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The Journal of the Pentecostal Theological Association (JEPTA) is a peer-reviewed international journal which has a pedigree stretching back to 1981 when it began as the EPTA Bulletin. Despite its European origins JEPTA has interests in Pentecostalism world-wide. It aims to promote and report research and scholarship in Pentecostal and Charismatic studies especially in relation to five fields of study:

- Theology
- Pentecostal / charismatic education
- Pentecostal history
- Charismatic history
- Missiology

The journal welcomes interdisciplinary debate and dialogue.

Editorial Addresses

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‘The Leaning Tower of Mission in a Postmodern Land’
Ecumenical Reflections on Pentecostal Mission in the After-Edinburgh World

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen

Standing at the Foot of the Tower: Christian Mission Before and After Edinburgh

Following the Edinburgh meeting, I took a trip with my wife touring widely in Southern Europe. One of the monuments my wife always wanted to photograph is the famous leaning tower in Pisa, Italy. What struck me about this tower is that it seems to be leaning in all directions. From whichever angle you are looking at it, it is leaning! Allow me to use that metaphor as the lens through which I seek to offer reflections on Pentecostal-Charismatic mission and spirituality in relation to the Edinburgh process and in the context of the emerging postmodern consciousness not only on the Old Continent but also beyond, globally. My basic contention is that in many ways Pentecostal mission and spirituality is leaning in certain directions familiar to the emerging postmodern consciousness. I think ecumenically and theologically it is critical to acknowledge that but, at the same time to be aware of the fact that, similarly to the famous tower, Pentecostalism’s position is far from fixed. It may also end up in opposite directions – and often has.

The topic of postmodernity of course reminds us of the vast differences between the original mission meeting in Edinburgh and its centennial celebration. As is routinely mentioned, these differences include the

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1 This essay is based on the presentation I gave at the 16th Annual Meeting of the Societas Oecumenica: ‘Mission and Unity – Common Witness or Separated Churches,’ in Belgrade, Serbia, August 26-31, 2010.

2 For useful reflections on the relation of postmodernity to mission as produced by the Edinburgh process, see Edinburgh 2010: Witnessing to Christ Today, vol. 2,
composition of the delegates, the nature of the agenda, and the overall ethos. In other words, whereas the 1910 meeting included mainly Europeans and European Protestants only, the 2010 meeting was thoroughly global in representation. The recent meeting did everything in its power to cast off the mantle of colonialism. And so forth.

For the sake of my presentation, I am interested in two radical changes, already alluded to, that have taken place between the two meetings. First, whereas in the beginning of the twentieth century, the ideology of modernity was the reigning force without many contenders, in the beginning of the third millennium the Enlightenment paradigm has been seriously challenged. In the striking words of Harvey Cox, the Harvard theologian once famous – or better, infamous – for his failing prophecy concerning the role of religion in the modern world: “For the past three centuries, two principal contenders – scientific modernity and traditional religion – have clashed over the privilege of being the ultimate source of meaning and value. Now, like tired boxers who have slugged away too long, the two have reached an exhausted stalemate....” As a result, Cox claims, numbers of people are on the lookout for new alternatives, including that of ‘experientialism,’ as he calls it. This is because “we are entering a period in which we will see the world and selves less cerebrally and intuitively, less analytically and more immediately, less literally and more analogically.” In other words, we are faced with the era of postmodernism – whatever that word may mean. What is highly important to our topic is that, in Cox’s view it is precisely this experiential postmodernism where he thinks “one can also fit in pentecostalism.” This brings me to the second noteworthy difference between the two Edinburghs. Understandably there were no Pentecostals nor Charismatics in the first meeting, whereas there was a fair representation of them in the latter gathering, including a keynote address by the pastor of the Korean Yoido Full Gospel Church, the world’s largest local church.

Any theological talk about Pentecostalism is faced with the thorny issue of Pentecostal identity. Ecumenically, it is a critical question to ask, what makes Pentecostalism, Pentecostalism? Common sense says that its identity

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4 Cox, Fire, 301.
cannot be determined in a way similar to, say Roman Catholicism or the Reformed family of churches, because of its lack of creeds, shared history, and worldwide organization. Its diversity is breathtaking in terms of beliefs, practices, ecclesiastical structures, and so forth. It seems to me the only way to seek for any kind of shared understanding of identity among these fast-growing and proliferating movements is with reference to spirituality. Spirituality – rather than theology or creeds (or even sociology of religion) – is the key to understanding Pentecostalism. Echoing this line of thinking, the way Cox and other observers such as Walter J. Hollenweger have described the ‘essence’ of Pentecostalism has to do with features such as the centrality of religious experience along with a new appreciation of affections and the mysterious/mystical, healings and deliverances, nonhierarchical structures and involvement of all (rather than those educated formally), and grassroots spirituality. And so forth. Interestingly enough, Cox also mentions similar kinds of things emerging in the renewal of other religions such as those documented and ably discussed in Seyed Hossein Nasr’s *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations.*

I am less convinced than Cox and some likeminded of the wisdom of lumping together too easily two developments as different as Pentecostalism and postmodernism. However, as hinted at above, there are some convergences – leanings, if you will – and to those I will turn next. Let me mention these three:

- rediscovery of ‘experientialism’ and ‘primal spirituality,’
- emphasis on ‘the materiality of salvation’ and search for holism,
- cherishing of communitarianism and empowerment of all.

### Looking at the Tower from Three Different Angles

#### ‘Experientialism’ and ‘Primal Spirituality’

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7 See further my ‘“The Re-Turn of Religion in the New Millennium”: Pentecostalisms and Postmodernities,’ *Swedish Missiological Themes* 95, no. 4 (Fall 2007): 469–96.
According to Cox, Pentecostalism

has succeeded because it has spoken to the spiritual emptiness of our time by reaching beyond the levels of creed and ceremony into the core of human religiousness, into what might be called ‘primal spirituality,’ that largely unprocessed nucleus of the psyche in which the unending struggle for a sense of purpose and significance goes on. Classical theologians have called it the ‘imago dei,’ the image of God in every person. Maybe the Pentecostals are referring to the same thing with different words…. My own conviction is that Pentecostals have touched so many people because they have indeed restored something.⁸

Part of the texture of primal spirituality is ‘primal piety,’ which speaks of the spiritual importance of vision, healing, dreams, dance, and other archetypal religious expressions. What is important here is that “the reemergence of this primal spirituality came – perhaps not surprisingly – at just the point in history when both the rationalistic assumptions of modernity and the strategies religions had used to oppose them (or to accommodate to them) were all coming unraveled.”⁹ Alongside this emphasis on experience and primal spirituality, Pentecostalisms share with postmodernities the new appreciation of the affectivity of religious experience and knowledge. For any observer of Pentecostal worship services, the presence of an affective element is visible in music, dance, drama, movement, tears and laughter, and so on.

American philosopher J. K. A. Smith has paid close attention to the epistemological implications of the centrality of primal spirituality among Pentecostals. He speaks of ‘affective epistemology,’ which does not privilege only (and at times not even primarily) discursive, analytic argumentation but gives a fair place to intuition, emotions, and other nonrational aspects of the human being. According to this philosopher, because of an emphasis on the role of experience and its rootage in affective epistemology, Pentecostal theology – unlike typical mainline traditions – has the potential of resisting dualisms that postmodernists also want to avoid.¹⁰ This takes me to the second feature in Pentecostalism with parallels in postmodernity: the search for wholeness of salvation, embodiment, and what I call here ‘the materiality of salvation.’

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⁸ Cox, Fire From Heaven, 81.
⁹ Cox, Fire From Heaven, 81.
‘Materiality of Salvation’ and Holism

In an important essay titled ‘Materiality of Salvation: An Investigation in the Soteriologies of Liberation and Pentecostal Theologies,’ Miroslav Volf has argued that with all their differences, these two Christian movements share a vision of salvation in this-worldly, physical, material, embodied terms. While neither of the movements, of course, leaves behind the eschatological, future-oriented hope, relegating salvation merely to the future will not do either. True, liberationists focus their efforts on socio-political (including gender) liberation, while for Pentecostals it is more about the individual’s release from sicknesses and ailments, physical or emotional. All the same, there is resistance to excluding the bodily this-worldly reality from the vision of salvation. “The centrality of belief in physical healing ... is a fundamental assertion of the value of embodiment and should constitute a radical critique of all dualisms.... By affirming that God is concerned with the health of the body, we affirm materiality, embodiment, and the sensible world.

While Volf takes Luther as his main example of what he calls traditional theologies’ ‘spiritualist’ orientation, I would like to point to the contemporary Lutheran theologian W. Pannenberg, the greatest living systematician. What amazes me in the Münnich systematician’s pneumatology that – alongside that of the Reformed J. Moltmann – represents a holistic, world-embracing vision, in keeping with currents in the doctrine of the Spirit, is that it completely misses the topic of healing and exorcisms as well as empowerment in terms of spiritual gifts. All good talk about the continuity between the first creation and the coming new creation is oblivious to its implications for our lives here and now as embodied creatures, in need of restoration, healing, and release.

Smith sees this central feature of Pentecostalisms deriving from its “positioning of radical openness to God, and in particular, God doing something differently or new,” including healings, revelations, prophecy and

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12 Smith, ‘What Hath Cambridge to do with the Azusa Street,’ 112.

13 See further, V.-M. Kärkkäinen, ‘The Working of the Spirit of God in Creation and in the People of God: The Pneumatology of Wolfhart Pannenberg,’ _PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies_ 26, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 17–35. In contrast to Pannenberg, Moltmann, in his _Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation_, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), chap. 9, discusses widely these topics; even more broadly, Moltmann’s constructive theology appears to me postmodern in many ways even though Moltmann never engages the postmodern discourse!
the like. According to Smith, Pentecostalism’s “courage and willingness to recognize in these ‘strange’ phenomena the operation of the Spirit and declare it to be a work of God” is what “[i]n postmodern terms, we might describe ... as an openness to alterity or otherness.”

Embodiment of course stands at the heart of postmodernity and thus is a high value in postmodern Christian theologies as well.

Alongside the idea of the materiality of salvation and search for holism goes the continuing work for social, political, and economic justice and righteousness. With all its problems with ‘other-worldliness’, Pentecostalism is also characterized by a commitment to social justice, empowerment of the powerless, and a ‘preferential option for the marginalized’ tracing back to its roots at Azusa Street as a kind of paradigm of marginalization – a revival in an abandoned stable, led by an African American preacher.

Communitarianism and Empowerment of All

One of the many things that amazes – and confuses – me about postmodernism is its checkered and in many ways confusing way of negotiating the relationship between persons and communities. On the one hand, the postmodern mindset is a rebuttal of modernity’s ‘turn to individuality,’ if that is being understood in terms of atomistic, separated individuals as is the case in the lifestyles of contemporary urban villages. Postmodernists have rightly reconstructed ‘self’ in terms of ‘person,’ which is all about relationality, connections, belonging, and sharing. Certainly no man (or woman) is an island after the advent of postmodernity. That said, on the other hand, no movement is so careful to preserve, cherish, and cultivate some kind of ‘individuality’ and uniqueness. Call it alterity, difference, or some other term – it is all about the same. Even in postmodern ghettos individuals do not want to be subsumed under any kind of collectivity that washes off differences. Be that as it may, my point in relation to the discussion at hand is simply this: postmodernity celebrates communities, communalism, belonging.

Observing Pentecostals, especially their mission, I discern a definite cultivation and building up of communalism. For postmodern people and

15 Smith, ‘What...’ p.110. Smith makes here a reference to the Hispanic Pentecostal Liberationist Eldín Villafañe who makes an interesting connection between sacramentality and helping the poor and marginalized: ‘Hispanic Pentecostalism must reappropriate from its Catholic sacramental past the understanding and challenge that worshipping Jesus is also accomplished through its ministry and service to and with the poor’ Smith, p. 112, citing Eldín Villafañe, The Liberating Spirit: Toward an Hispanic American Pentecostal Social Ethic (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), p 218.
Pentecostals, communities are shaped and brought about by a shared narrative, a story that is unfolding in the life of the community. “The Pentecostal community is a distinct coherent narrative tradition within Christianity. Pentecostal communities are bound together by their charismatic experiences and common story.”

Should we thus speak of a distinctive Pentecostal koinonia? This koinonia orientation was rightly acknowledged in the dialogue between Roman Catholics and Pentecostals.

In the life of the community, Pentecostals have found a new sense of dignity and purpose in life. Their solidarity creates affective ties, giving them a sense of equality. These communities have functioned as social alternatives that protest against the oppressive structures of the society at large. Along with some social critics, Pentecostals have discovered that effective social change often takes place at the communal and micro-structural level, not at the macro-structural level.

What is significant about the Pentecostal koinonia is “that the Pentecostal revivals of the present century have taken the koinonia of/with the Holy Spirit out of the cloistered mystical tradition of the Church, and made it the common experience of the whole people of God.” Pentecostal koinonia at its best represents a principle of democratization and reconciliation: not only is

16 Kenneth J. Archer, ‘Pentecostal Story: The Hermeneutical Filter for the Making of Meaning’, PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies 26, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 40–42. This sounds very postmodern – McIntyrean, and indeed it is. Interestingly enough, a key resource for Archer’s construal of Pentecostalism is A. McIntyre’s insights into the importance of narrative and tradition(s) for community formation.


18 ‘Evangelization, Proselytism and Common Witness: Final Report of the Dialogue (1990–1997)’, # 43 in Information Service 97 (1998/1-II): 38–56. One is reminded of the important statement by the Reformed theologian Emil Brunner, The Misunderstanding of the Church (London: Lutterworth, 1953), 10–11: ‘The Body of Christ is nothing other than a fellowship of persons. It is ‘the fellowship of Jesus Christ’ or ‘fellowship of the Holy Ghost’ where fellowship or koinonia signifies a common participation, a togetherness, a community life. The faithful are bound to each other through their common sharing in Christ and in the Holy Ghost, but that which they have in common is precisely no ‘thing,’ no ‘it,’ but a ‘he,’ Christ and His Holy Spirit.’

there access to God and ‘holy things’ for all men and women, but also the access to ministry and leadership. It is not about education, status, or wealth, but about the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Coupled with the belief in and claim of empowerment of all Christians – men and women, young and old, rich and poor – by the same Holy Spirit, Pentecostal communities have launched massive mission projects all over the world. Consequently, this has led to the enthusiastic application of the ‘voluntary principle’, which may be the key to the massive growth and explosion of the Pentecostal mission enterprise.

Especially during the birth years of the Pentecostal movement in the United States, Pentecostal koinonia acted as a powerful social, political, and ecumenical critic. Men and women, white and colored, Methodists and Catholics – they all worshipped together, shared leadership, claimed the ‘power from on high.’ No wonder that not only the religious establishment but also the then-liberal secular establishment, with the Los Angeles Times in the forefront, ridiculed and ostracized the fledgling movement as scandalous and heretical.20 The Pentecostal belief that “the color line was washed away in the Blood of the Lamb” was such a blow against the turn-of-the-twentieth-century racist, gender-exclusive, and socio-politically conservative mindset.21

**What If the Tower Collapsed?**

One could imagine that the leaning tower would collapse one day; thereafter, it would soon lose its appeal to tourists. Or the tower could be ‘fixed’ by forcing it to stand straight. Then it would look like any other tower. Again, it would probably draw less attention! In the Pentecostal-missions tower there are a number of dynamic tensions – depending on which angle you are looking at it. The above-mentioned three general features of Pentecostalism are in constant danger of being taken over and twisted by counter forces.

I mentioned above, with reference to Cox’s analysis of the changing religious landscape, that ‘experientialism’ and fundamentalism often go hand in hand – as different species as they appear to be. This is a continuing liability of Pentecostalism as well. While spirituality is the legitimate and appropriate way of defining Pentecostalism, it also is the fact that very soon

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20 This is well documented in the new study by the leading Pentecostal historian and ecumenist Cecil M. Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of a Global Movement* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006).

after their birth, Pentecostal movements made a determined effort to define themselves along the lines of written texts, ecclesiastical formulae, and so forth – in other words, to make themselves look more like their respected conservative Protestant (‘Evangelical’) counterparts. As a result, the revivalistic movement tied itself into a conservative, quite literalist Bible hermeneutics, dispensational eschatology, and so on. At first the doctrinal contours, however, were looser and more fluid. Then came the need for institutional solidification and especially wider Protestant acceptance for a movement that came out of the margins. In general, the location of Pentecostalism in the camp of conservative Christians, especially in the United States and many parts of Europe and as a result of aggressive missionary work also in many former mission lands, is the historical and social background for Pentecostalism’s current manifestation. The alliance with Fundamentalism, however, is a complicated and in a way self-contradictory development. Among all Christians, it is the Fundamentalists who have most vocally opposed the Pentecostal claim for the continuing miraculous work of the Spirit. Similarly, the rather Fundamentalistic understanding of revelation and inspiration they inherited may be at odds with a Pentecostal worldview.22

The alliance with the conservative, at times even fundamentalistic, Christianity also helps explain another built-in tension in Pentecostal theology and missiology: the principle of the freedom of the Spirit – or lack thereof – in relation to other religions. The Canadian Baptist theologian Clark Pinnock states the obvious: “One might expect the Pentecostals to develop a Spirit-oriented theology of mission and world religions, because of their openness to religious experience, their sensitivity to the oppressed of the Third World where they have experienced much of their growth, and their awareness of the ways of the Spirit as well as dogma.”23 This has not, however, been the case for the most part.24 While Pentecostals have excelled in missionary activities with impressive results by any standards, most often they have succumbed to the standard conservative/fundamentalist view of


limiting the Spirit’s saving work to the church (except for the work of the Spirit preparing one to receive the gospel).

When it comes to the materiality of salvation, Pentecostal spirituality, church life, and mission work gives an inchoate picture. Having aligned themselves with Fundamentalists and their dispensationalist eschatology, as well as socio-politically conservative Christians, many Pentecostals, especially White Pentecostals, have also had serious doubts about the value of investing in the world that is to disappear. Fortunately, Pentecostals have not been consistent with their eschatological faith and thus over time have invested huge amounts of energy and resources in social programs, both at the individual and structural level. Yet this mixed feeling has always been there speaking against the idea of the materiality of salvation.

At the same time, the idea of the materiality of salvation in the hands of too many Pentecostals and Charismatics has also turned into a gross materialistic search for financial and other benefits. The misdeeds of many Pentecostal leaders in their greedy quest for money and prestige are too well documented to deserve much reflection. Any visit to many Pentecostal churches not only in the USA but also all over in the Global South from Africa to Asia to Latin America paints a picture with serious questions to any theologian and missiologist. Health and wealth are made the prime indicator of God’s blessings, and spiritual techniques for reaching them are fine-tuned by ever new itinerant charismatic preachers. Through satellite broadcasting, Prosperity Gospel shows are being brought into our living rooms. On the other hand, Pentecostalisms also suffer from the same kind of ‘spiritualist’ reductionism Volf sees indicative of many traditional theologies, namely, prioritizing the salvation of the ‘souls’ to the point where the wholeness of the human being as an embodied *imago Dei* is being missed. In Pentecostal preaching and witnessing, you can hear simultaneously both voices: seeking for wholeness of salvation and emphasis on the salvation of the soul.

Finally, when it comes to the communitarian nature of Pentecostalism, a mixed picture also emerges. Pentecostals are no less prone to embrace the ‘religion of individualism’ so rampant especially in the Global North. Rightly, then, does the Pentecostal theologian from Singapore, Simon Chan, lament that Pentecostalism suffers from individualism: “My relationship with God is primary, while my relationship with others is secondary.” As an
Asian theologian, he urges Pentecostals to work towards an ecclesiology in which the Spirit fosters community and unity.25

Indeed, again, having aligned themselves with religiously and socially conservative forces, many Pentecostals faithfully stick with color-line, status-line, and other markers of exclusion. Certainly, White Pentecostals have become anti-ecumenical against their original vision of the unity of all Christians as a result of the pouring out of the Spirit. And even a cursory look at many Pentecostal churches betrays highly hierarchic, institutionalized, and rigid church structures.

**Leaving the Tower: Whither Postmodern Mission?**

It seems to me that these reflections on the intriguing and, at the same time, uneasy relationship between postmodernism and Pentecostalism are helpful pointers to something new happening in the world. In the spirit of postmodernity, a tension-filled, inchoate picture emerges. Religion is alive and well in the postmodern land. But so also is secularism (whatever that complicated and many-faceted term may mean!). I think that, rather than speaking merely in terms of the ‘return’ of religion in the aftermath of the weakening of modernity, we should also speak of its ‘re-turn,’ i.e., turning around or making another turn. When religion has re-turned into the life of the third millennium at the global level, it is not only re-appropriating old realities such as experience, mysticism, communion, healing, and so on, but also re-configuring them in a new postmodern context. The emergence of Pentecostalism as a major Christian manifestation of that complex matrix of developments should pose a continuing study task for ecumenical and missiological research.

While many questions remain unanswered, we can be sure that the ‘turn’ to the spirit is part of postmodernity’s religiosity. Revival movements are usually spirit movements! For the Christian church, the turn to the Spirit – both ‘return’ and ‘re-turn’ – opens new vistas and new horizons. In the words of J. Moltmann, this points to ‘A Pentecostal Theology of Life’:

The gift and presence of the Holy Spirit constitutes the greatest and most wonderful reality that we – the human community, all living beings, and the entire earth – can experience. For present in the Holy Spirit is not just one spirit of the many good and evil spirits that exist, but the very God who creates, gives life, blesses, and redeems....

and the demons of death are cast out. According to the book of Acts and the apostolic epistles, wherever the Holy Spirit is present, there is life, for there one finds joy for the victory of life over death and there the power of eternal life is experienced. Mission, in this divine sense, is nothing else than a movement of life and healing which spreads comfort and courage for life and uplifts those who want to die. Jesus did not bring a new religion in the world, but a new life.\textsuperscript{26}