

Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement  
Donald E. Miller & Tetsunao Yamamori

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Theology in a Global Context  
TH502  
Spring 2020  
Professor: Dr. Stanley John  
March 22, 2020

In *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* by Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, sought to study what effects Pentecostalism had on socially neglected, ostracized and destitute community-based groups around the world and to research if Pentecostals are more effective in their approach to make new Christian converts.

The thesis is Pentecostalism has grown at a faster pace than mainline denominations due to their direct involvement holistically with communities needing the most assistance. Examples of the holistic ministries observed were those who contracted AIDs and the children who were orphaned due to their parents dying of AIDs. Other holistic ministries dealt with drug abusers, prostitutes, gangsters, etc. Each ministry is considered “Progressive Pentecostalism<sup>1</sup>” since they meet the root needs of the whole individual and not just spiritually. These Pentecostals are conducted by vision and are able to break free from Conservative Fundamentalism as well as Liberation theology.

Why is Pentecostalism growing so rapidly where other denominations like Catholicism and mainline Protestant is remaining stagnant? A major factor for their growth is their approach to meeting people’s needs. The authors found that the groups they studied had no agenda or ulterior motive for working with these communities. In some of these ministry outreaches, there is no pressure for the person to initially go to church or to commit to something before being ministered to. Their main goal was to love the communities they served unconditionally, with no strings attached. Not only were they financially independent, they recognized the need to train leaders from their own people. This forced each community to develop ownership and take responsibility for their own growth, sustenance, and continuance.

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<sup>1</sup> Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement*. (University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 2007), 2.

Another important factor for the rapid growth of Pentecostalism is the works and gifts of the Holy Spirit operating in the lives of those performing these acts of service. These leaders, operating like CEOs of these ministries, are not trained academically. These individuals have little to no seminary training, and little to no business background. They rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to give them the wisdom how to organize, run and lead these ministries. One example from the book already mentioned, is St. Stephen's Society in Hong Kong. Jackie Pullinger's work with drug addicts does not solicit fundraising nor do they have formalized plans for running the organization.<sup>2</sup>

How these ministries are formed and run is where criticism takes place. Some of these organizations are run with business leadership styles. Others are directed on the leader's guidance and direction from the Holy Spirit. These leaders were not trained to head these organizations. Many had to learn through trial and error while keeping a posture of humility. An outside observer could wonder how do they know where to begin and will there be enough finances to begin these ministries? Will the ministry continue when the founding leader steps down?

The argument for this book is why is Pentecostalism so important and why should we take notice of how they minister and engage with communities. According to David Martin, a British sociologist, Pentecostalism is taking over the religious sector in large bounds.<sup>3</sup> According to the book, one-third of the Christian population may identify themselves as Pentecostals by 2025.<sup>4</sup> With such a large shift in Christianity towards Pentecostalism, why are so many choosing this religion over mainline denominations?

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<sup>2</sup> Miller and Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, 100.

<sup>3</sup> Miller and Yamamori, 19.

<sup>4</sup> Miller and Yamamori, 18.

Pentecostalism appeals to non-believers because Pentecostalism approaches ministry by meeting the needs of the person first. In Hong Kong those addicted to drugs were amazed at the difference they saw in the lives of their former drug addicted friends. They saw that the friend was physically set free and wanted to know how they could achieve the same freedom. There was no preaching or sermon, only a prayer given by the friend to the addict. The addict then begins to speak in tongues or has an encounter with the Holy Spirit. From this engagement, the addict under no pressure is encouraged to attend their rehabilitation program. While in rehab, it was reported that they do not experience the usual amount of pain and discomfort that comes from drug withdrawal. They find freedom in Christ physically and spiritually.

Why is Pentecostalism so important to World Christianity? The authors discuss the impact of Pentecostalism and the poor around the world. As Pentecostalism has more followers, it was explained that religion gave people hope in the midst of suffering and social injustice. This translates to people looking for a way to better themselves, to achieve more in life, to possibly work toward changing the political system in their environment.

It was stated in the book that Pentecostals who were vibrant in their faith were staying away from the vices that cause people to spiral downward such as gambling, drinking, pornography, dishonesty, etc. Young people were encouraged to stay sexually pure, go for higher education, etc. Therefore, these believers are considered to affect society positively. Another way is to view Pentecostalism through the lens of human rights. There is no class system, nor any limitations due to “race, ethnicity, or family lineage.”<sup>5</sup>

To critically engage in an issue of importance is that Pentecostalism has a large population of people they minister to. Therefore, as their ministries are showcased before the world, there needs to be accountability, purity and an untarnished record. In the West, we have

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<sup>5</sup> Miller and Yamamori, 31-34.

seen too many fall from grace after having a successful, large ministry such as Jim and Tammy Baker, Jimmy Swaggart, etc. As this book was written several years ago, I happened to look online for more information on City Harvest church in Singapore. To my dismay, there was a scandal and some of the leaders were imprisoned as \$50 million dollars were misappropriated.<sup>6</sup>

Having such a large base of followers can generate enormous amounts of money. Unfortunately, as in 1 Timothy 6:10, “the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.”<sup>7</sup> What is surprising is City Harvest church seemingly continues to thrive despite the scandal.<sup>8</sup> City Harvest happened to have the resources and capital to do ministry in a large context. Also on the internet are many lists of the 9 or 10 top richest pastors. One of them, Joseph Prince, stopped taking a salary in 2009.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps this is one of the ways to curb misappropriation of church funds if one becomes famous and pastors a mega church.

These financially rich ministries happen to be in the context of the church. However, the other ministries mentioned in the book are not as wealthy, and are geared toward helping people groups that are not financially endowed. Each ministry needs to be run properly. As much as Pentecostalism is less formal in how they worship, how they dress, how they view ministry, the ministry still needs to have some formality. Unfortunately, humans are sinful and it is a matter of time before something happens. As an example, documentation is necessary even though Jackie Pullinger mentioned that nothing was written as to how many drug addicts were helped

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<sup>6</sup> Theresa Tan and Prisca Ang, “City Harvest Church Founder Kong Hee Released from Jail, Plans to Spend Time with Family,” *The Straits Times*. Last revised August 24 2019, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/city-harvest-church-founder-kong-hee-released-from-jail>

<sup>7</sup> 1 Timothy 6:10 (NLT)

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Koay, “I Left City Harvest Church 7 Years Ago. I Returned Yesterday (Kong Hee Too). Nothing Has Changed,” Last revised August 25, 2019., <https://mothership.sg/2019/08/visiting-city-harvest-church-first-service-kong-hee-prison/>

<sup>9</sup> Bryna Singh, “Pastors Rich List: Who the Top 9 are and How They Rose to Prominence,” *The Straits Times*. Last revised October 25, 2014., <https://www.straitstimes.com/world/africa/pastors-rich-list-who-the-top-9-are-and-how-they-rose-to-prominence>

through the rehab program. Additionally Pullinger stated that she did not have budgets or plans written down.

Arguably it is much easier to run an organization without the impediment of paperwork nor to trouble those in leadership with an extra task. However, we have seen how money has a tendency to corrupt even the most well meaning Christians. Also, when it is written on paper, it gives more accountability as someone has to account for what is transpiring within the organization.

As for missional implications for today, bearing the name of Christ brings great responsibility. Home grown ministries are to be applauded when they are governed by the Holy Spirit and led by the Holy Spirit. Hearing of the miraculous happening around the world with our brothers and sisters in Christ is encouraging, and challenging. If we say Hebrews 13:8 that “Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever,” and in John 14:12 that we will do even greater works than He has done, should we not look for more of the supernatural? I agree with the workings of the Holy Spirit as He is the One Jesus referred to would come and teach us.

All the people who are being touched by Jesus through the ministries in this book serve as a model for my present church. It serves as reminder to serve others with the love of Jesus and to show unconditional love. This type of sacrificial love and servant hood can only be done in the power of the Holy Spirit. So even though the Christian & Missionary Alliance Church is not considered Pentecostal, the founder, A.B. Simpson has had experiences that would fall in line with Pentecostal expression.

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