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Empowered for Witness

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CONTEMPORARY MISSION OF THE CHURCH

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A PERSONAL STORY

I REMEMBER AS IF it were yesterday and still remember exactly where I was. It was August 1997, and I was driving east-bound on Louise Avenue in Manteca, California. As I drove, the Holy Spirit spoke to me in a thought: “Change the name of the church.”¹ It takes much longer to tell the story and describe the inner dialogue than the whole experience actually took. I instantly knew that the church my wife and I had planted eighteen years before had grown inward in our ministry focus and that we needed to recover our sense of mission to the community. Despite that fact that I knew to be true, I inwardly resisted the notion. After all, I thought, Covenant Christian Fellowship, as the congregation was then known, was one of the largest churches in

our city and was highly regarded by fellow pastors as well as by civic leaders in the community. Why would we want to change the church's name? It had taken many years to overcome the suspicions my Evangelical colleagues had of a growing Pentecostal/Charismatic church.² We had overcome the Pentecostal stereotypes and had been "accepted" by the larger Christian community in Manteca. Why confuse people with a name change when it was unnecessary?

As soon as these thoughts entered my mind, I remembered that a few of the vendors our church had dealt with over the years had billed us as "*Convent* Christian Fellowship" or a nonsensical "*Covenant* [*sic*] Christian Fellowship." They had no clue what *covenant* meant. At the same time I remembered our church receptionist reporting that the offices occasionally received phone calls asking if we were a church or not; "fellowship" apparently was not an adequate descriptor. I also instantly knew we needed to change the church's name to reflect a fundamental heart and attitude change that freshly embraced Jesus's Great Commission. God was reminding me that His church exists to be a "missionary people" in unique and particular sociocultural settings.³ It was not easy to admit, but our church had lost sight of its "sentness" as the people of God. We were neglecting our mission field.

Thus began the most challenging task I ever faced in my pastoral ministry: leading an inwardly focused church outward to reengage its mission locally and globally. With the congregation's full approval, we did change our name to New Hope Church five months later, but it would take some three years, however, to complete the painful reorientation. It was painful because during that time, nearly 150 people stopped attending our congregation, moving on to other churches, many openly complaining that

evangelism and missions were all we ever talked about.⁴ Despite the criticism I continued to pastor the congregation through the end of 2002 and a new trajectory was charted in becoming an “outpost” for the kingdom of God in our community and beyond.⁵ When I left for a new ministry assignment it was bittersweet. The congregation had made real progress in living missionally, but much of the vision was yet to be realized. I passed the leadership mantle to another.

I am thrilled to report that over the last three years, under the leadership of the church’s former youth pastor, now the senior pastor, New Hope Church is authentically living out its mission to the Manteca community and beyond. The church has established a regular outreach in a troubled area of the city, purchased a house there to practice incarnational ministry, and is planning to start a new church in the neighborhood at some point when the appropriate leader is found. Through this and other missional expressions, new people are regularly becoming followers of Jesus and being incorporated into the family of the church. Though I watch from a distance, it is wonderful to see. But most important, this transformation of New Hope Church is an example of the Holy Spirit’s relentless missional leadership.

In this essay, I want to explore the challenge and opportunity pastors and Christian leaders face in providing missional leadership in our North American cultural settings and the attendant need for God’s presence and power to accomplish the task. What is needed in particular, I suggest, is a reappropriation of the empowering, missional character of the baptism with the Holy Spirit, hereafter referred to as Spirit baptism. The people of the Spirit need to rediscover their canonical and historical heritage in order to inform and shape authentically missional churches that

engage in Spirit-directed mission in western culture.⁶ Moreover, Spirit baptism brings believers into the rich experience of God's redeeming love for our world and provides the gift of prophetic insight dispensed by the Spirit to direct the church's mission in diverse and varied contexts. Empowerment and prophetic vision are sorely needed if the church in the U.S. is to carry out God's mission effectively.

THE STATE OF THE CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA

The Manteca church that I pastored for twenty-five years is not unique. Although the congregation grew remarkably for many years, its very growth ironically led to a disengagement from the Great Commission. In the first few years after planting the church we saw many first-time converts, but gradually that changed. For several years we became the "hot" church in town, and most of our growth no longer came from people newly converted to Christ but from transfers from other congregations. We subtly and unintentionally had lost sight of our fundamental mission as we focused our attention on caring for those already following Jesus. This is the experience of far too many growing churches in the U.S. Unfortunately, many pastors and church leaders do not seem to fully appreciate the problem, as churches frequently end up competing with one another for the same Christian consumer market by offering "better" programs and ministries targeting believers. This is not good news given Christianity's present social location in the west. Just what is the state of the American church? The answer depends on the source.

Presently, the megachurch phenomenon is getting much attention. So named because of a regular weekend worship attendance

of over two thousand, megachurches are more prevalent in United States than ever before, giving the appearance of Christianity's growth and impact on our culture.⁷ At the same time, Gallup pollsters and church statistician George Barna have been reporting American weekly church attendance at 40 percent or more.⁸ Add to this the high-profile Christian media ministries whose reports of impact and success seem to reinforce the notion that church is doing the job of evangelism and mission well. At times some of the rhetoric is triumphalistic.

On the other hand, many voices are pointing to other statistics suggesting "the American church is in crisis."⁹ These sociologists and church growth researchers have conducted studies asserting that people over-report their attendance patterns to pollsters and that actual church attendance is half the Gallup and Barna figures. David T. Olson, who directs church planting for the Evangelical Covenant Church, says that actual church attendance the U.S. is about 17 percent and that only one state (Hawaii) has shown an increase in the last ten years.¹⁰ Some argue that things look so bad that Christianity might die out in one generation if nothing is done to correct the situation.¹¹ Alarmist pessimism is not any better than triumphalism.

Although statistics can be misleading if mishandled, there is little question that the church in North America is facing a new day with new challenges. Of the top twenty-five Christian denominations in the United States, only two are growing, and their growth is only marginal. The overall trend in the U.S. indicates a downward spiral when church attendance is compared to the overall population growth.¹² Just as alarming, if not more so, is the research that tells us that so many of those "who identify themselves as Christian (and this includes conservative evangeli-

cal) do not evidence the beliefs historically held by Christians.”¹³ None of this is to suggest that the church in North America faces inevitable decline. Nevertheless, Ed Stetzer of LifeWay Research, far from being a pessimist, acknowledged that “Christianity is losing its ‘home-field advantage’ in North America.”¹⁴ Some are suggesting we have already lost it.

According to George Hunsberger of the Gospel and Culture Network, the church in North American has become “a vendor of religious services and goods” to Christian consumers rather than a missional people who model and proclaim in deed and word the gospel of the kingdom of God.¹⁵ Market categories shape too much of church life as churches “vend” their goods. The church in our culture is no longer in the center; we have experienced a “social dislocation,” and the majority of pastors and church leaders have yet to come to grips with the reality. Simply stated, the church is at the margins of North American culture and is ignored by vast numbers of Americans who see the church as irrelevant to their everyday lives.¹⁶

Pastors I encounter everywhere sense this missional malaise but are unsure of what to do to change things. Far too many go from conference to conference or resource to resource trying to find something that will bring an answer to the cultural disconnect they are experiencing. The answers, however, will not be found in the latest success stories or by imitating the practices of growing churches. Darrell Guder has said it well: “[T]he crisis of the North American church will not be found at the level of method and problem solving....The real issues in the current crisis are spiritual and theological.”¹⁷ The decline of the Christian church in western culture is a fact, and superficial solutions are inadequate in addressing it. Indeed, it is easy to be pessimistic, but I would

suggest that the current sociocultural realities facing the American church are a providential opportunity for a radical rediscovery and renewal of the missional purpose of Spirit baptism.

THE MISSIONAL CHARACTER OF SPIRIT BAPTISM

Before exploring the missional dimensions of Spirit baptism, I want to first discuss the word *missional*. “When it comes to being missional, it seems everyone wants in on the action.” So writes Reggie McNeal, the missional leadership specialist for the Leadership Network.¹⁸ The term *missional* (and its nearest kin, *missional church*) seems to be the “in” word currently. In Christian circles everywhere people are using the word *missional*—do a Google search to confirm my assertion. Considering that the word came into usage just over ten years ago, this is somewhat surprising.¹⁹ As expected, with wide usage, the terms *missional* and *missional church* are taking on many connotations, and with much imprecision. *Missional church* now is a “label to describe practically everything a church does.”²⁰

Defining *Missional*

When Darrell Guder, George Hunsberger, and others starting using the term in 1998, they were seeking to overcome a similar imprecision associated with terms like *mission*, *missions*, and *missionary*. So just what is meant by the term *missional*? There is need for clarification. Missiologist Charles Van Engen uses the term *missional* to “emphasize the essential nature and vocation of the church as God’s called and sent people.” Van Engen goes on to say that “God’s mission calls and sends the church of Jesus Christ, locally and globally, to be a missionary church in its own society, in the cultures in which it finds itself, and globally among

all peoples who do not yet confess Jesus as Lord.”²¹ Most of the leaders of the “missional renaissance” correctly place considerable stress on the initiative of God, the *missio Dei*, and His redemptive “action in human history,” expressed in the gospel story. Thus the church is “the primary agent of God’s missionary action.” Fundamentally in Van Engen’s thinking, the church “exists” for mission.²²

Adding another perspective, missional church theoretician and practitioner Alan Roxburgh suggests that it might be better to think of the word *missional* as a process or lifestyle. “Missional for me is about how we rediscover a radical engagement between Scripture and the strange, changing culture(s) in we find ourselves....[I]t’s discovering what God is up to in the neighborhoods and communities in which we live, and seeking to join with God [redemptively] in those places.” While Roxburgh acknowledges that there is much more that could be said about the term *missional*, his practical definition “helps people get a handle on the idea.”²³

Clearly Roxburgh does not aim for a dictionary definition of *missional*, preferring instead to recognize the “imprecision” of the term as a corrective to the modern western tendency to demand “precise definitions for everything...that can be used to design strategies and implement plans that leave us in control.” Just as the Scriptures’ use of the term *kingdom of God* is filled with “imprecision that can’t be pinned down [and therefore] invites us to risk entering a world we may not be able to control or manipulate...” so it is with *missional*.²⁴ Roxburgh’s perspective on the use of the term *missional* is suggestive in that it points to the need for deeper dependence on and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit as the one who empowers and directs missional engagement.²⁵ In summary, for

use in this essay, the term *missional* captures both the church's essential "sentness" as God's missionary agent, announcing God's kingdom, as well as the church's radical dependence on the Holy Spirit as the "supreme missionary strategist."²⁶

EMPOWERED TO WITNESS

For those in the modern Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions of the last century, the notion of Spirit-empowered and -directed engagement in evangelization and missions is not new. Both biblically and historically it has been the woof and warp of an understanding of the Holy Spirit's renewing work. That said, much like the church I pastored in Manteca, I would suggest that many—if not most—Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in the U.S. have lost their "pneumatic" missional orientation. Largely, they market themselves to Christian consumers in a manner that reflects a cultural captivity no different than other Evangelical churches in America. While Pentecostal and independent churches in Asia and the southern hemisphere continue to flourish and grow with attendant manifestations of the Holy Spirit's power, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in the west, with the exception of African-American, Hispanic, and immigrant congregations, are largely plateaued or experiencing decline in church attendance.²⁷

This is not to suggest that pastors and church leaders have intentionally led the church into its present condition. Instead, the difficulty is part of the North American church's broader struggle to adjust to its social dislocation and find its way forward in the midst of increasing cultural and religious pluralism, as well as the secularization that characterized western culture in the twen-

tieth century. Pastors are experiencing a “dis-ease” as they seek to understand and relate to these rapidly changing and vastly different contexts, which also include the often confusing philosophical boundary zone between modernity and postmodernity.²⁸ The reality is that the disestablishment of the church in the west has now made Europe and North America mission fields that are unfamiliar to many Pentecostal and Charismatic pastors and church leaders. Consequently, they still conduct church life as if Christianity stood in the middle of our society rather than at its margins. It has been aptly put about the western church in this new milieu, “We’re not in Kansas anymore.”²⁹

Compounding these broader church and culture contours and significant for this paper is the idea that the fundamental missional purpose of Spirit baptism seems to have been eclipsed, at least in part, by the cultural accommodation that has come as U.S. Pentecostals have sought wider societal and ecclesial acceptance in the decades that followed World War II. Consequently, there is a need to “hear again” the biblical emphasis on the Holy Spirit’s role in enabling and leading the early church’s mission in the Book of Acts. Modern Pentecostals would also be well served by revisiting their biblical origins and their early history a century ago.³⁰

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS³¹

Historian and theologian Justo González, in his appropriately titled commentary *Acts: The Gospel of the Spirit*, suggests “that the main character in the Book of Acts is not the apostles, nor even Paul, but the Holy Spirit.”³² This is not a novel view. Graham Twelftree’s recent study in Luke-Acts also highlights the Lukan emphasis in which “the presence and power of the Spirit is almost

everywhere palpable.”³³ Certainly Luke’s account of the church’s early history puts in clear theological perspective the essential and unequivocal missional character of Spirit baptism.³⁴ While there are other theological dimensions to Spirit baptism both in Luke-Acts and the rest of the New Testament, the author of Acts sees Spirit baptism as preeminently, though not exclusively, about empowerment for mission, and he shapes his narrative accordingly.³⁵ As classical Pentecostals continue to debate initial evidence and its relationship to Spirit baptism, Luke’s narrative places the focus on the “distinctively missiological” nature of the experience in Acts 1:8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my *witnesses* in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth” (RSV, emphasis added).³⁶

This verse also serves as a summary statement for the biblical narrative that follows. Acts tells the story of “the expansion of the church through missionary effort” as “the Spirit restlessly drives the church to witness” and to grow through the planting of new churches in strategic cities.³⁷ It is the story of a group of marginalized Jews that God uses to bear “witness” to the Christian story.³⁸ More than anything it is the continuing story of what Jesus “began to do and teach,” now carried on by an empowered church directed by the Holy Spirit.³⁹ Just as surely, Acts reveals the expansion of Christianity from its rather provincial beginnings as a Jewish sect to its expression as a universal faith uniting both Jew and Gentile. Under the Holy Spirit’s guidance Christianity spread from its humble origins in Palestine and penetrated to the heart of the mighty Roman Empire in just over thirty years.⁴⁰ Importantly, an honest reading of the Lukan account of Christianity’s beginnings leaves little room for notions of an idealic, pristine

New Testament church. Rather, Luke shows us that God's mission goes forth despite the church's all too frequent recalcitrance and parochialism, something especially evident in the early chapters of Acts.⁴¹

The Book of Acts puts emphasis on God's supernatural initiative and the Holy Spirit's pivotal role in directing the church's mission and evangelistic work.⁴² It is God who confronts Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road and calls him to missionary enterprise (Acts 9) and pushes Peter past his prejudices to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10). It is the Holy Spirit who gifts the infant church with missionary and evangelistic power (Acts 2), who inaugurates the missionary journeys of Paul (Acts 13), and turns Paul from his northward travel plans in Asia Minor, pointing him instead toward the west, eventually arranging for the first penetration of the gospel into Europe (Acts 16). Space does not allow for specific mention of the many manifestations of the Spirit that lace the Acts narratives as the gospel message was confirmed with healings, signs, wonders, and remarkable power encounters.⁴³ Significantly, Luke chronicles the apostles, particularly Paul, contextualizing the gospel message in diverse contexts with prophetic discernment and sensitivity.⁴⁴

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

From the birth of modern Pentecostalism at the dawn of the twentieth century, Pentecostals saw Acts and Spirit baptism with missional eyes. Charles Fox Parham, the theological architect of Pentecostalism in the U.S., believed God's gift of speaking with tongues ("glossolalia") was the Bible evidence of Spirit baptism that gave the recipient a supernatural ability to speak in known

languages (“xenoglossa”) to aid in the task of world evangelization. Believing in the imminent return of Christ, there was no time for the laborious and long process required to learn foreign languages. Rather, God was bypassing language study altogether through Spirit baptism and the gift of tongues so that missionaries could deploy straight to the mission field. Of course, Parham was wrong about xenoglossa. Nevertheless, he and his students shared “an intense interest in world evangelism,” which helped create the womb for the “missionary origins” of modern Pentecostalism.⁴⁵ A trajectory was set that would reshape world Christianity within a century.

William Seymour took up the missions banner leading the 1906 Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles. The fires of spiritual renewal at the Azusa Mission fueled a deep missionary passion that resulted almost immediately in the sending of missionaries overseas. Fuller Seminary professor Cecil “Mel” Robeck, who has spent much of his scholarly career studying the Azusa Street Mission and the life of William Seymour, argues that Seymour saw the very purpose of the Azusa Mission as “evangelization—the evangelization of the entire world.”⁴⁶ The emphasis was not just on foreign mission but also on evangelization broadly under the charge “try to get people saved.”⁴⁷ There is much scholarly debate today over whether the Azusa Street Mission was the “American Jerusalem,” the geographical center from which most of modern Pentecostalism spread with increasing attention given to more diverse and widespread origins. Whatever one may wish to argue, the Azusa Street Mission illustrates the catalytic evangelistic and missionary zeal early Pentecostals drew from their experience and understanding of Spirit baptism.⁴⁸

Over the succeeding decades after Azusa Street, Pentecostals

gradually became more organized and strategic in their missions enterprise while still maintaining their evangelistic zeal. They made many mistakes along the way, but their emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit to confirm the preaching of the gospel with signs and wonders made considerable impact in the developing world and established significant expressions of Pentecostal faith in the southern hemisphere and Asia.⁴⁹

Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in the United States grew with similar evangelistic fervor throughout the twentieth century and into the 1980s. Over the last quarter-century, however, the marginalization of Christianity in North America has left most U.S. church congregations, including Pentecostals, plateaued or in decline, as we have already discussed. Though church growth has slowed in some nations, such as South Korea, Pentecostal-like expressions of the Christian church in Africa, South America, and Asia continue to experience remarkable growth. It is the western church that faces the greatest challenge.

RECOVERING A MISSIONAL SPIRITUALITY

Our exploration of the state of the American church, the clarification of the word *missional*, and the cursory review the biblical and historical missional heritage of those of us who embrace Spirit baptism beg the question, What are we to do? More specifically, how are we to recover a renewed missional passion and vision for North America? There are several possible trajectories toward renewal, but I will suggest two priorities that are particularly important.

It may sound simplistic, but I suggest our first priority is discovering a deeper spirituality that emerges from heartfelt prayer and

worship as devoted followers of Jesus. Spirit baptism is not an experience that we simply assign a date to and then move on from as if it were merely an historical event. It is an experience in which we are to live (Eph. 5:18). Pentecostal exegete Gordon Fee asserts that in the New Testament “spirituality is defined altogether in terms of the Spirit of God. . . . One is spiritual to the degree that one lives and walks by the Spirit.”⁵⁰ Those who affirm the empowering work of the Holy Spirit must recover a spirituality adequate for the times we face.⁵¹ Over a century ago Andrew Murray wrote that one of the keys to “missionary motivation is the deepening of spiritual life” and “true dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁵² The South African Dutch Reformed minister used language that Pentecostals and Charismatics would unquestionably endorse. Referring to Acts 1:8, Murray wrote, “The Pentecostal commission can only be carried out by a Pentecostal church, in Pentecostal power.”⁵³ Murray believed that the “missionary problem” (a lack of missionary passion and zeal in pastors and churches) was a “personal one” and that:

...every believer, in receiving the love of Christ into his heart, has taken in a love that reaches out to the whole world. The great commission rests on every member of the Church. Let each begin with himself in seeking for the Church the restoration of her pentecostal power for the work of conquering the world for her King.⁵⁴

Returning to my own story that opened this essay, I must admit that I had lost sight of this missional ecclesiology, at least in part, because my heart had grown cold. The church I pastored for a quarter-century veered from its missional focus because I lost

my love for those without Jesus and was not leading well. Living with the deterioration of morality in our culture, the destructiveness of the pornography industry, the slaughter of the unborn, and the growing hostility toward Christianity in the U.S. left me angry at “sinners.” Subtly, it became an us-against-them situation. The encounter with God’s voice calling me to change the church’s name was one wake-up call among many in 1997 that brought me back to a place of prayer, asking God to give me His heart for people He so deeply loved. Within months of praying that prayer my heart was again broken for those for whom Jesus died. I learned afresh that John 3:16 was no slogan but an ultimate missional verse. I recovered a more vibrant life in the Spirit.

Theologian Frank Macchia points to something I believe is often missed in discussions regarding Spirit baptism and empowerment. For Macchia it is God’s selfless love that motivates and sustains mission to the world.

God’s people are carried by Spirit baptism on the winds of God’s holy breath to bear witness to Christ. They come to know that divine freedom as their own when they lay down their limited imaginations and are overtaken by God’s missionary passion for the world. The self-giving God of Spirit baptism produces a self-giving people who do the same. To love God is be shaped by that love so as to share its affections and passions.⁵⁵

In view of Macchia’s perspective, I wish to raise a question. Is it possible, despite having experienced Spirit baptism, that many Pentecostals and Charismatics no longer see the “helpless and harassed” people in this world with the redemptive compassion

that Jesus so marvelously modeled for us in His earthly ministry?⁵⁶ At least for me, this was the case. Nevertheless, prophetic sight returned as I set aside my “limited imagination” and let God’s love supply a renewed missional vision, resourced by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. I was once again deeply “moved on the inside” as I saw the broken condition of people living without the gracious care and leadership of the Good Shepherd.⁵⁷ I am convinced that many other pastors and leaders could benefit as I did by a spiritually revitalizing “pouring out” of the love of God in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5).

The second priority is an outflow of a passionate spirituality. We must have Spirit-endowed prophetic vision and sensitivity in order to effectively carry out evangelism and mission in our varied and particular contexts. As I have argued, far too many churches in the United States continue to function as if Christianity is still enfranchised—at the center of culture—despite the fact that America has radically changed, the church at the margins. The implication of these changes is clear: *the church must now look at North America with “missional eyes” that recognize and find answers to the significant cultural barriers and challenges the church faces in proclaiming and modeling the good news of the kingdom of God.* This will require prophetic leadership. Let me explain what I mean by “prophetic leadership.”

This essay is calling for a rediscovery of Spirit baptism’s essential connection to the Great Commission. In addition to a recovery of God’s redemptive love, there is a great need for prophetic discernment that will bring about strategic alignment with God’s missional purposes in the earth. In referring to the need for prophetic leadership I am not suggesting prophetic insight makes one a prophet;⁵⁸ rather, I seek to emphasize the need for the prophetic gifting that

Peter's Pentecost sermon promises is available to all believers (Acts 2:18). The eschatological gift Peter speaks of is the Spirit of prophecy (prophetic insight) promised by the prophet Joel. For Luke its purpose is "to equip the disciples for the mission that lay ahead."⁵⁹ I have already recounted a few pivotal instances in Acts of the Spirit's strategic guidance regarding the direction of mission that suggest this is the case.

In this critical hour we need missional leaders who "understand the times" and see their cultures and ministry settings with God's perspective. These prophetic leaders see with God's eyes and feel what He feels for our lost world.⁶⁰ With God-given vision they discern God's creative and redemptive strategies in bearing witness for Christ in unique and particular contexts. Considering that the U.S. is now a missionary location, we need God's wisdom in responding to "Lesslie Newbigin's important call for the missionary encounter of the gospel in Western culture, addressing especially how we are to contextualize that call here in North America."⁶¹ Fuller Seminary president Richard Mouw sees an example of this "missionary encounter" in Paul's preaching at Athens on Mars Hill (Acts 17). In Mouw's view, Paul "presents to us a profoundly biblical and practical missionary methodological model." Mouw explains that Paul did four things:

First of all, he had studied the Athenian perspective on reality. He knew their writings and was conversant with their poetry. Second, he had discerned an underlining spiritual motif, observing that, "I see that in every way you are very religious." Third, he looked for positive points of contact within their worldview, noting that even their own poets had said, "For in him we live and

move and have our being,” and that, “We are God’s offspring.” And finally, he invited them to find their fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ.⁶²

This missionary encounter is an example to us of more than just a methodology to be copied. It is instead an example of how the Spirit will supply prophetic insight and direction for evangelism and mission. Though not explicitly stated in the Mars Hill narrative, it illustrates Paul’s practice of careful contextualization, the reshaping of the gospel message to make it intelligible within his audience’s unique worldview.⁶³ That the Spirit directed the process is implied by the overall prominence of the Holy Spirit’s leadership throughout the Acts narratives.

Finally, it almost goes without saying that with the cultural and religious pluralism in the United States there is no one strategy to reach neighborhoods and cities with the gospel message. So then we must follow Paul’s example and do the cultural research necessary in preparing for the missionary encounters God has called us to. But this work must be aided by prophetic vision that garners an “insightful awareness of how the Spirit of God is already at work in a culture before we go there.”⁶⁴ We will find that the Holy Spirit will lead us to adjust our terminology and the “angle of address” as we engage the multiple audiences in our contexts.⁶⁵ Nor should we forget that when we get the message straight, the Holy Spirit will confirm with attending gifts.

Unfortunately, prophetic sensitivity has not been a sufficient priority for many American pastors, both Pentecostal and Evangelical. Too many of us are still intoxicated by modernity’s demand for well-thought-out formulas and strategic plans and have relied too much on our own resources and abilities, only to find evan-

gelistic efforts misdirected or frustrated. The challenge before us is not becoming more adept at a faddish quests for “cultural relevance.” Rather, the real is need is a renewal of radical dependence on the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who empowers the church to be God’s missionary people and who directs culturally sensitive missionary encounters. May God grant us afresh a baptism of His divine love for our world and prophetic vision through which we discover and join with His redemptive purposes on the earth.

Pentecostal, reports some helpful historical information, but many of his claims are questionable or inaccurate. For a response, see *Ibid.*, 119–123; David Norris, “Christianity without the cross: a history of salvation in Oneness Pentecostalism,” *Pneuma* 26 (2004): 151.

42. *Manual* (Hazelwood, MO: United Pentecostal Church International, 2010), 29. This statement appears in every issue of the *Pentecostal Herald*, the official monthly publication of the UPCI.

43. Bernard, *A History of Christian Doctrine*, 3:90–98.

44. French says that almost sixty percent are African-American. French, “Garfield Thomas Haywood,” 9.

45. *UPCI Annual Report* (2009), 75.

46. In 2000, there were 3,898 churches and few daughter works. *UPCI Annual Report* (2000), v. In 2009 there were 4,330 churches and daughter works. “Report to General Board” (2010).

47. “South Texas Statistics,” South Texas District UPCI (unpublished report, December 2009). Daughter works are included. Churches grew from 160 to 242. Ministers grew from 346 to 440.

48. See Norris, *I AM*, 3–10; David K. Bernard, *Understanding God’s Word* (2005), 73–106.

CHAPTER 24

MISSIOLOGICAL AIMS IN NORTH AMERICA

1. No apology is made for the assertion that God spoke to me. The Bible clearly teaches that God speaks directly to His children. God communicates through the Holy Scriptures, through members of the community of faith, through thought and intuition, visions and dreams, and in other multifaceted ways, abundantly evident in biblical texts. Overcoming the fear of appearing uncritical in suggesting “God spoke to me” is not easy for those in the scholarly academy. I owe a debt to colleague and friend Rickie Moore of Lee University, whose scholarship emboldened me to risk being marginalized in learning to be truly “critical.” See Rickie D. Moore, “Deuteronomy and the Fire of God: A Critical Charismatic Interpretation,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* (1995): 11–33.

2. It is easy to forget thirty years later the degree of threat and suspicion that still remained the 1970s regarding Spirit baptism and the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements.

3. Charles Van Engen, *God’s Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991).

4. I actually went back and counted the number of weekends I spoke on evangelism and mission during this time and discovered that it was only thirty percent of the time. Still, when compared to my previous preaching calendar it was a substantial increase.

5. One significant gain was establishing a long-term strategic mission commitment working in the African nation of Niger, a partnership that continues to this day.

6. My own ministry context informs this conviction. I presently hold my ministerial credentials with the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel and serve as the denominational historian and also serve as the pastor of a local church.

7. Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 76.

8. Bob Smietana, "Statistical Illusion," *Christianity Today*, April 2006: 85–88. The Gallup Poll in 2009 showed average U.S. church attendance at near 42 percent. See Gallup, "Mississippians Go to Church the Most, Vermonters, Least," Gallup Online, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/125999/Mississippians-Go-Church-Most-Vermonters-Least.aspx?version=print> (accessed February 23, 2010).

9. David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).

10. Smietana, 86. For example, The Gallup Pollsters consistently say California church attendance is around 30 percent, yet when the Manteca, California, ministerial association conducted an actual count of the city's attendance on a given Sunday, it was only 12 percent. This figure is more reflective of actual church attendance in California.

11. Ed Stetzer, "Chicken Little Was Wrong," *Christianity Today*, January 2010: 34–37. Stetzer did not say the church would die. Quite the opposite. He included the statement about the church dying out as an example of the overreaction some have to declining church attendance.

12. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis*. News is not all bad, however. Of those who do attend church in the United States, the percentage of Evangelicals has risen in the last two decades. See Stetzer, 36.

13. Stetzer, 37.

14. *Ibid.*

15. George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder, *The Church Between Gospel & Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 337–338. The kingdom of God was central to the

message of Jesus and is inseparable from the Great Commission. And excellent discussion can be found on this asserting in Gordon Fee, "The Kingdom of God and the Church's Global Mission," *Listening to the Spirit in the Text* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2000), 163–180.

16. George Hunsberger, *The Social Dislocation of the Church*, audiocassette (Vancouver, BC: Regent College, n.d.).

17. Darrell L. Guder, *The Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 3.

18. Reggie McNeal, *The Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard of the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), xiii.

19. Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 28–29; An informative discussion by Ed Stetzer on the history and use of the word *missional* can be found at <http://www.edstetzer.com/the-meanings-of-missional.html> (accessed February 18, 2010). Stetzer points out the word *missional* was used earlier by Golden Gate Baptist Seminary professor Francis DuBose.

20. Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 31.

21. Ed Stetzer, "Meanings of Missional Part 5," *Ed Stetzer: The Lifeway Research Blog*, October 2, 2007, <http://www.edstetzer.com/2007/10/meanings-of-missional-part-5-1.html>. (accessed February 23, 2010). The quotes by Van Engen come from his essay in a forthcoming book edited by Ed Stetzer and David Hesselgrave, *Mission: God's Initiative in the World*.

22. Charles Van Engen, *God's Missionary People* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1991).

23. Alan Roxburgh, "Missional Map-Making," *Leadership Network*, <http://www.pursuantgroup.com/leadnet/advance/feb10s1a.htm> (accessed February 23, 2010).

24. Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 34–37.

25. This is my inference, not that of Roxburgh.

26. This phrase "the supreme missionary strategist" comes from Steven Land. Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 120.

27. Gaston Espinosa, et al., "Hispanic Churches in American Public Life: Summary of Findings," *Interim Reports*, Notre Dame Center for Latino Studies (March 2003): 1–28; idem., "African-American Churches Flourish," *Christian Century* (August 11, 1993): 770. Although there are notable exceptions, like Joel Osteen's Houston-based Lakewood Church, most church growth among Pentecostals is among ethnic and immigrant communities.

28. Alan Roxburgh, “The Church in the Postmodern Context,” in *Confident Witness—Changing World: Rediscovering the Gospel in North America*, ed. Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 1999), 241–259; Guder, *The Missional Church*, 77.

29. Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 75–90. In the chapter “We’re Not in Kansas Anymore” Roxburgh addresses the mission field condition of western culture.

30. When I say “revisit their biblical origins” I am pointing to Pentecostals’ strong identification with the primitive New Testament Church and how the biblical story shapes Pentecostal self-identity.

31. Given the emphasis among Pentecostals and Charismatics on the normative value of the Book of Acts for today’s church and also the necessary brevity of this paper, I limit the biblical discussion to Acts.

32. Justo L. González, *Acts: The Gospel of the Spirit* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 8.

33. Graham H. Twelftree, *People of the Spirit: Exploring Luke’s View of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 13.

34. That the author of the Gospel of St. Luke and the Acts of the Apostles wrote with theological purpose can hardly be challenged any longer. See I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: n.p., 1970); Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984); Robert P. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness, The Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); James B. Shelton, *Mighty in Word and Deed: The Role of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991). For Pentecostals, Stonstad, Menzies, and others stress the distinct Lukan approach to pneumatology that, while not in conflict with Pauline pneumatology, puts the emphasis on empowerment and inspired speech instead of soteriology.

35. Amos Yong cautions against overly limiting Spirit baptism to just empowerment for mission and argues for a more “robust pneumatological soteriology” that sees Spirit baptism as multidimensional. It is a variety of experiences, including Christian initiation as well as empowerment. Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 85–120.

36. Eddie Gibbs, “The Launching of Mission: The Outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost,” in *Mission in Acts: Ancient Narratives in Contemporary Context*, eds. Robert L. Gallagher and Paul Hertig (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 18–28. It is important to recognize that Acts 1:8 is a promise rather than a command. This is an important distinction to note. See

Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "You Will Be My Witnesses: Aspects of Mission in the Acts of the Apostles," *Missiology* (October 1982): 418.

37. These quotes come not from a Pentecostal but from the British Evangelical John Stott. John Stott, *Introduction to Acts*, audiocassette (Vancouver, BC: Regent College, n.d.).

38. Missiologist David Bosch says that in "Acts, 'witness' becomes the appropriate term for 'mission.'" David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 116.

39. Bosch puts it this way: "The Same Spirit in whose power Jesus went to Galilee also thrusts the disciples into mission." *Ibid*, 113. See also: Twelftree, *People of the Spirit*, 177.

40. I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: Tyndale New Testament Series* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 26–27.

41. Gaventa, "You Will Be My Witnesses," 423.

42. Shelton, 126–128.

43. Twelftree, *People of the Spirit*, 214–217.

44. Drawing on Robert Menzies's arguments, I am suggesting that the missionary strategies in Acts were also a result of the Holy Spirit's work. The Acts 2 narrative makes clear that Spirit baptism dispenses prophetic gifting to all believers. This prophetic gifting carried with it divine wisdom and insight that was used in evangelism and mission. Menzies, 44.

45. James R. Goff Jr., *Field White Unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1988), 72–77. Parham framed his belief in xenoglossa at least in part by his reading of Acts 2.

46. Cecil M. Robeck Jr., "Pentecostalism and Mission: From Azusa Street to the Ends of the Earth," *Missiology: An International Review* (January 2007): 75–92, 76.

47. L. Grant McClung Jr., "'Try To Get People Saved': Revisting the Paradigm of Urgent Pentecostal Mission," in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel*, eds. Murry Dempster, et al. (Carlisle, UK: Regnum Books, 1999), 30–51.

48. Gary B. McGee, "The Azusa Street Revival and Twentieth-Century Missions," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (Dec. 2002): 58–60. McGee's historical work on Pentecostal mission is the place to start in studying the movement's world missions history, particularly of the Assemblies of God. Gary B. McGee, *Miracles, Missions, and American Pentecostalism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010).

49. For a most helpful survey of the literature and developments in Pentecostal missions history, see Byron D. Klaus, "Pentecostalism and Mission," *Missiology: An International Review* (Jan. 2007): 41–54.
50. Gordon D. Fee, *Listening to the Spirit in the Text* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2000), 5.
51. Eugene H. Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: Studies in Vocational Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 2000), 3. For more perspective on spirituality see Andrew Lord, *Spirit-Shaped Mission: A Holistic Charismatic Missiology* (Bletchley, UK: Paternoster, 2005).
52. Andrew Murray, *The Key to the Missionary Problem* (Ft. Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1979), 71, 74.
53. *Ibid.*, 111.
54. *Ibid.*, 121.
55. Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 264.
56. Note especially Matthew 9:35–38.
57. The Greek word *spiangnizomai* could be translated colloquially "moved in the gut" in describing Jesus's compassion for the helpless and harassed in Matthew 9:36.
58. Though I do believe the office of a prophet is a valid present day calling.
59. Menzies, 187.
60. This perspective is drawn from George Hunsberger's comments on Abraham Heschel's view of prophetic character. George Hunsberger, *Features of the Missional Church*, audiocassette (Vancouver, BC: Regent College, n.d.)
61. Richard Mouw, "The Missionary Location of the North American Church," *Confident Witness—Changing World*, ed. Craig Van Gelder, 3. Mouw is referring to Newbegin's call in *Foolishness to the Greeks*.
62. Mouw, 8.
63. Shawn B. Redford, "The Contextualization and Translation of Christianity," *Mission in Acts*, eds. Robert Gallagher and Paul Hertig, 283–296.
64. *Ibid.*, 13.
65. The Empowerment 21 conversation is rightly concerned about finding a new terminology to express the heart of what it means to be Pentecostal or Charismatic. Those words today carry so many varied connotations that their usefulness is becoming problematic, (2001).