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Doing Theology in the Philippines

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DOING THEOLOGY IN THE PHILIPPINES:
A CASE OF PENTECOSTAL CHRISTIANITY¹

Wonsuk Ma

1. Introduction

Doing theology inevitably involves at least three elements to make it meaningful to listeners in a specific context, be it special or temporal: revelation, context and the theologizer-communicator. Revelation in theologization refers to primary sources: the Scripture and a specific theological tradition aroused in a particular socio-historical situation. The contextual component in theologization is again found in two major categories: cultural and contemporary. The third, theologizer-communicator, includes the individual's experiential involvement in both revelation and context and the method of presentation/communication of the fruit of the theological inquiry in a way that is understandable to and acceptable by the audience.²

In this reflection on Pentecostal Christianity in the Philippines, due to the limitation of space, only two components will be discussed: the revelation and the context. For revelation, the focus will be more on the theological and spiritual tradition of this specific family of Christianity, particularly as witnessed in the last century. For the context, obviously it will be the socio-cultural context of the Philippines which the charismatic theological and spiritual tradition has interacted with, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century.

¹ Its earlier version was presented in the Annual Theological Forum under the theme of "Doing Theology in the Philippines," Asian Theological Seminary in February 2005, Manila, Philippines.

² For more discussion, see Wonsuk Ma, "Toward an Asian Pentecostal Theology," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 1:1 (1998), pp. 15-41.

1.1 Pentecostal Christianity: A Definition

The definition of Pentecostalism has been a sharp point of debate among theologians, historians and sociologists. In the first half of the twentieth century, the term simply referred to what is called “classical Pentecostals.” These denominational groups, primarily found in North America and Europe, trace their roots to the early twentieth-century Holiness-Pentecostal revival, such as that found in the Azusa Street revival (1906-09) in Los Angeles. Their doctrinal uniqueness is found in the “baptism in the Spirit,” with tongues as an initial evidence of it. At the advent of the charismatic movement in the 1960s among the mainline churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, the characteristic of the movement shifted to supernatural gifts such as healing, speaking in tongues, prophecy, and others, with reduced emphasis on the baptism in the Spirit. However, with the “discovery” of indigenous Pentecostal groups all over the world, a universally acceptable definition of this fast growing segment of Christianity has become simply unattainable, unless one presents a definition too watered down to be useful anymore.

For the present discussion, however, the term “Pentecostal Christianity” is used as an umbrella term encompassing classical Pentecostals, charismatic fellowships, Catholic charismatics and Christians who accept Pentecostal beliefs and practices while attending non-Pentecostal/charismatic churches/communities. A working definition of the term is: “A segment of Christianity which believes in and practices the availability of the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit today, with their characteristic lively and spontaneous worship with the manifestation of the spiritual gifts and enthusiastic Christian lifestyle.”

1.2 Pentecostalism in the Philippines

The main thrust of Pentecostal Christianity to the Philippines was initiated by “balikbayans,” Filipino-Americans in the 1920s and 30s, who had experienced the baptism in the Spirit in California and Hawaii. Three of the four “classical” Pentecostal groups included in Suico’s report owe their existence to such balikbayan missionaries.³ Even before Pentecostal denominations were officially registered, these balikbayan missionaries

³ Wonsuk Ma, “Philippines,” in *New International Dictionary of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. van der Maas (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), pp. 201-207. Also for a good survey, Joseph Suico, “Pentecostalism in the Philippines,” in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, eds. Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2005), pp. 345-62 (350-56).

conducted evangelism and teaching activities often in their home towns and provinces. With the arrival of missionaries, primarily from the United States, “classical” Pentecostal denominations were organized: Filipino Assemblies of God of the First Born in 1943 in La Union, the Foursquare Church of Gospel in 1937 in Iloilo City, Church of God (Cleveland, TN) in 1952 in Ilocos Norte, and the Assemblies of God in 1953 in Pangasinan.

The 1980s brought another wave of spiritual awakening—this time, among Catholic believers. Partly with encouragement coming from the Vatican II, Bible study groups and prayer groups proliferated. Often led by gifted lay leaders, the groups met in homes, offices, restaurants and hotels. Also influenced by the Catholic renewal movement started in North America in 1967 and later spread throughout the world, the prayer and Bible study groups included prayer for healing and renewal. Many local communities mushroomed and some grew as national networks.⁴ Many such groups eventually left the fold of the Catholic Church and formed their own “fellowships,” such as the Jesus Is Lord Christian Fellowship by Eddie Villanueva in 1978 and the Bread of Life Ministry by Cesar “Butch” Conde in 1982. This wild growth of the groups and the exodus of Catholic members from their parish churches prompted the Archdiocesan Office of Manila to publish an important booklet in 1983 titled, *Guidelines for Prayer Groups*. The intention was to prevent Catholic “faithfuls” from becoming “born again,” a popular term referring to Protestantism, while providing room and supervision for their “charismatic” activities. One guideline allowed charismatic Catholics to have their own gathering on weekdays and participate in their parish church on Sundays for mass. However, the rise of the powerful El Shaddai broke this guideline, as the group celebrates its own Sunday worship among themselves all over the country and in overseas locations.

Currently, the believers in various Pentecostal denominations are estimated to be about 1.2 million, in the (non-Catholic) charismatic groups 2.5 million, and the Catholic charismatic groups around 11 million, bringing the total Pentecostal Christians in the Philippines to about 15 million. This represents a startling proportion of 18% of the population of 80 million. In this counting, what is missing is “Pentecostal” believers found in non-Pentecostal churches, the traditional category for “charismatics” in other parts of the world. This segment is believed to be growing steadily as Pentecostal beliefs and practices are

⁴ For a recent study on Philippine Catholic renewal movement, see Lode Wostyn, “Catholic Charismatics in the Philippines,” in *Asian and Pentecostal*, pp. 363-83.

increasingly accepted by traditionally non- or anti-Pentecostal groups. David Barrett's estimate for mid-2000 is 20 million, higher than 13 million, the number of Johnstone & Mandryk.⁵ It is possible that Barrett included the estimated charismatic believers in traditional churches. He expects this form of Christianity to grow to over 30 million by 2025.⁶

1.3 Goal and Purpose

This essay is offered to delineate unique theological and spiritual traditions of Pentecostalism developed primarily in the twentieth century. Although occasionally biblical basis may appear, attention will be given primarily to the historical tradition of the movement. Under each theological uniqueness, the Philippine context is briefly discussed to justify the theological application useful to Philippine Pentecostal churches, believers and leaders. Whenever possible, such theological potential will be explored in three categories: 1) basic issues as they apply to Pentecostals, 2) issues which have to do with the larger church communities in the country, and 3) issues that are related to the society.

As the primary audience is Filipinos or non-Filipinos who are working in or for the Philippines, no extensive discussion of the Filipino society is made, nor is any detailed discussion on Pentecostal history, theology and spirituality provided, as the author assumes the sufficient exposure of the audience to such information.

This reflection is written to help fellow Pentecostal-charismatic believers in the Philippines to become more aware of their theological potential inherited from the worldwide movement, and encourage and challenge them to be engaged in an intentional theological process. This will involve conscious awareness of the context where this theological tradition has been placed by God's providence and the perspective to see this unique theological tradition in the context of the large Christian mandates. The latter will require for the movement to shed its sectarian and fundamentalist mindset and actively dialogue with other theological traditions. Thus, the exposition of its unique theological potential is not to minimize in any way other Christian traditions and their unique theological contributions. In contrast, the call is to view each tradition as a unique gift from the Lord to the Body of Christ and to the dying world,

⁵ Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, *Operation World*, 6th ed. (Carlisle, UK: OM International, 2001), p. 521.

⁶ David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian and Todd M. Johnson, eds. *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), vol. 1, p. 594.

so that each can perform its unique tasks so that the entire Body will be edified. With this in view, several potential weaknesses in this theological system are also included in this discussion.

2. Theological Potential of Pentecostalism in the Philippine Context

2.1 Religion of Empowerment

The bedrock doctrine of classical Pentecostalism is the “baptism in the Spirit,” often witnessed by speaking in other tongues, and this principal belief is anchored in Acts 2.⁷ Among the Charismatics, the same experience has been identified differently, e.g., “fullness in the Spirit” with no doctrinal emphasis on speaking in tongues as “the initial physical evidence” of baptism in the Spirit. However, tongue-speaking still played an important role, as is well described in the experiences and ministry of Dennis Bennett, commonly recognized as the beginning of the “Charismatic movement” in the early 1960s.⁸ Regardless of the locus of tongues in the wider Pentecostal movement, what is universally common is the empowerment impetus of this theology. Based on Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (NIV), the coming of the Spirit has been understood as the empowerment of the Holy Spirit for witnessing.⁹ The

⁷ For example, the “Fundamental Truth of the (US) Assemblies of God (<http://ag.org/top/beliefs/truths.cfm#1>, checked: 05/29/2005) reads, “All believers are entitled to and should ardently expect and earnestly seek the promise of the Father, the baptism in the Holy Ghost and fire, according to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the normal experience of all in the early Christian Church. With it comes the endowment of power for life and service, the bestowment of the gifts and their uses in the work of the ministry” and “The baptism of believers in the Holy Ghost is witnessed by the initial physical sign of speaking with other tongues as the Spirit of God gives them utterance.”

⁸ See his popular accounts in *Nine O'clock in the Morning* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1970), pp. 79-80, for example, highlights speaking in tongues as the focus of the new spiritual experience: “Joy, freedom, and spiritual understanding came as the new language poured from their lips” (80).

⁹ The unique feature of Lukan pneumatology, particularly in contrast with Paul’s, has been the subject of several important Pentecostal treatises such as Roger Stronstad, *Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984)

empowerment theology presumes the calling of believers for ministry regardless of gender, age, and training. This is aptly coined by a Pentecostal scholar as the “prophethood of all believers,” that is, every believer is called to proclaim to be an active witness, in comparison with the traditional notion of the “priesthood of all believers.”¹⁰ This theological breakthrough has provided an incredible release of people in the pew for ministry, while the mainline and evangelical churches are still “ministered” predominantly by properly trained clergies. The explosive expansion of the movement in the first century of its existence, the birth of mega-churches, and the emergence of Pentecostalism as a main missionary force, all have found its theological rationale in the empowerment theology of Pentecostalism.

In a unique Pentecostal tradition, making of theology is now primarily in the hands of the masses in the pews. This theologizing process has been shaped through two important practices, among others. The first is spontaneous public utterance in the form of prophecy and messages in tongues and often with interpretation. These unique practices based on 1 Cor 14 have undoubtedly promoted the open invitation to everyone in the congregation to participate in worship and proclamation. As in the Azusa Street revival, a spontaneous congregational worship called the “heavenly choir,” often in tongues, is another common feature of Pentecostal worship today, and this also can be understood to have a similar effect on the participatory nature of Pentecostal worship and ethos.¹¹ Although presumably the message is not of human source, this has provided a conducive atmosphere for a participatory theologizing process. The second, and more direct than the first contributing element, is testimonies. Most likely Pentecostals inherited the Holiness practice of public testimonies, particularly in the camp meetings. In most Pentecostal worship, except in highly organized and prescriptive ones often found in mega-churches, a testimony time is an important part of the order of worship. With no prior arrangement, anyone is expected to share one’s testimony, often in the form of his or her recent experience with God. Even in tribal churches in the Cordillera mountain region of the Philippines, old and young members stand or come forward to the

and Robert P. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2004).

¹⁰ Roger Stronstad, *The Prophethood of All Believers: A Study in Luke’s Charismatic Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

¹¹ E.g., Larry Martin, *The Life and Ministry of William J. Seymour* (Joplin, MO: Christian Life Books, 1999), p. 187.

pulpit to share their experiences with God. Sometimes this lasts more than an hour. Occasionally, prayers are offered for certain needs expressed through the testimonies. This tradition provides a place not only for participation in theology-making, but also a space for the rest of the congregation to reflect, evaluate, and commonly share, once accepted as genuine and valid, the theological experiences of one member as a community possession. This has made Pentecostal theology inevitably a “people’s theology.” The uniqueness of this feature should be understood in the context where theologizing has been left exclusively in the hands of theological and ecclesial elites in most Christian traditions. In addition to the empowerment of individuals, the strengthening of the church in general has resulted in significant consequences in the areas of church growth, mission, and social upliftment. (For details, see below.).

This feature of empowerment in the Pentecostal tradition has several theological implications to the Philippine setting. Although historically church polity has produced various forms of church governance, no one would deny that a theology should have a broad participation particularly from real life situations, although clergy has to provide guidance and theological framework. In many non-western societies, including the Philippines, various social and historical factors have contributed to the existence of social classes. Although in “modern” times egalitarianism with the democratic idealism has strongly influenced Asian societies, the long cultural tradition of social class system still persists, often in subtle forms. This cultural milieu and the long Roman Catholic influence has fostered clergy-oriented Christianity and Protestantism has been not much different from the Catholics. In such a setting, the “anti-cultural” pattern of lay leadership among Pentecostal churches and independent charismatic fellowships has revolutionized the religious norms in the Philippines. The Pentecostal tradition here is known for the mobilization of laity, including women¹² and youth, or sometimes even children in leadership.¹³ The emergence of successful lay founders of charismatic

¹² One highly publicized program to augment this spiritual tradition can be seen in the cell group system of David Yonggi Cho’s Yoido Full Gospel Church. For details, see Yonggi Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups* (Miami, FL: Logos International, 1981). This mobilization of lay women in church should be understood in the highly male-dominant social context of Korea.

¹³ Suico, “Pentecostalism in the Philippines,” p. 350. In Buguias, Benguet Province, I was delighted to see in 2001 a nine-year old girl lead a song service for a Sunday morning worship. In Yoido Full Gospel Church, for many decades, the cell system includes children’s cells and their leaders are also children,

groups is another unique expression evident in Philippine Charismatic Christianity: Eddie Villanueva of the Jesus Is the Lord Church, “Butch” Conde of the Bread of Life Ministries, and, recently, Mario “Mike” Z. Velarde of the El Shaddai Catholic charismatic group, to name just a few. Due to the cultural makeup, traditionally the role of women in the Philippine society in general has been strongly encouraged, and the Pentecostal tradition of empowerment of all believers for ministry has further enhanced women in leadership positions in churches.

In spite of this emergence of a radical shift in church leadership, a broad participation of laity in the formation of “our” theology will be a challenging ideal. Filipino Pentecostals need to articulate and foster this important theological gift.

In a broader sense, the Pentecostals need to continue to develop the empowerment theology of all believers not only for their own sake, but also to effect other church traditions including the mainline Protestantism and Catholic churches. Adding the “prophetic” (or service and more specifically proclamation) to the traditional “priestly” call for all believers is a unique theological contribution to the churches. With the already advantageous cultural traditions of empowerment of laity, Philippine Christianity can influence other Asian churches particularly in the traditionally class or male dominant societies through the increasing missionary activities.

Socially speaking, in this traditionally elite dominant society, the empowerment of the socially marginalized is a theological potential that Pentecostals can develop to make a positive contribution to the society. How the “People Power II” has been interpreted by some sectors as a hegemony war between the established socio-political elites and powerless majority is an interesting reflection to an outsider, but it also demonstrates the longing of the masses to be socially and politically empowered to be the positive and forceful movers of the society. Here the Pentecostals provide a creative role of empowerment from their theological traditions.

One important area to watch, however, is the mushrooming of independent churches (mostly Pentecostal-charismatic type) in the past decades, often led by people with little or no theological training. The down side of the democratization of ministry is the “entrepreneurial” and casual approach to ministry. With little regulation for ordination, for example, hundreds, if not thousands, “ministers” were born during this

leading cell gathering, worship and other activities under the supervision of a clergy or teacher.

period. Schisms among churches have become a scandal of Pentecostal Christianity in many parts of the world. Some times moral standard and lifestyle of some leaders are being questioned, resulting in the formation of a religious “free market” where anyone is free to set up a church, or even a denomination. Thus, how Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity in country can establish its credibility will be an on-going challenge.

2.2 Theology of Transformation

In a way, closely related to the empowerment emphasis of Pentecostal theology is the potential of transformation in various levels of human life. The “uninherited” and marginalized mass suddenly acquired a radically new worldview: their perception of self and everything around them.¹⁴

In many testimonies, the chain of changes is attested to, often with a radical inner transformation, through conversion experiences, but far more often through the “baptism in the Holy Spirit.” Here is one typical description of this unique experience by C. H. Mason, a prominent leader of the Church of God in Christ, the largest Pentecostal denomination in North America:

So there came a wave of glory into me, and all of my being was filled with the glory of the Lord. So when I had gotten myself straight on my feet there came a light which enveloped my entire being above the brightness of the sun. When I opened my mouth to say, “Glory,” a flame touched my tongue then ran down to me. My language changed and no word could I speak in my own tongue. Oh, I was filled with the glory of my Lord. My soul was then satisfied.¹⁵

Although it is not fully articulated, the Pentecostals assume that a genuine and unmistakable change begins with the inner being of a person. This is an opposite approach to the liberation theology of Latin America, which experimented a structured and community-based transformation. The general perception of the net result has not been satisfactory in spite

¹⁴ An exceptional helpful study of Pentecostal’s potential for social transformation is found in Joseph R. Suico, “Institutional and Individualistic Dimensions of Transformational Development: The Case of Pentecostal Churches in the Philippines” (Ph.D. thesis, University Wales, 2003).

¹⁵ E. W. Mason, *The Man...Chares Harrison Mason: Sermons of His Early Ministry (1915-1929) and a Biographical Sketch of His Life* (n.p., n.d.), pp. 15-19 quoted in Martin, *The Life and Ministry of William J. Seymour*, p. 215.

of much planning, financial support, studies and effort. On the other hand, on the Pentecostal side, Teen Challenge may provide a good example.¹⁶ Its unusually successful drug rehabilitation program, which began in 1960 in New York,¹⁷ attracted much attention from government agencies and private sectors. The same report reveals not only a stunning success rate between 67-86% after seven years of their graduation from the Teen Challenge program, 72% continued their education to the college level, 75% are employed, 67% are regularly attending church (while 57% are involved in ministry), and 92% maintain good to excellent health.¹⁸ At the core of its value is the inner transformation of individuals and, earlier, this radical transformation was sought through the experience of the baptism in the Spirit. This powerful experience radically changes one's values, priorities, life's goal, attitude, habits and the entire life, often instantly, although there is a continuing process of molding.

This transformation potential is well attested to in the growth of churches. Although multiple factors contribute to the growth of a local church, there is no doubt that each member contributes to the health and growth of the church. Hong's study reveals that ten of the twelve mega-churches in Korea are Pentecostal or Pentecostal-like in their ethos, worship and message.¹⁹ Harper makes a similar observation about Philippine churches that Pentecostal churches would lead the growth of Christianity in the Philippines.²⁰ A study of the several large churches in the country proves that growing churches are Pentecostal in orientation.²¹

¹⁶ See for example David R. Wilkerson with John and Elizabeth Sherrill, *The Cross and the Switchblade* (New York: B. Geis, 1968).

¹⁷ "History" (www.teenchallenge.com/index.cfm?infoID=7¢erID=1194), checked: Feb 21, 2005. One report reveals that the "Teen Challenge claims of a 70% cure rate for the drug addicts graduating from their program...[while] most secular drug rehabilitation programs only experienced a cure rate of 1-15% of their graduates," "National Institute on Drug Abuse Report" (<http://www.teenchallenge.com/index.cfm?studiesID=3>), checked: Feb 21, 2005.

¹⁸ "National Institute on Drug Abuse Report."

¹⁹ Young-gi Hong, "The Backgrounds and Characteristics of the Charismatic Mega-churches in Korea," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 3:1 (2000), pp. 99-118.

²⁰ George W. Harper, "Philippine Tongues of Fire? Latin American Pentecostalism and the Future of Filipino Christianity," *Journal of Asian Mission* 2:2 (2000), pp. 225-59.

²¹ Julie C. Ma, "Growing Churches in Manila," *Asia Journal of Theology* 11 (1997), pp. 324-42.

The issue of growth may not be so critical in the Philippines as in many other Asian nations, but it is important to note that Christianity is a minority in the sea of religions in Asia, and the growth of churches is, in fact, a powerful demonstration that the Christian God is indeed true and powerful, thus, rendering credibility to the Christian message. On the other hand, more critical “growth” of the church is in the area of paradigm shift in individual and church life wrought partly through the influence of Pentecostal Christianity, such as aggressive evangelism, church planting, lay mobilization, lively music, and celebratory nature of worship. The Pentecostal contribution to the “renewal” of churches is unquestioned.

When it comes to social transformation through Pentecostal influence, many studies from and on Latin America illustrate the Pentecostal’s potential for social “upward mobility,”²² another form of empowerment. Unlike the Catholic and mainline social programs, the Pentecostal approach to individual, family and social transformation has been remarkably effective. This “religion of the poor” (against the “religion for the poor,” referring to the church’s program for the underprivileged) has empowered the marginalized mass in a holistic manner and, as a result, many Pentecostals in Latin America are now middle class, influencing citizens of their countries. In Asia this trend is also noticed, that many Pentecostals have advanced in their socio-economic status in the society. In Korea, for example, David Yonggi Cho’s theology of blessing has challenged many urban poor to believe in the “good God” who is concerned not only with their eternal life, but also their daily needs.²³ Many popular televangelists in this country, including Mike Villarde and even controversial Apollo Quiboloy of Kingdom Broadcasting Network, have preached the immanent aspect of God’s presence with instantaneous provision of physical and material needs and have attracted large followings. While undeniably the emphasis on God’s immediate provision has contributed significantly, the relevance of the Christian message in the minds of the masses has also contributed to the

²² E.g., David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Pentecostalism in Latin America* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

²³ E.g., Wonsuk Ma, “Asian (Classical) Pentecostal Theology in Context,” in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, eds. Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2005), pp. 59-91 (64-75).

“pop” version of Christianity, sometimes accused of being shamanistic, in the sense that God is exploited for the worshipper’s personal gain.²⁴

In the social context of the Philippines, as well as Asia in general, a more serious social issue is before Pentecostal Christianity: moral transformation. The Philippines, the only Christian nation in Asia, has failed to demonstrate the high moral standards that are generally expected among Christian nations. The corruption index of the nation is one of the lowest in Asia.²⁵ Moreover, recently a question was raised: Why have many political, government, and business leaders of the country trained in Christian (in this case mostly Catholic) universities become part of social corruption and graft? If, in the last fifty years, Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity has reached close to ten million, about one-seventh of the total population, what difference have they made to the moral standards of the society is a pointing question.²⁶ The highly publicized moral failures of some Pentecostal preachers in the West have already posed some hard questions to Pentecostals.

In the last general election, the Philippines experienced for the first time the political potential of Charismatic Christianity, attained for the first time its political potential for two fronts: a presidential candidate, coming from a large charismatic congregation, and also the voting power of El Shaddai, perhaps an 8-million strong Catholic charismatic movement. Some even suggested that to the traditional three “determinants for the presidential election in the Philippines,” Charismatic Christianity demonstrated its potential either to replace one of the existing three, perhaps Iglesia ni Cristo, or to become a new determinant in this highly visible demonstration of political powers. Whether it is consciously recognized or not, Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity has grown in its influence on the society, and it is a proper

²⁴ For a little different reason, Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995), pp. 218-19, 224-28, 240-41; Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*:

²⁵ “Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index 2002” (Berlin: Transparency International Secretariat, 2002) available at http://www.transparency.org/pressreleases_archive/2002/dnld/cpi2002.pressrelease.en.pdf, checked Feb 21, 2005.

²⁶ For a good biblical basis for Pentecostal contribution to moral restoration, see Matthias Wenk, *Community-Forming Power: The Socio-Ethical Role of the Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

theological reflection which will provide guidelines to promote a just society, while sharing Christian witness.

2.3 Potential of Unity

The theological potential for Pentecostal religion to cross the barriers of differences is primarily found in the incredible racial and ecclesial diversity among the participants of the Azusa Street revival (1906-09). Although severely scorned by white-dominant mass media and the existing ecclesial establishment of the time, the revival led by a humble African-American Holiness preacher was a powerful demonstration of the Holy Spirit's potential to bring radically different people together in the genuine celebration of God's presence.

Although the revival started among a few who were African-American by race, Holiness by doctrine, and lower to middle in economic class, eventually men and women from all races, creeds and socioeconomic positions worshiped together in the unassuming little mission.²⁷

To Christian unity, this "spontaneous ecumenicity"²⁸ among Spirit-filled believers, regardless of their ecclesial affiliation, has been demonstrated time and again. Robeck reminds the Pentecostals of their powerful and yet hidden potential for ecumenism found in the work of the Holy Spirit.²⁹ Kitano, employing a sociological analysis demonstrated that the socio-religious distance between, for example, Pentecostals and non-Charismatic Catholics is significantly far, leaving little expectation that they would engage with each other. However, the socio-religious distance between Pentecostals and Charismatic Catholics is very close, even if their fundamental theological differences still remain.³⁰ This study done in Metro Manila in the 1980s proves that genuine ecumenism

²⁷ Martin, *The Life and Ministry of William J. Seymour*, p. 194.

²⁸ Koichi Kitano, "Spontaneous Ecumenicity between Catholics and Protestants in the Charismatic Movement: A Case Study" (Ph.D. dissertation, Centro Escolar University, Philippines, 1981).

²⁹ E.g., Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., "Pentecostals and the Apostolic Faith: Implications for Ecumenism," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 9:1 (Spring, 1987), pp. 61-84.

³⁰ Koichi Kitano, "Socio-religious Distance between Charismatics and Other Religious Group Members: A Case Study of the Philippines in the 1980s," *Journal of Asian Mission* 5:2 (2003), pp. 231-42.

is possible not through efforts to reduce theological differences, but through a powerful encounter with the Holy Spirit. Also, the emergence of the Charismatic movement in the 1960s among mainline churches and the Roman Catholic Church powerfully demonstrated the inter-confessional potential that Pentecostal spiritual experiences can easily be incorporated into the existing theological systems.

However, Pentecostals have two challenges to face in order to fully recognize its ecumenical potential and make positive contributions to the larger church world. The first is the historical reality that Pentecostals have caused more church divisions, understandably due to its unique doctrinal positions, but also, more often than not, due to personality conflicts. The proliferation of Pentecostal denominations in the early twentieth century in North America, especially in some areas, was in direct opposition to its theological potential. This is also true in the Philippines and other countries. Not only in big cities, but also in rural areas, the mushrooming of independent Pentecostal congregations is shamefully alarming. Secondly, thus, Pentecostals need to commit themselves to live up to their theological mandate and distinctives. This requires an intentional action toward church unity. The recent new ecumenical initiative around the creation of the Global Christian Forum (GCF) and its warm invitation extended to the Pentecostals is an encouraging move.³¹ The Asian Consultation of the GCF took place in May, 2004 in Hong Kong with 150 Asian Christian leaders encompassing Catholics and Pentecostals and every possible group in between. As a result of this gathering, an ecumenical academic conference took place in Baguio in January, 2005 with representatives from the Catholic, mainline (including Episcopalian, Methodist, Lutheran, United Church of Christ in the Philippines), evangelicals and Pentecostals.

The second area of unity concerns multi-racial matters. Bartleman, an eyewitness and participant in the Azusa Street revival, reported the unheard of interracial nature of the mission: "Divine love was wonderfully manifest in the meetings... The message was the love of God. It was a sort of 'first love' of the early church returned... The 'color line' is washed away by the blood."³² This went beyond the racial differences. The Azusa Street mission transcended the socio-economic

³¹ "Taking Shape: Global Christian Forum" (<http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/news/press/00/25pre.html>, 2000): checked: July 1, 2005.

³² Frank Bartleman, *Azusa Street*, foreword by Vinson Synan (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1980), p. 54.

differences as well, while the majority of established churches represented often clearly demarked socio-economic lines: “educated and illiterate, rich and poor, brown, black and white all worshiped together”³³ under the leadership of a “one-eyed, illiterate, Negro” preacher.³⁴ *The Apostolic Faith*, the official monthly publication of the Azusa mission even reported, “One token of the Lord’s coming is that He is melting all races and nations together, and they are filled with the power and glory of God. He is baptizing by one spirit into one body and making up a people that will be ready to meet Him when He comes.”³⁵ This interracial fellowship, however, was quickly met with a harsh reaction from local communities and media. The media was particularly strong in condemning the interracial nature of the mission, and captions such as “Disgraceful Intermingling of the Races” appeared regularly.³⁶ This harsh criticism came not only from the secular media, but more disappointingly from other Christian traditions. Unfortunately, this signaled the devastating development of the mission: schisms initiated by white Christian leaders from within as well as without. The long awaited visit of Charles Parham, the mentor of Seymour, in September, 1906 ended with Parham’s harsh condemnation of the interracial fellowship of the Azusa Street mission. He established his own racially exclusive, in this case white, congregation not far from the mission.³⁷ Two white female leaders of the mission left with the mailing list of *The Apostolic Faith* and established their own ministry in Oregon, triggering the unrecoverable decline of the mission. Underwood attributed this racial division partly to the immense pressure consistently exerted by the secular press.³⁸ Until the last decade of the twentieth century, most of the Pentecostal denominations in North America were exclusively either black or white, until the so-called “Memphis Miracle” took place to resolve the exclusively white body of Pentecostal churches in North America and the “white” denominations joined the more inclusive, thus, black-controlled Pentecostal-Charismatic Church of North America in

³³ Martin, *The Life and Ministry of William J. Seymour*, p. 196.

³⁴ “Weird Babel of Tongues,” *Los Angeles Daily Times*, April 18, 1906, p. 1.

³⁵ “One token...,” *The Apostolic Faith* (Los Angeles), Feb-Mar, 1907), p. 7.

³⁶ Martin, *The Life and Ministry of William J. Seymour*, p. 248.

³⁷ It was the Women’s Temperance Christian Union building at Broadway and Temple Street, literally a few blocks away from the Azusa Street Mission.

³⁸ B. E. Underwood, “Memphis Miracle,” *Legacy* 1997:4 (Summer), pp. 3-6 (3).

1994. What the Holy Spirit miraculously put together was miserably divided by humans.³⁹

As Samuel Huntington and many others argue, the post-Cold War era has seen increasing and intensifying conflicts along racial (thus religious) lines. Somalia, former Yugoslavia, and East Timor are only a few examples. The rise of radical religious fundamentalism and its clash among religious groups, as predicted by Harvey Cox,⁴⁰ was displayed horribly and powerfully in the 9/11 incident. In the Philippines, subtle racial conflict and sometimes rivalry still exists. However, what is more critical is the conflict in Mindanao by Islamic groups. Although this conflict is religious in nature, one cannot ignore the racial/ethnic component imbedded in the issues.

2.4 Contextualization

It has been observed that Pentecostalism has a very different worldview orientation from many traditional Christian groups. In the West in particular, the spiritual world has been practically ignored for a long time, primarily due to the Enlightenment influences in education. As a result of this rationalistic Christian orientation, anything that cannot be proven scientifically has been removed in Christian thinking, including healing, miracles, prophecy, exorcism, et al. This rationalistic Christianity flourished in the West also because of their increasing affluence and social welfare systems, thus, God is less needed in everyday life. The existence and role of angels and demons, for instance, has steadily diminished in this social and mental environment. When Christianity is brought into a radically different world where existing religions assume a lively and active spiritual world and its close interference with human daily life, this type of Christianity has been found simply handicapped in responding to such daily needs. Inevitably, this has resulted in “split-level Christianity”⁴¹ where a Christian's loyalty and commitment is divided between their new Christian religion for the matters of sin, salvation and afterlife, and to their old religion for daily and existential matters such as disease, omens, daily material needs, et al.

Pentecostal worldview with its restored spiritual world has brought the lost elements of Christianity into the forefront. They include the

³⁹ Underwood, “Memphis Miracle,” pp. 3-6.

⁴⁰ Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, pp. 302-304.

⁴¹ E.g., David S. Lim, “A Critique of Modernity in Protestant Missions in the Philippines,” *Journal of Asian Mission* 2:2 (2000), pp. 149-77 (156 n. 29).

emotive or expressive element of worship (now in songs in particular) and the demonstration of spiritual power resulting in healing, miracles, exorcism and prophetic words. In fact, a Pentecostal scholar argued convincingly that the worldviews of Pentecostalism and animism share many similarities with each other.⁴² With the demonstration of the tangible reality of God as a Pentecostal ethos, it demonstrates better potential for contextualization among animistically-oriented minds (and after all Asians, Filipinos included, are mostly animistically oriented). This is a stark contrast with the substantial disparity between western Christianity and animistic worldviews, and presents a strong possibility for ideal contextualization.

There is also a practical side to Pentecostal's contextual potential. Poverty is the number one challenge to Asia, and Pentecostal response to felt and daily needs has resulted in an explosive growth of this type of Christianity. For instance, the prevailing message of Mike Villarde of the El Shadai Charismatic group has been God's ability to meet people's daily needs and desires. There is no doubt that this positive notion of God and Christianity has resulted in many cases of social and economic "upward mobility" as previously seen in Latin America. It is also unusual to hear many testimonies of God's miraculous material and physical blessings.

At the same time, there is a great potential that this emphasis on pragmatic and self-oriented religious expectation can easily create another form of "animistic" Christianity. David Yonggi Cho, the pastor of the world's largest single congregation in Korea was accused of propagating shamanistic Christianity. In fact, there are good cases of Pentecostal syncretism in Asia and the Philippines. As seen in Africa, it is possible to see religious groups that are "more Pentecostal but less Christian." Related to this is the danger that Pentecostalism may become a "pop religion" with the increasing and elaborate music and worship which appears to be quite close to the consumer-oriented entertainment industries.

⁴² Julie C. Ma, *When the Spirit Meets the Spirits: Pentecostal Ministry among the Kankana-ey Tribe in the Philippines* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 213-31.

As “post-colonial” thinking is advocated in some parts of Asia,⁴³ self-awareness of Asian Christians to obtain “theological independence” from the missionary, thus, often western-dominant theological agenda and process, has been a constant call from within as well as without.⁴⁴ In this context, Pentecostalism has demonstrated its possibility to present culturally acceptable and viable Christianity to Filipinos and Asians with its holistic worldview. The Pentecostals have to constantly warn themselves of the gravity toward an animistic, pragmatic and pop variety of Christian religion.

3. Conclusion

Pentecostals in the past have been more activity-oriented with less emphasis on reflection and theological construction. This “intuitive Pentecostal theology” often deduced from their religious practices need to be articulated, especially in its socio-religious context. Their raw material for theologization are narratives such as testimonies, songs, sermons and the like. In spite of its danger of subjectivism, its theology from ordinary people (or “theology from down to up”) can make an important contribution in its theological process and the fruit of theologization.

With a few areas where Pentecostal spiritual tradition can make a significant contribution in the theological process in the Philippines, the Philippine churches hold an important promise to the entirety of Asia and beyond. The growth of Pentecostal Christianity results in an increasing impact to the large church world and society, including the political arena. Also noted is the rapid growth of international mission movements. Filipinos are perhaps best equipped for cross-cultural

⁴³ See R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998). Also the Association of Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA) began a project to re-evaluate and revise the so-called “Critical Asian Principles” in doing theology in Asia, at the center of which is the colonial history in Asia. In the theological arena, coming out of missionary-, thus, western-led theologization in Asia to relevant Asian theology by Asians has been a continuing call.

⁴⁴ For example, Warren Newberry, “Contextualizing Indigenous Church Principles: An African Model,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 8:1 (2005), pp. 95-115 (110-14) proposed additional component to the traditional “Three-Self” indigenous church principle, and one of the new component is “Self-Theologizing.”

ministries with their adaptability in language and culture, high educational standards, constant supply of young ministerial candidates, minimal budgetary requirements and others. Born of their worldviews and religious experiences, signs and wonders will play an important part in future mission, particularly in the non-western continents. How to fully augment the holistic approach to their own society through moral transformation will be a critical challenge for Philippine Christianity at large and Pentecostals in particular.

With the growing scholarly reflections among Filipinos, it is possible or even plausible for Filipino Pentecostals to see increasing contributions to the future of Asian Pentecostal movement through their theological reflection. If this is coupled with the steady growth and missionary movement, Philippine Pentecostalism is poised to impact Philippine Christianity (including Roman Catholicism) and Asia.