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PENTECOSTAL SPIRITUALITY IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

Rebecca Jaichandran and B. D. Madhav

1. Introduction

“Our Time” is the epithet David Harvey attaches to modernity and its postmodern successor.¹ Princeton philosopher Diogenes Allen declared, “A massive intellectual revolution is taking place that is perhaps as great as that which marked off the modern world from the Middle Ages.”² It is a shift that shapes every intellectual discipline as well as the practice of law, medicine, politics and religion in our culture. We can readily identify with Charles Dickens when he depicted the French Revolution in *The Tale of Two Cities*, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”³

All that one sees and hears about is the decline of any absolute truths, the creation of relativity, the lack of purpose and direction in historical change, the disintegration and division of all academic subjects into a variety of perspectives—with no “answers,” no agreement and the fragmentation of cultural forms into a “playful celebration” of chaos. Strong is the belief that there are no certain, single truths about the world. Instead, every question has an infinite number of answers, each being equally as valid as each other. This is the postmodern world—the world of rock groups like U2, Oasis, Blur and Prodigy. This is the world of celebrities like Madonna whom Jock McGregor calls the “icon of

¹ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 39.

² Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989).

³ Quoted by Rick Shrader, *The Church in Postmodern Times* (http://www.bethelbaptch.com/.church_in_postmodern_times.htm), p. 1, checked: Aug 6, 2002.

postmodernity.”⁴ It is the world in which children enjoy watching Star Trek, Star Wars, Johnny Quest, Harry Potter and Pokemon. Darren Mitchell begins his article “Embracing Uncertainty” with thought-provoking quotes that best summarize the invading influence of postmodern thought and culture.⁵

I thought Star Trek was pretty harmless, but when I sat down to watch the new series with my children, I couldn't believe my eyes. It was the same sort of plots worked over, souped up technology, a bit more splashy. But the epistemology had fundamentally changed. Program after program pushed or assumed postmodernism. My kids couldn't see any problem, but my jaw was dropping.

Postmodernism, in its arrogance, far from safeguarding our liberties, is becoming one of the most tyrannical controllers of thoughts and culture and speech and discourse that has walked this planet since the dawning of the Reformation.

These are times that James R. White describes as a tidal wave sweeping across western thought undermining the very idea of absolute truth.⁶ From the classroom to the television and even to the churches, institutions are asking the audience what they think truth should be and what it should look like, and then marketing their products to the whims of the world. This is the first time that people are asking “not to know” and are being obliged by their society. The symbol of this age could easily be the bungee cord. It is a free-fall into nothingness just for the sake of doing it.

Whether we accept it or not, whether we want to believe it or not, we live in a postmodern world. Indian-born Ravi Zacharias has observed: “What’s happening in the West with the emergence of postmodernism is only what has been in much of Asia for centuries but under different

⁴ Jock McGregor, *Madonna Icon of Postmodernity* (www.facingthechallenge.org), p. 1, checked: Aug 6, 2002.

⁵ A paper presented at the Society for the Integration of Faith and Thought, May 1997 by Darren Mitchell, “Embracing Uncertainty: Some Perspectives on Evangelical Thought in Postmodern Times” (www.siftorg.au/97_may_dm.htm), checked: Aug 6, 2002.

⁶ James R. White, *The Roman Catholic Controversy* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1996), p. 9.

banners.”⁷ Thus the mammoth task before us as Pentecostal theologians is to address the whole issue of Pentecostal spirituality in this present context of a postmodern world.

“Spirituality” is relatively a new term to many Pentecostal believers who have all the while been more preoccupied with the whole concept of “being spiritual.”⁸ Christian spirituality has its center of gravity in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. has written, “True spirituality involved the giving of our very selves to the One we worship and adore (Romans 12:1:2).”⁹ Therefore spirituality is the giving of ourselves to God through both our beliefs and emotional attitudes, which ultimately influences our actions and values.

Richard Lovelace aptly divides Christian spirituality into two major trajectories that he calls “ascetic spirituality” and “Pentecostal spirituality.”¹⁰ According to him the ascetic spirituality focuses on spiritual disciplines that is the progressive, training mode of spirituality.¹¹ He finds biblical support in passages like 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. This kind of spirituality will cause spiritual growth but in a gradual process.

The second trajectory that he calls “Pentecostal spirituality” emphasizes the spirituality that grows by means of the work of the Holy

⁷ Interview with Ravi Zacharias, “Reaching the Happy Thinking Pagan: How Can We Present the Christian Message to Postmodern People?” *Leadership Magazine* XVI (Spring, 1995), pp. 18-27 (23).

⁸ Being spiritual involves actions like fasting, praying, speaking in tongues, operating the gifts of the spirit, raising hands while singing or praying and emotional attitudes like joy, sorrow, confidence, being comforted etc.

⁹ Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. “The Nature of Pentecostal Spirituality,” *Pneuma* 14:2 (Fall 1992), pp. 103-106 (103).

¹⁰ Richard Lovelace, “Baptism in the Holy Spirit and the Evangelical Tradition,” *Pneuma* 7:2 (Fall 1985), pp. 101-23 describes this ascetic spirituality from a historical perspective. Other interesting works that deal exhaustively with ascetic spirituality are Martin Thornton, *Spiritual Direction* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1984) and also his *English Spirituality* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1986).

¹¹ The famous book of Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), best illustrates this in three spiritual disciplines: 1) the inward disciplines including meditation, prayer, fasting and study (pp. 13-66); 2) the outward disciplines including simplicity, solitude, submission and service (pp. 69-122); and 3) the corporate disciplines include confession, worship, guidance and celebration (pp. 125-171). Other significant recent works include Charles W. Colson, *Loving God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983) and Jerry Bridges, *Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs, CO: Nav, 1982).

Spirit. He uses Galatians 3:2-3 and 5 to define this group that is epitomized by the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” which is not a progressive stage but a leap as it were to a new dimension. It is spiritual growth by means of coming into contact with God that is experiencing God.

Pentecostal spirituality has for all these years upheld the basic orthodox doctrines and tenets of the faith. The major point of distinction is that the Pentecostal believes that God continues to work in the church through supernatural means. However there are specific values that shape Pentecostal spirituality. Russell Spittler in his article “Spirituality, Pentecostal and Charismatic” isolates five implicit values that govern Pentecostal spirituality. They are: 1) The utmost importance of individual experience; 2) The importance of the spoken (orality); 3) The high esteem places on spontaneity; 4) An other-worldly tendency in which the eternal, the “up there” in heaven is more real than the present; and 5) The authority of the Bible as the basis of what we should experience.¹²

This paper seeks to understand postmodern thought and expressions. An attempt will be made to determine whether postmodernism has influenced Pentecostal spirituality like it has done to fashion, literature, art, architecture, television and culture. It then examines the extent of this influence in order to see how Pentecostal theologians should look at this influence—as a threat or an opportunity.

2. Features of the Postmodern Worldview

2.1 What Is Postmodernism?

Rick Shrader presents postmodernism as the third of three time frames: the pre-modern era, the modern era and the postmodern era.¹³

¹² Russell Spittler, “Spirituality, Pentecostal and Charismatic,” *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds., Burgess and McGee (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), p. 804 defines spirituality as “a cluster of acts and sentiments that are informed by the beliefs and values that characterize a specific religious community.” Note also Daniel E. Albrecht’s excellent article “Pentecostal Spirituality: Looking through the Lens of Ritual,” *Pneuma* 14:2 (Fall 1992), pp. 107-125 (108-109) where he uses a working definition: “the lived experience which actualizes a fundamental dimension of the human being, the spiritual dimension, that is the whole of one’s spiritual or religious experience, one’s beliefs, convictions, and patterns of thought, one’s emotions and behavior in respect to what is ultimate, or God.”

¹³ Shrader, *Postmodern Times*, pp. 1-2.

According to him, “If modernism began in the sixteenth century with the Enlightenment, brought on by the French Revolution, pre-modernism is that long period of history that led through the Dark Ages, the Reformation and up to the 1700s.”¹⁴ During this period there was a definite belief in a God (or gods) that meant, even to the pagans, that there is a certain moral accountability to a Being beyond oneself. Hence people believed in good and evil as present realities that affect their lives. Humankind was made by a Creator (even if a mythological god) and was free to obey or disobey their Creator’s wishes.

The modern era he classifies, along with Oden, as the period of time from 1789 to 1989 encompassing the ideology and malaise attendant from the Bastille to the Berlin Wall.¹⁵ This era saw the rise and influence of the Enlightenment, English deism, French skepticism, German rationalism, and American pragmatism leading to exaltation of the rights of humans and the supremacy of reason. The coming of this modern era, however, effectively reversed most basic scientific and religious assumptions of the previous era. As a result Christianity was dismissed as a relic of the past. The world was now a closed system that could be satisfactorily explained by cause and effect, morality was utilitarian, nature is self-contained and human is the highest product of the survival system, and only the senses contain reality. “Logical positivism” had become the law of scientific investigation: If we cannot see God, he does not exist.

Then comes the postmodern era that Carl Henry wrote about: “The intensity of ‘anti-modern sentiment’ is seen in the widening use of the term ‘postmodern’ to signal a sweeping move beyond all the intellectual past—ancient, medieval, or modern—into a supposedly new era.”¹⁶ This era that has set in after 1989, does not point to an ideological program, but rather to a simple succession—what comes next after modernity. The Industrial Revolution of modernity is giving way to the information age of postmodernity.

Walter Truett Anderson tells the story of the three umpires representing the three ages of human history. The first, representing the pre-modern age, says, “Three strikes and you’re out and I call ‘em the way they are.” The second umpire, representing the modern age, says, “Three strikes and you’re out and I call ‘em the way I see ‘em.” The third

¹⁴ Shrader, *Postmodern Times*, p. 1.

¹⁵ Thomas Oden, *The Death of Modernity: The Challenge of Postmodernism* (Wheaton: BridgePoint Books, 1995), p. 20.

¹⁶ Quoted by Shrader, *Postmodern Times*, p. 2.

umpire, representing the postmodern age, says, "Three strikes and you're out, and they ain't nothin' til I call 'em."¹⁷ For those of us who are now in this era, it simply is the elimination of truth. Truth does not exist except as the individual wants it to exist. In fact, he can create his own truth.

In an interview, Dennis McCallum responded, "A simple definition of postmodernism is the belief that truth is not discovered, but created."¹⁸ A typical postmodernist jargon could be read as follows, "There is now a consensus that consensus is impossible that we are having authoritative announcements of the disappearance of authority, that scholars are writing comprehensive narratives on how comprehensive narratives are unthinkable."¹⁹ Postmodernism is not a theory or set of ideas as much as it is a form of questioning, an attitude or perspective.

In this section, we will look at some of the features of the emerging postmodern worldview (postmodernism) and the kind of culture it is creating (postmodernity). Peter Stephenson feels that very few people appreciate the philosophical basis of the postmodern worldview simply because it is the whole set of "givens" that explains what it means to be human, "givens" that need no explanation or justification because that is just the way things are.²⁰ The following suggestions are an attempt to stimulate thought and make no pretence of being definitive. It is, after all, a culture in a state of "becoming," of flux, unconformity, ambiguity and contradiction.

If we are to understand what postmodernism means, we must first define modernity to which it claims to be the successor. Modernity is characterized by the triumph of Enlightenment, exaltation of rights of humans and the supremacy of reason. Modernism assumed that human reason was the only reliable way of making sense of the universe. Anything that could not be understood in scientific terms was either not true or not worth knowing. Human beings, by means of scientific reason, could make sense of the world and even manipulate it for their own

¹⁷ Walter Truett Anderson, *Reality Isn't What It Used to be: Theatrical Politics, Ready to Wear Religion, Global Myths, Primitive Chic and Other Wonders of the Postmodern World* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), p. 19.

¹⁸ Quoted by Rick Shrader, *Postmodern Times*, p. 1.

¹⁹ Peter Stephenson, *Christian Mission in a Postmodern World* (<http://www.postmission.com>), checked: Dec 1, 2001. Also see Andrew Fellows, "Postmodern Epistemology" (a lecture given at L'Abri Fellowship, April 2000, London).

²⁰ Stephenson, *Christian Mission in a Postmodern World*.

benefit with or without reference to God (who or whatever he/she/it might be). Stephenson acknowledges that this ability to understand and manipulate the natural world that is the only part of the world knowing about held out the promise of unlimited progress.²¹ The world was recognized as being infested with problems of ill-health, poverty, suffering and war, but science would find the solutions sooner or later.

As the twentieth century progressed, some of the first cracks began to appear in the modernist worldview and the myth of progress. Two world wars showed that the same scientific technological progress that promised great hope to humankind could also be used to inflict untold suffering on men, women and children and could even destroy the entire world. The same progress that promised to save now threatened to destroy us. Hope was shattered. Now like Frankenstein's monster it threatens to turn on its creator and wreak global devastation through ecological disaster or nuclear/biological/chemical holocaust in the hands of some mad person and God forbid even through technical failure of control systems. Thus, modernism and the myth of scientific progress is dead or at least in its final stages, but there is nothing to take its place. We do not know what is coming, only that it will be the worldview that replaces modernism. Until we know exactly what form it will take, we might as well call it postmodernism for the time being.

As the name implies, postmodernism is something that comes after modernism. Thomas Oden puts it, "If modernity is a period characterized by a worldview which is now concluding, then whatever it is that comes next in time can plausibly be called post modernity."²² It is the recognition that modernism has run its course and that a change is taking place in the thinking and beliefs of our present generation. The entire postmodern worldview is based on the failure of modernism. Intellect is replaced by will, reason replaced by emotion, morality replaced by relativism, reality replaced by social construct.

2.2 Characteristics of Postmodernism

Some of the basic tenets of post modernism are as follows:

2.2.1 *The Anti-foundationalism of Postmodernism*

To a postmodern, knowledge is uncertain. Therefore it totally abandons foundationalism that is the idea that knowledge can be erected

²¹ Stephenson, *Christian Mission in a Postmodern World*, pp. 1, 2.

²² Oden, *The Death of Modernity*, p. 25.

on some sort of bedrock of indubitable first principles. No wonder it denies the framework of reason in modernity. The goal of post-modernism is to do without frameworks. Anti-foundationalism also cries out that history is dissolved. There is no distinction between truth and fiction. Since there is no objective truth, history maybe re-written to the needs of a particular group (e.g., in favor of women, homosexuals, blacks and other victims of oppression).

There is no transcendent mental or spiritual approach to Pure Reason or Ultimate Reality, nor is there an unchanging internal essence within the individual exempt from physical law. This is what one would call the basic naturalistic presumption of anti-foundationalism.

2.2.2 Deconstruction of Language

According to Stephenson modernism as an explanation of what it means to be human (worldview, “big story” or metanarrative) has been shown to be inherently violent, as all other metanarratives.²³ This is the essence of deconstructionism—the knocking down of would-be big stories (worldviews with universalistic pretensions) often through listening to the local understandings of truth of minority communities.

The only hope then is to deconstruct and reject all would-be big stories since they are all oppressive. It is oppressive because culture defines language and cultures are oppressive, therefore language is oppressive. In Nietzsche’s language, culture is defined as “will to power.” In Marx’s language, culture is a mere “class-conflict.” In Freud’s language, culture is “sexual repression.” In feminist language, culture is reduced to gender conflict. In short, for a postmodernist language does not reveal meaning, it only constructs the meaning. To put it in the words of David F. Wells, “Words mean only whatever we wish them to mean.”²⁴ Therefore, the aim of postmodernists is to deconstruct language and ultimately the truth. The deconstruction is done, firstly, by analyzing the metaphors inherent in scientific language and secondly, interrogating the text to uncover its hidden political or sexual agenda.

2.2.3 The Denial of Truth

Stephenson while discussing this topic in his paper says that absolute truth does not exist “out there” in the world waiting to be discovered. “Truth” as perceived by every human community is that community’s

²³ Stephenson, *Christian Mission in a Postmodern World*, p. 4.

²⁴ David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Leicester: IVP, 1993), p. 65.

interpretation of the world.²⁵ If “truth” does not exist outside human consciousness than it would be best to insist that no version of truth is inherently better than any other way. No one belief system has superiority. Postmodernism is thus inherently pluralistic.

We are beginning to see this in the people around us. For example, a politician breaks his promise without any shame, a judge constructs brand new legal principles that reflect current fashions, and a journalist writes biased stories—stories that people want to hear about rather than recording the truth and a teacher offers processes and experiences instead of knowledge. Some people object to abortion and still claim to be “pro-choice,” some people claim to be “Christian” in their thinking and also accept the idea of reincarnation, etc. This is the effect of postmodernism. Without any order or absolute truth, people are free to believe what they want whether it fits with other beliefs or not.

2.2.4 Virtual Reality

Postmodernists reject the connection between thought and truth. In a postmodern world, people want to think least and feel more. The life of mind has new models. The new model is the virtual reality helmet. Technological wonders such as television, movie theaters, videos and computers have become realities and no state of existence typifies postmodernism better than “virtual reality.” It is a state of being informed but disconnected; of power without the difficulties of confronting others face to face. Leonard Payton writes of technological wonders that they are “made by people who tend not to know one another for people they do not know at all and will probably never meet.”²⁶ Indeed, to a postmodernist, “all reality is virtual reality.”²⁷ Since our existence has no meaning and we are not connected to history or its values by any binding truths, no one can be quite certain where reality and non-reality start and stop. Francis Schaeffer wrote, “If one has no basis on which to judge, then reality falls apart, fantasy is indistinguishable from reality; there is no value for the human individual, and right and wrong have no meaning.”²⁸ Technology can be a blessing or a curse. In this regard it is becoming a curse.

²⁵ Stephenson, *Christian Mission in a Postmodern World*, p. 4.

²⁶ Quoted by Shrader, *The Church in Postmodern Times*, p. 4.

²⁷ Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1994), p. 61.

²⁸ Francis Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1994), p. 50.

Neil Postman has called this technological control, “Technopoly—the submission of all forms of cultural life to the sovereignty of technique and technology.”²⁹ Groothuis, in the same vein as Postman, laments the takeover of our society by such a valueless medium: “When information is conveyed through cyberspace, the medium shapes the message, the messenger and the receiver. It shapes the entire culture.”³⁰ A key ingredient is not only the blurring of the fact with the fiction, but the participation by the user in this virtual world. Through a computer, one can actually participate (of course, only virtually) in sporting events, world-wide field trips and even in virtual eroticism. Technology fits well in the postmodern world of surface realities. Today, people experience the feelings simulated by computers, televisions and video games. It has ushered us into a new age where reality is seen as virtual reality or hyper reality. The virtual reality has influenced us to an extent that we do not know which is real and which is fictional. Thus things that were authentic and absolutes that were never questioned before have been targeted because the real is now questioned and seen as virtual.

2.2.5 Disoriented Self

Post modernism also suggests that we can make ourselves whatever we want to be. We are shaped by endless cultural and social factors that make it impossible to know who the real “me” is. Therefore it totally abandons the search of the inner self simply because there is no inner self to find, no essence from which to be alienated. Richard Middleton says that “the fully saturated self becomes no self at all. To be more precise, we are left with an infinitely malleable self, capable of taking on an indefinite array of imprinted identities.”³¹

In view of the fact that who we are is created by life experience, it would make perfect sense for me to now take control of my identity and make “me” whatever I want to be. According to Philip Sampson, the exemplary case of a self presenting a range of identities or performances is provided by Madonna who draws a multiplicity of representation, from

²⁹ Neil Postman, *Technopoly* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), p. 52.

³⁰ Douglas Groothuis, *The Soul in Cyberspace* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), p. 53.

³¹ J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Post Modern Age* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1995), p. 52.

material girl, through creator of her own sexuality, to the vulnerability of Monroe.³²

With the emphasis on society, postmodernism also denies that humans are the most important thing in the world. Secular humanism's exaltation of people has no place in postmodern thinking. Before we applaud the death of secular humanism at the hands of postmodernism, we should realize that the postmodernists deny that a human being has any special significance at all. People are no better or no more important than anything else in the world. This is where the modern animal rights and ecological movements have gained their strength. Humans are just another living thing on the planet, no nobler and with no more "rights" than spotted owls or pine trees. Thus, humans are insignificant. Perhaps one can see where this is going. If human life is no more valuable than any other life, then there can be nothing wrong with infanticide, abortion or any other means of population control. Even the so-called ethnic cleansing of Hitler and, more recently, in Bosnia would not be wrong to the postmodernist.

3. Postmodern Spirituality

In the context of postmodern moral weightlessness we see a contemporary interest in forms of spirituality. James M. Houston further explains by saying that "there is a thoroughly postmodern distinction now being made between those who say that they are not religious (because of the inconsistencies and offences they see in organized religion), and yet who say they are on a spiritual quest."³³ Graham Cray quotes Chris Carter the creator of the popular TV serial *X Files* as saying, "I'm a non-religious person looking for a religious experience."³⁴ It seems that something of the "beyond" suits the postmodern discontentedness well. Spirituality is identified with the individual quest as well as with the questioning of institutionalism. As a result, contemporary breakdown of traditional values and communal life is compensated for by a renewal of spirituality.

³² Philip Sampson, "The Rise of Postmodernity," in *Faith and Modernity*, eds. Philip Sampson, Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (New Delhi: Regnum Books, 1994), pp. 29-57 (45).

³³ James M. Houston, "Modernity and Spirituality," in *Faith and Modernity*, pp. 182-207 (186).

³⁴ Stephenson, *Christian Mission in a Postmodern World*, p. 11.

The Enlightenment era promised so much to mankind. With the triumph of human reason, it sought to eliminate superstition and unexamined authority in religion. Religious traditions are called in to question and challenged. Spirituality is lifted out of the realm of faith-exercise and posted as rational-exercise. The enlightenment sought to test spirituality with the measurement of science and rationality. With this triumph of human reason, modernity, the brainchild of Enlightenment, replaced the experience of the reality of God with the rationality of the human existence. There is a new crisis of belief. It is well expressed by T. S. Eliot: "Men have left GOD not for other gods, they say, but for no god; this has never happened before."³⁵ This crisis has several deadly marks on world history.

Firstly, Atheistic existentialism became the natural product of the deadly marriage between humanism and rationalism. This modern period has seen the attempt of Man replacing God.³⁶ It is characterized by the genocide of over 167 million human beings by tyranny that has been ideologically and politically motivated. Modernity tried to eradicate the religious, only to find that demonic social ideologies dominated its historical scene.

Secondly, Secularism became the buzz word in world civilization. "Privatization" of spirituality and the separation of religion from the public life has turned the world into a machine. Humanity is interpreted in terms of a great machine without any spirit or soul. The world became a closed system. Modernity left too many challenges for the humanity of "this age." In pursuit of autonomy, modernity found itself sliding into narcissistic subjectivity. In its attempt to rationalize social existence, it had created problems for strong individuals and community alike.

It is in this context of disillusionment with modernity that the postmodern spirituality started to rise. There is a new found openness to other religions, cults and occults. Humanity stopped looking for rational explanations for their religious experiences. Religious truth is being eliminated by a phenomenological pluralism. Salvation has found a new meaning—ranging from the "high" a particular drug gives to the mystical

³⁵ Quoted by Michael Harrington, *The Accidental Century* (London: Penguin, 1967), p. 173.

³⁶ Malcom Muggeridge, quoted in Ravi Zacharias, *A Shattered Visage* (Madras: RZIM Life Focus Society, 1986), p. 25 said: "If God is dead, somebody is going to have to take his place. It will be megalomania or erotomania, the drive for power or the drive for pleasure, the clenched fist or the phallus, Hitler or Hugh Hefner."

high through New Age religious practices.³⁷ In short, pluralism, complexity, relativism and ambiguity in human spirituality marked the postmodern spiritual climate.

3.1 Higher Experience: New Foundation or No Foundation?

With the rejection of rational foundations, the postmodern spiritual man or woman started to look for various experiences in his/her quest for a direct experience of the Ultimate. In this quest, the postmodern spirituality showed an indefinite openendedness and syncretized Gnosticism or paganism of the classical world, and the hermeticism or occultism of the renaissance age.³⁸ With the lack of objective social and personal values, psychedelic exploration, ecofeminist experimentation and the individualist experimentation of new cults became the trends in the human spiritual quest.³⁹ Scientists, artists, actors, novelists and celebrities sought to look for mystical experiences. The following words of artist Marc Chagall may well represent the mood of the age:

Mystic! How many times they have thrown this word at my face, just as formerly they scolded me for being 'literary'! But without mysticism would a single great painting, a single great poem, or even a single great social movement exist in the world? Does not every individual or social organism fade, does it not die, if deprived of the strength of mysticism?... It is precisely the lack of mysticism that almost destroyed France.⁴⁰

It is these mystical experiences the new age gurus promise which has made them popular in this postmodern world. It is the rejection of rationality and openness to experience that attracts many followers to the new age movement. At the entrance of Bhagwan Rajneesh's sacred

³⁷ Aldous Huxley believed that genuine mystical experiences could result from taking hallucinogenic drugs. His ideas led to the formation of religious movements that used drugs to bring about mystical states. For fuller discussion on this discussion, see Dewi Arwel Hughes, *Has God Many Names? An Introduction to Religious Studies* (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 1996), pp. 195-212.

³⁸ For a detailed study on the impact of mysticism on objectivity, see Elliot Miller, *A Crash Course on New Age Movement* (Eastbourne: Monarch Publications, 1989), pp. 35-51.

³⁹ Houston, "Modernity and Spirituality," p. 183.

⁴⁰ Houston, "Modernity and Spirituality," p. 191.

sanctuary hangs a notice that reads: "Please leave your shoes and your mind outside." His teachings reflect the postmodern spirituality and their rejection of objective truth in search of "higher" experience. He said:

If you want to know and realize that which is undivided, go beyond mind. Do not use your mind as the instrument.... There is no problem in the reality and there is no need for any answer. But when you think there are problems, when you do not think and realize, there are no problems. So, religion is a process to go beyond thinking, to achieve a point in your mind where there is no thinking at all.⁴¹

The "psychotechnologies" such as deep meditation, creative visualization, chanting and techniques for altering consciousness play a pivotal role ushering in mystical experiences.

3.2 Silence: Language of Ultimate Reality

For two hundred years the Enlightenment has assumed that western civilization was superior to others. But in the postmodern world view, that assumption is questioned. Various ideologies and civilizations of the world have created a multi-world with the juxtaposition of various religious faiths creating a global pluralism. The deconstruction of the metanarrative of the western tradition left the modern man with a couple of possibilities: 1) a mystical experience of silence, and 2) a plurality of narratives and values.

If reason, one of the metanarratives of the modern world, is deconstructed, then it leaves language ambiguous. For central to the critique of reason is language. All thinking begins and ends in language. In the postmodern spirituality, language is reduced to mere silence.⁴² The

⁴¹ Rajneesh, *Beyond and Beyond*, (Bombay: Jeevan Jagruti Kendra, 1970), pp. 14-15.

⁴² Ludwig Wittgenstein followed Kantian dichotomy and argued that language is meaningful only in the sphere of phenomena. Realizing that one cannot verbalize that which is unknown and unknowable, he then concluded that "whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." In this regard Wittgenstein paved way for postmodern thinking in the era of modernity. For a detailed study on this subject, see Gareth Moore and Brian Davies, "Wittgenstein and the Philosophy of Religion," in *Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Brian Davies (London: Cassell, 1998), pp. 27-34 (28).

Ultimate reality is Silence.⁴³ The epistemological methodology of the postmodern quest of knowing the ultimate reality is Silence. In a postmodern spirituality any sentence about God has no meaning. Os Guinness correctly observes: “This leaves the western discussion of God with only two possibilities...the sheer silence of the atheist or the mere symbolism of the mystic.”⁴⁴ Unfortunately, much of postmodern spirituality bent towards the latter, mystical experiences, and they are equated with divine revelation.

In the postmodern spirituality an individual can choose from a variety of truths and techniques, old and new, in order to have a heightened awareness of the present. In simple words, contemporary man/woman can now choose from the “hypermarket” of world religions and traditions. Even if there are apparent contradictions in his choices, in the contradictions meaning can be found. Observers of religion are aware of an intrinsic relativism in eastern mystical traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism. As Monistic faiths, these religions teach that everything is part of one essence. All these traditions not only reject reason as tool for discovering truth, they even utilize contradiction on the rational level to drive learners to a deeper or higher plane of understanding. For instance, Buddhism describes the Tao as the sound of one hand clapping. The Hindu Brahman is “always and never.” Such paradoxical thinking, with its rejection of rationality, is naturally compatible with postmodernism.

3.3 “I, Me, Myself”: The Voice Within

In a society that is seen as a reflection of fragmented personalities, there is a quest for the true self. The only reality that exists is the reality that we create. The postmodern spirituality does not accept the reality of the world we observe in an objective sense. In Hinduism, the material world is *maya*, which means illusion. What seems real to us (the material world) is an illusion. The postmodern spirituality is an escape from the reality of the world. The distinction between reality and illusion is non-existent. Lao Tse summarizes the postmodern dilemma of knowing reality:

⁴³ Swami Sivananda, the founder of Divine Life Society writes: “God or Brahman is Supreme Silence, Soul is Silence, Peace is Silence, or simply is God.” Swami Sivananda, *Bliss Divine* (New Delhi: Divine Life Society, 1974), p. 555.

⁴⁴ Os Guinness, *Dust of Death* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1973), p. 202.

If, when I was asleep I was a man dreaming I was a butterfly, how do I know when I am awake I am not a butterfly dreaming I am a man?⁴⁵

Sathya Sai Baba, a popular guru from India, captures the problem in a poem:

Rebuked by his wife
For not shedding even a tear
Over the death of their only child,
The man explained
“I dreamt last night
That I was blessed with seven sons,
They all vanished when I woke up.
Who shall I weep for?
The seven that are vapor
Or the one that is dust?
The seven are a dream
And the one a day-dream.”⁴⁶

The rescue is to be sought within each person, in a space beyond conditioning. The postmodern spirituality or New Age cure for most of our modern problems can thus be summarized in the slogan: “The only way out is in.” This journey within can be described, writes Lars Johansson, as an ongoing process where one gets in touch with his or her inner feelings, “inner child,” inner wisdom or inner voice, in order to fully realize oneself.⁴⁷

4. Postmodern Influence on Pentecostal Spirituality

If Christian spirituality can be defined as the practice of the Christian life in the real world, then according to Houston a postmodern definition would be, “the ways individuals seek to renew spirit and soul in their

⁴⁵ Quoted in Vishal Mangalwadi, *Missionary Conspiracy: Letters to a Postmodern Hindu* (New Delhi: Good Books, 1996), p. 82.

⁴⁶ V. K. Gokak, *Bhagavan Sri Satya Sai Baba* [The Respected Lord Satya Sai Baba] (Mumbai: Abhinav Publications, 1975), p. 216.

⁴⁷ Lars Johansson, “New Age: A Synthesis of the Premodern, Modern and Postmodern,” in *Faith and Modernity*, pp. 208-251 (221).

lonely lives.”⁴⁸ It is this kind of new openness to various religious experiences that present an opportunity and challenge to Pentecostal spirituality. One can find the “techniques” of postmodern spirituality such as deep meditation, creative visualization, chanting and techniques that alter the consciousness in Pentecostal spiritual experiences. In some respects, Pentecostal spirituality lays a greater emphasis on subjective experience over objective truth.

The much-talked about Pentecostal revival at Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship (TACF), many believe, is just individuals being renewed by the Spirit of God. If so, the question that needs to be answered is whether what one sees happening in Pentecostal churches is the subtle influence of postmodern spirituality.

4.1 Postmodern and Pentecostal Emphasis on Experience

Often Christian faith is interpreted more in terms of feeling and experience than a reasonable belief. Pentecostal spiritual models, rituals, symbols, signs are all geared towards ministering to the feelings of the person. Pentecostal worship services revolved around and have evolved strange spiritual experiences—like being slain, barking or growling—all in the Spirit.

It cannot be denied that the most important value that governs Pentecostal spirituality is the locus of individual experience. Viewed positively, this means that the Pentecostal is not satisfied until he or she has had an experience with God. The Pentecostal’s use of the phrase, “I am praying through,” epitomizes this. A person is not satisfied by hearing about someone else’s experience with God; they must experience God themselves. This strong emphasis on individual experience should be seen as a necessary balance in our churches. However, viewed negatively, experience can become the tail that wags the dog. Beliefs/faith can become secondary to experience or else beliefs can be denied as “untrue” unless they are experienced. To make things worse, many times experiences can be manufactured.

Margaret M. Poloma talking about the Toronto revival quotes Leslie Scrivener, a reporter of the *Toronto Star*, Oct. 8, 1995:

The mighty winds of Hurricane Opal that swept through Toronto last week [were] mere tropical gusts compared with the power of God thousands believe struck them senseless at a conference at the controversial Airport Vineyard church. At least with Opal, they could

⁴⁸ Stephenson, *Christian Mission in a Postmodern World*, p. 186.

stay on their feet. Not so with many of the 5,300 souls meeting at the Regal Constellation Hotel. The ballroom carpets were littered with fallen bodies, bodies of seemingly straitlaced men and women who felt themselves moved by the phenomenon they say is the Holy Spirit. So moved, they howled with joy or the release of some buried pain. They collapsed, some rigid as corpses, some convulsed in hysterical laughter. From room to room came barnyard cries, calls heard only in the wild, grunts so deep women recalled the sounds of childbirth, while some men and women adopted the very position of childbirth. Men did chicken walks. Women jabbed their fingers as if afflicted with nervous disorders. And around these scenes of bedlam, were loving arms to catch the falling, smiling faces, whispered prayers of encouragement, instructions to release, to let go.⁴⁹

Of all the incredible manifestations of the Spirit at TACF—speaking in tongues, miraculous healings, tearful conversions—the cleanliness of its crib has been most disturbed by the controversial animal sounds made by some of its worshipers. The revival has also been characterized by wild bouts of “holy laughter,” “slayings in the Spirit,” shaking, quaking and prophetic words.

Margaret Poloma, a sociologist who has studied the Toronto Blessing, regards these unusual physical manifestations associated with the revival to be “‘normal’ responses to intense emotional reactions that may occur during spiritual, inner, and physical healing.”⁵⁰ Can one conclude that if, as a result of an intense inner encounter with God, a person experiences a physical inability to move (to the point that he/she appears almost dead), a bodily lightness (to the point of rising above the ground), a deep inner pain (perhaps with crying) or an intense sensation of God’s presence (to the point of a strong feeling of happiness), then the person is gripped by God or “totally with God.”⁵¹ Or is it a fascination with the phenomena that cause them to be created by human efforts. Paul

⁴⁹ Margaret M. Poloma, “The ‘Toronto Blessing’ in Postmodern Society: Manifestation, Metaphor and Myth” in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism*, eds. Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen (New Delhi: Regnum Books, 1999), pp. 363-385 (364).

⁵⁰ Aaron McCarroll Gallegos, *Beyond Signs and Wonders* (<http://www.sojo.net>), p. 1, checked: Aug 6, 2002.

⁵¹ The Theological Commission of the Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church of Germany, “Concerning Extraordinary Bodily Phenomena in the Context of Spiritual Occurrences,” trans. Veronika Ruf and others, *Pneuma* 18 (Spring 1996), pp. 5-32 (13).

himself agrees that it is possible to do this.⁵² Veronika says, “When spiritual phenomena are sought for their own sake and accompanying phenomena are desired as an end in themselves, the proper order of things is reversed.”⁵³ The question we need to ask is whether we seek to experience God or seek to experience the phenomena?

Margaret Poloma in her article examines the Toronto Blessing and the unusual manifestations associated with the revival. She examines the behavioral manifestations—some rather unusual and unprecedented in revival history—from the postmodern emphasis on semiotics in order to interpret what signification the manifestations may represent in constructing and maintaining a Pentecostal worldview. She concludes that this emphasis on manifestations draws on the pre-modern consciousness marked by holism, and holds a balance between the straightjacket of Enlightenment-generated modernism and the chaos of a postmodern de-centered universe.⁵⁴ The influence of postmodernism is obvious to Poloma.

Even as there are some similarities Pentecostal spirituality shares with Postmodern spirituality, there are also some dissimilarities that are unique to Pentecostal spirituality. For example, while the emphasis of postmodern spirituality is on the deconstruction of language which results in the sheer silence of the mystic, Pentecostal spiritual experience centers around the language of God-experience. Since God is silent in postmodern spirituality all descriptions about God are impossible. However, Pentecostal worship and experience of God focuses on adoration of God and his nature. While postmodern spirituality emphasizes silence, Pentecostal spirituality emphasizes audible.

4.2 Virtual Reality of Postmodernism and Ecstatic Worship in Pentecostal Spirituality

Worship presents a set of meanings configured by Pentecostals. Our understanding and practice of worship lies at the heart of our liturgies and spirituality. No wonder we constantly hear phrases like, “I have come for worship,” “Vineyard has the best worship, or “Worship is the best part of our service.” Daniel Albrecht says that Pentecostals understand worship as having three main connotations: 1) Worship as a

⁵² Galatians 3:3

⁵³ The Theological Commission of the Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church of Germany, “Concerning Extraordinary Bodily Phenomena,” p. 16.

⁵⁴ Poloma, “The ‘Toronto Blessing’ in Postmodern Society,” pp. 361-85.

way of Christian life especially outside of the church services and activities. All of life is seen as worship, as an expression, a gift offered to God; 2) Worship as the entire liturgy, the whole of the Pentecostal service, and 3) Worship as a specific portion, aspect or rite within the overall liturgy.⁵⁵

All three contain the Pentecostal understanding of the symbol. To the postmodernist, worship is mere technological symbolism over substance, thus, symbols are the substance. Groothuis writes, "The image is everything because the essence has become unknown and unknowable."⁵⁶ Because he sees reality and truth as being constructed at the moment, worship need not go beyond the worship act. This amounts to, in the words of Albrecht, "worshipping worship."⁵⁷ The more "real" the worship service seems, the less a postmodern person needs or wants anything beyond that.

For some contemporary Pentecostals, worship refers to the encounter with the divine as mediated by a sense of the divine presence or power. Pentecostals believe strongly in the manifest presence of God. The heightened awareness of this presence often occurs within the dimension of worship. Pentecostals practice worship as both *experiencing* God and as *techniques* into the presence of God. Forms of musical expressions including suggestive, symbolic worship, choruses and verbal praise practices serve to trigger a close sense of God's presence.

Pentecostals believe that worship is an encounter with God. God will come and meet his people. They can only prepare and wait for God's actions among them and then respond to the flow of the Spirit. Pentecostals also see worship as a kind of performance that attends closely to God. God is the audience and the congregation is to perform the drama of praise. For as they say, God inhabits the praises of his people. This performance represents a way of ministry unto God.

However, David MacInnes in his article, "Problems of Praise," points out two dangers which are infectious and can take one away from the true sense of worship.⁵⁸ The first one is emotionalism and he is

⁵⁵ Daniel E. Albrecht, "Pentecostal Spirituality: Ecumenical Potential and Challenge," *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research* [www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyber2.html] 2 (1999), checked: Aug 6, 2002.

⁵⁶ Groothuis, *The Soul in Cyberspace*, p. 16.

⁵⁷ Albrecht, "Ecumenical Potential and Challenge."

⁵⁸ David MacInnes, "Problems of Praise," in *Living in the Light of the Pentecost*, ed. Edward England (East Sussex, UK: Highland Books, 1990), pp. 241-49.

careful not to confuse it with the expression of emotion. This can be seen in the preference of one form of emotional expression over another. For some, noise is more spiritual than silence; for others, it is the reverse. Perhaps, one of the most authentic marks of the work of the Spirit is that the whole of human emotions is released both toward God and toward others. But emotionalism can easily creep in. It is a selfish indulgence in the sheer pleasure of emotion. This can make singing, clapping and dancing simply as an indulgence in emotion instead of being an expression of worship.

The second danger he mentions is escapism. Postmodern spirituality is an escape from the reality of the world as the distinction between reality and illusion is non-existent in its world view. Herein lies a threat from postmodern spirituality to Pentecostal spirituality. Many subtle forms of Pentecostal tradition do not believe in the reality of sickness and provide an escapism by emphasizing the unreal characteristic of the sickness. For example, the Word of Faith movement of Kenneth Hagin emphasizes the unreal nature of the sickness and encourages the believers not to consider it as reality. Unlike classical Pentecostals, the Faith teachers in the Faith Movement believe that diseases are healed by Christ's spiritual atonement in hell, not his physical death on the cross. Ralph Waldo Trine explains it in following terms:

Everything exists in the unseen before it is manifested or realized in the seen, and in this sense it is true that the unseen things are the real, while the things that are seen are the unreal. The unseen things are the cause, the seen things are the effect.⁵⁹

Pentecostal worship offers such a way of escape to those who come to the church carrying heavy burdens, frustrations and depression. The only difference is that the escape the Pentecostals offer is not an escape from a real world into unreality but into the ultimate reality.

Do Pentecostals create a world in which they express and experience their forms of worship? Do they try to provide a pathway into the holy of holies? Albrecht in his article points out that Pentecostals make use of ritual sounds that surround the Pentecostal worshipper, ritual sights that stimulate the Pentecostal ritualist and kinesthetic dimensions.⁶⁰ Walking

⁵⁹ Quoted by D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), p. 149.

⁶⁰ Daniel Albrecht, "Pentecostal Spirituality: Looking through the Lens of Ritual," *Pneuma* 14:2 (Fall 1992), pp. 107-25 (109-13).

into a Pentecostal service for the first time, one will be greeted by a cacophony of sounds. Sounds that surround, support and give a sense of security to Pentecostal worshippers. They symbolize an entrance into the very presence of God. Among the Pentecostal ritual sounds, the main one is music. The music of the Pentecostal song service usually called the worship service is often intended to help usher the congregation into the presence of God to help individuals taste a little bit of heaven or to bring down heaven to earth. One may ponder how many Pentecostals can truly worship their God without accompanying music.

Surrounding the different sounds of the Pentecostal service are also accompanying sights that stimulate worship. Probably the most significant and influential visual symbol in Pentecostal worship is the sight of fellow-worshippers. Pentecostals are encircled by fellow believers who stimulate each other actively to be immersed in worship. From the worship leader on the platform to the musicians and to the brother or sister across the aisle, Pentecostals influence each other's forms of worship, gestures and behaviors as they participate together in worship. Through their fellow worshippers, they look beyond, they see deeper, they see in one another their object of worship, their God.

In pursuit of higher experiences in Pentecostal worship services, there is an increasing tendency to add more simulating techniques, technologies, visuals and music, to take the worshipper from this world to another world. To some, the "experience of worship" is superior to the exposition of the scripture. Often than not, the exposition of the scripture is filled with experiences of either the preacher or of somebody else. All these and many more are aimed at bringing the childish delight that comes from being in the virtual reality. Do we see an influence of postmodern thought here? Are Pentecostals trying to create an atmosphere of worship, the feeling of other-worldliness, where the eternal becomes more real than the present?

5. Conclusion

This study has probably raised far more questions than it has offered answers. What does emerge from this study is the desperate need to seriously examine the importance we give to experience and worship in Pentecostal spirituality.

Do we then consider postmodernism as a threat to Pentecostal spirituality or do we see it as something that could be used to enhance and foster our experiences of spirituality? Would we rather take people

into a realm of virtual reality through worship and then let them plummet back into reality at the end of that “virtual worship”? Would we choose to let experiences and external manifestations take control rather than seek to live lives that blend with those experiences without being completely devoid of them?

We have to ask ourselves: Do we demonstrate an authentic spirituality, a spirituality that can put people in touch with the divine in a tangible, experiential way that makes sense of our experience of life? Does the spirituality we offer answer the deep longing for a spirituality that provides authentic answers to the real questions people have?