

# **“A Challenge in Contemporary Pentecostal Missiology”**

## **Understanding Mission as Evangelism**

- Pastor K. L. Zuala

### **Introduction**

The entire question of paradigm shifts in Pentecostal theology and missiology is difficult to explore. In line with the word of Frank D. Macchia, the difficulty involves the well-known fact that a fully developed Pentecostal theology along with missiology has not yet been written. Pentecostals have generally felt that Bible study and proclamation were sufficient to guide the church in its fellowship and mission. Any critical reflection on the meaning of the scriptural witness for the life and mission of the people of God from various contemporary contexts was an enterprise that few Pentecostals believed was essential enough to pursue.<sup>1</sup>

L. Grant McClung, Jr. argues that the first Pentecostal missiological formulation of the twentieth century may very well be in the pastoral admonition of William J. Seymore – **“Try to get people saved”** – and in the first written report of the events surrounding the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles, California, where Seymore was the recognized leader from 1906 to 1909. The first edition of the Azusa Street periodical, *The Apostolic Faith* (Sept., 1906), was headlined: **“PENTECOST HAS COME.”** The lead article, under the headline, **“Los Angeles Being Visited by a Revival of Bible Salvation and Pentecost as Recorded in the Book of Acts,”** provides a narrative insight into the early missiological worldview of those who came to be known as **“Pentecostals.”**<sup>2</sup>

However, it is not the purpose of this paper to revisit the paradigm shift under which the early missiology of the Pentecostal movement was formed. Of course the revisit and a critical reflection need a distinct topic and assessment paper. Rather, within the context of missions and evangelism being carried out by the United Pentecostal Church of North East India, this paper will focus on a challenge and needs in today’s Pentecostal missiology with the topic **“Understanding Mission as Evangelism.”**

### **Mission as Evangelism**

#### **1. What is Evangelism?**

The word **“evangelical”** is a general word meaning the **“gospel”**<sup>3</sup> preaching or proclamation.<sup>4</sup> Thus **“evangelism”** means a proclamation of the exciting and welcome news, **“the call for and an offering of repentance and remission of sins in Jesus name”** (Luke 24:47). Evangelism in the Bible is a ministry of the spoken word. Evangelism biblically means **“to make known the message of the gospel.”**<sup>5</sup> Jesudason Baskar Jeyaraj insists that in contemporary times, evangelism is projected as a mere proclamation of the Gospel through meetings, radio, television, print media, whether people respond to it or not.<sup>6</sup>

Thus evangelism, in a nut shell, means proclamation of the good news of salvation in Christ, announcing the offer of forgiveness of sins and inviting people to repent and accept and believe Jesus Christ as their Creator and Savior.

## **2. The Theology & Mandate of Evangelism:**

A theology of evangelism is an attempt at a systematic presentation of the historic news at a given age. Such an undertaking may differ in spiritual accent from theologian to theologian and according to the exigencies of a culture or society that is being addressed. But its subject matter, the gospel, remains always the same under all circumstances.<sup>7</sup> Hence, the cogency of the solemn warning, “but thought we or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that we preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:80) also still remains the same. Thus, the theology of evangelism, if biblical, is centered in the Old Testament and New Testament. The fundamental idea behind all these is the telling of good news to people who had not heard it before. In the New Testament context, preaching always connotes the announcement of the good news of the kingdom of God to the non-Christian world.

Evangelistic mission is an inescapable mandate of Christianity. Every Christian worth his or her ‘salt’ (to use a NT expression) recognizes that it is of the essence of being a Christian that one has both the responsibility and joy of witnessing to one’s faith and salvation. In fact, evangelism is the spreading of the good news of salvation freely available, by the grace of God to every human being. In the NT, we find not only the “Great Commandment” to love God and neighbor, but also the “Great Commission” to go, teach, baptize and disciple all people as followers of Jesus Christ (Mat. 28: 19, 20).<sup>8</sup>

## **3. Evangelism in a World of Religious Plurality: Sharing the Good News in Christ’s Way in the Context of the Overall Mission of the Church:**

The contemporary Pentecostal churches need to address the contemporary world of religious plurality in its overall missions by sharing the glad tidings in Christ’s way evangelistic missions. This involves a new reflection on the significance of evangelism and on the methods of sharing the gospel. Under are the urgent points which need to be reflected in understanding our missions as evangelism.

**3.1.1. *Evangelism is contextual and focused primarily on the less privileged, the rejected and the excluded:*** Today’s Pentecostal churches need to express the commitment to try to be a church incarnated in each society. This also explains the importance of the relationship between gospel and culture, addressing the question how to express our Pentecostal faith in a particular culture or context? A relevant question therefore is what does it mean to be a contemporary Pentecostal church in each of our contemporary societies? One must remember that authentic evangelism is always contextual. David J. Bosch rightly argues that an evangelism which separates people from their context views the world not as a challenge but as a hindrance, devalues history, and has eyes only for the “spiritual” or “nonmaterial aspects of life” is spurious.<sup>9</sup> In fact, much so-called evangelism, it appears, aims at satisfying rather than transforming people.

**3.1.2. *Evangelism is carried out in dialogue:*** As evangelizers, we are bridge-builders. Our Lord takes the initiative to approach the Samaritan woman and develops a very rich dialogue, and a very profound exchange of ideas and opinions.

**3.1.3. *The content of the gospel is a “life-giving” one:*** In a world of brokenness and of fragmentation, the message of the good news is one that gives life, like the water that Jesus was offering to the Samaritan woman. Evangelism therefore in the words of Revd Dr. Emilio Castro “aims not to satisfy people, but to transform people, we are

not calling them to be happy with what they are, we are calling them and ourselves to aim at the promise of abundant life, that is the life under the cross that Jesus has called us for.”<sup>10</sup>

- 3.1.4. *Evangelism is informed by the Biblical message and tradition:*** The Swiss Reformed theologian, Professor Karl Barth once said “in order to bear witness of the risen Lord, we ought to hold the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.” We have seen that the evangelization endeavors of Jesus to the Samaritan woman is contextual; the contemporary Pentecostal churches also need to inform and address our present context and social problems by the Biblical text, the “revealed Word of God” so as to bring an inner and structural transformation.
- 3.1.5. *As evangelizers, we are not judges:*** The Samaritan woman is never judged as a sinner. On the contrary, she is portrayed as a model of growing faith. In fact Jesus treats her as a serious conversation partner, the first person in the gospel to whom He makes a bold statement of self-revelation. As we evangelize, “we are not called to be judges; but to be a witness.”
- 3.1.6. *As we evangelize, we call to metanoia - repentance, conversion, transformation, liberation - a turning from and a turning to:*** As evangelizers we ourselves are not the message, we are the channels of the message, called to lead people to a personal encounter with our risen Lord. We propitiate this encounter without interfering or hindering, giving “account of the hope that is in us.”
- 3.1.7. *Evangelizers as servant:*** “as my Father hath sent me, even so I send you” (Jn. 20:21). The kenosis (self-emptying) of our great God and Saviour who lived among the people as servant, sharing in their hopes and sufferings, giving His life on the cross for all humanity- this was Christ’s way of proclaiming the good news, and, as disciples of Christ, we are summoned to follow our Master the same way. “A servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him” (Jn. 13:16). A Christian mission is always a servanthood ministry.

#### **4. Summary:**

For summarizing our discussion on mission as evangelism, I would like to quote from the words of Dr. David Bosch, one of the most helpful thought on the theology of evangelization.<sup>11</sup>

*“Evangelism as that dimension and activity of the church’s mission which, by word and deed and in light of the particular conditions and a particular context, offers every person and community, everywhere, a valid opportunity to be directly challenged to a radical orientation of their lives, a reorientation which involves such things as deliverance from slavery to the world and its powers; embracing Christ as Saviour and Lord; becoming a living member of his community, the church; being enlisted into his service of reconciliation, peace, and justice on earth; and being committed to God’s purpose of placing all things under the rule of Christ.”*

#### **End Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> Frank D. Macchia, “The Struggle for Global Witness: Shifting Paradigms in Pentecostal Theology” in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion made To Travel*, edited by Murray W. Dempster, et al., (Regnum Books International: Oxford, UK & New Delhi, India, 1999), 8.

<sup>2</sup> L. Grant McClung, Jr., “‘Try To Get People Saved’ Revisiting the Paradigm of an Urgent Pentecostal Missiology” in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism...*, 30– 31.

<sup>3</sup> Here in this paper, synonymously ‘gospel’ will sometimes be written as good news or glad tidings.

<sup>4</sup> O.L. Snaitang, *A History of Ecumenical Movement: An Introduction* (Bangalore: BTESSC/SATHRI, 2004), 143.

<sup>5</sup> The Bible does not give a quick answer in our search for a definition or meaning of evangelism. The word *evangelism* in fact is not in the Bible, but the words *evangelist* and *evangelize* are there, and from these we learn what evangelism is. The Greek word *euaggelizo* means “to preach, to proclaim the good tidings, to tell the good news.” The angels evangelized. They brought “good tidings of great joy” (Luke 2:10). Jesus evangelized. He preached the “glad tidings of the kingdom of God” (Luke 8:1). Paul evangelized. He said, “I have preached to you the gospel” (2 Corinthians 11:7), Philip evangelized. He “preached unto him Jesus” (Acts 8:35). Evangelism in the Bible, then, was a ministry of the spoken word.

<sup>6</sup> Jesudason Baskar Jeyaraj, *Christian Ministry: Models of Ministry and Training* (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 2002), 158.

<sup>7</sup> Akbar Abdul-Haqq, “A Theology of Evangelism” in *Christ Seek Asia: Asia-South Pacific Congress on Evangelism: Official Reference Volume-Papers and Reports* (Hong Kong: The Rock House Publishers, 1969), 65.

<sup>8</sup> K. Lalthazuala, “Evangelism in the World Council of Churches” (A BD assignment paper on the “History of Ecumenical Movement”, Durtlang: Aizawl Theological College, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission – American Society of Missiology Series, No. 16* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 417.

<sup>10</sup> Revd Dr. Carlos E. Ham, “Evangelism Beyond the World of Anglicanism” Retrieve from: <http://www.Anglican communion.org/resources/index.cfm> (Access on 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Retrieve from: <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/index.cfm> (Access on 2008).