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The Pentecostal Movement of Samoa

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Item Type	Article
Authors	Pagaialii, Tavita
Publisher	Asia Pacific Theological Seminary
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Download date	2026-06-30 08:58:37
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/236860

THE PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT OF SAMOA:
REACHING THE UTTERMOST¹

Tavita Pagaialii

1. Introduction

Nearly a century ago there was an outbreak of the Spirit known as the Azusa Street revival. This outpouring occurred between 1906 and 1913.² It is also referred to as the “third force of Christendom.”³ The year 1914 was the birth year of the Assemblies of God church.⁴ This Pentecostal movement was an instrument used by God to introduce the Pentecostal message as far as the Pacific islands. Because of the location of these islands, some refer to them as the uttermost part of the earth. Thus some feel that the arrival of the Pentecostal movement in the islands has fulfilled Jesus’ command to his disciples that they ought to be witnesses unto him “even to the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

It is to the glory of God that Pentecostal power has impacted a great harvest of souls in the islands. Recent statistics show the number of Assemblies of God churches in Fiji to be over 300. The Samoan Assemblies of God has 98 local churches, with another 180 in overseas

¹ An earlier version appears as “The Pentecostal Movement: Invading the Uttermost,” in *Reflections on Developing Asian Pentecostal Leaders: Essay in Honor of Harold Kohl*, ed. A. Kay Fountain (Baguio, Philippines: APTS Press, 2004), pp. 381-404.

² C. M. Roebeck, Jr., “Azusa Street Revival,” *International Dictionary of Pentecostal Charismatic Movements*, eds. S. Burgess and others (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), pp. 344-50 (344).

³ Gary B. McGee, *This Gospel Shall Be Preached* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1986), p. 40.

⁴ McGee, *This Gospel Shall Be Preached*, p. 79.

like USA, New Zealand and Australia. Vanuatu has about 85 local churches, and the Solomon Islands have about 20.⁵

Each island group in the South Pacific has its own unique Pentecostal story.⁶ To write an adequate account of the Pentecostal movement in each island group would cover many volumes, and deserve much time and concentration. This article is limited to and concentrates on the Pentecostal movement in Samoa:⁷ how it arrived on Samoan shores, its impact and growth and some of the challenges it now faces.

I. The Arrival of the Pentecostal Movement in Samoa

The year 1928 marked the arrival of the first Pentecostal missionary in Samoa. In that year, Rev. Herman Winkleman and his family, appointed by a local Assemblies of God church in the USA, first arrived in Pago Pago, American Samoa.⁸ His outreach ministry of witnessing in several villages resulted in the establishment of a small church in Pago Pago. After several years in Samoa, Winkleman returned to the USA, and Rev. Maurice Luce was sent as his successor, but as the first appointed missionary by the US Assemblies of God. Luce was welcomed by a church group called the Congregational Church of Jesus, a breakaway group from the London Missionary Society church, in 1944.⁹ He worked with them until he was officially designated as the Assemblies of God missionary in Samoa, at which point he took over the small church Winkleman had started.

⁵ These figures were given in an interview between the author and representatives of these islands at Asia Pacific Theological Seminary in 2002. The statistics from other islands like Tonga, Kiribati, Marshall Island, Papua New Guinea were not available at the time.

⁶ For example, the history of the Assemblies of God in Fiji has been published by Lawrence R Larson, *The Spirit in Paradise* (St. Louis, MO: Plus Communications, 1997).

⁷ There are two island groups in Samoa. One is American Samoa, a territory of the USA, the other is Samoa, formerly known as Western Samoa, and it is an independent state. However, the Samoa Assemblies of God General Council is formed of the two countries. The writer is the newly elected general superintendent of the Samoa Assemblies of God General Council.

⁸ Maurice Luce, *Samoan Assemblies of God* (Fair Oaks: Maurice Luce, 1988), p. 3.

⁹ Luce, *Samoan Assemblies of God*, p. 6.

Keise Ae, one of the early Samoan converts who is still living today said, "The Pentecostal style of worship was very new to the Samoan people who were used to a traditional quiet style."¹⁰

The Samoan people were first exposed to Christianity around 1830, when a British missionary named John Williams arrived with the gospel.¹¹ Thus the Pentecostal movement did not arrive to a pagan, but to an already so-called Christian country. The Samoans were already introduced to God for almost a century when they were first exposed to the Pentecostal movement. Their resistance to Pentecostalism at first was not so much with the message it brought but their style of worship and proclamation. The Pentecostal expressive, joyful, shouting, hand clapping, dancing and loud singing was a new and even strange kind of Christianity. So when this early Pentecostal group gathered for worship, it was not unusual to hear a rain of rocks landing on their roof. It was a reaction from the outside spectators signaling their disapproval of this new religion. However, the early pioneers continued to preach the Pentecostal message until they began to see results as people accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior. Many of them who accepted Christ were the same ones who threw rocks on the church building. They testified later that their former non-Christian behavior was out of their ignorance of the truth about the Pentecostal movement.

Missionary Luce and early pioneers worked hard and the Lord began to add souls into his kingdom. Many of those early pioneers have gone to be with the Lord. A schoolteacher named Ieti Mageo was converted and was instrumental in literature translation, sermon interpretation, pastoring and teaching. Luce and Ieti Mageo established a Christian school called Happy Valley School where new converts were trained for the ministry. A businessman named Max Haleck, Jr. was saved in a service held in his movie theatre in 1956. Eight years later he became the Superintendent of the Assemblies of God in Samoa. He had held that position until recently.¹² This shows that Christian workers were very few at the time, and they were young Christians when released to work in the ministry.

¹⁰ Keise Ae, in an interview with the writer on 7 March 2003, at her house in Pago Pago, American Samoa.

¹¹ Charles W. Forman, *The Island Churches of the South Pacific* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1982), p. 3.

¹² Rev. Max Haleck, Jr. was the Superintendent for about 40 years. He is the longest serving Assemblies of God superintendent in the South Pacific, if not in the world. He was interviewed by the writer on 7 March 2003, at his office in American Samoa.

Around 1956, Happy Valley School established an extension at the village of Faleasiu in Western Samoa.¹³ That was how the Pentecostal movement reached the other side of Samoa. It is not known why it took so many years for the movement to reach Western Samoa, and it did not spread quickly after it arrived. It was not until 1962 when a couple from New Zealand named Makisua and Mau Fatialofa arrived in Western Samoa. A revival broke out at the village of Lotopa during their evangelistic meetings which lasted for weeks.¹⁴ From those meetings many pioneers of the Pentecostal movement in Western Samoa were saved. People like Barry Smith, a European teacher who has recently gone to be with the Lord, was greatly used as an evangelist worldwide, Tavita Tasi, who also went to be with the Lord, was the Superintendent for the Western Samoa Assemblies of God District for over twenty years, Samani Pulepule who is the Superintendent for the Samoan Assemblies of God in New Zealand, a post he has held for more than twenty years now, and many others, were the results of that outpouring of the Spirit at Lotopa, Western Samoa.

From both American Samoa and Western Samoa, the Pentecostal movement was spread to other parts of the world where Samoans live. People who migrated from the two Samoas spread the movement to the mainland, New Zealand and Australia. It is noted with gratitude that the western missionaries were used of God to introduce Pentecostalism to Samoa, but then it was left to the Samoans to spread it further not only in their homeland, but to other continents of the world.

2. The Growth of the Pentecostal Movement in Samoa

The Assemblies of God (AG) is the first Pentecostal church that arrived in Samoa, and it is also held to be the fastest growing church in Samoa.¹⁵ The AG adherents are converts from the mainline churches such as the London Mission Society, Methodist and Catholic. According to a survey published in 1994 by M. Ernst, there is a decline of

¹³ Interview with Fusipala Tasi, December 3, 2002 at Vailoa Faleata, Samoa.

¹⁴ Tasi interview.

¹⁵ M. Ernst, "Pacific Island (Survey)," *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement*, eds. Stanley Burgess, and others (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), pp. 194-96 (195).

membership in the mainline churches, and the reason for such decline is because of the “explosion of the AG.”¹⁶

In the month of July 2003, the Samoan Assemblies of God celebrated its 75th anniversary. The general council has about 98 established churches, with several outreach stations. American Samoa has 38 and Western Samoa has 65 churches.¹⁷ The Samoan Assemblies of God has three Bible schools, one in American Samoa and two in Western Samoa. People who have left the Assemblies of God have formed other Pentecostal groups.¹⁸

The growth was not without difficulties as members broke away and started other groups. The difficulty now is having two or three different Pentecostal groups carrying the name Assemblies of God, although with a slight change. However, the original Assemblies of God of Samoa continues to flourish with its endeavor to spread the Pentecostal message in Samoa and to other countries. Tuvalu is a nearby island that has a Samoan missionary who now heads a local church in that island.¹⁹

The Pentecostals introduced to the islands new ways of spreading the gospel. One is the outreach they called “open air.”²⁰ This draws people from all walks of life to accept the Lord as their Savior outside of a church building. It is very fitting with the island custom where people’s leisure time is usually spent in places like markets and shopping centers. These places are targeted by the Pentecostals to hold their “open air” services because a crowd is not hard to find. People who are engaged in their daily business can still have the chance to listen to gospel music and preaching through loud-speaker sound systems. The mainline churches do not practice this kind of service, but the Pentecostal churches harvest lots of unsaved people through the open air services.

¹⁶ M. Ernst, *Winds of Change: Rapidly Growing Religious Groups in the Pacific Islands* (Suva: Pacific Conference of Churches, 1994), p. 166.

¹⁷ *General Council Statistics* (Apia, Western Samoa: District Office of the Assemblies of God, 2001).

¹⁸ The Full Gospel Church now Voice of Christ was started by Tilo, a former Assemblies of God pastor. So also the First Samoan Assemblies of God, and Samoan Pentecostal Assembly of God were started by former Assemblies of God members, who originated from the USA and New Zealand.

¹⁹ Faasegi Liuato, a graduate of Samoa Bible College, is considered a missionary from Samoa to Tuvalu, and is the pastor of the Assemblies of God church there.

²⁰ Suva the capital of Fiji, Apia the capital of Western Samoa, and Pago Pago the capital of American Samoa are locations where open air services have been held on a weekly basis.

The children and young people in Samoa and other Pacific islands are more attracted to the Pentecostal style of worship than the older folks. Pentecostals took advantage of this fact as they concentrated on trying to get the young ones saved. Then they in turn will invite their parents who will eventually join the Pentecostal churches for the sake of their young ones. Mainline churches have tried to formulate programs for their young people to help keep them in their churches instead of being attracted to Pentecostal churches,²¹ but the difference lies on the convicting power of the Spirit of Pentecost who convicts people of their sins in spite of their age. The Pentecostal movement emphasis begins from a spiritual encounter with Christ, which is in contrast with other religions' emphasis, which seems to begin from the physical and material aspect of life.²²

The Pentecostal movement has greatly influenced the church community of Samoa. With the rise of the Charismatic movement, other Christian circles have tried to accommodate parts of the Pentecostal worship into their services. An example of this is the use of Pentecostal choruses, action songs and hand clapping during services. This is a good sign to the Pentecostals when they see non-Pentecostal churches enjoying an aspect of the Pentecostal experience.

Contributing to the growth of the Pentecostal movement in Samoa is the use of the television and radio media. A Christian television network called Graceland Broadcasting Network, in cooperation with the Trinity Broadcasting Network from the USA, is broadcasting local programs hosted by Pentecostal ministers.²³ This Christian television network also broadcasts Pentecostal services from the USA by satellite twenty-four hours a day in Samoa. Two Christian radio stations, Laufou o le Talalelei and Graceland Radio Station, also broadcast mostly Pentecostal music and messages in Western Samoa. The Assemblies of God in Samoa also has a Christian radio station called WWJD, or What Would Jesus Do, radio station broadcasting in both American Samoa and Western Samoa.

²¹ A concentrated effort among mainline churches is to engage young people in sports activities.

²² To further clarify this, youth programs like sports may entertain the physical side of a young person, but only a spiritual encounter with Jesus fulfills a young person's desire. That is the emphasis Pentecostal churches concentrate upon.

²³ I have hosted a weekly TV program "Harvest Time" where the Pentecostal message is proclaimed to the TV audience both in American Samoa and Western Samoa.

While the Assemblies of God seems to have introduced the Pentecostal movement in Samoa, and while this church has grown rapidly as many souls have been saved, and churches have been established, the other side of the Pentecostal growth is seen in the establishment of other Pentecostal groups. Also, the Charismatic movement is beginning to rise in other traditional churches.²⁴ People from non-Pentecostal circles who have experienced salvation and the baptism in the Holy Spirit are returning to their churches with the desire to awaken them with their newfound experience.

The growth of the Pentecostal movement in Samoa is seen not only in the Assemblies of God, but it has spread through many other Pentecostal groups and independent groups with the Pentecostal emphasis.²⁵ Truly the Holy Spirit has moved to impact Samoa with Pentecostal power: first with the arrival of the Assemblies of God, and then through many other Pentecostal groups, which have sprung up later.

3. Challenges Facing the Pentecostal Movement in Samoa.

The Pentecostal movement faces several challenges in Samoa. These challenges can be referred to as cultural, anti-intellectual and ecumenical.

3.1 Cultural Challenge

Samoa, like other Pacific islands, has a unique culture which began from non-Christian practices, but Christianity is held by many, especially the born-again Christians in Samoa, as the standard for all cultures. Thus, the difficulty lies in how people evaluate culture in light of Christianity. The Pentecostal movement as a later form of Christianity arriving in Samoa strongly emphasizes sanctification that is exemplified by the

²⁴ The Catholic Church is welcoming adherents with the newfound Pentecostal experience. Others who have been saved in youth groups such as the Youth For Christ and YMCA are returning to their churches with the same experience. Rhema Bible Training is educating a variety of students from both Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal churches with the Pentecostal message and experience.

²⁵ Samoa has the Full Gospel Church, Voice of Christ, Evagelia Samoa, Worship Centre and many other independent churches besides the Assemblies of God.

denial of fleshly or carnal activities.²⁶ Those practices are seen by others in Christian circles as being of no harm to one's spirituality. So the challenge for the Pentecostal movement is striving to uphold its standard for holiness based on the Bible.

Another difficulty with culture is that other new Pentecostal groups seem to agree with the older ones like the Assemblies of God in doctrine, but not in practice. For example, traditional and worldly dances are permissible in some circles as long as Christian music is used for those dances.²⁷ This becomes a controversial issue in Pentecostal church groups, and it is a challenge that must be addressed in light of the scriptures.

Samoan family ties are very strong, and it is the culture of Samoa to be closely knit together as a family. However, this has its disadvantages in that many Samoans have become dependants all their lives. The challenge for the Pentecostal movement is to strike the balance between the communal and individual way of living in light of the scriptures. Another challenge is to emphasize faith and works as means to prosperity instead of totally depending on others.

Culture becomes the environment in which Christianity is practiced, as it is the context in which the scriptures are interpreted. The question is whether we need to totally forsake culture, or should we adapt some of it. "Christian beliefs must not be based only on Scriptures, but cultural values and personal convictions."²⁸ This means that the scriptures were specifically addressed to specific people to address specific situations. Thus scriptures do not seem to answer all questions, and that is why cultural values and personal convictions must be considered where the Bible does not give a direct clarification.

The Pentecostal movement will do well to carefully consider culture in the Pacific islands in light of the scripture. It is an ongoing challenge because culture keeps changing, thus Pentecostals must always adjust

²⁶ Drinking, smoking and gambling are examples of carnal behavior that born-again Christians do not do. However, other Christians hold that these behaviors do not hinder one's Christian life.

²⁷ I was invited to a wedding in a new Pentecostal group Worship Center where Christian music was played and members were called on to dance. People got up and performed worldly dances.

²⁸ Russell P. Spittler's statement to my question in the class, "Issues in Asian Pentecostalism" (Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, Baguio City, Philippines, Oct. 2002).

their views in relation to cultural changes, yet still uphold the scriptural view.

3.2 Anti-Intellectual Challenge

This challenge is both external and internal. The external aspect refers to the view by some non-Pentecostals that Pentecostal ministers lack ministerial training and education.²⁹ The internal aspect refers to the view held by some Pentecostals that ministry relies totally on the Spirit, thus education and training are not necessary.³⁰ This is a great challenge for the Pentecostals in the Pacific. The establishment of Bible schools in the Pacific is an attempt to face this challenge. South Pacific Bible College in Fiji was established as a central training institute in the Pacific where graduates from regional Bible schools in other islands can further their studies.³¹ Asia Pacific Theological Seminary in Baguio, Philippines has also established a master-level extension program in Fiji for the Pacific islands.³²

In Samoa, there are three Bible schools where future ministers are being trained for the ministry.³³ These Bible schools help supply the Assemblies of God in Samoa with trained ministers, and thus eliminate the view that Pentecostal ministers are not trained. Other Pentecostal ministers in Samoa are graduates of overseas Pentecostal seminaries, and are now instrumental in leading training institutes in Samoa.³⁴ Pastors' seminars and workers' workshops are held occasionally to help train lay people in ministry.

²⁹ This is because many Pentecostal ministers lack ministry training, due to their sudden call to ministry and the rare opportunity to enter seminary training.

³⁰ This is an issue in Pentecostalism in the Pacific, where many feel that training is not a necessity in ministry as long as one has the Spirit.

³¹ Almost all the Pacific islands have three-year program Bible schools. Only South Pacific Bible College has a four-year program, thus graduates with diplomas from other schools can complete BA degrees at this college in an additional year.

³² Those with BA degrees can enroll in various master's programs in seminaries.

³³ Samoa Bible College is in American Samoa. Harvest Bible College and Ierusalem Fou Bible College are in Western Samoa.

³⁴ Samoa Bible College and Harvest Bible College have principals who graduated from Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, Philippines, while Ierusalem Fou Bible College's principal is a graduate of Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, MO, USA.

Other Pentecostal groups have also established training institutes to train their workers for future ministries.³⁵ It is interesting to note that many non-Pentecostal church members are now studying in Pentecostal Bible schools.³⁶ The Pentecostal movement has seized the opportunity to train lay people, while non-Pentecostals concentrate on the clergy. This has improved the moving of the Spirit in Samoa as lay people experience Pentecostal power and impact their non-Pentecostal churches with their newfound experience. Although that effort has been confronted with opposition, as some traditional churches do not welcome what their members have brought, sometimes it has resulted in people leaving their traditional churches to join Pentecostal groups.

There is steady progress in education within the Pentecostal movement in Samoa and the Pacific. With the help from overseas in sending missionary teachers, and with many local workers who have returned to their homelands after pursuing studies overseas, training institutes have been strengthened.

The anti-Intellectual challenge can be dealt with by exposing lay people to training that equips them for the ministry. There should be a balance in emphasis given to both Christian education and the work of the Spirit which some claim to be the only requirement for ministry. While people of the anti-intellectual view support it by referring to the disciples as unlearned, they overlook the fact that the disciples were followers of the Master Teacher.

This challenge calls for a wider understanding among Pentecostals. One area that is lacking is Pentecostal scholarly writings. Preachers and teachers are rising within the movement, but most of their studies are drawn from textbooks written by non-Pentecostal scholars. Thus the need is for adherents of this movement to begin to address this lack and to make every effort in order for it to be overcome.³⁷ Bible school students of the Pentecostal movement must be provided with Pentecostal scholarly research writing.

Although the anti-intellectual issue seems difficult to deal with, it is encouraging to note the view of one of the older Pentecostal ministers in

³⁵ Full Gospel Church has a Bible school. Rhema Bible Training is another Bible school where Pentecostal workers are trained for ministry.

³⁶ Rhema Bible Training in Apia the capital of Western Samoa has many students from mainline non-Pentecostal churches.

³⁷ *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* published by Asia Pacific Theological Seminary (Baguio, Philippines) is one recent attempt within the Pentecostal movement to address this need.

Samoa which reflects a positive view regarding Christian education. Max Haleck, Jr., former superintendent of the Assemblies of God in Samoa for over forty years stated:

Bible School training is a must and seems to be the backbone of the Pentecostal movement in Samoa, if not the world. Without it, there will be no growth because people will continue to be ignorant of the proper direction to take, and the ministry will always lack workers to do the work of the ministry. Every effort must be made to enhance Bible School training within the Pentecostal Movement.³⁸

This view sums up the need for proper training within the movement. The opportunity is great for Pentecostals to be equipped both intellectually and spiritually, which will help to avoid the unbalanced view of the help of the Spirit many seem to claim. For this movement to continue to flourish in future generations, there needs to be an appropriate appreciation of the Spirit, his gifts, and the need for proper training. Proper training will safeguard the movement from unusual, and even, false interpretation of the scripture and the work of the Spirit, which eventually leads to false doctrines.

3.3 Ecumenical Challenge

William Menzies introduced this challenge when he asked, "How are Pentecostal and Charismatic organizations to arrange themselves so that they can not only function well within their own constituency, but also relate constructively to other church bodies?"³⁹ The early response which the Pentecostal movement in Samoa faced was that of resistance and hatred. But as years went by, and the power of Pentecost continued to penetrate and impact lives, the response somehow changed. Instead of resistance, there seems to be a curiosity from outside the movement regarding its methods and power. Thus, this challenge presents an opportunity for the movement to seek constructive ways to share what it has with other religious groups.

The Samoan Council of Churches invites all religious groups in Samoa to join. While one Pentecostal group has joined, the Assemblies

³⁸ Interview with Rev. Max Haleck, Jr. on 7 March 2003 at his office in Tafuna, American Samoa.

³⁹ W. Menzies, "Reflection of a Pentecostal at the End of the Millennium," *Asians Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 1 (1998), pp. 3-14 (10).

of God has not.⁴⁰ A variety of reasons are behind this. Some feel that to join such a council would limit the church's mission, as mainline churches would control the newer ones. Others feel that to join them opens up other avenues, which would have been otherwise inaccessible.⁴¹ It is difficult to determine the outcome of a move to join such a council, as most Pentecostal churches are still operating outside of it. The Assemblies of God would not tolerate a demand to limit its sphere of doctrines and practice, as the work of the Spirit must not be controlled by human demands.

Many times, Pentecostals feel the need to share with non-Pentecostals on matters that build up the body of Christ. As Donald Gee said, "It is time to burn the partitions, not one another."⁴² Gee particularly referred to the need for unity among Pentecostal groups. This was the beginning of unity with non-Pentecostal churches. Caution must be exercised among Pentecostal churches so that there are no barriers between them. It is hard to seek unity with non-Pentecostals when there is disunity among Pentecostals. Therefore, the ecumenical challenge is an opportunity for the Pentecostals to seek unity among themselves, as an initiative towards unity with other Christian groups.

Another way this challenge can be addressed starts from the leadership of both sides. Those in leadership positions within Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal groups must discuss ways to help build the kingdom of God. At present, this is not happening. For example, one Evangelical leader referred to Pentecostal ministers as "sheep thieves"⁴³ who build their churches on converts from other Christian groups. While Pentecostals do not usually respond to this kind of allegation, it shows that church leaders need to discuss matters pertaining to the church at large.

On the other hand, it appears that the younger generation of Evangelical ministers feels differently about Pentecostals. They are more open to what Pentecostals have and are beginning to accommodate

⁴⁰ Full Gospel Pentecostal Church recently joined the Samoa Council of Churches.

⁴¹ Only member churches of the Council of Churches have access to broadcast their services over the national television and radio in Samoa.

⁴² Donald Gee, *Toward Pentecostal Unity* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1961), p. 8.

⁴³ A statement of Oka Fauolo, chairman of the Council of Churches in Samoa in Cathrin Schaer, "Religious Clashes in Paradise," *Sunday Observer*, Nov. 24, 2002, p. 2.

anything that would benefit their ministry.⁴⁴ It is believed that in generations to come, the ecumenical challenge will bear good results. Future leaders have a good chance of working together in spite of religious differences. It is not only the Pentecostals who have something to give to other churches; Evangelicals and other Christian religious groups also have something Pentecostals must learn. This is the attitude each side must adopt. When we are able to learn from each other things that contribute to building up the body of Christ, that alone will bring revival as it will show unity among Christian churches to the world. Truly, the ecumenical challenge is an avenue towards unity among the Pentecostal movement and other Christian groups in Samoa and the Pacific.

4. Conclusion

The Pentecostal movement greatly influenced the Pacific islands. Its humble beginning as it arrived into a part of the world which had long being reached by the gospel was an opportunity God used to usher in the Pentecostal power of the Spirit. Many miracles were recorded in those early years of Pentecostal infancy. As one former evangelical minister, now Pentecostal, said referring to the Pentecostal movement, "It is God reaching out again to his people in a new dimension."⁴⁵

To evangelize a Christian nation is as hard as evangelizing a pagan one. Although there were persecutions and difficulties, the power of God sustained early pioneers of the movement who persevered through much hardship. As a result, the movement has impacted almost all islands of the Pacific. Fiji and Samoa are probably the two Pacific islands where the Pentecostal movement is most prominent, compared to other island nations in the Pacific.

Specifically speaking, the Assemblies of God as a Pentecostal church has grown rapidly in Samoa, and has also reached other countries where there are Samoan communities. Such growth has been noticed by other religious groups, and has been surveyed and researched by their statisticians. This is a good sign for the Pentecostal movement. It shows

⁴⁴ Ministers from non-Pentecostal groups often attend Pentecostal emphasis gatherings, such as the Benny Hinn Crusade in May, 2001. Pentecostal worship songs and practices are now being used in non-Pentecostal churches.

⁴⁵ Written response of Livi Toelupe to my questionnaire, Nov. 2002.

this movement is of the Spirit, or people would not be converted to it, and other religious groups would not have shown interest in it.

As times change, and each generation brings new challenges, the Pentecostal movement is faced with the need for adjustment and evaluation. Culture must be evaluated in light of the scriptures. The Pentecostals must always view the scriptures as the standard for all cultures. Where culture is not in line with the scriptures, the Pentecostal movement must never adopt it, especially in places like the islands where some of the culture is pagan oriented.

Education is moving at a fast pace, and the Pentecostal movement must make every effort to enhance Christian education. The anti-intellectual mindset must not be tolerated. The church must advance itself in proclaiming the gospel. Moreover, Pentecostals must take advantage of the available means and opportunities where they can be trained to fulfill their call. One must never stop learning. While it is encouraging to see many graduates from Pentecostal Bible schools and seminaries entering the ministry, they must also be challenged to take the opportunity for further study when it comes.

Our inheritance as Pentecostals must be shared. Others are longing to have the Pentecostal power. We must strive to bridge the gap between us and other non-Pentecostal groups. There are many more souls we can reach through a combined evangelistic effort with other Christian circles. There are also lessons we can learn from those other groups. Thus the ecumenical challenge must be seen as a blessing and not a threat. The purpose of God through Christ must be the purpose of our existence. When God is glorified through the Pentecostal movement, and souls are added into God's kingdom, we can gladly proclaim that the mission has been accomplished.

Samoa as a Pacific island nation is an example of how God, through the Pentecostal movement, has reached as far as the ends of the earth with his power. It has transformed those who may have been Christians by name, but did not have a personal encounter with God. The arrival of this movement has somehow quenched the thirst of souls who may have been longing for more than just a mere knowledge of God. What was needed was a personal encounter with an experience of his saving grace, followed by an empowering encounter with the Holy Spirit through baptism and speaking in tongues, and a manifestation of his power through signs and wonders. That was how the Pentecostal fire was lit in Samoa, and through the years, it has continued to burn brightly. It was not exempt from persecutions and trials, but God has been faithful in keeping that fire burning.

Thanks be to God for his sustaining power, and also to the early pioneers of this movement who labored courageously for the cause of Christ. Their labors have brought this movement to where it is today. There is a younger generation of eager Pentecostal students God is raising in the Pacific. Some are now engaged in ministry while many more are studying in their local Bible schools, and in other Pentecostal graduate and post-graduate schools.⁴⁶ These will carry on the work previous generations have begun. This movement has become a blessing to the islands, and we can humbly proclaim that this movement has truly invaded the uttermost. Amen.

⁴⁶ APTS in Baguio, Philippines, AGTS in Springfield now have graduates who are engaged in pastoral and Bible school ministry in Samoa and Fiji Islands. Students from the Pacific are presently studying at APTS.