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Issues Arising from Weak Ecclesiological Concepts in the Modern Day Pentecostal Church: Part 1

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Introduction

This paper is presented in two parts. Initially, Part 1 looks at the biblical definition and Pentecostal understanding of a Church. This is followed by a discussion of three Pentecostal ecclesiological concepts, Christological, Pneumatological and Sociological, including some of the issues that can result from a weakened form of these concepts. The first two are presented in Part 1. Part 2 leads off with a discussion of the Sociological concept of ecclesiology, which is followed by the author's conclusions on the topic.

During the last century, the Pentecostal community has grown from a small group of Christian believers into a worldwide movement. In 2013, The Centre for the Study of Global Christianity reported that the number of Pentecostals grew from 1 million in 1900, to 63 million in 1963, and to 628 million in 2013. Additionally, this organization projected continued growth, which will result in 828 million by 2025. In other words, the Charismatic and Pentecostal movement has grown from 0.2 percent of all Christians in 1900 to 26.7 percent in 2013, and the projected growth is 30.6 percent by 2025.¹

Despite this rapid increase, Pentecostal churches have yet to own a distinctively Pentecostal theology of the Church.² P.D. Hocken states, "Explicit treatments of the theology of the Church have not been

¹Todd M Johnson and Peter F Crossing, "Christianity 2013: Renewalists and Faith and Migration," in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 37, no. 1 (January 2013): 32–33.

²Keith Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology: A Theology of Encounter* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 131.

common among Pentecostal authors and publications.”³ Paul D. Lee says Pentecostal ecclesiology “is not so much a thematized theology as lived reality.”⁴ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen states, “Pentecostals were ‘doers’ rather than ‘thinkers’ and instead of writing theological treatises they went on living and experimenting with the New Testament type of enthusiastic church life.”⁵ Peter Althouse agrees and laments:

Although Pentecostalism is now over a century old, its theology of the church is sorely underdeveloped. In practice, Pentecostal churches eclectically borrow from other theological traditions and apply their practices in pragmatic and technical ways, but with little understanding of their philosophical and theological implications. As a result, Pentecostal churches today appear to sustain and advocate social ideologies of consumer capitalism and market place values, borrowing heavily from corporate business practice to govern the church.⁶

As such, this paper attempts: 1) to explore three theological concepts of Pentecostal ecclesiology viz. pneumatological ecclesiology, Christological ecclesiology, and sociological ecclesiology from recent Pentecostal scholars; 2) to suggest what issues will arise from not embracing these concepts in the modern day Pentecostal church.

Biblical Definition of a Church

It is important to have a clear understanding of what a church is. Many people have different answers concerning the definition of a church. Some think it is a building, while others think it as a denomination. In the Old Testament, two useful Hebrew terms are found—**לֵאחָדָם** and **הָאֵלֹהִים**. The former term refers to summons of an assembly and the act of assembling. The latter refers to people, particularly as they gathered before the tent of meeting.⁷ Wayne Grudem

³P.D Hocken, “Theology of Church,” ed. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. van der Maas, *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, The (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, June 1, 2002), 546.

⁴Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 73.

⁵Warrington, 131.

⁶Peter Althouse, “Ascension-Pentecost-Eschaton: A Theological Framework for Pentecostal Ecclesiology,” in *Toward a Pentecostal Ecclesiology: The Church and the Fivefold Gospel*, ed. John Christopher Thomas (Cleveland, Tennessee: CPT Press, n.d.), 227.

⁷Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2 edition. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 1998), 1042.

adds, “The Septuagint translates the word for ‘gather’ (Heb. קָהַל) with the Greek term ἐκκλησιάζω, ‘to summon an assembly,’ the verb that is cognate to the New Testament noun ἐκκλησία, “church.””⁸ Millard J. Erickson comments that the word “church” and cognate terms in other languages (e.g., Κίρχη) are derived from the Greek word κυριακος, ‘belonging to the Lord’ and they are to be understood in the light of the New Testament Greek term ἐκκλησία.⁹ In classical Greek, this refers to a religious fellowship of the cultic guild and to their business meetings, not to the union itself. The meaning in the New Testament must be seen against two backgrounds, that of classical Greek and that of the Old Testament.¹⁰ In the secular sense, ἐκκ refers simply to a gathering or assembly of persons, a meaning found in Acts 19:32, 39 and 41. Thus, Grudem defines the church as “the community of all truth believers for all time”¹¹ He further states, “This process whereby Christ builds the church is just a continuation of the pattern established by God in the Old Testament, whereby He called people to Himself to be a worshipping assembly before Him.”¹²

Pentecostals’ Understanding of “Church”

How do Pentecostals define “church”? Hocken states that Pentecostals commonly believe that the Church of Christ is composed of all who are regenerated in Jesus through repentance and faith.¹³ He adds that the most distinctive Pentecostal contribution to ecclesiology might be the understanding of the local Church having two distinct, but complementary thrusts: 1) spiritual gifts as an intrinsic element in the life and equipment of the local Church; 2) the Pentecostal missionary experience that led to reflection on the purpose of mission and that produced a greater focus on the nature of the Church.¹⁴

The Assemblies of God as a denomination believes that the Church is the Body of Christ, the habitation of God through the Spirit, with divine appointments for the fulfillment of her Great Commission. It further holds that each believer, born of the Spirit, is an integral part of the general assembly and the Church of the firstborn, whose names are

⁸Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology : An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI : Zondervan Pub., 1994), 853.

⁹Erickson, 1041.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 853.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Hocken, 544.

¹⁴Ibid., 547.

written in heaven (Ephesians 1:22, 23; 2:22; Hebrews 12:23).¹⁵ Since God's purpose concerning man is to seek and to save that which is lost, and to build a body of believers in the image of His Son so that God is worshiped by man, the Assemblies of God understands their priority reason-for-being as part of the Church as:

- a. To be an agency of God for evangelizing the world (Matthew 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15, 16; Acts 1:8)
- b. To be a corporate body in which man may worship God (1 Corinthians 12:13)
- c. To be a channel of God's purpose to build a body of saints being perfected in the image of His Son (1 Corinthians 12:28; 14:12; Galatians 5:22-26; Ephesians 4:11-16; Colossians 1:29)¹⁶

Clark H. Pinnock states that Pentecostals live out a model of the Church that has the promise of transforming Christianity largely, but without doing the theology of church,¹⁷ and it exists to proclaim and serve the kingdom.¹⁸ The apostolic mission is inherent in Christianity according to the New Testament, and it is also at the heart of the Pentecostal movement that everyone must acknowledge.¹⁹ The Church is a community of people who are chosen to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Three Pentecostal Ecclesiological Concepts

In recent years, modern-day Pentecostal scholars like Amos Yang, Simon Chan, Frank Macchia, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen and many others have done in-depth research on Christological, soteriological, pneumatological, sociological and eschatological concepts relating to ecclesiology. These concepts are distinctive to the Pentecostal Church, and are helpful in the formation of Pentecostal ecclesiology so that the Pentecostal Church will have the right theology and praxis. Due to the limitations of this paper, only three concepts will be covered, viz.: the Christological ecclesiological concept, the pneumatological ecclesiological concept, and the sociological ecclesiological concept.

¹⁵“The Church and Its Mission,” <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Statement-of-Fundamental-Truths#10> (accessed November 17, 2017).

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Clark H. Pinnock, “Church in the Power of the Holy Spirit: The Promise of Pentecostal Ecclesiology,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 14, no. 2 (2006): 149.

¹⁸Ibid., 152.

¹⁹Ibid., 155.

Christological Ecclesiology

Keith Warrington states, “As the Pentecostals emphasize the Spirit, it is sometimes deduced that they have a faulty perception of Christ.”²⁰ He further adds that Pentecostals seek to provide a theology that is theocentric and Christocentric and so it may be argued that Pentecostalism is “Jesus-centric” rather than Spirit-centred.²¹

Pentecostals believe that the Church is not only built by the Spirit, but also by Christ because Jesus Christ promised, “I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18). He built the Church by calling his people to himself. Wolfhart Pannenberg rightly notes that in Paul's writing, Jesus Christ is the foundation of the Church (1 Cor. 3:11), whereas in Acts, the Church seems to be founded by the “power” of the Holy Spirit and the Church is thus the creation of both the Spirit and the Son.²² Ecclesiology is patterned after Christology.²³ The continuing presence of the incarnated and risen Christ is concentrated in the church and reinforces its ecclesiastical structures, function and mission.²⁴

The Christocentricity of the fivefold gospel is the distinct template of Pentecostal theological inquiry that highlights the confession of Christ as Spirit Baptizer, and the sacramental practice in tongues as one of the focal points of Pentecostal theology, while spirituality is essentially the Church's understanding of her identity and mission.²⁵ According to Frank D. Macchia, “Their [Pentecostal] fivefold gospel of regeneration, sanctification, Spirit baptism, healing and eschatological expectation isolated by Donald Dayton as distinctive to Pentecostal theology can be also seen as ecclesiological ‘marks.’”²⁶ He further adds that since the marks of the Church are also the marks of Christ, Savior, Sanctifier, Spirit Baptizer, Healer and Coming King, the fivefold gospel can be viewed as the Pentecostal elaboration of the marks of the Church.²⁷

²⁰Warrington, 34.

²¹Ibid.

²²Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 124.

²³Wolfgang Vondey, *Beyond Pentecostalism: The Crisis of Global Christianity and the Renewal of the Theological Agenda*, Pentecostal Manifestos (Grand Rapids, Mich. : William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2010), 147.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵Augustine Daniela C., “The Empowered Church: Ecclesiological Dimensions of The Event Pentecostal,” in *Toward a Pentecostal Ecclesiology. The Church and the Fivefold Gospel.*, ed. Thomas, John Christopher (Cleveland, Tennessee: CPT Press, 2010), 157.

²⁶Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit - A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2006), 208.

²⁷Ibid., 241.

Ecumenical and Pentecostal theologian, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, affirms the fivefold gospel is important for informing and shaping ecclesiology and he states that

the center of Pentecostal theology is the idea of the “Full Gospel”, which speaks of Christ in various roles as Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, Baptizer with the Spirit, and Soon-coming-King. Pentecostal spirituality is based on a passionate desire to “meet” Jesus Christ as he is being perceived of as the “Bearer of the Full Gospel.” Therefore, Pentecostalism is primarily a “Christocentric Spirit movement” not a free spirited pneumatological movement focusing upon the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit.²⁸

Pentecostal theologians, and historians of Pentecostalism, have recognized that the fivefold gospel or full gospel is significant for early “classical” Pentecostal identity and theology.²⁹ The fivefold gospel marks the very character of the Church, shapes its relational identity and directs its salvific path.³⁰ The marks of the Church are organically connected to the marks of the five-fold gospel which serve as the ministry marks of Jesus Christ.³¹

John Christopher Thomas, a Pentecostal professor of Biblical Studies has creatively joined each tenet of the fivefold gospel, Jesus as Savior, Jesus as Sanctifier, Jesus as Healer, Jesus as Baptizer with the Spirit, Jesus as Soon-coming-King, with a particular understanding of the nature of the community. Furthermore, Thomas associates a biblical and sacramental sign to that particular understanding of the Church. The following is an outline of his proposal:

1. Jesus is the Savior. The Church as a redeemed community and the ecclesiastical sign is water baptism.
2. Jesus is the Sanctifier. The Church as a holy community and foot washing is the ecclesiastical sign.
3. Jesus is the Spirit Baptizer. The Church as an empowered missionary community and the ecclesiastical sign is glossolalia.

²⁸Kenneth J. Archer, “The Fivefold Gospel and The Mission of The Church: Ecclesiastical Implications and Opportunities,” in *Toward a Pentecostal Ecclesiology. The Church and the Fivefold Gospel*. (Cleveland, Tennessee: CPT Press, 2010), 26–27.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 30.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 42.

³¹*Ibid.*, 42-43.

4. Jesus is the Healer. The Church as a healing community with the ecclesiastical sign of praying for the sick with the laying on of hands and anointing with oil.
5. Jesus is the Coming King, The Church as an eschatological community with the Lord's Supper serving as an ecclesiastical sign.³²

Weak Christological Concept of the Church

An absence of proper theological understanding of the relationship between Christ and the Church results in a weak Christological concept, and therefore a weak foundation, since Christ is the foundation of the Church. With a weak foundation, Pentecostals cannot have a full picture of what the Pentecostal Church should be. They will see only part of the whole, like in the story of six blind men trying to figure out what an elephant looks like by touching only a part of the elephant. The Pentecostals are in a similar situation to the Israelites in Judges 21:25, "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." To put this into the modern context, if there is no proper understanding of Christology within the church context, church leaders and members will do what is right in their own eyes. Thus, the Church will not be able to exhibit the nature of Christ.

Weak Understanding of Jesus as the Savior

If the Church has a weak understanding of Jesus as Savior, she will not function properly as a redeemed community and will have a poor understanding of soteriological truth. Amos Yong rightly states, "the 'what' of the Church is by definition related to the question of what it is meant to be saved. . . . Therefore, Pentecostal ecclesiology is intimately connected with its doctrine of salvation."³³ The Church with a poor soteriological understanding will not be able to see herself as the redeemed community. She will operate more like a club, secular society or business organization. Archer comments: "The local church is apostolic in function. Her authority is derived from Christ. Thus it has authority to proclaim the gospel and call the inhabitants of the world into the way of salvation. The redeemed community is a contrast society sent by the commissioning of Christ and in the power of the Spirit to carry forth the mission and message of God."³⁴

³²Ibid., 34.

³³Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 127.

³⁴Archer, 41.

Weak Understanding of Jesus as the Sanctifier

The Church is a sanctified community because Jesus is the Sanctifier. Scripture says that “We are to be holy because God is holy.”³⁵ When the Church has weak understanding of this concept, she will not be united and will be full of conflict. Matthias Wenk writes:

The designation of the Church as “Holy,” “called by God, and “son(s) of God” are to be the characteristics of God’s people. Thus, Church is a community of reconciliation and peace (2 Cor. 2:5-11; Eph 2:11-22; 4:32; Col. 3:13), for these are the characteristics of God (Rom. 5:5, 8; 14:7; 1 Cor.14:33; 2 Cor 13:11-13; Phil 4:7 and etc.). Hence, holiness is always a matter of and realized in relationships (cf. Gal 5:16-26). This is also evidenced in the call “not to grieve the Spirit”, for to grieve the Spirit is to desecrate the community (Eph 4:17-32).³⁶

Without proper understanding of the above, the Church will look like any other secular world organization. She will not distinctively live as a holy community that is called out by God to be separated from the rest of the world. The Church will not rise up to be a prophetic voice to a world that is full of darkness, sin, and immorality. Thus, it is imperative for the Church to disciple the community to live rightly in perfecting love with a loving and holy God and with one another.

Weak Understanding of Jesus as the Spirit Baptizer

Without a proper understanding of Jesus as the Spirit Baptizer, the community will ignore the sacramental practice of speaking in tongues that is one of the focal points of Pentecostal theology and spiritual growth.³⁷ The Church will not have biblical understanding of speaking in tongues, and will not value the gift of tongues. As a result, the Church will not teach her believers the purpose of speaking in tongues and will not encourage them to receive that wonderful gift of speaking in tongues.

Without praying in tongues, the believers will not have the opportunity for a dramatic and intensified personal union of the human with the divine.³⁸ Blaine Charette describes tongues as “demonstrating a

³⁵Archer, 41.

³⁶Matthias Wenk, “The Church as Sanctified Community,” in *Toward a Pentecostal Ecclesiology: The Church and the Fivefold Gospel*, ed. Thomas, John Christopher (Cleveland, Tennessee: CPT Press, 2010), 119.

³⁷Augustine, 175.

³⁸Warrington, 90.

unique encounter with God, insofar as believers use a divinely imparted language through which they speak to God.”³⁹ Walter J. Hollenweger views the gift of tongues as a possible motivation for social transformation.⁴⁰ Similarly Murray W. Dempster indicates that since the gift of tongues is identified as a liberating or empowering act, there will be a change in the believer’s morality as the result of a flawed believer engaging with the moral sacred divine, providing “a spiritual encounter with the God who is, and a moral encounter with God who values.”⁴¹

Without the gift of tongues, the believers will not have the capacity to edify themselves (1 Cor 14.4). Furthermore, believers will not see the value of tongues in the context of a charismatic community. One of the purposes of *glossolalia* is that the speaker in tongues evidences through this sign that they are part of a charismatic community, and therefore, is expected to function in the charismatic community. This means that the gifts of tongues is available to all believers and is a means of reminding individuals of their equal place with the Church, breaking all racial and economic divisions.⁴² Augustine adds:

Both *xenolalia* and *glossolalia* have a sacramental function in the life of the charismatic community, articulating the mystery of the union of the redeemed creation with its Creator and experiencing the in-breaking of the eschatological fullness of Christ in His Body. It is an experience of the presence and self-sharing of God in His Spirit that welcomes us in the life of the Trinity and makes us an extension of His life on earth.⁴³

The Pentecostal Church is an extension of Christ’s ministry on earth. However, without the Spirit, the Church will lack the anointing and the power of the Spirit to share with the world—offering her life as sacrament, mediating God’s presence and grace to all creation.⁴⁴

Weak Understanding of Jesus as the Healer

Without a proper understanding of Jesus as the Healer, the Church will ignore the possibility of divine healing as a legitimate expression of the ministry of the Church, entrusted to her by Jesus, and mediated

³⁹Ibid., 89-90.

⁴⁰Ibid., 92.

⁴¹Ibid., 92-3.

⁴²Ibid., 90-1.

⁴³Augustine, 43.

⁴⁴Ibid, 179.

through the power of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵ She will ignore Jesus' own healing ministry. Opoku Onyinah writes:

The early church took Jesus' healing ministry seriously, and Christianity presented itself to the Mediterranean societies of the time as a healing community. The final chapter of Mark's gospel, which was probably added in the second century CE, reflects this. Many writings of the early church fathers also affirm the centrality of the church as a healing community, and proclaim Christ as the healer of the world.⁴⁶

He further adds that the Church needs to understand that the local congregation is the primary agent for healing and this is based on a comprehensive understanding of health, suffering, sickness, and healing, as issues that should concern the entire community collectively.⁴⁷ Without this proper understanding, the Church will not be the healing community that brings healing to a world that suffers from divisions, conflicts and envy among ethnic, gender, and social groups, as well as among families or in the work place.⁴⁸

Weak Understanding of Jesus as the Coming King

The Church will not be a missionary community that actively moves out to the ends of the world to witness the full gospel in words and deeds if she has a poor understanding of Jesus as the Coming King. One thing to note is that Pentecostals view eschatology as the essence of being Pentecostal. Macchia articulates the view that eschatology may be more important to the essence of Pentecostalism than the baptism in the Spirit, while Land identifies it as the "driving force and galvanizing vision" of Pentecostalism.⁴⁹

Without a full gospel, there will not be a church.⁵⁰ We need to be reminded that the Church, for the early Pentecostals, was the new creation in Christ consecrated unto God and baptized in power for gifted service, especially empowered to a proclamation of a gospel that heralded healing and Christ's immediate return.⁵¹

⁴⁵Warrington, 265.

⁴⁶Opoku Onyinah, "Pentecostal Healing Communities," in *Toward a Pentecostal Ecclesiology: The Church and the Fivefold Gospel*, ed. John Christopher Thomas (Cleveland, Tennessee: CPT Press, 2010), 210.

⁴⁷Onyinah, 219.

⁴⁸Wenk, 117.

⁴⁹Warrington, 309.

⁵⁰Archer, 27.

⁵¹Macchia, 208.

Pneumatological Ecclesiology

The theology of a Pentecostal church should include the theology of the Holy Spirit. Macchia rightly states, “Pentecostal Church requires a more developed ecclesiology in the light of pneumatology.”⁵² He further adds, “They have traditionally yearned for revival to come upon the ‘sleeping churches’ but have lacked much of an appreciation for even more seminal pneumatological constitution of the church.”⁵³ According to Erickson, it is the Spirit who brought the Church into being at Pentecost, where he baptized the disciples and converted three thousand, and hence gave birth to the Church, and she is now indwelt by the Spirit, both individually and collectively.⁵⁴

Pannenberg’s ecclesiological vision sees an integral, dialogical relationship between the Spirit and the Son and he states, “The Christological constitution and the pneumatological constitution do not exclude one another but belong together because the Spirit and the Son mutually indwell one another as Trinitarian persons.”⁵⁵ Yong also sees that relationship, and he defines pneumatological ecclesiology as a church that is an organic, dynamic, and eschatological people of God called after the name of Jesus and constituted in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁶

To Macchia, the central focus is on the life of the Spirit or life of the kingdom.⁵⁷ With the power of the Spirit, the distinctive accents of Pentecostalism such as regeneration, sanctification, Spirit filling, the coming kingdom of God in power, missions, and charismatic gifting (especially but not exclusively, prophecy, speaking in tongues, and healing) can be drawn on to create a vision of the Church as the central and unique sign of grace in an increasing graceless world.⁵⁸ It is the Spirit baptism that gives rise to the global church and this remains the very substance of church life in the Spirit, including its charismatic life and mission.⁵⁹ For most other Christians, the presence of the Spirit is just that, presence. But for Pentecostals, the presence of the Spirit in their midst implies empowerment.⁶⁰ Pinnock comments:

⁵²Ibid., 155.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Erickson, 1049.

⁵⁵Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective*, 124.

⁵⁶Yong, 122.

⁵⁷Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit - A Global Pentecostal Theology*, 196.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid., 155.

⁶⁰Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pentecostal Mission and Global Christianity*, ed. Wonsuk Ma, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, and Kwabena J. Asamoah-Gyadu, n.d., 36.

The power of God that enabled Jesus to do signs and wonders is with us too. It is our advantage, Jesus said, that he go to the Father because only then would the Spirit come upon the disciples and they would do even greater deeds than he himself (John 14:12; 16:7). What happened was that on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit was transferred from Jesus to the disciples and they became successors in the charismatic ministry of historical Jesus on earth, in the healing of the sick and the expulsion of demons. This is the primary element in the promise of Pentecostal ecclesiology. It is a power ecclesiology, in which believers are endued with power to serve as anointed witnesses to the kingdom of God. Pentecostals experience God as empowering and commissioning them for the mission.⁶¹

Simon Chan sees the Church as a community “where God is moving in the here-and-now with signs and wonders, a community of faith in a new social reality which, because of its Spirit-empowered likeness to Christ and its renunciation of world’s values, reveals the nature of God’s kingdom.”⁶² The Church is an anointed witness to the kingdom of God that must be a community in fellowship with the Spirit, and without which, there will be no anointing.⁶³ Chan outlines three main features of pneumatological ecclesiology:

1. The Church as the Spirit’s personal indwelling
The coming of the Spirit to the Church is not just about the continuation of the historical mission of Christ through the church acting as Christ’s agent, but it completes the Trinitarian story of including something new. That is to say, Pentecost reveals the Spirit’s own proper work. It is essentially the story of the Spirit constituting the Church by his personal indwelling. The Spirit is the third person, precisely in his relation to the Church, and the Church is what it is essentially in relation to the third person of the Trinity: it is the body of Christ indwelt by the Spirit, making it the temple of the Holy Spirit (Eph 2: 18-22). As the temple of the Holy Spirit, the Church’s chief act is the worship of God, through Jesus Christ, in the power of the indwelling Spirit (1 Peter 2:5).
2. The Holy Spirit unites the Church ontologically to Christ as her head

⁶¹Pinnock, 151.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 152.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 156.

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit unites the people of God to Christ the Head, making the Church Christ's body. If the Spirit is the bond of love between the Father and the Son, the Spirit is the bond of love between Christ and his body which is the Church. The Church is the unity and communion of the Holy Spirit. Through the indwelling Spirit, the Church becomes the "corporate personality" of Christ, that is, the extension of Christ the Truth. Through the Spirit, the Church is Christologically shaped into the body of Christ.

3. The Church becomes the temple of the Spirit
The Spirit not only links the Church to the precious deposit of truth so that she is constantly renewed by it, He is God's gift "distributed throughout the Church" as "communion with Christ" and "the ladder of ascent to God. . . . For where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of grace." The Church is the locus of the Spirit's presence and the means of communion; in fact, the Church is essentially communion.⁶⁴

Assemblies of God adherents see the Church as the New Testament apostolic church and thus, the organization would like Assemblies of God churches to teach and encourage believers to be baptized in the Holy Spirit as they hold this experience will:

- a. Enable them to evangelize in the power of the Spirit with accompanying supernatural signs (Mark 16:15-20; Acts 4:29-31; Hebrews 2:3-4).
- b. Add a necessary dimension to a worshipful relationship with God (1 Corinthians 2:10-16; 1 Corinthians 12-14).
- c. Enable them to respond to the full working of the Holy Spirit in the expression of fruit and gifts and ministries as in New Testament times for the edifying of the body of Christ (Galatians 5:22-26; 1 Corinthians 14:12; Ephesians 4:11-12; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Colossians 1:29).⁶⁵

The Assemblies of God of Singapore hold to classical Pentecostal theological standards. In renewing the AG minister's credentials

⁶⁴Simon Chan, "Jesus as Spirit-Baptizer: Its Significance for Pentecostal Ecclesiology," in *Toward a Pentecostal Ecclesiology. The Church and the Fivefold Gospel*. (Cleveland, Tennessee: CPT Press, 2010), 142–8.

⁶⁵"Assemblies of God 16 Fundamental Truths," *Assemblies of God (USA) | Official Website*, <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Statement-of-Fundamental-Truths#10> (accessed February 19, 2018).

(exhorter, licensed minister and reverend) every year, ministers have to declare whether they agree with the Sixteen Tenets of Faith of the Assemblies of God; one of them is that the initial physical sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is speaking in tongues.

Assemblies of God churches in Singapore have taught about the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the membership classes, or nurturing classes, or at other platforms to encourage the congregants to be baptized in the Spirit. Some churches have some form of healing ministry—praying for the sick and inner healing. One of the mega Assemblies of God churches, Trinity Christian Centre, has courses on the “Holy Spirit and I,” “Prophetic Ministries,” and “How to pray for the sick” for the purpose of equipping their congregants to move in the Spirit.

A Weak Pneumatological Concept of the Church

Melvin Hodges was a pivotal Pentecostal missiologist who believed that the answer to the problems of mission field were New Testament methods coupled with New Testament power. He writes, “On the mission field, the emphasis which Pentecostal people place on the necessity of each believer receiving a personal infilling of the Holy Spirit has produced believers and workers of usual zeal and power.”⁶⁶ He adds that Pentecostals put emphasis on the present day working of miracles and the healing of the sick as the means of God’s awakening whole communities and convincing the unbelievers of the power of God.⁶⁷

Hodges also observes that the key to success for the Pentecostal Church in mission is that the missionary must introduce the people to the work of Holy Spirit.⁶⁸ Sadly, there are many modern day Pentecostal churches that have a weak pneumatological concept of the Church. This results in two major issues: 1) lack of power and; 2) individualism in the Church.

Lack of Power

A weak pneumatological concept of the Church will result in a church that lacks dynamism. If there is no Holy Spirit manifestation in the Church, the Church will be lifeless and powerless. Statistics show that an estimated 50% or more Pentecostal adherents do not speak in tongues.⁶⁹ If Pentecostals do not speak in tongues and do not believe in

⁶⁶Melvin L. Hodges, *The Indigenous Church* (Springfield, MO : Gospel Pub. House, 1976), 132.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 133.

⁶⁹Warrington, 87.

Spirit baptism, they will be unlikely to move in the power of Spirit, and be unlikely to teach and equip believers to operate in their own spiritual gifts.

Presently, Pentecostals are facing the threat of a third-and fourth-generational decline in spiritual zeal. Some observers suspect that denominational Pentecostals have begun moving into a post-Pentecostal phase of existence.⁷⁰ C. Peter Wagner has noted that the Pentecostal distinctive has been negatively affected through the mainstreaming of Pentecostal denominations into the National Association of Evangelicals.⁷¹ He finds that over the years there has been “a gradual deemphasizing of signs, wonders and other miraculous ministries so outwardly characteristic of first and early second-generation Pentecostals.”⁷² One of the main reasons is that in the Pentecostal schools, evangelical textbooks on exegesis, doctrine, discipleship, and missiology are used for study, and this has resulted in the “evangelicalization” of the movement over the past fifty years. Hence, although theologically trained, Pentecostal candidates for the ministry have serious uncertainties about the manifestation of the Holy Spirit.⁷³ This “evangelicalization” could be more serious when the Pentecostal Church sends the pastoral candidates to evangelical or inter-denominational seminaries. For these reasons, Pentecostals should not be tempted to conform to their established and well recognized evangelical neighbors and they must remain faithful to their distinctiveness to be effective in their mission and calling.⁷⁴

Power Evangelism refers to what Pentecostals know as signs and wonders revealed through the power of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals take these phenomena as a biblical pattern (e.g., Acts 3:1; 16:14; Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 2:1, 4, 5).⁷⁵ John York comments, “The heart of Pentecostalism is the supernatural empowerment of believers so that they may, in word, and deed, adequately bear witness of Christ to the nations

⁷⁰Del Tarr, “The Church and the Spirit’s Power,” in *Signs & Wonders in Ministry Today*, ed. Benny C. Aker and Gary B. McGee (Springfield, Mo: Gospel Pub. House, 1996), 11.

⁷¹Ibid., 12.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Jungja Ma, “Pentecostal Challenges in East and South East Asia,” in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel*, ed. Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen (Oxford, England: Regnum Books, 1991), 183–202.

⁷⁵Julie Ma, “Pentecostal Challenges in East and South East Asia,” in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel*, ed. Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen (Oxford, England: Regnum Books International 1991), 199.

of the world.”⁷⁶ As such, it is important for the Pentecostal Church to guard her Pentecostal distinctiveness and be educated about the important role of the Holy Spirit, and the work of the Holy Spirit in the Pentecostal seminary and the Church. The Pentecostal Church needs to put more emphasis on Pentecostal distinctiveness and education in the seminary, and the Church should not only supervise intellectual development, but the spiritual development that lead the students into full life of the Holy Spirit, and practical development so that ministers and congregants learn to move in the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit in their ministry and daily life.

In the Mar–Apr 2018 AG Times, a bi-monthly publication of Assemblies of God, Singapore, former members of the Singapore AG Executive Committee were asked how they feel the Church could do more in the days to come as the Singapore Assemblies of God churches move forward. Rev. Andrew Ong sees the importance of the Pentecostal Church in preserving Pentecostal distinctiveness and move in power. He states, “To move forward, we must keep our Pentecostal heritage as our core. We have to see more people being saved, baptized in the Holy Spirit and moving in the power of Holy Spirit.”⁷⁷

Individualism in the Church

A weak pneumatological concept of the Church will also result in individualism in the church. Many Pentecostals think that Spirit baptism is merely an experience of power or renewal among individual Christians. Macchia laments, “With their individualistic understanding of Spirit baptism, they have lacked the conceptual framework in which to understand its connection to the church’s communally-gifted life.”⁷⁸ The Pentecostal reality has tended to be understood as an individualized experience. Pentecostals are more concerned with their “personal Pentecost” than with the corporate Pentecostal reality of which each person has a share.⁷⁹ The Spirit baptism is not merely an individualistic experience but rather something that has taken place in relation to others. The gift of the Spirit is not just purposed for individual believers, but to

⁷⁶John V. York and Assemblies of God, *Missions in the Age of the Spirit* (Springfield, Mo: Gospel Publishing House, 2000), 185.

⁷⁷“Former EXCO Members Talk about Past Present and Future,” *The Assemblies of God of Singapore*, April 2018, 5.

⁷⁸Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit - A Global Pentecostal Theology*, 155.

⁷⁹Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology. Supplement Series 21 (Sheffield, England : Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 99.

aim at building up the fellowship of believers, “at the founding and the constant giving of new life to the Church.”⁸⁰

Chan states that it is imperative for Pentecostals to think about church in terms of an ecclesial pneumatology rather than an individual pneumatology.⁸¹ This means that the primary focus of the work of the Spirit is not in the individual Christian, but in the church. The coming of the Spirit to Jesus at his baptism is often regarded as a model for the Spirit’s baptism of individual Christians, but rather, Jesus’ baptism should be regarded as representative of the Spirit’s coming upon the church, His body.⁸² To be baptized into Christ is to be incorporated into a Spirit-filled and Spirit-empowered entity.⁸³ Macchia rightly states:

Spirit Baptism as mediated through the risen Christ and fulfilled at his return on the “Day of the Lord” (Acts 2:17-21) cannot be reduced to what is theologically implied in individual regeneration, water baptism, or personal empowerment. Spirit baptism constitutes the church as the church defining the very core of the church’s essence but also transcending the church as to reaches for new creation. In being the church as the dwelling place of the Spirit/kingdom of Christ, the church is consecrated and empowered witness to Christ and his kingdom in the world. It is at the vanguard of the transformation of creation into the dwelling place of God.⁸⁴

Pentecostals have to realize that Spirit-baptism is first an event of the Church prior to its being actualized in a personalized Spirit-baptism. This means that the primary focus of Spirit-baptism is to actualize our communal life, our fellowship in Christ.⁸⁵ It is the utmost task to teach Pentecostals to embrace the “corporate Pentecostal,” as the mindset of modern people is shifting from group-orientation to individualistic and task-orientation due to industrialization. Julie Ma observes that there are rapid changes in various economic, political, and social sectors in many countries that affect the environment and the life pattern of people.⁸⁶ As

⁸⁰Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective*, 124.

⁸¹Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition*, 99.

⁸²*Ibid.*

⁸³*Ibid.*

⁸⁴Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit - A Global Pentecostal Theology*, 191.

⁸⁵Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition*, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, 99.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 199.

a result, people are increasingly influenced by materialistic and secular priorities.⁸⁷ Pinnock laments:

According to a Barna research finding, which boggles the mind, ten million self-proclaimed believers have not attended church in the past six months, apart from Christmas and Easter. Are we on the way to becoming a gnostic religion in which the spirit abides in Jesus but the body goes its own way? People will say that Christianity is not about church but about a relationship with Jesus Christ. Well, no; the church is not an add-on but something crucial. This individualism of ours may just become our Achilles heel. . . . This issue is much more than academic. It is urgent.⁸⁸

The Church needs to see the importance of teaching Pentecostals regularly that they are not meant to be isolated disciples, but are communities incorporated into the Spirit-filled Body of Christ, and their experience with God is corporate, shared experiences, sustained by community.⁸⁹ Otherwise, the Church will create many individualist Christians who think that Church communal life is not important.⁹⁰

Trinity Christian Centre (Singapore) and some other Pentecostal churches see the importance of community life and thus, their congregants are encouraged to join cell groups because there is relational and communal discipleship taking place in the cell.

In this part, the biblical definition and Pentecostal understanding of a Church was explored. This was followed by a discussion of two of the three Pentecostal ecclesiological concepts, Christological ecclesiology and Pneumatological ecclesiology. Part 2 will present a discussion of the Sociological ecclesiological concept, followed by the author's conclusions on the topic.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Pinnock, 149; Barna research from: Tim Stafford, *The Church—Why Bother?* (Christianity Today, January 6, 2005).

⁸⁹Pinnock, 150.

⁹⁰Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective*, 124–25.