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PENTECOSTAL ESCHATOLOGY: WHAT HAPPENED WHEN THE WAVE HIT THE WEST END OF THE OCEAN

Wonsuk Ma

1. Introduction

As half a billion Pentecostal believers celebrate one-hundred years of growth, Asia has reason to be thankful to the Lord and to early Pentecostal pioneers in North America and Asia. As the spiritual eruption made waves across the Pacific Ocean, its power generated varying effects in different parts of Asia, just like the recent tsunami force experienced by areas across the Indian Ocean.

It is completely reasonable to expect continuity, as well as discontinuity, between the Azusa Street spirituality and what is found among Asian Pentecostals today. Azusa's unique spiritual tradition continues, but the temporal and spatial gaps between the extreme ends of the Pacific Ocean resulted in marked differences. These are often a creative modification of existing traditions or even the emergence of something quite new in Asia.

How much direct correlation one can trace between these two entities is another challenging question. There is no doubt that the early Pentecostal movement began as a powerful missionary force, and many "Pentecostal missionaries" reached parts of Asia and preached the Pentecostal message. However, an increasing number of studies, primarily based on Asian evidence, have issued a challenge to the "one-fountainhead" theory of the movement, that is, the Azusa Street Mission as the mother of all Pentecostal churches.[1]

Asian Pentecostalism has come a very long way, and now it is a vanguard in its growth and development. The size of Pentecostal

[1] E.g., Yung Hwa, "Endued with Power: The Pentecostal-Charismatic Renewal and the Asian Church in the Twenty-first Century," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 6:1 (2003): 63-82, (66).

Christianity in Asia, around 135 million according to Barrett and others, is quite comparable to its counterparts in Africa (142 million) and Latin America (142 million).[2] However, what makes up this proportion in Asia is surprisingly distinct: 1) the astonishingly high proportion of Pentecostals to the total Christian population (43.1% in Asia, in comparison with 29.4% and 40% in Latin America and Africa, respectively); and 2) an equally stretching "growth-room" of Pentecostal Christianity with the total Asian population to reach (27 times that of the Pentecostal-Charismatics in Asia, in comparison with 3.7 times and 6.2 times in Latin America and Africa, respectively) considering their total populations.[3] This expectation may not be a distant dream, but may actually happen in the near future. For example, the robust expansion of the house church networks in China, currently estimated as 70 million, can impact the topography of Asian Christianity in the coming decades.[4]

My reflection is intentionally theological, and this focus comes from a few assumptions: 1) theological conviction directly influences behavior, and 2) theology is shaped through constant interaction between the (imported, thus, foreign) message and the real life situation where the message should be received as the word of God to receptors. Using hindsight, many feel that Asian Pentecostal theology has been shaped not through intentional reflections, but often by default; that is, by the lack of intentional action in preserving Azusa theological traditions and in bringing these to an active dialogue with a given socio-cultural context.

This discussion focuses on one theological issue, eschatology, which shaped the Pentecostal ethos in the early days. The inquiry has four aspects: 1) how did eschatology impact early Pentecostal theology, 2) how was this transmitted to Asians (as it crossed the ocean), 3) how does this Asian version of Pentecostal eschatology give birth to unique spiritual traditions that we see in Asia, and 4) in what areas do Asian

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[2] David B. Barrett, G. T. Kurian and T. M. Johnson, eds. *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University, 2001), 12–13.

[3] For a detailed discussion on its future, see Wonsuk Ma, "Asian Pentecostalism: A Religion Whose Only Limit Is the Sky," *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 25:2 (August, 2004): 191-204, esp. 193.

[4] A recent popular portrait of Chinese Christianity and its possible impact on China and the world is found in David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Powers* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2003), esp. 285-92, for its future impact.

Pentecostals need to exert an intentional theological engagement for the sound future of the Asian Pentecostal movement? In the course of discussion, the contextual elements will come into constant interaction with the "message."

This discussion also centers on classical Pentecostals, although due to the ambiguous nature of Asian Pentecostalism, Charismatic Pentecostalism will naturally be considered when needed. An equally important consideration for the reader is to keep in mind the complexity and diversity of Asian countries in their history, society, culture, religion, economy and political systems.

2. Pentecostal Eschatology: Then, Now and Future

2.1 One-hundred Years Ago, There…

It is not an overstatement to view an immanent eschatological expectation as the backbone of early Pentecostal spirituality. Although this may appear less unique than other cardinal Pentecostal doctrines such as baptism in the Holy Spirit with speaking in tongues as the "initial physical evidence,"[5] the eschatological framework enhanced Pentecostal distinctives. In fact, Anderson forcefully argues that the primary message among early Pentecostals was "Jesus is coming soon."[6] This early Pentecostal eschatology had several unique expressions.

2.1.1 Realized Eschatological Urgency

Christianity in North America at the turn of the twentieth century was a middle-class phenomenon, with the pious anti-cultural holiness movement balancing the Christian world. Interestingly eschatological urgency was not found in either camp. It was the Keswick movement, based on John Draby's dispensationalism, that proposed a sweeping revival to usher in the eschatological climax, the return of the Lord.[7]

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[5] Robert M. Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1979), 44-45. Anderson puts it, "In short, the Pentecostal movement was as much a departure from the Wesleyan tradition as a development from it," 43.

[6] Ibid., ch. 5 entitled "The Pentecostal Message," 79-97.

[7] E.g., Frank Macchia, "The Struggle for Global Witness: Shifting Paradigms in Pentecostal Theology," in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion*

Thus, Pentecostalism was born as an eschatological movement, by interpreting the outbreak of the unprecedented revival as the prerequisite for the immanent return of the Lord in their lifetime. The experience of the Holy Spirit among them was quickly labeled as the "latter rain," assuming that the original advent of the Holy Spirit recorded in Act 2 was the "former rain."[8] In the premillennial framework, this also signals the last hour of the great harvest before the tribulation. That was where the baptism in the Holy Spirit to empower believers to witness found its eschatological and missionary impetus. In fact, Acts 1:8 has become the motto for Pentecostal believers: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (NIV). The only other passage which has attained a similar status is Zech 4:6, "'Not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit,' saith the Lord of hosts" (KJV). This eschatological urgency was evident in many early testimonies. The very first issue of *The Apostolic Faith* (Los Angeles) reports:

> The gift of languages is given with the commission, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." The Lord has given languages to the unlearned Greek, Latin, Hebrew, French, German, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Zulu and languages of Africa, Hindu and Bengali and dialects of India, Chippewa and other languages of the Indians, Esquimaux, the deaf mute language and, in fact the Holy Ghost speaks all the languages of the world through His children.[9]

This eschatological urgency led naturally to the missionary focus of the Pentecostal movement.

2.1.2 Other-worldly Orientation and Missionary Impetus

Almost all authors agree that the early Pentecostal expectation of the immanent return of the Lord fueled missionary zeal. Their premillennial eschatology conditioned them to view the world as the object of God's judgment for the seven-year tribulation, while the church would be taken to heaven to meet the Bride. Because of this

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made to Travel, eds. Murray Dempster, Byron Klaus and Doug Petersen (Oxford: Regnum, 1999), 8-29, (8-9).

[8] E.g., Joel 2:23 where the "former rain" is to be moderate (KJV).

[9] *The Apostolic Faith* 1 (Sept 1906), 1.

theological orientation, they were preoccupied with "soul winning," leaving very little room for anything else. The first issue of *The Apostolic Faith* also reports, "Hundreds of dollars have been laid down for the sending of missionaries and thousands will be laid down."[10]

This commitment to mission with eschatological urgency was expressed in various ways.[11] Theological education was strictly a practical and short-term ministerial training. Unlike established divinity schools, this program was to produce pastors, evangelists and missionaries in a minimum amount of time. Their summer activities consisted primarily of evangelistic tours. The most noteworthy development was the deployment of zealous missionaries, appropriately called "missionaries with one-way tickets."[12] They left for mission fields without any intention or expectation to return home, not only due to their commitment to mission but also because of their eschatological conviction. With the experience of the baptism in the Spirit, they were experientially and theologically convinced that they were called, empowered, and were now being sent. Eschatological urgency simply "put a pair wings to a tiger," as Koreans would say.

2.1.3 Revision by Default

It is perfectly reasonable to expect that the eschatological urgency, which the Pentecostal pioneers held, would face some revisions as the second generation slowly came into leadership. Various symptoms appeared such as "spiritual dryness and lack of God's presence" as early as the 1940s, when the Latter Rain movement brought back much of the early Pentecostal emphases including the "imminence of the premillennial return of Jesus Christ, preceded by an outpouring of God's Spirit."[13] Theological revision was not unfamiliar to early Pentecostals. Parham's contention that tongues were meant to be a

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[10] Ibid.

[11] By the printing of the second issue of *The Apostolic Faith* (Oct 1906), 3, "Eight missionaries have started to the foreign field since this movement began a Los Angeles a few months ago. About thirty workers have gone out into the field."

[12] Vinson Synan, *The Spirit Said "Grow": The Astounding Worldwide Expansion of Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1992), 39-48, coined this term.

[13] R. M. Riss, "Latter Rain Movement," in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, revised and expanded edition, eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. van der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 830-33, (830).

missionary gift that bypassed the language learning process[14] was quickly revised.[15] By nature, Pentecostal theology has been intuitively and experientially shaped, thus, the revision of the nature of tongues was accordingly revised through experiential observations. Worse yet, the revision of the Pentecostal notion of eschatological urgency took place by default, that is, without any explicit or intentional process.

The consequence of this seemingly irresponsible silence on the eschatological belief of the Pentecostal pioneers has been rather negative. It took until the 60s, but the message of the Lord's return began to disappear slowly but steadily from Pentecostal pulpits. This vacuum was quickly filled by the exact opposite message of this-worldly concerns such as blessing, church growth and others. This second and third-generation phenomenon coincided with the advent of the Charismatic movement, which by nature had more of this-worldly concern due to the established social and theological state of the mainline churches.

2.2 One-hundred Years Later, Here…

It is important to note that Pentecostal Christianity in Asia began to make its presence known to its own constituents in the 1960s and onwards. New Pentecostal missionaries of the second, and later, third-generations from North America and Europe came with the revised version of eschatology. This is also the period when most Asian nations

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[14] *The Apostolic Faith* 1:2 (Oct 1906), 1, recounts Charles Parham's experience suggesting that tongues were "language of preaching": "Instantly the Lord took his [Parham's] vocal organs, and he was preaching the Word in another language. This man has preached in different languages over the United States, and men and women of that nationality have come to the altar and sought God." Under the title "Fire Still Falling," in the same issue of The *Apostolic Faith*, 2, a more explicit reference is found, "Missionaries for the foreign fields, equipped with several languages, are now on their way…." Also under "Testimonies of Outgoing Missionaries" in the same issue, 6, it is plainly reported one "received the baptism with the Holy Ghost and the gift of the Uganda language." These quick surveys prove that the notion of tongues as the missionary language was widespread.

[15] By 1909, this popular notion of tongues as a Pentecostal missionary tool was simply abandoned as "many Pentecostals were becoming skeptical." James R. Goff, Jr., *Fields White unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism* (Fayetteville, AK: University of Arkansas Press, 1988), 16.

came out of their painful colonial past, and for some, with divided nations to begin with (such as Vietnam, China and Korea). The process of establishing their self-identity often took ideological struggles and consequent bloodsheds through civil wars (e.g., Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and Cambodia) and even all-out wars (Vietnam and Korea).

Asia had to face much more hardship to have this unique Christian tradition introduced than, let's say, Los Angeles in the beginning of the twentieth century. It is important to remind the reader that during the 1920s and 30s when the wave of the Azusa missionaries hit this continent, most Asian countries were still under colonial rules, the majority by Christian colonizers, but some (particularly East Asia) by non-, thus, often anti-, Christian colonial forces. For the former cases, already established Christian traditions (e.g., Reformed Christianity in Indonesia, or East Indies) posed a challenge to Pentecostal pioneers. For the latter, such as Korea and in some sense China, the challenge was more severe as Christianity in general was viewed as an anti-Japanese force, thus, a threat against the colonial authorities.

2.2.1 Revised Version of Pentecostal Eschatology

Until the 1950s Pentecostal missionaries had a strong eschatological orientation.[16] For example, some Filipino *balikbayan*[17] missionaries from North America returned to the Philippines in the 1940s to preach their new-found Pentecostal message to their own people. They gave up their American dream and returned to their own provinces in the Philippines to propagate Pentecostal faith. It was their new experience with the Holy Spirit which gave them new zeal and commitment, and it was the eschatological urgency of the immanent return of the Lord that caused them to return to the Philippines.[18]

The waning eschatological expectation among western Pentecostals and the arrival of the message of hope "for here and now" through the Charismatic movement from the 1960s quickly affected the theological orientation of many Pentecostal churches in Asia. Unlike the first half of the twentieth century, the second half witnessed the influx of western (often North American) evangelists holding mass

[16] In the 1960s and the early 70s, eschatological expectation was wide-spread in my own Christian experience in Korea.

[17] Returning Filipinos from overseas residency.

[18] Trinidad E. Seleky, "The Organization of the Philippines Assemblies of God and the Role of Early Missionaries," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 8:2 (2005): 271-82, (273), "They anticipated the early return of Christ and were constrained to spread the gospel to every tribe."

evangelistic crusades, crowding radio, and later TV channels, with their messages. The speed with which the "charismatic" version of the Pentecostal message spread heavily influenced Asian Pentecostal churches whose theological foundations were not yet solid. For example, for several decades, "Christ Is the Answer" was the most popular theme song among Pentecostals. Many churches were named after this title. Currently the song reads,

> Christ is the answer to all my longing.
> Christ is the answer to all my needs,
> Savior, Baptizer, the great Physician,
> Oh, hallelujah, He's all I need.

However, the last line, as some still remember, originally read: "He is coming soon." If this popular contention is correct, then all the experiences with Christ such as salvation, the Spirit baptism and healing originally were to be understood with the end time in view. However, with this revision, the same experiences are perceived to mean for life here and now. Today, Asian Pentecostal theology, in many places, is more accurately "charismatic" with a good dose of influence from the prosperity gospel and the faith movement. The animistic orientation of Asian minds is an extremely fertile ground for such "good news," with welcome supernatural help.

2.2.2 This-worldly Attention

This revised version of Pentecostal eschatology, with the consequential lack of major eschatological components, began to direct the attention of Christian life from the "other world" to this world. In a sense, the eschatological immediacy was replaced by the immediacy of God's action in daily life.

As briefly observed above, this "here and now" relevancy of the Pentecostal message found an opportune audience in Asia, as daily suffering was the primary context. In addition to the political struggles which Asian nations faced in the latter part of the twentieth century, simple daily survival was the greatest challenge Asia has faced. Regardless of the sources of poverty in different parts of Asia, economic hardship was compounded by a rising population, to the point that, for example, China imposed the one-child policy per family. Depleted natural resources by the colonial powers, deeply rooted structural corruption, social unrest, and an inefficient socialist or communist system in some parts of Asia have driven many Asian

societies to the extreme edge for survival. The preaching of the Pentecostal message, by this time fully revised through Charismatic influences, was indeed "good news for modern men (and women)."

For instance, David Yonggi Cho, who grew up under the harsh Japanese colonial rule and the devastation of the Korean War, received a Christian message that was much different from the one that was being preached in existing churches.[19] This gospel introduced him to the God who heals and performs miracles "here and now," and this God is good, not only after death but also now. Although he was nurtured under classical Pentecostal missionaries, theological influences also came from Charismatic sources. His Yoido era (1973-present) saw pulpit guests such as Robert Schuller, Oral Roberts and other popular Charismatic preachers. His *Fourth Dimension*,[20] a million-seller throughout the world, proves that his theology has a strong charismatic character. The high expectation of God's supernatural intervention in human life is the main message of Cho, often punctuated with testimonies of healing and miracles. His message can easily be summed up as a theology of blessing through the supernatural intervention of God. This explains why 3 John 2 has been the most popular passage in his church: "Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well" (NIV).

However, it is unfair to give all the credit for Cho's theological shaping to charismatic influences. His theology also bears the distinct mark that Christian (in this case, Pentecostal-charismatic) theology has wrestled with the context of suffering. If we borrow Cox's theory, deprivation in human life and eschatological hope have been the main context and cause for the growth of Pentecostal churches throughout the world.[21] Like Latin America, Asia's Pentecostal growth can, in part, be attributed to the sheer challenge of life. The very fact that the majority of Pentecostal believers in Asia come from the lower social strata proves this point. It is only recently that Pentecostal

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[19] E.g., Young-hoon Lee, "Life and Ministry of David Yonggi Cho," in *David Yonggi Cho: A Close Look at His Theology and Ministry*, eds. Wonsuk Ma, Hyeon-sung Bae and William W. Menzies (Baguio, Philippines: APTS Press; Goonpo, Korea: Hansei University Press, 2005), 3-23, (3-4).

[20] *The Fourth Dimension*, vols. 1-2 (South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Publishing, 1979 and 1983).

[21] E.g., Harvey Cox, *First from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995), 58, for the Azusa Street Mission.

congregations have begun to attain respectability in some Asian societies, thus attracting the more educated and established in social and economic aspects.

This revised version of eschatology also came with some surprising positive contributions. Attention given to social issues and environmental concerns among some Asian Pentecostals has been possible because of the this-worldly orientation. The growing awareness of the potential of socio-political influence was clearly brought about during the 2004 presidential election in the Philippines. Not only was a Charismatic minister among the presidential candidates,[22] but also the nine-million strong Catholic Charismatic group publicly endorsed a candidate. The recent Indonesian election also witnessed many Pentecostal ministers running for public posts. Aside from the question of whether these decisions were right or not, both incidents indicate Pentecostal-charismatic believers' awareness of the potential of their socio-political influence, as well as their determination to exercise it. The Korean Pentecostals included their prayer for the environment beginning in the 1980s. During the World Assemblies of God Conference in Seoul, Korea (1994), the published prayer for the gathering listed environmental concerns among the first four prayer topics.[23] Another surprising development is the social service area. Malaysian Pentecostal-Charismatic churches, for example, have pioneered social service programs for the neglected. Homes for orphans, single mothers, the elderly and drug addicts have become a regular feature of many Pentecostal churches. This began as a creative

[22] "Brother" Eddie Villanueva, the founder (1978) of the Jesus Is Lord, the "biggest born-again Christian group" with its claim of five million members, was the presidential candidate. He recently held a prayer rally for the nation, attracting not only one million participants (according to the organizer) but also Catholic bishops, religious leaders and many politicians, Leslie Ann Aquino and Raymund Antonio, "Thousands Join JIL Anniversary Rites, Prayer Rally at Rizal Park," *Manila Bulletin*, 3 October 2005, 1, 6.

[23] See also Walter J. Hollenweger, "The Contribution of Asian Pentecostalism to Ecumenical Christianity: Hopes and Questions of a Barthian Theologian," in *Asian and Pentecostal*, 15-25, (20-21), criticizes the handicap of western Christianity to deal with this issue adequately while he expressed hope in Asian Christians. However, the question remains: Do Pentecostals have any distinct theological contribution to make or are we simply raising awareness of this concern with other Christians? One clue was suggested by Hollenweger, 23, although in inter-religious context, that the *Creator Spiritus* (in the Old Testament) and this is identified with the *Spiritus Sanctus* (of the New Testament).

evangelistic strategy because Muslim law prohibits public evangelistic activities to Muslim Malays. Also we have seen the formation of a growing number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) among Asian Pentecostal churches. Equally unexpected is the ecumenical initiatives of some Asian Pentecostal leaders and churches. Evidently, the exponential growth of Pentecostal churches has increased their influence among Christian communities. They not only cooperate in local and national ecumenical initiatives, but also have started to lead ecumenical movements. The Korean Assemblies of God, which joined the Korean National Council of Churches (KNCC) in 1996, had one of their Pentecostal ministers to became the general secretary of the ecumenical body. He in fact set a goal to merge the KNCC with its evangelical counterpart in Korea. Malaysia is another case in point. Early Pentecostal churches had traditionally kept inter-church activities at arm's length, sometimes by choice but more often by external forces. Malaysian Pentecostal leaders, on the other hand, have actively cooperated with other evangelical churches to the point that more than half of the current executive members of the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship Malaysia are Pentecostal-charismatic.[24] Also, the chairman of the board of the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches is a Pentecostal minister, yet, it is important to note that these encouraging signs are still far from being widespread.

2.2.3 Theological Challenges

This radical shift of attention from other-worldly to this-worldly concerns has become an enormous challenge to Christianity in Asia. Asia has birthed many of the world's religions as well as plenty of animistic religious beliefs. Traditional gods have been used, even exploited for the worshiper's benefit. Spiritual power without an eschatological goal and moral commitment can easily fall into a religious utilitarianism, which is exactly what animism and shamanism are all about. It should be noted also that church growth seems to have replaced (cross-cultural) mission as the ultimate goal of the church. It is true that church growth has been a positive influence in making the presence of Christianity known in predominantly non- or often anti-Christian societies. Nonetheless, the church growth movement has evolved into a shape that represents the this-worldly orientation of Pentecostal Christianity. More seriously, this attention to the growth of

[24] Yeu Chuen Lim, "Malaysian Evangelical Fellowship" (email message to the author, limyc@tm.net.my, Oct 3, 2005). More information about the organization is available at http://www.necf.org.my (checked: Oct 3, 2005).

local churches may have taken place at the expense of global mission, an important theological tradition of Pentecostalism. Recently a serious reflection on the mega-church movement has taken place, and alternative approaches are suggested.[25]

A careful examination of the record of Pentecostal expansion seems to suggest that, unlike the common notion that Pentecostalism is predominantly a missionary movement, the movement has an equally, if not stronger renewal potential among existing churches. One can easily point to the advent of the charismatic movement which literally "renewed" existing churches as proof. Perhaps even more important is an observation that Pentecostalism seems to flourish more in already Christianized areas than in "virgin" territories.[26] If the primary missionary character of the movement is to be proven, there must be growing Pentecostal churches in places where there is little Christian witness. However, that is rarely the case.[27] Latin America and some parts of Africa are good examples. This has caused the debate of proselytism from existing churches.[28] The only exception known to the author may be China. It is true that the majority of the house church networks in China are characteristically Pentecostal in belief and worship,[29] yet, this phenomenon is more "indigenous" in nature and origin than the result of Pentecostal missionary efforts.

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[25] E.g., David Lim, "A Missiological Evaluation of David Yonggi Cho's Church Growth," in *David Yonggi Cho: A Close Look at His Theology and Ministry*, 181-207, strongly advocates church multiplication.

[26] This observation was made by Alan Johnson, a Pentecostal missionary to Thailand, in Feb, 2005 in Baguio, Philippines. In his follow-up, he argues, "…my gut impression is that you are hard pressed to find a place where Pentecostals went that was a resistant hard to reach group and they either a) were the first ones there or b) had a breakthrough. Instead, what you tend to see is that where the church among every stripe has grown greatly, Pentecostals have grown greatly. Where the church is small, Pentecostals are small," Allan Johnson, "On Chapel Service" (email message to the author, alan.johnson@agmd.org, Oct 6, 2005).

[27] This does not means that in "difficult" areas such as Thailand and Japan, there are no large Pentecostal-charismatic churches, but their overall impact to the larger church world and to the society has not been felt.

[28] The latest joint statement of the fourth phase of the international Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue (1990-1997) was titled, "Evangelization, Proselytism and Common Witness." For the full text, see *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 2:1 (1999): 105-51.

[29] Recently see Luke Wesley, *The Church in China: Persecuted, Pentecostal, and Powerful* (Baguio, Philippines: AJPS Books, 2005), esp. 35-67.

This calls for a recovery of the early Pentecostal commitment to soul winning, especially the cross-cultural variety. The history of the western Pentecostal movement has already demonstrated that the expansion of the missionary work is not solely fueled by eschatological urgency. Even by second and third generation Pentecostals, the missionary movement continues to flourish. For example, in U.S. Assemblies of God (2,729,000 adherents), only 5.2% of the world Assemblies of God family (52,811,000) has sent 33% (or 2,590) of the global Assemblies of God missionary force (7796).[30] Pentecostal mission has been known, however, to be triumphalistic in its attitude, in part due to its success, but also due to its "power missiology." Their aggressive approach to "convert" even believers, under the pretext that they are nominal, has been viewed as a sign of spiritual arrogance. As the centenary of the Edinburgh conference draws near the western church calls for the new shaping of Christian mission in humility and hope.[31] Pentecostal mission, as a movement of the poor fired up by the Holy Spirit,[32] needs to recover not only its trademark of power mission, but more importantly its humble attitude.

There is more reason to be mindful of the triumphalistic attitude of Pentecostal mission. The reality of human suffering cannot be ignored with simple faith statements. Asians, including Pentecostal believers, are living in constant struggle for survival. It is simply impossible to list all the factors contributing to suffering. The magnitude of natural and "(hu)man-made" disasters claim thousands of lives, as seen in the tsunami incident in the Indian Ocean in December, 2004 and the recent earthquake is Pakistan. Many of the terrorist attacks have been staged in Asia, be it in Iraq, southern Philippines or Bali, Indonesia. Turning to the Christian scene, for about three years since 1996, 275 Christian churches were closed, vandalized, destroyed or burned by Muslims in Indonesia. Close to one-half (121 churches) of them were Pentecostal churches and next on the list are Catholic churches (18).[33] In many

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[30] Assemblies of God World Missions, "Current Facts and Highlights: As of December 31, 2004" (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God World Mission, 2005).

[31] "Edinburgh 2010—Mission in Humility and Hope" (www.towards2010.org.uk, 2005), checked: Oct 15, 2005.

[32] E.g., Wonsuk Ma, "'When the Poor Are Fired Up': The Role of Pneumatology in Pentecostal-charismatic Mission" (A paper presented at the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, Athens, Greece, May 2005).

[33] Paul Tahalele, *The Church and Human Rights in Indonesia* (Surabaya, Indonesia: Indonesia Christian Communication Forum, 1998), 7-20; Gani

countries, gathering for Christian worship is still illegal, thus, subject to state punishment including death. An average first-generation Christian in Asia has to overcome much marginalization and even persecution from family and society.[34] Perhaps a good, if not the highest, proportion of modern martyrdom takes place in Asia, partly due to the extremely volatile religious context. A triumphalistic pronouncement of miracles and healings will not resolve this very real challenge. It will take far more than a band aid treatment, and this is where a proper understanding of Christian life from a balanced eschatological perspective becomes critical.[35]

Equally urgent is a right understanding of blessing. Due to the dire situation, God's blessing, be it supernatural, economic or social, will continue to be a main focus of Asian Christianity. In order for Asian Pentecostals to avoid the grave theological mistakes of the prosperity gospel, it is urgent to refine the popular theology blessing with the theological and eschatological understanding of Christian life in mind. It is argued contextually and biblically that the Spirit of God is the source of life, sustenance, rejuvenation and restoration of it.[36] Thus, it is legitimate to expect the Holy Spirit to "bless" lives for their material, physical, emotional, social and spiritual daily needs.[37] Here I stress the "needs" (versus "desires"), as God's blessing is interpreted as God's

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Wiyono, "Pentecostalism in Indonesia," in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, eds. Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang (Oxford: Regnum Books; Baguio, Philippines: APTS Books, 2005), 307-328, (320), points out the aggressive evangelistic activities as the main cause, thus, in a sense, self-invited.

[34] One less-drastic and yet common example is found in Wonsuk Ma and Julie C. Ma, "Jesus Christ in Asia: Our Journey with Him as Pentecostal Believers" (A paper presented at the Asian Consultation, Global Christian Forum, May 2004, Hong Kong, to be published in *International Review of Mission* [forthcoming]).

[35] Recently David Yonggi Cho, at a monthly prayer meeting of Korean Evangelical Fellowship on April 8, 2005, publicly repented of his preaching of [God's] "cheap grace" which more accurately refers to [physical and material] "blessing," while ignoring human suffering. Keun-young Kim, "Korean Church Leaders Repent" [in Korean], *Christian Today*, April 9, 2005 (http://www.chtoday.co.kr/news/rs_6269.htm), checked: Oct 7, 2005.

[36] For a contextual argument, Wonsuk Ma, "Asian (Classical) Pentecostal Theology in Context," in *Asian and Pentecostal*, 59-91, esp. 65-66.

[37] This is based on the creation spirit tradition of the Old Testament, e.g., as found in Isa 32:14ff. Wonsuk Ma, *Until the Spirit Comes: The Spirit of God in the Book of Isaiah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 25-32.

gracious means for human sustenance. This may be called "theology of blessing" in comparison with a "prosperity gospel." What is more critical is the proper theological purpose of blessing. One valid Pentecostal interpretation is to view blessings as part of God's empowerment for witness (Acts 1:8). Unlike the common supernatural perception of empowerment among Pentecostals, the "power" which the Holy Spirit endows can be understood broadly, and elements seemingly less than supernatural such as circumstances, should also be viewed as part of the Spirit's empowerment. The record in the book of Acts, such as the missionary journeys of Paul, seems to suggest this point repeatedly. If we follow this interpretation, then the "blessing" attains its new missionary purpose, and thus, an eschatological significance.[38] This would safely keep the theology of blessing from the dangerous utilitarian trap.

Ultimately the formulation of a sound Pentecostal mission theology will be the goal of Pentecostal theological inquiries. It is fascinating that Pentecostal mission did not decline along with its early eschatological urgency. This perhaps explains that eschatology was not the sole or even main, driving force for Pentecostal mission. It is argued that by the time Pentecostalism reached the Asian shores, "the 'power' came but 'mission' was not in the boat." It is true that much of the emphasis of early Pentecostal preaching was on the power of God. The relative silence of mission can be explained in two ways: 1) western Pentecostal missionaries were already doing mission,[39] and 2) given the "pagan" state of Asian nations, evangelism (verses "foreign" mission) was a more urgent task. However, even after substantial growth of Pentecostal Christianity in many Asian countries, there is little evidence that the powerful missionary theology of Pentecostalism distinguished itself from the rest of the churches in crossing cultural barriers to be witnesses. For example, in Korea, in spite of its robust

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[38] For an elaborate treatment of this point, see Wonsuk Ma, "Yonggi Cho's Theology of Blessing: New Theological Basis and Direction" (A paper presented at Youngsan International Theological Symposium, May 2003, Hansei University, Goonpo, Korea).

[39] It is also plausible that the early western Pentecostal missionaries, like their colleagues, may not have had the "full-circle mission" understanding as advocated by C. Peter Wagner, *On the Crest of the Wave: Becoming a World Christian* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1983), ch. 9. For a Pentecostal reflection and possibility, see Wonsuk Ma, "Full Circle Mission: A Possibility of Pentecostal Missiology," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 8:1 (2005): 5-27.

growth, the rate of cross-cultural missionary growth is not the highest among denominations. The issue boils down to the theological foundation of how faithfully the missionary nature of Pentecostal theology was transmitted to Asians by western missionaries. It is, therefore, surprisingly encouraging to see the steady and sometimes explosive growth of missionary forces among Asian Pentecostals.[40] However, the question still remains: What distinguishes the Asian Pentecostal missionary from the rest in their conviction and practices? There is no doubt that a healthy eschatology with the Pentecostal theology of empowerment will equip them to be a significant missionary force in the coming decades.

2.3. Toward Tomorrow

My suggestions here are restricted to the revision of Pentecostal eschatology particularly in Asia. As western Pentecostal scholarship continues its quest for revision,[41] Asians need to participate in this global journey by keeping in mind that every generation needs to hear the same message but often in a revised or re-cased form, and such collaborative work will benefit everyone.

Eschatology has at least two dimensions: the time of the Lord's return and the nature of the church and Christian life. Eschatological expectation involves the specific time of his return, as we have seen in early Pentecostal thought. Although no one knows when, the Lord's return is to be "soon." This can be explained through the journey of the church in history, as sandwiched between the Lord's ascension and the second coming. The end has begun and history is moving toward the end of the end time. However, this does not always generate the kind of eschatological urgency which would in turn create a "crisis mode" of life. In order for eschatology to be more relevant, it has to relate on a personal level. Casual life experiences attest amply that we will see him

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[40] The new "Back to Jerusalem" missionary movement of the Chinese house church networks is an example. Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing*, 103-205. Also Paul Hattaway, *Back to Jerusalem: Three Chinese House Church Leaders Share Their Vision to Complete the Great Commission* (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2003).

[41] E.g., Frank Macchia, "The Struggle for Global Witness," 23, urges Pentecostals to "rediscover the original eschatological fervor that allowed them in the early years of the movement to swim against the stream of the spirit of the age and to advocate female participation in the ministry and interracial fellowship."

rather soon, and sometimes unexpectedly soon. Thus, either the Lord returns or we go to him, both soon. Even though the Lord's return may not take place in our own generation, this should not keep us from maintaining the eschatological urgency. Life's uncertainty and unpredictability and yet the certainty of the closure itself are signs of our eschatological life.

The more important aspect of eschatology is the nature of Christian life. We are *in* the world but not *of* the world. Asian Christians, including Pentecostal believers, are keenly aware that Christians bring "foreignness" to their context not because of its western outlook but because of its radically "other" kingdom character. This pilgrim identity should be brought into the main focus of Pentecostal Christianity, which in turn will put the powerful experiential Christian life in right perspective with eternity in sight. From the same eschatological perspective, miracles and healing can be interpreted not as the manifestation of the "kingdom now," but as the sign of the token "invasion" of the kingdom of God that was inaugurated by Christ and yet in the anticipation of its fulfillment in the unknown near future. Thus, any supernatural manifestation is to be taken as a reminder or "sign" of God's reign that has begun and yet not fully recognized. Donald Gee may be theologically sound when he argued that the gift of healing has its true value when it occurs with evangelism as the ultimate goal.[42]

The good news for Asian Pentecostals is that this is not the first revision of eschatology; in fact, church history attests well that every generation has struggled with this challenge, and there are sufficient examples from which we can learn.

3. Conclusion

Going back to the beginning of this reflection, it is not true that eschatology has been the only determinant in the shaping of Asian Pentecostal thinking and ethos to its present form. Yet, the major shift in Pentecostal eschatology in the West has had an undeniable impact to Asian Pentecostalism.

The group that began as an anti-intellectual movement has come a long way as it crossed the Pacific Ocean in the past one hundred years. Now Asia boasts more than two dozen graduate-level Pentecostal

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[42] Donald Gee, *Spiritual Gifts in the Work of Ministry Today* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1963), 72-73.

institutions with at least four offering doctoral-level programs.[43] The appearance of three international[44] and at least three vernacular Pentecostal journals in Asia attests to the rising interest in higher learning.

The revision of Pentecostal eschatology is inevitable. With the explosive growth on one hand, and the ever-changing social situations on the other, Asian Pentecostals are called to engage in the constant process of theological reflection. This is the only way that the powerful spiritual tradition can have the same appeal to ever-changing generations in this diverse continent. Proactive and intentional theological undertaking is the key to the future of healthy Pentecostalism. With much history behind us, Asian Pentecostals need to demonstrate that we have learned an important lesson. Instead of blaming western Pentecostal missionaries who unintentionally brought a revised eschatology to this most populated continent, it is our turn to evaluate whether we made conscientious choices with proper evaluation of what was introduced to us. This may be the only way to renew this renewal movement, and to keep Asian Pentecostalism from falling into the trap of a modernist pop religion or an extremely self-centered utilitarian religion.

[43] A recent survey includes six schools in Korea, one in Japan, three in the Philippines, three in Indonesia, three in Singapore, two in Malaysia, one in Hong Kong and at least five in India. If Oceania is included, at least two more schools are added.

[44] *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* (Philippines), *The Spirit and Church* (Korea) and *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* (Australia).