determines one's view of history. And one's view of the purpose and

⁸² Many scholars argue that even though Spirit baptism is an important Pentecostal theme the main focus of the movement is the second coming of Christ and not baptism of the Holy Spirit. See, Clark describes Pentecostalism as "an apocalyptic movement, in its self understanding and in ideology." Mathew Clark and Henry Lederle, *What is Distinctive about Pentecostal Theology?* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1983), 90; Land describes it as "the driving force and galvanizing vision of the entire movement." Steven Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 61; Eschatology according to Damboriena "belongs to the essence of Pentecostalism," Prudencio Damboriena, *Tongues As of Fire: Pentecostalism in Contemporary Christianity* (Washington, D.C: Corpus Books, 1969), 82; For Anderson "second coming of Christ," not the 'Spirit-baptism' that was the focus of pentecostal message," Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: Making of American Pentecostalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 79-97.

⁸³ For detailed definition of Pentecostal eschatology see, Keith Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology: A Theology of Encounter* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 309-323; William Menzies, "Current Pentecostal Theology of the End Times," *The Pentecostal Minister* 8/3 (Fall 1988): 6-10; Grant McClung Jr. "The Forgotten Sign of the Times," *The Pentecostal Minister* 8/3 (Fall 1988): 11-14; D. J. Wilson, "Eschatology, Pentecostal Perspective on," in *The New Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* ed. Stanley M. Burgess (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 601-605; Julie Ma, "Eschatology and Mission: Living in the 'Last Days' Today," *Transformation* 26/9 (July 2009): 186-98.

⁸⁴ Dempster, "Christian Social Concern," 53.

goal of history as pointing to the eschaton definitely modifies one's attitude toward this-worldly historical realities."⁸⁵ Since the Second Coming of Jesus within Pentecostalism is often associated with the rapture of the saints and "apocalyptic destruction"⁸⁶ or "the annihilation"⁸⁷ of the world, there is little doubt why early Pentecostals did not pay much attention to social concern.

Christian theologians, according to Volf, basically hold two views about eschatological future of the world. One view sees radical discontinuity between the present and future orders because they believe that God will completely destroy the present world at the end of the age and create a world that is completely new "*ex nihilo*." Another view sees "postulated continuity between the two, believing that the present world will be transformed into the new heaven and new earth."⁸⁸

The eschatological orientation, which sees radical discontinuity between this age and age to come, does not see much potential "for a positive understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in creation, culture

⁸⁵ Peter Kuzmic "Eschatology and Ethics: Evangelical Views and Attitudes," in *Mission as Transformation*, eds. Vinay Samuel & Chris Sudgen (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 1999), 135. Wilson argues that the eschatological view of Pentecostal "governs their view of current events. Their interpretation of prophecy has had a very significant effect on their perception of the world historical events and on their political and social response to those events." Wilson, "Eschatology, Pentecostal Perspective on," 264.

⁸⁶ Clifton, "Pentecostals and Politics," 234,

⁸⁷ Dempster, "Christian Social Concern in Pentecostal Perspective," 59. According to Peter Kuzmic this 'sensational eschatology' with emphasis on impending premillennial return of Christ, that discourages social involvement is based on "western Cultural moods and fads as well as American conservative politics than to the clear teaching of scripture." see, Peter Kuzmic, "History and Eschatology: Evangelical Views," in *Word and Deed: Evangelism and Social Responsibility*, ed. Bruce Nicholls (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 146.

⁸⁸ Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 89. While Volf sides with transformation, Rodman Williams argues for complete renovation. See, Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology: the Church, the Kingdom and Last Things* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 397ff.

or society.”⁸⁹ Social concern within this view does not find much prominence because such works have no eschatological significance. Theologically also this view seems inconsistent with social concern. There are two reasons for that.

Firstly, theologically it will be difficult to affirm the goodness and intrinsic value of creation and at the same time expect its eschatological destruction. Volf argues “what God will annihilate must be either so bad that it is not possible to be redeemed or so insignificant that it is not worth being redeemed.”⁹⁰ If the world is not intrinsically good then there is little if any, theological basis for social involvement, the only motivation would be to merely provide temporal rest for the soul from the suffering of the world with no ultimate significance. As Volf points out “*without a theologically grounded belief in the intrinsic value and goodness of creation, positive cultural involvement hangs theologically in the air.*”⁹¹

Secondly, the annihilationist view of Christ’s second coming according to Dempster “most often presupposes, and coalesces with, the notion that the kingdom of God is an idealized state of future ahistorical bliss,”⁹² or something like heaven, eternal life or “the land beyond the river.”⁹³ These presuppositions are in contrast with ‘already-not yet’ character of the kingdom, which according to Fee is primarily matter of “time rather than space.”⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Frank Macchia, “Theology, Pentecostal,” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley M. Burgess (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 1138, see also Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 89-91, Dempster, “Christian Social Concern in Pentecostal Perspective,” 59.

⁹⁰ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 90-91. Volf argues that the belief in eschatological destruction is against “Jude-Christian belief in the goodness of divine creation.” See Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 95-96.

⁹¹ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 91.

⁹² Dempster, “Christian Social Concern in Pentecostal Perspective,” 60.

⁹³ Ronald J. Allen, “Signs of the Reign of God,” *Brethren Life and Thought* 30 (Spring 1985), 95. Quoted in Dempster, “Christian Social Concern in Pentecostal Perspective,” 60.

⁹⁴ Gordon D. Fee, “The Kingdom of God and the Church’s Global Mission,” in *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective* eds. Murray Dempster, Bryon Klaus and Douglas Petersen (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 8. The kingdom of God according to Fee “refers

The picture changes radically when eschatological future is seen in terms of eschatological transformation. Clifton argues that eschatology can actually become a motivating force for social concern, if seen in terms of transformation.⁹⁵ This section looks at two reasons how eschatological transformation encourages social engagement. Firstly, when eschatology is interpreted within what Dempster calls *Pentecost-kingdom association*⁹⁶ or *presence of future*⁹⁷ as Chan calls it, then apocalyptic act at the end of this age “will not be one of the total *annihilation* of the world but one of total *transformation* of the world.”⁹⁸ Dempster also argues that Jesus’ own mission, ministry and

primarily to the time of future—the Eschaton (“End”) when God would finally exercise his kingly rule over the whole of his created order.” pg 8.

⁹⁵ Both Clifton and Volf view eschatological future of the world in terms of transformation and fulfillment and not annihilation. See, Clifton, “Pentecostals and Politics,” 236; and Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 88-102.

⁹⁶ For the definition of the kingdom of God and to understand the *already, not yet* character of the kingdom of God in detail See, George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 89-90; Peter Kuzmic, “Kingdom of God,” in *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds., Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 521-26; Fee, “The Kingdom of God and the Church’s Global Mission,” 7-21; Dempster, “Evangelism, Social Concern, and the Kingdom of God,” 22-43; Murray Dempster, “A Theology of the Kingdom—Pentecostal Contribution,” in *Mission as Transformation: A Theology of Whole Gospel*, eds Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 1999), 45-75; Graham Cray, “A Theology of the Kingdom,” in *Mission as Transformation: A Theology of Whole Gospel*, eds Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 1999), 26-44; and Kuzmic, “Eschatology and Ethics,” 134-165.

⁹⁷ Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 186. The presence of future according to Chan shows that God intends to transform the world, not to destroy it.

⁹⁸ Dempster, “Christian Social Concern in Pentecostal Perspective,” 61-62. Hunter argues that “The biblical testimony to the earthly locale of the kingdom of God speaks indirectly in favor of the belief in the eschatological transformation of the world rather than its annihilation.” Harold D. Hunter, *Some Ethical Implications of Pentecostal Eschatology*, Paper presented at the 10th EPCRA conference in Leuven, Belgium, 10, available on

message, and the earthly hopes of the Hebrew prophetic tradition (Isa 11:6-10, 65: 17-25), both indicate eschatological continuity. The early church viewed the second coming of Christ differently than it is viewed in modern Pentecostal circles. It was not seen as an event that triggered the annihilation of the world but it was seen as the final consummation of the already present kingdom of God.⁹⁹ This hope led the early church to consciously get involved in society.¹⁰⁰

Secondly, the belief in eschatological continuity brings intrinsic value and ultimate significance to the human efforts in the society. Knowing that their noble efforts will not be wasted but through their modest and broken human efforts they are contributing toward God's kingdom gives a strong motivation for social involvement.¹⁰¹ Since the world to come is in some way already present, Chan argues that Christians should be more committed socially to the world. The "commitment to the world is based on attachment to the kingdom of God present in the world rather than on detachment from the snares of the world."¹⁰² When seen from kingdom perspective, the second

http://www.epcra.ch/papers_pdf/leuven2/hunter_2001.pdf . Commenting on Rom. 8:21, Bruce argues that "if words mean anything, these words of Paul denote not the annihilation of the present material universe on the day of revelation, to be replaced by a universe completely new, but the transformation of the present universe so that it will fulfill the purpose for which God created it." F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 170.

⁹⁹ The return of Jesus Christ in the early church according to Dempster was not seen as a "promising escape from a world doomed for annihilation, [but an] event that solidified the believing community in the hope of God's future eschatological reign. Dempster "Christian Social Concern in Pentecostal Perspective," 63.

¹⁰⁰ The social concern of early church can be seen "in its conscious attempts to create economic *koinonia*, to share in giving to the poor and to overcome the moral biases and cultural prejudices inherent in the old social order by forming an inclusive community of men, women, bonded, free, rich, poor, Jew and Gentile." Dempster "Christian Social Concern in Pentecostal Perspective," 63.

¹⁰¹ Volf contends that the results of human work "after being purified in the eschatological *transformation mundi*, they will be integrated by an act of divine transformation in to the new heaven and the new earth." Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 92. See also Dempster, "Christian Social Concern in Pentecostal Perspective," 63.

¹⁰² Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 186.

coming of Christ not only validates the eschatological significance of social concern but it also works as motivating force for social concern.¹⁰³ Eschatological continuity also helps the church to have a “holistic, hope-filled approach to mission,”¹⁰⁴ bringing a great sense of optimism not only about their future existence but also about the work they are doing at present.¹⁰⁵

To summarize, one can only agree with Macchia that Pentecostals will have to develop an eschatological passion that “preserves a legitimate desire for the coming of the kingdom of God in righteousness and justice but without the triumphalist and escapist tendencies of earlier convictions.”¹⁰⁶ Pentecostal social concern can get a massive boost if Pentecostals are able to direct their strong moral and ethical consciousness that accompanies their eschatological passion toward social awareness and action, and engage in prophetic criticism of unjust structures as well as of those oppressing powerless of the society. They need to work toward bringing constructive political and social change, and have a constructive prophetic vision for eschatological future.¹⁰⁷

Tradition

The word ‘tradition’¹⁰⁸ within Pentecostal circles often is not considered good, even though it is a good biblical word.¹⁰⁹ One needs

¹⁰³ Dempster, “Christian Social Concern in Pentecostal Perspective,” 54. see also Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 186; Veli-Matti Karkkainen, “Truth on Fire: Pentecostal Theology of Mission and the Challenges of A New Millennium,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 3/1 (2000) : 48.

¹⁰⁴ Andrew M. Lord, “Mission Eschatology: A Framework for Mission in the Spirit,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 11 (October 1997): 111.

¹⁰⁵ Douglas Petersen, *Not by Might Nor by Power; A Pentecostal Theology of Social Concern in Latin America* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 1996), 107-8.

¹⁰⁶ Macchia, “Theology, Pentecostal,” 1138.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 1138-39.

¹⁰⁸ Cambridge Advance Learner’s dictionary defines tradition as “a belief, principle or the way of acting which people in a particular society or group have continued to follow for a long time,” is helpful. *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1377.

to realize that tradition can be good and bad in the same way a theology can be good or bad. Since most early Pentecostals came from different traditions, and viewed human traditions as something that hindered the free move of Holy Spirit, they were determined not to bind themselves again to any human tradition. But the fact is that no movement can continue without developing a tradition.¹¹⁰ In spite of their reluctance toward human tradition, Pentecostals actually developed a particular tradition which is called *Pentecostal oral tradition*. Orality is one of the fundamental qualities of Pentecostal spirituality. Spittler even goes to the extent of saying that “no one can rightly appreciate Pentecostal spirituality merely by reading what Pentecostals have written.”¹¹¹ Pentecostals according to him are yet to produce any substantial theological literature that will capture the whole dimension of movement. But because of its tradition, the movement has been able to accomplish what literature could not. For example certain behavioral patterns such as avoidance of alcohol, gambling, empowerment of women or helping those in need may go entirely unwritten, but through a strong oral tradition a newcomer soon learns what is expected of him/her.

One cannot deny the importance of tradition in theology. McDonald claims that “without tradition there can be no theology,” tradition, according to him is a theology.¹¹² Roots of many Pentecostal

¹⁰⁹ McDonald, “Pentecostal Theology,” 60. For different biblical traditions and their contribution to Christianity, see F. F. Bruce, *Tradition Old and New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970)

¹¹⁰ Addressing those individuals and churches that profess a pure Biblicism and deny that they have any tradition or traditions apart from what is written, Bruce says, “a pure biblicism is rarely as pure as it is thought to be. Let these friends be confronted with an interpretation of scripture which is new to them, held (it may be) by others but unknown to their own circles, and they will suddenly realize that what they had always taken to be the plain sense of Scripture is really their traditional interpretation.” F. F. Bruce, *Tradition Old and New*, 20.

¹¹¹ Russell P. Spittler, “Spirituality, Pentecostal and Charismatic,” in *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library, 1988), 805. See also Walter J. Hollenweger, “Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement,” in *The Study of Spirituality*, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 550-552.

¹¹² MacDonald, “Pentecostal Theology,” 60.

practices can be easily traced back to its oral tradition. McDonald's statement that "the confessions of faith of the Pentecostal denominations afford outlines, but the more substantive matters by and large must be traced to the oral traditions that implement them,"¹¹³ shows the importance of oral tradition within Pentecostalism. One can even argue that Pentecostal theology is predominantly oral in its character.¹¹⁴

This oral nature of Pentecostal tradition actually worked well for social concern. It allowed Pentecostals (especially early Pentecostals) to be pragmatic in their approach to social needs around them. Even though it created tension between their belief and practices, for example, conceptually they were convinced that one would only waste his/her time by being involved in social concerns, but practically they found themselves involved in the very things they professed not to do. In fact one of the reasons for the exceptional growth of the movement was their pragmatism. The movement, according to Sepulveda, not only identified with those hurting, but it also offered the possibilities of a direct access to God through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and the movement was able to "offer a satisfying answer to the problem of uprootedness and the disorientation produced by the social crises characteristic of our societies in development."¹¹⁵ Pentecostals cannot afford to neglect their rich heritage, but they have to learn to appreciate it, and incorporate it in their theology.

The very fact that oral tradition was an integral part of New Testament Christianity, and its founder himself, as Hollenweger puts it "was a story-telling rabbi from the *oral culture* of Middle East, who healed the sick and never wrote a book,"¹¹⁶ should encourage Pentecostals to do so all the more.

¹¹³Ibid, 60-61.

¹¹⁴ The emphasis on oral tradition here does not imply that there are no written resources. But *Predominantly* as MacDonald points out both in "past and present, pentecostal theology has had a character of a "witness" experience. This witness tends to have at its deepest level an oral-aural rather than an optic-literary transmission." See MacDonald, "Pentecostal Theology," 61.

¹¹⁵ Sepulveda, "Reflections on the Pentecostal Contribution to the Mission," 98.

¹¹⁶ Walter J. Hollenweger, "An Irresponsible Silence," *Asia Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 7/2 (July, 2004): 220. (Italics mine)

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Pentecostals in recent times have taken great interest in society. This newfound interest for social concern, as Sepulveda calls it, needs to find proper channel through theological reflections. Pentecostalism today is very different from early 20th century Pentecostalism. The lack of theological reflection in early Pentecostalism can be explained, because, Pentecostalism initially was movement of those excluded from society, poor, illiterate, farmers or those who had no opportunity to prove their skills. But that is not the case today. Pentecostalism today is increasingly growing in middle and upper classes as well; there is more opportunity for theological education today than there ever was. There is also more desire for social concern within the movement today than ever before. These opportunities also bring greater challenges, which should be taken seriously. An effective Pentecostal theology of social concern will have to address the issues of dichotomy between its beliefs and practices, provide a holistic definition of its mission, be able to answer the question of priority, and clearly state the purpose of social concern.

While the Bible should always be the foundation for any theology, the other three distinctive characteristics of Pentecostal identity namely, eschatology, Pentecostal experience and Pentecostal tradition, should also play vital roles in its theology of social concern. Eschatology, if understood properly within Pentecost-kingdom perspective, can actually serve as motivating force for social concern within the movement. The Holy Spirit also needs to play a greater role in Pentecostal theology: The Holy Spirit who leads them in their pragmatism can also lead them in their theologizing. The task of doing theology should never be seen as a pure rational exercise, but a process of knowing and experiencing God. Pentecostals should also understand the value and importance of their rich tradition and utilize it in their theology. So what should a Pentecostal theological framework of social concern look like? A true Pentecostal theology of social concern should be based on the Bible, enriched by its tradition, pneumatological in its dimension and eschatological in its orientation.

Finally, by laying down a prospective theological framework for Pentecostal theology of social concern, the writer does not claim these are the *only parameters* for an effective theology of social concern. What the author hopes is that this paper, in some way will help Pentecostals to realize the need for developing a theology of social

concern that will provide a vision for future, and help the movement to clearly articulate its understanding of social concern.