

WHERE THE SPIRIT LEADS: PENTECOSTALISM AND FREEDOM



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Religions that do not experience organizational, theological, and ritual renewal decline, losing market share to competing religious groups that are more creative and adaptable to contemporary culture and political realities. Currently, Christianity is the world's largest religion, with approximately 2.2 adherents, followed by Islam with 1.6 billion, Hinduism with one billion, and Buddhism with fewer than a half billion. Christianity, however, would not be in this place of dominance without renewal movements throughout its history and, most recently, an example of a renewal movement is Pentecostalism, which was ignited by the Azusa Street revival in 1906 and rapidly began exporting missionaries around the world, followed by what became known as the charismatic renewal among Catholics and some mainline Protestants beginning in the 1960s.

Defining Pentecostalism is complex because of its many permutations. Theologically, Pentecostals trace their history back to the early Christian church when fifty days after Jesus' reported resurrection, the Holy Spirit descended on his disciples and followers, enabling them to "speak in tongues" and empowering them to heal those who were sick, as well as prophesy and appropriate other "gifts" of the Spirit. In the intervening 2,000 years, there are various instances when ecstatic religious experiences were manifested, but the contemporary origins of Pentecostalism are typically traced to the recurrence of speaking in tongues in 1901 when students at Bethel Bible School in Topeka, Kansas, were moved by the Spirit under the tutelage of Charles F. Parham. A few years later, Parham took his message regarding Spirit baptism to Houston, Texas, where William J. Seymour, a black Holiness preacher, became convinced that the Holy Spirit was still in the business of working supernatural miracles. Seymour then began preaching the same message to a small gathering of people in 1906 in Los Angeles, igniting what became known as the Azusa Street revival, attended by thousands of people and named after the street where an interracial gathering began to replicate the acts of the first-century apostles: speaking in tongues, healing the infirm, and prophesying.

According to Allan Anderson (p. 31), a simultaneous expression of the gifts of the Spirit was manifest in India (1905-7) in the Mukti ("Salvation") revival, led by a woman, Pandita Ramabai. But Anderson does not dispute the importance of the events in Los Angeles, because it launched a massive missionary movement in which individuals experienced their

"call" to spread the gospel around the world, many believing that their gift of tongues would serve them well in foreign countries. Also, they went in faith, without return tickets home, believing that the return of Christ was imminent. Cecil Roebeck (p. 54), says that "Between April 1906 and the end of the year, the Azusa Street Mission commissioned 19 first-time missionaries. They went to India, Sweden, Palestine, Angola, and Liberia," which shows the range of their vision. And according to Anderson (p. 33), by 1915, there were 150 expatriate Pentecostal missionaries in such far away locations as China.

While there were a number of Pentecostal denominations of US and European origin that emerged in the aftermath of the Azusa Street revivals, many of these denominations have routinized, and currently their growth is primarily outside their country of origin. Furthermore, there have been numerous "local denominations that have formed, especially in the global south, and many of these groups are now sending missionaries around the world. South Korea, Nigeria, Brazil, and India are prime examples of what is sometimes referred to as the "reverse missionary movement." But one of the most dynamic expressions of Pentecostalism is found in churches that have broken away from the "classical" Pentecostal denominations, feeling that they became too controlling, bureaucratic, and staid—especially in terms of manifestations of the "gifts" of the Holy Spirit—and instead have formed their own renegade churches, many of which have birthed numerous "daughter" churches, and may be on the way to creating their own quasi-denominations. These neo-Pentecostal churches tend to be driven by a charismatic leader who does not have seminary education, but experienced a dramatic life-change conversion, and now applies his business savvy to creating new innovative ways of propagating the Christian gospel.

Today, many Protestant congregations have been "Pentecostalized" and hundreds of indigenous denominations with Pentecostal and charismatic characteristics have emerged in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. The result is that religious monopolies have been challenged around the world, both within Christianity—for example, where Roman Catholicism or Orthodoxy was the primary religious option—as well as in regions of the world where Christianity was virtually non-existent. This expansion of Christianity through missionary activity, and the dramatic growth of Pentecostal style religion, has created religious conflicts, contributed to religious

persecution, and, at the same time, it has stimulated religious pluralism, allowing for religious choice that previously did not exist.

Pentecostals and charismatic Christians, both Protestant and Catholic, may currently number over 500 million people, or about one-quarter of all Christians. Many of the largest congregations in the world are Pentecostal or charismatic—some with tens of thousands of members. Also, many of the most creative, innovative and entrepreneurial congregations in the world are Pentecostal. And many of the most missionary-minded individuals are also Pentecostal, seeking to spread the “good news” around the globe.

According to Todd Johnson (p. 319), in 1910 there were 5,000 Christian denominations in the world. By 1970, this number had increased to 20,000. Currently, there are over 40,000 denominations, and the vast majority of these new denominations are Protestant independent groups, many with a Pentecostal or charismatic flavor. What is striking, however, is not just the growth of different Christian groups, but their geographical location. According to Johnson, in 1910, over 80 percent of all Christians were located in Europe or North America. Today, fewer than 40 percent of Christians are in these two regions of the Western world. Instead, the center of gravity of Christianity has moved to the global south, with the fastest growth occurring in Africa and Asia.

Furthermore, in areas such as Latin America, which traditionally have been Roman Catholic, there is a substantial shift occurring in the religious identification of Christians, with increasing numbers changing to some form of Protestantism and especially Pentecostalism. According to Paul Freston (p. 104) , “Latin America is now the global heartland of Pentecostalism,” and he says that there are more Pentecostals in Brazil than in any other country. In the 2000 census in Brazil, 10 percent of the population identified with Pentecostal churches. Today, Freston thinks the number is closer to 12 percent, and he guesses that another 2 percent of the population attends charismatic Protestant churches that are not explicitly Pentecostal. He says that currently about 12 percent of Latin America as a whole is Protestant, with 70-75 percent of these individuals being Pentecostal.

Andrew Chestnut (p. 65) places these numbers in historical perspective, saying that 1 percent or

less of Latin America was Protestant in 1940. The game-changer has been Pentecostalism, which brought a new style of worship music, less bureaucratic forms of social organization, and an emphasis on the supernatural. These elements appealed to millions of nominal Roman Catholics who converted to Protestantism. Freston (p. 104), for example, cites a survey done about ten years ago in Rio de Janeiro that indicated only 30 percent of Pentecostals had been born into the religion—the rest were converts. Similar findings were found in the Pew Forum surveys, discussed below.

Inevitably, the success of Pentecostalism in Latin America has led to charges of “sheep stealing” by Roman Catholic bishops and clergy in Latin America, creating animosity between these two factions of Christianity. However, in the last decade or so, some Roman Catholic clergy have begun to compete with Pentecostals, emphasizing healing and more dynamic forms of worship. Also, in some areas of Latin America there are Pentecostal-Roman Catholic dialogue groups forming, which is a healthy development for the unity of Christianity, since previously many Pentecostals refused to acknowledge that Catholics were even Christians—saying that they worshiped “idols” and were not “born again.”

In 2006, the Pew Forum did a ten-nation survey of Pentecostalism, which led to some important generalizations. For these surveys, they developed two categories—Pentecostals, which referred to respondents who identified with a Pentecostal denomination, such as the Assemblies of God or the Church of God in Christ or the Brazil-based Universal Church of the Kingdom of God—and “charismatics” who did not belong to a Pentecostal denomination but who nevertheless identified themselves as a “charismatic Christian” or “Pentecostal Christian,” or who reported speaking in tongues at least several times a year. Combining these two categories, the Pew Forum developed a more general category that they called “renewalist,” which included Catholics who were part of the Charismatic Renewal Movement.

According to the Pew Forum surveys (p. 332), Guatemala has the highest percentage of renewalists in Latin America, with 60 percent (20 percent Pentecostals and 40 percent charismatics). In Africa, Kenya had the highest percentage of renewalists, at 56 percent (33 percent Pentecostals and 23 percent charismatics). And in Asia, the Philippines was

highest at 44 percent renewalists, with 40 percent being classified as charismatic. When one analyzes only Protestants, the picture is somewhat dismal for mainline, non-Pentecostal denominations. For example, here are the statistics for percentages of Protestants who were neither Pentecostal nor charismatic: Brazil: 22 percent, Chile: 22 percent, Guatemala: 15 percent, Kenya: 27 percent, Nigeria: 40 percent, South Africa: 57 percent, and Philippines: 33 percent. (p. 333). Only South Africa out of their ten national survey had more than 50 percent of Protestants from non-Pentecostal or non-charismatic orientations.

Perhaps most striking across the ten countries surveyed is that renewalists were not necessarily disproportionately drawn from the lower socio-economic sectors of society when compared with their fellow countrymen. Furthermore, they were not disproportionately women. And, thirdly, although renewalists are conservative on sexuality related issues (e.g., opposed to abortion, premarital sex, etc.), they were quite progressive on social welfare issues, including their affirmation of democracy, believing that the church should speak out on social issues, affirmation of free-market economics, etc. And, somewhat surprising, renewalists were more inclined to have experienced or observed some form of supernatural healing than to speak in tongues on a regular basis. Each of these generalizations warrants a brief comment and contextualization.

The roots of Pentecostalism are among the poorer classes of society. Theoretically this makes sense, fitting nicely with deprivation models of religion whereby religious ecstasy and the promise of supernatural healing are compensation for living on the margins of society without health care and financial stability. However, an odd thing happened, contradicting Marxist theories of religion as an “opiate” of the people. Namely, many people who embraced the conservative moral ethic of Pentecostalism began to experience upwardly social mobility. Men, in particular, quit drinking, gambling and womanizing, which then led to surplus capital that was invested in the education of their children as well as better healthcare for the entire family. Young women were less promiscuous, delaying sexual debut, pregnancy, and marriage—which gave them more opportunities for education and employment outside of the home.

Pentecostal men were viewed as morally upright and employers started to move them into middle management positions. And perhaps even more fundamental, people living on the margins began to have hope in the future, inspired by their religion—which sometimes took the form of the “prosperity gospel.” Within a generation or two, and sometimes less, many Pentecostals started to experience upward economic mobility, which explains, at least in part, why the Pew Forum study found that renewalists are not disproportionately from the lower sectors of society.

More surprising is the finding by the Pew Forum that renewalists are not disproportionately women. In my own observations of Pentecostalism, it is not unusual for two-thirds of the seats in worship services to be occupied by women. And it is also my experience that women are very often the first ones to convert within a family, bringing their children to church, which they view as a safe environment and a good place to learn moral values. Within Pentecostal churches, women—and particularly lower class women—find the support and social roles that are not available in the larger society. They have a new dignity as they participate in church activities. And eventually, their husbands are often wooed into the church, pressured by their wives, or else they come out of respect for the transformation that they observed among family members. In spite of the top leadership being men, new women converts strike a patriarchal bargain based on the personal benefit of their menfolk tending to be less abusive, better fathers to their children, and more responsible wage-earners after their conversion. Also, there are multiple roles for women within Pentecostal churches—even if they are not the senior pastor. Pentecostalism has historically been more open to women than many mainline Christian denominations. Aimee Semple McPherson is just one example, but several authors who have written chapters in a recent book I co-edited give numerous other examples (Estrelida Alexander, pp. 225-241; Katherine Attanasi, pp. 242-256).

The stereotype that Pentecostals are so “heavenly minded” that they are no earthly good has a partial ring of truth, since they are very focused on prayer, worship, and personal purity. However, from the very beginning of the movement, Pentecostals have been involved in charitable activities, often times at informal levels, but in the last fifteen years or so many large Pentecostal

churches have developed significant social ministries related to education, health care, counseling, and so on. Although sometimes these ministries are primarily for church members, increasingly Pentecostals are focused on the wider community, seeing such ministries as an expression of Jesus' commitment to feed the hungry, minister to those who are sick, and care for the needy. Typically, these social ministries are not political or policy focused, but I have observed Pentecostal gatherings of clergy, in places such as Uganda and Kenya, that are addressing the issue of political corruption. Also, increasingly Pentecostal churches are partnering with Christian NGOs, such as World Vision and Food for the Hungry, on large-scale rural development projects and even social issues related to AIDS, female genital mutilation, and so on. Hence, it is not surprising that the Pew Forum found Pentecostals to have political and social welfare attitudes that were not very different from their fellow countrymen.

Finally, what is somewhat more surprising is the generalization from the Pew Forum surveys that healing is more prominent than speaking in tongues, since glossolalia was an early earmark of Pentecostalism. In part, this observation may derive from the fact that Catholic charismatics were included in their survey, and speaking in tongues is not emphasized within the Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement to the same degree as it is within Pentecostal circles. However, I have noticed in my own experience of attending Pentecostal churches, and especially neo-Pentecostal mega-churches, that speaking in tongues has become highly ritualized and confined to a few minutes of collective "prayer language," lacking the steps of "interpretation" that were instructed by the Apostle Paul. In short, tongues speaking seems to have become routinized in many congregations. This is also somewhat true of healing, which previously was often quite dramatic, with crutches being cast aside after individuals came to the front of the church for prayer. Nevertheless, among the hundreds of people that I have interviewed over the past two decades, many individuals point to an experience of personal healing, or the healing of a friend or relative, as the turning point in their own conversion. Whether these healings are due to a placebo effect is not for me to judge; experientially, they are real to the participants in these churches, as are miraculous stories of people being raised from the dead.

In spite of some domestication of Pentecostal experience, there are a number of elements of Pentecostal and charismatic churches that have a bearing on the issue of religious freedom. It is my view that Christianity would be in global decline without the emergence of the Pentecostal movement, and its various offshoots, a hundred years ago. Furthermore, there is every reason to believe that Pentecostalism has some life left to it, since various neo-Pentecostal churches continue to renew the mother movement. And, also, Pentecostalism has become thoroughly indigenized, which means that new sources of creative innovation are emerging which are culturally and politically resonant with the local context.

Trying to identify the DNA of a movement as broad as Pentecostalism is a challenge, but one distinguishing feature is the way in which Pentecostalism democratizes the Christian faith. Rejecting hierarchical expressions of Christianity, Pentecostalism affirms the priesthood of all believers. Everyone is equal in God's eyes; the important thing is that one affirms the calling of the Holy Spirit on your life, which may be as a pastor but it may also be as a businessperson, a carpenter, or a maid. By giving the ministry to the people, members of Pentecostal churches are empowered to be God's agents in the world and in the church. In practice, some pastors—especially dynamic, charismatic leaders—may play an important role in casting the vision for the church. But the actual work of ministry is done by the people. In the most successful churches, including those with large staffs, the role of the pastor is to equip the people for ministry, training them, but not doing the ministering themselves. This is clearly seen in churches with cell-based organizational structures. Every member is part of a cell group of a half dozen to fifteen people. The cell group is led by a lay person. Clergy seldom attend, if ever, although they typically have a role in training cell group leaders. When the cell group grows larger than a dozen or fifteen, it is divided and a new leader is given the opportunity to exercise his or her "gifts," leading Bible study, prayers, and so on. In fact, even the gift of healing is available to laypersons, as are prophecy, baptism, etc.

One consequence of democratizing the sacred is that it is much more difficult to control renewal-style religion than it is for a repressive state to manage hierarchical religions where one can arrest the

leadership and the movement falls apart. I encountered a good example of this in the Republic of Armenia, which is dominated by the Armenian Apostolic Church. In a confrontation several years ago, the leader of a ten thousand member Pentecostal church told the government, which was a surrogate for the Orthodox (Apostolic) Church, that it could either work with the leadership of their church or deal with 1,000 cell groups. The government selected the former option, and the result is that this Word of Life church is successfully moving forward on many fronts, including building a large church that will seat several thousand people at one time.

A second element of Pentecostal DNA is the focus on religious experience, which acknowledges that the Holy Spirit may speak directly to individual believers. This can occur through dreams, an audible voice, or reflection on scripture whereby one receives a strong calling or “feeling” that they should do a specific thing. Sometimes this calling is starting a new ministry; other times it may be leaving the comfort of one’s country and being a missionary in a new land; or development of a new “gift” that has not previously been exercised. I have heard numerous accounts from people who said that they resisted the Spirit for a while, but the “voice” or “leading” persisted until they acted on it. These powerful spiritual encounters do not respect traditional authority, either of government, family, or even church leadership. Individuals responding to their “call” may undergo substantial hardship, but in retrospect they see this as God’s way of pruning their ego, building personal strength, and equipping them for the task. This model of leadership is quite different from what the sociologist Max Weber called legal-rational styles of authority or, alternatively, traditional models of leadership where one respects custom and hierarchy.

A third element of Pentecostal DNA is its adaptability to different cultural contexts and circumstances. Renewal movements inevitably point back in time to the origins of the religion, when things were organizationally simple and religious experience was prized over ensconced authority. In the case of Christianity, this means that 2,000 years of tradition can be dismissed or even viewed as corrupt—especially in terms of institutional forms. Rather, one appeals to the model of the early Christian church, the example of Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit following Jesus’ resurrection. This

appeal to the primitive church enables one to critique existing religious institutions—much as Jesus did—and view the authority of the state as an earthly institution that may persecute but cannot restrict one as he or she pursues the leading of the Holy Spirit. Such religious zeal is nearly uncontrollable, because prison, restrictions, even death are not sufficient deterrents for the work that God, through the Holy Spirit, has ordained.

Fourth, Pentecostals believe that they have the truth—with a capital T. Therefore, they have an obligation to share it with the world. This may lead to demonizing other religious traditions, including within Christianity. From the view of outsiders, Pentecostals may appear to be unsophisticated, dogmatic, uncompromising, and even arrogant. On the other hand, it is precisely their certainty about the faith—or their particular brand of it—that contributes to their zeal, and makes them committed missionaries and dedicated, almost beyond comprehension, to their church and spreading the good news as they perceive it. Indeed, risk-taking seems to be wrapped up in the Pentecostal DNA and is reinforced from the pulpit and in publications.

Fifth, not only are Pentecostals risk-takers, but they tend to be visionaries, with what might even be perceived as completely unrealistic goals and ambitions. Compared to the typical mainline Protestant pastor, the charismatic leaders of large Pentecostal mega-churches tend to thrive on “big ideas” related to building projects, saving “unreached” peoples, and planting new churches. Particularly in neo-Pentecostal churches, where they do not have to go through bureaucratic procedures, visionary ideas draw the congregation to new levels of giving, self-sacrifice, and personal piety—such as round-the-clock prayers, and so on. Sometimes outside prophets are brought into the congregation for special meetings, and radical new ideas are planted. Indeed, the idea of “self-fulfilling” prophecy takes on a whole new meaning within the Pentecostal context.

Sixth, in recent times, Pentecostalism has had a great boost from modern technology and advanced forms of travel. Unlike many denominations, which tend to operate within the confines of their own institution, many Pentecostal churches, and especially neo-Pentecostal churches, are part of international networks that operate independent of denominational ties and country boundaries. Senior pastors and church leaders connect through

international conferences, they communicate by e-mail, they share songs, sermons, organizational insights, and ideas for new ministries. Hence, in a matter of seconds new ideas are flowing around the world, which is one reason that so many of these churches are creative and innovative. They are picking up the latest ideas from global thought leaders and practitioners and they are trying them out in their own local context.

Seventh, Pentecostal churches and especially large Neo-Pentecostal churches tend to have culturally current worship music that appeals to a younger generation of members. Worship is joy-filled. People are on their feet dancing, swaying, singing. Oftentimes the musicians are highly professional, sometimes having entertained in clubs and secular venues prior to their conversion. They bring the musical idiom of contemporary culture into the church, but change the words—not the style. Young people are attracted to this music. Gone are the organs and choirs, replaced by guitars, drums, saxophones, and singers—each in front of their individual microphone. And the worship leader knows how to modulate the mood of the audience, taking them into the quiet space of prayer and worship and by the end of the service into the triumph of living out the Christian life in secular society.

Eight, many of the mega-churches are run like corporate businesses, with efficiency and direction. I visited a large Pentecostal church in Malaysia and interviewed a member who worked for an international consulting firm. After his conversion, he had tried some non-Pentecostal churches, but he yearned for a fast-paced, CEO-led church which paralleled his business experience. He found it in the church he now attends. Several weeks later, I visited a church in Indonesia and heard the same story as we sat around a corporate-type boardroom table. The pastor had a degree in business and the church ran with the efficiency of a major corporation, which, in turn, attracted staff members with the same competencies as well as members who wanted a church that was contemporary in substance and form.

Nine, many Pentecostal churches do not have the look and feel of a traditional church. Gone are the steeples, stained glass, and pews. These churches often meet in former movie theaters or transformed warehouses. The Malaysian church mentioned above constructed their church to look like an industrial building, in part because it is located

in an industrial park, and the area is not zoned for a church. They purposely set up a corporation that owns the building and land, which then leases to the church. And the Indonesian church that I previously mentioned has constructed a large building that doubles as a school and has an auditorium that they frequently rent to other groups, including Muslim groups. The vast majority of Pentecostal churches, of course, are relatively small. They tend to meet in storefronts, which, if they grow in size, allows them to easily upgrade to larger facilities since they are rented and not owned.

Mainline churches oftentimes look sleepy in comparison to these fast-moving, creative, adaptable churches. Furthermore, mainline Protestant churches are often pushing moral principles that are red-hot in a western setting, such as the United States, but in fact are divisive in the global south. I am, of course, thinking of issues related to homosexuality, the blessing of same-sex unions, and high-flung ideas about religious freedom and pluralism. In contrast, Pentecostal churches tend to be rooted in the concrete reality of everyday life in their local context. They know local government leaders as well as the mentality of their own people, and know when to push and when to accommodate. And they know the immediate needs of their people, which may have little to do with certain western values related to individual freedom and rights.

Over the past several decades I have had the opportunity to observe Pentecostal churches in a variety of different cultural settings. Much of what I have described in the preceding section applies to “open-market” countries with a considerable degree of religious freedom. But I have also had the opportunity to travel in countries with a more regulated religious marketplace, which has allowed me to observe some ways in which they manage their religious freedom. And to a lesser degree I have traveled in highly regulated religious marketplaces. While not definitive, I have some observations regarding coping strategies utilized by Pentecostals in these various contexts.

Recently my colleague Tetsunao Yamamori and I were in Shanghai and Beijing for several weeks, talking with house church leaders. Contrary to some stereotypes, urban house churches are no longer “underground.” There are thousands of them in large cities. Government authorities are aware of many, if not most of them, and they meet for tea or informal conversation with house church leaders on a

regular basis. So long as foreigners are not involved with the church, the house church remains relatively small in size, and if it does not engage in any sort of political activity, they are allowed to exist. Pentecostal churches are somewhat more problematic because they are “too noisy,” and also if they have connections to Taiwan, South Korea, or even Hong Kong, questions may be raised. Also, it is important to note that many urban house church leaders are not particularly well disposed to Pentecostal churches, in part because they do not fit with the mentality of educated professionals who are upwardly mobile, such as themselves.

One of the negative effects of state oversight in China is that house churches must practice a rather truncated view of the Christian gospel, not engaging issues related to social justice, human rights, or even social welfare, except on a very informal level. Any sort of formal social ministry would need to be registered, which house church members would resist since it would put them under the authority of the government rather than Christ. In contrast, registered Three-Self Patriotic Churches appear to be flourishing. Bibles are easily available through Three-Self churches, as is Christian literature. On a Sunday morning that I attended services at the Haidian Christian Church in Beijing, I spotted a Josh McDowell book on apologetics on a display table, there was a free medical clinic set up outside the church, a video was shown during the service of a half dozen young adults who had been baptized the previous week, and the style of worship and preaching would have fit anywhere in a mega-church in the US. The auditorium, seating nearly a thousand people, was packed, including the overflow meeting room.

Yamamori and I also visited a number of large churches in both Malaysia and Indonesia. In every case we found the leadership of these Pentecostal churches to be very respectful of government regulations. For example, in Malaysia, they only sought converts among the Chinese, not among the Malay who are Muslim by birth. For this reason, church leaders said that it is questionable whether Christians will increase over their current figure of 9 percent, in part because many economically successful Chinese are leaving Malaysia. I already mentioned that one of the churches we visited in Malaysia met in an industrial style building, which had been designed with a large auditorium, Sunday school meeting rooms, and offices for the staff. On the Sunday that

we were there, they baptized about 20 people, and as each one was introduced they were identified by name, occupation, and school grade—showing evident pride in the successful nature of those who were joining the church. This church has also started 92 other churches, including churches in Nepal and India. Also, we visited a substantial new four-story building they had just built that was a block from the church. It was just ready to open with a dialysis center on one floor, a gymnasium on another, plus a coffee shop, a space for physical therapy, and a huge room for youth programs. Church members viewed this building as their contribution to the civic welfare of the community.

This church in Malaysia does not take political stances, although it does host forums for candidates to express their views. The pastor recognizes that members of his congregation vote for multiple candidates, and he says that the church has the obligation for members to be well informed prior to their vote. All he says from the pulpit is that people should vote for “righteousness.” Recently they had hosted a candidate forum where the daughter of the opposition leader expressed the view that Malay should have the right to choose their religion, which is technically possible but nearly impossible to do. This had caused a huge controversy, not against the church, but that a Muslim woman would articulate such a point of view. Also stirring in the courts at the time was an appeal by the Catholic Church that Christians should have the right to use the word “Allah” for God, which they had done for many years but now was in question. Very recently an appeals court decided against the Catholic Church’s petition and there will undoubtedly be an appeal to their Supreme Court.

We also visited a Pentecostal church in Malaysia that was much less affluent, but it was clearly a very vital religious community. They sponsor a home for mentally challenged children that is a financial drain on the congregation, but they are committed to caring for these children. They also give rice and oil to impoverished families, and they also have publically honored the police department as a way of demonstrating their civic engagement. This independent Pentecostal church was in stark contrast to a rather depressing interview that we had with several leaders from a “classic” Pentecostal denomination. We were told that rules and regulations within this denomination stifle innovation. Seminary students don’t want to pioneer

new churches, but instead want a comfortable job in one of the denomination's mega-churches. A seminary professor told us that speaking in tongues is minimized in many of their churches and he wondered if this had anything to do with the fact that students were reading the theologian Rudolf Bultmann on demythologizing the New Testament. In contrast, the pastor of the previously mentioned church said that tongues is an important part of his prayer life. He said that there are things we don't know how to pray for and so this is done with tongues, uttering things that come from the Holy Spirit, not from ourselves. He also attributed the fresh quality of their worship and church life to the Holy Spirit, saying that the Spirit is "creative," and to have too many rules is to quench the activity of the Holy Spirit.

In Indonesia we visited a church that went under the name ROCK, which stands for "Representatives of Christ's Kingdom." The auditorium and office space for this church are located in a multi-story mall-like building with shops of various sorts. A senior pastor told us that the role of Christians is to be a "blessing" to all people, including Muslims. Collectively, their goal is to make Indonesia a better country. He said, "We pray for the best president, not a Christian president." Their values, he said, are captured in the acronym "LIGHT," which stands for love/loyalty, integrity, generosity, humility, and truth. One way that they act out these values is to sponsor some of the best schools in the slum area, where they also have an active medical program. They deliberately counter the image of the senior pastor as the "big boss." Instead, they think that every vocation has worth, whether one is a government employee, an educator, or one is in the arts, sports, business, or technology. Members of this church focus on the "incarnational Jesus," in which people see Jesus through them as they seek to be the "salt of the earth." They are not at all hung up on labels; in fact, they say that they don't even put their "ROCK" symbol on their posters that advertise events. Like many neo-Pentecostal churches, they are part of a network of churches and are related to about 175 churches globally, and they also have 7 satellite churches, but they seem to have very little interest in being formalized into a denomination.

In both Indonesia and Malaysia, Pentecostal churches seem to flourish so long as they honor the principle of pluralism in their country and do not proselytize outside the specified boundaries. Also, Pentecostal churches gain credibility within the

eyes of the government and general population when they provide social services to people in need. However, I did not sense that they were engaged in compassion ministries with an ulterior motive; rather, they see such programs and acts as a reflection of the Christian gospel. Indirectly, however, programs such as high quality education are a means of communicating the principles of Christianity to Muslims who attend their schools because of their excellence. Organizationally, social ministries are operated under separate non-profit status, which avoids the problem of overlap with the legal status of the church. The churches that seemed to be flourishing were not bogged down in denominational structures and tradition, but had a fresh, corporate feel to them—both in terms of buildings but also in leadership style. In a visit in Jakarta with leaders of an umbrella organization of non-Pentecostal churches, they were struggling to come to grips with their declining status, seeking to understand why Pentecostal churches were growing, but they were also defensive—regarding them as sheep stealers. In a round table discussion with members of this organization, one person confessed that mainline churches may be operating out of an agrarian mentality—singing their 18th century songs—while Pentecostal churches understand urban culture, as reflected in their worship, buildings, and organizational structure.

In Kerala, India, I encountered a definite contrast between older, established Pentecostal churches and what were described as "New Generation" churches. For example, we visited the seminary and office buildings of a very established group, the India Pentecostal Church (IPC), which has about 7,000 congregations. In a round table discussion with seminary faculty, they showcased their very formalized organizational structure. We met in a beautiful dining hall and were served an elaborate meal. Short, disciplined presentations were made by faculty members, some using PowerPoint. This meeting was in sharp contrast to our informal discussion with two pastors from a rapidly growing church called Heavenly Feast, that we met on the stage of an open-air building that seated several thousand people. Sitting on plastic chairs, we were served coconuts with a straw, which we sipped during their descriptions of their own testimonies and the ministry of the church.

The Heavenly Feast church had not been able to meet in their building for the past three weeks because of persecution from Hindu extremists.

In response, they were renting five auditoriums around the city where they could accommodate smaller crowds. In spite of this challenge, they seemed to be flourishing. They were regularly broadcasting on two major secular channels and one religious radio channel. They had 1,000 cell groups, which they called “care” cells. Members are genuinely concerned about the poor. They challenged people to put aside one handful of rice every day that they then collect at the church, feeding up to 2,000 people at a time. They are also helping a thousand children with food, clothing, and tuition. And they have given away a thousand wheelchairs, plus they have an active program for people who are drug and alcohol addicted. In spite of the current persecution, they have a plan to build a church seating 15,000 people—but in a new location.

I also visited a “New Generation” church in the southwestern part of India, although the pastor was indifferent to the label. They appropriately called themselves the “Blessing Center” and view their role as blessing the society around them. Sixty percent of their members were born Hindu. Many people are attracted to the church through their TV programs, which demonstrates the power of media to communicate without engaging in direct evangelization of people from another faith. During their 30 minute TV programs, they focus directly on people’s needs. Hence, during exam time for students, they offer study tips and also try to blunt the pressure that sometimes leads to suicide by young people who are competing to be at the top of their class. They also distribute hundreds of school bags to students, along with notebooks, which have the church phone number on them so that students can call and talk to someone if they are distressed. They also operate free medical camps every third Sunday, plus they have a blood bank and clothing program. The senior pastor said that he makes a point of never criticizing other religions. Several thousand people were at the service that I attended, which included a very well developed Sunday school program for children. They have 800 lay leaders and fourteen other Blessing Centers in India. They find that the greatest opposition comes from rural areas of India where Hinduism is very strong. There seems to be greater tolerance in the city, which is a theme that I also heard in Malaysia.

In my three trips to India, several things stand out in my mind. One is the extreme devotion and pietism of members of Pentecostal churches. I talked

to several seminary students at Doulos College. A young woman told me that she wakes at 2 a.m. every morning to pray and then again at 4 a.m. and she continues to pray multiple times during the day. A young man who is a convert from a Sikh background reiterated the same pattern, waking at 5 a.m. to pray on the rooftop of his building. He said that when he first converted to Christianity he was beaten by his parents, but now 20 people in his village, including family members, have become Christians. I also recall waking up early in Chennai to go to a 6 a.m. prayer meeting. I expected there might be a few dozen people. Instead, there probably were 1,500—each with a Bible and notepad, with men sitting on one side and women on the other of a large open-air building. This monastic type practice is clearly conditioning the hearts of these people to hear God’s calling.

I also clearly remember visiting with a group of young pastor in Hyderabad when one of them casually mentioned that a woman had been raised from the dead. Later in the week, Yamamori and I were taken to a few of the 50 small village churches that were part of a network overseen by a young missionary from the Dalit class of untouchables. Upon arriving at the church led by the pastor who had referenced the woman who was raised from the dead, I insisted that we should interview her. And so we drove down the narrow roads of the village to her house, whereupon a crowd gathered when I took out my camera, including an elderly Hindu who appeared to be a village elder. He confirmed the story that this pastor told and was reiterated by the young woman. The pastor had been passing through the village when he was asked to cast demons out of this girl; he did and then went on to another village. On his return home, he was accosted by family members, saying that he had killed her and that they were preparing to bury the girl, having already called a village doctor to confirm her death. Perhaps in desperation, the pastor started praying over her and an hour or so later, she came back to life, describing how Jesus had appeared to her while dead. I also heard other supernatural accounts of people being raised from the dead in India, but this one seemed the most credible. The bottom line is that healing of various kinds is viewed as evidence of God’s power and provides a turning point in conversion and confirmation of the truth of one’s faith.

In the case of Malaysia, Indonesia, and India, Christianity is a minority religion within dominant Muslim or Hindu countries. It is also useful to look at Pentecostalism within dominant Christian countries, and specifically where Orthodoxy is favored over Protestantism. I have been to the Republic of Armenia on many different occasions, which is considered to be the first country to convert to Christianity in the fourth century. Although Christianity was nearly snuffed out during 70 years of communist domination, the Armenian Apostolic Church survived—but under heavy state regulation and with only a few priests and a handful of active members, most being elderly women. However, when Armenia became independent from the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the Orthodox Church sprang back to life. Nearly simultaneously, in the mid-1990s a Pentecostal Word of Life church was born, currently led by a convert to Christianity, Artur Simonian. This church now has 10,000 members. It has 23 daughter churches in Armenia, as well as Georgia, Turkey, Russia, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, and several European countries as well as one church in the US.

As one might predict, the numerical success of this Pentecostal church in the Republic of Armenia has angered the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church. At one point their offices were raided and there was an attempt to close them down. But today, the main persecution comes from the media, which labels them as a cult. Pastor Artur, however, points to the freedom of people in the church related to dress and personal choice. Artur avoids talking about politics from the pulpit, except for references to corruption. He never criticizes the “Mother” church, which is closely aligned with the government. Members try to demonstrate their Christian values by caring for children that are abused, assisting the elderly who often live very marginal lives, and helping to feed the poor and needy. While the pastor teaches about tithing, he has no idea what people give and there is no tracking of tithes. The worship style of this church differs dramatically from the formal liturgy of the Apostolic Church, and I distinctly remember trying to videotape one of their youth services, except that the microphone on my camera kept going into the red because of the distortion of the volume level. In a recent interview, Artur repeatedly said that they are a family—as a church—and they teach family values, believing that caring for one another is a high value within the Christian faith.

One of their sister Word of Life churches is in Moscow, with about 3,000 members. Like the Yerevan church, it is filled with young people, contemporary music, and a dynamic team of pastoral leaders. It is not surprising that leaders of the Orthodox Church, whether in Armenia or Russia, feel threatened. Even though the Orthodox often have beautiful churches, they are weighed down by tradition. The services are interminably long. The liturgy is chanted, and the priests are garbed in clothing styles that are centuries old—sharply contrasting with Pastor Artur in his jeans and sports shirt. Nevertheless, there is some indication that Pentecostalism is having an effect on Orthodoxy. For example, in Egypt there is a growing charismatic element within the Coptic Church that is influenced by various Western Pentecostals. There are also indigenous ministries, such as Stephen’s Children, which is led by the saintly “Mama Maggie,” who works exclusively with children living in Cairo’s worst slums. And even in Armenia, there appear to be some reforms within the Orthodox Church that may be linked to the competition that they are experiencing from vibrant Pentecostal churches such as the Word of Life.

Hence, in examining the relationship of Pentecostalism to religious freedom, it is important to contextualize it within Christianity, where Pentecostalism is challenging Catholic, Orthodox, and mainline Protestant churches for members, as well as challenges between religions, where Pentecostalism may be in tension with Islam or Hinduism. In both of these contexts, it is possible that the aggressive proselytizing of Pentecostals may provoke persecution. And their exclusive claims to truth may hinder them from being good neighbors or participating in interfaith activities. Nevertheless, in the churches that I have observed, there tends to be an attempt to honor the laws of the state, to respect the rights of other religious traditions, and to witness to the Christian faith through charitable acts rather than dogmatic preaching. However, I also recognize that this may be one slice of Pentecostalism and there undoubtedly exists a more hard line and exclusivist expression. But it is precisely this expression of the faith that neo-Pentecostals reject, such as being forbidden to wear jewelry, enforcing restrictive dress codes, and so on.

In my concluding observations, I will focus on what I have called “Progressive Pentecostals,” acknowledging that these generalizations may not apply to more traditional forms of Pentecostalism.

First, I believe that religious competition is fundamentally healthy for the creative evolution of religion. Without competition, renewal and reform do not take place and religion gradually becomes irrelevant to the daily needs and aspirations of people. Furthermore, I do not believe that “one size fits all.” Human beings are a diverse lot, and consequently it is appropriate that there are many different varieties of religion. Hence, when governments positively sanction a single religious option and repress other religious expressions, over time religion loses its ability to function positively within civic life and to meet the population’s needs at a personal and communal level. Although it may seem arrogant to say this, monopolistic religions are actually harming themselves when they collaborate with the state to repress competition. Why? Because healthy religion is a constantly evolving phenomenon, and to not be challenged by competing alternatives means that the dominant religion is going to fail to evolve at the same speed as cultural change.

The implication of this view of competition is that Pentecostalism potentially fulfills a positive function, both for the health of Christianity, but also as it provides an alternative to the dominant religion where Christianity occupies a minority status. Having said this, I want to quickly acknowledge that there are charlatans among Pentecostals. It is not unusual to read negative news reports of high-flying Pentecostal and charismatic pastors who are involved in tax evasion, sexual scandals, and conspicuous consumption, including owning private jets, multiple million dollar residences, and so on. Furthermore, manipulation undoubtedly exists in some of the “health and wealth” prosperity gospel churches, which is difficult to reconcile with the humble lifestyle of the founder of Christianity. Having acknowledged these pathologies—which exist in every institution and religious faith—there are manifold expressions of the variant strains of Pentecostalism that are creatively mediating between the sacred and profane, transforming human life and institutions.

Second, there is a definite fit between the DNA of Pentecostalism and democratic values. Pentecostalism, at root, challenges hierarchical, authoritarian structures, empowering the laity and the priesthood of all believers. All religious callings are equal in God’s sight, and everyone has the right to have direct access to God, the “king” of the universe. It is a small leap from this religious perception to saying that everyone should have a vote, that all votes are equal, and all people

are of equal value, regardless of wealth or power. In empirical studies of the correlation between Pentecostalism and democracy, Robert Woodberry (p. 135) argues that “Pentecostalism has a moderate positive impact on the spread and stability of democracy.” What is increasingly evident is that the stereotype of Pentecostalism as being politically right wing and repressive simply does not hold in a number of cases, as argued by Timothy Wadkins (pp. 143-159) based on his research in El Salvador. Furthermore, there need not be an antinomy between progressive expressions of Pentecostalism and the prosperity gospel, since giving people hope can become a self-fulfilling prophesy, especially when it is matched with proscriptions against alcohol, gambling, womanizing, etc.

Third, in spite of the perceptions of many mainline Protestants that Pentecostals are “primitive” because of their embrace of tongues, healing and the supernatural, in actual practice Pentecostalism often has a modernizing influence on society. Especially in animistic cultures, Pentecostalism offers a monotheistic God, or one Spirit, in place of the multiple spirits of traditional religion, which war within the individual and are a disruptive force in society. Furthermore, Pentecostal worship is actually more in sync with contemporary culture than the liturgy of many mainline, Catholic, and Orthodox churches. Pentecostals know how to use technology, in their worship services as well as hooking up with one another through various networks via the Internet, etc. It is also common to see books on the shelves of Pentecostal pastors by the latest Western leadership and business gurus. In short, these pastors and their churches are not bound by traditionalism, which is why they are a challenging renewal force within Christianity.

Fourth, Pentecostalism is providing a response to postmodern culture in a way that mainline religions clearly are not, or else they would not be in decline. Within our disenchanting world—to use Max Weber’s term—Pentecostals are offering an expansive sense of joy, mixed with a degree of supernaturalism, that re-enchants the material (and materialistic) world of many people. Harvey Cox says that Pentecostalism fills the “ecstasy deficit” of people living in a capitalistic world environment. Or framed in another way, during the Enlightenment, the mind got separated from the body, and what Pentecostalism does is reconnect the body through religious experience with the mind and religious beliefs.

By making this judgment, I am not necessarily spiritualizing Pentecostalism. It is an open question as to whether the Holy Spirit exists independently from one's consciousness. An enormous amount of research is occurring related to the brain and its incredible capacity. Some of this research is summarized in the book "Hallucinations" by Oliver Sachs, which elaborates the multiple ways in which the mind can "see" and create various realities, including voices, fantastic beings, and so on. And Stanford anthropologist, Tanya Luhman, has made similar arguments based on her close observation of a Vineyard church filled with middle-class Americans. In her view, religion is a matter of practice, and through prayer and worship people experience "realities" that non-practicing people do not experience or have any affinity.

And when it comes to healing, studies show that the placebo effect is remarkably strong, although less is known about how the mind controls various biological and neurological agents that deal with pain, contract tumors, and actually eliminate certain pathogens. Hence, there is something arrogant and actually narrow-minded for religiously non-practicing people to say that these realities do not exist or are not experienced as "real." It is quite possible that Pentecostals are having visions, hearing voices, and are making prophecies that are not mere ego projections, but come from the deepest sources of human inspiration—what for lack of a better term might be called the Spirit. At minimum, Pentecostals demonstrate that religion is not simply a rational affair based on reason.

Finally, it is appropriate to speculate about the future of Pentecostalism, since this has implications for its role related to religious freedom and the religious marketplace more generally. One possibility is that Pentecostalism will lose its uniqueness. First, like any institutional form it will routinize over time, becoming progressively more bureaucratized, which will choke out the freshness and creativity of the Spirit at work. Secondly, it appears that many expressions of Christianity are becoming Pentecostalized, which may dilute the uniqueness of the original movement as it emerged from the Azusa Street revivals. A third possibility is that the spiritual zeal associated with Pentecostalism will become domesticated as members become increasingly middle class and well educated. And a fourth possibility is that Pentecostalism may be a significant force that continues to energize the Christian faith for decades to come. After

all, it's DNA is a rather powerful amalgamation of elements, which should strike fear in the heart of any competitor. Because of the religious zeal of the participants, who are buttressed in their commitment and self confidence by powerful religious experiences, Pentecostals are able to purpose agendas that do not respect political power, cultural obstacles, or personal difficulties. Like an invasive virus, Pentecostals worm their way into the most inhospitable locations and then reproduce with remarkable proficiency, supported by a global network of co-conspirators.