

Globethics Repository



Outpouring of the Spirit

This page was generated automatically upon download from the Globethics Repository. More information on Globethics see <https://www.globethics.net>. Data and content policy of Globethics Repository see <https://repository.globethics.net/pages/policy>.

Item Type	Article
Authors	Yan Kung, Lap
Publisher	Asia Pacific Theological Seminary
Rights	With permission of the license/copyright holder
Download date	2026-09-22 09:37:39
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/237017

OUTPOURING OF THE SPIRIT:
A REFLECTION ON PENTECOSTALS' IDENTITY¹

Lap Yan Kung

No Christian theology can avoid paying attention to the significance of Pentecostalism. Apart from the growing numbers of Pentecostals,² Pentecostalism retrieves the forgotten person of the Trinity, namely, the Holy Spirit, in Christian doctrine and living.³ Nevertheless, the Pentecostal movement not only brings the churches to renewal, but also to schism.⁴ This ambiguity is a basic fact that we have to take seriously. We have to be fair that schism is not what the churches (Pentecostal or Evangelical) want or intend, but schism gives Pentecostalism a bad

¹ An earlier version of the paper was presented at the Second Annual Meeting of the Asian Pentecostal Society at Asian Seminary of Christian Ministry, Makati, Philippines on August 25, 2000.

² David Barrett's *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) estimates that in the year 1991, around 392 million people would be involved in Pentecostalism, and that the annual increase amounted to nineteen million. There is still no sign that this growth will decline in the immediate future.

³ A lot of works on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit have been published in the last 30 years. For instance, Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3 vols. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983); Adasair Heron, *The Holy Spirit* (London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1983); G. W. H. Lampe, *God as Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977); Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life* (London: SCM, 1992).

⁴ Split can be found at the very roots of Pentecostalism, which was itself divided into various sects, such as Elim and Assemblies of God. Classical Pentecostal churches also lived with a sharp distinction between mainline churches and themselves. For instance, the "Toronto Blessing" has very rapidly become divided, and there has been a split between Wimber's "Vineyard" churches and the Airport Vineyard Church in Toronto where the "Toronto Blessing" originated.

name, because schism is exactly a sign that the Spirit is not at work.⁵ Even though in recent years there is a better understanding and communication between Pentecostals and Evangelicals,⁶ this does not enhance our understanding of the work of the Spirit. What I mean is that they may be more open to one another and less critical toward one another than before, but their basic framework of understanding the work of the Holy Spirit remains unchanged. The thesis of this paper is to argue that the task of Pentecostalism does not lie in improving the relations between the Pentecostals and Evangelicals, but depends upon recalling its identity, namely, the eschatological sign of the outpouring of the Spirit. This sign is the nature of the church. Such a concern is involved in a shift from the apostles' paradigm of understanding of the Spirit to Isaiah's paradigm. This proposal is not to neglect the significance of any particular charismatic experience, but to recover the central message of the outpouring of the Spirit whom the Pentecostals are dependent upon.

1. Is the Difference between Pentecostals and Evangelicals Unbridgeable?

What makes Pentecostalism so controversial among the Christian churches? Michael Welker lists five major characteristics of the Pentecostal movement. They are:

1. Members of the charismatic movement emphasize that they have experienced with new power the reality and presence of God.
2. Members of the charismatic movement emphasize that they have come to a new awareness of community and to new community experiences.
3. Members of the charismatic movement emphasize that among themselves the abundance and diversity of the gifts of the Spirit are taken seriously.

⁵ See the history of the Donatist Controversy of the third and fourth century. Augustine argues that schism and the betrayal of faith are both sinful. For Cyprian, schism is by far the most serious sin.

⁶ Some consider that the "fourth wave" of the Charismatic movement is the unity between the Pentecostals and Evangelicals. See David Pawson, *Fourth Wave* (London: Edward England, 1993). Besides, we notice that the ecumenicals and the Pentecostals come near together now. See Arnold Bittlinger, ed., *The Church's Charismatic* (Geneva: WCC, 1981); and Jürgen Moltmann ed., *Pentecostal Movements as an Ecumenical Challenge* (London: SCM, 1996).

4. Members of the charismatic movement emphasize that for them the relativizing and removing of confessional boundaries and an attendant opening to an ecumenical Christianity have become an important sign of the power of the Spirit's action.
5. Members of the charismatic movement emphasize the experience termed baptism in the Holy Spirit.⁷

Among these five characteristics, different Pentecostals are allowed to have different degrees of emphasis and interpretation. If what Welker summarizes is valid, we do not see any sound theological reason why the Evangelicals are antagonistic to the Pentecostals, because it is clear that most of the Christian churches would welcome these five emphases one way or another. But in reality, their relation is still in tension. From the content of their discussion, I notice three main divergences between them. Firstly, Pentecostal movements usually have a two-tier concept of spirituality, and this is inherently threatening, because such theology creates a sharp distinction between those who have the particular experience, and those who have not. There are people who are "in," and people who are "out," but ought to be "in." A good example of this is the awkward implications of the classical Pentecostal doctrine of "baptism in the Spirit."⁸ Secondly, Pentecostalism emphasizes the work of the Spirit, and brings with it an experience of unusual power, and even abnormal phenomena, such as, healing, speaking in tongues and prophecy. Since the event of the "Toronto Blessing" some more abnormal phenomena are characterized. David Lewis summarizes them as tingling in one's hands, hand or arm shaking, stiffening of one's body, weeping, laughing, fluttering of one's eyelids, falling over, screaming, hot areas on one's body, change in one's breathing, behavior resembling drunkenness and others.⁹ All these experience are not only alien from the Evangelical understanding of spirituality, but also different from their traditional

⁷ Michael Welker, *God the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), pp. 11-13. I am aware of the differences between the Charismatic and Pentecostal movements. Especially for the Pentecostals, Pentecostals and Charismatic movements are not interchangeable. But Welker's summary may still be validly applied to the Pentecostals. See Stanley Burgess and Gary B. McGee, eds., *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988).

⁸ See David Middlemiss, *Interpreting Charismatic Experience* (London: SCM, 1996), pp. 1-30.

⁹ David Lewis, *Healing: Fiction, Fantasy or Fact* (London: Hodder, 1989), p. 185.

emphasis on Christology.¹⁰ Thirdly, the Pentecostals emphasize the significance of the “middle spectrum” in their theology. This is the spectrum where the spirits’ activities take place. Our world, thus, is seen as warfare between God and the evil spirits. Christians are asked to struggle with these spirits in their world.¹¹ Such kind of “middle spectrum” theology sounds irrational in western academic theology.¹²

These theological and practical differences do not easily bring the Pentecostals and Evangelicals together. Nevertheless, we notice that the Evangelicals since the 1980s have been developing a piety centered on the Holy Spirit and on experiences of the Spirit, without being directly connected to the Pentecostal movement. For instance, the charismatic worship that emphasizes singing short hymns, use of different types of musical instruments, and prayer of healing have been introduced to the Evangelical churches. In order to meet the needs of the young people, some of the Evangelical churches hold two different services, namely, the traditional and the charismatic.¹³ On the other hand, the Pentecostals stress less exclusive and authoritative interpretation of the work of the Holy Spirit. Undoubtedly, such a move can release tension between them. However, this is not enough, because their attempts are more likely a matter of tolerance or even positively stated, a result of mutual appreciation, but they do not enhance our deeper understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit. In other words, their framework of understanding the Spirit remains unchanged. Despite their difference, the Pentecostals and Evangelicals share the same framework of understanding the Spirit, namely, the paradigm of the apostles’ experience.

¹⁰ This may be understood in terms of the debate between logos-Christology and spirit-Christology. The former emphasizes Jesus Christ as the sole criterion of Christian theology.

¹¹ Such kind of understanding is clearly expressed in the works of John Wimber, *Power Evangelism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986) and *Power Healing* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

¹² For instance, most of the works on systematic theology do not give a chapter on the theology of “middle spectrum.”

¹³ This is one of the features of the Hong Kong churches. But is such kind of arrangement a kind of schism within the same church?

2. Apostles' Experience

When we pay attention to most of the reference between the Pentecostals and Evangelicals, we find that their reference to the Holy Spirit mainly comes from the apostles' experience. The Pentecostals emphasize the experience of the Acts of the Apostles, while the Evangelicals consider Paul's experience as primary. Both sides seldom refer to the Old Testament. This is quite understandable because the Spirit in the Old Testament is less explicit and clear than in the New Testament.¹⁴ More importantly, the Christian churches have an ideological preference for the New Testament. This ideological preference considers that the Old Testament is the shadow of the New, and the New Testament is the fulfillment of the promise of the Old. Obviously, such an ideological preference is an extension of the understanding of Jesus Christ as God's revelation.¹⁵ Because of this ideological preference, the contribution of the Old Testament to the understanding of the Holy Spirit is ignored. Apart from this, it may be argued whether it is more appropriate to read the New Testament in the light of the Old, because if the New is the fulfillment of the Old, we then have to know what the Old Testament's promise is about. Otherwise, the term fulfillment has no content, and we do not know what is going to be fulfilled. On the other hand, the biblical authors are subject to their socio-political context, and this shapes the interpretations of their faith. For instance, the Old Testament is mostly addressed to the Israelites as a nation and a people, but the New Testament is mostly addressed to the church and individuals. Obviously, this difference of emphasis will produce two different pictures of the Holy Spirit (although these two pictures have commonalities between them). Thus, we cannot say that the New Testament has a better interpretation of the Spirit than the Old, and *vice versa*. It is because each author has his own emphasis and concern. How then is the Holy Spirit portrayed in the New Testament?

According to the Pentecostals, their experience of the Spirit is most likely dependent upon the Acts of the Apostles. The Pentecostal event mentioned in Acts 2:1-13 is a testimony of the fulfillment of the promise of God, that is, the outpouring of the Spirit. This is exactly why Peter

¹⁴ See Gary D. Badcock, *Light of Truth and Fire of Love* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 8-34.

¹⁵ Because Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the God's promise, and he can only be known in the New Testament. As a result, this makes the New Testament have a different status.

quoted Joel 2:28-32 to justify this moment of time. In this particular event, the work of the Spirit is characterized by speaking in foreign language, prophecy, vision, miracles, and power evangelism. In later development, the outpouring of the Spirit is characterized by the baptism in the Spirit, healing and exorcism. These phenomena or characteristics become the basic framework of understanding the activities of the Spirit. In fact, we can easily detect a close link with the Acts' experience of the Spirit and the contemporary Pentecostals' concern and emphases.

Unlike the Pentecostals, the Evangelicals emphasize Paul's teaching of the Spirit. Paul, unlike the Acts of Apostles, does not say much about the external expressions of the work of the Spirit, such as, healing and speaking in tongues. But he considers rather that the work of the Spirit is to build up the churches (1 Cor 12-14) and bring one to have a relation with God (Gal 3:1-5; Rom 8:16). Regarding the latter, the Spirit is viewed as both the source and goal of the believer's life. Themes like the justification of life, the rebirth to life and the sanctification of life often occur. Besides, because of Paul's experience of being put on trial, he emphasizes that the Spirit of God is the guarantee of God's act of justification and brings us to freedom (Rom 8:2, 6; 2 Cor 3:17).

This basic different understanding of the Spirit between the Acts and Paul explains why the Pentecostals and Evangelicals do not find it easy to come together. Nevertheless, their difference is only a matter of emphasis, and in fact they share a lot with one another. Firstly, both sides understand the work of the Spirit chiefly on an individual level. The Pentecostals talk about the individual's healing and baptism in the Spirit, while the Evangelicals talk about the individual's holiness. Secondly, both sides consider that the work of the Spirit is concerned about the spiritual existence of a personal being. The Pentecostals talk about speaking in tongues and spiritual warfare, while the Evangelicals talk about inner reconciliation with God. Thirdly, both sides see that the work of the Spirit mainly takes place within the ecclesial (institutional) context, not in a socio-political arena. Therefore, it seems to me that moving towards another side of one's own is not a promising way to solve the misunderstanding between the Pentecostals and Evangelicals, because the outcome would be more or less the same, that is, an individual, spiritual and ecclesial framework of understanding. This does not retrieve the core of the work of the Spirit. According to the Old Testament, the outpouring of the Spirit is an eschatological sign, and this is exactly why Peter quoted Joel 2 after the experience of speaking in foreign languages. In his sermon, Peter considers that Jesus Christ is the realization of God's promise, and the outpouring of the Spirit is a

testimony to it. Then, it is necessary to understand what this eschatological sign is about, and I consider that this is the hermeneutical key to Pentecostalism. Now, we turn to the Book of Joel.

3. Re-reading Joel

The promise mentioned in Joel 2:28-32 cannot be understood in isolation, because it is a response to God's call to lament (1:1-2:27), and leads to the announcement of judgment (3:1-20).¹⁶ Therefore, Joel 2:28-32 has to be understood in the context of the whole Book of Joel.

Joel 2:28-32 suggests that the promise of the pouring out of the Spirit comes as a response to the people's lamentation and repentance. In his promise, God will restore the land of faithfulness (2:19, 21-26), deliver Judah from its enemies (2:20), and more importantly, assure his people of his presence among them (2:27-32). The goal of these promises of salvation is that his people may know God, and the promise of the Spirit functions here as the guarantee of the fulfillment of his promises, especially the promise of the knowledge of God. Thus, when we read Joel's saying that "your sons and daughters shall prophecy, your old people shall dream dreams..." (v. 28), all of these signify that all will have immediate knowledge of God.

Nevertheless, the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit is an integral aspect of the salvation that God promises. Joel is not introducing a new promise, but rather a promise shared with and/or inherited from other traditions, such as Isaiah and Ezekiel. Therefore, the promise in Joel should be understood in the wider context of God's promise in the Old Testament rather than as a different promise. It is true that the promise in Joel mentions prophecy, dreams and visions that are not found in other relevant texts, but they are only the signs, not the core message of the outpouring of the Spirit. The core message of the outpouring of the Spirit is God's salvation, because it is God's response to the people's lament. I will come back to this point later.

The promise in Joel mentions that the Spirit is poured out on "all flesh." All flesh can be simply understood as humans or a collective noun that includes sons and daughters, young and old people, male and female slaves. Nevertheless, Hans Walter Wolff calls attention to the fact that the phrase, "on all flesh" highlights in general "the weak, the powerless

¹⁶ See Larry R. Queen, *Joel and the Spirit* (Sheffield; Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

and the hopeless” as “recipients of new life with God.”¹⁷ It is because “flesh” in the Hebrew Bible refers to humans in their infirmity.¹⁸ Indeed it is not only female and male slaves, but also the old and the young who are highlighted as recipients of new life. The old women and men are the people who are passing away, who no longer are present in full power, and who will soon belong to the past. Young persons are the people who are not yet powerfully present, whose effectiveness lies in the future. Yet it is certain that sons and daughters mean not only young people, but the old, and to no less an extent the powerful and hopeful men and women of the generation standing in the middle of life. They, too, are to receive the Spirit and thus new life with God and with each other.

Besides, it picks them up inasmuch as the explicit promise is made that male and female slaves will also receive the Spirit. The promise holds fast to the conviction that the action of the Spirit of righteousness occurs for the benefit of the economically weak and the socially disadvantaged. The Spirit remains a Spirit of righteousness who binds together justice and mercy. The Spirit remains a Spirit who mediates attentiveness to those who are weaker with the act of working towards equal status for all persons. Privileges based upon gender or age or social standing will end when the Spirit is poured out. One thing that is necessary to point out is that “all flesh” does not mean the whole world, but everybody in Israel, for according to the introduction in 2:19 this oracle pertains to God’s people, and immediately preceding it the manifestation of God “in the midst of Israel” has been announced (2:27).

The wonders in the heavens and on the earth (2:30-31) are signs of the salvation of the people of Judah. On the other hand, wonders can also be understood as God’s judgment. This is exactly what the following chapter after the promise testifies, that is, God’s announcement of judgment. In fact, even in the event of the Exodus, both the message of salvation and the announcement of judgment can be discerned in the wonders. This is to explain why the outpouring of the Spirit cannot be understood apart from the day of the Lord.

In relation to the Acts of the Apostles, we find that firstly, the apostles extend the promise in Joel to the gentiles (Acts 10:44-47). This goes beyond the promise mentioned in Joel, but is in line with God’s promise in Isaiah, for instance. Secondly, the apostles consider that the Pentecostal event is a testimony of God’s salvation. This is obvious in Peter’s sermon (Acts 2). God’s salvation is primary, and signs are

¹⁷ H. W. Wolff, *Joel and Amos* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), p. 67.

¹⁸ H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1974), p. 26.

secondary. Signs need not indicate anything extraordinary, and the extraordinary need not refer to a sign. For Peter, the importance of the experience of speaking in foreign languages is a sign of the fulfillment of God's promise rather than the experience of speaking itself. Thirdly, if Joel's promise is related to God's judgment, we find that the judgmental message is implicit in the Acts of the Apostles. Despite that, we have to know that the salvation message itself implies both "yes" and "no," that is, a "yes" to those who lament, and a "no" to those who oppress.

4. God's Promise in Isaiah

As being said before, the promise of the Spirit in Joel quoted by Peter is not an independent promise, but rather is an integral aspect of God's salvation. This becomes clear when we refer to the Book of Isaiah.¹⁹ The messianic texts (11:1-10; 42:1-4; 61:1-3) will be particularly chosen to illustrate what the promise of the Spirit is.

We find that these three messianic texts attest to the fact that God's Spirit is a Spirit of justice and peace. They all announce God's chosen bringer of salvation, upon whom the Spirit not only comes in a surprising way, but upon whom the Spirit also remains. The understanding of the Spirit of God now appears to be settled in the truest sense of the word: the Spirit of God rests. For the bringer of salvation, God's Spirit is an enduring endowment. These three messianic texts have different emphases due to three different periods of time,²⁰ but they all share the basic message of the power and authority of the person who bears God's Spirit that lies in the fact that this person establishes justice, mercy and knowledge of God, and gives them a universal extension.

Isaiah 11:1-10 promises that the bearer of the Spirit brings righteousness. He does not judge by appearance or by hearsay. He judges the helpless righteously; he decides for the poor of the land. He dispenses mercy in the place of judicial decision-making. He judges, and

¹⁹ Wonsuk Ma makes a very good and precise study of the Spirit of God in his book, *Until the Spirit Comes* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999). Nevertheless, my concern here is not to provide a summary of a theology of the Spirit of God in the Book of Isaiah, but rather to emphasize the messianic texts. The messianic texts are chosen mainly because Jesus Christ concretizes what the outpouring of the Spirit means.

²⁰ Put simply, they are the pre-exilic Isaianic Spirit tradition, exilic Isaianic Spirit tradition and post-exilic Isaianic Spirit tradition. See Wonsuk Ma, *Until the Spirit Comes*.

establishes justice. The bearer of the Spirit does not moralize at the expense of the cultivation of justice. For example, he does not develop an abundance of exceptions for the weak without regard for justice. The weak shall be treated with righteousness, and justice shall adjust to protecting the weak. The text does not stop at here. In verse 6, it turns to describe a universal condition of peace that even includes animals. The passage concludes with the promise that nothing evil will be done and no more crimes will be committed, because the land will be filled with the knowledge of God, inasmuch as the realization of justice and mercy is bound up with a knowledge of God that fills the whole land.

Nevertheless, the promise holds out the prospect of the establishment of justice, mercy and knowledge of God not remaining confined to Israel. Israel becomes conspicuous to the nations in a particular way. Filled with righteousness and knowledge of God, Israel directly attracts the nations. The establishment of justice, mercy and knowledge of God is accompanied by a power of influence and attraction in relation to the nations. The revelation of God - not only for Israel, which is described both as the establishment of an eschatological condition of freedom in Israel and as the gathering of the dispersed. The revelation does not lead merely to the nations taking wide-eyed cognizance in one way or another. It leads rather to changes in orientation and in behavior. The nations seek out Israel, orient themselves toward Israel, and take as a model the people that reflect nothing less than divine glory.

The second passage, Isa 42:1-8, emphasizes more strongly than Isaiah 11 that the justice brought by the bearer of the Spirit is established universally and recognized universally. God's chosen one brings justice to the nations, establishes justice on earth. Mercy, the act of going to meet those who are weaker, the suffering and the disadvantaged, is again emphasized. The messianic bearer of the Spirit is called to open eyes that are blind, to bring prisoners out of the dungeon, and to free from prison all those who sit in darkness.

In this passage, the term "justice" is sounded three times (vv. 1, 3, 4). The characteristic notion of justice, rooted in the Mosaic tradition and explicated in prophetic utterance, is the reordering of social life and social power so that the weak (widows and orphans) may live a life of dignity, security and well-being. Regarding the mandate of the servant, it is first voiced in two sweeping phrases, "covenant to the people" and "light to the nations" (v. 5). The phrase is commonly taken to mean that Israel is to live as to bring others to a defining relationship with Yahweh or, alternatively, to transform social relationships in order to make them neighborly. The poetry seems to entertain the thought that social

relationships in the world can be radically reordered, and the servant is to effect that reordering. The second phrase, “light to the nations,” also offers a general notion of rehabilitation.

In verse 7, it talks about the prisoner. In the ancient world, imprisonment is primarily an economic function so that the poor are imprisoned. This authorization perhaps suggests something like the ancient Israelite practice of debt cancellation, whereby the poor may be released from prison because they are released from debt (see Deut 15:1-11). In verses 8-9, it affirms that it is Yahweh and only Yahweh who acts. Thus the call of the servant is to make clear that it is the will of the creator that is to be enacted by the servant.

Finally, the third text, Isa 61:1-3, promises that the bearer of the Spirit chosen by God brings good news to the oppressed, binds up those who are of broken heart, proclaims liberty to the captives, comforts those who are mourning, awakens a song of praise instead of a faint spirit. This mercy is not regarded as some sort of charitable good deed toward the weak, but as an act of establishing righteousness. The event is also universally perceived as such. Through the bearer of the Spirit, God brings forth righteousness and praise before all the nations, which is described in still more detail in Isaiah 62.

“The year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance” refers to the practice of the jubilee year authorized in Leviticus 25, when all properties lost in economic transactions will be restored and returned in order to permit a stable, functioning community. It is not an anticipation. Rather it concerns the concrete issues of a community in trouble, and it proposes a transformative response out of Yahweh’s resolve. The proclamation is something of a test case for the way in which the Old Testament holds together theological vision and concrete economic practice.

From the above discussion of the three messianic texts, we realize that firstly, the promised Spirit is the Spirit of justice and peace. It reminds us that for all of royal Israel’s compromise and opportunism, it still kept alive a sense of its distinctiveness as a community committed to justice in public affairs, justice for the weak and vulnerable. Secondly, insofar as Isa 42:1-8, with its clear messianic flavor, can be drawn upon as an illumination of Jesus, it is a reminder that Jesus cannot be reduced to privatistic salvation or to sacramental operations, but that Jesus was received, celebrated and eventually crucified precisely for his embodiment and practice of this vision of social possibility. Therefore, any form or tendency of privatization and spiritualization of God’s promise of the Spirit is misleading and distorted. Thirdly, outpouring of

the Spirit is about a social vision, a new creation. It aims at re-ordering our social relations and re-structuring our social behavior. Finally, from the messianic texts themselves, we notice that the outpouring of the Spirit takes place through mediation. In Christian term, this is Jesus Christ. The relation between the Spirit and Jesus Christ is best illustrated in current emphasis on the Spirit-Christology.²¹ Since the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the establishment of the church is seen as a continuation of Jesus' ministry.²² Thus, the Spirit, Jesus Christ and the church are closely related.

5. A Fresh Look at the New Testament

What I have done so far is to establish a thesis that any understanding of the Holy Spirit should not ignore the contribution of the Old Testament, and that the Old Testament testifies that the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit is about a vision of social possibility. In Jesus' life, we find that this promise is not carried out through a struggle for political power or the establishment of a new government, but rather through the transformation of values and the establishment of a new polity, namely, the church. The church is not simply a purely religious institution, but rather is an alternative society of those that decide to live in accordance with the Spirit and to proclaim the message of salvation. In this sense, we then can understand why the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is very seldom related to the social vision mentioned in the Old Testament. It is because the Old Testament's vision is already accepted with no reservation, while the New Testament is concerned about how this vision is carried out, and the building up of the church as an alternative society is the answer to it. In fact, this is the core concern of the New Testament. Peter says,

²¹ See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM, 1990); C. S. Song, *Jesus in the Power of the Spirit* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1994).

²² If Christ is the subject of the church, then in the doctrine of the church Christology will become the dominant theme of ecclesiology. Every statement about the church will be a statement about Christ. Every statement about Christ also implies a statement about the church; yet the statement about Christ is not exhausted by the statement about the church because it also goes further, being directed towards the messianic kingdom which the church serves.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Pet 2:9).

The New Testament is not a book about religious matters, but about the formation of a community that sees itself as a mediation to witness to and proclaim God's kingdom. It is a kingdom that is characterized by the Spirit of justice and mercy, and knowledge of God.

In this light, the Pentecostal event in Acts 2 is not simply about religious phenomena, but rather gathers a community that becomes a bearer of, and a witness to, God's deeds of power. We have encountered this process of gathering - as an effect of God's Spirit - in diverse contexts. The Pentecostal event gathers a differentiated community that includes various groups of people. Nevertheless, it is only a starting point. This process of gathering is extending and expanding. This can be discerned from Paul's words,

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:27-28).

This community is not simply a religious community. Rather it is a new polity. It breaks down all human barriers, and endeavors to build up a just and caring society. In the Book of Revelation, it becomes clear that such a community makes a "political" option, that is, as a witness to God in the midst of political and economic upheavals and distortions.²³ We call this community the fundamental sacrament of salvation.²⁴ The church as the fundamental sacrament of salvation is not so of itself, but only in relation, distinction and subordination to Christ as to the historically primal sacrament in which God's promise of himself as

²³ See Pablo Richard, *Apocalypse* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995).

²⁴ "Essentially the church is the historically continuing presence in the world of the incarnate Word of God. She is the historical tangibility of the salvific will of God as revealed in Christ. Therefore, the church is most tangibly and intensively an event where Christ himself is present in his own congregation as the crucified and resurrected Savior, the fount of salvation; where the Redemption makes itself felt in the congregation by becoming sacramentally visible; where the New and Eternal Testament which he founded on the cross is most palpably and actually present in the holy remembrance of its first institution." Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Image, 1978), pp. 73-74.

forgiveness and glorification comes to historical appearance and irreversible completion. Being the sacrament of salvation, the church can only depend upon the presence and the power of the Spirit. As Jürgen Moltmann puts it,

The living remembrance of Christ directs the church's hope towards the Kingdom, and living hope in the Kingdom leads back to the inexhaustible remembrance of Christ. The present power of this remembrance and this hope is called the power of the Holy Spirit.... The church's fellowship with Christ is founded on the experience of the Spirit which manifests Christ, unites us with him and glorifies him in men. The church's fellowship in the Kingdom of God is founded on the power of the Spirit, which leads it into truth and freedom. It is when the church, out of faith in Christ and in hope for the Kingdom, sees itself as the messianic fellowship that it will logically understand its presence and its path in the presence and the process of the Holy Spirit.²⁵

The church as the fundamental sacrament of salvation becomes our hermeneutical key to understand the practice and ministry of the church.

Generally speaking, the ministry of the church is twofold. Firstly, it is about what I call the "means of salvation," that is, proclamation, baptism, the Lord's supper, worship, acts of blessing and the way in which individual and fellowship live. Secondly, it is about the charisma, the gifts and office that are supporting the means of salvation. Obviously, the former is dependent upon the latter, and the latter is the work of the Spirit. Because of the church as the fundamental sacrament of salvation, these twofold ministries have to orient themselves towards God's mystery of grace. God's mystery of grace is his promise of the outpouring of the Spirit, and his Spirit is to bring salvation and announce judgment to the world. Thus, all the ministries and practice of the church have to lead the church beyond itself, out into the suffering of the world and into the divine future. Otherwise, the church becomes a sectarian, and loses its sacramental nature. Lesile Newbigin rightly says,

If the gospel is to challenge the public life of our society...it will not be by forming a political party, or by aggressive propaganda campaigns.... It will only be by movements that begin with a local congregation in which the reality of the new creation is present, known and experienced, and from which men and women will go into every sector of public life to claim it for Christ, to unmask the illusions which have

²⁵ J. Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (London: SCM, 1977), p. 197.

remained hidden and to expose all areas of public life to the illumination of the gospel. But that will only happen as and when local congregations renounce an introverted concern for their own life, and recognize that they exist for the sake of those who are not members, as sign, instrument and foretaste of God's redeeming grace for the whole life of society.²⁶

This can only happen when the church is filled by the Spirit.

6. Outpouring of the Spirit

Pentecostalism is not an ideology holding a belief about speaking in tongues or baptism in the Spirit, but rather is an experience of and a commitment to God's promise of the outpouring of the Spirit. This experience and commitment bring the church not to see its nature in the context of the inner mutual relationship between Christ and the church, but to see itself as a charismatic fellowship, a messianic fellowship of service for the kingdom of God. What then does it mean to the people in Hong Kong?

Firstly, the outpouring of the Spirit affects our economic sphere. According to the most recent government statistics, 30% of the total households in Hong Kong have experienced a drop of income of 24% from 1997 to 1999. On the contrary, the highest income group of households has seen an increase of 2%. From the Gini-coefficient figure, we find that the figure in 1991 is 0.476, but in 1996 it is 0.518.²⁷ From the present trend, it is more correct to say that the gap between the rich and the poor will be widening in the coming years. Even though the poor may have a job, their income is not enough to sustain their daily living. Poverty is not simply a matter of insufficiency of food, but rather is closely related to the concept of disempowerment. Due to the lack of economic power, the poor are gradually deprived of participating in social life.²⁸ As a result, the poor not only become a class of dependents, but also they have no power to change their destiny. The promise of the

²⁶ L. Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 232-34.

²⁷ See Lap Yan Kung, *Your Kingdom Come: A Theological Reflection on Social Spirituality* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Christian Institute, 1997), pp. 88-89, and *Liberation Theology and Hong Kong's Predicament* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Christian Institute, 1999), pp. 19-25.

²⁸ See John Friedmann, *Empowerment* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

outpouring of the Spirit is to bring justice to them, and to empower them so that they can experience the goodness of life. In order to bring justice, it is not enough for the church to do some charitable works, but it also has to challenge our existing social structures. It is not because we believe that social reform can bring us a just world, but a just world cannot be established without a just and caring social system. The church has no other option but to challenge our socio-economic structure, because the promise of the Spirit has a concrete economic practice.

Secondly, the outpouring of the Spirit affects our cultural life. Hong Kong is a capitalist society from which Hong Kong benefits from it a lot. Nevertheless, when capitalism becomes an ideology, our culture gradually becomes inhuman and impersonal.²⁹ Humans are no longer considered as beings with immeasurable value, but rather as means of production. Besides, humans are no longer who we are, but rather what we can contribute. As a result, the poor, the disadvantaged and the weak are no longer the people whom the members of society have to take care of, but rather whom they consider to be a burden of society. Obviously, the purpose of society is not to create harmony and solidarity among people, but to create wealth and prosperity. Those who fail to fit in would be given up. On the other hand, consumerism is another ideology associated with capitalism. In order to facilitate capitalism, consumerism is promoted. Consumerism is not simply a matter about spending, but rather becomes an ideology to believe that we are what we spend. Obviously, this brings serious damage to our environment, because wants and desires are emphasized and over-exaggerated. On the other hand, humans become more materialistic and fail to appreciate the importance of transcendence. Our world becomes a world without windows. The outpouring of the Spirit is of a Spirit who creates a new relationship among people and brings transvaluation to our society. It is an ideological struggle as well as a spiritual warfare. Nevertheless, this struggle cannot be achieved simply by evangelism, but rather through "evangelization."³⁰ It demands that the church be involved in all areas of public life.

²⁹ See Lap Yan Kung, "The Cultural Dimension of Liberation Theology: The Case of Hong Kong," *Ching Feng* 38 (1995), pp. 213-26, and "Christian Welfare Ideologies: The Basis of Human Welfare," *Social Thought* 19 (2000, forthcoming).

³⁰ Evangelism, in the Evangelical understanding, most likely emphasizes the importance of personal conversion, while evangelization considers that the gospel does not lie in personal conversion only, but also includes human culture in general as well.

Finally, the outpouring of the Spirit comes upon our church life. The church is God's agent. In order to fulfill its mission, the church has to be a presence in the power of the Spirit. Nevertheless, the church in Hong Kong is in captivity.³¹ The church is absorbed by the government, and becomes the government's agent. In order to be trusted by the government, the church is reluctant to take any so-called radical action against the government's unjust policies. As a result, the church becomes a means to preserve the status quo. Besides, the church in Hong Kong is rather middle-class oriented. There is nothing wrong to be middle-class. In fact, the church benefits from its large middle-class membership. It is because the middle class has time, money and professional knowledge for the church. Nevertheless, this makes the church gradually become a church of the middle class. The poor find no place in the church, and the church finds it difficult to listen to the voice of the poor. The outpouring of the Spirit is both a message of repentance and of empowerment. On the one hand, the Spirit of God challenges the church as to what extent the gospel is rephrased to become a middle-class ideology, and it is no longer the good news to the poor. On the other hand, the Spirit of God sanctifies the church in order that it can be faithful to its call and mission.

Pentecostalism is never a monopoly of the Pentecostal churches. Rather it is the confession of any Christian or church that decides to live in the Spirit, and believe that the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit is taking place. The power of the Spirit is not characterized by speaking in tongues or other spiritual phenomena, but by the presence and practice of justice, peace and the knowledge of God. Therefore, the identity of Pentecostalism is not dependent upon any particular historical experience or event, but upon the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit. This is the message that we are committed to.

³¹ See Lap Yan Kung, *Liberation Theology and Hong Kong's Predicament*.