THINKING IN THE SPIRIT: THE EMERGENCE OF LATIN AMERICAN
PENTECOSTAL SCHOLARS AND THEIR PNEUMATOLOGY OF SOCIAL
CONCERN

A thesis presented to
the faculty of
the Center for International Studies of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts

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August 2003
This thesis entitled

THINKING IN THE SPIRIT: THE EMERGENCE OF LATIN AMERICAN
PENTECOSTAL SCHOLARS AND THEIR PNEUMATOLOGY OF SOCIAL
CONCERN

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Latin American Pentecostalism is often characterized as being either socially and politically conservative or apolitical. Nevertheless, Latin American Pentecostal scholars have expressed progressive political and social concerns. In this thesis, I synthesize Latin American progressive Pentecostal theology and explore the prominence given to the Holy Spirit in such doctrine. I also examine the influences of liberation theology on the movement.

I argue that the emergence of progressive Latin American Pentecostal scholars has thus far been an ambiguous phenomenon. These scholars have played an important role in bringing Latin American Pentecostals into the ecumenical sphere. Also, their social doctrine seems to be both spurring and reinforcing social and political concern in some segments of grassroots Latin American Pentecostalism. On the other hand, progressive Pentecostalism has not resonated at the grassroots level to the degree that one might expect, given the marginalized social class base of Latin American Pentecostalism.
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Chapter One

Thinking for Themselves: The Development of the Latin American Pentecostal Scholar

Pentecostalism has often been labeled—sometimes vilified—as other-worldly and escapist. Indeed, adherents of the faith partake in highly expressive, and sometimes ecstatic, personal and communal religious experiences: including glossolalia (speaking in tongues), faith healing, prophetic utterances, and other manifestations of spiritual devotion. Hence, for many observers, this form of Latin American Christianity seems to be highly incongruous in a post-Vatican II religious climate in which social activism and religion have often gone hand in hand.

Nevertheless, rather than being a religious aberration that is divorced from the dire social needs of many Latin Americans, the widespread appeal of Pentecostalism in Latin America seems rooted in the region’s distinct socioeconomic conditions. This is not to say that Pentecostalism is never appropriated by richer segments of society—especially in North America. Nevertheless, Pentecostalism has, by and large, been a movement of the poor that has had a pronounced impact on the social sphere of Latin America and is more recently emerging as a growing force in the political field.

In opposition to theories about Pentecostals being anti-intellectual “fundamentalists” who are obsessed with eschatology (the “end times”), the region is producing Latin American Pentecostal scholars who seem perpetually drawn to the socio-political implications of the Pentecostal worldview; though such theological developments may reflect broader global trends in Pentecostal scholarship, there seems to
be a particular urgency in Latin America to shape—and even reform—the Pentecostal
movement into one which will vigorously proclaim both personal and social
transformation. Hence this thesis will address the development of Latin American
Pentecostal thought and examine the ways that such theology is speaking to the unique
socio-political matrix of Latin America

The terms prophetic and progressive as adjectives to describe a sociopolitically
engaged strain of Latin American Pentecostalism will be used interchangeably in this
thesis. These descriptors will refer to a person of Pentecostal faith who intentionally
critiques sociopolitical structures and values in light of Christian Scripture or other forms
of divine revelation—in this respect they are like the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures.
The use of the term progressive is not meant to imply that there is an official prophetic
Pentecostal allegiance to the Latin American political left. Rather progressive means, in
this case, a category of Pentecostalism that stresses the needs of the poorest and most
marginalized segments of Latin American society and develops social and political
doctrine in accordance with that reality.

There is substantial evidence that points to the autochthonous nature of Latin
American Pentecostalism. Nevertheless, to ignore some of the North American
influences on and origins of the movement would be superficial. Some expressions of
Latin American Pentecostalism may have emerged independently of the North American
form in some Latin American countries. But Latin American Pentecostalism did not
develop in a vacuum. Understanding why prophetic Pentecostals want to reform Latin
American Pentecostalism requires placing the movement within the broader context of
Pentecostal history.
Latin American Pentecostal scholars are, to a certain extent, giving new meaning to old language. The old language refers to the ubiquitous mention of the Holy Spirit in traditional Pentecostal discourse. Prophetic Latin American Pentecostal scholars are attempting to imbue new sociopolitical meaning into that traditional language. Hence pneumatology, “the study of the person and work of the third person of the trinity” (Solivan, 1997, p.51), is a cornerstone in the intellectual foundation of Latin American Pentecostal social concern.

As Walter Hollenweger points out, “One would expect Pentecostals and charismatics to be strong on pneumatology; this is not the case. They are strong on experience of the Spirit, on pneumapraxis, but they are weak on the interpretation of these experiences” (Hollenweger, 1997, p.218). Thus Latin American Pentecostal scholars may help pastoral and lay leaders as well as the rank and file of the movement to reconsider the significance of their experiences of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, in stressing the prophetic sociopolitical function of the Spirit, Latin American Pentecostal scholars may help to quell some of the tendencies toward political quietism and social indifference that have plagued some segments of the movement on particularly momentous and unfortunate historic occasions.

A broader examination of what I will refer to as “Pentecostalized” thought in Latin America reveals that there are some theologians and religious practitioners of the Charismatic Renewal, who in addition to emphasizing deep personal spirituality have also developed sociopolitical concerns. The term Charismatic Renewal refers to a religious movement in the historic traditions, such as the Roman Catholic Church and mainline Protestant churches, in which believers purport to have experienced the Holy
Spirit in some tangible and often demonstrative ways. This spirituality borrows both terminology and practice from the classical Pentecostal churches. The Charismatic renewal began in the 1960s when two Catholic lay professors from Duquesne University, Ralph Kiefer and Bill Storey, developed an engrossing interest in the Pentecostal experience called the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” (Synan, 1997, p. 246). The movement erupted when Roman Catholics and historic Protestants began to testify that they, like the Pentecostals, were experiencing the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the form of various “gifts”: speaking in tongues, divine healing, spirit-enthused worship etc (Synan, 1997, p.246). There is thus substantial commonality regarding the theology of (or beliefs about) the Holy Spirit in the classical Pentecostal churches and the Charismatic groups found within mainline Protestant and Catholic folds. Hence, the growth of Pentecostal social concern in the theological arena may buoy an integration between Charismatic devotion and social concern; this developing and yet to be synthesized Christian thought will likely borrow much language and practice from liberation theology but remain grounded in distinct Pentecostal-Charismatic praxis and interpretation. Given the central role of pneumatology in the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, a possible name for this social doctrine would be “a pneumatic theology of transformation.”

For the purposes of this thesis, “Latin American Pentecostal scholar” will include self-proclaimed Pentecostals who have published articles or books in any of the following forms: monographs published by scholarly or theological press; articles in anthologies of scholarly and/or theological concern; journal articles of scholarly and/or theological concern; articles published through official ecumenical dialogue; and online papers or articles that fall within any of the above categories.
I will include within the rubric of Latin American Pentecostal scholarship both
native Latin American Pentecostal scholars and scholars living in the United States who
define themselves as Hispanic American Pentecostals. Hispanic American Pentecostal
scholars are included in this study because, as Peterson, Vásquez, and Williams have
shown (2001), the burgeoning phenomenon of transnational migration has widespread
religious ramifications for both Latin America and the United States. There is often
relationship (at least informal) between Hispanic American Pentecostal congregations
and their Latin American counterparts (Gómez & Vásquez, 2001). Also, the Hispanic
American Pentecostal scholar Eldin Villafañe has become an important figure in the
Latin American Pentecostal theological arena. He was, for example, one of six presenters
at the fourth Latin American Evangelization Conference of the year 2000, organized by
the Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana (Latin American Theological Fraternity).
Nevertheless, because of the scope of this study, the interplay between theology and
sociopolitical practice will only be covered in depth in relation to the social and political
context of Latin America.

Prophetic Pentecostals in Latin America strikingly defy academic stereotypes of
Pentecostalism as an intrinsically conservative movement. A collection of articles
published in a work entitled Pentecostalismo y Liberación (Pentecostalism and
Liberation) (1992) is a manifestation of the pan-American Pentecostal awakening to a
theology of social concern (Alvarez, 1992). “The majority of the authors are young
Pastors (both male and female) who are restless and alert. They are joined by some
veteran leaders who in their accompaniment of their younger counterparts on this journey
are also challenged to re-evaluate their experience of the faith.” (Alvarez, p.13) That this
theological reflection is coming from Pastors who are not divorced from the everyday realities of their parishioners but are in fact writing their own versions of contextualized theology is significant:

The articles have been written from a pastoral praxis and not from the lonely confines of an academic desk. It is an expression of a theology on the road. Thus the work treats the realties of pastoral accompaniment and encouragement undergirded by a profound love for the impoverished but hopeful [Pentecostal] churches—suffering and joyful but firmly rooted in the life of the Spirit. (Alvarez, p.13)

Commentaries of this kind sound more like the sophisticated and impassioned appeals of Catholic liberation theologians than the stereotype of manic Pentecostal street preachers.

Indeed liberation theology has had a marked influence on the development of prophetic Pentecostalism. It is thus useful to provide an overview of the major tenets of liberation theology. An important feature in liberation theology is the idea that the church’s social doctrine should be developed from the reference point of the poor. “Liberation theologians believe strongly that God takes sides—in favor of the poor, the nonpersons” (Cleary, 1985, p.89). Hence, liberationists claim that if the Church has generally failed to discern the cries of Latin America’s poor, marginalized and oppressed people, it may be because dominant status quo theology has muzzled those groans. Hence, in When Theology Listens to the Poor (1984), Leonardo Boff argues that the Church needs to speak a language that more inclusively and accurately accounts for God’s, and by extension, humanity’s dealings with the oppressed. Such a theological framework, in his view, would not only provoke the Church to stand at attention to the
heartfelt bellows of the poor, but would even compel the Church to bend down low with ears attuned to the very murmurs of those oppressed. For, Boff argues, God desires to give the excluded and downtrodden first place and highest priority. Hence, the Church should seek to do no less.

Thus liberation theologians propose a “hermeneutic of experience” as the key to understanding God’s relationship to the world. The so-called “father of liberation theology” Gustavo Gutiérrez, for example, eschews the abstractions and niceties of much that passes for doctrine, and in essence he argues for a practical theology. Theology is to be rooted in experience and to be moved and shaped by integral earthly realities. Edward Cleary calls this approach “step methodology”:

The first step is a description of the church in the world. This step involves the use of sociology and economics . . . Then as a second step comes biblical and doctrinal reflection on the situation described . . . As a third stage, pastoral conclusions follow the biblical and doctrinal reflections. (Cleary, 1985, p.63)

And Gutierrez is insistent that this is not a spontaneous argument birthed in a vacuum of twentieth century existence, but is rather a notion that is rooted in early Christian history: “The function of theology as critical reflection on praxis has gradually become more clearly defined in recent years, but it has its roots in the first centuries of the Church’s life” (Gutiérrez, 1988, p.5). Indeed history is another prominent component of liberation theology.

Liberation theologians have helped disabuse Christians of a dichotomy between secular and divine history. Edward Cleary draws attention to this contribution:
The major debt of liberation theologians to modern European theology is the acceptance of the unity of history. To non-Catholic and especially to non-Catholics this may not appear as a major achievement but for Latin Americans it is a crucial shift in thinking, in fact a quantum leap. Instead of thinking of religious history and world history as separate, instead of believing that outside the church there is no salvation, instead of talking about religious or secular activity, liberation theologians routinely and strongly emphasize the unity of history. (Cleary, 1985, p.84)

Their affirmation of the unity of history has led liberation theologians to reconsider the religious motif called the kingdom of God.

As liberation theologians assiduously studied the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) in light of the rampant sociopolitical injustice in Latin America, “the kingdom of God lost its far-away, after-life character for them” (Cleary, 1985, p.96). In the liberationist view, it seemed that Jesus had inaugurated the kingdom (at least the initial stage) with His mission on earth. Liberationists thus concluded that a chief task of the Christian is to participate in the building of this kingdom on earth. “In shorthand terms, one may say that liberation theologians emphasized such ideas as realizing the future, making the kingdom present now” (Cleary, 1985, p.96).

Prophetic Pentecostals have likewise explored and trumpeted themes common in liberation theology: the option for the poor and oppressed and an attendant hermeneutic of experience; the unity of history; and the present dimension of the kingdom of God. The prophetic Pentecostal treatment of these elements differs from liberation theology in that there is a more pronounced stress on the role of the Holy Spirit in the Pentecostal
literature that covers these subjects. Both prophetic Pentecostalism and liberation theology have been fashioned by ecumenical dialogue between various Christian traditions. Prophetic Pentecostals understand this multi-denominational cooperation as a prompting and manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

That there are significant commonalities between liberation theology and prophetic Pentecostalism is not surprising given the time period in which the latter began to take shape. Just as the rudimentary skeleton of liberation theology was growing flesh in the late 1960s and early 1970s, some progressive Pentecostals were accompanying progressive Catholics in their attempts to make a more just Latin American society (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.120). Hence, given their histories of social and political involvement in Latin America, prophetic Pentecostals like Miguel Angel Casco of Nicaragua and Juan Sepúlveda of Chile had opportunity to interact with adherents of liberation theology. Miguel Angel Casco is both a Pentecostal and a Sandinista supporter and has served in various social and political capacities in Nicaragua. Today he is the director of INEC (Instituto Nicaragüense de Estadísticas y Censos-Nicaraguan Institute of Statistics and Censuses). He uses his position to ensure justice for the poor and to “fight corruption at every level; in the government and every area of society” (Sanchez Rizo, para.12).

Juan Sepúlveda’s Pentecostal roots lie in the Chilean MIP Misión Iglesia Pentecostal (Pentecostal Mission Church), which was active in opposition to the Augusto Pinochet regime. Sepúlveda was also a member of a Pentecostal NGO called SEPADE (Servicio Evangélico Para El Desarrollo-Protestant Development Service). The SEPADE team worked “resolutely on the task of constructing and implementing ‘socioevangelical ethics’ . . . .” (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.174) Their efforts were facilitated by ecumenical
contacts in the WCC (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.177), and as Ed Cleary points out, liberation theology is traceable to “currents of thought” that were developing in those European church circles (Cleary, 1985, p.77).

Hence it seems appropriate to speak of two waves of prophetic Pentecostalism. The first wave can be traced to figures like Casco and Sepúlveda whose social and political commitments gave them an affinity for many aspects of liberation theology. There was, however, an influx of North American missionaries in Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s who helped spark unprecedented Pentecostal growth and altered, to a certain degree, the landscape of Pentecostal theology. Despite the subsequent paucity of social and political critique in most Pentecostal churches of the time, Casco and Sepúlveda held firm to progressive Pentecostalism. By contrast, many Latin American converts to Pentecostalism during the 1980s were greeted with a Pentecostal model that was worlds apart from the progressive strain.

The white North American Pentecostal missionaries tended to encourage unquestioned obedience to non-Marxist governments and thus they arguably diverted attention away from social and political realities (Stoll, 1990, p.19). Personal salvation, the afterlife and the return of Christ were predominant themes in their preaching (Stoll, 1990, p.2). Nevertheless, since prophetic Pentecostal literature speaks of a new generation of Pentecostals who are dissatisfied with escapist theology, one can plausibly speak of a second wave of progressive Pentecostalism that is finding expression in young Pentecostal leadership.

Just as the first wave received financial and spiritual backing for their efforts, so is this latest fusion of younger and older prophetic Pentecostals garnering the attention of
ecumenical organizations like the World Council of Churches. With assistance of that kind, prophetic Pentecostals have been able to assemble for pan-Latin American Pentecostal conferences. One of those conferences took place in Santiago, Chile from November 28 to December 5, 1990. Articles presented at the conference were published in the aforementioned work entitled, *Pentecostalismo y Liberación: Una experiencia latinoamericana* (Pentecostalism and Liberation: A Latin American Experience). In addition to projects of this kind, prophetic Pentecostals have also established an online journal entitled *Pentecostalidad: Revista Latinoamericana de Teología Pentecostal* (Pentecostalism: Latin American Journal of Pentecostal Theology) and a related website called RTISPALC-La Red De Teólogo(a)s e Investigadore(a)s Sociales del Pentecostalismo en América Latina y El Caribe (Network of Theologians and Social Science Researchers of Latin American Pentecostalism). On March 8, 2002 the “First Itinerant Latin American Pentecostal Workshop” (Primera Cátedra Pentecostal Latinoamericana Itinerante) was held in San José, Costa Rica at the Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana (Latin American Biblical University). This was the first conference organized by RTISPALC (RTISPALC, Online).

As the forum for prophetic Pentecostals continues to expand, it is likely that their theology of social concern, which is still in an inchoate stage, will mature into a fully developed social doctrine—internal contradictions will dwindle in the shadow of an overriding and coherent narrative. Indeed, it is theology told through story which is most likely to resonate at the grassroots level of Latin American Pentecostalism. And the “editors” of that tale will be the rank and file of the Pentecostal movement; for if
prophetic Pentecostalism does not take root there, the concomitant theology of social concern will have a relatively short shelf life.
Chapter Two

Home at Last: A Review of Literature on Latin American Pentecostalism

A review of literature dealing with Latin American Pentecostalism reveals a scholarly conversion of sorts that mirrors the Pentecostal ideal of a break with the old to usher in the new. In the 1960s Catholic bishops derided Latin American Evangelicalism for being a foreign implant. As David Stoll explains, “Catholic commentators tend to attribute evangelical gains to external agents, especially North American evangelists and money” (Stoll, 1990, preface xvi). Some scholars, like Jean-Pierre Bastian, echoed the idea that Latin American Pentecostals represented foreign interests and he doubted whether “Latin American Pentecostalism, given its authoritarian leadership, would contribute much to democracy” (Cleary, 1997, p.2).

Other scholars focused less on the supposed North American influence on the movement and instead examined how Latin American countries in transition can be fertile ground for religious conversion. Emilio Willems, for example, in a book entitled *Followers of the New Faith* (1967), examined the interplay between Pentecostal conversion and abrupt sociocultural change in Chile and Brazil during the 1940s and 1950s. He argued that rapid industrialization and urbanization in both countries had disrupted the traditional social mores of the rural-agrarian society. By converting to Pentecostalism, Latin Americans could acquire Protestant values that were more compatible with modernization. “In other words, acceptance of Protestantism carries
unmistakable rewards, it has a distinct ‘survival value’ in a society suffering the pains of rapid industrialization and urbanization” (Willems, 1967, p.57).

Similarly, Christian Lalive d’Epinay argued in Haven of the Masses: A Study of the Pentecostal Movement in Chile (1969) that Pentecostal conversions in Latin America were due to disorienting changes in society. Lalive d’Epinay noticed that the staggering growth in Chilean Pentecostalism from 1920 to 1960 occurred alongside economic crisis. Many agricultural workers were squeezed out of their jobs and headed despairingly for the cities. For these Chileans in flux the city was dizzyingly alien. There was a stark contrast between the relational patterns of the countryside and the city. Agricultural workers had been familiar with the benevolent and authoritarian leadership pattern of a patrón (local boss), but no such ties seemed to exist in the urban environment. Hence, in the city these displaced agricultural workers found a “refuge” in Pentecostalism from their “anomie”; the patrón was replaced by an authoritarian and loving Pentecostal pastor. In Lalive d’Epinay’s view, then, Pentecostalism represented a replica, or at least a close facsimile, of the pre-modern cultural patterns of agricultural workers in Chile.

Two Davids brought the study of Latin American Pentecostalism to the academic fore in the 1990s. Both David Martin’s Tongues of Fire (1990) and David Stoll’s Is Latin America Turning Protestant? (1990) offered comprehensive views of the social, political, and theological intricacies of Pentecostal growth in Latin America. David Martin claimed that Pentecostalism was opening up new spaces of democracy to the legion of disenfranchised Latin Americans attracted to the movement. In contrast to Lalive d’Epinay, Martin believes that Latin Americans turn to Pentecostalism not out of despair
but expectation. And Martin contends that upon entering the Pentecostal movement, Latin American converts become pregnant with hope:

New cultural practices had to be initiated in a free space which was circumscribed against the intrusive and hostile “world.” Outside was bedevilment and corruption, machismo and violence, as well as personal and familial disintegration. Inside, however, there began a new order of the world full of Sanidad Divina: soulful release and physical healing. For those people gathered in the free space a signal break had been made with the old ways. All the mediations between them and God were abolished. They were now a redeemed community with direct access in and through the Spirit, and by implication they were also above or beyond all the mediations of society as a whole, not merely the mediations of the priestly caste. All the criteria of power and worth which oppressed them in daily life were removed or reversed, and replaced by one criterion alone: God’s sovereign favour, freely available to all. Once that criterion was fulfilled all the “gifts” were theirs. (Martin, p.107)

Furthermore, Martin believes that this nurturing democratic-religious space will mould Pentecostals into dynamic agents for social change. In his view, Latin American Pentecostals will help consolidate democracy.

Although he is less exuberant than Martin about the democratic potential of Pentecostalism, David Stoll believes that Pentecostal contribution to Latin American society remains at least an open question. He warns, however, that the movement is vulnerable to external influence: “Although stressing that evangelical Protestantism must be understood from the ground as a popular movement, I want to emphasize the clear and
present danger that it is being manipulated by the U.S. government” (Stoll, Preface, xv).

Still, in Stoll’s view, Latin American Pentecostals are taking their own initiative in developing the movement:

If evangelical [mainly Pentecostal] churches were really built on handouts as opponents suggest, then they would be spiritless patronage structures, not the vital expressions that so many of them are. Where evangelical churches are successful, they proliferate far beyond the buying power of mission subsidies. With little or no training and without financial backing, people equipped with little more than Bibles are starting their own churches, beginning with their families and neighbors, then proselytizing vigorously for enough followers to make a living.

(Stoll, p.12-13)

Stoll believes, then, that it will mainly be Latin American Pentecostal themselves, not foreign governments, that will decide the direction of the movement. The Latin American Pentecostal course is not predetermined.

Stoll and Martin have added fuel to a fire of academic interest in Latin American Pentecostalism. Indeed, the perceived “explosion” of Pentecostalism in the 1970s and the 1980s in many parts of Latin America has led to a concomitant eruption of scholarly works—including theses, edited works, and monographs—on this perplexing and often polemical subject. Although academics heartily acknowledge the intensely personal nature of the spirituality espoused by Pentecostal Christians, they have also drawn attention to the potential and immediate socio-political ramifications of the movement.

A presupposition which much recent literature on the subject seems to share is that early studies that centered on portrayals of Latin American Pentecostalism as the
fruit of a decidedly foreign initiative, not only sparked by U.S. impetus but preserved through foreign financial maintenance, were essentially myopic. In “Guatemalan Pentecostals: Something of Their Own” (Wilson, 1997), for example, Everett Wilson argues that Guatemalan Pentecostalism has, in the main, been an autochthonous movement. Wilson responds to the great (but dwindling) academic ballyhoo made about the tandem of a U.S. conservative agenda to stymie revolution in Guatemala, and concomitant growth of Pentecostalism in that country. Wilson claims, “The groups that emerged with considerable strength in the 1980s had, in fact, begun to take shape much earlier” (p.141). And as to the charges of anemic Latin American Pentecostal churches surviving parasitically off the financial contributions of American co-religionists, Wilson points to indigenous success to counter such claims: “The Iglesia del Príncipe de Paz, founded by a Charismatic Guatemalan leader, has thrived as a national movement without any foreign patronage” (p.144).

In addition to emphasizing what he views as the movement’s Latin American institutional and financial base, Wilson also argues that the Pentecostal belief system fits snugly in the Latin American religious context. The Pentecostal notion that there is an on-going cataclysmic battle between spiritual forces, for example, is particularly compatible with the myriad expressions of “popular religion” in Latin America—many emphasize an ever-present interaction between an invisible spiritual world and that which is seen (Wilson, p.152). Wilson summarizes, “Whatever the other attractions of evangelical conversion, the familiarity of Pentecostal faith, not its foreignness, was a strong attraction for the Guatemalan poor and distressed” (p.153). Wilson is certainly not
conspicuous in his assertion that Pentecostalism has some very distinct expressions in its Latin American context.

Wilson’s emphasis is illustrative of the overriding thesis of the edited work in which his essay is found—*Power, Politics, and Pentecostals in Latin America* (Cleary, & Stewart-Gambino, 1997). Though the variety of essays in the book stress various aspects of Pentecostalism in different Latin American countries (with some overlap), the prevailing thesis is that many studies of Pentecostalism have been reductionistic—approaching the movement as a monolithic and passive pawn of North American influence. Hence the pioneering studies are criticized for having ignored the complexities of motivation behind Pentecostal conversion and for having downplayed (or not recognized) the varieties of political and social strategies found in this essentially autochthonous movement.

In the conclusion of the book, for example, Hannah Stewart-Gambino laments, “For many of us, old or new to the study of Latin American Pentecostalism, our frustration has been that old categories of analysis simply fail to illuminate” (p.227). She likewise stresses that the weight of evidence presented in the book belies the notion that Latin American Pentecostalism is an American transplant: “Although it is true that growth rates rose sharply in the post-World War II period, the roots of a number of national Pentecostal churches reach back to the early twentieth century—particularly in Brazil (1910), Chile (1910), Argentina (1910), Peru (1911), Nicaragua (1912), Mexico (1914), Guatemala (1916), and Puerto Rico (1916). Some Latin American groups were in fact established prior to the formal organization of the North American denominations that are presumed to have brought them into existence” (p.228). This point leads to the
question that if Pentecostalism in Latin America is—as tautologous as this may seem—
really Latin American, how is this faith shaping and being informed by the peculiarities of the region’s socio-political matrix?

Firstly, Pentecostalism is by and large a movement of the poor. Within the socioeconomic realm, Pentecostals churches can act as mutual aid societies in which poor Pentecostals give out of their substance to provide for fellow believers who are in even greater economic peril than themselves. Likewise the churches, as a representation of the Pentecostal community, are expected to assist those congregants who are struck by unexpected and demoralizing circumstances.

In Coping With Poverty: Pentecostals and Christian Base Communities (1994), Cecília Loreto Mariz argues that instead of choosing Pentecostalism because of the “magical” elements that it can provide to everyday life (she believes the middleclass might be attracted to the faith for this reason), Pentecostalism offers Latin Americans a tangible coping mechanism for enduring poverty; and, less frequently, a means of triumphing over it—mostly at the micro-social level (p.8). Since she affirms that classical Pentecostals are most often found in the very lowest classes, her argument that the Pentecostal ethos fosters a kind of ascetic approach to use of monetary funds is revealing of both possible motivations for and socioeconomic benefits from Pentecostal conversion: “The Pentecostal ethic does not emphasize working more, but it stresses consuming less. This ethic is strategic for survival because it gives religious meaning to the survival strategy . . . [of] ‘tightening one’s belt,’ that is, reducing ones consumption to the bare minimum” (p.130). Notably, her studies find that the poor are perpetually conscious of their need to participate in economic coping strategies. She says, for
example, “Poor people’s life histories are mostly descriptions of searches for work and struggles to save and survive. Therefore, work and saving are important values for them” (p.130).

Pentecostal moral ethics, thus, facilitate the meeting of some of the most palpable needs of the poor: “The elimination of drinking alcohol, for instance, functions as a very important savings strategy. This confirms tendencies in which Pentecostals show different consumption patterns than people from other religious groups. Pentecostal asceticism provides options to save through the reallocation of resources” (Mariz, p.130). Hence, while Pentecostalism may not on the whole be superior to other religions in Latin America, in terms of ameliorating the dire economic conditions of the poor, there do seem to be unique tendencies within the Pentecostal faith which make it especially conducive to alleviating poverty.

Persons living in poverty are especially vulnerable to problems of health. In Born Again in Brazil, Andrew Chesnut postulates that there is an all-encompassing motive for, and by extension, benefit of Pentecostal conversion. He argues that the poor choose Pentecostalism usually as a last ditch effort to mitigate against what he views as poverty’s most pernicious “pathogen,” inadequate health care: “Exploring the mechanics of the conversion process, such as the contractual agreement that the petitioner enters into with Jesus or the Holy Spirit, I posit to convert to Pentecostalism is to heal the maladies of poverty” (Chesnut, 1997, p.23). And it is the lack of access to adequate health care among the poor that is seen as the grossest manifestation of that malady: “With little access to the city’s precarious health care facilities and neglected by the Catholic Church,
many ill Belenenses add their families came to the Assembly of God as a last resort” (p.28). Chesnut’s work is thus replete with testimonials of divine healing.

Indeed, reports of divine healing in the Assembly of God (AD) monthly newspaper are, according to Chesnut, “ubiquitous”:

From snake bites to ovarian cancer, crentes relate how Jesus, the Physician of Physicians, cured them of their ailments. Assembleiana Gertrudes de Palma exemplifies how the lack of resources in the material world leads many into the spiritual realm in search of succour. “My four-year-old daughter became delirious with a sudden fever. We didn’t have any money; we are poor. So I invited my husband and some crentes to pray for my child. She was completely cured at the end of the prayer.” (Chesnut, p.54)

Moreover, Chesnut argues that the various other social factors that can make Pentecostalism appealing to the poor—holistic assistance of a support group, boosting of personal self-esteem through spiritual empowerment, psychological and material benefit to women, and group and individual embracement of an ascetic and morally “clean” lifestyle—operate as reinforcements for the Pentecostal’s struggle to maintain health. These reinforcements are important in a context in which the precarious nature of and limited access to alternative forms of health care make preserving and achieving health an especially daunting task.

In Not by Might nor by Power: a Pentecostal Theology of Social Concern (1996), Douglas Peterson joins the chorus of voices who exalt the socioeconomic appeal and advantage of Pentecostal conversion. Peterson is not surprisingly the most insistent that there are overwhelmingly positive impacts of Pentecostal growth on the social realm of
Latin America, since he is himself a Pentecostal. Indeed the thesis of his book is that Pentecostalism has by the very nature of its class base and religious sensibilities been a movement that has benefited the poor of Latin America; and that their social concern has gone beyond the confines of the church walls, extending particularly into the realm of private education. Peterson points most triumphantly to the social concern exemplified in the work of a Latin American Pentecostal organization, Latin American Child Care, which has been instrumental in providing education in areas where abject poverty is most evident:

Specifically, LACC has emerged as part of an effort to break the cycle of poverty that traps poor families. By providing an alternative education, the programme at once offers relief for children by providing them with schooling, structure in their often chaotic lives, improved nutrition and most importantly, concern for their complete social, physical, intellectual and moral development. (p.180)

In fact Peterson thinks that LACC has actually fostered the kind of social consciousness-raising advocated by such educational proponents and liberation theologians as Paulo Freire and Gustavo Gutiérrez.

In Peterson’s view, where the Pentecostal approach to educational development differs from that of Freire and Gutiérrez is the disparate, but not mutually exclusive, social perspectives which Pentecostals and Liberation Theologians advocate. Peterson notes that contrary to the pastor action theory of Freire and Gutiérrez who would contend for primarily a political option directed to the macro-perspective of social structures to enable radical change, LACC would prefer to approach similar
educational and social inequalities from the micro-perspective upon Christocentric schools in general, and upon impacting the marginalized child in particular. (p.174)

Peterson views this perspective as something akin to what is being trumpeted by organizations like UNICEF: “It is the widespread conviction of sociologists and political analysts, reflected in the UNICEF report, that the condition of children; their care, education, and ethic training is essential for any kind of structural change that will include democratic participation and a stable future” (Peterson, p.152). Also, Peterson points to a greater awareness and interest among Pentecostals to address the issue of structural evil, in addition to the traditional stress on individual immorality (p.146).

While he is eager to point to developments in Pentecostal social concern, Peterson seems to downplay the role of Latin American Pentecostal politics. He explains,

I have proposed that Pentecostals could argue legitimately that they have created their own alternative institutions that can function as instruments of human justice. Through the process of institution-building it is possible that constructive alternative instruments of social justice may actually enable the church to “break action axiomatically with political action.” Social action and political action have become almost interchangeable terms in some circles of Christian social ethics. (p.231)

He stresses that political “involvement is only one alternative among several options of social action to institute social change. Pentecostals have a clear expression of serious and committed Pentecostal views, articulating a beginning agenda for a further discussion of social concern” (p.231).
He admits, however, that Latin American Pentecostalism needs to develop a more sophisticated theology of social concern so that followers can buttress social efforts with intellectual reinforcement. The Pentecostal poor have been charitable with their time and energy but this has not necessarily been a natural outflow of their Pentecostal beliefs: “While Pentecostals have been too intent on their work to give much reflection to why they are doing it, increasingly they will need to demonstrate that they have an adequate theological articulation to provide continuing support for their social programmes” (p.181). In short, “Demonstration that fundamental Pentecostal beliefs have produced social concern leads necessarily to the movements’ continuing theological support for such programmes” (p.181).

Thus it seems that prophetic Pentecostalism is developing at a very opportune moment. Progressive Pentecostals scholars could be key actors in providing Latin American Pentecostals with a reason for both social concern and social action. And this could be the latest development to spur yet another scholarly shift in reconsidering Latin American Pentecostalism.
Chapter Three
Pentecostals and Politics in Latin America

Only the most naïve citizens refuse to believe that the world of politics is sometimes mired in “dirty business.” Throughout much of their history in Latin America Pentecostals needed no strenuous convincing on that point. Indeed until the late 1970s most Latin American Pentecostals shunned political involvement as “sinful” and “worldly.” In recent decades, however, some of the faithful seem to have been converted to at least a measure of political involvement. From the perspective of many observers this has not always proved to be a laudable change. Some vociferous Pentecostals, for example, were eager supporters of the brutal Pinochet regime (1973-1990), which harnessed all the religious legitimation for its tyranny that it could find. Even worse, the only Pentecostal to ever serve as president of a Latin American country, Efrain Ríos Montt, apparently left a bloodbath in his wake. Those who focus on these realities paint a very gloomy picture of Pentecostal politics. According to this picture, Pentecostals are at best naïve pawns, manipulated by the wiles of conservative forces from the U.S.; at worse, Pentecostalism is conceived as an intrinsically conservative movement that will at every turn stymie Latin American democracy. As is so often the case, however, the reality of Pentecostal engagement and disengagement in politics is more complex than facile interpretations will allow.

Pentecostalism is not monolithic and neither are Pentecostals politically uniform. There are a number of factors that have shaped the style and extent of Pentecostal political participation in Latin America. Addressing the interplay between
Pentecostalism and politics in Latin America involves taking the following factors into account: the U.S. influence on the movement; the largely marginalized class base of Pentecostalism; cultural and Catholic political practices and philosophies influencing Pentecostalism; Pentecostal doctrine and theology; variation of Pentecostal political experience; the pragmatics of Pentecostal politics; and the political gap that sometimes exists between Pentecostal leadership and the rank and file that they supposedly represent. In order to steer the movement into a sustained social and political struggle for the oppressed, a new and old wave of progressive Pentecostals will need to stay attuned to these multifarious influences. For there are indeed a multitude of voices vying for the attention of the Latin American Pentecostal.

**The U.S. Influence**

While it easy to exaggerate the influence of the U.S. on Latin American Pentecostalism, it also can not be denied. Throughout the cold war, U.S. officials feared that Latin America could become a beachhead for communism. Accordingly, the U.S. applied heavy pressure on their neighbors to the South, imploring (sometimes through force) Latin Americans to steer clear of Marxist oriented governments. Since the religious right in the United States was so vigorously anti-communist, it seems to have been assumed that co-religionists in Latin America would be allies in staving off the red tide. Some Pentecostals were relatively obliging in this task.

When considering the U.S. influence on Pentecostal politics, two examples readily spring to mind: U.S. sponsored opposition, couched in religious terms, against the
Sandinistas of Nicaragua and the case of Efrain Ríos Montt in Guatemala. “Guatemala shows what can happen when Protestantism begins to be practiced by significant numbers of the elite” (Freston, 2001, p.266). The dictatorship of Efrain Ríos Montt in that country (1982-1983) is arguably the most frequently cited example of U.S. Fundamentalist influence on Third World evangelical politics. Paul Freston explains that “after the 1982 elections, a group of younger officers stage a coup and invited Rios to lead them” (Freston, 2001, p. 268). Ríos Montt was not only a military leader; he was also a convert to neo-Pentecostalism.

Unlike the classical Pentecostal faith, neo-Pentecostalism, as the name would suggest, is a newer brand of Charismatic Christianity which ignores some of the perceived escapist tendencies of traditional Pentecostal theology. It places greater emphasis on God’s interest in blessing His children in the here and now. Unlike the classical Pentecostals, however, most neo-Pentecostal converts come from the middle or even upper classes of Guatemalan society. Perhaps attracted to the so-called “health and wealth” aspects of the gospel, some middle class Guatemalans seem to believe that God can bless their finances as well as their body and souls; thus enabling them to climb another rung of the social strata.

Key leaders of the religious right in the U.S. were neo-Pentecostals and Ríos Montt garnered significant sympathy from conservative U.S. politicians interested in precluding the spread of Marxism to Latin America. During Ríos Montt’s rule he trumpeted personal values of spiritual transformation, and ethical commitments to one’s family. He also vigorously denounced government graft and corruption. At the same time, many of his policies exacerbated the already precarious condition of the indigenous
population of Guatemala. He won allegiance from some of the poorer sectors with a limited degree of social reform but during his presidency thousands of Guatemalans were slaughtered by the military. George Lovell notes that Ríos Montt’s counterinsurgency effort “was especially harmful to Maya communities within whose territory the Guerrilla Army of the Poor and the Organization of People in arms had established a strategic, insurgent base” (Lovell, 1995, p.56). His critique of Rios Montt’s initial period as president is scathing: “Even to people for whom conquest and subjugation have been a way of life for centuries, Ríos Montt’s first five months in office rank among the bloodiest of time the Maya have known” (Lovell, p.59). Paul Freston details Rios Montt’s extremely heavy-handed policies:

The raison d’etre of his government was the new counter-insurgency policy known as ‘bullets and beans’ (fusiles y frijoles). Based on ‘strategic hamlets,’ the goal was destruction of autonomous village life. Civil patrols were maintained through enforced conscription. The first stage of this campaign was ‘incredibly brutal’; four hundred villages were destroyed, hundreds of thousands of Indians fled to Mexico and one million were internally displaced. (Freston, p.269)

Some have concluded that Ríos Montt’s fervent Pentecostalism was linked to his harsh political measures. According to this theory, Ríos Montt’s political sensibilities were shaped by a U.S. political theology called reconstructionism. Reconstructionists believe that it “is the destiny of Christians to govern the nations by a mixture of extreme neoliberal economics and Old Testament theocratic laws” (Freston, 270). Thus,
according to this religio-political philosophy, faith and rigid rule of law can go hand in hand.

Paul Freston, however believes that the situation was more nuanced than conspiratorial theories would suggest:

Placing the Rios administration in context nuances both the ‘Christian president’ myth and that of the bloodthirsty butcher. There is probably truth in a Christianity Today article (13 Jan. 1984) by an American missionary, which claims that Amnesty International wrongly attributed to the Rios period some incidents which had occurred earlier. But it is not necessary to say he was exceptionally repressive by the standards of Guatemalan military governments; it is enough to say he exemplified those standards. It is in this context that Ríos still enjoys considerable popularity, as an upright soldier untainted by the corruption of politics. (Freston, p.272)

Also, it appears that this alleged pawn of conservative American influence in fact had at best an ambivalent relationship to the U.S. Ríos Montt piqued the ire of American officials, for example, when he refused to support the Contra War in Nicaragua. Indeed, Freston claims that the tensions between Ríos and U.S. officials were so acute that they led to his removal from the presidency:

Two days before Ríos was overthrown, the coup leader met the US ambassador and the head of the US command in Panama. It seems that the first evangelical president in Latin America was ousted by a US-supported coup, despite conspiracy theories about the supposed role of ‘evangelical sects’ in promoting American interests in the region. (Freston, p.272)
Nevertheless, Rios Montt’s regime does, at the very least, provide evidence that elites of
society who become Pentecostals do not necessarily jettison conservative political or
military sensibilities that they had prior to conversion (a point to which we will return).
And the preponderance of American missionaries in Guatemala who preached from the
book of Romans that sincere Christians were expected to obey their leaders in
government may have precluded a forthright and united Evangelical opposition to Rios
Montt (Stoll, 1990, p.19).

The picture of the religious underpinnings to U.S. hostilities towards Nicaragua
throughout the 1980s is no less rosy. In order to sway both domestic and global opinion
that the Sandinista revolution was the first step towards a Marxist-Leninist dictatorship of
the proletariat in Nicaragua, U.S. officials and Evangelical accomplices went to great
lengths to demonstrate Soviet-style religious persecution in Nicaragua. Tension between
some Christians and the Sandinistas did apparently manifest in limited government
repression of religious freedoms: “. . . pastors and deacons had been detained, and a few
were still in jail” (Stoll, p.265). But there were a slew of charges of religious oppression
that were clearly manufactured in the U.S. and had no grounds in reality. David Stoll
confirms, “Judging from what anti-Sandinista evangelicals in Managua told me, many
accusations of religious persecution from outside the country were outlandish” (Stoll,
p.248). “Lending weight to any accusation against the Sandinistas, no matter how far-
 fetched, was the Reagan administration. To recruit North American evangelicals into its
war, the White House held numerous briefings on the theme of Sandinista religious
persecution” (Stoll, 249). It seems that more often than not Evangelicals in general and
Pentecostals in particular were caught in a conflict that compromised their overriding religious goals. A leader of a conservative pastor’s association explained in 1985:

“Everyone is calling for an end to the war anyway. If the evangelical church calls for an end to hate and war, we can be accused of placing ourselves on the side of the revolution. If we don’t say anything, then we’re accused of being with the contras. If evangelicals help with the cotton and coffee harvest, then the newspapers say that we support the revolution. If not, then you’re a contra. So if you participate you’re manipulated, and if you don’t you’re in trouble too. Our mission is clear and specific—it’s spiritual, that Jesus Christ is the only answer. We know that this isn’t the answer people want to hear, but this is what we believe.” (Stoll, p.228)

Given their lack of a sophisticated political theology, and their genuine interest in applying the “Jesus is the answer” solution to a myriad of social and political situations, Pentecostals are sometimes trapped in the middle of polarized conflicts—with little political leverage of their own they can be used as pawns. “Given their highly charged position, evangelicals became key figures in the claims and counterclaims of ideological warfare: while the Sandinistas applied the more cooperative to the task of defending the revolution’s image, the Reagan administration used them to justify a war” (Stoll, p.223).

This, of course, is not to say that Pentecostals never act politically on their own accord. There were Pentecostals who were unabashed supporters of the Sandinistas. Pentecostal Miguel Angel Casco, for example, led an ecumenical Protestant organization called CEPRES (the Evangelical Commission for the Promotion of Social Responsibility) that was vociferous in its backing of the Sandinistas—the organization was established
“to defend the revolution against religious backlash at home and abroad” (Stoll, 1990, p.235). In February 1984 Casco and another Pentecostal were suspended by the Assemblies of God for “defending the revolution in print” (Stoll, p.240). Other Pentecostal leaders belonged to an ecumenical organization that offered more cautious and tempered support for the Sandinistas: the Evangelical Committee for Aid to Development (CEPAD). On the other hand, some Pentecostal pastors were accused of fighting on the CONTRA side against the Sandinistas (Stoll, p.258). It is likely, however, that the majority of Pentecostals did not take sides. Patently, in a war the middle ground disappears and thus Pentecostals often garner the label “conservative” for their non-participation in political turmoil.

**Pentecostals and Progressive Politics**

Nevertheless, accusations that Pentecostals are by their very nature politically conservative do not take into account historical examples of progressive Pentecostal politics. David Martin explains, “At the grass roots, in rural Mexico, in Nicaragua, in the movement called Brasil para Cristo, and among some Pentecostals in Chile during the Allende years, there has been sympathy and support for radical change, though rarely for violence” (Martin, 1990, p.54).

Some who argue that Pentecostals are inherently conservative point to their pliability in the hands of military regimes. Indeed, many censure Pentecostals for their silence during the “dirty war” years (especially the 1960s and 1970s) of brutal military dictatorship in Latin America. Paul Freston points out, however, that the relatively weak
position of Protestants in Latin America has made public opposition to governing forces sometimes seem like a futile and foolhardy exercise:

Whereas Protestantism entered Asia (except the Philippines) as a new religion vis-à-vis huge non-Christian faiths, and entered Africa in a variety of situations according to the colonial power, it entered Latin America (mostly in the second half of the nineteenth century) as an effectively sectarian variant of the dominant religion, but in tandem with the political and economic liberalism brought by the Anglo-Saxon powers. Until recently, growth was far slower than in many African countries and Korea. This meant that Protestant churches had scant possibility of playing the role of surrogate oppositions to repressive military regimes in the 1960s and 1970s, as the Catholic Church sometimes (but not always) did.

(Freston, 2001, p.93)

This makes Pentecostal opposition to military rule in Chile and Brazil all the more remarkable. While some out-spoken Pentecostals favored the Pinochet regime in Chile (1973-1990), there was also significant Pentecostal opposition to the dictator.

“Protestant, and Pentecostal critical stands were . . . publicly heard during the 1980s, when from 1982 onward the Confraternidad Cristiana de Iglesias (CCI, Christian Fraternity of Churches) became the critical opponent of . . . the military regime . . . .” (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.89) Similarly, the neo-Pentecostal Brazil for Christ congregation denounced the military regime in Brazil. Freston affirms that “Brazil for Christ’s critical stance during the most repressive period of the regime was, amongst Protestants, second only to the Lutherans” (Freston, p.15). Freston explains that this opposing stance can be attributed to the church’s unique extra-Pentecostal ecclesiastical links: “Brazil for Christ
was the only pentecostal church to make remarks at all critical of the regime, and the only one to join ecumenical organisations. This affiliation made criticising the regime somewhat less risky” (Freston, p.15).

Indeed ecumenical ties—or a lack thereof in most cases—play an important part in shaping Pentecostal political behavior. Freston opines that tensions between Catholics and Protestants facilitate evangelical (including Pentecostal) shifts to the political left. Describing evangelical voting patterns in the 1988 Mexican presidential election, Freston notes, “

Slightly more evangelicals voted for the PRD than the official national average, while only 2 per cent voted for the pro-Catholic conservative PAN. This is one of many cases in Latin America where anti-Catholicism pushed evangelicals into a more leftist pattern than the general population, despite media and even academic perceptions of them as conservative. (Freston, p.205)

Also, “A Church of God pastor, Domingo López, was a candidate for deputy with the left-wing PRD” (Freston, p.206). Mexico is not the only country where Pentecostals are moving left.

Apparently some Brazilian Pentecostals also have had an affinity for progressive politics. “In fact, there is a small but constant flow of pentecostal candidates in left-wing parties. Many leaders of rural unions are pentecostal” (Freston, 34). And probably the most notable progressive Pentecostal politician in Brazil has been Benedita da Silva. Silva joined the Presbyterian Church after her marriage to a non-Pentecostal occasioned negative comment from Pentecostal leaders. Nevertheless, she gained political notoriety as a Pentecostal. With steadfast determination she made an inspiring social climb from
“maid, street-peddler and nursing auxiliary” (Freston, p.34), to city councilor and finally senator for the Workers Party (PT) (Cleary, 1999). Edward Cleary describes her as a “Pentecostal who is deeply convinced of divine healing in this life” and also “advocates social justice for Brazil” (Cleary, 1999). It is difficult to assess the role of religion in Silva’s political life. Freston assumes that “her pentecostal faith and lifestyle probably helped to support her upward course”; but then again, “Her political education was in the Catholic Church, through shanty dwellers’ associations” (Freston, p.34). Perhaps Silva serves as an example of how a conversion to Pentecostalism does not always necessitate a wholesale break from one’s past. While Pentecostal testimonies are often larded with negative references to life “before I was saved,” it seems that deep seeded cultural and political philosophies acquired before conversion, may, at least on an unconscious level, remain imbedded within the new religious paradigm.

_Influence of Roman Catholic Thought and Latin American Culture_

And those subconscious cultural and political assumptions seem to manifest in Pentecostalism in a variety of political behaviors: in conservative, progressive and all the political practices in between. Since many Pentecostals are converts out of Roman Catholicism, it is not surprising that Pentecostals occasionally seem to drink from that particular well of religious, political and cultural philosophy. “Though Pentecostalism maintains a rigorous rejection of Catholicism, it also activates elements which are actually latent in the Catholic faith” (Martin, 1990, p.203). One of the most prominent Catholic cultural philosophies to appear in Pentecostal politics is the idea of corporatism.
This concept was first proposed by the great Catholic thinker Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) in the thirteenth century and it has deep historical roots in Latin America.

In Corporatist thought society is conceived of as a living organism and diverse groups in society are like cells which must function in harmony with the rest of the body. When one cell becomes malignant, or by comparison a social group grows discordant, the entire body (re: state) is infected. Just as the brain works to keep every aspect of the body in order, so does the state in the corporatist model act as the cerebral safeguard against disorder and instability.

It appears that some conservative Christians in Chile have appropriated the corporatist idea of society and added a distinctly Protestant aspect to the paradigm—the heart. A Presbyterian Pastor, apparently holding corporatist beliefs, described Augusto Pinochet as both the heart and mind of the Chilean state. The Pastor thus lauded Pinochet as "blessed":

. . . our soldiers do not only deserve the title of just people, but as blessed servants of God . . . . In this hour in which we live beset by our enemy, especially when the weight of this opposition falls on the shoulders of our blessed soldier, Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, should we forget all the good that he has done for our country and for us? He was the brain and the heart that our blessed savior used . . . ."

(Shuffeneger, 2001, p.39)

Moreover, some Pentecostals are organizing politically as a new corporate body in Latin American society. Paul Freston says, for example, “The first Pentecostal church founded by a Brazilian, Brazil for Christ, was also the first to elect politicians from its own ranks
on a corporate vote” (Freston, p.14). Nonetheless, Pentecostals reflect the historico-cultural reality of Latin America in more ways than just corporatist leanings.

Pentecostalism also bears an uncanny resemblance to the traditional patron-client relationship ubiquitous throughout Latin American history. David Martin echoes this sentiment: “One characteristic of Protestant (and of Pentecostal) political activity is worth reiterating, and that is the way many Protestants reproduce the pattern of relationships based on authority and patronage” (Martin, 1990, p.259). Modernizing currents have attenuated patronage in many areas of Latin America, and thus some Latin Americans have sought new relationships that would reproduce traditional ways of meeting civic needs. Friendships between fellow Pentecostals are often extremely fraternal and thus when a believer is successful in a bid for politics and becomes a government deputy, he can be turned to with even greater confidence than a traditional patrón figure. Paul Freston describes this religio-political transition in Brazil:

Economic crisis, urban growth and expectations created by redemocratization also weakened urban patronage politics. The old rural dependency was built on ‘moral bases of kinship’, whereas modern urban clientelism is a mercantile relationship lacking in mutual confidence. A space thus appears for fusing patronage politician and rural boss in the figure of the ‘brother’ deputy. Sectarian networks have advantages over fragile parties and weakened patronage. (Freston, p.24)

It is not surprising, then, that Pentecostals often practice the kind of pragmatic politics that are typical of patron-client relationships. In Brazil, for example, “Assemblies leaders were joining political machines to obtain building and parade permits, neighborhood improvements, and government jobs for their members” (Stoll, 1990, p.111). Hence
Pentecostals may be new actors on the political scene but their style seems as old as Latin America itself.

It would be incorrect, however, to assume that the Pentecostal leaders entering the political arena are always representative of the rank and file of this religious movement. There may be truth to the idea that some Pentecostals abdicate their civic responsibilities and simply fall in line with whatever their Pastor’s political preferences happen to be; but there is also evidence that suggests that grassroots Pentecostal political attitudes differ substantially from that of Pastors and leaders of the faith. Edward Cleary notes, “Surveys show Pentecostal congregants holding positions closer to those of Catholic bishops than those of their own leaders. This cleavage was extensively discussed by Pentecostal leaders in annual retreats” (Cleary, 1999). The political gap between Pentecostal leaders and laity may have to do with different socioeconomic motivations:

Why this disparity between the Pentecostal pastors and their flocks?

Tennekes suggests that the view of the pastors is influenced by their concern for the organizational survival of the movement, a concern which also happens to coincide with personal interests. The movement provides the outer limit of their horizon. Their flocks, by contrast, are influenced by the interests promoted in and by their social milieu. (Martin, 1990, p.240)

It seems that for both Pentecostal leaders and laity to see beyond their most immediate interests to a broader horizon of the collective good, they will need to find recourse for such commitment in their religious beliefs.
Lamentably, it appears that some of the dubious choices that Pentecostals have made in the political sphere are due, in part, to superficial religious doctrine that is too thin to supply sturdy political parameters. Martin affirms,

They may suppose that the national security state offers political and economic stabilities which are worth the cost in terms of liberty of expression and association. All these options have been explored by some Pentecostals. There is no route which Pentecostal doctrine absolutely precludes, except adherence to a movement which is doctrinally atheist. (Martin, 1990, p.236)

Similarly, David Stoll points to the political pitfalls of possessing a selective biblical literalism:

Then there was the belief, based on a fundamentalist interpretation of Romans 13:1, that any anti-communist government was divinely ordained. When much of the Catholic clergy turned against military regimes in the 1970s, evangelical leaders usually did not. Some energetically preached submission to dictatorships and defended the status quo as if it were God’s handiwork (Stoll, p.19).

Nevertheless, there is precedent for converts melding the most progressive strains of Catholic social thought with Pentecostal devotion. And the resulting fusion of liberation theology and Pentecostalism has, at times, diverted the traditionally conservative Protestant political tide into waves of social protest.

In his discussion of indigenous Mexican politics Freston explains that “many indigenous people trained in Liberation Theology while lay pastoral agents in the
Catholic Church become pentecostal pastors because of the greater scope for indigenous leadership, and this led to an increase in pentecostal participation in the EZLN [Zapatista National Liberation Army] . . . ” (Freston, p.210) To sustain progressive Pentecostal politics of this kind a developing Pentecostal theology of social concern will need to find a home among the grassroots of Latin American Pentecostalism. It is unlikely that progressive Pentecostal social and political doctrine will consistently spur adherents to the kind of revolutionary struggle represented by the EZLN. Such theological developments may, however, provide the pivotal intellectual and spiritual resources needed to foment a more socially conscious Pentecostalism. Freston points out, “A crucial part in mobilisation is telling ‘a reasonably coherent story about why what is wrong is wrong and what can be done about it’” (Freston, p.21). Hence progressive Pentecostal scholars in Latin America are hoping to provide the kind of gripping spiritual narrative that will propel Pentecostals into a politics of and for the poor. People familiar with the tragic history of the downtrodden of Latin America are eager to see this new Pentecostal story flourish.
Chapter Four

Interpreting with the Spirit: Toward a Latin American Pentecostal Hermeneutic

Pentecostals have a unique approach to interpreting Scripture. A salient characteristic of global Pentecostalism is a reverence for the Bible. Indeed, most Pentecostals believe that the Bible is the normative authority in all matters of faith and morals and that it provides an accurate account of both the human and the divine. Pentecostals turn to the Bible as their ultimate guide for understanding their immediate circumstances and world events. They also affirm what they believe to be the fundamentals of the Christian faith: salvation by grace through faith, the atoning work of the crucifixion of Christ, the bodily resurrection of Jesus etc. Hence in this respect Pentecostals in general and Latin American Pentecostals in particular can, to a certain extent, be appropriately considered Fundamentalists. Nevertheless, there are some dramatic and potentially revolutionary ways in which Pentecostals globally deviate from classical Fundamentalist interpretation of Scripture. In contrast to classical Fundamentalists, Pentecostals use a distinct hermeneutic in interpreting Scripture: lived experience with the Holy Spirit.

Progressive Pentecostals in Latin America highlight this pneumatic reading of the Bible in their attempts to add a new layer of sociopolitical meaning to Latin American Pentecostalism. Further, in the prophetic Pentecostal view, not only does the Spirit interpret Scripture, but He also makes meaning out of mundane day-to-day affairs and broader social and political events. Thus both the Bible and quotidian reality become a canvas on which the Holy Spirit paints a picture of God’s will for the Church and the
Bernardo L. Campos insists that “it is important, above all, to realize that Pentecostal preaching is basically a dramatization (a narrative) of the meaning of a biblical text in light of quotidian life experience” (Campos, 1992, p.144). According to progressive Pentecostals, not just any vantage point will suffice for interpreting the work of the Holy Spirit. The focal point for understanding the meaning-making of the Spirit is God’s alleged bias for the downtrodden and poor of society. It is from that viewpoint, prophetic Pentecostals insist, that the Holy Spirit speaks—especially through the Bible. This experience-based hermeneutic does not find a home in strict Fundamentalist ranks.

Fundamentalism and Pentecostalism Compared

Classic Fundamentalism was at least in part a movement that defined itself by negation. At the turn of the twentieth century, “Liberal” Christians were responding to developments in scientific thought and biblical scholarship by reconsidering traditional interpretations of Scripture. Even before a developing consensus of evolutionary science made the Biblical creation accounts seem especially primitive, some Protestant Christians in America had downplayed the more extraordinary and miraculous phenomenon mentioned in the Bible and chose instead to highlight the moral imperative of Scripture. The proliferation of Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* accelerated this tendency and so-called mainline Christians continued to emphasize the ethical dimension of Scripture while giving far less credence to traditional notions of personal salvation of the soul (Carl, 1997). Thus Liberal Christians trumpeted a “social gospel” as the essence of Jesus’ message.
In contrast to these progressive Christians, Fundamentalists countered theological innovation by insisting that true “old time religion” had stood the test of time and would continue to be faithful in the face of Liberal apostasy. Hence Fundamentalists were spurred to hammer out rigorous definitions of concepts that had historically, at least in Protestant tradition, generally been taken for granted. The most distinguishing feature of Fundamentalist faith was a strict definition of the reliability of the Bible. Christian Scripture was affirmed to be trustworthy in every possible context, whether one was speaking in historic, scientific, or theological terms. In contrast to the “social gospel” of mainline and liberal Christians, Fundamentalists insisted that the Biblical demands for individual repentance and Christian conversion were immutable realities (Hunt, 1997). In what seems to have been a reactionary response to the social gospel, Fundamentalists gave inordinate attention to personal salvation—sometimes to the near exclusion of social concern. Given this legacy of Fundamentalism it is useful to examine the ways that Pentecostalism deviates from fundamentalist interpretation of Scripture.

Amongst other things, Fundamentalism involves a dispensational reading of Scriptural literalness that reconciles the abundance of the miraculous in the Bible with the perceived absence of such experience in the present age. Adherents of dispensational theology believe that God has acted in distinct ways during various stages of Biblical and human history. “By emphasizing how divine requirements changed during each age, dispensationalists not only resolved contradictions in the Bible but also were able to dismiss the scriptures which contradicted their views” (Stoll, 1990, p.40). Scriptures that are discounted as irrelevant for modern times include those which attest to dramatic miracles.
According to Christian Scripture, “signs and wonders” were prevalent in both the ministry of Jesus and in the lives of His immediate followers. Adherents of Fundamentalism, however, perceive that those miraculous gifts do not seem to occur in modern times (notably Fundamentalism developed independently and before the onset of Pentecostalism.) Fundamentalists thus conclude that the portions of Scripture treating miraculous circumstances should be understood as a faithful historical record which, however, does not have transplant relevancy for modern Christians. The book of Acts, for example, would be viewed in Fundamentalist circles as historically accurate but currently relevant only in terms of providing a reliable record of early Christian history. Fundamentalists insist that such miraculous and extraordinary power is no longer available for Christians. Despite their negation of the miraculous, Fundamentalists believe that the Scriptures are entirely accurate—scientifically, historically, and theologically—and in their vigorous insistence that the Biblical record is reliable, “inerrancy” is used as a litmus test for theological orthodoxy.

Although Pentecostals also affirm the reliability of Old and New Testament Scripture, their hermeneutic for interpreting the Bible is markedly different from the Fundamentalists. The lens through which Pentecostals (and usually Charismatics) view Scripture is that of experience. Unlike the Fundamentalists, Pentecostals do not view scriptural accounts of the miraculous as historically relevant material that is nevertheless divorced from current faith experience. Since Pentecostalism was birthed in an atmosphere in which believers were claiming to have had divine encounters, tantamount to Book of Acts phenomena, scriptural accounts of the supernatural resonated with Pentecostal experience (Synan, 1997, p.96).
This tandem emphasis on experience and the Bible has led to some vast interpretive differences between Pentecostals and non-Pentecostal fundamentalists on such important and socially relevant issues as the role of women in ecclesiastical leadership positions. In “Exploring Why We Think the Way We Do about Women in Ministry” (Spring, 2001), Assemblies of God pastor George O. Wood cogently argues for a Pentecostal apologetic of female ordination; in doing so he elucidates the hermeneutical device of interpreting Scripture through lived Pentecostal experience (Wood, 2001).

Wood points out that the testimony of Scripture itself resounds with this experiential interpretive approach. He draws attention, for example, to the circumstances that led the early Christians to direct the gospel message to Gentiles as well as Jews. Before this decision was made, the Hebrew Scriptures weighed heavily on the side of excluding non-Israelites from salvific relationship with God. There were some scriptural passages that seemed to portend a future inclusion of Gentiles into this relationship, but they were made somewhat inconsequential by a plethora of verses testifying to the contrary. According to the New Testament, it was not the overriding message of Scripture, then, that caused the Apostles to take the gospel message to the Gentiles but rather an *experience* of the Holy Spirit. First Peter has an enigmatic dream in which God deems the Gentile culinary habits “clean” even though such practices are forbidden in Hebrew Scripture (Acts 10:15). Then the Holy Spirit tells Peter that men are seeking him on behalf of a centurion named Cornelius. Cornelius had sent for Peter because the former had been told to do so by angel. Peter deduces from these miraculous series of events that perhaps a God who “shows no partiality” can save Gentiles as well as Jews (Acts 10:34). As Peter launches into a sermon about the universality of Jesus’ lordship,
the Holy Spirit “falls upon” the Gentiles listening to the message. Peter interprets the Holy Spirit’s baptism of these erstwhile foreigners as the seal of approval that Gentiles are welcomed into Christendom: “‘Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’” (Acts 10:47, New King James Version) It was only after the Apostles witnessed or heard about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles that they were reminded of some aspects of Scripture that did indeed point to an eventual adoption of Gentiles into covenant relationship with God.

Wood argues that Pentecostals often use the same criteria for discernment as the apostles did—interpreting Scripture through experience. This is especially pertinent in understanding the early Pentecostal position on female leadership in the Church:

Men and women of that day seemed to be grounded in the understanding that because God chose women to participate in the New Testament Holy Spirit baptism experience, it was only logical that they, too, should carry the message of the gospel. In the words of Mae Eleanore Frey, ‘God almighty is no fool—I say it with all reverence—Would He fill a woman with the Holy Ghost—endow her with ability—give her a vision of souls and then tell her to shut her mouth? (Benvenuti, 1997, para.8)

Indeed, it seems that there were few female Pentecostal pioneers willing to smother the message God had given them. For it was not on their own authority that they spoke, but God’s:

In early Pentecostalism, authority was never the issue; rather, servanthood was always the focal point of one’s ministry calling. Even the manner in which the
church services were conducted suggested that early Pentecostals fully believed that the Holy Spirit himself held absolute authority, and the Spirit anointed whomever he chose to serve the body of believers” (Benvenuti, para.11).

This may not have always been the case in the New Testament Church, however. The Apostle Paul, for example, insists, “And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man but to be in silence” (1 Timothy 2:12, NKJV). Hence many Fundamentalists believe that a faithful reading of Scripture precludes an interpretation that allows for female ordination. Some Pentecostals counter such sentiment, however, with egalitarian passages that announce the abolishment of social differences; including the rupture of divisions between men and women: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28; NKJV).

Nonetheless, in both North America and Latin America as Pentecostalism has institutionalized and fallen increasingly under Evangelical influence, women are squeezed out of official leadership opportunities in Pentecostal churches (Benvenuti, 1997, para.3) In Latin America, however, many of the autochthonous Pentecostal churches are products of church splits and are generally resistant to formal institutionalization. In some of the more progressive variants women continue to shoulder a sizeable load of preaching duties (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.124). Also, prophetic Latin American Pentecostal scholars are providing theological reinforcement for continuing the older Pentecostal tradition of female authority and leadership. Rhode González, for example, affirms,
In the extant books of the New Testament there is considerable mention of women transmitting the message of salvation. Nothing, neither the [historical] context nor the text [Scripture] could reverse the process of gender inclusion that Jesus began. The gifts [of the Spirit] are for everyone. We should put them into practice. (González, 1992, p.185)

Hence, prophetic Pentecostals in Latin America, like some of their progressive counterparts in North America, downplay or reinterpret those problematic scriptural verses. Fundamentalists have concluded, by contrast, that the overarching testimony of the Bible mandates a distinct role for women in Christianity. Prophetic Pentecostals in Latin America challenge this assumption: González inveighs against male-centered Biblical hermeneutics that disrupt the otherwise liberating potential of Pentecostalism in women’s lives:

Now, in my experience, although the participation of women does not seem to be restricted in most cases, dogmatic biblical interpretations do confine women. Commentaries on letters attributed to the Apostle Paul about the proper behavior of women in the congregations are especially restrictive. The traditional roles of a mother or wife are translated into congregation life as the Sunday School teacher, the Pastor’s wife, or at most a missionary. These interpretations limit, either intentionally or unwittingly, the ministry gifts that the Holy Spirit could have deposited in the lives of these women. (Gonzalez, 1992, p.187)

Thus while Pentecostals believe that the Bible is the normative and authoritative source for all matters of faith, their religious experiences color their reading of Scripture in unique ways. Harvey Cox affirms that “Pentecostals, who take the authority of the Bible
very seriously but also believe in direct revelation through visions, have opened a wider space for women than most other Christian denominations have. What the Bible says is one thing, but when God speaks to you directly, that supersedes everything else” (Benvenuti, 1997, “The Need for Affirmation” section, para.2). It seems, then, that even before the proliferation of terms like “contextualized theology,” Pentecostals had been living a theology of the road.

**The Holy Spirit as Interpreter of Scripture**

This coupling of Bible reading with faith experience allows for a certain element of flexibility in Scriptural interpretation. Hence prophetic Pentecostal theologians and scholars admonish Latin American Christians that the Spirit—through the Bible—is speaking to the Church to intentionally confront socio-economic and socio-political injustice. Arguments of that kind can be made on the basis that “the Spirit, despite being subject to the Word [written scripture] is not limited to the Word. The Spirit can work beyond the efficacy of the words themselves, penetrating the heart and conscience” (Ramirez, 2000, para.2). Or even more revealing, “The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ who speaks scripturally, but has more to say than the Scriptures” (Ramirez, 2000, para.5). This of course is not to say that the Bible is silent on matters of economic and socio-political concern and that Pentecostals need to have some kind of extra-biblical witness to social justice; in fact Scripture is replete with divine mandates to act justly in all quotidian matters of life (Matt 6:25-34, Luke 12: 22-31, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 etc.). In the Hebrew Scriptures particularly God makes countless demands that the oppressed be
delivered from exploitation (Prov. 14:31, Prov. 22:16, Lev. 25:17). These scriptural references, however, have not always been given great prominence in most Pentecostal churches. Nevertheless, it seems that when Pentecostals participate in acts of social welfare or justice, they subsequently give more attention to those aspects of Scripture that speak forthrightly to socio-political concern (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.131). In some instances they attach sociopolitical significance to passages that had formerly been read in an inordinately personal fashion (Kamsteeg, p.26). This radicalizing experience is akin to the accounts of liberation theologians and Catholic lay people involved in Christian base communities.

Indeed progressive Latin American Pentecostals like Miguel Angel Casco have had, what could be deemed, two profound conversions—the more traditional Pentecostal crisis conversion of personal forgiveness of sins, and an equally soul-stirring awakening to confront the evils of social injustice. Some Pentecostals who undergo a dual-conversion of this kind believe that the new dimension of their faith is incompatible with what they perceive to be the mystical or otherworldly tendencies of Pentecostalism. Some have thus left Pentecostal churches in search of a Christian community which would be more amenable to their newfound progressive social commitments (Lewis, 2000). Miguel Angel Casco, on the other hand, has incorporated a keen social conscience into his Pentecostal worldview yet still calls the Pentecostal church his home. He thus appeals for an intimate wedding in Pentecostalism between the two manifestations of liberation—individual and social; both, he argues, are carried out by the Holy Spirit.

Prophetic Pentecostals, like liberation theologians, invert the traditional order of Biblical exegesis. Instead of studying the Bible and then looking at social conditions
through the lens of Scripture, they examine their social conditions and then read Scripture in terms of that reality. The difference between the liberation theologian and the prophetic Pentecostal in this respect seems to lie in the more prominent role granted the Holy Spirit in Pentecostal circles. In prophetic Pentecostalism it is the Holy Spirit who mediates both the comprehension of social situations and Biblical reflection on those conditions. Liberation theologians, on the other hand, seem to rely more on the mediating role of social sciences and rationality in this interpretive process.

Miguel Angel Casco’s description of his conversion to social justice is revealing on more than one level. First it shows an impediment that Pentecostals often face in developing a social conscience: believers sometimes paradoxically trumpet personal spiritual empowerment on the one hand, and yet hold a pusillanimous and fatalistic view of socioeconomic disparity on the other. This dichotomy can be particularly egregious in areas like Latin America where economic and class differences create a seemingly unbridgeable chasm between the rich and the poor. His testimony also provides a glimpse into the process of the contextualization and reformulation of Pentecostal faith in Latin America. Casco hints that his epiphany was sparked by the agency of the Holy Spirit.

He describes growing up in dire socioeconomic conditions, perplexed by the grinding poverty that he experienced in his home. He asked his father, “Dad why are we so poor?” The father responded with a familiar adage imbedded in the hearts and minds of many poor Latin Americans: “My son, because it is the will of God” (Casco, 1992, p.191). Casco explains that this conversation with his father was “illuminating” and transformative. He subsequently understood his father to be a sincere and genuine man
of faith who was, nevertheless, grossly mistaken about God’s will on earth. Casco
“realized that the entire country was writing in misery, injustice and every kind of
wickedness. I then recognized the dire need for liberation” (Casco, p.192). And for
Casco this means a Pentecostal faith that seeks to understand the plight of the poor
through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and in turn strives through tangible and
transformative action to change those conditions.

Casco’s alchemy of significant elements of liberation theology (though he never
uses that term explicitly) with Pentecostal faith reflects the distinct hermeneutic of
Pentecostal theology. And by extension, his view of Pentecostal faith calls into question
the oft-ballyhooed term used almost interchangeably by some academics when
addressing Pentecostalism in Latin America—Fundamentalism. In Pentecostalism, the
Spirit speaks through Scripture. The idea suggested by many Fundamentalists that there
is dispensational discontinuity between the Old Testament (more explicit in demands for
social justice) and the New Testament (often interpreted in more personal spiritual terms)
is untenable in most Pentecostal churches. Many Pentecostals believe that the Spirit
imbues whatever aspect of Scripture that He wants to speak through—at a particular
moment or period—with acute relevancy. Many thus make a distinction between the
\textit{rhema} (spoken word of God) and the \textit{Logos} (written word of God). A person can be
reading the Bible (the Logos) and suddenly have an impression that God is speaking
through some particular passage or verse about the reader’s current life experience and
understanding of faith. This particular moment of divine revelation is understood as a
\textit{rhema} experience—hearing the spoken word of God through the written word of God.
The abundance of Pentecostal Bible Colleges with the word Rhema in their name
bespeaks this interpretive practice. Thus Latin American Pentecostal scholars affirm that it is “the inner light of the Spirit that ‘energizes’ the objective truth of the Word and transforms it into life” (Ramirez, 2000).

And this somewhat flexible hermeneutic not only makes Angel Casco’s pleas for a Pentecostal theology of individual and social liberation understandable, but also speak to the potential acceptance of such views within Pentecostal and Charismatic circles. The Hispanic American Pentecostal scholar, Eldin Villafañe, for example, affirms that the mystical dimension of Pentecostal Bible reading has had a marked impact on the social ethics of the Hispanic Pentecostal Church.

While still holding a high view of Scripture, as the Word of God – with moral laws and rules and principles binding today – one finds that in fact the relational motif dominates in Hispanic Pentecostals’ moral reasoning, especially in those indigenous Hispanic Pentecostal churches where the North American Pentecostals’ denominational influence has been minimal.” (Villafañe, 1993, p.207-208)

The relational motif is distinct from “prescriptive” Christian ethics in which “moral reasoning is seeking a rule to fit a particular moral dilemma.” (Villafañe, p.207) And it is also different from the “deliberative motif” where the role of reason is given prominence in moral judgment. (Villafañe, p.207) Rather, the relational motif stresses the response in faith which the believer is to make to the living presence of God. The Bible may certainly provide normative guidance through its specific moral teachings, but the basic consideration is the concrete response of the believer to the action and initiative of God in history. No amount of imitative
behavior of the moral directives in Scripture is truly biblical until it is behavior
elicated as personal response to the divine activity. (Villafañe, p.207)
Hence, Villafañe declares that “the fact of the matter is that implicitly Hispanic
Pentecostals subscribe to a view of revelation that is dynamic and continuous in nature”
(Villafañe, p.206).

**The Hermeneutic of Experience and Social Concern**

Thus it seems that Latin American and Hispanic Pentecostal scholars are using the
spontaneity and spiritual effervescence of Pentecostalism as a tool in bringing newfound
awareness to the social and political responsibilities attendant to faith. For example,
Casco buttresses his argument for Pentecostal social concern with an affirmation about
the “liberating and transforming action of the Holy Spirit.” He adds that “the Spirit is
acting and moving like the wind that blows where it wishes, refusing to be chained or
boxed in by four walls or theological doctrines imbedded in certain churches” (Casco,
1992, p.194). It seems that the language in this passage is meant to strike a distinct
Pentecostal nerve. Casco uses a Pentecostal vernacular that reminds co-religionists that
the vitality of their faith is in its liberation from rigid doctrinal boundaries. In his view,
the strength of Pentecostalism depends on whether believers are attuned to what the Spirit
is saying.

From Casco’s perspective, the Spirit speaks decisively through Scripture. Casco’s
reading of Matthew 25: 42-43, Romans 8:21-22, Galatians 5:1 and a host of other
scriptural references leads him to the conclusion that the Holy Spirit is intimately
involved in social justice. Hence Angel Casco serves as an example of how Pentecostals can “feed raw of the Bible” and arrive at drastically different religious applications to life than do the classical Fundamentalists with whom they are so often erroneously compared.

Also, Casco points to the Spirit’s ability to interpret and speak through life circumstances. “The reality around us becomes a cry of the Holy Spirit, who convicts and moves us to repentance when we are indifferent to that reality” (Casco, 1992, p.195). Life, then, becomes a megaphone for God.

Likewise the Hispanic American Pentecostal scholar Eldin Villafañe recognizes a tripartite connection between the experience (or recognition) of social injustice, the testimony of Scripture, and the Holy Spirit’s illumination of both.

This dynamic and dialectical spirituality is to be ‘worked out’ in a social context, one that deeply needs both contemplative and apostolic activity. The brokenness of society (so visible in our ‘barrios’), the scriptural missional mandate, and the Spirit’s love constrain us to feed the hungry, visit the sick and prisoners, shelter the homeless and poor – to express God’s love in social concerns. In Matthew 25: 35, 36, 40, Jesus graphically depicts the interrelationship of the vertical and horizontal dimension of worship and social concern, and thus challenges us to a wholistic spirituality.” (Villafañe, p.168).

Hence, prophetic Pentecostals debunk false dichotomies that separate life into opposing camps of the spiritual and material. Róger Cabezas affirms, “In this sense, we believe that dualism needs to be overcome; therefore Christians can not be divided up into camps of ‘Charismatic Christian’ vs. ‘Social Christian’” (Cabezas, 1992, p.164).
Prophetic Pentecostals are suggesting that an authentic Pentecostal Christian should be a person whose practice of the gifts of the Holy Spirit elevates rather than weakens his social conscience. They claim that the Holy Spirit will shed much light on the meaning of daily experience and biblical accounts when Pentecostals open to new dimensions of the love of God for the poor. Grassroots Pentecostals seem well aware of the traditional notion of God’s special spiritual blessing on the poor but are perhaps less cognizant of the integral liberating dimensions of that bias. God loves the poor and wants to bring them justice on earth and in heaven, proclaim prophetic Pentecostals. Since most Pentecostals in Latin America are poor themselves, living a “wholistic spirituality” will lead them to take an active role in their own history. Thus Pentecostals like Miguel Angel Casco and Eldin Villafañe are making space for a new fundamental of theologically conservative Christian faith—social concern.
Chapter Five

Searching for the Cloud of Witnesses: The Role of History in Prophetic Latin American Pentecostalism

It was important for many of the leading figures of the Reformation to believe that history was on their side. Both Luther and Calvin argued that there was nothing novel about their teachings; indeed they were adamant that their formulations of the Christian faith were in keeping with Ancient creedal and patristic pronouncements. The early Reformers were not interested in jettisoning the bulk of Christian teachings and tradition promulgated over more than a millennium. They did not see the Roman Catholic Church as some behemoth that needed to be toppled in order to clear the view of a pristine Christian past. D.H. Williams points out that "historians agree that a breach with the Roman church was not what Luther intended by his reformation" (Williams, 1999, p.183). Hence, the early reformers, or magisterial reformers as they are sometimes called (to distinguish them from the more radical reformers like the Anabaptists) believed that their championing of Biblical Christianity represented continuity with rather than a radical break from the Christian past.

In the last couple of decades an unlikely Christian movement has emerged in Latin America that seems to be striking a similar apologetic chord as those magisterial reformers of the sixteenth century. Like the early reformers, prophetic Pentecostals in Latin America have demonstrated an eagerness to reformulate and recapture what they view as the essence of their faith. Similar to Luther and Calvin, progressive Pentecostals in Latin America utilize historical precedent to demonstrate the authenticity and religious legitimacy of their interpretation of Christian faith. Luther and Calvin drew attention to
early Church fathers, like Augustine, who emphasized the role of God's grace in salvation. Similarly, Pentecostals in Latin America have searched for historical antecedents to their particular brand of Pentecostal faith. These progressive Pentecostals have thus highlighted historical figures, like the African-American William Seymour, whose Pentecostal spirituality had a distinct sociopolitical hue.

Walter Hollenweger declares that for William Seymour, “Pentecost meant more than speaking in tongues. It meant to love in the face of hate, to overcome the hatred of a whole nation by demonstrating that Pentecost is something very different from the success-oriented American way of life.” (Shaull, & Cesar, 2000, p.211)

Progressive Pentecostal scholars thus posit that prophetic Pentecostalism is a movement in keeping with Pentecostalism’s African-American historical roots. In short, progressive Pentecostal scholars in Latin America have stressed what they believe is the providential essence of history; they assign a pedagogical function to history in their attempts to reform Latin American Pentecostalism.

God has been at work by His Spirit throughout time, claim prophetic Pentecostal scholars, to bring social-political-religious liberation to all people. Prophetic Pentecostal scholars seem to have assumed a divinely-sanctioned responsibility to illuminate such action—not least in the history of Pentecostalism itself. And their interest in history is intimately tied to pneumatology.
There is evidence to suggest that the prophetic Pentecostal approach to history has been influenced to a certain degree by the legacy of the radical reformers of the sixteenth century. The latter proposed that the Catholic Church had gone awry in the fourth century and lapsed into an inexorable apostate condition. Many modern Evangelicals have adopted this view of Church history.

The radical reformers created greater metaphorical distance between themselves and the early church than did the magisterial reformers. D.H. Williams claims that the elevation of Scripture and rejection of church authority caused Protestants “to mute the voices of that weighty preaching with which the church of antiquity had come to understand the meaning of Scripture,” and eventually, “the councils, the creeds, the grand theologians, the apologists, and the philosophers—all could now be abandoned.” (Williams, p.15).

A byproduct of the Anabaptist tendency to decry most of what came before the Reformation (with the obvious exception of the New Testament period) was a historico-religious paradigm of the “fall” of the Roman Catholic Church.

According to this historical model, the Church was flung headlong into apostasy when it supposedly became a faith of the state (under Constantine) rather than the people. Thus proponents of the fall theory make a sharp demarcation between the New Testament Christian community and the institution birthed at the “Constantinianization” of the Church. The purity of this wholly corrupted Church could then only be recovered through a radical reformation initiated by the magisterial reformers but exemplified in the
Anabaptist movement. Some progressive Pentecostals in Latin America have apparently accepted this view of church history:

The devil seduced church leadership and tempted them with the glories of earthly power. The devil had attempted, unsuccessfully, to offer the same temptation to Christ during his forty day fast in the desert. When it came to the Church, however, the devil was able to carry out his purposes and thus the Roman Church, supposedly the head of the universal church, renounced the way of the cross with all of its attendant persecution from the Roman Empire. In exchange, the Church accepted the favor of the imperial Caesars.

Hence, the church in Rome, which had been lauded by the Apostle Paul for its faithfulness, faith and obedience (Romans 1:8 and 16:9), was transformed in the fourth century with the reign of Constantine into the Imperial Church.

The Church thus ceased to depend on the power of the Holy Spirit and relied instead on political power (Méndez, 210-211).

This raises a question: If the Church was in a fallen state from the time of Constantine to the Reformation, was God active at all in Christianity during this period of perceived spiritual slumber?

Some radical reformers had addressed this issue by claiming a lineage with those Christians throughout the centuries who had allegedly remained steadfast in proclaiming truth and were subsequently persecuted by the official Church. Modern Evangelicals, however, tend to be much more reluctant about claiming denounced heretics of the past in their historical heritage; some, instead, emphasize the spiritual effervescence of figures like Francis of Assisi as bright spots in an otherwise dim history. They thus posit a
spiritual successionism where Christianity of the heart is assumed to have been practiced throughout history, even during periods when such devotion was largely suppressed. “By discounting the intrinsic theological value of the fourth century and beyond, the only ‘real’ history that counts is a truth-only or a spiritual successionism that has come to typify the history of evangelical theology and biblical exegesis” (Williams, p.129).

Early Pentecostal and Charismatic Views of History

Nevertheless, early Pentecostals in the United States were initially not concerned with finding this thread of historical continuity between the early Church and the Protestant Reformation. Indeed, there was little motivation to even bridge the historical gap between the New Testament Church and the Pentecostal movement of the twentieth century:

Significantly, the first history of the Pentecostal movement, authored by Bennett F. Lawrence, a charter member of the Assemblies of God, was entitled The Apostolic Faith Restored (1916). In contrast to the established denominations that valued “precedent,” “habit,” and “custom,” Lawrence, with a model display of first-generation Pentecostal ahistoricism, claimed that the movement had only one ancestor—the primitive church. Frank Bartleman (1871-1963), an early Pentecostal evangelist and the primary recorder of Pentecostal beginnings at the Asuza Street Mission in Los Angeles, lamented the alleged ‘fall of the church’ after the first-century. Since that time the church had purportedly operated

Nonetheless, “Conscious of being dismissed by other churches as schismatics, attempts were made by some leaders to establish a sense of legitimate historical continuity between the movement and its first-century prototype” (Nienkirchen, p.123). This somewhat grudging appeal to history detailed a list of supposed proto-Pentecostals such as Martin Luther, Methodists, and Quakers (Nienkirchen, p.123-124). Still, the Pentecostals attributed the watershed of religious history to the inauguration of their own movement: it was through the twentieth century Pentecostal revival, Pentecostals exclaimed, that the vitality of the early church had been restored to what was otherwise a fairly emaciated modern Church. The remedy for the sagging Church was a spiritual shot in the arm with a heavy dose of the Holy Ghost. In this view of Church history, even the most enthusiastic Protestant reformers were merely forerunners to the Pentecostal “restoration” of power to the Church.

In the 1960s what came to be known as the Charismatic renewal erupted in a variety of Christian traditions. Through contact with Pentecostals eager to share their dynamic spirituality, some Catholics and mainline Protestants began to take part in spiritual phenomenon that had previously been considered as the exclusive domain of Pentecostal churches. In contrast to the classical Pentecostals, the Charismatics were unabashedly ecumenical and thus “devoted their academic skills to constructing an historical apologetic that would bring added credibility to the charismatic movement and justify its attempt to affiliate with the mainstream of Christendom” (Nienkirchen, p.125).
Erudite Charismatic Christians thus sought to find historical precedent for the manifestation of miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit in Church history:

Consequently, they developed revisionist interpretations of what they deemed past “renewal” movements, which were accompanied by glossolalia, prophetic utterances, healing, and other related supernatural phenomena, and which traditional ecclesiastical historians had pejoratively judged as schismatic and heretical in character. (Nienkirchen, p.125).

Progressive Pentecostals in Latin America are drawn to this ecumenical reading of the movement of the Holy Spirit through history. They affirm that “the Holy Spirit (in terms of fruits, miracles, signs and wonders) has broken down dividing walls . . . .” (Cabezas, 1992, p.171) Gamaliel Lugo thus explains that ecumenical Pentecostalism is not based on well-defined and rigid doctrine, but rather in communal experience. It is especially rooted in community based communication that surpasses barriers of education, skin color, and nationality . . . it is not true that we Pentecostals are by definition sectarian . . . . (Cabezas, p.171)

Róger Cabezas adds, “The Holy Spirit is the property of no one. He acts how he wants and when he wants. He is not confined by any boundaries; whether one is talking about the borders of time, space, race, Church, creed, language, or structure . . . .” (Cabezas, p.177) Prophetic Pentecostal scholars espouse a spiritual successionist model of church history that seems to include all faithful Christians of the past—regardless of the tradition to which they belonged. Róger Cabezas explains, “In all of history, in all the men and women of God from every age . . . the presence of the Holy Spirit has been manifest”
(Cabezas, p.176). Also, the prophetic Pentecostal insistence that the Spirit has moved throughout time and across ecclesiastical boundaries suggests an implicit affirmation of the spiritual successionist model of church history propagated by Charismatic scholars in the 1960s and 1970s.

Influence of Liberationist Model of History

While references to a fall of the Church and an implicit acceptance of spiritual successionism seem to point to the influences of Evangelical and Charismatic historiography on prophetic Pentecostalism, liberation theology has had an even more pronounced impact on progressive Pentecostal views of history. Proponents of liberation theology of both the Catholic and Protestant fold believe that God has been at work throughout all of human history bringing liberation to the oppressed and marginalized of the world. They also affirm that He has done so both through the Christian Church and apart from it. José Comblin, for example, believes that relegating the Spirit’s influence to the Church, in only its institutional forms, undermines the Spirit’s keen interest in those marginalized members of society who are repelled by institutional formalism:

Experience has shown that the very poorest do not belong to base communities. Those living on the margins of society—tramps, beggars, thieves, prostitutes and other outcasts, most of the unemployed, slum-dwellers, most of those who are hungry or thirsty, who are homeless, who live under arches, who scrounge a living—will not go to public meetings or join formal communities. Are they all outside the church? (Comblin, 1989, p.95)
Patently, Comblin’s resounding response to this question is that these excluded members of society are the ones who have a special place in the Spirit’s task of making the kingdom come and God’s will be done “on earth as it is in heaven.” And the coming of the kingdom of God is understood in liberationist circles to be the great historical project of the Holy Spirit. Hence, liberation theologians attempt to debunk what they view is a false dichotomy between sacred and secular history. It is idle to speak of Church history as opposed to human history, they claim, since the two should be in constant interaction. All history can be viewed as sacred because God has historically moved by His spirit in an effort to bring integral liberation—political, religious, social etc.—to all of humankind.

Prophetic Pentecostals seem to pick up on many of these liberationist themes in their treatment of history. Like the liberationists, they recognize the historical work of God even outside of the Church. In addition to extolling the Christians of the past who have been faithful to God, prophetic Pentecostals affirm that the historical footsteps of the Holy Spirit in history can also be seen in everything that is “good, acceptable and perfect that is on the earth . . . .” (Cabezas, 1992, p.176) Theology, then, need not be divorced from society and relegated to an ephemeral and esoteric realm. Rather it should be rooted in quotidian life and seen through the purview of a singular human history. History and the world thus sacralized become instruments of God: He speaks through “the signs of the times” (Gutierrez, p.7). Prophetic Pentecostal Carmelo Alvarez maintains, “It is important to discern the ‘signs of the times’ to respond to the challenges of these days with a vigorous faith. We can not and should not ignore the current clamor of anguish, oppression and conflict, because [God wants us to minister in places where
there is need]” (Alvarez, 1992, p.96). To understand the “current clamor” requires unearthing the historical roots of that anguish.

Some prophetic Pentecostals posit that present manifestations of injustice in Latin America can be traced back to colonial history. In addressing the theme of “five hundred years of evangelism since the Spanish invasion,” Luis Segreda insists,

For us it is extremely important that the process not be referred to as “evangelism”; it is more accurate to call it “annihilation and cultural alienation” that we suffered with the arrival of the Europeans to our continent. While there were various models of “evangelism” used in the colonies and not all fit in the same basket, we should repudiate the kind of “evangelism” that tried to rip our people from the cultural and religious ties of their Amerindian past; this facilitated the conquest and colonial domination. (Segreda, 1998, point #6 of “programa de trabajo)

Hence prophetic Pentecostals are eager to learn from the injustice of the past to ensure that it not be repeated, especially in their own religious circles.

Prophetic History in Scripture

It is not only the errors of the past that grab prophetic Pentecostal attention; they are also keenly attuned to praiseworthy historical examples of the integration of faith and social justice. In highlighting the historical precedent for religiously-informed social concern, prophetic Pentecostals in Latin America draw attention to documents considered sacred by numerous religious groups—the Hebrew Scriptures. Like liberation
theologians from the mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions, progressive Pentecostals place particular emphasis on the prophets of the Older Testament. Gamaliel Lugo, for example, opines, “The voice of the prophets in the Old Testament was always raised to denounce those who exploited the earth to the detriment of the poor and needy” (Lugo, 1992, p.116). And in Lugo’s view, the prophetic function is as relevant for present day injustice in Latin America as it was for the sociopolitical complexities of Jewish history. Speaking of the struggle for indigenous rights in an area of Venezuela called Cabimitas, Lugo proclaims, “We are raising our voices, as the prophets of today, to point out and denounce injustice. God will hear this clamour of justice for the poor people of Cabimitas. Those who are responsible for their misery, marginality, and exploitation, will be judged” (Lugo, 1992, p.117).

Indeed, prophetic Pentecostals in Latin America not only affirm events recorded in Scripture as historically faithful renditions of the past, but they also point to the symbolic role that such historical incidents can play in religious faith. In other words, historical archetypes can be used to elucidate the socially liberating dimension of the Spirit for current circumstances. Bernardo Campos claims, for example,

As we know, Pentecost was an antithetical event to the success of the tower of Babel. At Babel, languages were confused and different groups of people were thus separated from each other. Pentecost, therefore, symbolically points to the unifying nature of language. Thus during a [Pentecostal] service a feeling of community is produced that ruptures the cultural (linguistic) barriers that would otherwise separate people from one another (Campos, p.131).
Since prophetic Pentecostals assign spiritual meaning to historical events that positively impact social dimensions of humanity, they recognize the Spirit at work in various Christian traditions, including the Roman Catholic Church. Miguel Guerrero Menendez is a strident proponent of the Church fall historical paradigm and draws attention to the “erroneous” doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. Nevertheless, despite his qualms with Roman Catholic doctrine, Méndez praises the Catholic Church for its prophetic and courageous historical stance in Chile. There the Catholic Church was “the principal force of resistance against the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. They were also the major contenders for human rights especially through the Vicariate of Solidarity” (Guerrero Méndez, 1992, p.211). In the religious climate of Latin America where Pentecostals and Catholics rarely recognize one another as fellow Christians such laudatory language speaks to the centrality of faith-informed social action in the historical outlook of prophetic Pentecostals.

Many Pentecostal scholars admit that the awakening of the Pentecostal social conscience is a relatively recent phenomenon in Latin America. Richard E. Waldrop explains that “only in (sic) past two decades has the Full Gospel Church of God of Guatemala begun to develop a social consciousness with a view toward overt and concrete action related to what might traditionally be understood as Christian social responsibility” (Waldrop, 1997). How, then, can Pentecostal scholars in Latin America communicate the idea that a concern for social justice should indeed be an important element of Pentecostal practice, if much Latin American Pentecostal history seems to belie such a notion?
In their search for a precedent for Pentecostal social concern, some prophetic Pentecostals have unearthed historical examples of Latin American Pentecostals in overt social action. Róger Cabezas describes a struggle for land in 1962, in Maranhao, Brazil, in which there was ample participation of Pentecostals—mainly from the Assemblies of God. They were involved in different actions of protest, as well as community organization such as unions. In this struggle, [the meaning of] Pentecost was transformed into an impulse for survival, because their meager properties were to be destroyed by large agricultural companies (Cabezas, 1992, p.175).

Indeed, prophetic Pentecostals insist that there is much that Latin American Pentecostals can learn from their own history:

We need to recover our historical memory. We should tell our story and give testimony. It is necessary that we retrieve the oral tradition that is dispersed throughout Latin America. We need to imitate the spirit of the book En Tierra Extraña (In a Foregin Land), about the Chilean Pentecostal experience, in other countries. There are “life histories” that need to be shared.

Even cursory historical analysis of the modern Pentecostal movement tells us that women were pioneers, principal protagonists, effective instruments of the Holy Spirit. For the love of the Lord we are going to give them the place they
deserve in the Pentecostal movement! We need to recover the “life histories” of these women (Alvarez, 1992, p.99-100).

In addition to exploring Latin American Pentecostal history, prophetic Pentecostals also turn to the roots of the movement in North America for evidence of a socially and politically engaged faith.

Gamiliel Lugo as a Pentecostal Pastor and scholar argues that Latin American Pentecostals can find a wealth of ideas and examples in selective Pentecostal history which speak to socio-political concern and ethics. He explains that the imbuing of Pentecostalism with a socio-political ethic requires sober historical research that would reveal and subsequently “retrieve the contesting character and revolutionary past of Pentecostals as catalysts of social change . . . .” (Lugo, 1992, p.108) Lugo draws attention to holiness preachers like John Wesley, Asa Mahan, and Charles Finney, who gained notoriety for their theologies of a second work of grace. This second blessing doctrine was the foundation on which the Pentecostal experience of the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” was laid. The primary difference between the holiness view of a post-conversion encounter with the Holy Spirit and the Pentecostal conception of spiritual baptism was the stress that the Pentecostals would come to place on speaking in tongues as the initial evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Thus Lugo affirms that Wesley, Mahan, and Finney should be recognized as proto-Pentecostals who notably possessed fervent social ethics:

Wesley’s profound spiritual experience of sanctification did not draw him away from socio-ethical issues, but on the contrary he became a renowned social reformer. Wesley believed that the gospel demanded social concern and he thus
raised funds for needy people. And for concrete problems like slavery he reserved his most vigorous and clear condemnations. Wesley paid careful attention to the problems of unemployment, hopelessness, growing poverty in England, and above all the imposition of unjust labor laws; and he began to reflect theologically and ethically on those problems (Lugo, 1992, p.105).

In addition to affirming the Biblically based social ethics espoused by these proto-Pentecostals, Lugo believes that Latin American Pentecostals would do well to also recognize similar social commitment in the founders of the Pentecostal movement. To uncover such examples, he argues, requires fixing the Pentecostal gaze on the original Pentecostal revival of Los Angeles in 1906. It initially garnered much attention and disdain from skeptical onlookers because of the preponderance of African-Americans in the movement. Lugo longs to unlock “a discovery of our own [Pentecostal] historical roots, revealing that Pentecostal ethic which was adopted by African-Americans and confronted the racist social structure of the day; those Pentecostals were driven to root themselves in social change” (Lugo, 1992, p.108). If Latin American Pentecostals are drawn to the socio-political theology of African-American coreligionists in the United States, they will certainly find some insistent appeals to Scriptural demands for social justice in those communities.

It seems that the civil rights struggle of the 1960s catapulted African-American Pentecostalism deeper into the political and social realm. African-American Pentecostal scholar Cheryl Sanders testifies to the ways that Pentecostal experience has informed her progressive social and political activity:
In retrospect, I can say that my early worship and leadership experience in the Church equipped me for participation in the black student movement of the late 1960s and 1970s, especially those aspects of the movement that required planning, organization, public speaking, singing, or rehearsals. (Sanders, 1996, Preface, viii)

Also, Omar M. McRoberts describes how African-American churches in Boston were shaped through their prominent role in the civil rights movement:

I argued that the apparent increase in Black Pentecostal clergy activism nationwide reflects historical forces and organizational pressures. Specifically, the highly visible church presence in the civil rights/Black power movements of the 1960s and 1970s inspired some members of the latest generation of Black Pentecostal clergy to develop activist interpretations of that faith. In the meantime, Pentecostalism has become a major faith community. Within this constantly expanding community, religious strictness is no longer such a distinctive trait for individual congregations. This development has forced individual clergy to develop original ministries, including socially activist ones. In the hands of these entrepreneurial and innovative clergy, basic Pentecostal ideas are surprisingly supple. (McRoberts, 2003, p.108)

Other historical examples of African-American Pentecostal social concern include Pentecostal participation in the black clergy caucus movement of the 1960s; this represented a “struggle against discriminatory structures and patterns of subordination based on race” (Sanders, p.104). Moreover, Walter Hollenweger notes that “the strike of sanitation workers in Memphis under the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King had its
headquarters in the big Mason Temple of the [Pentecostal] Church of God in Christ” (Hollenweger, 1997, p.28).

What is missing, however, from Latin American prophetic Pentecostal references to the progressive sociopolitical concerns of African-American Pentecostals is a genuinely historical exploration of cause and effect. This is not to say that progressive Pentecostals in Latin America sidestep the how of African-American Pentecostal social commitment. They do, for example, note that such activity has been facilitated by an expansion of the list of gifts of the Holy Spirit in African-American Pentecostalism to include public protesting and sociopolitical mobilization (Lugo, 1992, 106). Here they note how social and political concern is baptized in uniquely Pentecostal terms giving further impetus and spiritual motivation for bringing Pentecostal faith to bear on the sociopolitical realm. Latin American Pentecostal scholars also at least implicitly touch on the why of such historical black Pentecostal commitment. They draw attention, for example, to the distinct racial dynamics of early Pentecostalism. Lugo explains,

An important aspect of that event [the Pentecostal revival of Asuza street in 1906] was the racial harmony that drove this movement. White pastors and evangelists, overcoming racial prejudice, were willing to not only pray alongside blacks, but also to learn from them and allow them to lay hands on them for spiritual empowerment. It is surprising that for years white preachers were ordained by black Pentecostal bishops. Witnesses to the revival in Los Angeles affirm and relate with pride that racial segregation disappeared because of the shed blood of Christ (Lugo, 1992, p.106).

Lugo admits, however, that such harmony was not to last:
Outside criticism of African-American preponderance in the revival motivated the white Pentecostals to disassociate themselves from the progressive sociopolitical struggle of the black Pentecostals. In contrast to the white Pentecostals, black Pentecostals maintain their prophetic social stance to this day.” (Lugo, p.107)

According to this version of Pentecostal history, Pentecostalism was originally an intentional agent of social, and by extension political, change. This fervent sociopolitical ethic is assumed to be rooted in the African-American history of the movement. White Pentecostals, however, are alleged to have distanced themselves from the social concerns of the African-Americans because the movement was ridiculed in the press for being an overwhelmingly African-American faith full of religious excess.

This vision of Pentecostal history, however, seems wanting in a number of respects. It ignores, for example, the heterogeneous makeup of African-American Pentecostalism. There seems to be an a priori commitment reflected in the literature of prophetic Latin American Pentecostals dealing with African-American Pentecostalism. Prophetic Pentecostals in Latin America presuppose that African-American Pentecostalism has intentionally and consistently brought faith to bear on the social and political realm. Nevertheless, some African-American scholars have criticized African-American Pentecostal religion as “the most negative and culturally stifling aspects of black culture . . .” (Sanders, p.112) This suggests that African-American Pentecostalism is not uniformly progressive. It is possible that progressive African-American Pentecostals, like their counterparts in Latin America, represent a minority rather than the majority of the wider Pentecostal movement. Nonetheless, that progressive strains of
African-American Pentecostalism have flourished in certain areas of the United States lends credence to the idea that Pentecostalism is inherently flexible and subject to change.

The example of a prophetic Pentecostal witness in the origins of the movement has helped some Latin American prophetic Pentecostals to fortify their commitment to social change. Luis Segreda testifies to this reality:

What is certain is that in the Azusa street revival a large percentage of the first Pentecostals were black. Also most came from the more marginalized socioeconomic classes. Also women were the majority. For a four-square [a member of the Pentecostal denominational known as the Four Square Church] like myself in Latin America, who has little historical tradition to hold on to . . . it was important to reaffirm the poor, black, and feminine origins of the movement.

(Segreda, 1998)

Prophetic Pentecostals are perhaps less interested in the nuances of African-American Pentecostal history as they are in establishing a contrast between white “fundamentalist” Pentecostal history and the more progressive African-American form (Lugo, 1992, p.107). This search for precedent may in fact be a more conducive approach to solidifying prophetic Pentecostal identity.

In summary, according to Latin American Pentecostal scholars, God’s work of liberation has not been confined to Pentecostal circles; nor does He restrict such activity to the various Christian traditions. Progressive Pentecostals in Latin America lay a theological prism over human history in a quest for signs of social-religious-political liberation; thus refracted a history of liberation becomes a tool for evangelization of the
perceived conservative segments of Latin American Pentecostalism. Hence progressive Pentecostal scholars in Latin America use history to both teach and learn.

History, however, is not approached as a quest for truth on its own terms where cause and effect are rigorously studied. Rather, allusions to history in progressive Pentecostal circles represent a quest for precedent to confirm a presupposed theological outlook. In this respect, progressive Pentecostals in Latin America are following a pattern established in the three primary streams of Christian influence on the movement: Evangelical Protestantism, Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity, and liberation theology. The strength of prophetic Pentecostal historiography seems to lie in its potential to help socially engaged Pentecostals root their identity in the Pentecostal faith; there is a growing realization that the prophetic strain of Pentecostalism is not a novel phenomenon that has suddenly burst on to the Latin American scene, but one that is as old as Pentecostalism itself. This awareness will likely bolster both the confidence and effectiveness of prophetic Pentecostals in their attempts to reform Latin American Pentecostalism.
Chapter Six

Where there is Justice, There is God: The Kingdom of God in Prophetic Pentecostalism

The reality of widespread global poverty and the stinging images of indigence that often accompany such misery, have prompted many Christians to ask where is God in the midst of human sorrow and evil? This of course is an age-old religious question with no facile solution. Religious specialists have a special term for this theologically vexing issue: “theodicy.” Literature on the subject is often as impenetrable as the word makes it sound.

It is, of course, not just theologians, however, who have interest in this problem. Many people of faith (as well as atheists and agnostics) who have suffered some kind of hardship in life have been drawn to questions of divine providence. When malicious people perpetrate unspeakable acts of violence, with seemingly no divine retribution, it raises the question that if there is a God, over what jurisdiction does that God rule? Various Christian responses to this question have been manifested in disparate conceptions of what Jesus refers to as the “kingdom of God.” And progressive Latin American Pentecostal scholars often make the kingdom of God—in conjunction with the Holy Spirit—the centerpiece of their theology. The progressive Latin American Pentecostal vision of the kingdom reflects their desire to reform Pentecostalism into a faith that will intentionally and effectively contribute to social justice in Latin America and the world at large. Accordingly, it seems that prophetic Pentecostals have borrowed much of their understanding of the rule of God from liberation theology. While not discarding religious notions of heaven, progressive Pentecostals emphasize this-worldly
dimensions of the kingdom of God. And they do so by pointing to the key role of the Holy Spirit in understanding and living in the kingdom.

**The Kingdom of God in Early Pentecostal History**

In its infancy in North America, Pentecostalism was driven more by passion than reason. That is not to suggest that Pentecostals were irrational people; in religious terms one might say that they were acting supra-rationally. Nevertheless, Pentecostal theology remained in a period of formulation from 1901-1929 (Lewis, 2003, para.3). Therefore, the early Pentecostals had not concretized a systematic theological definition of the kingdom of God. But in the inchoate stage of the movement, Pentecostals championed a somewhat imprecise belief in the “gospel of the kingdom.” William Faupel explains that “the Gospel of the Kingdom proclaimed that God was about to end the dispensation of grace and usher in ‘an age of law and Kingship, preceded by judgment’” (Faupel, 1996, p.43). This was a rule of God that could not be initiated without the physical presence of Jesus. In other words, Christ would need to return to earth for the kingdom of God to be inaugurated.

Many scholars of Pentecostalism have documented the eschatological fervor that accompanied the explosion of the movement in Los Angeles in 1909. Eschatology refers to Christian projections about the future based on biblical passages concerning the so-called “last days” when Jesus will return to earth. And in the Pentecostal revival at the turn of the twentieth century, an alleged eruption of the miraculous was interpreted in a
distinct eschatological framework. Indeed, “The second coming of Jesus was the central concern of the initial Pentecostal message” (Faupel, p.20).

Pentecostals found Biblical precedence for a widespread and seemingly indiscriminate outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament book of Joel. The prophet Joel had proclaimed that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on all flesh, regardless of age or gender, in the last days. In the Azusa street revival, men, women, and children of various races and ethnicities, were testifying to intense divine encounters with the Holy Spirit. Surely this was what Joel had prophesied. Hence many Pentecostals assumed that they were living in the last days.

This belief had pronounced missiological implications for Pentecostals because they believed that the Second Advent would be preceded by global proclamation of the gospel. Thus, when Pentecostals proclaimed that “speaking in tongues” was the initial evidence for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, they were not referring to some private mystical affair. In fact many early Pentecostals believed that the gift of tongues was not glossolalia (speaking to God in an unknown spiritual language) but rather xenolalia (speaking in a known human language learned neither by environmental exposure, nor assiduous linguistic study, but by the miraculous divine enablement of the Holy Spirit) (Hollenweger, 1997, p.21). “To whom much is given, much is required,” and thus countless Pentecostals marched off to the mission field where they believed that their gift of xenolalia could be put to use (Faupel, p.23).

Understanding the connection between Pentecostal eschatology and the implications that such belief has on social concern requires a glimpse into the theological views of the immediate predecessors to the Pentecostals: holiness (or perfectionist)
Christians. The perfectionists believed that God had enabled believers to live a victorious life so that they could combat both personal and social sin. The holiness/perfectionist movement had initially espoused an end-times scenario in which Jesus would return only after believers had enacted His moral and religious standards on earth for a period of a thousand years. This particular version of the end-times is deemed postmillennialism. “In the context of this vision, the Holiness movement devoted itself to social reform of all kinds, engaged in evangelism and mission work, called for the unity of the Church, and urged Christian believers to press on to experience the perfecting power of Perfect Love” (Faupel, p.73). The movement lost confidence in the earthly view of the kingdom of God, however, because of the devastation of the Civil War. Holiness Christians thus shifted from a postmillennial to a premillennial eschatology. It was this theological seed that was to impregnate Pentecostalism with an urgent expectation of Christ’s return. Faupel explains, “The new chronology disclosed a transformation in world-view” (Faupel, p.91). The new Pentecostal cosmology inherited from the Holiness camp placed significantly less stress on earthly reform and substantially more on inward conversion.

The idea that the kingdom of God would not come until Jesus returned to earth made a lot of sense to Pentecostals in light of their precarious socio-religious standing: “Within these first few decades, Pentecostals find themselves heavily alienated from other Christian groups. Frequently called and treated as cult or heretics, they learned to be an enemy of the world, and a sojourner waiting for the heavenly citizenship to be realized” (Lewis, 2003, para.3). It seems that the influence of various end-time theologies on Christian ethics can be interpreted in multiple ways. Paul W. Lewis notes, for example, that the Pentecostals’ certainty that they were living in the last days
motivated them to “reach out” (Lewis, para.3). Nonetheless, many scholars have called into question the socially transformative potential of premillennialism:

At the heart of Perfectionism is the concern that the purposes of God are realized both in the life of the individual and in the world. What happened . . . is that the Perfectionist’s view of how God accomplishes his purposes was transformed. This change of perception shifted from “gradual within history” to “instantaneous beyond history.” (Faupel, p.17)

Hence Pentecostals inherited a belief in a kingdom that was not of this world. It seems likely that a Christian who believes that the world is perishing and can only be rescued by the second coming, may adopt a fatalistic view of injustice and hardship on earth.

In the post-millennialist vision, by contrast, Christians are expected to enact God’s will on earth for a thousand years before the return of Christ. Thus the burden of responsibility for social concern seems significantly greater in the post-millennialist paradigm.

It seems that in some cases traditional Pentecostals in Latin America have eschewed explicit religiously-informed social commitment because of their otherworldly ideas about the kingdom of God. In 1978 the Latin American Evangelical Confederation (CONELA) was founded partly in response to the establishment of an ecumenical Protestant group called the Latin American Council of Churches (Stoll, 1990, p.132). CONELA was a predominantly Pentecostal operation since “three-quarters of the 4.2 million church members represented directly belonged to just one group: the Assemblies of God in Brazil” (Stoll, p.134). CONELA organizers expressed fear that Latin
American Evangelicalism was becoming intermingled with left-wing political philosophy.

As a result, CONELA’s architects concluded that the kingdom of God should not be confused with . . . struggles for political power, and that Christians should render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s. In keeping with church-growth thinking, they relegated social responsibility to specialized relief and development agencies. (Stoll, p.134)

Clearly, then, at least some Pentecostals in Latin America have reflected the same premillennialist beliefs prevalent during the inception of the movement in North America: “Thus verses about the kingdom—often quoted to agitate for social improvements—could be deleted from the present age and put into storage for the glorious period following Christ’s return” (Stoll, p.48).

Reinterpreting the Kingdom as Now and Not-Yet

There is a trend in Pentecostalism, however, to reinterpret the traditional Pentecostal understanding of the kingdom. This reformulated theology, especially prominent among Pentecostal scholars, borrows the idea common in liberation theology that there is a present and not-yet dimension to the kingdom of God. A persuasive and adroit explanation of the dual nature of the kingdom of God comes from Pentecostal Murray Dempster in an article entitled, “A Theology of the Kingdom—A Pentecostal Contribution” (Dempster, 1999).
In quintessential Pentecostal fashion Dempster gives prominence to the Holy Spirit in addressing the theological complexities of the kingdom of God. He draws on the work of Roger S. Stronstad, who has studied the continuity between the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts (also written by Luke): “Based on Stronstad’s work, it is possible to demonstrate that Luke linked church mission to the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost and antecedently to the proclamation of the kingdom of God in Jesus’ ministry. This Pentecost/kingdom linkage that undergirds Luke’s theology of church mission comes to light when Stronstad’s claim is acknowledged that Luke’s gospel and Luke’s acts constitute two volumes of a single theological treatise” (Dempster, 1999, p.49). Since Luke’s gospel describes Jesus being “anointed” by the Holy Spirit for ministry and the book of Acts details the transfer of the Spirit to the disciples, Dempster draws a further connection between Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God and the mission of the Christian Church: “Luke made clear in his prologue in the Acts that the church continued to do and teach those things which Jesus began to do and teach (Acts 1:1). The eschatological concept of the kingdom of God was the focal point of all things that Jesus began to do and teach” (Dempster, p.50). Dempster attempts to harmonize the various sayings of Jesus regarding the kingdom, because in certain passages Jesus claims that the kingdom of God has come but He is equally adamant in other instances that the kingdom is in the future:

Jesus declared that it was not that the present historical moment was moving into the future of God’s reign. Rather, it was the reign of God that belonged to the future that was moving into the present. The imagery that Jesus used was that the future eschatological kingdom was pressing against the time line of this age. It
was the kairos moment—a new era was dawning. The time was fulfilled, the
kingdom of God was breaking into the present moment

And, Jesus said, as the kingdom pressed into this age, people could press
against it and already experience the transforming power of God’s messianic
salvation. (Dempster, p.57)

Thus, in Dempster’s view, people become part of the kingdom by placing themselves
under the gracious rule and reign of God:

To come under God’s reign is to become part of an eschatological people—a
people of God who live in the present age by the future kingdom ‘not yet’
consummated. Within this theological context, the ethical teachings of Jesus are
designed to create a people who provide a visible witness in the present age of
what the future will look like. (Dempster, p. 58)

Latin American and Hispanic Pentecostal scholars have plenty to say about the concrete
shape that the ethics of the kingdom should take in individual lives, church life, and in
society at large.

Prophetic Pentecostal Visions of the Kingdom in Latin America

First, progressive Pentecostals in Latin America draw attention to testimonies of
the rank and file of Latin American Pentecostalism that suggest a this-worldly response
to conversion. Juan Sepúlveda, for example, affirms,

. . . Chilean Pentecostals generally do not retreat from the world. When a
Pentecostal convert testifies that he ‘left the world,’’ he isn’t saying that he left
society. Rather, he is saying that he has abandoned the world that made up his previous life. But this ‘new life’ must be lived in this world, because this is where he must now bear testimony to having been made new (Sepulveda, 1996, para.36).

Furthermore, Sepúlveda believes that it is difficult to make a distinction between the Pentecostal hope for the future and the joy of the present; both kinds of expectation, he believes, are indivisibly linked:

Pentecostal testimony doesn’t compare the present with the future, but the present with the past, a present of salvation versus a past of perdition. The preacher announces that this same experience is within reach of anyone listening if she sincerely wants it because, not long ago, the preacher himself was in the place of the listener. Although Chilean Pentecostalism is certainly not disinterested in the hereafter, the novelty of the Pentecostal gospel is that the hereafter can actually be lived in the here and now. (Sepúlveda, 1996, para.38)

Sepúlveda is, however, forthright that while the Pentecostal conversion to Jesus and His kingdom are expected to have present ramifications for the believer, kingdom ethics and blessings are not necessarily understood as being available to non-believers: “God’s promises (fulfilled eschatology) are usually understood to apply only to the lives of the converted, not to society in general” (Sepúlveda, 1996). Thus many progressive Pentecostals are assuming responsibility to convince both co-religionists and observers that a faith immersed in the Holy Spirit can and should produce dynamic agents for social justice.
Some Pentecostal scholars, like Eldin Villafañe argue for an addendum to the notion that the kingdom of God is made evident on earth by those Christians who follow the ethical pattern of Jesus; according to Villafañe the (partial) rule and reign of God on this earth can be seen anywhere (not just in Christians circles) that the values of the kingdom of God are expressed:

The Holy Spirit as Parakletos is helping to bring God’s Reign to completion. It is present in the world to convict of sin, righteousness, and judgement. It is present in the charismatic renewal of the church in and for the world. The Spirit is present as a ‘Helper’ wherever good, love, peace, justice – Signs of the Reign – are manifested in our world. (Villafañe, 1993, p.183)

Other progressive Pentecostals, like Róger Cabezas, insist that Christians should not only recognize the ways that God is building the kingdom apart from church activity, but to also participate with the Holy Spirit in the “construction of the kingdom of God, which ‘is justice, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit’” (Cabezas, 1992, 165).

Indeed, this latter point is of particular relevance to Latin American Pentecostals because of mystical concepts such as spiritual warfare. Similar to many spiritist religious forms in Latin America, Pentecostalism can lend itself to magical interpretations of reality—the world is considered to be in a perpetual cosmic clash between spiritual forces of good and evil. Thus some Pentecostals use their perceived gifts of the Holy Spirit to wage war exclusively in the spiritual realm. Villafañe laments this approach to Pentecostalism: “As typical of the contemplative strand of spirituality, this spiritual warfare against the flesh, the world and the devil (Ephesians 2:2-3) tends to be seen in individualistic terms” (Villafane, p.170). To counter what could be perceived as evasive
and escapist approaches to reality progressive Pentecostal scholars stress the tangible action that is necessary to contribute to the kingdom of God.

Miguel Angel Casco is perhaps the most insistent in his attempts to disabuse fellow Pentecostals of inordinate attention to the kind of spiritual warfare that does not manifest in concrete action:

The reality around us becomes a cry of the Holy Spirit, who convicts and moves us to repentance when we are indifferent to that reality. The Spirit wants to act in the world through our hands, our lips, our feet, and by way of all our actions; He wants to make us conscious of the fact that the work of the Holy Spirit is not carried out by instantaneous magic, but by concrete action through the hands of those who love God and walk in the liberty of the Spirit. Because the love of God and freedom of people is the liberating truth of the Kingdom of God. (Casco, 1992, p.195)

Perhaps a fusion of the two concepts—spiritual warfare and sociopolitical activism—would be in order. That way the popular religious belief in a cataclysmic struggle between good and evil could energize adherents for a tireless struggle against social and political injustice. Patently, for a conglomeration of that kind to occur in Latin American Pentecostalism social and political injustices would need to be conceived as something more than unfortunate realities; indeed structural maladies would have to be denounced as sinful and evil.

Hence progressive Pentecostals are expanding the notion of personal sin to include social and structural sin. Once again Eldin Villafañe’s writings strike a particularly relevant chord: “It is within the framework of the ongoing cosmic conflict
between God and Satan, and the restraining power of the Holy Spirit, that any discussion of sin – particularly in its powerful and mysterious (secret) structural or institutional manifestations – must be set” (Villafañe, p.174). He adds a succinct explanation of the resulting alloy of spiritualism and activism:

All social structures and institutions “have moral values embedded in them. They can be good or evil.” To speak of sinful structures and institutions is to speak of structures and institutions that have become distorted, misguided, destructive or oppressive. As such they are in need of liberation – by dismantling, reconstruction, transformation, revolution or ‘exorcism’ – by human and divine power (Villafañe, p.175-176).

If such a conception of liberation is taken up at the grassroots of Latin American Pentecostalism, then the idea of church mission will be significantly altered in those circles.

It seems that progressive Pentecostals have already laid down the theological tracks on which such faith-infused social action could ride. Traditional Pentecostals have seen the mission of the church as saving souls; that is, preaching the gospel of Jesus in such a dynamic way that people will be persuaded to accept Him personally as Lord and Savior. Most often the miraculous—particularly healing—has been seen as an essential ingredient in sparking conversion and thus the combination of proclamation and miraculous demonstration of the gospel has been considered “integrated evangelism.” The prophetic Pentecostals are building on this approach. Maritz Leon of Venezuela, for example, affirms:
We have not abandoned the traditionally integrated way of evangelization but we have enriched it in a contextualized perspective of Jesus Christ in our communities. Thus we can nurture the two dimensions, not from the point of view of a sectarian ecclesiastical organization but deeply rooted in the spiritual, social and cultural structures which form the space of our struggles and victories.

(Léon, 1994, para.6)

And Leon believes that as the Pentecostal vision of the kingdom of God (or kingdom of heaven as she refers to it) at the grassroots level expands to include social justice, Pentecostals will experience a newfound empowerment for service:

When believers feel they are subjects participating actively in the extension of the Kingdom of Heaven they adopt the attitude of praise in the complex reality in which they live, because this is part of the mission. And they begin to understand that it is not the organized church which fills temples through the appeal of its programs but the Holy Spirit making living temples of those who were human wrecks of sin, pain, misery and oppression; penetrating all layers of life and making us accept that the key point is to take the Divine Design with human support, and not the human plan which seeks divine sustenance. (Léon, para.1 of section “A Pentecostal Perspective From Situations of Conflict”)

Furthermore, she describes the sociopolitical conflicts that inevitably arise when the kingdom of God is proclaimed and evidenced in religious, social and political dimensions:

The Divine Design goes on amidst opposition: Jesus himself was sent out in the midst of total opposition, in the family, in the society (he was called a son of
adultery), in the political realm (he represented another kingdom with another system, whereas Herod was the link with the system of the world which Christ came to break down) . . . and above all this he brought integral liberation with the sword of the Spirit . . . (Leon, para.25)

Prophetic Pentecostals believe that the message of the kingdom of God is synonymous with what they call “integral liberation.” Thus the liberating kingdom becomes the dominant motif in interpreting all Scripture—especially such beloved Pentecostal Biblical books as Acts. In referring to the second chapter of the book of Acts, prophetic Pentecostal Daniel Chiquete Beltrán proposes that “the concept of liberation is the fundamental theological key for unlocking this portion of Scripture” (Beltrán, 2002).

In summary, prophetic Pentecostals seem to have rejected the early Pentecostal formulation of the kingdom of God. They have built on the present and not/yet aspects of the kingdom delineated by Pentecostal theologians like Murray Dempster. While they generally refrain from making definitive statements about pre or postmillennialism, the accent they place on the present dimension of the kingdom of God implicitly suggests an adherence to postmillennialism. Hence, like liberation theologians, prophetic Pentecostals admonish Christians to participate in the construction of the reign of God on earth. The mission of the Pentecostal is thus broadened from soul winning, to both individual and structural evangelism. Not only does sin dwell in people, prophetic Pentecostals claim, but it is also imbedded in social structures. It is the Holy Spirit’s task, using people as cooperative and participatory vessels, to eradicate both kinds. This way, through integral liberation, the kingdom is made manifest.
Chapter Seven

We Are One in the Spirit: The Role of Ecumenism in Prophetic Latin American Pentecostalism.

Throughout history Christianity has been stretched and pulled in various directions by multifarious religious denominations and orders. Examples of division within Christendom are legion: there was the split between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy as well as a subsequent splintering of the Western form of the faith into Catholicism and Protestantism. Disparate visions of the essence of the faith have manifested in sometimes gruesome struggles between competing groups, all calling themselves Christian. From the 1960s into the early 1990s in Latin America, for example, Catholic supporters of liberation theology struggled (sometimes violently) against oppressive dictatorships that were often backed by conservative forces in the Roman Catholic Church.

And of course Protestantism has proved to be especially atomistic, not least in its Latin American forms. Nonetheless, progressive Pentecostal scholars are proclaiming that God is moving by His Spirit to bring unity to His Church. They are developing a distinctly Pentecostal contribution to ecumenism that is rooted in a two-pronged work of the Spirit: multi-denominational participation in the gifts of the Holy Spirit and Christian cooperation through social activism. Nevertheless, considering the often intense religious rivalries found in Latin America, these progressive Pentecostals have a daunting task before them; it is a challenge, however, that they seem eager to tackle.
Indeed, maintaining a semblance of Christian unity in Latin America has proved to be a particularly tricky endeavor. Many Catholics have resented what they perceive as an invasion of sects from outside the region. Signs hang on Latin American homes testifying to the owner’s Catholic faith and explaining that she is not interested in converting from her religion. Such displays bespeak the competition between Protestantism and Catholicism in Latin America. For their part, Evangelical Christians resent being lumped in the same category as Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses, who most Evangelicals consider to be cults. But Pope John Paul II continues to raise concern about “the sects” in Latin America, rarely offering a clear explanation of who is talking about. Many Evangelical Protestants ruefully assume that the holy finger is being pointed in their direction (Stoll, 1990, p.40).

It is not surprising then that, given the hostilities between Catholics and Protestants in Latin America, some Evangelicals are at least finding unity in defining themselves by what they are not: Catholic.

“Here in Nicaragua you’re either Catholic or Protestant,” an evangelical leader declared in 1985. “We don’t consider Catholics to be Christians and so we try to win them to our faith. They feel the same way about us. So anything calling itself ecumenical doesn’t have much behind it.” (Stoll, p.31)

Still, the fact that Latin American Pentecostals have friendly relations with other Evangelical churches is a stride that can not be taken too lightly; for Pentecostals have been frequently shunned by other Christians and have also maintained a significant degree of insularity throughout much of their history. That Pentecostals have had difficulty finding common ground with other Christians seems ironic considering the
ecumenical vision of its beginnings. The Pentecostal movement was initially made up of a collection of believers drawn mainly from holiness churches. Originally, there were no plans to create a Pentecostal denomination and the movement itself was referred to by the inclusive term Apostolic. Thus Walter Hollenweger affirms that “Pentecostalism started in most places as an ecumenical renewal movement in the mainline churches.” (Hollenweger, 1997, p.334). The spiritual vitality of the Pentecostal awakening was expected to breathe new life into the universal Christian Church. The man who many consider the founder of Pentecostalism, William Joseph Seymour (1870-1922), testified to the early Pentecostal message of unity:

“Apostolic Faith doctrine means one accord, one soul, one heart. May God help every child of His to live in Jesus’ prayer: ‘That they all may be one, as Thou, Father, are in Me and I in Thee, that they may all be one in us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me.’ Praise God! O how my heart cries out to God in these days that He would make every child of His see the necessity of living in the 17th chapter of John, that we may be one in the body of Christ, as Jesus has prayed.” (Bundy, 1999, para.10)

The unity expressed in the infancy of the movement was not to last, however, and Pentecostalism eventually experienced palpable growing pains.

**Challenges to Ecumenism in Early Pentecostal History**

While many Pentecostals were at first enthusiastic about the blurring of racial divisions at Azusa street—even claiming that “the color line was washed by the blood”
(Nathan)—the movement quickly proved vulnerable to racial prejudice. Pentecostal attempts to live out their faith in multi-racial harmony were stymied by intractable social norms. The press harped on the fact that some black Pentecostal preachers were baptizing white women. William Seymour was even “named as an aggravating factor in several high profile divorces because of these baptisms” (Bundy, 1999, para.18).

“Inevitably the above discrimination and cultural biases led to the separation of many Black Pentecostals and indigenous peoples from White Pentecostal structures” (Nathan, 1999, para.4). Hence Pentecostalism became a segregated Christian institution that could not manage formal racial reconciliation in the U.S. until 1994 (Hollenweger, 1997, p.39).

If Pentecostals had trouble maintaining internal unity, relations with non-Pentecostal denominations were even more strained. The Fundamentalists for example denounced Pentecostalism as a heterodox movement plagued with religious excess. In yet another ironic historical turn of events, however, white Pentecostal denominations, such as the Assemblies of God, sought fraternal relations with the Fundamentalists and their descendents, the Evangelicals. The Pentecostals made significant alterations to their theology to appease their Fundamentalist and Evangelical brethren:

The Assemblies of God (USA) identified with the burgeoning National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) . . . This organization . . . was dominated by anti-intellectual, anti-Holiness, anti-Pentecostal, and anti-Catholic Fundamentalist influences. It was through the influence of J. Roswell Flower that the Assemblies of God began to associate with the NAE. However, it was especially the ascension of Thomas Zimmerman to General Superintendent of the denomination which brought the Assemblies of God into the Fundamentalist orbit with its
radical antipathy for the World Council of Churches. Zimmerman arranged for the Assemblies of God to change its creed for the only time in history, to incorporate Fundamentalist elements. (Bundy, para.38)

So while white Pentecostals found a fairly amiable partner in Evangelicalism, they lost a host of other potential Christian alliances from the WCC.

There were some Pentecostals, however, who tried to rescue the ecumenical foundations of the Pentecostal movement. Perhaps the most notable figure in this vein was David du Plessis (1905-1987). The South African was a leading figure in global Pentecostalism and served “as Secretary of the World Pentecostal Conference until 1958” (Bundy). His ecumenical efforts were facilitated by the Charismatic renewal. The eruption of interest in Pentecostal practices during the 1960 and 1970s among Christians from the Roman Catholic Church and the historic Protestant bodies created a kind of ecumenism of the Spirit. This created unprecedented opportunities for Pentecostals to dialogue as well as worship with other Christians. David du Plessis, for example, “had been active in Vatican II and had mentored a generation of Pentecostal leaders throughout the world. The last fifteen years of his life were focused on the Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue” (Bundy, para.42). But ecumenical Pentecostals like David du Plessis suffered immense backlash from fellow-Pentecostals for their interest in opening Pentecostalism to other Christian traditions. For example, when a Pentecostal named Donald Gee dared to test uncharted ecumenical waters in an editorial for an international periodical called “Pentecost,” the reaction in many Pentecostal circles was hardly jubilant. He “began a discussion of the World Council of Churches Assembly in Amsterdam, which he attended as an observer, with a positive reference to Karl Barth.
The report and the comment were condemned by anti-ecumenicals within the American Assemblies of God” (Bundy, para.31). So much for unity in the Spirit.

**Latin American Pentecostal Ecumenism**

Thus before progressive Latin American Pentecostals emerged on the scene, there was minimal historical precedent for concerted Pentecostal efforts toward ecumenism. That changed when two socially active autochthonous Pentecostal churches in Chile caught the attention of ecumenical Christians: “In 1961, the first Pentecostal churches joined the WCC: the Iglesia Pentecostal de Chile and the Misión Iglesia Pentecostal . . .” (Bundy, para.47) A Pentecostal minister turned Swiss Reformed Pastor named Walter Hollenweger played a pivotal role in extending the links between ecumenical Protestants and Pentecostals.

Eventually his efforts began to bear results. In 1969, the Igreja Evangélica Pentecostal ‘O Brasil para Cristo’ joined the WCC. Following suit were the Iglesia de Dios (Argentina) which became a member in 1980 . . . and the Iglesia de Misiones Pentecostales de Chile in 1990. In addition, other Pentecostal churches established relationships with mainline churches. For example the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has had long term relationships with five Latin American Pentecostal Churches: (1) Unión Evangélica Pentecostal Venezolana; (2) Iglesia Cristiana Pentecostal de Cuba; (3) Iglesia de Dios, Argentina; (4) Iglesia Pentecostal de Chile; and, (5) Misión Cristiana Unida Pentecostal de Nicaragua. (Bundy, para.48)

Nevertheless, many Pentecostal churches in Latin America continue to eschew ecumenical relations and avoid such perceived mixture at all costs (Shaull, & Cesar, 2000, p.96). Hence, the importance of progressive Pentecostal scholarship to provide theological reinforcement for those Pentecostal churches that are making the plunge into the kind of ecumenism that surpasses conservative Evangelical and Pentecostal fraternizing. Also if the sophisticated scholarship of Latin American Pentecostals can be appropriated and consolidated at the grass-roots level, then churches that were formally reluctant to branch out into the ecumenical realm may be motivated to take such steps.

The 1987 “Letter of Valencia” of the Venezuelan Evangelical Penteocostal Union seems to confirm such potential. In the letter “this church justifies its option for the poor and its ecumenical practice” (Shaull, & Cesar, p.98):

> We do not deny our identity with these actions. But we affirm that we are not sectarian. Sects are hermetically closed and dogmatic groups that believe that they possess the absolute truth and are closed to dialogue. We believe in the ecumenical spirit that calls us to Christian fellowship and to interconfessional dialogue, and that impels us to accept each other as members of the same body—the Universal Church . . . . We shall continue to affirm our openness to dialogue . . . while maintaining our Pentecostal peculiarities (Shaull, & Cesar, p.98)

Indeed progressive Latin American Pentecostals contend that if churches attune their spiritual ears to the voice of the Spirit they will hear Him encouraging them to
jettison sectarianism. Prophetic Latin American Pentecostals affirm that “the Holy Spirit (in terms of fruit, miracles, signs and wonders) has broken down dividing walls.” (Cabezas, 1992, p.171). Gamaliel Lugo thus insists that

... ecumenical Pentecostalism is not based on well-defined and rigid doctrine, but rather in communal experience. It is especially rooted in community based communication that surpasses barriers of education, skin color, and nationality ... it is not true that we Pentecostals are by definition sectarian ... (Cabezas, 1992, p.171)

_The Spirituality of Ecumenism_

Thus just as progressive Pentecostals in Latin America propagate a hermeneutic of experience they likewise champion an ecumenism of experience. “‘What Pentecostals are offering to the ecumenical movement is a _spirituality_ of ecumenism—a universal rediscovery of the Spirit for all Christian denominations’” (Shaull, & Cesar, p.106). Given the preponderance of Pentecostal worship styles and Charismatic phenomena in such seemingly traditional churches as the Mennonites in Latin America, progressive Pentecostals can persuasively argue that the same Spirit is being celebrated in historic Protestant churches as is being glorified in the Pentecostal congregations. Róger Cabezas, for example, insists, “The Holy Spirit is the property of no one. He acts how he wants and when he wants. He is not confined by any boundaries; whether one is talking about the borders of time, space, race, Church, creed, language, or structure ...”
(Cabezas, 1992, p.177) Accordingly, the perpetual fracturing of Protestant churches is contrary to the express will of God:

We can not conceive of a Church in which the Holy Spirit is dwelling and leading, yet is torn apart into a thousand denominations. This is completely contrary to the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit unites together in love the body of Christ, which is the Church. (Méndez, 1992, p.209)

And for greater emphasis he adds, “The Spirit of God never divides . . . .” (Méndez, p.212)

Interestingly, some progressive Pentecostals put a more providential spin on the atomizing tendency of Pentecostalism. Maritza Léon, for example, identifies the ecumenical potential built in to a church that is constantly splitting and reproducing itself. New congregations can be disseminated into new areas of society:

Pentecostal communities suffer internal situations of conflict which lead to divisions and split the congregations, but the Holy Spirit makes use of the opportunity to enter into all the cracks of our world so that the salt of the earth and the light of the world penetrate and enter into communion with those who are in need, and it is there that ecumenical relations are forged. (Léon, 1994, point 4 of “suggested conclusions”)

A prophetic Pentecostal congregation in Chile called the MIP serves as an example that when Pentecostals with ecumenical sensibilities leave a church and start their own ecclesiastical initiative they feel more freedom to instill faith-based sociopolitical ethics in fellow congregants. Also, it should be noted that Leon is not proposing a divine sanction for internal religious divisions. Rather she seems to be saying that God in His
providence is so intent on building ecumenical relations that less a particular church become intransigent in its sectarianism, He allows it to divide so that the resulting congregations have a greater chance for theological reformulation.

Regardless of how a given progressive Pentecostal approaches the issue of internal Church division, they have reached consensus that multi-denominational experience of the power of the Holy Spirit can edify the broader Christian Church. This spiritual ecumenism is, they propose, especially manifest among the poor. In keeping with their liberationist influences, progressive Pentecostals stress God’s bias for the poor in social, political, and especially religious matters. Thus progressive Pentecostals in Latin America claim that ecstatic spiritual expressions are most likely to occur among the poor, since they are the specially favored of the Holy Spirit. Senia Pilco, for example, proclaims:

The Pentecostal movement is not exclusive to one particular group. Rather it grows out of the experience of a group of believers from the marginalized class. They experience revivals and manifestations of the Holy Spirit by way of glossollalia, healings and miracles. This phenomenon transcends denominational barriers. The spiritual gifts are emphasized to such an extent that it creates a spiritual ferment in different churches and movements. (Pilco, 1992, p.245)

Hence the marginalized and oppressed are the pivotal actors in the progressive Pentecostal model of the ecumenism of the Spirit.
Ecumenism of Social Action

Nevertheless, progressive Pentecostals espouse more than just an ecumenism of common spiritual fervor. An equally essential aspect is social activism. Gabriel Vaccaro affirms:

We believe in the necessity of working from a feeling of solidarity that is both pastoral and comforting. The permanent disenfranchisement of the popular class by the powerful; growing dehumanization; and the marginalization of the poor, of women, of indigenous peoples, of anyone different, demands that these groups be given more than institutional discourses. What is needed is the concrete practice (praxis) of liberating love; the kind of love that commits wholeheartedly to hurting and suffering people. (Vaccaro, 1992, p.225)

And “‘social involvement is one of the chief routes to ecumenical awareness’” (Waldo, & Cesar, p.97). Prophetic Pentecostals recognize that the enormity of this task requires cooperative ecumenical participation with other Christians. “Therefore Christians have the inescapable responsibility of working . . . diligently, without reservation, for the kingdom of God . . . .” (Cabezas, 1992, p.171)

Non-Pentecostal Contributions to Latin American Pentecostal Ecumenism

As in most Latin American dances, it takes at least two parties for ecumenism to function. At the same time that progressive Pentecostals are making overtures to historic Protestant churches, so too are historic Protestants looking at Pentecostals in a brand new
light. One of the most striking examples of historic Protestants reinterpreting Pentecostalism comes from Richard Shaull and Waldo Cesar in their work, *Pentecostalism and the Future of the Christian Churches: Promises, Limitations, Challenges*. Shaull is professor emeritus of ecumenics at Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey, and Waldo Cesar is retired from research at the Institute for the Study of Religion in Rio de Janeiro. Both suggest that historic Protestants should repent for elitist attitudes and recognize the unique religious and social contributions that Pentecostalism has to offer both the universal Christian Church and Latin American society. Cesar, for example, surmises that while progressive Christians and traditional Pentecostals take different approaches to social problems, perhaps both models are equally viable and effective in their own ways:

If on the one hand we have the concern of some ecclesiastical currents for a new social order, economic development, a healthy environment and so forth, in the Pentecostal sphere on the other hand what prevails are the day-to-day issues—personal health, work, housing, a search for a place in society, migration, and survival. This does not mean that these later problems are completely absent from the more specially privileged churches, or that the other issues are not incorporated . . . into the simplicity of a doctrine that emphasizes sanctification and spirituality. The difference—and perhaps also the convergence—is in the way in which the people, in their religious experience, deal with the afflictions of life and submit them to the same Lord of the church. (Shaull, & Cesar, p.101)

This, however, raises a question about the role of the progressive Pentecostal. Could progressive Pentecostals who are taking up the cause of “a new social order, economic
development” etc., perhaps be losing touch with the unique ways that traditional
Pentecostalism satisfies the quotidian exigencies of Latin American life? Some of
Richard Shaull’s conclusions about the socially transformative potential of traditional
Latin American Pentecostalism may give pause to progressive Pentecostal scholars.
There is always the risk that progressive Pentecostals will borrow theologies of social
justice from other traditions (albeit assimilated in a uniquely Pentecostal package) at the
expense of losing some of the unique spiritual vitality of the Pentecostal tradition.

According to Shaull, the potential for Pentecostalism to transform Latin American
society is substantial. He insists that Latin American Pentecostals “have demonstrated
their ability to reach and convert vast numbers of the most impoverished and broken
people who, because of their social position, have the strongest desire to change the
existing order of things in the direction of greater equality and justice” (Shaull, & Cesar,
p.211). Instead of calling on Pentecostals to imitate the theology of historic churches,
Shaull insists that it is progressive Christians who have much to learn from their
Pentecostal brethren:

As we have affirmed repeatedly, they are presenting us with a new interpretation
of and experience of the Christian faith, which could contribute to the
development of a new paradigm from which to re-create our theology and orient
and motivate a more dynamic response to the growing crisis of our society

If this is the case, then we enter into dialogue with them not from the
security of our position, but rather with the recognition that, as we relate to them,
we might be radically changed. (Shaull, & Cesar, p.213)
But Shaull insists that this interchange can only occur if Pentecostals are understood on their own terms:

For this to happen, it will be imperative for us to allow them to open our eyes to the reality of their faith as understood, experienced and lived by them. As we do this, we will probably not be converted to their position, but we may find ourselves struggling to articulate a new paradigm that is authentic for us, our history, and our situation. (p.213)

Hence the progressive Pentecostal in Latin America may prove to be an essential bridge between the traditional segments of Pentecostalism in Latin America and historical Protestants and Catholics who are beginning to seek understanding of the movement. Shaull affirms that “what we are going to see . . . is a growing commitment, in Pentecostal circles, to the poor and their struggle which will need a solid theological foundation to sustain it” (Shaull, & Cesar, p.217). It seems that progressive Pentecostals are well on their way to providing that theological sustenance. The overriding pneumatic motif in their treatment of hermeneutics, history, the kingdom of God and even ecumenism make the progressive Pentecostal scholar a potentially qualified interpreter of Pentecostal experience for Christians outside the movement. Shaull explains,

For us, what this means specifically is that we must be willing to start with the witness and centrality of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our experience of the faith and our reflection on it: the Spirit that spoke through the prophets; the Spirit that filled the life of Jesus leading him to identify himself with the poor and excluded and empowering his mighty works as signs of the coming reign of God . . . .” (Shaull, & Cesar, p.213)
Hence through ecumenical activity progressive Pentecostals in Latin America may not only reform their own tradition but deeply impact other Christian traditions for which they can translate Pentecostal social responsibility. That the WCC has offered “decisive” financial support for progressive Pentecostal publishing in both print and on the internet indicates that some non-Pentecostals are hopeful that the progressive Pentecostal will have success in her interpretive role (Alvarez, “Presentación,” 1992, p.14).
Chapter Eight

From Theory to Practice: The Interplay between Prophetic Pentecostal Theology and Sociopolitical Attitudes and Behavior at the Grassroots

The preceding exploration of the development of Pentecostal socio-political thought raises the question as to what extent these educated and erudite scholars will impact the marginalized, often uneducated, sometimes indigent masses of Pentecostal believers. In addressing this question I will rely heavily on the most thorough study to date of progressive Pentecostalism at the grassroots level, *Prophetic Pentecostalism in Chile: A Case Study on Religion and Development Policy* (1998), by Frans H. Kamsteeg. Kamsteeg provides ample narrative accounts of Chilean Pentecostals interacting with progressive Pentecostal theology in both ecclesiastical and broader community settings.

I will address the four themes of progressive Pentecostal theology that I have detailed thus far—hermeneutics, the kingdom of God, history, and ecumenism—and utilize Kamsteeg’s documentation to assess how such theological developments have impacted lay people in the churches in which a theology of social concern has been implemented. Furthermore I will discuss both the failures and successes of prophetic Pentecostalism in terms of its reception among the rank and file of Latin American Pentecostalism. In treating specific incidents from Kamsteeg’s account, I will discuss ways that progressive Pentecostal thought could have been used to mitigate the confusion sometimes attendant to religious change. In addition, I will suggest avenues of theological exploration that progressive Pentecostals could cover more comprehensively in their attempts to reform Latin American Pentecostalism.
There is evidence to suggest that Pentecostal theological institutes in Latin America have already been instrumental in fomenting and buttressing the socio-political commitment of some Pentecostal churches. In addressing “The Social Consciousness and Involvement of the Full Gospel Church of God of Guatemala,” Richard E. Waldrop affirms that “there yet exists a greed need to continue to develop a soundly biblical basis for social awareness and involvement. This would strengthen the sorely needed incarnational dimension to an otherwise reasonably healthy growth” (Waldrop, 1997, para.3). He also highlights, however, the headway that Pentecostal theological education has achieved in molding the socio-political thought and practice of the churches:

In 1979, the Proyecto Evangélico de Servicio a la Comunidad (Evangelical Community Service Project) was founded under the auspices of the Bible Institute (Guatemala Center for Practical Theology), the principal theological institution of the Full Gospel Church of God of Guatemala. This organization has been responsible for a number of community service projects such as medical clinics, personal and community health campaigns, home improvement programs, children’s feeding programs, and nursery facilities. (Waldrop, 1997)

Furthermore, he shows how the theological institute worked to integrate the new emphasis on social concern with a biblical foundation.
During that same year of 1979, the Guatemalan Center for Practical Theology conducted its first seminar on social involvement in conjunction with the Christian relief and development agency, World Vision of Guatemala. Also, the first formal course was offered in Christian Social Ministry by the Bible Institute during the academic year of 1979. The course had previously been approved for inclusion into the theological curriculum by the National Theological Education Committee. (Waldrop, 1997)

At least in Guatemala, then, contributions from socially conscious Pentecostals have exceeded merely theoretical developments and have initiated practical strategies for socio-political commitment.

There is similar evidence of progressive Pentecostalism taking root in certain Venezuelan churches. According to progressive Pentecostal Gamaliel Lugo, the Mesa Alta church in Venezuela is emblematic of the ways that evangelistic fervor can spill over into a concern for meeting social and material needs:

It is situated in a campesino settlement of Mesa Alta, which is in the highland region of Portuguese Guanare city. In this settlement we initiated an evangelistic work through the efforts of a campesino family that was attending the church that we have in the [main] city. The work began to bear some good results and we constructed a simple storehouse that just has floors and a roof. In that very place, campesino children are gathering to receive primary education. The church of Mesa Alta has been transformed into not only a place of worship but also a center of education and literacy. (Lugo, 1992, p.119)
According to Lugo, this integration of personal evangelism and social activism did not happen by accident; rather such accomplishments can be attributed to grassroots theological approaches spurring and undergirding those initiatives:

By way of a program that we have called “Programa de Evangelización Integral y Desarrollo” (Integral Evangelism and Development Program) we have taken the first steps in an attempt to develop an integral and liberating evangelism. It is integral and liberating because it does not separate the spiritual from the material. Rather, it must take into account the social and spiritual condition of the human being. Churches should be places of worship and also places of service. They should promote individual salvation and the salvation of the world or society; all of this should be inspired by a faith in Jesus Christ, the son of God, who died and was raised again for humanity and all of creation. (Lugo, 1992, p.118)

Here we see the practical application of the kingdom of God. Lugo champions a kind of participatory spirituality that cooperates with God in the construction of His kingdom on earth. As noted in chapter six, for progressive Pentecostals the kingdom of God is understood to be evident in areas of life where people have adopted the ethics and values of Jesus. Thus the building of that kingdom involves more than just making converts; it requires manifesting the great reversal of Jesus kingdom—justice for the poor and downtrodden is made top priority in society. This concept is given more than just lip-service in the congregation that Lugo describes. He talks, for example, about the efforts that the Church has made to assist the indigenous and campesinos of an impoverished area in Venezuela known as Cabimitas. The community has apparently endured
tremendous hardships and their appeals to government officials for justice have often been met with apathy (Lugo, p.116). By contrast, Lugo insists that the Pentecostal church of Cabimitas is exerting every effort to bring justice to the people. He explains that the Church has assembled on various occasions since its establishment in 1973 to address the most pressing social concerns of the people of Cabimitas.

We have met to discuss the problem of transportation for this community. Its inhabitants have to walk up to twelve kilometers every time they need to go to the closest store to stock up on food. We managed to get transportation for them. A fiesta ensued. We have met various times to try and resolve the problems of education, health, housing and water. We have met for workshops on cooperatives and to analyze our suffering. We have met to thank God for the formation of a craftsmanship cooperative in which, although it is an initiative of the Church, other people from the community participate. We have met to give thanks to God because after having contacted other organizations . . . we managed to get a health centre . . . Likewise electricity has been acquired for the community. (Lugo, 1992, p.199)

Of particular import is Lugo’s declaration that social service is also rendered to those who do not belong to the community of faith. This is comprehensible only if the ethical imperative of the kingdom requires that all people be treated justly—regardless of their religious affiliation.

While Lugo has a decidedly positive take on the dissemination of progressive Pentecostalism to the grassroots, Frans Kamsteeg is much more cautious and ambivalent in treating this phenomenon. It is in Chile where prophetic Pentecostalism has had the
most demonstrative political results. To say that progressive Pentecostalism in Chile has manifested at times in overt social and political struggles, however, is not to suggest that scholars have always been keenly aware of such activity. Hence Kamsteeg’s research is innovative; it is thanks to his copious documentation of the accounts of people affiliated with prophetic Pentecostalism in Chile that an assessment can be made about the interplay between theology and sociopolitical attitudes in progressive Pentecostalism.

Kamsteeg’s study focuses on a prophetic Pentecostal denomination known as Misión Iglesia Pentecostal-Pentecostal Mission Church (MIP). Kamsteeg narrows his scope further by reserving a detailed examination for just the MIP church of an area known as La Victoria in Santiago, Chile. His cursory study of an IMP church (Iglesia Metodista Pentecostal-Pentecostal Methodist Church) in the same area only serves as a point of contrast between progressive Pentecostalism and the traditional form. The MIP of La Victoria is considered to be one of the most progressive of all the prophetic Pentecostal churches in Chile. Nevertheless, what Kamsteeg found amongst its congregants was a heterogeneous mix of sociopolitical attitudes and behaviors. Some members expressed a remarkable social and political commitment, while others seemed to hang on to a traditional Pentecostalism that focused more on explicitly spiritual matters. There was also a sizeable middle group that seemed ambivalent and pragmatic in their approach to prophetic Pentecostalism.
Nevertheless, the history of the MIP of La Victoria is an illuminating picture that shines light on why and how some Pentecostal churches in Latin America translate spiritual fervency into an aggressive commitment to progressive social and political causes. The La Victoria MIP church, like so many Pentecostal churches, was birthed as a result of a church split. A group of relatively well-educated parishioners grew exasperated with what they felt was the excessive reliance on spiritual spontaneity in their IEP congregation (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.99). In the view of the disaffected, the preaching lacked depth and was bereft of theological sophistication. Notably many of the 120 members who would eventually leave the church were Sunday school teachers (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.99).

As one of the initial separatists declared,

“The pick of the bunch left: there was an ordained pastor, the head of the Sunday School department, the head of the Youth Group, several members of the church council, almost the complete body of teachers and also some lay men who were running an annex of the main church . . . . Their educational level was also above average.” (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.99-100)

These educated Pentecostals lamented the ways that preachers would justify a lack of knowledge—even confusion over where different books of the Bible were located—with a glib assurance that the Holy Spirit is more apt to speak through the ignorant (Kamsteeg, 97). The disenchanted members were quite knowledgeable, by contrast, and their growing interest in social concern, along with their general distaste with the autocratic
rule that they perceived in the local IEP, prompted their exit from the “mother church” in 1952 (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.99). Soon thereafter the MIP was formed. “Theology, ecumenism, and social action were the key words that gradually came to be associated with the MIP” (Kamsteeg, p.101). And, as Kamsteeg demonstrates, unique social and political currents in Chilean society during the 1960s and early 1970s were particularly conducive to sparking and in some ways solidifying a prophetic Pentecostalism.

Upon assuming the presidency of Chile in 1964 Eduardo Frei implemented a series of reformist measures including agrarian reform, increased tax collection for social spending, and state ownership of various industries. Also, he did much to improve “services in health, education, and housing, and encouraging wider participation in social and political organizations among the poor” (Kamsteeg, p.126). Kamsteeg adds, “Membership of the respective neighborhood organizations, and also of the agricultural cooperatives that grew out of the government’s land reform, rose spectacularly. Also, the membership of the traditional trade unions increased noticeably” (p.82). Thus there was an escalation of political and social action among the same social class base in which Pentecostals had been having the greatest evangelistic success. Some Pentecostals were radicalized by the increasingly polarized political climate of Chile. Other Pentecostals remained reluctant to get involved in anything that could be perceived as political, based on the traditional Pentecostal inclination to avoid all things “worldly.”

It was, however, after the military coup of September 11, 1973 that the dividing lines between progressive and traditional Pentecostalism became clearest. Protestant support for Pinochet was organized in a group called the "Consejo de Pastores." A number of Protestant denominations were represented in this organization but since they
composed eighty percent of the Protestant population of Chile it was the Pentecostals who were the most notable members. Despite a significant minority of Chilean Pentecostals who had supported Salvador Allende and were active both in opposition to Pinochet and in carrying out various social service ministries to the victims of the regime, the Pentecostals in the Consejo de Pastores were unflinching backers of Pinochet.

The main demonstration of the Consejo of Pastores' support for Pinochet was the Te Deum, celebrated from 1975 onward. This Thanksgiving service, officially held to commemorate Independence Day (September 18), always took place in the large (IMP) [Methodist Pentecostal Church] Evangelical Cathedral. Pinochet, himself a devout Catholic, attended this service, at which the regime's blessings for Chile were counted and “God's protection for the country's benefactor” was implored, until 1989. These meetings were broadcast nationwide, year after year, confirming the image that Pentecostalism was a strong pillar of Pinochet's regime. (Kamsteeg, 1999, p.198)

Hence, Kamsteeg declares, “In a way, then, the separation between different Pentecostal tendencies, which originated in the 1960s, became more marked after 1973” (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.95).

And nowhere was that separation as acute as in the town of La Victoria—a neighborhood that was born in political and social struggle. Kamsteeg describes the founding of the neighborhood of La Victoria:

. . . on October 30, 1957, at dawn, hundreds of families from a very precarious, overpopulated, and fire-afflicted settlement called Zanjón de la Aguada (on the fringe of the Santiago municipality) started to occupy the semiagrarian area of La
Feria. To avoid alarming the police, they even wrapped up the wheels of the carts on which they had loaded their properties; after some days it became evident that around two thousand families had settled on the spot. The invaders immediately started a process of negotiation with the city authorities over their case for acquiring proper housing. After a short period of uncertainty and fear of evacuation, the land invaders were permitted to stay on the occupied terrain. The squatter settlement was baptized La Victoria by the beginning of November 1957. (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.111)

In many ways, the MIP church of La Victoria reflects the neighborhood’s struggle for political and social rights. The youth of the church for example were very active in the national protests that took place from 1983 to 1985 (Kamsteeg, p.113). Furthermore, “Individual church members participated in neighbourhood associations and subsistence activities; in addition, the church itself also started a communal kitchen (olla común)” (Kamsteeg, p.113). The IMP church, by contrast, which sits only fifty meters from the MIP, has largely avoided social and political action, even during the tumultuous years of the Pinochet regime (1973-1990).

In the case of the MIP of La Victoria there seems to have been a dialectical relationship between theology and social concern. The MIP, for example, adopted a social doctrine in the early 1960s. The “biblical foundations” for this social concern were laid in a 1963 church document:

The social responsibility of the church is fully justified in the attempt to establish the best condition for this proclamation of the gospel . . . . These conditions not only comprise the freedom and right of proclamation, but also better social
circumstances in the actual world in order to increase susceptibility to the gospel. On the other hand, the social action should also be the consequence of the new life of the believers, producing good fruits and maintaining a living faith which is translated into works. (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.98)

That this document was based on a biblical passage from James 2:14-20 shows that involvement in social and political struggles not only produced new strains of Pentecostal social doctrine but, conversely, theology helped shape subsequent church-based social action. Kamsteeg documents the prominent role of theology in MIP churches:

At the level of doctrine, two major shifts took place within the young MIP. The emphasis on studying was strong from the start, and studying meant not only the “traditional” Sunday schools and Bible studies but also learning and theology teaching; preparing oneself theologically was also strongly encouraged at the academic level. Together with the Pentecostal IPCH [Iglesia Pentecostal de Chile] and other Protestant churches, in 1966 the MIP became involved in the establishment of the CTE, the first interchurch theology training center in Santiago, which now has several theologians among its members. (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.97)

Hence it is useful to examine the ways that MIP church members have responded to socially progressive theology.
Hermeneutic of Experience: Variations and Complications

That biblical passages in the MIP documents were used to buttress social concern in the church, bespeaks the reality that Scripture is expected to play a pivotal role in inspiring parishioners to contend for social justice. Hence the topic of Pentecostal hermeneutics—treated in chapter four of this thesis—is especially relevant. As demonstrated in chapter four, Pentecostal theology has often relied on a hermeneutic of experience. Often when Pentecostals approach a scriptural theme that seems to receive contradictory treatment in the Bible (i.e. the role of women in the New Testament church), they tend to weight those Scriptures that they perceive to most clearly align with their experiences of the Spirit. Hence a Church like the MIP of La Victoria, which is made up of members of varying and sometimes disparate sociopolitical experience, will have multiple Biblical interpretations that at best appear as polyphony and at worst as a discordant choir with clashing musical styles:

On a Sunday morning in May (1992) the church members get together to celebrate their weekly Sunday class. In contrast to most Chilean Pentecostal Sunday classes, the MIP custom is to assemble in small groups to concentrate on a particular theme dealt with in a guide. This morning the topic is the annual ceremony of the Te Deum held during the week Chile’s independence is celebrated and consists of an intercession for the country’s authorities and an evaluation of the past year. The Bible text related to the theme is from Mark 11:15-19, Jesus’ cleaning of the temple. The discussion that follows is heated; in particular two young men attack the Te Deum ceremony, which they believe has
served only to support the military regime, which neither God nor the Chilean people recognize as legitimate. They clearly understand the guide’s reference as the Pentecostal Te Deum, constituted in 1975 in the presence of General Pinochet. One of them even calls this a prostituted service for which a kind of temple cleaning would be very appropriate. Then an older brother asks why they, the youngsters, always have these severe criticisms? As he understands the Bible, “we ourselves are the temples, so the cleaning concerns us personally, our hearts and minds, our relation to God. Instead of talking about politics, we would do better refreshing our personal relationship with God,” he adds. (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.26-27)

Indeed it seems that there is great potential for hermeneutical variance between Pentecostal youth, some of whom demonstrably resisted the tyrannical government of Pinochet, and an older generation of Pentecostals who have known no such political involvement. “The La Victoria youth came of age in a Pentecostal church where they acquired many notions of a social gospel and relatively less of the spiritual fervor with which their parents had grown up, and which was found in other Pentecostal churches” (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.140). This lends further credence to the supposition that Pentecostal interpretations of Scripture are indeed colored by experience.

This is not to say that progressive Pentecostals only read the Scripture through the lens of whatever their individual experience happens to be. The prophetic Pentecostal hermeneutic of experience is intertwined with an a priori commitment to the dire needs of the poor. This is reflected in the following MIP testimony:
Even in our MIP there are churches with people for whom the only thing that counts is the spiritual, nothing to do with the outside world, only to save the soul, or something like that; I believe that is not correct, the Lord himself never withdrew from the world, He never held Himself back from situations which might lead to death, religious and political persecution; He was with the prostitutes, with sinners... how else could He have brought relief if He had not walked in darkness. If we do not follow that example, we should restudy the biblical lessons and then see what happens... Because if we go to the Old Testament, the prophet of God knew he would be persecuted and killed, but he accused the king and condemned his abuses, he never tapped on the shoulder of the king, but showed him the injustice... our church has to play the role of the prophet of the real God. Then the church becomes the voice of those who lack a voice, doing what others do not dare. (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.140)

**Competing Views of the Kingdom of God and Mission**

Just as progressive Pentecostals put a uniquely political spin on certain Biblical passages, so too do they imbue traditional emotive Pentecostal music with novel sociopolitical meaning. The pastor of the MIP in La Victoria, Erasmo Farfán, sung a song entitled “I’ve Got New Life (Tengo Vida Nueva)”—which in traditional Pentecostalism would refer to the “born-again” experience of conversion. While not completely dispensing with this classical interpretation of the song, the Pastor
emphasized the way that the lyrics should be understood in light of the progressive Pentecostal idea of the kingdom of God:

“... God sent Jesus to support us in the struggle for the new earth. Jesus came to us in the middle of the process which leads from the good creation to the new earth (and heaven). He gives us new life, which enables us to continue working for this better world instead of shutting ourselves off from it. That is the meaning of ‘knowing Jesus personally.’” That is also the meaning of the song Erasmo had sung before the start of his sermon. (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.152)

Indeed, the theme of the kingdom of God is prevalent in both the MIP discourse and practice. An MIP lay person named Juan attests to dynamic interplay between kingdom talk and kingdom action: “Jesus said that the Kingdom of heaven is among us, and that the Kingdom of the Lord should start here... I want to hear them saying: This Pentecostal preaches, but he also puts into practice what he says when he speaks of a better world” (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.131). The postmillennialist accent to kingdom theology is also evident in teaching resources designed for the progressive Pentecostal churches in Chile: “The specific activities should be understood as efforts aimed at the achievement of a new society, or ‘a new heaven and a new earth’” (Kamsteeg, p.183). Kamsteeg’s observations about his visit to the IMP church, located near the MIP of La Victoria, provide a stark contrast to the this-worldly emphasis of the kingdom discourse and practice of the MIP:

The church members confirm the sermon with lots of amens and hallelujahs. The musicians start playing and money is collected. Finally, we sing hymn number 279: Yo Sólo Espero Ese Día (I’m Just Waiting for the Day when Christ Will
Come). In the second stanza of the song is, “I’m no longer of this world; I belong to the kingdom of heaven.” It is the only time during my research I am reminded of Lalive d’Epinay’s characterization of Pentecostals as people who have withdrawn from this world. (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.156)

Still, while the IMP church does not seem to have embraced the liberationist stream of the gospel that is evident in the MIP, there are MIP church members who believe that their congregation needs to rescue some of the spiritual effervescence still found in the IMP. And I believe that their complaints represent a shortcoming in the reformation attempts of progressive Pentecostals.

As was demonstrated in chapter six of this thesis, the progressive Pentecostal reformulation of the kingdom of God influences the ways that the churches perceive mission. Some progressive Pentecostals scholars suggest the need for both a personal experience of conversion to Christ and a concomitant conversion to social liberation. It seems, however, that in practice progressive Pentecostal churches end up emphasizing the latter dimension at the expense of the former. Kamsteeg notes that in one year of his acquaintance with the MIP La Victoria church and its parishioners, there was only “one service with a clear evangelistic goal I ever witnessed in La Victoria; this feature continued to amaze me throughout my stay in Chile” (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.116). Some Pentecostal laymen in prophetic Pentecostal churches find that their appeals for a return to traditional Pentecostal evangelism fall on deaf ears. It is not that these discontented lay people want to dispense with the prophetic sociopolitical witness of their churches, but they long for greater balance between personal conversion and social liberation. A layman from the MIP claims, for example that
what is needed is a translation of “spirit into works.” “We are doing that in the teaching, in our social action work, but it also has to appear in proclamation. There we often stop at good intentions. First, we did street preaching, then we did it from door-to-door, but finally we also dropped that last approach.” He says he has had this sermon in mind for a long time and that “the Lord has repeatedly confirmed that he should deliver it. The spiritual revival we are witnessing now must be translated into a new evangelism.” (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.153)

In describing this feature as a shortcoming in progressive Pentecostal practice, I am not trying to impose a value judgment on what authentic Pentecostal or, for that matter, Christian behavior should look like. Rather, I believe that the failure to maintain the traditional Pentecostal emphasis on witnessing verbally to their faith is a limitation because the paucity of evangelistic fervor is disturbing some congregants who have otherwise made a commitment to the social and political dimensions of the gospel. If the message fails to resonate with the grassroots than perhaps it needs to be delivered in a different fashion—with some of the “old” included with the “new.” Ultimately Pentecostals will decide what it is to act like a Pentecostal but some progressive Pentecostal leaders seem obstinate in their refusal to respond to critiques, albeit subtle and sometimes indirect, from the members of their own congregations.

**Desiring the Old with the New**

A telling example of a distressed progressive Pentecostal longing for traditional Pentecostal vitality in his congregation is an MIP church member who Kamsteeg refers to
as Juan: “As a member of the present church council, he feels responsible for the current
decline of his church; he wants to evaluate what the efforts to replace traditional
Pentecostalism by a much less spiritualist religious practice have meant for his church”
(Kamsteeg, 1998, p.130). Juan is, however, by no means a beleaguered traditionalist
trying to stave off “new” social doctrines. Rather, he is a self-proclaimed convert to the
Pentecostal social gospel: “I learned, first as a pupil and then as a teacher, that the work
of a Christian was not limited to the church alone, but went far beyond the walls of the
temple. In fact, I understood that there the real work was to be done” (Kamsteeg,
1998,130). As a leading figure in the land seizure of a squatter settlement called “Juan
Francisco Fresno,” Juan became somewhat of a spokesman for liberationist-influenced
Pentecostalism:

In an interview with the . . . journal Evangelio y Sociedad, Juan relates the
hardship thousands of families had to endure in their struggle to defend the land
they had occupied. The discourse he uses is larded with biblical references which
are commonly used in liberationist theologies. The search for “a place of one’s
own,” which the Fresno inhabitants defended, Juan describes as very similar to
the Old Testament exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. This liberation, he says, is
a legitimate struggle against the oppressor. (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.131)

Still, Juan feels that adopting sociopolitical ethics in the MIP has come at too high a cost.
The Church, he believes has lost sight of what should be its “first love”: passionate
devotion to Jesus. “It is obvious that Juan’s position is ambiguous. He wants a
Pentecostal church that is ecumenical, that stimulates social action, but that at the same
time remains faithful to its identity, to the old-time Pentecostalism he knows, and which
he still perceives in other churches” (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.132). One wonders why this is too much to ask. This is especially perplexing in light of the particular aspects of traditional Pentecostalism that are either being suppressed or are waning in the MIP.

Juan explains, for example, that when he returned from Argentina after several years in political exile, his Pentecostal expressions of enthusiasm were apparently off-putting for fellow MIP members: “When he showed his enthusiasm aloud, shouting hallelujahs and amens at any moment, he felt his fellow brothers and sisters starting to look at him as if he were the exception” (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.132). Similarly, the youth of the MIP in La Victoria appear disinterested in traditional acts of Pentecostal exuberance and this has caused great concern among older church members. It seems likely that an already socially and politically active congregation could only benefit from bolstered religious enthusiasm—that is as long as such ecstatic devotion is connected to both the personal and social dimensions of their message.

A Need for the Dissemination of the Prophetic Pentecostal View of History

It seems to me that there is an aspect of progressive Latin American Pentecostal theology that is relatively absent in the MIP church; it is a feature that could act as a remedy for the perceived spiritual malaise of some of the youth and other church members: progressive Pentecostal history. An oft-repeated refrain in the testimonies of MIP youth is that they suffer from a lack of identity—particularly Pentecostal identity. Many of the youth of the MIP have known, to one degree or another, what it is like to actively struggle—sometimes in violent clashes with police—in an effort to secure social
justice for themselves and their neighbors living in poverty. This activity seems worlds apart from what is perceived as common Pentecostal behavior. Hence, the youth often express confusion regarding what it means to be Pentecostal. One Pentecostal youth explains:

“I don’t feel Pentecostal. If we speak of Pentecostals, we speak of people with their heads in the clouds, who do not live the whole gospel. People tell me I don’t look like a Pentecostal. Pentecostals have their way of clothing, of living, they are traditional. You are different, they tell me. The Pentecostal church of La Victoria is different, that is why I do not feel Pentecostal . . . Well, maybe I am contradicting myself, but it is not that I don’t feel Pentecostal. It is that we ourselves are realizing that being Pentecostal does not mean being someone with so many limitations, locked in one’s own church, just living along with a number of rules and norms. I identify with that different gospel, caring for our fellowman, about what goes on in the neighbourhood . . . I mean, when Jesus walked on this earth, he shared everything.” (Kamsteeg, p.143)

In chapter five, I drew attention to the progressive Pentecostal search for the historical precedent for their faith. And it was also shown that there were what could now (somewhat anachronistically) be deemed progressive Pentecostals from the very outset of the movement—this seems to have been particularly the case in African-American Pentecostalism. Thus, the work of prophetic Pentecostal scholars could help youth already committed to the social gospel to see that throughout history there have been some Pentecostals who have been demonstrative and exuberant in worship, deeply committed to evangelism, and most importantly intent on seeking justice for the
marginalized and dispossessed of the world. Thus progressive Pentecostal youth, like the ones in the MIP La Victoria congregation, could be disabused of a false dichotomy that pits spiritually enthused Pentecostalism vs. the socially active form. There is historic precedent for both and knowledge of that history could go a long way in helping progressive Pentecostals root their identity in an energetic, socially-committed Christian faith that is unabashedly Pentecostal.

*Ecumenism: Promises and Limitations*

The fourth theme in progressive Pentecostal theology treated in this thesis, ecumenism, is the one that has arguably had the most ambiguous and even problematic manifestations in the grassroots Pentecostalism of the MIP. From the very start, international organizations and ecumenical bodies have played a major part in fomenting and attempting to solidify progressive Pentecostalism in Chile. “The first contact with WCC activities went through [an MIP pastor named Francisco], who first came into WCC circles during his stay in Uruguay, where he worked as a missionary. Another pastor, Narciso Sepúlveda, also pressed for WCC membership . . . .” (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.99) Subsequently, the MIP and another Pentecostal church called the IPCH (Iglesia Pentecostal de Chile-Pentecostal Church of Chile) were accepted as members of the WCC in 1961 (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.175).

In the view of many ecumenical Christians, the emergence of a socially engaged Pentecostalism in the 1960s could not have been more fortuitous.
Belying traditional notions of a Pentecostal aversion for all things political, the MIP Pentecostal church (along with other progressive Pentecostal churches), joined the Ecumenical Committee for Peace in Chile (Comité Pro-Paz), which was founded on October 6, 1973 (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.83). This was an ecumenical expression of opposition to the military regime and was composed of Lutherans, Methodists, Pentecostals, Greek Orthodox, Jews, and Catholic clerics and church members. Though scant documentary evidence makes it difficult to assess the role of the Pentecostal churches in this initiative, the Ecumenical Committee was clearly not the only organization through which prophetic Pentecostals protested the regime:

Protestant, and Pentecostal critical stands were more publicly heard during the 1980s, when from 1982 onward the Confraternidad Cristiana de Iglesias (CCI, Christian Fraternity of Churches) became the critical opponent of both the military regime and the Consejo . . . . To raise a public and prophetic voice against the violation of human rights was considered one of the primary tasks of this interchurch council. This task was constantly performed during the period that started with the national protests against the regime from May 1983 onward . . . . It was not until 1985 that the CCI became legally established by the ten participating churches, among which were several of the smaller Pentecostal denominations (Iglesia Pentecostal de Chile—IPCH, Pentecostal Church of Chile—Iglesia Wesleyana, MIP). (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.89)

There were also distinctly MIP initiatives for social change: “After the military coup of 1973, social commitment became institutionalized in separate institutions, first the Comisión Técnica Asesora (CTA, Technical Advisory Commission, 1975) and later

This prophetic Pentecostal concern coincided with the eruption of domestic and international interest in both alleviating Chilean suffering and fostering sociopolitical justice. There was, for example, “a boom in Chilean NGOs concerned with children’s welfare, nutrition and malnutrition, ‘popular education,’ health care, cheap housing, human rights, cooperatives, and so on” (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.177). Also, the WCC was strongly opposed to the Pinochet regime and had praised church leaders who had opposed the military coup (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.177). WCC members were thus eager to find Christians willing to help ameliorate the dire situation in Chile. It was not long before international forces, like the WCC and others, recognized prophetic Pentecostals as a strategic ally in the battle against social and political oppression in Chile.

In 1979 the WCC cofinanced, with more than 100,000 Swiss francs, CTA social service and community development projects among the poor victims of the regime. By that time, there were several other big Western donors providing funds for CTA projects, among which was the Dutch ICCO [Dutch Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation; a Cofinancing agency], which held out great hopes of financial support to the young bearers of the CTA initiative. (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.177)
Nevertheless, the hopes for the CTA/SEPADE work may have been too high. In his first visit to Chile in September, 1976, ICCO officer Cees Oskam testified to the high expectations he had for MIP and the CTA/SEPADE work:

“This is a group on the left wing of the Pentecostal community. Contrary to most Pentecostals these people are very ecumenical (they became a WCC member in 1961). Its executive organism is CTA . . . This organization is also politically clearly leftist. Most CTA people belong to the MAPU, a leftist split off from the Christian Democrats. They are keenly against the Pentecostal ‘flirting’ with the regime . . . They work on behalf of political prisoners for example. Consequently, [the pastor] has been visited by secret police four times.

We have met this group by way of the WCC, which has already been supporting them for a while. The work is similar to that of the Vicaría and ACE, but that is no problem: this happens to be the work that has to be done. Here again we see projects of human development, arising from strong feelings of solidarity and a certain amount of charity. The MIP, however, has one other very important objective, which is to raise consciousness among the evangelical [his words] Pentecostals, and to induce them to leave their religious verticalism. In a country like Chile, where Protestants have not particularly shown their best side, this endeavor certainly deserves ample support.” (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.179)

Thus the common perception of Pentecostals as a monolithic conservative force was turned on its head. In this case it seems that the ICCO officer longed to see the MIP and related churches as a homogeneous juggernaut of progressive political change.

According to Kamsteeg, however, the ICCO and WCC may have overestimated the
progressive political commitment of MIP members. It seems that these international organizations assumed that the grassroots of the MIP was basically synonymous with its socially and politically active leadership. That was not always the case, however. Although Kamsteeg recognizes the multifarious ways that the MIP and SEPADE contributed to social welfare and a measure of social justice in La Victoria, he concludes that SEPADE ended up primarily meeting the social and economic needs—as pressing as they were—of the MIP church members, rather than the broader community (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.241-242). What is revealing in this ambiguous picture of ecumenical partnership and financing for prophetic Pentecostal initiatives is the proclivity of non-Pentecostal ecumenical Christians to treat Pentecostals (even of the progressive variety), perhaps unintentionally, as unequal partners in ecumenical exchange.

It seems that the ICCO and WCC were impressed by the prevalence of liberationist discourse among the leadership of the MIP and other progressive Pentecostal churches. What those organizations perhaps failed to consider was the complexity of a movement of this kind, especially one in the relative inchoate stages of its development. The prophetic Pentecostal leadership felt compelled to stress a progressive liberationist parlance in order to acquire and maintain outside funding. This is not to say that such leaders were disingenuous in those appeals. It does, seem, however, that at the grassroots level that discourse is tempered or accepted with traditional Pentecostal variations.

Apparently these voices from below often only seem like a whisper. A laymen of the MIP explained,

“Of course [not all people can be prophets], but leaders do not always think the same as those at the base. This is a big truth and it worries me. I am not against
ecumenism, but I have my own thoughts about it. There are many things that
should be changed [in the practice of ecumenism], but the professionals tend to
overrule the people at the base, who are seldom consulted.” (Kamsteeg, 1998,
p.91)

Some of the grievances that certain lay people in the MIP have with ecumenism
can be attributed to the threatening atmosphere that is created by multi-denominational
gatherings. Pentecostals often have a very strict morality and, for many, gathering with
other people who smoke yet also call themselves Christian is confounding at best and
offensive at worst. The experience of the aforementioned “Juan,” who longed for a
Pentecostalism that would be as socially engaged as it is spiritually vital, is an example of
how Pentecostals are often expected to adapt in ecumenical settings to behavior with
which they are not comfortable. In his participation with Catholics and other non-
Pentecostal Christians in the seizing of the Juan Fransico Fresnos squatter settlement,
Juan had an ambiguous experience of ecumenism. On the one hand, “He explicitly refers
to conversations about this interconfessional collaboration in which he and his
conversation partners reached the conclusion that they shared the belief in the same God,
which enabled them to work together in the struggle for those who needed most”
(Kamsteeg, p.130). On the other hand, however,

he mentioned the loss of identity as a result of the constant ecumenical
intermingling. During the whole period in the Fresno encampment he had never
felt at ease religiously, but it had taken years to realize what caused this
uneasiness. He had finally come to the conclusion that he had given up part of his
religious practice out of respect for the convictions of others. He realized that
such is the cost of ecumenism and asked himself if it would not have been better
to stick to his own habits. He attributed this behavior—that is, giving in—to the
feeling of inferiority many Pentecostals still have despite their apparently strong
convictions. Undoubtedly, the long tradition of Pentecostals being disdained by
the Catholic majority was haunting him.” (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.132)

If Richard Shaull’s sentiments (as noted in chapter seven) are representative of a
burgeoning openness on the part of ecumenical Christians to approach Pentecostals on
Pentecostal terms, then perhaps experiences like Juan’s will become a thing of the past.
For example, it is highly unlikely that in an interfaith gathering between Christians and
Jews, Christians would dine on pork in front of their kosher friends. Similarly, sensitive
ecumenical Christians—historic Protestant or Roman Catholic—may refrain from
behavior during multi denominational meetings or activities that would cause their
“weaker brother” to “stumble.” Progressive Pentecostal scholars could stimulate such
sensitivity with scholarly works especially designed for non-Pentecostal ecumenical
Christians. Such literature could help other Christians better understand what
Pentecostals bring to the ecumenical table of fellowship.

Some progressive Pentecostals who have participated in ecumenical activity at the
grass roots have found it to be a thoroughly positive experience. The *comedor popular*
(“a communal kitchen, in which meals were for the children) in 1976” was an
ecumenically-minded venture of the MIP with strong social justice overtones”
(Kamsteeg, 1998, p.122): “The pastor, as well as most of the women who participated in
the kitchen, consider it to have been an act of solidarity beyond the confines of the proper
Pentecostal community, a service to the La Victorian community, especially because
there was close cooperation with the Catholic church and its priests.” (Kamsteeg, 1998, p.123). Thus shared work for social justice seems to have a binding effect among Pentecostals and Catholics.

In summary, there is much evidence in the study of progressive Pentecostalism at the grassroots which augers well for the scholars and leaders trying to propel the movement forward. In Guatemala the combination of theological courses on social ethics and the creation of programs designed to put that theory into practice has seemed to buoy social concern in at least one Pentecostal church. Also the prophetic Pentecostal position on the kingdom of God has provided theological reinforcement for Pentecostals who have been radicalized by grassroots social and political activity. Furthermore, the hermeneutic of experience suggested by many scholars appears to be a vital interpretive practice in some levels of progressive Pentecostal church experience.

It seems, however, that dimensions of progressive Pentecostal thought have yet to filter down to the congregational level. Progressive Pentecostal youth, uncomfortable with a Pentecostal label that does not seem to fit them, could be helped by the socio-historical work of progressive Pentecostals, which offers an alternative vision of what it means, and has meant in times past, to be Pentecostal. Also there seems to be a growing distance between progressive Pentecostal leaders and some church members who want to fuse social concern with traditional spiritual vigor. It is certainly not an easy task to reconcile the enthusiasm of traditional Pentecostalism with the sober commitment of the more socially-engaged form; but if prophetic Pentecostalism is to thrive, or even survive, it seems that progressive Pentecostals will have to find a way to meld the two.
Prophetic Pentecostalism is on the move; whether it is here to stay is another matter. Nevertheless, there certainly seems to be some provocation for joy in these progressive circles. Prophetic Pentecostals are no longer isolated in their individual countries—lone prophets crying out in a wilderness of Pentecostal conservatism and sociopolitical indifference. Now, they are organized like never before and can with sincerity claim that there brand of Pentecostalism reaches throughout Latin America, albeit in small numbers.

They do not seem to believe, however, that a socially and politically engaged Pentecostalism is one alternative amongst a variety of viable options. Prophetic Pentecostals insist, rather, that to be Pentecostal is to be guided by the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit, they claim, brings personal liberation so that Spirit-empowered Christians will delve into a sea of agonized Latin American faces to proclaim social liberation. There message to the poor is as empathic as it is emphatic. For many progressive Pentecostals know first-hand the misery of squalor. They seem to be calling out to their brethren in this way: “We will work with you for your liberation from these chains of socioeconomic slavery. And greater still, the Holy Spirit will accompany us in this task, giving the strength and inspiration we need to face our pernicious enemies—original sin, habitual sin, sickness, evil social and political structures, huge chasms of socioeconomic disparity, racism, and indifference in the face of injustice.”
Why, then, has the prophetic Pentecostal message not taken hold among the poor Pentecostals of the grassroots as one might expect, and progressives Christians would hope. Clearly, prophetic Pentecostals face formidable obstacles. Their social consciences have been awakened through political struggle for the poor; and they have seen similar experiences put into provocative words by liberation theologians. Nevertheless, the sophisticated social and theological commentary of social scientists and theologians seems to lose something in its translation to the poor Pentecostal communities.

Part of what prophetic Pentecostalism may be lacking is simplicity. David William Taylor notes that Evangelical growth in Latin America is partly attributable to a “straightforward message, ‘Solo Cristo Salva’”-Christ alone saves (Nuñez, & Taylor, 1996, p.462). Thus despite the unnerving instability of their social conditions, poor Pentecostals find assurance and solace in the fact that they have been saved by Christ. In a well-meaning attempt to sound a death knell to sociopolitical indifference, prophetic Pentecostals may be stripping Pentecostals of their spiritual insurance. Prophetic Pentecostal Daniel Chiquete Beltrán, for example, claims that in the book of Luke “the term ‘salvation’ is never completely understandable” (Beltrán, 1999). For people who have no possibility of building up treasures on earth, the hope of eternal bliss has obvious merits. And if it is a tenet of the Pentecostal faith, the message of heaven is not necessary a reversion to escapism. Prophetic Pentecostals must find other means of awakening social consciences other than making the idea of salvation by grace murky.

Indeed, in using liberation theology as a model for social concern, Prophetic Pentecostals run the risk of jettisoning some prominent traits of Pentecostalism that could
otherwise be harnessed to fight injustice. Charges that Latin American Pentecostals are generally cowardly in the face of social and especially political injustice fail to take into account the Pentecostal emphasis on grace and forgiveness. Latin American Pentecostals have generally trumpeted peace and forgiveness rather than conflict and denouncement. That peace, of course, has often been proclaimed at too high a cost and there are countless incidents in Latin American history when Pentecostals should have made vociferous denouncements against injustice. Having said that, however, grace and forgiveness are prominent characteristics of the movement that can be harnessed for social change. This is made especially clear in Daniel Bell’s book entitled *Liberation Theology after the End of History* (2001).

Bell is a progressive Protestant Christian who nevertheless finds fault with the liberation theologian’s conception of justice. Bell’s critique of the liberation theologian’s view of justice is that it fails to effectively harness the Christian technology of desire—namely forgiveness—that he believes is indispensable in the battle against savage capitalism.

Bell notes that “by far the most common cry raised against capitalism is that of justice” (Bell, 2001, p.99). But he also believes that the clarion call for justice is, as tautologous as it may seem, “not just enough” (Bell, p.125). He insists, “Forming persons to respect rights is not enough to repel capitalism. In other words, their (the liberationists) conception of justice is undermined by its being guided by too thin an account of the common good” (p.125). Bell believes that the liberationists’ insistence on justice is incomplete because they conceive it strictly as rendering what is due to persons.
This, Bell claims, is a practical impossibility because “injustice is irreversible” (p.129). He explains,

Granted that in some cases, when the violation of rights is not particularly grave, justice can re-establish the precarious balance of rights. But even then the offense is not offset. This problem comes into high relief when the injustice is a matter of the masses of tortured and murdered. Nothing can be set on the scales of justice opposite an infant victim of the Contras that will somehow balance it out, that will render that death amenable to a calculus of “what is due” for the simple fact that precisely as an act of injustice it is irretrievably “that which is not due.” (p.129-130)

That justice so conceived is relatively impotent is made especially clear by Bell’s insistence that the message of the Christian gospel is that God grants salvation as grace and gift—not rendering to humans what they are due, but rather generously offering the sacrifice of His son to reconcile people to Himself.

It is this model of grace and forgiveness that Bell believes is the most potent opposition to savage capitalism. Indeed, if the Church were to conceive itself as serving an explicit, rather than implicit, political function it could harness the technology of forgiveness at its disposal and fight relentlessly but peaceably against the powers and structures of injustice. For in Bell’s view the Christian faith is centered in grace: “Christ’s work is the inauguration of a different economy for dealing with the sin of injustice, of a peculiar technology for healing desire of the wounds inflicted by capitalist discipline, namely, the refusal to cease suffering that is forgiveness” (p.144). Since the liberationist idea of justice as restoring individual rights to persons lends itself to
proprietary desires for what is “mine,” Bell believes that justice so conceived falls into the capitalist trap of distorted desire.

Forgiveness on the other hand—understood as a divine ability to forgive humans after being completely forgiven by God in the death and resurrection of His son—reorients desire toward generous and convivial ends. Importantly he believes that this model of forgiveness encompasses: confession (acknowledging the painful and real of the situation), repentance (a conversion of the oppressor to solidarity with the oppressed) and penance (or reparations given as a natural corollary to that confession and repentance). The oppressor is thus involved in this model and is a necessary component for its consummation. But, ingeniously, the first act of power is given to the oppressed.

And in a laudatory and emulative fashion, Bell explains that the Church of the poor, especially in the base communities, is already harnessing the technologies of forgiveness: A church in El Salvador during the 1980s, for example, offered a primitive memorial to their oppressors with flowers and a card which read: “Our dead enemies. May God forgive them and convert them” (Bell, p.6). Amazing grace indeed! This is both literally and figuratively a familiar tune in poor Pentecostal churches.

Thus while prophetic Pentecostalism can find a host of features in liberation theology that can be convincingly repackaged in Pentecostal form, they would do well to look for potentially liberating practices that already exist in Latin American Pentecostal churches. Also, since a consistent thread in their social concern is the liberating function of the Holy Spirit, prophetic Pentecostals could learn much from Christians in different traditions who share their Pentecostal emphasis on the Holy Spirit (a stress that is less frequently evident in liberation theology literature). While the emergence of a Latin
American Pentecostal theology of social concern seems to have only noticeably
developed in the last two decades, Charismatic Catholic formulations of pneumatic
sociopolitical doctrine have a longer history. A Charismatic Catholic priest named James
Burke, for example, illustrated in the 1970s the ways in which his own experience of the
Charismatic Renewal within the Catholic Church in Latin America belied stereotypes
branding Charismatic Catholics as passionately individualistic and socially passive:

In my retreat work in the United States and Latin America, I have heard
repeatedly one criticism of the charismatic renewal: that its members are not
involved in the work of liberation, but have an individualistic spirituality which is
an escape from the real world and its enormous problems. My experience with
the charismatic renewal does not confirm this. (Burke, 1976, p.23)

And it is in Burke’s writings where the differences between Pentecostal-Charismatic
social doctrine and liberation theology are most succinctly delineated. He says, “The
movement to break down oppressive structures both in poor and rich nations is of the
Spirit, though the violence and hatred that sometimes accompany the work of liberation
cannot be attributed to the Spirit” (p.24). This statement is revealing of the roots of
cautions exhibited by various Christians (of different traditions) about liberation
theology—namely, that the movement was seen at the height of its popularity to be
politically partisan and supposedly left little room for dialogue or gradual political
processes.

Charismatic Roman Catholics like Burke distance themselves, in some respects,
from the revolutionary violence that sometimes accompanied the proclamation of
liberation theology in Latin America; he is, however, equally insistent that the Holy Spirit
“is the wind that is stirring the hearts of men to free themselves from structures that dominate and oppress” (Burke, p.24). But Burke offers a paradigm of hierarchical priorities for Charismatic transformation which seems to differ from the traditional emphasis of liberation theology on unjust social structures. He affirms,

Though the Spirit is moving powerfully to a radical transformation of unjust structures, his work in liberation is more basic. Both Medellin and Che Guevara said that a new society requires new men. A change in structures alone will not eliminate oppression. It will only make for different oppressors and oppressed. For true liberation, there must be a transformation of the heart of man (Burke, p.24).

Many scholars, clergy, and various religious practitioners of Pentecostalized religion in Latin America seem to have found consensus that the starting point for social transformation does not lie in political activism—less such a movement lack deep spiritual roots. As a precursor to social change, argues Burke, their must be a widespread revolution of the heart: “Jesus came in the power of the Spirit to liberate man. He denounced enslaving structures and institutions (Matthew 23), but he did much more—he liberated the individual person from oppression: from the forces of nature, from hunger, from sickness and death, and especially from the oppression of sin” (Burke, p.24). Hence Charismatic theologians are emphatic in their declaration that “Jesus’ work of liberation goes from the inside out, not from the outside in” (Burke, p.25).

It seems that Christians in Latin America who fall under the rubric of Pentecostalized Christianity would benefit from a collective effort to systematize their theologies of social concern. They testify to very similar experiences with the Holy
Spirit; and the Spirit has been the pivotal figure in Charismatic social doctrine. Also, Charismatics and Pentecostals in Latin America share similar challenges.

Just as Latin American Pentecostalism has generally had a conservative or apolitical orientation, so too has the Charismatic Catholic variant been criticized for otherworldly tendencies. But there are signs of change in the Charismatic Christian realm. Some Charismatics are choosing progressive political options. Caio Fábio D’Araújo Filho of Brazil is an example of a Charismatic Christian who has made political pronouncements indicating a concern for the poor:

Caio Fábio is a charismatic leader of elitist origin but self-taught after an adolescence spent in the drug culture; a Presbyterian pastor but with charismatic tendencies and wide acceptance in pentecostal sectors . . . Unlike [a Pentecostal bishop named] Macedo, who accused Lula, the left-wing candidate for president, of being “the devil’s candidate,” Caio stated after the election that he had voted for Lula because “I did not think of myself but of the millions of destitute people in the country.” (Freston, 2001, p.38)

Also, there is evidence in Brazil of participatory overlap in Christian base communities and fellowships of Charismatic Renewal (Theije, 1999). If these Catholics are attracted to Charismatic meetings for their spiritual effervescence and are drawn to base communities for the social and political doctrine they find there, then it seems that a movement that could combine both would be an especially attractive religious option. Through forums, conferences, and general interpersonal communication prophetic Pentecostals and socially concerned Charismatics could cooperatively formulate a theology of social concern that fits their pneumatic (Holy Spirit) experiences. This
developing doctrine could be deemed a pneumatic theology of transformation. It seems that both groups (prophetic Pentecostals and Charismatics with social concern) have made strides in demonstrating how intense spiritual mysticism can go hand in hand with fervent sociopolitical commitment.

In summary, one could say that prophetic Pentecostals are operating incognito. They are not, for example, affixing distinguishing terms such as “prophetic” or “progressive” to their conferences, publications, or internet resources. It is clear, however, that the articles and lectures presented in such settings come from Pentecostals or non-Pentecostals who are conscious that their progressive viewpoints do not necessarily represent the bulk of Latin American Pentecostal churches. It seems that prophetic Pentecostals are hoping to gradually reform Latin American Pentecostalism by leavening it with an informed social and political conscience. Describing the purpose of The Network of Theologians and Social Science Researchers of Pentecostalism in Latin America and the Caribbean (RTISPALC), Bernardo L. Campos explains,

The network has turned into a preferred interlocutor that provides a space for dialogue and study; this is happening as much at the continental level as it is globally. There are many persons, institutions, and organizations that are currently interested in understanding the varieties of Pentecostalism. Thus this network will be an instrument that facilitates their study.

Along with contributing to a depth of understanding of Latin American and Caribbean Pentecostalism, the network hopes to consolidate a Pentecostalism with its own regional roots; we are especially conscious of young Pentecostals
that nowadays face the twentieth century in a religious and secular world that is growing increasingly complex and fragmented.

Therefore, we believe that along with offering a service for academic objectives and concerns, the network should relate to the liturgical and pastoral practices of our communities. (RTISPALC, online)

Hence, prophetic Pentecostals seem eager to serve in an interpretive role.

Many of them have reached the level of intellectual and theological sophistication to be taken seriously in ecumenical and non-Pentecostal settings. They can thus act as apologists of sorts for Latin American Pentecostalism; they translate the hopes and aspirations of poor, relatively uneducated Pentecostals into a comprehensible dialect for outside scholars of the movement. That way, the rank and file of Latin American Pentecostals may be given a fairer hearing and will be less likely to be dismissed by academics as just another “opiate” or “haven of the masses.” At the same time, however, prophetic Pentecostal scholars see much need for improvement in Latin American Pentecostalism. Hence they often toss their apologist hat to the side, exchanging it for a prophetic one. They critique the movement from within and without, hoping to reform it at its roots. For it is there where the prophetic Pentecostal gaze is most clearly directed—at the countless poor, oppressed, and marginalized persons who make up Pentecostalism. If Pentecostalism has been the option of the poor, prophetic Pentecostals are hoping to make it the option for the poor.
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