

Chapter 13

Singapore: The Antioch of Asia? (Kong Hee)

Abbreviations

AG	Assemblies of God
AG USA	Assemblies of God USA
AWARE	Association of Women for Action and Research
CMIO	Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer

Introduction

Singapore first received the designation as the “Antioch of Asia”, from Billy Graham in 1978 and then from Yonggi Cho in 1982.¹ There are good reasons why these prominent leaders made this claim. Antioch, the ancient capital of Syria, was well-known for its strategic location as an important centre of commerce, culture, art, and philosophy.² As a cosmopolitan city of 500,000 inhabitants, Antioch had a multiracial population, attracting Syrian, Greek, Cretan, Cypriot, Jewish, Persian, Indian, and Chinese settlers.³ Some of the languages Antiochenes spoke or read included Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Syriac, and Persian. They were also multireligious, worshipping a myriad of Greco-Roman deities like Zeus, Tyche, Aphrodite, Artemis, Athena,

¹ May Ling Tan-Chow, *Pentecostal Theology for the Twenty-First Century: Engaging with Multi-Faith Singapore* (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2016): 15.

² John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), Acts 11. Antioch is a crossroads of trade routes south to and from Egypt, Asia Minor, Greece, Italy, Mesopotamia, and later Armenia and India. See Worcester Art Museum, “Antioch: The Lost Ancient City – City of Antioch,” *Worcester Art Museum*, Webpage about October 2000 exhibition. [Available at: <https://archive.worcesterart.org/exhibitions/antioch.html>], [Last accessed: 27th March 2024]. See also Eric P. Costanzo, “Antioch of Syria”, John D. Barry *et al.* (eds), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016), [Available at: https://biblia.com/books/lbd/word/Antioch_of_Syria], [Last accessed: 27th March 2024].

³ By AD 165, Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire. See Trent C. Butler (ed), “Antioch”, in *Holman Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible, 1991), [Available at: <https://www.studylight.org/dictionaries/eng/hbd/a/antioch.html>], [Last accessed: 27th March 2024]; David Noel Freedman, “Antioch (Place)”, in *A-C*, vol. 1 of *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1992): 264-69.

Dionysus, Hermes, and Jupiter, and their deified Roman emperors were well-represented in the city.⁴ The Antiochenes were upwardly mobile, since commerce thrived, luring aspiring entrepreneurs from all over the Mediterranean into the city.⁵

When reflecting on the question whether Singapore today stands as the “Antioch of Asia”, one can see the similarities of these two cities. Like Antioch, Singapore is one of the world’s most strategically located countries, situated along the world’s major trade, shipping, and aviation routes.⁶ Although a small tropical island in Southeast Asia with a land area of merely 728 square kilometres, Singapore is highly urbanised, and culturally, socially, and economically diverse and complex.⁷ The 5.92 million population has a multiracial makeup consisting of four main communities: Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Eurasian,⁸ although more than 120 nationalities live and work in the city.⁹ Singaporeans are multilingual with most being bilingual in English – the lingua franca and working language for government and business, and one of the other three official languages.¹⁰ The Pew Research Center considers Singapore the most religiously diverse country in the world with its population practising at least eight religions, including Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Taoism (including several Chinese “folk

⁴ Freedman, “Antioch (Place)”, 264-69.

⁵ Worcester Art Museum, “City of Antioch”.

⁶ EDB Singapore, “Global Connectivity”, *EDB Singapore*, [Available at: <https://www.edb.gov.sg/en/why-singapore/global-connectivity.html>], [Last accessed: 27th March 2024].

⁷ J. Clammer, *Singapore: Ideology, Society and Culture* (Singapore: Chopmen, 1985): 5.

⁸ Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “About Singapore”, *Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, updated 12th October 2023, [Available at: <https://www.mfa.gov.sg/Overseas-Mission/Washington/About-Singapore>], [Last accessed: 27th March 2024]; *Population in Brief 2023: Key Trends*, National Population and Talent Division (Singapore: Prime Minister’s Office, 2023): 19-20.

⁹ Lemuel Teo, “The Church Going Urban”, *Singapore Centre for Global Missions*, updated 14th June 2018, [Available at: <https://www.scgmm.org.sg/the-church-going-urban>], [Last accessed: 27th March 2024].

¹⁰ Wai Yin Pryke, “Singapore’s Journey: Bilingualism and Role of English Language in Our Development”, Transcript of presentation to British Council, Chile, 2013, [Available at: <https://www.britishcouncil.cl/sites/default/files/escrito-way-yin-pryke.pdf>], [Last accessed: 27th March 2024].

religions”), Hinduism, Sikhism,¹¹ and Judaism.¹² Singaporeans epitomise upward mobility, and like Antioch, the city-state’s thriving economy, exceptional educational system, and diverse cultural tapestry magnetise individuals from across the globe.

Although separated by time, culture, and space, one can observe six insightful biblical elements shared between Antioch and Singapore: (a) the importance of urban ministry: Antioch marked the first time the Church crossed the fundamental divide between rural people and city dwellers;¹³ (b) the empowerment of the laity: unnamed lay disciples from Cyprus and Cyrene brought about the Antiochene conversion (Acts 11:20-21);¹⁴ (c) dependence on the Holy Spirit: Barnabas and Paul were clearly men of the Spirit, and Antiochene believers respected the *charismata* (11:24, 28; 13:2); (d) instruction and discipleship: for an entire year, the members received thorough instruction (11:26); (e) compassion for the poor: when Agabus prophesied about an impending famine, the Antiochene Christians “as each one was able” helped “the brothers and sisters living in Judea” (11:27-29);¹⁵ and (f) global outreach: Antioch became the mother church of all the Gentile churches, from which Paul and Barnabas were sent on

¹¹ Joseph Chinyong Liow, “Managing Religious Diversity and Multiculturalism in Singapore”, in Terence Chong (ed), *Navigating Differences: Integration in Singapore* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2020): 20; Pew Research Center, “Global Religious Diversity”, *Pew Research Center*, 4th April 2014, [Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2014/04/04/global-religious-diversity/>], [Last accessed: 27th March 2024].

¹² Singapore Infopedia, “Jewish Community”, *National Library Board Singapore*, updated April 2018, [Available at: <https://www.nlb.gov.sg/main/article-detail?cmsuuid=b176a5a8-100e-49f7-9dbc-41b0b31779d7#:~:text=The%20history%20of%20the%20Jewish,their%20exile%20from%20ancient%20Israel>], [Last accessed: 27th March 2024].

¹³ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983): 11; Gerhard A. Krodel, *Acts*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1986): 207. In 1970, Donald McGavran said, “Discipling urban populations is perhaps the most urgent task confronting the Church.” See *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970): 295.

¹⁴ Lay ministry brings diverse perspectives, expertise, and energy, extending the reach of the church into the marketplace.

¹⁵ All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version.

missionary journeys throughout the Mediterranean and Europe. From Antioch, Christianity became a world religion.

In many ways, Christianity¹⁶ in Singapore exemplifies these six biblical Antiochene characteristics. Many churches are adept at urban ministry. Lay volunteerism remains high. Many identify as Pentecostal or have Pentecostal leanings¹⁷ and thus are open to the *charismata* of the Spirit. Singapore has emerged as a major centre of theological education in Asia. Many churches have vibrant ministries to the poor, and a recent national missions report rightly observes that the Singapore church has done “extensive work” in global missions.¹⁸ Each of these shared characteristics merits its own treatment. This chapter, however, focuses on two formidable challenges that the Singapore Church must confront on its journey to emulate the Antioch model.

Multiracial and Multireligious Harmony

The first challenge has to do with fostering racial and religious harmony. One interesting feature often overlooked is that Antiochene Christianity thrived in a multiracial, multireligious context in which social harmony was maintained. From its founding, the church was a mixed congregation of Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, enjoying table fellowship with one another.¹⁹ The Antiochene leadership reflected that diversity (Acts 13:1).²⁰ Breaking down the prejudices

¹⁶ A Christian believes in Christ and seeks to live according to his teachings. See Millard J. Erickson, “Christian,” in *The Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), e-book.

¹⁷ Mathew Mathews, “Pentecostalism in Singapore: History, Adaptation and Future”, in Denise A. Austin, Jacqueline Grey, and Paul W. Lewis (eds), *Asia Pacific Pentecostalism* (Leiden: Brill, 2019): 271-94.

¹⁸ Singapore Centre for Global Missions, *An Antioch of Asia: The National Missions Study 2019 Report* (Singapore: Singapore Centre for Global Missions, 2019): 11, [Available at: <https://www.scgm.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/NMS2019-Report.pdf>], [Last accessed: 27th March 2024].

¹⁹ Stott, *Message of Acts*, Acts 11.

²⁰ Barnabas was a Jew from Cyprus (4:36). Simeon was likely a black West African man, whose alias was “Niger”, Latin for “black”. Lucius of Cyrene was from North Africa; his Latin praenomen suggests important Roman connections. Manaen was the *suntrophos* (foster brother) of Herod the Tetrarch and a man of position in the royal court. Paul came from Tarsus in Cilicia. Despite their racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds, these five

of their day, the church echoed Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” More than that, it flourished without causing tension with other faiths. Can the same be said of Christianity in Singapore?

Considering that Singapore is the most religiously diverse country in the world and ranks as the world’s third richest and sixth safest country,²¹ sociologist Joseph Liow argues that these factors suggest that Singapore has successfully maintained multiracial and multireligious harmony whilst achieving an enviable level of development.²² Many Asian countries politicise race and religion because it is an attractive and powerful rallying point in the face of dislocation, oppression, poverty, and powerlessness. Singapore’s vulnerable position – in relation to its neighbours and its own complex and fragile ethnic structure – compels the government to adopt the ideology of a secular state. Religion in Singapore, although widespread, is not a public function but only a private conscience upholding Asian values, such as filial piety, thriftiness, diligence, and group interest above all else.²³

Historical events, such as the 1950 Maria Hertogh riots, underscore the fragility of this equilibrium. Maria was a Dutch Catholic girl raised by Malay-Muslim foster parents during

men by the Spirit loved one another and served together. See Freedman, “Antioch (Place)”, 264-69; Stott, *Message of Acts*, Acts 13.

²¹ Luca Ventura, “Richest Countries in the World 2023”, *Global Finance*, 30th January 2023, [Available at: <https://www.gfmag.com/global-data/economic-data/richest-countries-in-the-world>], [Last accessed: 27th March 2024]; “Overview of Safety and Security Situation in 2022”, *Ministry of Home Affairs*, Press Release, 8th February 2023, [Available at: <https://www.mha.gov.sg/mediaroom/press-releases/overview-of-safety-and-security-situation-in-2022>], [Last accessed: 27th March 2024].

²² Liow, “Managing Religious Diversity”, 20; Reuters, “Religious Conflict in Global Rise”, *The Telegraph*, 14th January 2014, [Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/10572342/Religious-conflict-in-global-rise-report.html#:~:text=Violence%20and%20discrimination%20against%20religious,by%20the%20Pew%20Research%20Centre>], [Last accessed: 27th March 2024].

²³ Tan-Chow, *Pentecostal Theology*, 9.

World War II. After the war, her biological parents were awarded custody. The Muslim community strongly opposed this decision, leading to massive violence that left many dead or injured.²⁴ Since then, Singapore has encountered several incidences where communal tensions threatened to spill over into conflict and violence.²⁵ The government enacts “tough laws to prevent race and religion [from] being used to create divisions”, to “protect our racial, religious harmony”, and to ensure all Singaporeans have “the freedom to practise his or her religion”²⁶ while fostering the greatest likelihood of avoiding unnecessary cultural disequilibrium.

The Societies Act allows the government to ban religious groups that are “prejudicial to public peace, welfare or good order”.²⁷ The Penal Code makes it a criminal offence to defile or disturb a place of worship, utter words to insult any religion, or to arouse animosity between religious groups or “promote enmity [...] on grounds of race”.²⁸ The Internal Security Act allows the detention of individuals without trial for the purposes of national security or public order.²⁹ Finally, and most specifically, the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act, passed in 1990, allows the government to issue a restraining order on any religious leader causing hostility between different religious groups, promoting a political cause or political party, or carrying out

²⁴ Singapore Infopedia, “Maria Hertogh Riots”, *National Library Board Singapore*, updated 28th September 2014, [Available at: <https://www.nlb.gov.sg/main/article-detail?cmsuuid=fbc266c5-4f6f-49d8-b77e-d37e20742087>], [Last accessed: 30th March 2024].

²⁵ Liow, “Managing Religious Diversity”, 26.

²⁶ K. Shanmugam, “The 2nd SRP Distinguished Lecture and Symposium 2016 – Opening Address by Mr K. Shanmugam, Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law”, *Ministry of Home Affairs*, 19th January 2016, [Available at: <https://www.mha.gov.sg/mediaroom/speeches/the-2nd-srp-distinguished-lecture-and-symposium-2016---opening-address-by-mr-k-shanmugam-minister-for-home-affairs-and-minister-for-law/>], [Last accessed: 30th March 2024].

²⁷ “Societies Act (2020 rev. ed.), section 24 (1) (a) (Singapore)”, *Singapore Statutes Online*, updated 1st December 2021 [Available at: <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/SA1966>], [Last accessed: 30th March 2024].

²⁸ “Penal Code 1871 (2020 rev. ed.), sections 298, 436 (Singapore)”, *Singapore Statutes Online*, updated 1st December 2021 [Available at: <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/PC1871>], [Last accessed: 30th March 2024].

²⁹ “Internal Security Act 1960 (2020 rev. ed.), section 8 (Singapore)”, *Singapore Statutes Online*, updated 1st December 2021 [Available at: <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/ISA1960>], [Last accessed: 30th March 2024].

subversive activities under the guise of religious programmes.³⁰ Apart from strict laws, the government has set up many “racial and religious harmony circles” to promote greater social cohesion and more interfaith dialogues among Singaporeans.³¹ Singapore’s Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others (CMIO) system of ethnic classification enforces ethnic quotas in public housing to prevent the creation of enclaves. Every town also has land equally allocated for churches or temples.³²

Pentecostalism, Harbinger of Plurality

How does Christianity fare in Singapore with respect to fostering religious harmony? May Ling Tan-Chow, a theologian from Singapore who earned her PhD from Cambridge University, observes that most Singaporean churches have an apathetic attitude towards ecumenism among different Christian traditions, let alone interfaith dialogues with religious others.³³ This is because of one of the possible outgrowths of fundamentalism in Singapore, in which conservative piety, eschatological understanding, and a largely exclusive view of religious others militate against a positive engagement with them.³⁴ I refer to a dispensational view of the Spirit that is “unreservedly opposed to Modern Pentecostalism, including the speaking in unknown tongues, and [...] healing in the atonement”.³⁵ Dispensational premillennialism can result in a focus on building separatist churches and schools that would allow them to shun the

³⁰ Terence Chong, “Christian Activism in Singapore”, in Terence Chong (ed), *Navigating Differences: Integration in Singapore* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2020): 47–48.

³¹ Harmony Circle, “About Harmony Circle”, *Racial & Religious Harmony Circle*, [Available at: <https://www.harmonycircle.sg/about-harmonycircle/>], [Last accessed: 30th March 2024].

³² Liow, “Managing Religious Diversity”, 30.

³³ Tan-Chow, *Pentecostal Theology*, 21.

³⁴ Tan-Chow, *Pentecostal Theology*, xvii; 21; 26–27; 90.

³⁵ Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997): 191.

corrupting influence of society and competing forms of Christianity.³⁶ Tan-Chow notes that, while evangelicalism distances itself from the anti-intellectual and parochial characteristics of fundamentalism,³⁷ their core beliefs can end up being similar. Fear of getting labelled *liberal* and *unorthodox* can result in a refusal to participate in multireligious events, despite the government's push for greater interfaith dialogues. At the same time, the tendency here is the church's demonisation of the ecumenical movement as a liberal project, while triumphalistically absolutising itself over others.³⁸

Tan-Chow argues that Christianity has thrived in Singapore precisely in a context of complex ethnic, social, and religious plurality.³⁹ The Christian population has surged from 10.1 percent in 1980 to 18.9 percent in 2020, while other religious affiliations have registered a decline in the same period. Its growth trumps even secularisation, as those professing “no religion” increased only from 14.1 to 20.0 percent in the same period.⁴⁰ The brilliance of Pentecostalism lies in its contribution in promoting and maintaining racial and religious harmony, when Pentecostals tap into its ecumenical roots of openness and dialogue, as practised by William J. Seymour and David du Plessis.⁴¹

³⁶ The Pluralism Project, “Fundamentalism, Evangelicalism, and Pentecostalism”, Harvard University: The Pluralism Project, updated 25th October 2023, [Available at: https://pluralism.org/files/pluralism/files/evangelicalism_fundamentalism_and_pentecostalism.pdf?m=1648211809], [Last accessed: 28th March 2024].

³⁷ “Fundamentalism, Evangelicalism, and Pentecostalism”.

³⁸ Tan-Chow, *Pentecostal Theology*, 21; 26-27; 90.

³⁹ Tan-Chow, *Pentecostal Theology*, 16.

⁴⁰ Daniel P.S. Goh, “Grace, Megachurches, and the Christian Prince in Singapore”, in Terence Chong (ed), *Pentecostal Megachurches in Southeast Asia: Negotiating Class, Consumption and the Nation* (Singapore: ISEAS-Yusuf Ishak Institute, 2018): 181; See also “Share of Population in Singapore in 2020, By Religion”, *Statista*, updated 22nd May 2023, [Available at (behind a paywall): <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1113870/singapore-share-of-population-by-religion/>], [Last accessed: 28th March 2024]. Christians come from all ethnolinguistic groups, and Christianity is popular among the middle class – those socially mobile, English-speaking, and well-educated. See Tan-Chow, *Pentecostal Theology*, 16.

⁴¹ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, 1; See also Tan-Chow, *Pentecostal Theology*, xvii.

Analysing Pentecostal spirituality requires understanding its Azusa Street origin. Steven Land agrees with Walter Hollenweger that Pentecostalism's first decade represents its "heart" and not its infancy.⁴² From its inception, Azusa Street was multiracial, multicultural, and manifestly ecumenical.⁴³ Journalist Frank Bartleman, who witnessed the revival, writes that as whites and blacks intermingled, "The 'color line' was washed away in the blood."⁴⁴ Led by Seymour, a black ecumenist, the experience of the Spirit gave these "voiceless" people a new freedom and language to praise God, and a new status and relationship not defined by race, colour, class, or gender – but by their relationship together in Christ.⁴⁵ The Azusa miracle was a solution to people marginalised by societal segregation and racism. Assemblies of God (AG) Superintendent Doug Clay quotes Seymour as writing, "The Pentecostal power, when you sum it all up, is just more of God's love. If it does not bring more love, it is simply a counterfeit."⁴⁶ Bartleman writes further of Azusa, "Divine love was wonderfully manifest in the meetings. They would not even allow an unkind word said against their opposers or the churches. The message was 'the love of God.'"⁴⁷ As such, Pentecostal belief, affection, and practice are amicable, encouraging an unconditional love and respect for all people regardless of race, language, or religion.

⁴² Walter J. Hollenweger, "Pentecostals and the Charismatic Movement", in Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold (eds), *The Study of Spirituality* (London: SPCK, 1986): 551.

⁴³ Tan-Chow, *Pentecostal Theology*, 29.

⁴⁴ Frank Bartleman, *What Really Happened at Azusa Street?* (Northridge, CA: Voice Christian): 29.

⁴⁵ Tan-Chow, *Pentecostal Theology*, 44.

⁴⁶ Doug Clay, "Five Leadership Lessons of William J. Seymour", *Influence Magazine*, 22nd February 2021, [Available at: <https://influencemagazine.com/en/Practice/Five-Leadership-Lessons-of-William-J-Seymour>], [Last accessed: 30th March 2024].

⁴⁷ Bartleman, *What Really Happened at Azusa Street?*; See also Frank Bartleman, "The Great Earthquake", *Revival Library*, [Available at: <https://revival-library.org/revival-histories/pentecostal-revivals/american-pentecostal-revival/azusa-street-revival/>], [Last accessed: 30th March 2024].

Can multiracial, multireligious fellowship and dialogue between Christians and religious others take place, even if the latter remains closed to conversion? For Pentecostals, the answer is yes. Robert Menzies argues that Pentecostals staunchly view the Book of Acts as the model for the contemporary Church.⁴⁸ In Acts 17, when Paul came to Athens, a city filled with adherents of other religions, he engaged them with humility, respect, and kindness. He did not insult or condemn their religious beliefs but critically sought to find commonalities without surrendering his own conviction in the centrality of Christ (17:22-34). Liow posits that a central principle of interreligious dialogue is to “agree to disagree”,⁴⁹ something Paul obviously could do. In Acts 10:28, Peter says, “God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean”. The Spirit opened Peter to God’s inclusive love and hospitality. Peter gladly had fellowship with Cornelius, even before Cornelius’ conversion (v. 23).⁵⁰

The Spirit’s outpouring in the Book of Acts remains central to the Pentecostal *Weltanschauung* (worldview). Frank Macchia rightly observes that, at Pentecost, Christ fulfilled the promise of the Father when he imparted the Spirit on all flesh, overflowing all social boundaries and privileges regardless of age, gender, race, or socio-economic class (Acts 2:17-18).⁵¹ In Acts, the Spirit came upon the Jews of Jerusalem and the Jews of the Diaspora (2:9-11) and then upon the Samaritans (8:14-17), the Caesarean Gentiles (10:44), and the Ephesians (19:1-7).⁵² The Spirit’s outpouring not only effected territorial expansion, but it also enlarged the apostles’ mental landscapes of God’s nature and generosity, reaching out to and seeking

⁴⁸ Robert P. Menzies, “Pentecost: This Story is Our Story”, *Enrichment Journal* (Fall 2013): 40, [Available at: <https://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/Issues/2013/Fall-2013>], [Last accessed: 30th March 2024].

⁴⁹ Liow, “Managing Religious Diversity”, 31.

⁵⁰ Tan-Chow, *Pentecostal Theology*, 159.

⁵¹ Frank D. Macchia, *Jesus the Spirit Baptizer: Christology in Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021): 204.

⁵² Tan-Chow, *Pentecostal Theology*, 31.

reconciliation with all flesh (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 3:6). Antioch's multiracial congregation celebrated and embraced diversity, not fearing or suppressing it, thus exemplifying this Pentecostal ethos.⁵³

Amos Yong rightly cautions against uncritically joining fundamentalists and evangelicals in their antagonistic disposition towards religious others. The Spirit's outpouring on all flesh requires a respectful orientation towards religious others because the Spirit can redeem traditions and communicate the gospel in new ways.⁵⁴ Recognising that the Spirit can speak through even religious others demands a listening ear, a willingness to be self-critical, and an openness to learn from and even be corrected by them. The Wesleyan theological tradition provides a proto-pneumatological theology of religions to discern the Spirit's presence and activity in others. Without affirming universalism, it argues the possibility for the unevangelised to be saved if they respond to the light that they have received (Rom. 2:12-16).

For example, a Pentecostal pneumatology can provide a way forward in Christian-Muslim interactions since a commonality is the Spirit in both the Bible and Quran.⁵⁵ In the Quran, *ruh* (the Arabic counterpart to *ruach*) is the source of Allah's word and human breath. *Ruh* was given to Mary to bear Jesus and declared him the perfect man. *Ruh* was the Spirit of holiness imparted to him. *Ruh* is the comforter and strengthener of all Allah's believers.⁵⁶ Volf argues that Muslims' denial of the Incarnation and Trinity is not dissimilar to the Jews, yet Christians nonetheless accept that the God

⁵³ This required intentional effort by the leaders and church members to overcome divisive barriers to shape Christian theology and missions. Diversity and inclusivity in Christ reflect the gospel truth that humankind are created in God's image, equal in value and dignity. A diverse community is vibrant, resilient, adaptable, and creative, making the local church better and stronger, a powerful witness of God's love and grace to a fallen world (Jn 13:34).

⁵⁴ Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2005): 237–47.

⁵⁵ The word translated "spirit" in the Qur'an, *ruh*, has etymological roots similar to those of the Hebrew *ruah*, "wind".

⁵⁶ Yong, *Spirit Poured Out*, 260–61.

of Christianity and the God of Judaism is one and the same. Since these three monotheistic religions all claim to believe in the God of Abraham, should Christians not accord Muslims the same courtesy and respect as they do the Jews?⁵⁷

Liow has observed that post-9/11, the resilience of interreligious harmony has grown more acute against the backdrop of terrorism and religious extremism.⁵⁸ To truly foster understanding towards religious others, one must emphasise the importance of everyday interaction. Knowing others' religious beliefs, traditions, and customs humanises them by identifying similarities instead of differences.⁵⁹ Tan-Chow rightly argues that Pentecostalism can be “a peaceful harbinger of plurality”.⁶⁰ Paul, too, exhorts us to pray for those in authority to create social stability and a conducive environment wherein everyone can practise their faith without fear or anxiety (1 Tim. 2:1-4). We are to heed God's command and take the responsibility to seek the *shalom* and flourishing of our city (Jer. 29:7). Because of Pentecostalism's innate belief in the Spirit who instantiates love, respect, and forbearance for all, this movement can play a vital role in fostering tolerance and understanding among different religious communities. Tolerance does not mean being soft or weak but kind and respectful – treating religious others with courtesy and consideration, without compromising one's own values and beliefs.

⁵⁷ Miroslav Volf, “Wheaton Professor's Suspension is about Anti-Muslim Bigotry, Not Theology”, *The Washington Post*, 17th December 2015, [Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/12/17/wheaton-professors-suspension-is-about-anti-muslim-bigotry-not-theology/>], [Last accessed: 30th March 2024].

⁵⁸ Liow, “Managing Religious Diversity”, 31.

⁵⁹ Liow, “Managing Religious Diversity”, 32.

⁶⁰ Tan-Chow, *Pentecostal Theology*, xvi. David Martin used this phrase in his lecture “Missions and the Plurality of Faiths”, presented at the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge, October 2001.

Pentecostalism Eschews Christian Activism

The second challenge to the Singapore church functioning as the “Antioch of Asia” concerns Christian activism, a potential problem of both fundamentalism and evangelicalism,⁶¹ but something Pentecostals tend to avoid. Sociologist Terence Chong defines Christian activism as the mobilisation of the Christian community to resist or publicly express objections to events or public policy based on Christian morality and values. Since its independence, Singapore’s conservative government was perceived as guarding the populace against decadence and vice, protecting cultural conservatism, dominant heterosexual values, and traditional institutions like the nuclear family unit.⁶² Christian activism began in earnest in the 1990s when the government began to liberalise not just the banking and financial sectors but also the arts and entertainment industry to make Singapore a culturally vibrant global city. To attract global talent and dissuade Singaporeans from immigrating, the government relaxed censorship regulations.⁶³ In 2004, the government approved the building of two casinos and the now-defunct topless Parisian cabaret show, *Crazy Horse*.⁶⁴ Conservative Christians felt particularly troubled by the spectre of homosexuality and gay lifestyles.⁶⁵ For many conservatives, the country had sacrificed its moral values on the altar of economic growth and global-city ambitions.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Fundamentalists tend to be effective political organisers for conservative moral reform. See “Fundamentalism, Evangelicalism, and Pentecostalism”. Evangelicalism is marked by the four distinctives of conversionism, biblicism, crucicentrism, and activism. See David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 2003): 3.

⁶² Chong, “Christian Activism”, 39.

⁶³ Chong, “Christian Activism”, 9. Movie ratings allowed themes like nudity, sex, homosexuality, and other taboo issues for certain age groups.

⁶⁴ Chong, “Christian Activism”, 41.

⁶⁵ The term “conservative Christian” should not necessarily denote intolerance or narrow-mindedness. After all, for most local Christians, personal adherence to conservative moral values does not inevitably lead to the desire to impose them on others. Indeed, Christian activism is confined to a minority within the community. However, this minority may be argued to be disproportionately impactful in light of its socio-economic profile. See Chong, “Christian Activism”, 38; M. Nirmala, “Govt More Open to Employing Gays Now”, *The Straits Times*, 4th July 2003.

⁶⁶ Chong, “Christian Activism”, 42.

In 2009, a group of Christian women challenged the women's rights group, Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE), for straying from its original objective of championing workplace gender equality towards actively promoting homosexuality and lesbianism amongst the young.⁶⁷ AWARE thus became a battleground for the pro-LGBTQ and anti-LGBTQ activists.⁶⁸ Chong observes that this marked the coming of age of Singapore's Christian activism.⁶⁹ That year, the first "Pink Dot" annual festival publicly celebrated Singapore's LGBTQ community. By 2014, Pink Dot had a turnout of 26,000.⁷⁰ One Christian alliance, together with their Muslim counterparts, publicly expressed their displeasure at such "alternative lifestyles" with their "Wear White" campaign.⁷¹ This is the most visible example of Singapore's culture war, not a transplant of a Western or American problem (although the comparative influence is obvious), and it is happening in the social milieu of public morality grounded in Asian family values.⁷²

Of particular concern is the rhetoric that Singapore should be a Christian nation with a Christian moral framework. Some have interpreted Billy Graham's call for Singapore to be the "Antioch of Asia" to mean that it should not merely serve as a centre for missions but as a Christian state.⁷³ In 2001, a prominent interchurch network's goal of seeing two million

⁶⁷ Zakir Hussain, "Dr Thio Upset about Sexuality Programme", *The Straits Times*, 24th April 2009.

⁶⁸ LGBTQ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer.

⁶⁹ Chong, "Christian Activism", 36.

⁷⁰ "26,000 Crowd Celebrate the Freedom to Love at Pink Dot 2014", *The Online Citizen*, 28th June 2014, [Available at: <http://www.theonlinecitizen.com/2014/06/26000-crowd-celebrate-the-freedom-to-love-at-pink-dot-2014>], [Last accessed: 29th March 2024].

⁷¹ Chong, "Christian Activism", 46.

⁷² Daniel P.S. Goh, "Protest and the Culture War in Singapore", in Terence Chong (ed), *Navigating Differences: Integration in Singapore* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2020): 143.

⁷³ Chong, "Christian Activism", 46.

Singaporeans receiving Christ⁷⁴ was viewed by some as an attempt to “Christianise” Singapore.⁷⁵ One senior clergyman prophesied that *Singapura* (Sanskrit for “lion city”) would be returned from the demonic lion of Sang Nila Utama (the Malay prince who founded the pre-colonial settlement) to Christ the Lion of Judah in its fiftieth jubilee year.⁷⁶ Observers fear that such aspirations may trigger Muslims, Buddhists, Taoists, or Hindus to similarly express their religious identities to restore some semblance of symmetry⁷⁷ if they get anxious that Christian activism is shrinking public spaces.⁷⁸

How can concerns over public morality issues not lead to greater societal tensions? Can Pentecostals, adept at evangelism and missions, live as socially moderate Christians? If the Book of Acts provides a model for the contemporary Church, one must admit that little Christian activism appears in it, if any at all. Paul certainly has misgivings about homosexuality (Rom. 1:27; 1 Cor. 6:9) but he does not force Christian values upon the Roman society through lobbying and demonstration. In fact, all New Testament writers seek to win the ungodly to Christ by living exemplary lives in obedience to God’s will.

A major social ill in the time of the Early Church was slavery. John Stott notes that while the New Testament does not condone slavery, it also does not outrightly condemn it.⁷⁹ Paul neither incites slaves to revolt against their owners and seize their freedom, nor does he

⁷⁴ Tan-Chow, *Pentecostal Theology*, 77. Full disclosure: I was a committee member of that interchurch network in 2001.

⁷⁵ Simon Chan, “Chan on Tan-Chow, ‘*Pentecostal Theology for the Twenty-first Century: Engaging with Multi-Faith Singapore*’”, *H-Pentecostalism*, December 2007, [Available at: <https://networks.h-net.org/node/9663/reviews/11358/chan-tan-chow-pentecostal-theology-twenty-first-century-engaging-multi>], [Last accessed: 29th March 2024].

⁷⁶ Daniel P.S. Goh, “State and Social Christianity in Post-Colonial Singapore”, *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 25(1), (2010): 81.

⁷⁷ Chong, “Christian Activism”, 45; 47.

⁷⁸ Chong, “Christian Activism”, 47–50.

⁷⁹ John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1979), Ephesians 6:9.

command slave-owners to emancipate their slaves. Slavery was an indispensable part of the Roman world, with many cities having more slaves than free people. It would have been impossible to abolish slavery in one stroke without the complete disintegration of society. Even if Christians had liberated their slaves, those freed slaves would face unemployment and penury. The Early Church's way to eradicate this structural evil was by exemplifying the gospel in everyday living. Paul's letters talk about the transformed slave-master relationship in a countercultural way, with equality, justice, and mutual love between masters and slaves (Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1; Philem. 1:16). All those in Christ are sons and daughters of God, and there is "neither slave nor free", for all are "one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Such teachings *ipso facto* issued a radical challenge to an evil institution separating them as proprietor and property. Instead of Christian activism, Paul allows "slavery to be abolished from within", as William Hendriksen notes, by the Spirit through his Word.⁸⁰

Steven Jack Land argues that most Pentecostals do not believe that worldly politics, manipulation, and coercion will bring in the Kingdom.⁸¹ Historical, social, and theological reasons exist for this. Pentecostals in the early twentieth century were cultural and premillennial pessimists, eschewing politics, and believing Jesus alone rewards covenant faithfulness to his Word and to the neighbour, not the world.⁸² This does not mean Pentecostals have no social conscience. Douglas Petersen defines the Pentecostal view of social justice as meeting essential human needs within a community and creating an environment where the poor and oppressed

⁸⁰ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Ephesians* (Ada, MI: Baker, 1967): 263. See also P.R. Coleman-Norton, "The Apostle Paul and the Roman Law of Slavery", in *Studies in Roman Economic and Social History in Honor of Allan Chester Johnson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951): 155-77; Ephesians 6:21.

⁸¹ Pentecostals are often criticised for their lack of social consciousness and responsibility.

⁸² Steven Jack Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Cleveland, TN: CPT, 2010): 179.

can flourish through “experiences of the divine”.⁸³ As such, Pentecostals were, and are, very much involved in rescue missions, medical help, building orphanages and schools, feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked. Their focus, however, remains clear: the church must spread the gospel, relieve suffering, and prepare the faithful for the Lord’s coming – not crush social injustice.⁸⁴ At times, individuals may emulate figures like Joseph and Esther from the Old Testament, speaking truth to power without resorting to overt activism or resistance. They employ the soft power of wisdom, humility, and unwavering commitment to moral convictions; they seek common ground and show respect for the human rights of all, including non-believers and established authority.

Hollenweger notes that the earliest Pentecostals were pacifists. In 1917, the Assemblies of God USA (AG USA) sent a statement to President Woodrow Wilson officially declaring itself a pacifist church.⁸⁵ The community within the church was the Spirit’s strategy for transforming the world and them with it. Christian activism was considered the “works of the flesh” and destructive to love, unity, and missions. Land argues that most Pentecostal full-time workers do not engage in direct socio-political action but have created communities of care, respect, and empowerment, thus developing their own “affective conscientisation” toward liberation.⁸⁶ The fruit of the Spirit, coupled with the gifts, unify and build up the community and qualify it for effective witness. Pentecostal liberation brings great joy because peace – not violent coercive

⁸³ Douglas Petersen, *Pentecostals and Social Justice*, unpublished paper for The Pentecostal Movement of Sweden, Sweden, 25th March 2020: 9.

⁸⁴ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 179.

⁸⁵ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, 188.

⁸⁶ Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy among the Oppressed*, vol. 2 of *Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

manipulation – is the means and the goal of the fruit and gifts of the Spirit, respectively.⁸⁷ This chapter argues that this remains the best strategy for the Church today.⁸⁸

The Urgent Need for Pentecostal Theological Education

If Pentecostalism is inherently well-suited for fostering racial and religious harmony, as well as preventing social strife caused by Christian activism, why do Pentecostals not pursue it more? It is my opinion that a dearth of rigorous Pentecostal theological education prevents such a pursuit. This was not the case at Antioch. Barnabas and Paul met with the church “for an entire year” and taught “a great many people” (Acts 11:23-26). Paul himself was a theologian par excellence. His fourteen years in Syria and Cilicia (Gal. 1:18-19, 21; 2:1), where he received revelations and spiritual experiences (Eph. 3:3-5; 2 Cor. 12:1-7), were mostly spent in Antioch.⁸⁹ There, Paul honed his understanding of christology, teaching the significance of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, exaltation, his present reign, and future coming.⁹⁰ The word “Christ” was constantly on the lips of believers to an extent that witty Antiochenes coined the moniker *Christianoi* (Acts 11:26).⁹¹

The necessity for rigorous theology was made abundantly clear at Antioch. For a while, Gentile believers were baptised without circumcision. When Judaisers arrived in the city, they insisted that Gentile converts must submit to circumcision and other law observance (Gal. 2:12). Paul’s indignation increased when the Judaisers won Peter over to their side, stumbling many

⁸⁷ Certainly, individuals have the option to engage in social activism through non-violent and non-manipulative means, aligning with the perspective on addressing injustice as defined by Douglas Petersen above.

⁸⁸ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 207.

⁸⁹ Wayne Meeks believes that Paul resided in Antioch for more than a decade. Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 10.

⁹⁰ Stott, *Message of Acts*, Acts 11.

⁹¹ Edward Arbez, “Antioch”, in *The Catholic Encyclopedia Vol. 1* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907). No evidence suggests that it arose elsewhere. Among the Apostolic Fathers, it occurs only in Ignatius’ letters, and again in Theophilus’ apology. The verb form in Acts 11:26 does not specify whether the Antiochene Christians gave themselves that name or it was given to them by outsiders.

Jewish believers into joining him “in his hypocrisy”; even Barnabas was “led astray” (v. 13). Paul confronted Peter by asserting that “a person is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ” (v. 16). To resolve the issue,⁹² the Antioch Church appointed Paul and Barnabas to consult with the Jerusalem apostles (Acts 15:2) to clarify doctrine, end controversy, and promote peace. The outcome was a landmark decision: Gentile believers neither needed to follow Jewish customs and laws nor convert to Judaism. The message was clear: the sinner is saved by grace through faith in Christ alone. Justification is by *sola fide* (by faith alone), not a mixture of faith and works, grace and law, Christ and Moses. Gentile believers thus can have fellowship as authentic members of a multinational family.⁹³

The Jerusalem Council served as a watershed of Christianity.⁹⁴ Galatians 2 and Acts 15 show the importance of theological clarity. Once the theological principle was firmly established, Paul made two conciliatory concessions. First, he accepted the four cultural abstentions (Acts 15:29) for Gentile converts, to ease Jewish conscience and facilitate Jewish-Gentile social intercourse. Second, he circumcised Timothy out of consideration for the Jews who would feel offended otherwise (16:3). With theological adeptness, Paul diffused an explosive situation. Antioch was the place where Paul formulated his theology. Many believe that the Gospel of Matthew,⁹⁵ the Gospel of Luke, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistle of James were all

⁹² Scholars who hold the “South Galatian” view believe that the context of Acts 15 is Galatians 2. In addition to circumcision, Judaizers insisted that Gentile believers were “required to keep the law of Moses” (15:5). These Judaizers were teaching that faith in Jesus was insufficient for salvation, which undermined the very foundation of the Christian faith.

⁹³ Stott, *Message of Acts*, Acts 15.

⁹⁴ Ernst Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1971): 461.

⁹⁵ The Gospel of Matthew was used by Syrian writers such as Ignatius of Antioch.

written there.⁹⁶ Antioch was home to many Christian leaders and theologians like Peter, Luke, Ignatius, and Chrysostom.⁹⁷ For the first six centuries, it was a centre of theological education.⁹⁸

Alas, Pentecostals, in general, have not been known for theological sophistication. Many remain wary of academic theology, prioritising experience over disciplined theologising. Systematic thought is often equated with “the dry rot of orthodoxy” and the saying that “Pentecost is not a creed but an experience”.⁹⁹ Such rhetoric makes the “traditioning” of experiences problematic because of the lack of an adequate theological foundation.

The embourgeoisement of Pentecostals should not cause them to seek evangelical respectability at the cost of their conviction on themes like political neutrality, women’s equality, and the embracing of ecumenism. Pentecostals have their own identity in relation to mainstream evangelicalism, moving in directions in tension with the doctrines of Calvinism, dispensationalism, and cessationism.¹⁰⁰ Their eschatological understanding and piety are arguably more robustly pneumatological than conservative evangelicalism. Pentecostal theology rejects an arid, rationalistic, formalistic, unemotional, non-experiential, and non-charismatic approach,¹⁰¹ as espoused by Charles Hodge and B.B. Warfield.¹⁰² Pentecostals are evangelical only in the sense that they believe in the inspiration of Scripture. The Spirit, however, is prior to

⁹⁶ Freedman, “Antioch (Place)”, 264–69.

⁹⁷ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Church History*, Book III, Documenta Catholica Omnia, 2006, [Available at: https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0265-0339_Eusebius_Caesariensis_Church_History_EN.pdf], [Last accessed: 29th March 2024]; See Horatio Balch Hackett, *A Commentary on the Original Text of the Acts of the Apostles* (Gould, AR: Gould and Lincoln, 1858): 12; See also Chrysostom Baur, “St John Chrysostom”, in *The Catholic Encyclopedia Vol. 8* (New York: Robert Appleton, 1910).

⁹⁸ Britannica, “School of Antioch”, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, [Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/School-of-Antioch>], [Last accessed: 29th March 2024].

⁹⁹ Tan-Chow, *Pentecostal Theology*, 31–32.

¹⁰⁰ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, 201–2.

¹⁰¹ Donald R. Wheelock, *Spirit-Baptism in American Pentecostal Thought* (Atlanta, GA: Emory University, 1983): 334; See Douglas J. Nelson, “For Such a Time as This: the Story of Bishop William J. Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival; a Search for Pentecostal/Charismatic Roots” (Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham, 1981).

¹⁰² David R. Nichols, “The Search for a Pentecostal Structure in Systematic Theology”, *Pneuma* 6(1), (1984): 73.

the written Word, and his purpose is not just to illumine Scripture and apply salvation's benefits to believers. Pentecostals believe that while "the Spirit does not contradict the Scriptures [...] his job is more than just repeating what we can find by reading there".¹⁰³ The Spirit remains actively involved in every part of salvation history, featuring a Spirit christology, Spirit soteriology, and Spirit ecclesiology. Hollenweger argues that Pentecostals should not be enamoured by evangelical and Protestant scholasticism but instead combine the Spirit's dynamic with cognitive academic theology.¹⁰⁴ More than ever, an urgent need exists for rigorous theological reflection that strengthens Pentecostal identity and witness in polycentric cultures like Singapore.¹⁰⁵

Recovering the "Heart" of Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism must recover its historical roots, which are black oral, Wesleyan, Catholic, Protestant, and ecumenical.¹⁰⁶ The black spirituality root was mediated through Seymour, characterised by oral liturgy, narrative theology, participation of the whole church in prayer and worship, visions and dreams, witnessing, and the healing ministry.¹⁰⁷ Their media were sermons, songs, pamphlets, testimonies, and conferences, not unlike the first hundred years of Christianity.

¹⁰³ J.W. Jones, *The Spirit and the World* (New York: Hawthorn, 1975): 98-99.

¹⁰⁴ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, 303.

¹⁰⁵ Singapore is uniquely situated in a global centre of high technology, commerce, and trade. Here, we Pentecostals desire to be a people who stay attentive to the Spirit's impulse in expressing the *imago Dei* through expanding lay ministry and creativity in the church, as well as through believers flourishing in workplace spirituality.

¹⁰⁶ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, 2.

¹⁰⁷ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 52. See Walter J. Hollenweger, "After Twenty Years' Research on Pentecostalism", *Theology* 87(720), (1984): 405-6, [Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X8408700602>], [Last accessed: 30th March 2024]. See also Leonard Lovett, "Black Origins of Pentecostalism", in Vinson Synan (ed), *Aspects of Pentecostal-Charismatic Origins* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos, 1975): 145-58; See also Walter J. Hollenweger, "The Black Pentecostal Concept: Interpretations and Variations", *Concept* 30 (1970): 16-17.

Pentecostalism also has a Wesleyan root, with shared beliefs like Arminianism, supernaturalism, and the *ordo salutis* of a subsequent experience after conversion.¹⁰⁸ Wesley's creative Protestant-Catholic construction was drawn from both Eastern and Western traditions, while always seeking to remain faithful to Scripture.¹⁰⁹

Pentecostal spirituality thus embodies Catholic transformation of a deep and personal union with God through contemplative prayer, mystical experiences, and ascetic practices.¹¹⁰ Instead of calling it “mysticism”, we term it “divine encounters” and “being touched by the Lord”. At the same time, Eastern Orthodox pneumatology stresses each member of the Trinity equally in a *perichoresis* seeking to bring creation into their loving embrace.¹¹¹ Pentecostal soteriology is, therefore, more than just forensic justification by the removal of guilt, but an ever-deepening communion with the Father by the Spirit, leading to a transformative *theosis* in conformation to image of the Son (2 Cor. 3:18). The greatest evidence of the indwelling Spirit is love for God and for all others. Pentecostals also reject the Calvinistic pneumatology of *filioque*, that the Spirit has no dignity on his own but is an inferior member of the Trinity.¹¹²

A new intercultural, ecumenical theology is also needed. Pentecostalism from its inception was manifestly ecumenical – freely crossing denominational, social, racial, and economic boundaries. Unity and embrace within the body of Christ were intuited as the necessary correlates of the Spirit's presence and outpouring. Pentecostals should return to their ecumenical root through dialogue with other church traditions and organised ecumenism. Because Pentecostalism understands the third article (“I believe in the Holy Spirit”) well, it is

¹⁰⁸ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, 143.

¹⁰⁹ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 222.

¹¹⁰ Sung Jin Song, “John Wesley and Mysticism”, 14th Institute of The Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies, Pembroke College, 12th–19th August 2018.

¹¹¹ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, 218.

¹¹² Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, 218, 221.

tolerant and open to new unknown moves of the Spirit. It can easily consult with non-Christians on religion and peace and embrace a global ethos of love.¹¹³ No doubt this might inflame some evangelicals, but it would also make clear that Pentecostals are not just “evangelical plus fire” but have their own identity as pioneers in new areas of the Spirit’s workings, as seen in the work of du Plessis and others.

Finally, Pentecostals must engage in humble self-reflection. Heretical theologies, outrageous visions, preposterous fundraising schemes, financial improprieties, and scandalous moral failures among its ranks expose Pentecostal hermeneutics as deficient and inadequate in translating biblical principles to everyday moral application.¹¹⁴ However, the wholesale adopting of a fundamentalist and evangelical hermeneutics that ultimately rejects Pentecostalism is not the answer. After more than a century, the Pentecostal Movement today consists of classical, charismatic, neo-Pentecostals (third wavers) and neo-charismatics. We should humbly repent and honestly deal with the abuse of theologies within our ranks and not allow fringe doctrines like hyper-faith, hyper-grace, the prosperity gospel, and dominion theology to hijack Pentecostalism. Where is the place of suffering? How do we ride the tension of the already and not yet? Pentecostal theology is a serious study of immense depth and breadth.

Conclusion

I feel strongly convinced that Pentecostalism remains pivotal in maintaining and fostering racial and religious harmony, and in preventing social strife caused by Christian activism. However, the need exists for an educational renaissance within Pentecostal circles for theological

¹¹³ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, 399.

¹¹⁴ Gary L. Anderson, “The Changing Nature of the Moral Crisis of American Christianity”, Unpublished paper presented to the 38th Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, 1990: 3. Cited by Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, 312.

clarity and robust understanding. Pentecostalism is not anti-intellectual and anti-ecumenical. Is Singapore the “Antioch of Asia”? Perhaps. Or perhaps not yet. Suffice it to say, the Pentecostal Spirit remains key to us drawing ever closer to the fulfilment of that dream.

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Abstract

Singapore is emerging as what might be termed “the Antioch of Pentecostalism” in the East. Its geographical advantage, stability and multiculturalism is establishing it as a Pentecostal epicentre. Its thriving Pentecostal community, comprising churches and educational institutions, is a launching pad for Pentecostal missions to neighbouring regions. However, several challenges loom. Singapore’s laws to maintain social harmony necessitates the rethinking of Pentecostal worship and evangelism. Pentecostalism faces resistance and competition from established Asian religious traditions, necessitating interfaith dialogue and cooperation. Maintaining the movement’s authenticity is challenging in the cosmopolitan and commercialised city-state, with its global connectivity and openness to all ideas.