

**PRAYER, EVANGELIZATION AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE:
A PENTECOSTAL PERSPECTIVE**

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Over the last few years, I have from the sidelines, observed the increasing interest within Evangelical circles in issues of spiritual warfare. Some of the things I have read and heard about seem far-fetched and bizarre, but there are other factors that indicate a healthy turn away from a sterile and rationalistic Enlightenment paradigm of salvation. This “turn to the supernatural,” is fraught with difficulties and the potential for excesses, but on the whole, does not necessarily signal a naive and simplistic return to a pre-modern worldview. Rather, it may in fact be a move forward toward a more holistic understanding of humanity and redemption.

My own tradition, namely what is often called “classical Pentecostalism,” is known for its emphasis on spiritual warfare and “power evangelism.” The Pentecostal movement was an early 20th century turn to the supernatural. Appearing on the scene during the high gilded age of modernity and science, Pentecostalism seemed to most a throw-back to an era long abandoned by the Protestant faith. However, in recent years there are those such as Harvey Cox, who interpret the movement as signaling a first wave of the post-modern turn to experience.¹

The issue of whether or not Pentecostalism is in fact the “first fruits” of a wave of spirituality that is sweeping the world is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that the movement has historically emphasized the co-joining of prayer and spiritual warfare with

¹Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1995).

evangelization. It can be said that wherever the movement is flourishing, persons are finding deliverance from the powers of darkness and they are experiencing healing in both body and spirit. It is the purpose of this paper to explicate the movement's understanding of the intersections of prayer, spiritual warfare and evangelization. How Pentecostals approach prayer, evangelization and spiritual warfare is intrinsically related to their world-view and vision of God. Therefore, it seems necessary for me to spend some time discussing the theological presuppositions out of which Pentecostal practices flow. I will attempt to do so by first discussing the world-view that is inherent within the Pentecostal movement. This will be followed by some reflections on how the Pentecostal movement names and experiences God. Finally, the issues of prayer and spiritual warfare will be discussed within a framework of a Pentecostal soteriology.

A Pentecostal Worldview

The Pentecostal worldview is one in which “all things relate to God and God relates to all things. This fusion of God with the phenomenological does not collapse God into creation. Instead, it is a predisposition to see the transcendent God at work in, with, through, above and beyond all events.”² Reality is defined in the context of an overwhelming experience with God who is actively at work in the world. In this context the classic distinctions between immanent and transcendent, sacred and profane break down. God is active in history and can be known and experienced in the most mundane of life.

Pentecostals are inclined to think systemically (vs. systematically) which causes them to hold to a holistic view of the world in which a transcendent God is at work, in, with, through, above and beyond all events. In this context revelation is not static but progressively unfolds.

²Jackie Johns, “Pentecostalism and the Postmodern Worldview,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, 78, 1995,87.

The ages of time are not disjointed; rather they are interrelated -fused into a single master plan of God. Speaking of this fusion, Steven Land observes that in Pentecostalism ‘space and time are fused in the prophetic reckoning created and sustained by the Spirit of the end. Here and now, there and then are telescoped and traversed by the Spirit.’³ Healings and deliverance from powers of this age are fused with the biblical witness and the age to come in which all will be healed and restored. This means that the movement sees the contemporary world in light of both the biblical witness of the past and in light of that which is to come. It is the one and same Spirit who is at work.

One of the distinctives of a Pentecostal worldview (perhaps over against some of the more recent movements stressing spiritual warfare) is the focus on God as mystery. The ways of God are not always easily reduced to laws and principles. Some people are healed and others are not. The broken and the hurting are often instruments of God’s work in the world. These tensions are maintained because life is a journey with God and in God while not always fully understanding the ways and means of the journey. The Pentecostal movement has not historically stressed knowledge of territorial spirits or understanding of the names of demonic spirits who rule over certain cities. For the most part the movement has been content to live in the dialectical tension between certainty and mystery. So Pentecostals can sing, “We will understand it better by and by.”

It is important to note that a Pentecostal worldview is trans-rational. Truth is not limited to reason. The spectrum of knowledge includes cognition, affection and behavior, each of which

³Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993, p. 98.

is fused into the other two.⁴ To know the truth is to experience the truth and to be transformed by that encounter. Transformation may occur at many forms. It may occur as the new birth leading to salvation. It may occur as deliverance from addictive behavior. It may occur as being filled with the Holy Spirit.

While many believe that a Pentecostal worldview contains a fundamentalist understanding of Scripture, there are some major differences. First, for Pentecostals the Bible is first and foremost a living book. It is the Word of God in which there is a co-joining of God's presence with God's Word. Thus to encounter the Scriptures is to encounter God. The Holy Spirit is the critical agent of this encounter. Second, the Scriptures serve as a template for reading the world. Third, the Scriptures function as a link to God's people and God's presence in the world throughout history.⁵

Finally, it should be noted that a Pentecostal worldview is one in which evil is a reality. There are epiphanies of darkness that surround all knowing. The world is in a fallen state in which the powers of evil inhabit the created order. The devil, who is the "prince of this world," is a personal spirit-being who controls the powers of darkness. When a person becomes a believer, he or she renounces the kingdom of darkness and enlists in the kingdom of God. A believer becomes part of God's mission on the earth to restore all things to himself. Therefore, for many Pentecostals, the Christian life is living in the tension between the already and the not yet.

The above characteristics of a Pentecostal world-view can be seen in various forms throughout the world. In places such as Africa and Brazil there is greater fusion of God with the phenomenological; while in the West, Pentecostal believers tend toward a more dichotomized

⁴J. Johns, "Pentecostalism," 89.

world-view between the natural and supernatural. Yet, in spite of the distinctions there is a unique world-view that is Pentecostal. This view may be characterized as seeing God at work in all of life, the revelation of God unfolding in human history.

A Pentecostal Vision of God

Critical to understanding the nature of Pentecostal prayer and evangelization and spiritual warfare is a view of God that may be characterized as Trinitarian, personal and dynamic. For the most part Pentecostal theology reflects a form of Trinitarian faith which is based on God's economy.⁶ For Pentecostals God is not an abstract idea, nor merely a transcendent apathetic Being. Rather, Pentecostal experience of the economy of God as "the path of God's glory,"⁷ uniting Creator and creature, becomes the starting point of theological reflection.

Within the framework of a Trinitarian theology, Pentecostals would emphasize the dynamic liveliness and communion of the Divine life. The life of God is a life of "Being in Communion."⁸ It is God's desire to share the divine life with humanity so that the nature of God becomes the dwelling of the created beings who share in that nature (John 14-17)

Furthermore, Pentecostal theology is centered in worship of an ecstatic God whose desire and longing for communion with humanity leaves no room for rest (*stasis*) but continually moves outward in *ek-stasis*. It is the Holy Spirit who is the agent who bonds the loving fellowship that

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ It should be noted that there are large numbers of Pentecostals who do not hold a classical trinitarian view of God.

⁷ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), p. 377.

⁸ See John Zizioulas, *Being As Communion* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985). Although Zizioulas is Orthodox, his views are in harmony with Pentecostal experience. See also Terry Cross, "The Rich Feast of Theology: Can Pentecostals Bring the Main Course or Only the Relish?" *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, 16 (April 2000), 27-47. See also Clark Pinnock, "Divine Relationality: A Pentecostal Contribution to the Doctrine of God," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, 16 (April 2000), 3-26.

God is and creates access to the Father through the Son. As Clark Pinnock notes, “The Spirit reaches out to creatures, catches them up and brings them home to the love of God.”⁹ In this sense grace is lavished upon us so that we can traverse the path of glory made available to us through Jesus Christ.

While a Trinitarian theology stressing the economy of God is central to Pentecostal theology it should be noted that this does not represent a purely functional view of the Trinity. God is not reduced to human experience, but always remains ineffable. Humanity is incapable of fully receiving or understanding God. The Holy Spirit thus becomes the critical epistemological agent, who is always leading into truth that is one at the same time revealed to us yet always beyond us.

It should be noted that within Pentecostalism there is a prevailing vision of a God who suffers with and in behalf of humankind. The crucified God who is the God takes unto himself the pathos present in creation. There is deep pathos present within the life of God which groans for and with broken humanity. Sharing in the Triune life means participating in God’s embrace of a broken world. Samuel Solivan terms this participation *orthopathos* and describes it as “the proper or liberating appropriation of suffering (pathos) to encourage living as loving subjects inspired by the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰ There are significant implications regarding evangelization, prayer and spiritual warfare when one takes seriously the nature of God as pathos. These implications become even more clear when framed within a discussion of the meaning of salvation.

A Pentecostal Vision of Salvation

⁹ Clark Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996), p. 20.

¹⁰ Samuel Solivan, *The Spirit, Pathos and Liberation: Toward an Hispanic Pentecostal Theology* (Sheffield:

All of what has been stated so far in this brief paper comes to bear in the meaning of salvation for humankind. The soteriology found within most of Pentecostalism goes far beyond the Protestant emphasis upon justification. If God's life and nature are available to humanity and if the Holy Spirit is actively seeking to join humanity in fellowship with the Triune life, then salvation conveys a radical transformation into the life of God. The power of God's Spirit to bring us into "the path of glory," out of an existence of alienation and darkness, is the message of salvation preached by many Pentecostals.

In his recent analysis of Pentecostalism, particularly in the context of Latin America, Richard Shaull concludes that the movement represents a radically new paradigm of salvation over against the Reformation paradigm. He notes that the historic Protestant model defines the human problem primarily in terms of guilt arising from the state of sinfulness resulting from the Fall. God offers forgiveness and justification made available through the expiatory work of Jesus on the cross. The human response is faith as the acceptance of God's forgiveness and grace.

Shaull notes that among Pentecostals the human problem is seen in terms of humanity caught in a world "possessed" and dominated by supernatural demonic forces who are agents of chaos and destruction. He observes that they "experience evil primarily as something outside themselves that threatens them and their world."¹¹ The solution is an experience of the presence and power of the resurrected Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit that gives the power to make it through each new day and the guarantee of victory over demonic forces. God's saving work is manifest as an immediate response to suffering, pain and brokenness, which makes possible a journey toward the fullness of life. The human response is faith "that dares to start a new

Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), p. 66.

interaction with God and take possession of what has been lost. It means “appropriation of the power made available by God now in order to take responsibility for one’s life in community with others.. and join in the struggle against demonic forces fully confident of the coming of the millennium.”¹²

I would observe that Pentecostals would define the human problem both as guilt arising out of the context of original sin and as the chaos and oppression from external demonic forces. Salvation would mean justification before God and liberation from evil. The human response would be faith as acceptance of God’s forgiveness, and faith “that dares to start a new interaction with God and the ability to take possession of what has been lost.” This conveys a view of salvation that dares to traverse the “path of God’s glory” in order that the presence of God can become the home of humanity. It is a transformational view that encourages freedom and deliverance from evil. Salvation is thus therapeutic in-as-much-as it brings healing as well as forgiveness. For the masses of humanity living on the edges of civilization, the good news of the gospel is the good news that they who are the voiceless victims are enabled to become subjects of history whose voices give witness to the saving and delivering power of God.¹³

Prayer, Evangelization and Spiritual Warfare

It is with the context of this paradigm of salvation that prayer, evangelization and spiritual warfare must be understood. I would concur with Steven Land’s assessment that Pentecostals tend to view themselves as participants in the ongoing salvation-historical drama of redemption.

¹¹ Richard Shaull and Waldo Cesar, *Pentecostalism and the Future of the Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 144.

¹² Ibid., p. 146.

¹³ See Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy Among the Oppressed* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

They are joined to the missionary movement of God and are part of a missionary fellowship whose life nurtures the essential Christian affections (fruit of the Spirit).¹⁴ In this context mission is the over-arching drama in which prayer, evangelization and spiritual warfare play a part.

Prayer

Land views prayer as the primary theological activity of Pentecostals and the most significant activity of a Pentecostal congregation. He further observes:

When the Spirit comes to indwell the believer in regeneration, the Spirit brings the Son and the Father. The living of God in the believer and the believer in God -- a mutual indwelling— makes the Christian, and the church as a whole, a habitation of God through the Spirit. Praying in the Spirit is intercourse or deep communion with God. It is to be “on fire for God.” Being filled with the Spirit is being yielded to, directed and empowered by God to give a witness more consistent with God’s Spirit to Jesus Christ.

There are many modes of prayer practiced in a Pentecostal congregation, such as prayers of praise and adoration, prayers of thanksgiving, prayers of contrition, but the mode of prayer most related to evangelization and spiritual warfare is intercessory. This type of Spirit-filled prayer occurs when believers “pray through,” traversing the path of glory in-behalf of others. Intercessory prayer brings together human need and Divine longing. It touches the ends of the continuum of the economy of God. Such prayer is often initiated by a burden for the needs of a group of people or for an individual. This burden becomes the launching point for prayer and as a person enters into the presence of the Divine, the human burden is fused with the Divine longing or pathos of God. The person who is in prayer experiences a “figure-ground reversal” in that he or she is no longer the primary subject of the prayer with God as the object. Rather, the human

¹⁴ Steven J. Land, “Praying in the Spirit,” in “Pentecostal Movements as an Ecumenical Challenge,” edited by Jurgen Moltmann and Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Concilium* 1996/3, pp. 85-93.

person becomes the vehicle through which the Spirit prays. The Spirit prays through them, often with groans and sighs too deep for words (Romans 8:26). Such prayer participates in God's redemptive plan for the world.

Intercessory prayer is a form of spiritual warfare, often placing the person who prays into the fray between the power of darkness and the power of God. That is why in the Pentecostal tradition people who participate regularly in intercessory prayer are called "prayer warriors." It is believed that every church is gifted with individuals who are called to be intercessors. They are the ones who participate in God's mission for the world by allowing God to burden them with his burden for a lost and hurting world. It is the intercessors who support those engaged in evangelization. Yet it is often the intercessors who themselves engage in evangelization, for they who have bore the burden of the pathos of the world are the most likely to feel compelled into mission.

Evangelization

Given the nature of salvation as discussed above, evangelization among Pentecostals can be seen as participation in God's healing of the world. It means preaching and teaching deliverance from the powers of darkness. It means bringing persons living in a world characterized by chaos into the "nomos" or order of God's household of faith.¹⁵ Evangelization is therefore most often accompanied by the presence and power of the resurrected Christ. The saving work of God through Christ is revealed as the power to free humanity from bondage.

Among Pentecostals you will often hear the phrase "full gospel" associated with evangelization. The 'full gospel' is understood often as a four-fold (Jesus as savior, healer,

¹⁵Harvey Cox observes that Pentecostals have the ability to "lure anarchy into the sacred circle and tame it

baptizer, coming king) or five-fold (Jesus as savior, sanctifier, healer, baptizer, coming king) paradigm. By “full gospel” Pentecostals mean that “to rightly relate to God — that is to know and to follow God — require(s) a progressive transformative development.”¹⁶ Salvation is a journey deeper and deeper in God and with God. As such, it is marked by transforming moments in time, moments in which one’s life is radically altered and one’s affections are transformed into the image and heart of Christ. Between these transforming experiences lies the developmental journey. (In developmental terms there is an ongoing dialectic between dis-equilibrium and equilibrium, or accommodation and assimilation. In theological terms there is the ongoing dynamic of *metanoia*.).

Evangelization is therefore about bringing persons to a “saving knowledge” of Christ which becomes their entry point into the “way of salvation.” Throughout the world Pentecostals evangelize others into this way. They do so by testifying about the transforming power of Christ in their own lives. Their evangelization may also be accompanied by miracles which testify of the power of Christ to deliver. Consequently, when giving witness to their faith, persons testify of being “set free” or “delivered” from the bondage of sin.

Evangelization among Pentecostals calls for a personal surrender or a conversion without restrictions. It asks for more than a “decision.” It demands giving of oneself: mind, body and affections to the reign of Christ. This surrender is signified in receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit, an experience where even language itself is under the control of the Spirit. The surrender signals a new beginning in which “persons dare to state a new interaction with God.” Persons are connected to the realm of the Spirit, a connection that breaks down the boundaries between

¹⁶Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, p. 130.

sacred and profane and creates zones of liberation and healing in which they can live out their lives.

People whose lives are characterized by addictions, violence, abandonment and failure are in need of evangelization that offers the power of Christ found in a healing community. That is why in many parts of the world evangelization is a “package deal” complete with nightly worship services, opportunities to share and celebrate the little victories along the way. These healing communities have the ability to take broken and scarred tissue from tattered lives and out of terrible environments and form new cells. Here persons can migrate, renewing the ties that bind, re-ordering priorities and reversing the chaos and alienation of the outside world. Such communities provides zones of liberation and freedom, allowing persons to reinvent themselves in a atmosphere of fraternal support.¹⁷ Here they can experience powerful ecstatic experiences which are “capable of breaking the spell under which they are living and of setting their lives in a new realm toward which they are moving.”¹⁸

Spiritual Warfare

It is normal within a Pentecostal world-view to see the world as an arena in which God is actively at work bringing healing and restoration. The world is also an arena in which Satan is actively seeking to destroy human lives. To become a believer means joining the kingdom of light and living in daily conflict with the powers of darkness. The way of salvation is thus one marked with conflict and disappointment, but ultimately it is the way of victory over evil. Spiritual warfare is therefore not something outside of the ordinary walk of the Christian. It is important

¹⁷ David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

¹⁸ Shaull, “The Pentecostal Appeal to the Poor: The Challenge to the Presbyterians,” *Church and Society*, 86 (1996): 49-55.

for me to stress this aspect of Pentecostalism because while spiritual warfare within this tradition is normal it has not made spiritual warfare a primary focus of its preaching and teaching.

This lack of attention is in stark contrast to the recent fascination with spiritual warfare that includes an emphasis upon territorial spirits, mapping of territories, the naming of demonic powers, etc. Classical Pentecostalism has for the most part avoided this fascination due to two reasons. First, there is within the movement a healthy respect for and fear of the demonic. It is often preached that too much attention in this area can cause one to become captive to the very powers that one is engaging.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, is the worldview of Pentecostalism which stresses living in the dialectical tension between knowledge of God and the mysterious ways of God. The obsession with knowing the specifics of the powers of darkness collapses the dialectic into a pragmatic “spiritual technology,” in which the human rather than God is the primary subject of the knowing event.

It is important to stress that while engaged in evangelism persons will encounter opposition from the devil, even demonic possession. However, God is more powerful and will give the Christian discernment and power as needed for the occasion. The emphasis here is on evangelization, not on spiritual warfare. Spiritual warfare is the by-product and consequence of participating in the mission of God. The mission of God is primary and God as agent in this mission is primary. Also, Pentecostals would point to the biblical text as lacking reference to the disciples of Jesus putting emphasis upon the specifics of the realm of darkness.

It should be noted that the tendency within Pentecostalism to personalize evil has caused the movement to fail to adequately account for systemic evil. Lack of awareness of evil as it

manifests itself in the socio-political realm in injustice, exploitation, materialism, oppression, hatred and destruction of natural resources has resulted in a deficient public or moral theology. The current emphasis upon powers of domination and oppression as seen in the work of Walter Wink,¹⁹ or even the emphasis upon territorial spirits as seen in the work of Peter Wagner²⁰ has helped to broaden many Pentecostals' understanding of systemic evil. While there are many difficulties in "naming" the powers or mapping them, what is needed among Pentecostals is a comprehensive public theology or social ethic that arises out of their primal theological tradition and takes into account the realities of the socio-political dimensions of evil. The development of such a theology is imperative for a movement that is quickly moving from the margins of society to the centers of power.

Finally, it should be pointed out again that for most Pentecostals around the world prayer, evangelization and spiritual warfare are interwoven within the dynamics of healing communities of faith. Harvey Cox refers to these as "little outposts of the kingdom."²¹ They are pro-active communities, existing as light and salt in a hostile and dangerous world. Cox points to the Azusa Christian Community in the Grove Hall area of Dorchester, a crime-ridden section of Boston as an example of such an outpost. This church, led by Reverend Eugene Rivers, is a community characterized by worship, prayer and evangelization. It is a liberation and safety zone existing in the midst of the powers of darkness.

It seems to me that as we move forward into a postmodern world that is characterized by

¹⁹ See Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984); *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992); *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces That Determine Human Existence* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986).

²⁰ See Peter Wagner, *Breaking Strongholds in Your City* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1993).

²¹ Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, p. 320.

disorientation and confusion, there will be the need for many more such outposts of the kingdom.

These may be humble places, as was the livery stable on Azuza Street, but the most humble of dwellings filled with prayerful people of God can become portals through which the path of God's glory comes to earth.