


Pentecostals and the marginalised: A historical survey of the early Pentecostal movement's predilection for the marginalised



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Early Pentecostals came mostly from the ranks of the marginalised and disenfranchised, leading some researchers to describe the origin, attraction and expansion of Pentecostalism as some form of Social Deprivation theory. The article hypothesises that its origins among the marginalised rather demonstrate its hermeneutical concerns, especially in its identification with the portrayal of Jesus in the Gospels and specifically with Luke. The early Pentecostal hermeneutic is described in terms of its predilection for the marginalised, and some of the most significant implications of such a hermeneutic for the contemporary movement that, to a large extent, lost its emphasis on the marginalised are portrayed.

Introduction

A prerequisite for understanding the phenomenon of the early Pentecostal movement is that its hermeneutic be comprehended. Although Pentecostalism can be categorised as one of many subgroups within evangelicalism, the movement serves as a reaction and protest to mainline Protestantism as well as liberal theology, inducing Archer (2009:38) to call it a diverse and divergent countercultural paramodern movement functioning on the margin of society. The study is limited to classical Pentecostals linked to the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles of 1906–1909 and the first generation of the Pentecostal movement because from the 1920s some Pentecostals in what Oliverio (2016:3) typifies as a movement-become-tradition started adopting a fundamentalist hermeneutic, a process that culminated in the 1940s when the major Pentecostal denominations in the United States participated in the establishment of the National Association of Evangelicals (Robeck 1988:634).¹

It has been proven that most adherents of the early movement came from the ranks of the disenfranchised and marginalised, especially the racially marginalised people in society (Archer 2009:198). Cox (1995:106) argues that at first its message appealed mainly to the most disenfranchised, those with little stake in the status quo, people with no reason to hope that things would improve. To those people, Pentecostals held out the possibility of a radically new order. The movement impacted Afro-Americans as well as black people in Africa, and in white communities its greatest influence was among the poor in urban and rural areas. Its hermeneutic allowed the movement to identify with the marginalised, and in the process lifted them up. This was true for South African Pentecostalism as well, as Anderson and Pillay (1997:234) argue, where it expanded in a marginalised and underprivileged society struggling to find dignity and identity. Oppressed African people were neglected, misunderstood and deprived of anything but taken leadership by their white 'masters'; however, Pentecostalism adapted and fulfilled African religious aspirations.

Early Pentecostal origins among the marginalised

There have been several attempts to explain the early Pentecostal movement. One such attempt is that early Pentecostalism came mainly from the marginalised, as a result of social disorganisation and/or individuals who compensated for their defective psychological constitution by way of ecstatic religion (Hine 1974; Miller 1996), as an example of the Church-sect Theory (Kenneson 1999). The argument is that their religious experiences had to compensate for personality defects resulting from their socioeconomic deprivation (Archer 2009:30). For instance, Anderson (1979:135) asserts that most Pentecostal converts came from peasant roots and their religious heritage differed from that of evangelical-pietistic Protestantism. Their spirituality consisted of mystical,

1. Participating denominations included the Assemblies of God, Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.), Church of the Nazarene, Christian and Missionary Alliance and the International Pentecostal Holiness Church.

Note: The collection entitled 'Christina Landman Festschrift', sub-edited by Wessel Bentley (University of South Africa) and Victor S. Molobi (University of South Africa).

supernatural, even animistic and magical notions common to those who live close to the soil.² Anderson (1979:228) then defines Pentecostalism in terms of a unique response to the common problems of the working poor, consisting of the notion that religion was a matter of the 'heart' rather than the intellect, and that miracles and wonders held a central place. The poor thrived in the emotionalistic and supernaturalistic outlook that also characterised the holiness movement, in contradistinction to evangelical-revivalistic Protestantism. Because they were frustrated with their low social position in society and could not adjust to the challenges presented by urbanisation, their social discontent became the root source of Pentecostalism (Anderson 1979:240). If social depravity explained the attraction of Pentecostalism, then one would expect that in the contemporary Pentecostal movement the poor would still form the majority of members, which is not the case, as Hine (1974:656) argues. She adds that the characteristics associated with the 'sect type' and 'socially and economically disinherited people', such as emotionally charged religious experiences, lay leadership, a confessional requirement for membership, a high degree of participation by members and reliance on the guidance of the Spirit, occur in contemporary Pentecostal churches consisting of middle- and upper-class converts. By 1950, Pentecostalism was no longer solely a religion of the poor and marginal (Peel 2009:184). Although Pentecostalism still draws people from the lower socioeconomic classes, many from other economic statuses also join the movement.

However, many researchers do not accept this explanation and depict the movement's self-understanding rather in terms of its quest for a deeper and developing relationship with Jesus through Jesus' Spirit. Individuals were primarily attracted to Pentecostalism through its attention to people's religious quest, serious consideration of spiritual growth and the way they respected and interpreted the Bible (*contra* Miller 1996:114).³ The majority of Pentecostal recruits in the West came from the holiness movements, both the Wesleyan holiness movement⁴ and the Keswickian higher life movement.⁵ Pentecostal identity was established by the

2. Anderson refers to Weber's (1962:80–84) argument that artisan classes generally share the same religious notions, consisting of animism and spiritism.

3. Asamoah-Gyadu (2013:166–167) makes the important observation that while Pentecostals respect the Bible, African Pentecostals regard the Bible itself as holy, mediating holiness from the supernatural realm to the natural realm of existence, containing a divine and supernatural status, as the last word on any matters of belief or behaviour. It is a symbol of sacred power, able to protect the believer from the adverse effects of evil powers because in the African imagination that which is holy exudes power that could even be dangerous (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013:171).

4. This movement serves as Pentecostalism's immediate predecessor and provides the new movement with several important characteristics, such as literal-minded biblicism, emotional fervour, a puritanical ethical code of living, enmity towards established denominations due to its rejection by these churches and a belief in the 'second blessing' in Christian experience, resulting in sanctification. The Church of God in Christ under the leadership of Charles Mason and the Church of God (Cleveland) had been at first holiness denominations, and now they accepted a third work of grace, the baptism of the Holy Spirit usually accompanied by speaking in tongues. Sanctification consists of moral perfection attainable in this life through the baptism of the Spirit with the resultant eradication of inbred sin (Anderson 1979:289–290).

5. Higher life movements advocated a second work of grace, called the baptism of the Spirit and consisting of an endowment of power, enabling one to become an effective winner of souls (*contra* Wesleyan holiness groups). Sanctification is for them a progressive process instead of an immediate experience (Waldvogel 1977). The Keswick Convention recognised two distinct experiences, the 'new birth' and the 'fullness of the Spirit', with sanctification seen as a possible but progressive experience (Anderson 2012:128).

preaching of the full gospel message⁶ in a restorationist-revivalistic manner with emphasis on Millenarian theology and ecstatic charismatic experiences and the expectation that miracles would occur, and experiential celebrative worship consisting of participatory expressiveness of tongues and prophecy (Archer 2009:32). The full gospel was understood by early Pentecostals to be a restoration of the New Testament presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, a complete gospel that emphasised the importance of Jesus's redemptive ministry for humanity (Archer 2012:89). Salvation, baptism in the Spirit, divine healing and the second coming are the four cardinal doctrines commonly referred to as the full gospel. There was a shared belief and proclamation of the fourfold (or fivefold) understanding of the work of Jesus as saviour (sanctifier), Spirit baptiser, healer and soon coming King, and of tongues as the initial evidence of Spirit baptism (Purdy 2015:33).

In summary, people did not become Pentecostals because they were deprived, disorganised and defective but because of their religious concerns and acceptance of a Pentecostal hermeneutic. And this hermeneutic draws the attention of the Pentecostals to Jesus's predilection for the marginalised, transforming them into change agents in the poor parts of society (Gerlach 1974:671; Hine 1974:652), allowing Gerlach (1974:672) to define Pentecostalism not as a 'reaction to change' but rather as a 'cause of change'. Pentecostalism is not a reactionary but a revolutionary movement (Archer 2009:36) in the margins set apart from the larger Christian community by its distinct doctrine of 'Spirit baptism' and 'speaking in tongues' (Archer 2009:209).

Pentecostalism provided people with a democratic worship event where all and sundry may participate as equals, allowing everyone to live out his or her ministry, and with emotional support from like-minded people in a group interaction characterised by equality between members. Involvement was a key component of Pentecostal worship (Cox 1995:246) and is inclusive of all races and genders as well as age groups.⁷ Therefore, ordinary, untrained people were able to participate in public worship in a variety of ways, including the exercise of spiritual gifts that includes bringing a message (sermon)⁸ and giving of personal testimonies (Purdy 2015:46). In their testimonies they made theological sense of their participation in the activities of the church as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit now bestowed

6. Pentecostals seldom have an elaborately worked-out theology, as Anderson (1991:32–33) observes. Their theology comes to life in song, music, prayers, sacramental acts of healing and exorcism, art forms, architecture, liturgy, dress (especially important in Africa), church structures and community life. Although they have little of an explicit theology, they have a praxis and spirituality in which their theology is implicit (Anderson quoting Hastings). Seaman (2013) writes in this regard: It is of the essence that the believer interpreting the Spirit-inspired Scriptures be in submission to the Holy Spirit through prayer in order that he might be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18), walk by the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:16–25), and live by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:1–11) so that his sinful nature might not quench the Holy Spirit's work (1 Thess 5:19) (p. 167).

7. Marsden (1982:83) remarks that early Pentecostalism was, in fact, the only portion of Protestantism that was integrated racially, referring to the situation in the United States. This is true for South Africa as well (Burger & Nel 2008:384).

8. Early Pentecostals avoided using the term 'sermon' because of its association with established churches and the ministry of preaching confined to the professional pastorate, and preferred to speak of 'a message from the Lord', supposing that any Spirit-filled believer might be used to bring the message.

on believer and church in an abiding, empowering presence (κοινωνία), a term which primarily means 'participation in', in Fee's (2001:259) opinion.

Early Pentecostals moved along the fringes of established denominations; their theological preferences of eschatological urgency to evangelise the whole world before the end of the age would occur had already marginalised them from these mainline churches (Dempster 1993:1). Their revivalistic, experience-oriented worship was appealing to those who were often shunned by mainline congregations and sidelined by society (Purdy 2015:45).⁹ Pentecostal preachers, energised by their eschatological fervour, preached wherever they could find space and, because of financial restraints, their locations were often storefronts, warehouses and so on, making them both accessible and appealing to marginalised persons. They often worked along the fringes of the established churches because their message appealed to those who had been turned off (or turned away) by the alleged cold, cerebral religion of mainline denominations (Purdy 2015:46). Their reading of the metanarrative with its latter rain motif¹⁰ and primitivistic impulse (Archer 2009:136, 150) was driven by their passionate desire for an unmediated experience with the Spirit developing into a deeper personal relationship with Jesus, and their restorationist views moulded the subculture in which Pentecostalism flourished. Their attitudes towards the world were shaped by their conviction that current cultural values necessarily opposed true faith and they interpreted persecution and discrimination against them as a measure of spiritual strength and a sign of the correctness of their beliefs.¹¹ They volubly opposed much of their culture, and the sense that they offered a viable, satisfying alternative to this worldliness, was instrumental in attracting new adherents (Blumhofer 1989:19).

Early Pentecostal hermeneutics of the marginalised

Early Pentecostal hermeneutics were determined by its preoccupation with events that are supernatural (Wacker 1984:360), and they expected that the 'latter rain' of the Spirit would enable them to share in the experiences of the New Testament church (Arrington 2012:17). A dialectic tension between ecstasy associated with tongues speaking and supernaturalism associated with signs and wonders generated a cultural reading of Scripture that distinguished it from other traditions, qualifying the ability to interpret the Bible by a person's experience of a direct encounter with the Spirit during the reading of the Scripture.

9. See Keener's (2016:46) provocative remark that most of the places experiencing profound spiritual revival are situated among the poor and the marginalised.

10. The use of the motif in the Pentecostal movement should be distinguished from the New Order of the Latter Rain, a revival serving as a precursor of the charismatic movement of the 1950s and originating at the Sharon Orphanage and Schools in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, Canada, in 1947. George Hawtin, a pastor of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, clashed with colleagues due to his controversial statements, prophetic utterances and 'heavenly revelations' (Mittelstadt 2012:135–136), leading to the new movement.

11. Early Pentecostals were certain that God had called them despite the fact that they were poor and unlettered. Cox (1995:254) adds that they also perceived that God had called them because of their poverty and the resultant dependence upon the power and care of God.

The supernaturalistic emphasis in Pentecostal culture functioned in opposition to the modernistic worldview that dominated society with its humanistic view of the universe where supernatural intervention is excluded, instrumental reasoning provides the only arbiter for truth and the observable material is the sum total of reality (Fay 1987:12–26).¹² Its supernaturalistic focus allows Pentecostalism to grow in the Two-Third world because it provides in the direct, everyday needs of the marginalised, including divine healing. The typical African comes to a Pentecostal church for the first time in search of healing, either bodily or in relationships, and usually for a malady that has resisted other means of solution, whether traditional or modern medicine or both, writes Cox (1995:247). The supernaturalistic focus serves as an alternative worldview to modernity with its acceptance of the premise that truth was based upon objective and observable evidence by fusing the natural and supernatural, emotional and rational, and charismatic and institutional in what Poloma (1989:xix) in anachronistic sense calls a decidedly postmodern way.

German higher criticism and the Darwinian idea of an evolutionary spiral of human history during the 1880s to 1920s led to the rise of the modern university and the demise of Common Sense Baconianism with its inductive scientific method of Bible reading.¹³ Protestantism moved in several directions, with modernists or liberals postulating that the Bible's authority was to be found in *personal experience*, conservative fundamentalists reaffirming the *factuality, authority and infallibility of Scripture*, and the Wesleyan holiness movement and Pentecostals affirming the *objective nature of the Bible* and the *importance of personal experience* as the basis for the supernatural inspiration of Scripture (Marsden 1982:79–100; Murphy 1996:61).

Scriptural inspiration implied for Pentecostals that the Bible is able to speak to the contemporary community when the anointing of the Spirit rests on them; inspiration lies in the nature of God because it is his desire to communicate (Arrington 2012:14).¹⁴ Pentecostals' pre-critical Bible reading approach consists of stringing together a series of scriptural passages on a given topic and deducing what God was saying about the topic under investigation (Weber 1982:110), using the same Bible reading method as the holiness believers (Noel 2010:13). All one needs to support this practice of

12. Noel (2010:45) contends that modernism has downplayed the importance of experience, particularly in terms of an epistemological approach to defining truth. He writes that reason became king and truth could not be discovered, except through the brain's cerebral cortex, when modernism ruled. Pentecostalism was, in part, a reaction against these modern assumptions, and it placed high value upon the role of experience in the Christian life and rejected the exaltation of reason as the arbiter of truth in the Christian context.

13. The Baconian system first gathers the teachings of the word of God, and then seeks to deduce some general law upon which the facts can be arranged. It preserved the concept that the common person, acknowledging the self-evident principles of the existence of God and the veracity of his Word, could discover the facts of Scripture in the same manner as one could discover the facts of science (Noel 2010:128). Noel also mentions that the 'academically informed Fundamentalist group' continued to reaffirm the veracity and authority of Scripture by appealing to the older scientific Baconian common sense model. For these fundamentalists, inerrancy became the key, and much effort was put into establishing the historical veracity of the scriptures.

14. 'God is at work, but this activity is seen only from its effects', writes Thiselton (2009:350).

proof-texting was a concordance. The assumption is that the Bible was equally inspired throughout and timeless in its teaching (Archer 2009:64), that harmonisation leads to a progressive unfolding of truth (Pierson 1998:97–111) and that each believer is able to understand its message.

At the same time, Pentecostals tend to read the New Testament through Lukan eyes (Dayton 1987:23), basing their doctrine and praxis (Hollenweger 1972:336) and founding their theological and practical identity (Mittelstadt 2010:1) almost exclusively on the gospel of Luke and Acts.¹⁵ The Lukan predilection for the poor (Lk 4:18–19; 6:20–22; 11:41; 12:33; 14:13; 14:21; 19:8) and the Lukan Jesus's social concern in his treatment of aliens, the exploitation of women, the economic exploitation of the oppressed and poor, underemployed and unemployed, and the dignity of children stimulated Pentecostals to attend primarily to the needs of the marginalised (Dempster 1987:143). Luke's version of the beatitudes is also realistic about the poor in contrast to Matthew's 'spiritualised' interpretation of the poor:

... blessed are you who are now poor ... blessed are you who are hungry now ... blessed are you who weep now ... blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil ... woe to you who are rich ... woe to you who are full now ... woe to you who laugh now ... woe to you when all people speak well of you. (Lk 6:20–26)¹⁶

Metanarrative of Pentecostal hermeneutic

Marginalised white and African slave holiness people were expectedly negative toward the society from which they were alienated. At the beginning of the 20th century these groups found themselves in direct opposition to the predominate worldview of modernity when they accepted the fivefold and/or fourfold full gospel message of Pentecostalism validated by the same supernatural signs and wonders as the New Testament ascribes to Jesus and the apostles. Early Pentecostals operated with a worldview that emphasised a living and growing relationship with Jesus as the incarnate, crucified and resurrected Lord through continuous encounters with his Spirit. Other important elements for them are the priesthood and prophethood of all believers, leading to interracial, unsegregated and gender-inclusive involvement of anyone in public ministry and worship, the role of Scripture in defining praxis and of the Spirit in empowering believers to understand Scripture, the

15. Pentecostals assert that Luke's intent as author of the Gospel and Acts was not only to record history, but also to teach doctrine (Arrington 2012:19). This is a point of debate because Pentecostals presuppose that doctrine can be deduced from narratives, a statement that many Protestants deny.

16. Mott and Powell (2011:815) notes that the 1st-century world was characterised by economic inequality with about 3% of the population who were extremely rich and 90% who were extremely poor. Twenty-eight per cent lived below subsistence level, meaning that they did not know from day to day whether they would be able to obtain what was necessary to sustain life. Unequal distribution of wealth is also a modern phenomenon, with South Africa scoring 0.59 on the Gini coefficient where 0 represents total equality and 1 total inequality. The average for industrialised countries is 0.37 (Pieterse 2001:51). The richest 10% of South Africans earn 48% of the country's income and the richest 20% earn 65% of that aggregate. The poorest 30% earn 5% and the poorest 50% get 11% (Pieterse 2001:52), demonstrating the historical inequality, mostly due to apartheid and capitalism.

necessity for experiencing signs and wonders to validate the gospel message, Spirit baptism with tongues as initial evidence and the pre-Millenarian immediacy of the second coming. These elements form the most important factors in the metanarrative of the latter rain motif that defined early Pentecostalism. Metanarrative can be defined as an overarching interpretation of events and a vindication for existence that provides a pattern or structure for people's beliefs and gives meaning to their experiences.

Bartleman ([1925]1980:43), an early historian of the Pentecostal movement, notes the humbleness of the Azusa Street Mission, consisting of a dilapidated and abandoned church building in the industrial area of Los Angeles, and argues that all the great revival movements required people who were humble and repentant and willing to give all the glory to God alone. He argues that the Azusa Street building was a perfect place for God to pour out his Spirit because it was outside all church establishments and in the humblest of surroundings. A former Methodist (Anonymous 1906:1) who attended the services writes that if the Pentecostal revival had started in a grand church building that would have disqualified the most marginalised people from attending the services. Poor Afro-American and Spanish people, for example, would never have entered the church building of a recognised denomination, but they gladly visited the Azusa Street Mission.

Their metanarrative allowed early Pentecostals to adhere to the values of humility and God's preference for the poor (Archer 2009:166). Their own marginal status contributed to the way they read and interpreted Scripture allowing them to hear the marginalised and humble voices and they developed an image of Jesus who concerned himself mostly with the people existing and functioning on the margins of society. Their existence and functioning on the margins of modernity directly affected and influenced their reading of Scripture (Archer 2009:265). For instance, Keener (2016:45–46) writes that Jesus calls (Lk 5:2, 10:6:13) and empowers (Ac 2:4) not the proud but the lowly who depend on him. That was at least part of why the Spirit was given not to the elite but to the humble who obeyed God's voice (Ac 5:32; cf. Ps 138:6; Pr 3:34; Ja 4:6; 1 Pt 5:5).

Their metanarrative (or Central Narrative Convictions, as Archer 2009:156 defines it) consists of the primary story Pentecostals used to explain their existence and the aims of their community, and how their movement fits into Christian history. Their metanarrative formed the primary filter and hermeneutical matrix that they used to find meaning in the Bible and their reality (Archer 2009:157).¹⁷ In their exposition of Christian history, the events on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit was poured out on the church described in Acts 2 formed a transitional point. Another such point occurred in

17. Oliverio (2016:2) contends that hermeneutics consists of knowing more than what such and such a text means, but what it means to understand. In other words, implicit in the question of meaning are questions about the nature of reality, the possibility of knowledge and the criteria of morality. Hermeneutic forms an aspect of all intellectual endeavours and the aim is to find meaning in the reality of daily life.

the 4th century when the church embraced the Roman Empire and God withdrew his Spirit from the apostate hierarchical Roman church (Noel 2010:65).¹⁸ The third transitional point is the latter rain outpouring of the Spirit, introduced by the holiness movement of the 19th century and inaugurating the last age and culminating in the imminent second coming of Christ. The Pentecostal perspective on church history is teleological, combining the beginning and end of the church age as the ideal ages, with its emphasis on the charismatic gifts and way of living as well as the imminence of the *parousia*. Pentecostal identity and spirituality was contained in this narrative, forming the filter and matrix for interpreting Scripture and reality (Archer 2001). The dislocation and rejection, low social status and economic deprivation felt by this group helped define the manner within which they heard and interpreted Scripture (Purdy 2015:46). When Pentecostals read the Bible, they implemented their cultural worldview as 'the people of the latter rain' that motivated them to proclaim the gospel to all people before the end. They were the marginalised people living in the margins of society for the same reason that the apostolic communities of faith consisted of the marginalised; Jesus's concern for the marginalised and poor was shared by the first church and early Pentecostals. Pentecostals saw as their mission the restoration of the full gospel that represented the original message preached by the apostles, a message vindicated by signs and wonders in the days of the apostles as well as of the latter rain. By living as the eschatological bride of Christ, Pentecostals perceived themselves as the restoration of the early church of 'apostolic Christians' (Archer 2009:161).¹⁹

Their spirituality contained a strong oral and narrative element (Noel 2010:33), because of the prominent African-American contribution to the movement (Hollenweger 1986:3–12) as well as an illiterate component within the movement. In their services, testimonies took up a large segment of time, consisting of believers' enthusiastic witnessing about their encounters with Christ in the terms found in the New Testament.²⁰ They had assimilated scriptural narratives, verses and concepts into their interpretation of reality (Archer 2009:161). As mentioned, everyone participated, including the unemployed, poor and illiterate, by way of oral agreement with the message, ministering to those who responded to the altar call, liturgical dance, prayer for the sick, prayer and song (Hollenweger 1994:201).

18.Noel (2010:65) adds that God had not withdrawn the manifestation of miracles permanently, as taught by cessationists, but temporarily, to show his displeasure with the lack of faith and unbelief of the church. Once the 'true church' was again formed on the earth, in the Pentecostal movement, miracles naturally started flowing again from the hand of God.

19.Even though the second coming did not happen as expected, it did not dampen the millennial zest of Pentecostals. Cox (1995:119) thinks that 13% of contemporary affluent Pentecostals might have lost interest in the subject of eschatological expectation but the 87% who live below the world poverty line still eagerly await the coming of a new earth and a new heaven.

20.In the process of interpreting reality and contemporary events through scriptural narratives, Archer (2009:163) writes, Pentecostals blurred the exegetical boundaries of what the text meant to its original readers and what it means to contemporary readers. Their Bible reading method was pre-critical, text-centred and synchronic, using the inductive and deductive common-sense method of reading.

Some implications for contemporary classical Pentecostals

Walls (1976:180) observes that the gravity of Christianity shifted in its centre to the southern continents of Africa, Asia, Oceania and Latin America, the so-called Third World, an observation corroborated by Barrett (1982); Johnson & Grimm (2013) and Grimm et al. (2016). The migration of Christianity towards the southern hemisphere implies in Buhmann's (1976:23) perception that the church is returning to the people in antiquity where world history initially began,²¹ and where newly independent nations with relatively higher proportions of youth are living in poverty. The church is again the church of the poor, experiencing the goodness, humanity, simplicity and integrity of poor people, which cause them to realise their dependence on God (Mt 5:3).²² The Christian poor mostly share a pneumatological view of the God of Scriptures, envisaged as present in power through the Holy Spirit, argues Turner (1979:xvii). The Holy Spirit is seen in all activities as the ambiguous, numinous force that pervades everything (Anderson 1991:34) and that stands in a special relation to the poor and dispossessed (Hauerwas & Willimon 2015:7).²³ In a period when the economic gap between the richer nations of the North and the poorer nations of the South is widening progressively and the number of Christians in the North is diminishing, the majority of Christians are now living in poverty and the church in the South is continuing to register growth (Bediako 1995:128).²⁴ The Two-Third world is marked by poverty and political instability; Christians in the Two-Third world churches have appropriated the gospel in their contexts and many of them prefer Pentecostalism as the facilitator of their religious experiences. Their preference is built upon the Pentecostal gospel's emphasis on a holistic approach directed at the whole person, with divine healing playing a major part in the presentation of the gospel (Anderson 1991:100). The Two-Third world context includes the perception of the reality of a spiritual world inhabited by angels and demons that influence what happens in the lives of believers, deliverance from inhabitation and oppression by evil spirits (Paas 2016:488) as well as the destruction of polluted objects associated with witchcraft and traditional religious practice (Maxwell 2013:100) and an emphasis on dreams and visions as a potential source of

21.Cox (1995:247) emphasises that African Pentecostals, unlike their Korean counterparts, seem proud that they have not forsaken the spiritual customs their ancestors passed on to them before the white people came, even though the missionaries urged them to abandon the remnants of superstition. They believe that God was already present in Africa before any Europeans arrived and that their ways of worshipping God are better than the ways missionaries suggested to them.

22.See the interesting remark of Webber (2002:47–54) that the new generation of 'Younger Evangelicals' are eager to commit themselves to the poor, *inter alia* apart from recovering the biblical understanding of human nature in the post-9/11 era, standing for the absolutes of the Christian faith in a new way, recognising that the road to the future runs through the past, an attraction to absolutes that are not necessarily acquired by rationalism, familiarity with technology, particularly that which is highly visual, and their ability to communicate through imaginative stories, appreciating the power of the symbol and of the arts and a longing for community and commitment to intergenerational and multicultural ministry.

23.Hauerwas and Willimon (2015:7) opine that Jesus's sermon in Luke 4 claims that the Spirit was upon him to preach the good news to the oppressed and deliverance to prisoners is taking form in worldwide Pentecostalism today.

24.It must be admitted that not all Christians in the South share in personal poverty.

guidance for believers, and Pentecostal churches excel in providing in these needs and assumptions.²⁵

Pentecostal theology is contextual and has related successfully to culturally related issues and challenges, including affirming the human dignity and cultural identities of formerly dominated, oppressed and marginalised people who emerged from colonial rule (Thomas 1981:26–27).²⁶ It succeeds in addressing core problems of Africa: ill health, poverty, unemployment, loneliness, sorcery and spirit possession (Anderson & Pillay 1997:227). Its early perspective concentrated the Pentecostal movement on the meaning of life in the margins, and in contemporary society it should again, within a multicultural and interracial community, give a voice to the poor, both economically and spiritually, to participate in the making of meaning (Archer 2009:212).²⁷ Pentecostal theology is ideally situated to reach and speak for 'the underside', from the periphery, removing the West's polarisation between evangelism and socio-political involvement. Bediako (1995:141) observes that it was through Christians from the Two-Third world that the social implications of the gospel were being brought to prominence. Pentecostals have been reading the Bible in a context of poverty, marginalisation and powerlessness for a century²⁸ and they have become experts in appropriating the gospel as good news to the poor, which in the African continent refers to the materially poor, socially oppressed and underprivileged.²⁹ Jenkins (2006:5) argues that the Bible speaks to everyday, real-world issues of poverty, debt, famine, racial and gender oppression, state brutality and persecution in the growing churches of the global South. 'The omnipresence of poverty promotes awareness of the transience of life, the dependence of individuals and nations on God, and the distrust of the social order'.

The Pentecostal message provides another definition of their humanity for believers and a meaning upon their lives that their being relegated to the underprivileged through being historically disadvantaged could not take away

25. Ward (2000:234) writes that Pentecostals focus on, rather than shy away from, the realm of spiritual powers, and so can be seen to deal with this important area of life in more honest and direct ways, helping people to cope with the struggles that define and circumscribe their day-to-day life as Africans. African Pentecostalism has a close affinity to Western Pentecostalism; the differences that emerge between them have to do with the African churches' fundamental orientation to the spirit world (Anderson 1991:34).

26. Today a new hermeneutic is in the process of being developed that can serve Pentecostals, with Thomas (1994), Archer (2002, 2007) and Yong (2002) leading the trend.

27. Martin (1990:232) observes the necessity for the African Pentecostal church to maintain its ability to expand among the masses, by remaining of the masses, and its ability to advance their condition.

28. Pieterse (2001:44) remarks that the poor profoundly experience a desperate powerlessness from which no escape seems to be possible.

29. Mveng (1988:25) uses the term 'anthropological poverty' to denote more than poverty on the material level and refers to the exploitation and sufferings that African peoples have experienced at the hands of colonial masters, making them probably the most humiliated people in history. See Pieterse (2001:30–45) for a perspective on poverty in South Africa where just below 50% of the population belong to the poorest 40% of households and are classified as poor, while 27% of the population fall in the bottom 20% of households and are classified as ultra-poor (Pieterse 2001:32). In an interview with a theology lecturer from a poor community, the interviewee remarks to Pieterse (2001:109) that black people in South Africa view poverty as being imposed on them by laws that put them purposely in a vulnerable position. The same people who brought Christianity to the continent impoverished its indigenous population with their politics.

(cf. Cone 1975:11).³⁰ They read the Bible and experience the reality of the power of the kingdom of God through faith in Jesus who became poor to save the world (2 Cor 8:9). Pentecostals do not read the biblical text primarily to understand the author's intended meaning. They let the text itself control the process, under the prayerful guidance of the Holy Spirit. Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard (1993:472) write that this is a more meditative kind of reading that does not seek so much the meaning in the text as the meaning of lives under the text's mastery. They do not read the Bible to get 'information'; they wish to allow God's Spirit to speak at the core of our being. Zimmermann (2004:160–180) criticises the Enlightenment theories of knowledge, and argues that the pre-Enlightenment emphasis on contemplation of God should be regained as a primary condition for right interpretation. This method of interpreting the Bible leaves ample room for the risk of subjectively reading into the text whatever suits the reader, necessitating the requirement of discernment by the larger community of believers.

In Africa the poor are blessed, not because they are poor but because the kingdom of God is theirs (Lk 6:20; Mt 6:3). They share in the divine preferential option for the poor because the gospel of Jesus Christ is good news to the poor, the good news of God's justice (Mt 6:33), implying that the gospel's contents are defined by what it means to the poor. The kingdom of heaven consists of justice, just relationships with God and among people and with the environment as experienced by poor people in whose lives the kingdom has come. That God saves the rich as well denotes his power to do what is impossible for humans (Mt 19:26). The road to the kingdom for the rich is signposted by their search for justice in whose service the rich must offer their possessions as a sign of their solidarity with the marginalised and poor (De Santa Ana 1977:96).

Christianity is the religion of the poor; they are at the centre of God's concern and among them the Saviour of the world came as a poor man among the poor. The lack of success of the affluence-based Western church to reach people with the gospel may be because of their being a less vitally Christian spiritual force, in contrast to the Two-Third world church where Christianity is flourishing as a valid answer to the gospel's question to poor people (Bonk 1989:179).³¹ The Western church with its spiritual and moral decline can learn from their brethren in the South what the essential wholeness of the gospel implies, with its struggle for ministry to the needs of African people and justice to the poor.³²

30. See the remark of Davis (2004:30, 32) that if God died in the cities of the Industrial Revolution, he has risen again in the post-industrial cities of the developing world. The 21st century's 'surplus humanity' finds emancipation in Pentecostalism, he contends, which is becoming the largest self-organised movement of urban poor on the planet. It should be kept in mind that most expressions of African Christianity are expanding, not only Pentecostalism (Maxwell 2013:108).

31. Hastings (1979:233) remarks that while Western Christians are concerned with material things, African Christians are devoutly 'evangelical' and place their spirituality first. African churches are immensely poor, but its members are manifestly prayerful. For that reason, their services are long, well attended and absorbing to its participants.

32. Re-evangelisation of the West is inseparable from the discovery of the gospel as 'good news to the poor', argues Padilla (1989), in the sense that when Jesus told the young man to sell all his possessions and give to the poor, he was more concerned about the spiritual needs of the young man than the material needs of the poor.

African Pentecostalism demonstrates that the Christianity of Jesus is indeed the religion of the poor of the earth (Bediako 1995:148).

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