

## **The Psycho-Social Implications for the Pentecostal Academy in a Destabilized World**

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by

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### **Introduction**

I am extremely honored for this opportunity to engage the Pentecostal theological academy in public dialogue about the issues that lie close to my heart. Since my appointment to the faculty at AGTS four-and-a-half years ago, I have enjoyed the privilege of reflecting academically on many contradictions and dilemmas that have created significant tensions in my heart over the past few decades. These tensions have driven so much of my passion and formed so much of my personal philosophy of ministry that I consider it opportune to be able to submit them publically to the academy for consideration and dialog. Today I will reflect on two specific issues which I believe directly impact us as Pentecostals and our influence in our world.

Let me first enumerate some of the glaring contradictions that have so significantly formed my persona.

- I am a white African.
- I am a thoroughly modern Westerner (complete with a Facebook page), but I am also (and will remain)

influenced by the Majority world orientation in my life.

- I am an ordained Pentecostal pastor and, until my departure from South Africa in 2004, a certified Psychologist and Social Worker.
- I am a biblically conservative Christian whose political and social views were drastically impacted by the events leading up to South Africa's miraculous inauguration of democracy in 1994.
- I am a first world academic with a passion for Majority world poverty alleviation and development.

This personal history, with all its nuances and contradictions, has created significant political, social, theological, and intellectual tension over the past three decades and, undoubtedly, influenced the way I interpret my social world and reality. Exactly twenty years ago, I was appointed to lead my church's National Welfare Department. Within months of taking this position, Nelson Mandela was released from prison after twenty-seven years, which significantly

changed the very fabric of our society. With a rising tide of HIV infections buffeting our nation, my management team and I began to put into place a strategy that led to full racial integration of our 450-employee organization, the migration of our church's social services from over-serviced white areas to significantly under-serviced black townships, the racial integration of institutions for orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC), and the re-tooling of our church infrastructure to engage the devastating AIDS pandemic.

I am declaring these experiences up-front because they have formed the context that nourished the strategies I consider as critical for the future of the Pentecostal academy. Since my transition to AGTS, I have reflected on my praxis. I have undergirded my personal experience with sound theory and been exposed to Pentecostal global thinkers who, like me, wrestle with the concept of our *missio Dei* in a destabilized world. From my perspective, I want to suggest two issues which require significant engagement and purposeful reflection within the Pentecostal academy if we are to succeed in our goal of training and equipping global leaders. First, AGTS must actively take personal and corporate steps to more purposefully and intentionally prepare Pentecostal leaders for the complex psycho-social demands of today's pastoral and global missional ministry. Second, AGTS must broaden its understanding of the single-purpose nature and character of the institution. We need to fully embrace the calling and anointing of Pentecostal psychologists, counselors, and social workers as professionals and full partners in ministry.

I want to further suggest that the importance of these two issues have been significantly magnified by our context and two very profound changes in our world. First, as we launch into the twenty-first century, we find ourselves in a seriously destabilized world context with increasing global economic inequality, financial instability, political upheaval, rampant diseases, and the inexcusable marginalization of the poor, victims of war, and the disenfranchised. Second, AGTS concurrently finds itself in the academic epicenter of a movement that has caught the world by surprise—the global Pentecostal explosion. Allow me first to explore these two contexts that give rise to my two proposed strategic initiatives.

### **Context 1: A Significantly Destabilized World**

Over the centuries, God has used advances in civilizations to prepare the world for new revelations on His path to finally establishing for himself a kingdom of kings and priests. Hebrew culture laid the groundwork by giving the world the wisdom of God's law. Greek culture spread culture and language throughout the known world in preparation for the coming of the gospel. *Pax Romanus* facilitated the spreading of the gospel by creating roads, global peace and prosperity, and effective international communications systems. In the nineteenth century, the British Empire spread western culture, international trade, and missionaries throughout the known world. In the twentieth century *Pax Americanus* destroyed Fascism and communism. World equity markets at the end of the century experienced historic highs. Scientific breakthroughs and global economic and political alliances spread the benefits of

health, incalculable wealth, and personal liberty to multiplied hundreds of millions.

In 2005, *New York Times* best-selling author Thomas Friedman related the story of his travels to India where he witnessed the incredible breakthroughs of the Information Technology industry. With tongue firmly planted in cheek, he suggests that when Christopher Columbus was searching for the western passage to India and discovered the Americas over 500 years ago, he returned home and was able to tell everyone that although he never did find India, he could at least confirm that the world was indeed round. When Friedman returned from his travels, he had a very different revelation.

I actually found India and thought many of the people I met there were Americans... Columbus reported to his king and queen that the world was round, and he went down in history as the man who first made this discovery. I returned home and shared only with my wife, and only in a whisper. 'Honey,' I confided, 'I think the world is flat'<sup>1</sup>

Friedman's "Flat World" presented a very positive perspective on the development of technology and epitomized the sense of triumphalism with which some greeted the conclusion of the twentieth century. Uploading and podcasting, outsourcing and offshoring, supply-chaining and insourcing have created an efficient and interdependent global village. Francis Fukuyama put into words what the optimists were already dreaming, when he said, this is "the end of history."<sup>2</sup> For all intents and purposes, the universal triumph of Western liberalism had arrived. An almost universal acceptance of

the power and efficiency of the global market economy existed. Developmental economists promised that the "Washington consensus" (the standard reform package developed by the IMF, the World Bank and the U.S. Treasury Department in 1989 for the financial crises of developing countries) would spread peace and prosperity around the world.

However, Samuel Huntington, Fukuyama's mentor at Harvard, had another view; he predicted that the new global order would spur violent conflicts between major civilizations as cultural and religious differences drove people apart.<sup>3</sup> The global pessimism Huntington touted was further affirmed as the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan began to resemble the quagmire of another Vietnam, as AIDS kills two million people per year (mostly in sub-Saharan Africa), as genocides and civil wars expose millions to lawlessness and dislocation, and, of course, as stock market crashes this past September wiped out trillions of dollars in investments and pushed the global economy to the brink of financial catastrophe and collapse. As my little brother used to say, "The world is not round; the world is not flat; the world is crooked."

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, our world has not spread the privilege of the few to the many and has become seriously and tragically destabilized. Some economists suggest that not only the U.S., but also the entire world hovers precariously at the brink of a global Great Depression. The frenetic attempts by developmental economists to "save the world" and to ensure that global wealth is fairly distributed is driven by the belief that a destabilized "Bottom Billion" (i.e., the poorest billion

people in the world) could threaten world peace and become breeding grounds for global terror.<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Sachs passionately appeals that “the end of poverty” will only take place as a result of massive increases in development aid to poor nations.<sup>5</sup> On the other side of the economic development spectrum, William Easterly counters loudly that \$2.3 trillion of development aid distributed over the past fifty years has not succeeded in wiping out poverty in the Majority world.<sup>6</sup> The tragedy is that after all this investment “twelve-cent medicines do not reach children dying of malaria, that four-dollar bed nets do not get to the poor to prevent malaria, that three dollars does not get to each new mother to prevent millions of child deaths.”<sup>7</sup>

It is a source of great distress to me that international development economists have shown more concern about the plight of the poor and the destitute of the world and for issues of injustice and global fair trade than we Christian Pentecostals. It is distressing that Pentecostal fervor has been honed in such a manner that in practice we have effectively paraphrased Jesus’ words to now say, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed me to preach the gospel to the RICH, He has sent Me to proclaim PROSPERITY to the WEST, and recovery of MARKET SHARE to the G8, to set free those who BUILD MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR EDIFICES IN WHICH TO WORSHIP ME for 3 hours a week” (not Luke 4:18-19).

Perhaps we can draw inspiration from St. Augustine who also found himself at the end of an era in 400 A.D. By this time, the Visigoths had sacked Rome, and the entire Roman Empire had begun to collapse under

the waves of barbarians spilling over the borders. As the very fabric of Roman civilization began to unravel, he penned his magnificent epic, *The City of God*. The hope for his civilization did not lie in Rome, the City of Man; his desire was for the New Jerusalem, the revelation of the sons of God, the manifestation of the Church of Jesus Christ, the Bride of Christ, who would bring healing to the nations!

From my perspective, if it is the intention of AGTS to be relevant to our destabilized world and have global impact, then global issues require a much higher priority within our Pentecostal academy. We must address issues such as global poverty and disease, the heart-wrenching tragedy of sexual slavery and child soldiers, the injustice of human rights abuses and the persecution of those who stand up for the “faith of our fathers.” If the Lord commanded us to give a cup of cold water to the thirsty, then surely the provision of clean safe drinking water should be part of our agenda. The Pentecostal academy has to become the Church’s think tank to strategize for mobilizing the resources of the Church to meet the agenda of God’s Kingdom!

## **Context 2: The Pentecostal Explosion**

The second significant context that impacts our world is found within the global Pentecostal/Charismatic explosion. In the midst of this seriously destabilized world, scholars and current affairs commentators note that Pentecostalism has inexplicably flourished. In a special report on Pentecostals in 2006, *The Economist* declared, “A century after its birth Pentecostalism is redrawing the religious map of the world.”<sup>8</sup> Referring to the Azusa

Street Revival it says,

The great secular ideologies of the 19th and early 20th centuries—from Marxism to Freudianism—have faded while Seymour’s spirit-filled version of Christianity has flourished. Pentecostal denominations have prospered, and Pentecostalism has infused traditional denominations through the wildly popular charismatic movement ... *LA’s most successful export is not Hollywood but Pentecostalism* (emphasis added).<sup>9</sup>

In a recent 10-country survey of Pentecostalism, the *Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life* suggests that Pentecostals and Charismatics comprise the world’s fastest-growing religious movements.<sup>10</sup> At least a quarter of the world’s 2 billion Christians are thought to be members of these movements (compared to only six percent 30 years ago).<sup>11</sup> A more recent report from South Africa found that in a five-year period between the last two censuses, the fastest growing religious group of all is that classified as “Pentecostal” or “charismatic.”<sup>12</sup> In this short period (the first comparison that could be made after the 1994 democratic election), this group grew by 55 percent.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the soteriological and ecclesiastical impacts of Pentecostalism in a destabilized world, I am energized by published reports of the developmental impact of our movement’s efforts to lift people out of poverty. From the earliest days of the Pentecostal movement, sociologists have commented on the global impact of Pentecostalism’s “redemptive lift.”

Pentecostalism has a special affinity with market-based development and the “Protestant ethic,” a cluster of beliefs, attitudes, and habits that underpinned the spectacular economic growth of north-west Europe during the Industrial Revolution.<sup>14</sup> This biblical ethic involves a disciplined approach to work and family life, and a deferral of gratification and insistence on instant consumption. This, in turn, led to capital accumulation and economic advancement, prerequisites for the successful dawning of the Industrial Revolution.

Regarding Pentecostals, the *Economist’s* 2006 study states: One of the movement’s central messages is self-respect—Pentecostals are ‘dynamite in the hands of God’ rather than deferential servants. Relying on ordinary people to spread the word, the churches are particularly good at conveying the rudiments of management. They teach people to speak in public, organise meetings and, as they become more successful, manage large organisations.

Easterly’s approach to breaking the grip of international poverty should appeal to us as Pentecostals, as we see development as the result of a personal transformation of the mind (Rom.12:1-2) and as a process that needs to be local-church based. He provides compelling evidence for the efficacy of local-community based development where homegrown solutions are created to lift people out of their poverty.<sup>15</sup> Another example is Muhammad Yunus, the “Banker to the Poor” and 2006 Nobel Peace Prize winner who has shown that small micro-

loans to poor individuals can reverse the poverty of millions and confound the wisdom of the macro-oriented global banking institutions.<sup>16</sup> As Pentecostals, we should be at the forefront of community transformation.

### **Implications for Traditional Bifurcation**

Given my personal life context, I find it difficult to entertain or accommodate a theology that attempts to separate the formal verbal presentation of the gospel from the engagement of people in the context of their social ills, physical needs, and suffering. James, the brother of Jesus, made this clear, “If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?” (James 2:14-17).

Since we first began to present classes in social justice here at the Seminary, Dr. Klaus has presented to each of these classes the theological underpinnings for “a compassion rooted in the gospel that transforms.” As he explored the historical roots of today’s Western bifurcation, he provided me, for the first time, an insight into what has been referred to by Western Church historians as “the Great Reversal.” In essence, Evangelicals in the early twentieth century distanced themselves from modernism, liberal theology, and what came to be derisively referred to as “the social gospel.” It included their reaction to such significant cultural impacts as the Scopes Monkey Trial, Darwinism, and the rise of European theological liberalism that denounced the inspiration of Scripture, the virgin birth, and the deity of Christ.<sup>17</sup>

Understanding the historical development of this bifurcation has provided me with deeper insight into the continuing reticence of the Western Church to embrace the holistic message that once characterized the church of the nineteenth century. I now better understand the underlying fear of slipping back into an emasculated “social gospel” where therapeutic efforts to help people “self-actualize” replaced the message of salvation.

However, over the last century there have been significant shifts in global Christianity. The majority of the Christian Church no longer lives in this Western Church. At the beginning of the twentieth century only ten percent of Christians lived outside the West; at the start of the twenty-first century, seventy percent of Christians live in the Majority world. We must now begin to recognize that what was once the periphery of the Church has become the center, and the center has become the periphery.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to this massive shift away from the West, the Majority world has matured, but does not share the same history of bifurcation as the Western Church. In Africa, at the very first charter meeting of the Assemblies of God leadership association, they called for the immediate establishment of a division for social concern because the future of the Church in Africa required this.<sup>19</sup> Two of my colleagues at AGTS have ably traced the tension in official policy on the primacy of evangelism over social action within the AG.<sup>20</sup> These works demonstrate that even during the most evangelistically oriented periods of AG history, social programs have been widely

implemented, even if they were officially done “under the radar.”

I find myself theologically at home within an emerging group that Newberry identifies as “advocating a new understanding of the kingdom of God motif in order to develop a holistic mission theology which encompasses an active social concern and action theology.”<sup>21</sup> I reiterate the voice of theologians and missiologists such as Gordon Fee, Paul Pomerville, Murray Dempster, Peter Kuzmic, and Douglas Petersen: Our Western concept of a bifurcated gospel is, *at best*, a reflection of our unique history which reflects the Great Reversal, and *at worst* reveals an ethnocentric monocultural imposition that fails the test of appropriate cultural indigenization.<sup>22</sup>

It is within this narrow context that I understand my colleague, DeLonn Rance’s appeal during his Hogan Chair presentations this year. He stated, “I believe that the greatest contemporary crisis in missions is not AIDS, malaria, poverty, illiteracy, globalization, urbanization, the global economy ... but rather the lack of Missiological reflection by those engaged in apostolic praxis.”<sup>23</sup>

I fully understand the need for the Western Church to reflect, as well as the latent fear of Western missiologists who still remember the slippery slope of the “social gospel.” Although I understand, I must point to the global context into which we, as a Pentecostal academy, are launching our students. After all our reflection, I am convinced that we will come to the same conclusion as did Rick Warren, who exclaims incredulously, “I’ve got three

advanced degrees. I went to two different seminaries and a Bible school. How did I miss the 2000 verses in the Bible where it talks about the poor?”<sup>24</sup>

The African Church has grown immeasurably; even in the most remote village, far from the vestiges of modernity, a local church can be found. Half of all Africans identify themselves as Christians, while in Sub-Saharan Africa this number shoots up to sixty percent.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, in terms of all the global development indices that reflect poverty and suffering, Africa’s nations are amongst the world’s worst. This includes the Human Development Index, the Human Suffering Index, the Freedom Index, the Corruption Perception Index, AIDS Infection Rate, Infant Mortality Rate, and the list of Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC).

Charles Malik, former President of the UN Security Council, captures my thoughts well when he says, “The problem is not only to win souls but to save minds. If you win the whole world and lose the mind of the world you will soon discover you have not won the world. Indeed, it may turn out that you have actually lost the world.”<sup>26</sup> We have evangelized Africa, but we have failed to “renew her mind” (Rom. 12:1-2) and are in danger of losing her to poverty, disease, and misery. I cannot consider the meaning of *missio Dei* without reference to issues like these that describe so poignantly the abject absence of Kingdom ethics in our destabilized world.

When Jesus emerged from the desert to launch His formal ministry, He proclaimed that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him and anointed Him to preach the gospel to *the*

*poor*, to proclaim release to *the captives* and recovery of sight to *the blind*, to set free those who are *oppressed* (Luke 4: 18-19, emphasis added). THIS is the message that our destabilized world needs to hear!

### **Implications for Soul Care**

The bifurcation of the Great Reversal has, however, also had an unfortunate impact on the Western Church by reducing the breadth of the Great Commission to the single act of “religious conversion.” All the post-conversion functions of Matthew 28:19-20 have been significantly neglected: *make disciples of all the nations, immersing them in the knowledge and experience of the triune God, teaching them to observe all that Jesus commanded us to do*. As evangelism has continued to be promoted as the singular valid function of the Church, the behavioral modification implications of the gospel have been sorely neglected. The critical significance of character development and maturity, as envisioned by Paul as the “fruit of the Spirit,” has received little attention. In practice, the attainment of moral attributes such as godly love, kindness, goodness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22) have been relegated to a condition that is to be attained in the indistinct future when the Church is rescued from this world or when the kingdom of God supposedly finally arrives.

This theological prioritization of evangelism has created a situation where the local church is filled with people bearing significant emotional and interpersonal scars but left without the shepherdly oversight and adequate care of their pastors. Marriages are under significant strain and divorce rates among Christians are indistinguishable from the general population.<sup>27</sup> Christian

psychologists and counselors report cases of child abuse and non-accidental trauma, sexual escapades outside of marriage, debilitating phobias, anxieties and a variety of alcohol and dependency issues among Christians. Tens of thousands of veterans are returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in a serious state of emotional trauma affecting their mental health, marriages, and ability to reintegrate into society. Significant numbers of them are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).<sup>28</sup> For the first time, in January 2009, suicide claimed the lives of more American soldiers than Al Qaeda and the Iraqi insurgency combined.<sup>29</sup> All of these significant emotional, formational, and discipleship issues have become the reality and context of local church life.

Since the beginning of Church history, the pastor cared for the souls of men and women.<sup>30</sup> The pastor served not only as the counselor of the community but also as the educator, the keeper of culture, and often, even the doctor. Over time, the process, which sociologist Talcott Parsons referred to as functional specialization and structural differentiation, took place as each of these fields became occupational specializations and developed apart from the role of the pastor. Nevertheless, the role of counselor remained integrally entwined with pastoral ministry. The study of psychology was merely a metaphysical exercise philosophers mused about, but over which the Church always exercised full authority.<sup>31</sup>

A century ago, difficulties began to arise when a non-clergy professional for the first time began to treat individuals for their psychological problems. Sigmund Freud’s “talking cure” was an historic breakthrough

as, for the first time, psychologists scientifically began to discover the therapeutic power of cathartic recollections of the past and of the disruptive impact of unconscious defense mechanisms. Over the years, the insights of Freud have been significantly augmented by behaviorists like Wundt, Pavlov, and Skinner, by humanist psychologists such as Carl Rogers, existentialists such as Victor Frankl, and cognitive theorists such as Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck. Today, the vast majority of therapists have integrated elements of all of these theoretical schools into an eclectic mixture of empirically validated treatment approaches.<sup>32</sup>

The reaction of the Christian community to the encroachment of academic professionals onto their soul care function paralleled their reaction to modernism and the Great Reversal. While mainline churches embraced the potential value of psychotherapy, Evangelicals largely split into two camps. One camp was led by the Reformed theologian, Jay Adams, who declared that only pastors are “competent to counsel” and that the cause of all personal problems can be traced to demonic activity, personal sin, or organic illness. There was no room in Adams’ biblical theology for therapy, psychologists, or mental health professionals.<sup>33</sup> Clinton and Ohlschlager suggest that it was precisely this type of hard-line denial of the reality of psychological distress that drove millions of people to seek help from mental health professionals outside the church. They suggest that if the church had taken its task of discipleship more seriously, and not retreated into its priority of evangelistic conversion there would have been little need

for the specifically trained Christian counselor today.<sup>34</sup>

The second Evangelical camp, represented by the Christian Counseling movement, actively engaged the academic psychological disciplines and attempted to interpret to the Church the new social scientific findings. This group was led by people like Clyde Narramore, Howard Clinebell, James Dobson, Gary Collins, and Larry Crab. The movement has grown and matured over the last two decades. The influence of Pentecostally oriented therapists like Siang-Yang Tan, who provides APA seminars on spirituality and cognitive behavioral therapy, and the breakthrough volume by McMinn and Campbell on “Integrative Psychotherapy” are some of the elements that are bringing believers ever closer to an empirically validated Christian psychotherapy.<sup>35</sup> This excitement has recently been reflected by Sutton with his positive evaluation of the McMinn and Campbell model.<sup>36</sup>

The time has clearly come for us to elevate the ministry contributions of Christian counselors and social scientists in the hearts and minds of the Pentecostal academy. We, as Christian counselors, see our ministry as integral to the single-purpose institutional focus of the Pentecostal academy. Christian counseling reflects the professionalization of the soul care function that in times past was an integral part of pastoral ministry. In our minds, it is inconceivable that pastoral ministry, and particularly the chaplaincy, could be adequately engaged without a thorough understanding of the psychosocial dimensions of human growth and development, emotional distress, and healing models. Nor is it conceivable that

pastoral ministry could adequately meet the complex psychosocial needs of God's people without the active participation of a Christian counselor as part of the local church's ministry team.

## Conclusion

It should be clear by now that the many contradictions and cultural programming that have so significantly formed my persona over the years have also influenced the particular passions I present today as priorities. Friedman's picture of a flat earth has created a global village where human suffering, hunger, and destabilization eventually affect all of us. We cannot allow future leaders to pass through our institutions who are unable to contextualize the message of Jesus Christ as the One who saves the whole person: body, soul, mind, and social relationships. Our future leaders will be expected to apply the gospel message in an increasingly destabilized world. We cannot ignore the magnificent social lift that Pentecostalism provides. We cannot train Christian professionals within a Western-oriented bifurcated gospel that effectively separates them from a world suffering from psychosocial and economic distress.

In conclusion, what are the psychosocial implications for the Pentecostal academy in a destabilized world? We must commit ourselves to equip pastors, chaplains, missionaries, and counselors with the full armor of God. We dare not forget the poor (Gal. 2:10). We need to embrace the power of God, who not only transforms the soul but also has ordered us to disciple all nations

in the ways of our God (Matt. 28:19-20). We need to embrace social justice and compassion (Micah 6:8) not as an afterthought, nor as a delivery system to "bait and switch" unsuspecting sinners to "win their souls." Compassion is the act of love, the vital expression of God's character in us to a world that needs to experience His love. Our compassion is His love that shines through us and which brings life and hope for the widow, the orphan, the poor, and the disenfranchised (James 1:27).

May we at AGTS be a shining light to the nations.

### Song for the Nations

Chris Christensen

May we be a shining light to the nations  
A shining light to the peoples of the earth  
Till the whole world sees the glory of  
Your name  
May Your pure light shine through us

May we bring a word of hope to the nations  
A word of life to the peoples of the earth  
Till the whole world knows there's salvation  
through Your name  
May Your mercy flow through us

May we be a healing balm to the nations  
A healing balm to the peoples of the earth  
Till the whole world knows the power of  
Your name  
May Your healing flow through us

May we sing a song of joy to the nations  
A song of praise to the peoples of the earth  
Till the whole world rings with the praises of  
Your name  
May Your song be sung through us

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<sup>8</sup>“Pentecostalism’s Rise,” *The Economist*, [http://www.economist.com/world/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=E1\\_RQDTNDG](http://www.economist.com/world/displaystory.cfm?story_id=E1_RQDTNDG) December 19, 2006 (accessed July 29, 2009).

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<sup>10</sup>“Spirit and Power: A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals,” Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, <http://pewforum.org/surveys/pentecostal/> October 2006 (accessed July 27, 2009). The ten countries studied were: Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, India, Kenya, Nigeria, Philippines, South Africa, South Korea, and the United States.

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