

## SONS AND DAUGHTERS, YOUNG AND OLD: TOWARD A PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGY OF THE FAMILY

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### ABSTRACT

Do Pentecostals have anything distinctive to contribute to Christian discussions on theology of the family or theology of children? After a brief survey of the literature, we will explore the possibility of developing a Pentecostal theology of the family from out of the Day of Pentecost narrative and the Luke-Acts “canon-within-the-canon” – both of which have long been central to Pentecostal spirituality and its theological imagination. Central to such a Lukan and Pentecostal consideration will be the family as an eschatological sign of the coming reign of God. The concluding section will return to sketch trajectories for a pentecostal theology of family in the twenty-first century with implications for a theology of parenting, for filial and sibling relationships, and for thinking about the intergenerational family, all in eschatological perspective.

Keywords: Pentecostal theology, theology of the family, Luke-Acts, eschatology.

### Introduction

The emergence of pentecostal theology within the wider academy is a relatively recent phenomenon. This means, in part, that pentecos-

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tal theologians are still at the very early stages of thinking theologically about the various academic loci, and that there are therefore many topics about which they have given scant, if any, consideration. Theology of the family is one of those topics. The fact is that Pentecostals, at least in North America, register as being rather conservative in terms of family practices, sexual mores, anti-abortion, anti-homosexuality, and even opposition to birth control.<sup>2</sup> So in some circles, the issue about a pentecostal theology of the family is a closed one: why not just reiterate traditional evangelical or even fundamentalist views on the matter? For others, however, it is precisely this uncritical traditionalism that needs to be interrogated. Yet while there have been a growing number of studies of various aspects of family life in Pentecostalism, none of these have been sustained constructive theological efforts.

This essay intends to initiate theological reflection on the family among Pentecostals. In brief, it asks if there is an explicitly pentecostal set of perspectives on theology of the family and if so, what these might be. The three parts that follow thus are primarily prolegomenal in nature: initially in order to identify possible trajectories of approach, then with regard to pentecostal hermeneutical and scriptural intuitions, and finally to chart lines of inquiry for theological thinking about the family. My goal in what follows will be to invite pentecostal engagement with this topic by teasing out how the central motif of pentecostal spirituality, the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, might contribute toward the articulation, at least in outline, of a theology of the family that resonates with scholars of the global renewal movement. An emerging thesis, one with possible implications for discussions about theology of the family for Christians in general (beyond the circle of Pentecostalism), is that the family might also be considered as an eschatological sign of the reign of God, in which case, the family in all of its historical configurations remains ambiguous

2. See A. Greeley and M. Hout, *The Truth about Conservative Christians: What They Think and What They Believe* (Chicago, IL and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), chapter 11. I note here that my claims regarding “Pentecostalism” are informed more by my own North American perspective and location than anything else, so readers should keep this in mind. However, given the influence of North American Pentecostalism in the global South, and even given that the patriarchalism of the North American versions find parallel expressions across the various cultures within which Pentecostals in the global South find themselves, many of my generalizations remain applicable in the world pentecostal context. To be sure, exceptions abound, but only a full study, rather than an exploratory article, can tease out the diversity of family issues and perspectives with the global renewal movement.

and fragmentary, awaiting the final redemption wrought by Christ in the power of the Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

### Theology of the Family: Current Explorations

A wide-ranging discussion of theology of the family can be found across the spectrum, informed by a multitude of disciplinary approaches. To be sure, for Christians as people of the book, biblically oriented explorations are surely in the mix.<sup>4</sup> Not surprising, given the many challenges confronted by families since the dawn of the modern age and particularly now in an increasingly globalizing world, theologians have reflected on the family with practical questions and concerns as well, which explains in part why theological and social ethicists have entered into the discussion alongside practical and applied theologians.<sup>5</sup> Last but not least, there have been also more “confessional” proposals authored by scholars and theologians situated within and drawing from specific Christian traditions for thinking about the family.<sup>6</sup> The emergence of such more explic-

3. My remarks remain first and foremost at the prolegomenal level because I am not a specialist on the family; yes, I am a husband and father, but this gives me experiential perspective, rather than scholarly understanding. With regard to the latter there is a growing amount of literature that I have not been able to engage, so my comments remain horribly uninformed by the ongoing debates in theology of the family. Still, I hope that my considerations from a distinctively pentecostal vantage point will not only precipitate conversation among pentecostals but perhaps bring in a fresh voice that can potentially advance the discussion a step forward.

4. A more evangelically informed approach is R.S. Hess and M.D. Carroll R. (eds), *Family in the Bible: Exploring Customs, Culture, and Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), while a more history-of-religion set of discussions can be found in J. Willem van Henten and A. Brenner (eds), *Families and Family Relations as Represented in Early Judaism and Early Christianity: Texts and Fictions* (Studies in Theology and Religion 2; Leiden: Deo Publishing, 2000).

5. The former includes S.G. Post, *More Lasting Unions: Christianity, the Family, and Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000). The latter feature two field establishing volumes in 2007: D.S. Browning, *Equality and the Family: A Fundamental, Practical Theology of Children, Mothers, and Fathers in Modern Societies* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), and A. Thatcher, *Theology and Families* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007).

6. Reformed proposals include those by M.L. Stackhouse, *Covenant and Commitments: Faith, Family, and Economic Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), and G.W. Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations: Trinitarian, Christological, and Human – Towards an Ethic of the Family* (Issues in Systematic

itly confessional approaches invites pentecostal scholars and theologians also to reflect on what, if anything, they have to contribute to thinking about theology of the family.

Within Pentecostalism in general and pentecostal scholarship as a whole, there has been neither sustained studies of the family nor, as already indicated, explicitly theological reflection on the topic. This is not to say that there has been a complete absence of research on the family in Pentecostalism. However, much of this has been conducted by anthropologists and others working in the social sciences and humanities, and even some of what is available are tangential rather than focused explorations. For example, fitting the latter description is the work of Pacific Lutheran University anthropologist Elizabeth Brusco.<sup>7</sup> Yet her project is actually focused on gender issues in Colombian evangelicalism (or Pentecostalism, a practically synonymous term in the Latin American context), rather than on the family, more broadly considered. We surely learn much about the dynamics of pentecostal conversion and their implications for Latin American families in Brusco's study – i.e., about how women are empowered, how men are transformed so as to take responsibility for their families, and how pentecostal families are set on trajectories of upward social, economic, and ecclesial mobility, among other developments – but in the end, these anthropological insights into the nature of pentecostal families are in effect incidental to other concerns that animate the research.<sup>8</sup>

There are other smaller-scale research projects that have shed light on pentecostal family structures, configurations, and practices. An early study of the Catholic charismatic movement in the late 1970s by Mary Jo Neitz, a sociologist, focused on the pro-family ideology prevalent within

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Theology 4; New York: Peter Lang, 1999), while Roman Catholic offerings include J.H. Rubio, *A Christian Theology of Marriage and Family* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003); D.M. McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home: A Theology of the Household* (London: SCM Press, 2nd edn, 2004); and M. Cardinal Ouellet, *Divine Likeness: Toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family* (trans. P. Milligan and L.M. Ciccone; Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006). It is not surprising that the latter have been more energetic about this topic given the official Catholic position about the procreational purposes of human sexuality.

7. E.E. Brusco, *The Reformation of Machismo: Evangelical Conversion and Gender in Colombia* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1995).

8. In another study, Brusco focuses on the issue of violence within the Colombian evangelical and pentecostal family: "The Peace that Passes All Understanding: Violence, the Family and Fundamentalist Knowledge in Colombia," in J. Brink and J. Mencher (eds), *Mixed Blessings: Gender and Religious Fundamentalism Cross Culturally* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 11–24.

the renewal and compared and contrasted this view among the masses with the more pro-life ideology of the Catholic hierarchy.<sup>9</sup> Neitz has not, to my knowledge, retained her attention on the family in pentecostal or charismatic movements, although she has continued to work around the topic over the years, especially in her studies of gender, women's roles, and motherhood.<sup>10</sup> More recently, Maria das Dores Campos Machado, a sociologist at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, compared responses within pentecostal and Catholic charismatic communities in Brazil to perennial familial structures challenges – i.e., unfaithfulness, single motherhood, or homosexuality – with the former tending to spiritualize (even demonize) the issues much more so than the latter.<sup>11</sup> Both cases, of course, are prime examples of sociological analyses of families in Pentecostalism, and they should be taken into consideration in any interdisciplinary treatment of the topic.

More social scientific analyses, however, have also uncovered that many pentecostal churches are modeled after what they consider the New Testament to say about first century households as congregating centers for the earliest followers of Jesus. In these “home church” scenarios, the lines between families and churches are blurred: husbands are likened to priests of the home, and the family is structured like a church. For instance, the pentecostal Russian Church of Christians of the Evangelical Faith has as part of its 2002 statement of faith an article titled, “The Home Church,” which reads:

We believe that the blessing and well-being of the church to a great extent depends on the holy institution of the home church, which consists of the members of the family. The duty of the home church includes the parents'

9. M.J. Neitz, “Family, State, and God: Ideologies of the Right-to-life Movement,” *Sociological Analysis* 42.3 (Fall 1981), pp. 265–76.

10. This area of women and Pentecostalism has also been the focus of other studies, the most prominent being E.J. Lawless, *God's Peculiar People: Women's Voices and Folk Tradition in a Pentecostal Church* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1988); N.R. Toulis, *Believing Identity: Pentecostalism and the Mediation of Jamaican Ethnicity and Gender in England* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1997); E. Alexander, *The Women of Azusa Street* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2005); and J.E. Soothill, *Gender, Social Change and Spiritual Power: Charismatic Christianity in Ghana* (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2007).

11. M. das Dores Campos Machado, “Family, Sexuality, and Family Planning: A Comparative Study of Pentecostals and Charismatics in Rio de Janeiro,” in B. Boudewijnse, A. Droogers, and F. Kamsteeg (eds), *More than Opium: An Anthropological Approach to Latin American and Caribbean Pentecostal Praxis* (Studies in Evangelicalism 14; Lanham, MD, and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1998), pp. 169–202.

holy and exemplary life before God, their children and the surrounding world. Parents must raise their children in the word of truth, together they must pray, sing spiritual songs, and read the Holy Scriptures. Together with their children they must attend the Divine service.<sup>12</sup>

These developments should not be surprising if we keep in mind that pentecostal churches are growing in developing regions of the world experiencing high social mobility, and in these contexts, migrating families have left “home” and thus find new “family” support networks particularly among others of pentecostal faith.<sup>13</sup> Yet the emergence of these forms of pentecostal families/churches beg for more explicit theological reflection and elucidation.

One of the first and perhaps still only theological assessments remains a short essay written by then Associate Professor of Christian Education and Theology at the Seminario Sudamericano in Ecuador, Virginia Trevino Nolivos.<sup>14</sup> Nolivos here undertakes, in a very preliminary way, the task of developing a pentecostal theology of the family. Deeply informed by the work of what is now the Center for Pentecostal Theology affiliated with the Pentecostal Theological Seminary in Cleveland, Tennessee (affiliated with the pentecostal Church of God denomination),

12. This article is quoted in Torsten Löfstedt, “Gender Roles among Russian and Belarusian Pentecostals,” paper presented to the Sixth International and Multidisciplinary Conference of the European Research Network on Global Pentecostalism (GloPent), Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden, 20–22 May 2011, and derives from an earlier version of the church’s statement of faith. I am grateful to Prof. Löfstedt for sharing an electronic version of his paper with me.

13. At least two other papers presented at the GloPent Conference also discussed pentecostal churches which structured themselves according to the New Testament model of the family – viz., Evangelos Karagiannis, “More than a Metaphor: A Greek Pentecostal Church as a Family,” and Daniel Frei, “The Pentecostal Church as a Family – the Pentecostal Family as a Church.”

14. See Virginia Trevino Nolivos, “A Pentecostal Paradigm for the Latin American Family: An Instrument of Transformation,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 5.2 (2001): 223–34, slightly revised in Virginia Trevino Nolivos, “A Pentecostal Paradigm for the Latin American Family: An Instrument of Transformation,” *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research* 11 (2002) [<http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyber11.html>]. Nolivos’ later essay, co-authored with her husband, Eloy Nolivos, “Pentecostalism’s Theological Reconstruction of the Identity of the Latin American Family,” in Calvin L. Smith (ed.), *Pentecostal Power: Expressions, Impact and Faith of Latin American Pentecostalism* (Global Pentecostal & Charismatic Studies 6; Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 205–26, is more social-scientifically and historically oriented than the theological, although many of the same insights as from her earlier articles reappear.



Nolivos approaches her topic utilizing the framework of the pentecostal “five-fold gospel” of Jesus as savior, sanctifier, Spirit-baptizer, healer, and coming king.<sup>15</sup> What emerges are initial reflections about how these commitments and sensibilities can help shape pentecostal understandings of the family. The emphasis here is on the redemptive or ideal aspects of the family as envisioned in the saving, sanctifying, healing, and eschatological work of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus Nolivos presents her ideas as a transformational proposal or paradigm.

The following discussion builds on Nolivos’ suggestions particularly in light of her eschatological vision. As someone committed to interdisciplinary research, I would surely want to draw from and even highlight the empirical and social scientific research that has been done on the family in pentecostal movements, churches, and communities. Yet as a systematician, I would also insist that any theological proposal will need at some point to interpret the data across the spectrum of the sciences in theological terms. In other words, there ought to be a specifically theological framework of interpretation which enables us to make sense of the disparate data presented through historical and social-scientific research. My own work has presumed what I have called a pneumatological starting point, related to the experiences of the Spirit embedded within pentecostal spirituality.<sup>16</sup> My claim is that such a pneumatological approach to pentecostal theology dovetails nicely with Nolivos’ intuitions regarding the eschatological nature of the family and the need for a transformational paradigm of understanding that can help us work toward a normative and redemptive theology of the family.

For my theological starting point, however, I turn to the New Testament book of Acts. As members of a restorationist movement, many pentecostals read this Lukan account of the lives of the earliest followers of Jesus as providing a template for Christian life as a whole. In the past, the Acts narrative has been understood not merely as providing a

15. This theological framework revolving around the “five-fold gospel” also structures my reflections on public theology: *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010).

16. See my book *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Burlington, VT, and Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2002, repr.: Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), wherein the details of this methodology is articulated, and then my *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), wherein the methodology is exemplified.

history of the incidental truths of the apostolic ministry but as having normative import for the Spirit-filled life and for both theological self-understanding and doctrinal self-definition. Why then should pentecostal theologians not return to this same account for resources to deal with issues across the theological spectrum? This is not to confine pentecostal theology to Acts or even to the two-volumes of Luke-Acts; but it is to say that the pentecostal canon-within-the-canon has served and can continue to function as a springboard for constructive theological reflection among pentecostal scholars, even if the topic were theology of the family.

### **The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: The Eschatological Family**

Pentecostalism derives its name from the Day of Pentecost narrative about the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2. In response to the crowd's amazement and perplexity about what they were seeing and hearing (Acts 2.12-13), Peter responded, quoting also from the book of Joel:

In the last days it will be, God declares,  
 that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,  
     and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
     and your young men shall see visions,  
     and your old men shall dream dreams.  
 Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
     in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
     and they shall prophesy...  
 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved  
 (Acts 2.17-18, 21).<sup>17</sup>

I would like to invite reflection on this kerygmatic retrieval of the Hebrew Bible as a springboard to developing what we might call a Lukan, and then by extension pentecostal, theology of the family. Three themes stand out for explicit comment and consideration.

First, note the eschatological self-understanding foregrounded in this appeal to the prophet Joel (Acts 2.17). There are multiple levels of possible analysis here, including the original *Sitz im Leben* of Joel's prophecy, the reception and canonical history of Joel, Peter's own retrieval of Joel's text (assuming the historicity, at some level, of the Acts 2 narrative), and Luke's use of this Petrine sermon, among other hermeneutical approaches.<sup>18</sup> My

17. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version*.

18. A number of these various levels have already been identified and explored by L.R. McQueen, *Joel and the Spirit: The Cry of a Prophetic Hermeneutic* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).



point is that Luke, following Peter (as his source), situates the Day of Pentecost outpouring of the Spirit within an eschatological framework. Yet these “last days” refer not first and foremost to the end of time, but to the days of God’s promised redemption, restoration, and renewal of Israel.<sup>19</sup> So Luke is not thinking about, nor should pentecostals focus on, the end of history. Instead, the appearance of the Spirit marks the expansion of God’s redemptive age, initially inaugurated in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ, but now made available by Christ to all through his giving of the same Spirit who empowered his messianic mission.<sup>20</sup> In short, pentecostals have always been right to emphasize the eschatological character of the Spirit’s outpouring;<sup>21</sup> yet in developing what might be called their eschatological imagination, they have misjudged the signs of their own times insofar as they have framed the “last days” according to dispensationalist categories rather than attending to Luke’s own vision of what these last days mean and how they are to unfold.<sup>22</sup>

So what does this eschatological orientation have to do with thinking about theology of the family? I suggest – and this is my second set of comments – that the prophecy of Joel retrieved by Luke through Peter can help us begin to develop some basic intuitions about these matters. Consider, for example, what might be deemed the egalitarian character of the Spirit of prophecy: both sons and daughters, male- and female-servants, are empowered by the Spirit. While the Lukan witness to the role of women as equivalent with that of men is certainly incommensurate with contemporary notions of egalitarianism, it is also undeniable that women

19. See, for example, M. Turner, *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel’s Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); compare my *In the Days of Caesar*, chapter 3, 2.2.

20. Here I build on my proposal for understanding pentecostal eschatology on its own or on Lukan terms, rather than according to the categories of futuristic dispensationalism, presented in my *In the Days of Caesar*, chapter 8, especially pp. 331-32.

21. For example, S.J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), and D.W. Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

22. Here I follow the path blazed by G.T. Sheppard, “Pentecostalism and the Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism: Anatomy of an Uneasy Relationship,” *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 6.2 (1984), pp. 5-34, which has now been developed in multiple directions in P. Althouse and R. Waddell (eds), *Perspectives in Pentecostal Eschatologies: World Without End* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Press, 2010).

play a much more prominent role in the Third Gospel, not to mention the Acts narrative as well, than elsewhere in the New Testament writings, and that these images anticipate if not resource contemporary egalitarian visions.<sup>23</sup> Further, while there is no slighting of elders, who continue to dream dreams, there is also no recognition that age, and the sageliness that comes with that, is a privileged medium for revelatory insights of the Spirit. Instead youth, or young men, are not inhibited from seeing visions, even in tandem with the elders of the community. Last but not least is the suggestiveness in this passage for the extended family. As is well-known, ancient Israelite, Second Temple, and early Christian households – note that the New Testament uses the term *oikos* (household) instead of the Latin *familia* (family) – included servants (as in the case of Philemon). Yet the Christian message of Christ and his followers as servants of the living God introduced a new dynamic that began to unravel traditional master-slave relations.<sup>24</sup> In the eschatological perspective of Luke, servants are no less worthy as vessels of the Spirit or as conduits for the Spirit's prophetic witness.

Now we need to tread carefully here. It would be both anachronistic and exegetically irresponsible to say that Luke's retrieval of Joel constitutes his own theology of the family. In fact, as we shall see more clearly in the next section, Jesus himself called younger disciples, some who might have been young heads of households, into an itinerant ministry that was probably not conducive to the kinds of family structures desired at least by some in the contemporary world, even as he also expected that itinerant discipleship relied to some degree on an older generation of established heads of households (older fathers) to provide hospitality without reciprocity or other forms of social compensation.<sup>25</sup> In other words, Luke's portrait of Jesus' life and ministry itself operated according to an escha-

23. This is not to say that pentecostal scholars have automatically gravitated toward a feminist hermeneutical perspective. In fact, while there is more to work with in the Lukan texts toward a feminist reading, feminist scholarship has also illuminated that patriarchal assumptions still reign in Luke's two-volumes and so a hermeneutics of suspicion nevertheless should be engaged. Still, we await a feminist pentecostal reading of Luke-Acts, and this would also be especially important with regard to thinking about a Lukan theology of the family such as the one that is being outlined here. For preliminary considerations of women in Luke-Acts, see my *Who Is the Holy Spirit: A Walk with the Apostles* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2011), chapters 29–30.

24. See R.W. Klein, "A Liberated Lifestyle: Slaves and Servants in Biblical Perspective," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 9.4 (1982), pp. 212–21.

25. See, A. Destro and M. Pesce, "Fathers and Householders in the Jesus Movement: The Perspective of the Gospel of Luke," *Biblical Interpretation* 11.2 (2003), pp. 211–38.

tological model that would have challenged also the social status quo in the first century Mediterranean world. Hence we ought to understand the Day of Pentecost narrative not just eschatologically but also ecclesiological. The upshot of God's redemptive visitation of Israel in these last days is to renew and restore the exiled, oppressed, and dispossessed people of God. What emerges on the other side of the Spirit's outpouring upon all flesh is the reconstituted people of Yahweh, the church. But the key here is that God's renewal of Israel and establishment of the body of Christ and the fellowship of the Spirit is envisioned in familial – not to mention familiar – terms: the church is constituted as a new set of social relationships in which males and females play similar roles, in which the elders and the youth of the community are joined together in leadership and common cause, and in which the free and the slave – core and extended members of the household or the community, in short – are all recipients of the Spirit's gift and empowerment.<sup>26</sup>

This leads to my third set of observations: that this pneumatological, eschatological, and ecclesiological vision of the people of God is also finally soteriological: "Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2.21).<sup>27</sup> When does this happen? "...before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day" (Acts 2.20b), which is the day of the reign of God itself. This eschatological redemption and renewal of Israel is part of God's grand soteriological design, except that the earliest followers of the Messiah never anticipated that this restoration would involve the gathering and grafting (to use one of St. Paul's metaphors) of the Gentiles as well, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Thus

26. Here the lines between ecclesiological and familial discourse begin to blur, particularly as ecumenical conversation proceeds to take up the doctrine of the church utilizing models derived from family life; on this development in Roman Catholic ecclesiology, see, for example, A. Shorter et al., *Theology of the Church as Family of God* (Tangaza Occasional Papers 3; Nairobi and Limuru, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 1997); and P. Ryan (ed.), *The Model of "Church-as-Family": Meeting the African Challenge – Proceedings of the Fourth Interdisciplinary Session of the Faculty of Theology and the Department of Religious Studies, Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi* (Nairobi: The Catholic University of Eastern Africa Publications, 1999).

27. B. Waters, *The Family in Christian Social and Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), chapter 7, also suggests that the church witnesses to the eschatological nature of the family even as the family witnesses to the providential sustenance of the church; yet Waters' eschatological framework is driven more by the doctrine of the resurrection and christology compared to my more pneumatological emphases.

all the peoples of the earth would finally partake of the promises made to Abraham (Acts 3.25). Thus also does Luke record, at the conclusion of Peter's Day of Pentecost sermon, that the forgiveness of sins and gift of the Holy Spirit is available to all: "For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him" (Acts 2.39).

Here again we have a familial reference. Not only is there is no reason to exclude biological children from this promise, but the biological aspect appears explicit, alongside others, even "all who are far away" (both geographically and chronologically). Thus, the eschatological work of the Spirit and its attendant salvific benefits are meant for biological families within the reconstituted people or household of God, even as families are invited to nurture their children to live into this promise associated with God's redemptive plan.<sup>28</sup> Later on in the apostolic narrative, Luke confirms the ongoing unfolding of this promise in the lives of the household of the Philippian jailer who cared for Paul, Silas, and other prisoners: "At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay" (Acts 16.33).<sup>29</sup>

Thinking about a Lukan theology of the family in light of the Day of Pentecost outpouring of the Spirit, then, invites consideration of the household – first of God, and then of human families – in eschatological perspective. Here I wish to push pentecostal intuitions about the church as household or family, which we introduced in the first section (above), in a more explicitly theological, viz., soteriological and eschatological, direction. Such households are precisely what the Spirit of God is forming and constituting in these last days, both in order to renew and revitalize the fallen world and to save through the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit. The prophecy of Joel thus provides a template for the eschatological and Spirit-filled household. Pentecostals have now begun to give some consideration to the nature of the church (ecclesiology) as

28. See Billie Davis, "Perpetuating Pentecost through the Family," in John Kie Vining (ed.), *Nurturing Pentecostal Families: A Covenant to Nurture Our Families* (Cleveland, TN: Family Ministries/Pathway Press, 1996), pp. 87–97. This volume is one of the few "manuals" for pentecostal family raising that includes – certainly in some chapters more than others – some theological reflection.

29. Some charismatic Christians from mainline Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox churches might see in this reference justification for infant baptism; my proposals in this paper do not turn on any dogmatic stance regarding this matter. Pentecostally, in any case, baptismal efficacy is pneumatological rather than liturgical, as I argue in my *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, pp. 156–60.

a community of the Spirit;<sup>30</sup> might it also be possible to extrapolate from this discussion the beginnings of a pentecostal theology of the family?

**“Children of the Promise”:  
Lukan Intimations for Theology of the Family**

For preliminary considerations of this task, I consider moving backward from the early apostolic experience to the portrayal of the Christ in which steps they hoped to follow. Luke’s Gospel actually includes a number of references to household members that have deeply informed pentecostal beliefs and practices. Engaging with the Third Evangelist on these matters will enable us to accomplish at least three related purposes. First, it will help us to further navigate the hermeneutical circle by re-reading the Day of Pentecost account in light of the life of Christ, which preceded in historical and even chronological terms in the order of Luke’s writings; in this way, we can see how the early Christian experience as the household of faith may or may not have implemented or even extended Jesus’ teachings about the family.<sup>31</sup> Second, as shall be seen, there are a number of “hard sayings” of Jesus regarding the family that have been internalized in pentecostal piety; engaging with Luke on this matter will provide an opportunity for Pentecostal scholars to critically interrogate not only their own beliefs and practices but also their hermeneutical sensibilities. Finally, of course, as the Bible does not provide any systematic presentation of theology of the family, any attempts to sketch the contours of a pentecostal view on such matters will need to proceed ad hoc; my own approach is thus to mine especially the teachings of Jesus in order to outline a framework for thinking theologically about the family in light of the eschatological and pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh.

Inklings about the family in the life of Christ leap off Peter’s invocation (as recorded in Acts) to the crowd about the promise being for their children and others. This refers, of course, to the assurance of the forgiveness of sins and of the gift of the Spirit. More precisely, this is the guarantee

30. For example, V.-M. Kärkkäinen, *Toward a Pneumatological Theology: Pentecostal and Ecumenical Perspectives on Ecclesiology, Soteriology, and Theology of Mission* (ed. A. Yong; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), and Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical, and Global Perspectives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), pp. 72–74.

31. See also the introduction to my *Who Is the Holy Spirit*, where I explain more about this strategy of reading Luke’s account of Jesus from the standpoint of the apostolic and early Christian experience.

of God the Father, originally and vaguely made to the ancestors (in particular to Abraham) of Israel (Lk. 1.55 and 72), explicitly connected to the Spirit by Jesus at the conclusion of his teaching the disciples to pray (Lk. 11.13), and then referenced again just before his ascension (Lk. 24.49). Luke reiterates this aspect of Jesus' final instructions at the beginning of his second volume: "While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father" (Acts 1.4). This promise of the Spirit has been a perennial theme in early pentecostal history. Originally a legacy of the American Holiness movement,<sup>32</sup> which was a central part of the ferment for the emergence of Pentecostalism at the turn of the twentieth century, the promise of the Father was believed to have found further fulfillment in the last days as part of the latter rain outpouring of the Spirit at the Topeka, Kansas, and Azusa Street revivals.<sup>33</sup> Pentecostal historiography and theology, then, has been long informed by the notion of a promising Father.

What does this have to do with a pentecostal theology of the family? My suggestion is that the depiction of the Father's promise assumes both the patriarchal and hierarchical worldview of the ancient Near East. The father represents the primordial source of life (or of all things, in the case of the divine Father) and serves as the family authority figure.<sup>34</sup> The Father's willingness to make promises and then to bring them about presumes his responsibility to oversee the wellbeing of the family and to provide for its members. Similarly, of course, pentecostal pastors become father figures as well who provide leadership, oversight, and at least spiritual provision

32. Especially in the work of Phoebe Palmer, a Holiness preacher, whose *The Promise of the Father* (Salem, OH: Schmul Publishers, 1859; repr., New York: Garland, 1985), was a best-seller that influenced Holiness and, later, pentecostal traditions in North America.

33. See D.D. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), especially pp. 87–89; cf. J.M. Everts and R.S. Baird, "Phoebe Palmer and Her Pentecostal Protégées: Acts 2.17–18 and Pentecostal Woman Ministers," in P. Alexander, J.D. May, and R.G. Reid (eds), *Trajectories in the Book of Acts: Essays in Honor of John Wesley Wyckoff* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), pp. 146–59.

34. This is clearly articulated by D.L. Jeffrey, "Naming the Father: The Teaching Authority of Jesus and Contemporary Debate," in C. Bartholomew, C. Greene, and K. Möller (eds), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, and Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), pp. 263–79; I would agree that the Father's authority is clear in the Gospel accounts (not just in Luke) although I wonder sometimes how this authority is to be understood – which is part of the goal of this essay to ponder.



for members of their congregation, the household of God. Prayers are thus addressed to the heavenly Father, even as it is also the Father's prerogative to give good gifts to his children (Lk. 11.13; 12.32). To be sure, Jesus' own relationship with the Father contrasted with standard expectations for filial relationships of his time,<sup>35</sup> but the problem is that pentecostal readings of the Fatherhood of God is less Christologically informed than achieved through unexamined patriarchal assumptions.

In short, pentecostal reception of the promising Father within the various male-dominated societies that shape the global renewal movement have led to a sacralizing of a patriarchal theology of fatherhood. Traditional family values, among other conservative views of the family, are preserved within this scheme of things, even if much of the details of such understandings are developed from out of patriarchal cultural values and practices more than they are from the Bible.<sup>36</sup> Problems then unfold in light of the specific challenges such father figures confront in attempting to live up to certain expectations in a post-agrarian, post-industrial, and (for Latin American cultures) machismo world.<sup>37</sup>

I would urge pentecostals (and other Christians) to reconsider the nature of the Father within the eschatological perspective of the pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 2). Two alternative trajectories are opened up within such an eschatological reconfiguration. The first suggests that the paternal authority of the Father is either not yet fully revealed or that it has not yet been fully and properly established. Signs of such an eschatological paternalism are registered in the prophecy from Joel and inaugurated in the Pentecost outpouring of the Spirit. This allowance for a more egalitarian conception of father-mother-family relations is then also seen as anticipated in the life of Christ's extended family or household, wherein the authority of Zechariah to name his newborn son after himself is checked by Elizabeth's insistence that he be called John

35. See, for example, R.L. Mowery, "God the Father in Luke-Acts," in Earl Richard (ed.), *New Views on Luke and Acts* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), pp. 124–32, and M.M. Thompson, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000).

36. In North America, pentecostal "family values" are thus more or less Victorian; for details, see K. Ittmann, *Work, Gender, and Family in Victorian England* (Washington Square, NY: New York University Press, 1995), especially pp. 223–36.

37. K.L. O'Neill, *City of God: Christian Citizenship in Postwar Guatemala* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 2009), chapter 4, describes the issues confronting pentecostal fathers in the Latin American context.

(Lk. 1.59-60). Recall that Elizabeth herself anticipates the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit, in her case being filled with the Spirit in meeting with Mary, the *Theotokos* (Lk. 1.39-41).<sup>38</sup> Such an eschatological theology of fatherhood, then, would be neither hierarchical nor authoritarian vis-à-vis mothers (women); instead it would emphasize the co-equality of male and female – and by extension of husbands and wives and of fathers and mothers – in the eschatological household of God.<sup>39</sup>

A second trajectory opened up by re-situating the Lukan doctrine of fatherhood within the eschatological framework of the Day of Pentecost is that the Fatherhood of God is recast in a Trinitarian framework, not that of a Nicene or post-Nicene construct, but that of the salvation or redemption history of Luke's narrative. What I mean is that the Fatherhood of God now not only involves, but is in a sense completed by, the economies of the Son and Spirit: "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear" (Acts 2.33). According to such a salvation-historical interpretation, then, the Fatherhood of God is not absolute; instead, as Jesus responded to the man who wanted to bury his father before heeding the call to discipleship, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God" (Lk. 9.60). The point here is not to dishonor the deceased father, but to relativize the father's role within the eschatological horizon of the redemptive work of the Son and the Spirit.<sup>40</sup> This in turn helps us to understand the role of

38. Note that Mary's relationship with Elizabeth provides a window into the latter's role as the aunt of Jesus. While there is not much in the Gospel accounts to flesh out Jesus' relationship with his aunts, uncles, and extended family, given the nature of first century wider Mediterranean and more specifically Palestinian family life – e.g., extended families travelled together to Israel's festivals (Lk. 2.44) – there is no doubt that Jesus would have had significant interactions with broader family members. From a theology of the family perspective, I recommend consulting something like L.L. Ellingson and P.J. Sotirin, *Aunting: Cultural Practices that Sustain Family and Community Life* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), for insights into thinking about the roles of extended families in general and about aunts in particular.

39. Pentecostal women are already making such transitions, rejecting more secular versions of feminism on the one hand but yet seeking equality in the home and in the church through adherence to the biblical injunctions regarding mutual submission and spousal partnership; see S. Billingsley, *It's a New Day: Race and Gender in the Modern Charismatic Movement* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2008), especially chapters 2–3.

40. Or as Joel Green puts it, "the presence of dual references to the kingdom of God announces the reorganization of former allegiances, with the result that one

the father in particular and of the family as a whole in eschatological and soteriological perspective.

Having introduced such a relativization of the father, however, we must now confront a whole host of Lukan texts which is troublesome because they have been used to legitimate traditional theologies of the family and of family values as these have been formed from out of the modern Enlightenment period. I am referring to the various sayings of Jesus that minimize the importance of the family in contrast to personal commitment to the coming reign of God. Representative are the following:

- “Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. And he was told, ‘Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you.’ But he said to them, ‘My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it’” (Lk. 8.19-21).
- “... they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law” (Lk. 12.53).
- “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple” (Lk. 14.26).<sup>41</sup>
- “And he said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God’” (Lk. 18.29).
- “You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death” (Lk. 21.16).<sup>42</sup>

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may be called upon, in this case, to engage in behavior deemed deviant by normal conventions”; see J. B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), p. 408.

41. To “hate” means not to abhor, detest, or loathe, but to love less in comparison to something else, in this case, to the call of discipleship, so notes F. F. Bruce, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), p. 120. Yet this mode of alleviating the sting of this “hard saying” – not to mention the others cited, or not, here – should not numb the force of the challenges involved in responding to the call of the reign of God.

42. In an illuminating article, J. Lambrecht, SJ, “The Relatives of Jesus in Mark,” *Novum Testamentum* 16.4 (1974), pp. 241–58, suggests that one way to understand the ambiguous nature of Jesus’ relationship with his relatives in the Gospel of Mark is against the assumption that the relatives represent the unbelieving readers among Mark’s audience. This is open, however, to objections from a number of angles,

From within the eschatological horizon of the last days outpouring of the Spirit, these texts bear witness consistently to Jesus' commitment to doing the work of establishing the reign of God to restore, renew, and redeem Israel.<sup>43</sup> From this perspective, there can be no partial allegiances since the oppression of Israel has persisted for far too long and any stragglers will simply perpetuate the wilderness wandering of the people of God. Any fuller discussion of these issues should then also explore the similarities and differences between Luke and the other Gospels in which similar sayings appear in order to tease out a more specifically Lukan theology of the family. Yet from the perspective of needing to craft a contemporary theology of the family, these are hard sayings that exacerbate the tensions and stresses confronted by families in a globalizing and post-traditionalist world. This is particularly the case when pentecostals, like other conservative or fundamentalist Christians, read the scriptural witness fairly literally. The result is often the justification of practices that subordinate care of the family – either those of parents for their children or those of grown up children for their elderly parents – to the larger and, ostensibly, more worthwhile purposes related to the work of the kingdom.<sup>44</sup>

More extreme forms of neglect are, thankfully, much less prevalent today than in the first few generations of the pentecostal revival when many – according to a broad spectrum of anecdotal evidence – left (some say neglected and others say abandoned) their families in order to pursue what they felt was the call of God to the mission field or to evangelistic work, since the time was short and the days were evil.<sup>45</sup> Yet while this may

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including the speculative nature both with regard to Mark's intentions and of his audience. I prefer the explanation given by Watson, which I mention in a moment.

43. Clearly articulated in P. Borgmann, *The Way According to Luke: Hearing the Whole Story of Luke-Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, MA: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), chapter 12, titled, "Relinquish Family and Religion."

44. As Karl Barth rightly puts it – in his discussion of the relationship between parents and children – these sayings of Jesus "are anything but an invitation to engage in all kinds of perverse spiritual adventures"! This advice came too late, of course, for the earliest modern pentecostal missionaries, although it is doubtful that they would have read him then anyway! See Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III/4, *The Doctrine of Creation* (eds G. W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, trans. A.T. Mackay, et al.; 1961; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, repr., 2010), p. 265.

45. See for example, G. Wacker, "Living with Signs and Wonders: Parents and Children in Early Pentecostal Culture," in K. Cooper and J. Gregory (eds), *Signs, Wonders, Miracles: Representations of Divine Power in the Life of the Church – Papers*

not occur much if at all in today's climate, nevertheless pentecostals have not thought through the biblical and theological issues related to texts like these such that they have been left in a profoundly ambiguous situation: feeling as if the call of God requires a radical forsaking of the family on the one hand, but yet somehow sensing on the other hand that there is something not quite right with the radicality of such a divine vocation.

One way to understand the nature of these family-negating sayings is to compare the social milieu of the first century messianic movement with its eschatological orientation. For an eschatological people who understood themselves as the restored and renewed people of God, previous allegiances had been displaced. This new ecclesial context thus served "as a new court of public opinion, displacing the natural family in importance. This new court of public opinion would function as the primary context in which Christians secured honor."<sup>46</sup> The Gospels can thereby be understood as providing for an alternative means of Christians securing honor, a means not measured according to former natural family ties but to new criteria related to "doing the will of God, becoming a servant, becoming 'last,' becoming like a child, taking up the cross – in other words, acting in ways entirely opposed to the reckoning of honor in the wider culture."<sup>47</sup> If this is true, then, the eschatological orientation does not undermine the

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*Read at the 2003 Summer Meeting and the 2004 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (Studies in Church History 41; Woodbridge, UK, and Rochester, NY: Published for the Ecclesiastical History Society by the Boydell Press, 2005), pp. 423–43, especially pp. 429–32, and G.B. McGee, *Miracles, Missions, and American Pentecostalism* (American Society of Missiology series 45; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), pp. 148–49. E. Blumhofer, "The Role of Women in the Assemblies of God," *Assemblies of God Heritage* (Winter 1987–1988), p. 13, also notes: "In the movement's earliest phases, William Seymour (pastor of the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles) reminded husbands and wives of their responsibilities to one another and to their children. Contemporary conditions seemed to Seymour to render such advice necessary: situations in which one spouse neglected family obligations to follow a 'leading,' leaving a family in economic hardship, were all too common." Thanks to Darrin Rodgers for some of these references.

46. D. F. Watson, *Honor among Christians: The Cultural Key to the Messianic Secret* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), p. 148.

47. Watson, *Honor among Christians*, p. 149. See also J.H. Neyrey, SJ, "Honor and Shame: Loss of Wealth, Loss of Family, Loss of Honor – the Cultural Context of the Original Makarisms in Q" in J.H. Neyrey and E.C. Stewart (eds), *The Social World of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), pp. 87–102, especially pp. 95–96.

nature of the family per se, but reconfigures family ties within a soteriological and ecclesial framework.<sup>48</sup>

This leads us, then, to the one passage where Jesus blesses the children brought to him:

People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. But Jesus called for them and said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it' (Lk. 18.15-17).<sup>49</sup>

This pericope is followed by one in which Jesus interacts with a rich ruler who wants to know how to inherit eternal life; in response, Jesus re-affirms the commandments, including the one about honoring one's parents (Lk.18.18-20). Here we see Jesus' actions and teachings as an adult mirror what was enacted in his childhood, when he was cared for by his parents and sought to honor them while going about the work of the kingdom. What Jesus does in this case with children – i.e., receive them, bless them, and locate them at the center of the reign of God – provides a performative speech act through which to interpret his other teachings with references to the family. Whatever else an eschatological and salvation-history perspective entails – and there is much more with regard to the preceding material that we have not discussed, and which will need to be considered in any fuller articulation of a Lukan theology of the family – it does not involve the neglect of the most vulnerable in society who are nevertheless harbingers of the very reign of God toward which all of creation is called.

### **Transitions: Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Family**

The preceding reflections have attempted to proceed from the eschatological imagination at the heart of pentecostal spirituality toward what might

48. This focus on Jesus' attitude toward children is also the strategy deployed by A. Thatcher, "Beginning Again with Jesus," in A. Dillen and D. Pollefeyt (eds), *Children's Voices: Children's Perspectives in Ethics, Theology and Religious Education (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 230; Leuven, Paris, and Walpole, MA: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2010)*, pp. 37–61.

49. Elsewhere, I am developing also what might be called a pentecostal and pneumatological theology of the child drawing from Lukan resources in particular; see my "Children and the Promise of the Spirit: Child Theology in Pneumatological Perspective," presented at the Child Theologies: Perspectives from World Christianity Consultation, Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Indiana, 11–14 August 2011.



be considered as an eschatological notion of the family. One of the consequences of such an eschatological approach is that the family as we know it is still in the process of being fully redeemed and hence remains in significant aspects unformed, even as we can grant that it is also in other respects mal-formed. Hence human experiences of family life remain fragmented, unstable, and ambiguous, whether instantiated in so-called traditional nuclear forms or in its many variants (single-parent, extended, adopted, legal guardianships, foster families, etc.).<sup>50</sup> In fact, such an eschatological perspective sits in some tension with traditionalist models of the family, particularly those informed by conservative evangelical “family values” perspectives that at least some pentecostals have adopted and embraced.

At the same time, this does not mean that anything goes. The life, death, and resurrection of Christ in the power of the Spirit – a deeply Lukan set of motifs that we have not elaborated on here – provide us with general theological norms by which to assess the viability of families in historical life before the eschaton. In this in-between time, we recognize the dynamic nature of families in and amidst various times, places, contexts, and constraints – and this is where empirical studies of the pluralistic and diverse character of families across the global pentecostal landscape are essential – while simultaneously recognizing that the Spirit seeks to renew, restore, and redeem the human family fully and wholly within and as the eschatological household of God.

Still, in the meanwhile, pentecostal theological reflection cannot remain only at this level of eschatological abstraction. In order to fully reconsider the many issues involved, pentecostal theologians will need to reflect more broadly on the scriptural data, building on the pentecostal theology of Luke-Acts sketched in the preceding pages. But there is space left only to make suggestions about what issues need to be taken up more fully in light of the remainder of the New Testament witness in order to develop a pentecostal theology of the family:

- What does it mean to read St. Paul’s injunctions to husbands and wives to love one another as Christ has loved and served the church (Eph. 5.22-23) in light of the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit to empower all flesh equally, sons and daughters, male and female?
- How might we similarly understand St. Paul’s command to fathers – “do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them

50. For a succinct discussion of the fluid nature of the family across human history, see Browning, *Equality and the Family*, chapter 9.

up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6.4) – and his (or that of the Pauline “school” of thought’s) exemplary citation of mothers like Lois and Eunice (2 Tim. 1.5) in the eschatological perspective of the Spirit’s empowering equally the younger and the elder in the household of God?<sup>51</sup>

- What about St. Paul’s admonishment, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honour your father and mother’—this is the first commandment with a promise: ‘so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth’” (Eph. 6.1-3)? How might we understand this as an eschatological expression of family life within the coming reign and household of God?
- How else might the early Christian experience of filial love – of brothers and sisters of (the body of) Christ through (the fellowship and power of) the eschatological Spirit under the fatherhood of God – provide a template for filial relationships between biological family members in anticipation of the coming reign of God?<sup>52</sup>
- How might we reconsider intergenerational and extended family relations in light of the formation of the household of God as an eschatological community of equality and mutual sharing (Acts 2.42-47, 4.32-37, and 6.1-7)?
- Last but not least, does the eschatological baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch – of whom it was said that he resonated with the Isaianic scripture which told of the suffering servant’s descendent-less

51. Church mothers in African-American pentecostal denominations and traditions may embody this eschatological motherhood in palpable ways which in turn mediate the experience of motherhood in the home as well as relationships with fathers; see, for e.g., A.D. Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ: Making a Sanctified World* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), chapter 1; H.D. Trulear, “Ida B. Robinson: The Mother as Symbolic Presence,” in J.R. Goff and G. Wacker (eds), *Portraits of a Generation: Early Pentecostal Leaders* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2002), pp. 309–24; and C.E. Hardy III, “Church Mothers and Pentecostals in the Modern Age,” in A. Yong and E. Alexander (eds), *Afro-Pentecostalism: Black Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in History and Culture* (Religion, Race, and Ethnicity Series; New York: New York University Press, 2011), pp. 83–93.

52. The analogy here would be to move from the doctrine of the church (ecclesiology) to theology of the family (of filial love); I provide some orientation along these lines in my *God is Spirit, God is Love: Love as the Gift of the Spirit* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012).

future (cf. Acts 8.32-33 and Isa. 53.7-8) – have anything to say about how to understand the issue of homosexuality in general or its implications for theology of the family in particular?<sup>53</sup>

I am certainly not insisting that the preceding set of trajectories is the only or even the best way forward for pentecostal theological reflection on the family.<sup>54</sup> I am merely suggesting that insofar as pentecostals have perennially begun their theological reflections from a consideration of the apostolic experience, there is no good reason why we should not also turn there, at some point if not at the beginning, for thinking about the family. If we do so, I propose that a more dynamic and eschatological perspective on the family opens up, one that provides us with fresh angles on neglected or contested aspect of contemporary family life and realities. These provide, at least at this rudimentary stage, not so much clear cut templates for the formation of contemporary families, but they invite people of the Spirit to attempt to live in and after the Spirit and to perspicuously discern the ways of Christ in the power of the Spirit in order to live more faithfully in light of the eschatological and redemptive work of God, about which we now only dimly foresee. Perhaps along the way, pentecostal perspectives might help not just forge greater understanding for pentecostal communities and churches but also advance broader discussions that will remain urgent in the foreseeable future of this globalizing world.<sup>55</sup>

53. For further discussion of the Ethiopian eunuch, although not one that presses the issues of theology of family or theology of sexuality, see my *Who Is the Holy Spirit*, chapter 19. An illuminating ethnography of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender communities (LGBT) with many congregations that also identify with the charismatic movement is M.M. Wilcox, *Coming Out in Christianity: Religion, Identity, and Community* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003).

54. Another route worth exploring toward an eschatological theology of the family is the Corinthian letters, through which we have clear indications of the issues that confronted what we know to have been one of the most charismatic “households” of the early Christian communities; I thank Mark Cartledge for pointing out this connection.

55. I am grateful to Jan-Ake Alvarsson for the invitation to present this plenary lecture to the European Research Network on Global Pentecostalism, sixth annual conference in Uppsala, Sweden, 21 May 2011. Thanks also to my graduate assistant, Timothy Lim, and to an anonymous reader for *PentecoStudies* for their comments on an earlier draft of the paper. They are not to be held responsible, however, for any infelicities that remain.

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