

Internationale Theologie
International Theology

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**The Pentecostal
Movement,
its Challenges
and Potential**



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EDITION

Chapter One

An Introduction to the Dissertation

1.1 Pentecostalism as a Rapidly Growing Feature of the Global Religious Stage – The Rationale for this Research

Pentecostalism features prominently on the global religious stage.¹ By the end of the twentieth century more than 200 distinct or separate Pentecostal churches had established themselves in the United States of America.² Many of these churches are small but the two largest, the Assemblies of God and the Church of God in Christ have claimed millions of adherents.³ Others, like the United Pentecostal Church, claim hundreds of thousands of followers.⁴ According to a 1978 Gallup survey, 19 percent or 29 million adult Americans considered themselves to be Pentecostal Christians.⁵ Pentecostalism has grown around the globe, with there being nearly 525 million adherents worldwide.⁶ The growth has been marked in sub-Sa-

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- 1 Barratt, D. and Johnson, T. 2001. "Annual Statistical table on Global Mission in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, (January 2001) p25; Brierly, P. and Wraight, H. 1998. *Atlas of World Christianity: 2000 Years*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, p4 and 13; Shaull, R. and Cesar, W. 2000. *Pentecostalism and the Future of the Christian Churches: Promises, Limitations, Challenges*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, p9; Wacker, G. 2001. *Heaven Below, Early Pentecostals and American Culture*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, p8; Dempster, M. Klaus, B. and Petersen, D. Eds. 1999. *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel*. Irvine, California: Regnum; Macchia, F. 2006. *Baptized in the Spirit, A Global Pentecostal Theology*. Grand Rapids: Michigan: Zondervan, p33.
 - 2 Melton, J. 1993. "The Pentecostal Family" in *Encyclopedia of American Religions*. Detroit: Gale Research, pp77-84 and 401-78; Wacker, *Heaven Below*, p7.
 - 3 Melton, "The Pentecostal Family", pp77-84 and 401-78; Wacker, *Heaven Below*, p7.
 - 4 *Ibid*.
 - 5 Kantzer, K. 1980. "The Charismatics Among Us", *Christianity Today*, February, 22, 1980, pp24-9; Wacker, *Heaven Below*, p7.
 - 6 Gallup, G. 1985. *Religion in America, 50 Years: 1935-1985*. Gallup Report No. 236. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Research Center Inc; Cox, H. 1995. *Fire from Heaven: the Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley; Brierley and Wraight, *Atlas of World Christianity*, p4 and 13; Shaull and Cesar, *Pentecostalism and the Future of the Christian Churches*, p9; Barratt and Johnson, "Annual Statistical Table"; Wacker, *Heaven Below*, p8; Poloma, M. 2003. *Main Street Mystics*. Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press, p19.

haran Africa, south-east Asia and especially in Latin America, where there are 15 to 20 million in Brazil alone – some 10 to 20 percent of that country's population.⁷

The Assemblies of God church was founded in 1914 by about three hundred persons and has grown into the twelfth largest Protestant denomination in the United States.⁸ Its growth has extended beyond the United States of America to over one hundred different countries, embracing some fifteen million followers worldwide.⁹ It is now one of the most rapidly growing Christian organizations in the world.¹⁰

The term 'Pentecostal' derives from the account of Pentecost in Acts 2:4 where Luke describes how, on the day of Pentecost, those gathered in the upper room "were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues".¹¹ Broadly stated, there are three types of 'Pentecostals' in the twentieth century: the classical Pentecostal movement, connected to the so-called 'Azusa Street revival' in Los Angeles in 1906-1909 (which began in an old building at 312 Azusa Street in downtown Los Angeles); the charismatic-renewal movement in the more traditional Protestant, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic churches beginning in the 1960s; and a "catch-all category that comprises 18 810 independent, indigenous, post-denominational groups that cannot be classified as either Pentecostal or charismatic but share a common emphasis on the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, Pentecostal-like experiences, signs and wonders and power encounters".¹²

Inclusively defined, there is a consensus that there were about 525 million adherents of Pentecostalism world-wide in 2000, constituting about 28 percent of the world Christian population and 8.65 percent of the total world population.¹³

7 *Ibid.*

8 Jacquet, C. 1971. *Yearbook of American Churches*. New York: National Council of Churches, p18; Jacquet, C. 1981. *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, p18; Poloma, M. 1989. *The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads*. Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, p.xv.

9 Jacquet, *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*; Poloma, *The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads*, the cover and p.xvi.

10 Jacquet, *Yearbook of American Churches*, p18; Jacquet, *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*, p18; Poloma, *The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads*, p.xvi, 19.

11 *Revised Standard Version*. 1965. New York: William Collins.

12 Burgess, M. and Van der Maas, E. Eds. 2002. *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, pp.xviii-xxi, xx and 286-9; Yong, A. 2002. *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, pp248-51; Yong, A. 2000. *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, pp151-61; Yong, A. 2005. *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh, Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, p18. Welker, M. 2006. "The Introduction" in Welker, M. Ed. *The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, p.x.

13 Gallup, *Religion in America*; Burgess and Van der Maas, *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, pp286-9; Poloma, *Main Street Mystics*, p19; Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, pp248-51; Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, p19.

Of the some 525 million world-wide, more than 400 million or 76 percent live in Latin America, Africa and Asia.¹⁴ The pace and extent of the growth of Pentecostalism has attracted increasing interest from outside scholars.¹⁵

An example of this gathering interest is the fact that Douglas Petersen, together with Murray Dempster and Byron Klaus, organized an international conference in Costa Rica in 1997 with this globalization of Pentecostalism as its theme.¹⁶ According to Frank Macchia, one of the outcomes of this conference was an across-the-board awareness of the potential located within the Pentecostal movement as a contributor to ecumenical conversations.¹⁷ This potential reposes in Pentecostal claims of the experience of the Spirit.¹⁸ The 'experience of the Spirit' eludes easy definition. The concept will be explored and developed in the chapters that follow.

The rate of growth of the Pentecostal movement over a relatively short period of time provides the rationale for this research. Against this background of growth, questions arise as to: (i) what may account for this gathering, global momentum of Pentecostalism as a broad religious movement; (ii) what might the implications of this momentum be; (iii) what might be the challenges which the movement faces in the years that lie ahead and (iv) does the Pentecostal movement possess the potential to contribute fruitfully to academic and theological conversations about faith in a rapidly globalizing world? The primary aim of this research is to endeavor to answer these questions. This dissertation was successfully submitted as a doctoral thesis at the Karl-Ruprechts Universität in Heidelberg, Germany under the title: *The Work of the Spirit, the Contribution by American Contemporary Scholars of Pentecostalism to an Understanding of the Worldwide Pentecostal Movement- the Reasons for its Growth, its Intellectual Challenges and its Potential in Dialogue about faith in a Globalizing World*. The degree was awarded *cum laude*.

14 Burgess and Van der Maas, *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, pp286-9; Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, p248-51; Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, p19.

15 He refers, for example, to Crawley, W. 2001 *World Christianity, 1970-2000: Toward a New Millennium*. Pasadena, California: William Carey Library; Jenkins, P. 2002. *The New Christendom: the Coming of Global Christianity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, p19.

16 Dempster et al, *The Globalization of Pentecostalism*; Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, p33.

17 Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, p33.

18 *Ibid*.

1.2 The Pursuit of the Aim

In the pursuit of this aim, the writings of four American scholars have been examined. These scholars are:

- (i) Grant Wacker;
- (ii) Margaret Poloma;
- (iii) Frank Macchia; and
- (iv) Amos Yong.

All four of these scholars have a Pentecostal background and have undertaken research into and made observations about the Pentecostal movement. In at least some instances their academic interests have not been exclusively focused on specifically Pentecostal developments. The focus of this research has been deliberately multidisciplinary or, at least, transdisciplinary.¹⁹ The four scholars come from different intellectual disciplines and social *milieu*. Wacker is an historian, Poloma a sociologist, and both Macchia and Yong are theologians, having a Pentecostal ministry. Yong's background and interests are more internationalist than those of Macchia.

A multidisciplinary or transdisciplinary approach, by working across disciplinary boundaries, may have the following advantages:

19 There is considerable confusion as to the correct terminology to adopt where research crosses the boundaries of a specific discipline. The terms *interdisciplinary*, *multidisciplinary*, *cross-disciplinary*, and *transdisciplinary* are often used interchangeably and often erroneously. *Interdisciplinary* research involves "a co-operative effort by a team of investigators, each expert in the use of different methods and concepts, who have joined in an organized program to attack a challenging problem". *Multidisciplinary* research occurs where "independent or sequential research" takes place "focused on a common problem" but less sharing of ideas occurs in this instance than in the case of *interdisciplinary* research. *Transdisciplinary* research involves "the development of a common conceptual framework that bridges the relevant disciplines" and "can serve as the basis for generating new research questions related to the defined problems". A hallmark of *transdisciplinary* research is that it aims at achieving "novel and integrative conceptual models". See Rosenfield, P.L. 1992. *The Potential of Transdisciplinary Research for Sustaining and Extending Linkages between the Health and Social Sciences*. Soc Sci. Med. 35: pp1343-57; Fitzpatrick, J. 2002. "Multidisciplinary and Interdisciplinary Research: What it is and What it is not", *Applied Nursing Research* 16 (2): 59; Marts, S.A. 2002. "Interdisciplinary Research is the Key to Understanding Sex Differences: Report from the Society for Women's Health Research Meeting on Understanding the Biology of Sex Differences", *Journal of Women's Health and Gender-Based Medicine*. 11 (6), pp501-509; Stokols, D., Harvey, R., Gress, J., Fuqua, J. and Phillips, K. 2005. "In Vivo Studies of Transdisciplinary Scientific Research Collaboration: Lessons Learned and Implications for Active Living Research", *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. 28 (2S2), pp202-13 and 204; Hall, J. et al. 2005. *The Benefits and Barriers to Interdisciplinary Research in the Health Sciences in Canada*. Canadian Academy of Health Sciences.

- (i) The research will draw upon the strengths within the different academic disciplines concerned;
- (ii) The potential weaknesses in the approaches of different academic disciplines may be mitigated;
- (iii) Catalytic, synergistic consequences arising from the interaction of different academic disciplines may emerge, having a 'multiplier effect'.

The work of these four scholars will also be compared and contrasted with certain critical trends in philosophy and theology both in the twentieth century and at the cusp of the twenty-first.

The overall assumption of this research is that there are likely to be benefits to be derived from current developments in scholarship focused upon and within the contemporary Pentecostal movement. In summary, the research aims to determine the reasons for Pentecostalism's world-wide, rapidly growing following and, in doing so, to uncover academic and theological trends and tendencies within the movement. In the process, the likely challenges which the movement faces in the coming decades become apparent.

The American focus of this research derives from the conviction that one cannot properly understand the Pentecostal movement without having a sense of its American roots and the continuing influence of American traditions of pluralism and pragmatism upon the movement worldwide.²⁰ The Pentecostal movement traces its origins to the leadership of an itinerant Methodist preacher in America, Charles Fox Parham, who started a Bible school in Topeka, Kansas in January 1901.²¹ The Azusa Street revival is generally regarded as the event which gave critical momentum to the movement and launched it on the trajectory from which it has continuously grown from strength to strength.²²

Both the process and the outcome of any research will be affected by the theoretical framework within which it has been undertaken. This research has been premised upon five main suppositions.

20 See, for example, Wacker, *Heaven Below*, pp265-6; Poloma, *The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads*, p66 and 87.

21 Wacker, *Heaven Below*, pp100-104.

22 *Ibid.*, pp5-7, 37, 39, 49, 71, 77, 79, 100, 104, 132, 160, 178, 194, 201, 215, 227, 230, 232.

1.3 The Suppositions of this Research

The suppositions of this research are:

- (i) A transdisciplinary approach to research of this nature is likely to yield more widely validated conclusions than an approach which is more narrowly focused;
- (ii) Pentecostals in general and the intellectuals among them, in particular, may have the potential to contribute to worldwide academic and theological discourse in the coming decades;
- (iii) Theologically, the Spirit is likely to be best understood as being poly-contextual and polyphonic;
- (iv) The Spirit is theologically best understood as the *Deus absconditus*, the hidden God, the divine presence always active and engaged in the unfolding of the world, at least to some extent, and always working from within the processes of the world;²³
- (v) In the long run, theology (or any other intellectual discipline) which is inconsistent with scientific knowledge and discovery will be moribund.

‘The Spirit’, ‘the Holy Spirit’, or ‘the Spirit of God’ may be used coextensively and interchangeably with one another.²⁴ In this research, unless the context otherwise requires, the term ‘the Spirit’ is normally used for the concept in question.

1.4 Sources and Data Collection

This dissertation researches and analyses the published material of the above-mentioned four American Pentecostals. The research has also been undertaken

23 Moltmann, J. 1993. *God in Creation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, p9; Moltmann, J. 2003. *Science and Wisdom*. Translated by Kohl, M. London: SCM Press, pp66-7; Polkinghorne J. 1994. *Science and Christian Belief, Reflections of a Bottom-Up Thinker*. London: SPCK, p147; Polkinghorne J. 1996. *The Faith of A Physicist*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, p151; Welker, M. 2006. “The Spirit in Philosophical, Theological and Interdisciplinary Perspectives” in Welker, M. Ed. *The Work of the Spirit*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, the Preface; Kim, K. 2007. *The Holy Spirit in the World, a Global Conversation*. New York: SPCK, pp1-8.

24 See Yong, A. “*Ruach*, the Primordial Waters and the Breath of Life: Emergence Theory and Creation Narratives in Pneumatological Perspective”, in Welker, M. Ed. *The Work of the Spirit*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, pp183-204; Cruden, A., Irwin, C., Adams, A. and Waters, S.A. Eds. 1990 (Reprinted and Revised). *Complete Concordance to the Old and New Testaments*. Cambridge: the Lutterworth Press, p626; Kelly, J. 1968 (reprinted 1975). *Early Christian Doctrines*, 4th Edition London: Adam and Charles Black, p261; and see, also, more generally, the *New Jerusalem Bible*. 1985. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.

by reference to academic publications worldwide which touch upon the action of the Spirit. Original sources from Wacker, Poloma, Macchia, Yong, Moltmann, Polkinghorne and certain other contemporary theological writers' works, as well as commentaries on their works, have been considered in this research. Journal articles have aided in the interpretation and understanding of the ideas and insights considered in this research.

1.5 Methodology

In addition to the review of the published work of the four American scholars mentioned above, other pneumatological literature has been considered. Some of this literature is foundational but most is contemporary.

It has been expected that a comparative analysis of the research of Wacker, Poloma, Macchia and Yong will provide useful insights: all of these scholars have deep knowledge of the Pentecostal movement, derived not merely from a theoretical perspective but also from experience. Commonalities in their understandings may permit reasonably firm conclusions, especially where these commonalities are endorsed by other scholars. Differences invite further examination and exploration. Where there are differences of opinion and interpretation among these four scholars, the work of other contemporaries is explored to draw tentative conclusions and to test which position can more safely be regarded as correct.

Essentially, this research is concerned with the intellectual progress or *movement* over time that is to be discerned within Pentecostalism, especially insofar as its relations with the wider world are concerned. For this reason the researcher has tried to follow a broadly chronological sequence. This 'chronological orientation' in the research has influenced the sequence of the chapters as beginning with an historian, then turning to deal with a sociologist, and finally with theological scholars. In dealing with theological scholars, the research ends with the more 'radical' of the two. The movement from the past into the present, in order to facilitate a gaze into the future, features in the progress of the research.

Among the challenges in this research has been to find answers to questions which some of the scholars themselves have not asked. Another challenge has been to try to find commonalities in the deductions which they have made. Not all of the questions raised at the beginning of this chapter have been raised either singly or collectively by every one of the scholars whose work has been the focus of this research. The questions posed by this research have, in some instances, not even interested certain scholars.

Consistent with the transdisciplinary nature of this research, none of the chapters fit within a ‘watertight’ or ‘hermetically sealed’ compartment: there are overlaps and overflows in the different chapters. For example, chapter two does not deal, exclusively, with the history of Pentecostalism. There should be advantages in the chapters not reposing in discrete isolation: to the extent that there appears to be a consensus across a spectrum of opinion and intellectual discipline, this facilitates the drawing of more firm conclusions. Conversely, a divergence of opinion provides an alert for more rigorous scrutiny and analysis.

Insofar as the four American scholars are concerned, the focus of this research is that of their published work, especially that in the books of which they have been the authors. The year 2008, the year in which this research began, has been taken as the benchmark. This focus avoids the research being caught up in a vortex, chasing the latest publications of the different scholars. In the case of both Poloma and Yong their rate of publication has been prolific, if not exponential. The major trajectories in the work of all four scholars, insofar as Pentecostalism *per se* is concerned, have been identified. A perusal of the work of these scholars since 2008 does not suggest that any major shift in their thinking has occurred since then, insofar as it touches upon the subject matter of this research.

A brief outline of the chapters that follow may assist the reader as a ‘navigational chart’.

1.6 Chapter Outline

Chapter two considers the work of Wacker, a professor of church history whose upbringing has been shaped by the Pentecostal commitment of his family. Wacker’s specific interest has been the history of religion in America. Wacker recognizes that the rapidly growing following which Pentecostalism has attracted has confounded many critics. His work is examined to determine what the explanation for this following may be.

From an analysis of Wacker’s work there appears to be no sociologically determinable criterion such as educational levels or socio-economic status which explains the growth of the Pentecostal movement even though it appears that, historically, the movement held a special appeal to the socially disadvantaged.

This leads to an investigation as to whether there may be some other ‘defining’ feature of Pentecostalism which provides the key that unlocks the answers to the questions raised in this research. As is the case with each of the chapters dealing with the work of the specific scholars whose work has been scrutinized in this