**Creating Awareness of Collaboration in Theological Education among Orthodox and**

**Evangelical/Pentecostal Churches**

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It is very obvious that contemporary theological education is facing massive challenges in response to innumerable pressures from both within and outside, consequently we witness inevitable changes taking place in theological education. Recognition of this fact would point towards the need for collaboration among churches and centres of theological education. My observations in this area is primarily as a member of Pentecostal church and specifically as a theological educator, who has greatly benefited out of such a collaboration among orthodox and Evangelicals/Pentecostals.

**The Origin of Pentecostalism in South India**

Pentecostalism is a world wide revival and restorationist movement that emerged in the beginning of 20th Century. The dominant understanding regarding the origin of Pentecostalism is termed as Eurocentric view, because it affirms its origin in the west, in connection with revivals at Topeka, Kansas[[1]](#footnote-2) and the great Azusa Street[[2]](#footnote-3) and later it spread to different parts of the world. In this light, Indian Pentecostalism is seen as the product of western missionary activity. However, this Eurocentric (North-American) view of the origin of pentecostalism has been challenged, as noted by Allan Anderson,[[3]](#footnote-4) that Pentecostalism occurred almost simultaneously in the different parts of the world.

It is noted that the origin of Pentecostalism was not directly attributed to Western missionary activity, rather it was a product of revivals in historic churches in Kerala.[[4]](#footnote-5) A number of revivals took place with pentecostal characteristics in various places before Western Pentecostalism reached India, where people experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and its various manifestations, including speaking in tongues, prophecy, visions, healing, miracles etc.[[5]](#footnote-6) Till the arrival of missionaries they continued in the existing church. But only by the arrival of the missionaries Pentecostal churches were established in Kerala. Therefore, as Wesely Lukose rightly observes, 'Experiential Pentecostalism' had been taking place in India since the middle of the 19th century, but 'Denominational Pentecostalism' began with the coming of missionaries.[[6]](#footnote-7) Both missionaries and natives worked together for the growth of church.

One of the hall marks of early Pentecostalism in Kerala was that along with the doctrine of Spirit baptism there was an emphasis on holiness, which was understood not only in terms of separation from sin but also separation from the community/society which they were earlier parts of. However, it closed doors of ecumenism.

In the beginning Pentecostal denominations did not pay much attention to theological education, as they gave emphasis only to equip and train ministers with scriptural knowledge for Christian ministry. For that purpose they had begun Bible schools. Pentecostalism initially was not very much concerned with articulation of theology. Being a renewal movement with the emphasis on a personal encounter with the Holy Spirit, as Veli-Matti Karkainen observes, "its mode of doing theology has been oral/experiential rather than discursive/analytic way familiar with Western academy."[[7]](#footnote-8) So former theological education came as an after thought once Pentecostal churches became institutionalized. In India, Pentecostal churches generally kept a distance from the Serampore University, that offered systematic theological programmes and credible theological degrees, due to aversion to critical scholarship and fear of compromise in Pentecostal theological convictions once they join.

But an important milestone was laid regarding systematic theological training and biblical scholarship when Faith Theological Seminary, the first Pentecostal Theological Institution got affiliation from the Senate of Serampore College (University) in the year 1988 at B.Th level and subsequently at B.D and M.Th level. The vision of Rev. Dr. T.G.Koshy, the Founder President of Faith Theological Seminary and who also served as the president of Sharon Fellowship Church, a main line Pentecostal denomination is really commendable. He is the one who took theological education and ministerial training of Pentecostals to Serampore circle for he has the vision and foresight that it is important for the future not only for the Pentecostal churches of India but also for the Senate of Serampore to make it more inclusive and truly ecumenical.[[8]](#footnote-9) This actually opened a way for more collegial relationship with other churches and theological institutions.

I would like to situate the significance of Orthodox Pentecostal Collaboration in theological education in this context. One thing particularly noteworthy is the contribution of Federated Faculty for Research in Religion and Culture (FFRRC), which is a joint venture of the theological faculties of Orthodox, Marthoma and Church of South India, turned out to be a platform for collaboration in theological training. FFRRC opened doors for Pentecostals. It is the main arena where Orthodox and Pentecostals could come together in theological training mainly at Post graduate and Doctoral level. Eleven members of the faculty of Faith Theological Seminary, had done either post graduate or doctoral studies at FFRRC in addition to members of other Pentecostal theological colleges and churches. I did my M.Th in New Testament at FFRRC while my husband did his D.Th in Christian theology. Our supervisors were Professors from Orthodox Theological Seminary. Personally speaking, it was a very memorable time, where we were introduced to the rich heritage of Eastern traditions and spirituality, which, earlier we could see only from a distance as Pentecostals and most often with a certain measure of bias and even misunderstanding of each other. However, we experienced encouragement and collegiality from our professors and fellow Orthodox students. This was truly an enriching experience for us. The enormous support and encouragement given and theological scholarship they invested in us paved the way for an ecumenucal outlook. Later that became an impetus for me to pursue Doctoral progamme in New Testament at Durham University, UK from 2006-2010.

It was our mutual interaction at Orthodox Theological Seminary, that made us explore further about a collaboration in theological training in a more deeper level and more nuanced way.

**Pneumatology as Area of Convergence among Orthodox and Pentecostals**

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Is there a possibility of convergence in the matter of theology between Orthodox and Pentecostal, in spite of notable differences in the area of doctrines, understanding of scripture, hermeneutics, tradition and spirituality? One of the possible areas of convergence would be the emphasis on Pneumatology in both Orthodox and Pentecostal traditions.

**Pneumatology in Eastern Theology**

The doctrine of the Spirit has always played a more prominent role in Eastern Orthodox theology than in the West, with roots in the classical works of Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, and Basil the Great.[[9]](#footnote-10) Western theology with its preoccupation with Christology, displays a pneumatological deficiency. Spirit is seen or presented as an addition to the church, its ministries and sacraments. In Eastern Orthodoxy this deficiency is addressed, hence there is a proper emphasis on Pneumatology. However, Eastern Pneumatology is always anchored in Christology rather than operating as an independent theological locus.[[10]](#footnote-11) The overarching emphasis of Pneumatology can be further deciphered in Eastern Theology. For instance, the ecclesiology of Eastern Orthodoxy is permeated with Pneumatology. John Zizioulas speaks of the church as being "instituted" by Christ and "constituted" by the Spirit.[[11]](#footnote-12) Moreover, Orthodox soteriology is also pneumatologically oriented, with its goal of theosis. The role of the Holy Spirit in Eastern soteriology is highlighted by the ultimate goal of salvation. Redemption has our salvation from sin as an immediate aim, but in its ultimate realization in the age to come salvation will be our union with God, the deification of redeemed. Words of Athanasius succinctly explains theosis, when he says, "Christ became human that human might become divine."[[12]](#footnote-13) Basil attributes the experience of theosis to Holy Spirit.[[13]](#footnote-14) According to the Eastern view, the descent (*katabasis*) of the divine person of Christ makes human persons capable of an ascent (*anabasis*) in the holy Spirit.

**Pneumatological Orientations in Pentecostal Theology**

Pneumatology is immensely important for modern Pentecostalism. Pentecostalism  is a renewal movement within Protestant Christianity that places special emphasis on a direct personal experience of God through the baptism of the Holy Spirit and  exercise the gifts of the Spirit. In Pentecostal discourse Spirit baptism is primarily understood as an experience of empowerment for Christian service and mission that is distinct from conversion, initiation through water baptism, regeneration and sanctification.

*Trinitarian basis of Pentecostal Pneumatology*

The Pentecostal-Charismatic experience is intrinsically trinitarian in structure. Pentecostal Pneumatology is rooted in Trinitarian theology. Pneumatology of Eastern Tradition also insists on proper grounding on Trinitarian theology. This is seen in the writings of Basil the Great. There is a persistent emphasis on the unity of the Holy Spirit with God the Father and the Son. The distinctive Pentecostal contribution would be the accent on baptism of the Holy Spirit with accompanying charismatic manifestations, brings doctrine of Trinity into the experiential level.

*Pneumatological Ecclesiology*

The ecclesiological understanding of Pentecostals is primarily Pnuematological. "The church is inherently pneumatological; the church is founded by the Spirit, nurtured in the fellowship of and in the Spirit and empowered by the Spirit to spread gospel."[[14]](#footnote-15) The christological foundation of the chruch, as the body of Christ and pneumatological orientation as the fellowship in the Spirit are central to Pentecostal ecclesiology. This interconnection between Christology and Pneumatology is well addressed in Eastern tradition in its theology and spirituality. A pneumatological orientation is needed to overcome dilemma between charism and institution. The work of the Spirit lays foundation for both structure and charism. Pentecostal movement reintroduced a dynamic, charismatic spirituality and church life. Pneumatological ecclesiology reminds us that the Church does not exist for the sake of itself but for the world.

*Theosis: A Pentecostal appraisal of Orthodox Teaching*

The doctrine of deification or theosis is central to the Orthodox teaching. It gives distinctive perspective to understanding of salvation, as it goes beyond the legal, forensic categories of redemption and justification to participation in divine life, which is resulted from our union with God (2 Pet 1:3-4). Deification is the highest gift and blessing of the Holy Spirit. It is not surprising that, although Pentecostals haven't articulated the doctrine of deification as seen in the Eastern Tradition, it is not a strange concept for them***.*** The idea of deification is a pneumatologically rich concept, helping Pentecostal theologies to highlight the role of the Spirit in soteriology. It affirms the importance of God's grace and human response to grace as means of deification.

The concept of theosis for both Orthdox Church and Pentecostals can be traced back to biblical teaching as well as patristic traditions. While Pentecostals can learn a great deal of pneumatological import of theosis from Orthodox traditions, Orthodox churches can be enriched by the emphasis of Pentecostals on the dynamic experience of the Holy Spirit and charismatic gifts that energizes the church in the journey towards theosis.

Conclusion:

Though there are differences between Orthodox and Pentecostalism at many fronts, close at heart to each other are vital issues of the Holy Spirit and His work and presence. A dialogue between each other is essential for collaboration in theological training, as we move forward with participation in God's mission.

1. The first report of baptism with the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of glossolalia occured in 1900, when Ms. Agnes Osman received Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues at Charles Parham's Bible School in Topeka, Kansas. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Azusa Street Revival was associated with Afro-American Holiness Preacher, William Joseph Seymour, which took place in 1906. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge: University Press, 2004), 171. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Ipe K.A, "Pentecostalism Today: The Result of Revival Movements During 19th Century", in *Pentecostalism Today,* edited by M.Stephen and T.M.Jose (Manakala: Faith Theological Seminary, 2015), 80-111. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Wesley Lukose, "Indian Pentecostal Historiography: An Introduction," in *Pentecostalism Today,* edited by M.Stephen and T.M.Jose (Manakala: Faith Theological Seminary, 2015), 165. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Toward a Pneumatological Theology: Pentecostal and Ecumenical Perspectives on Ecclesiology, Soteriology and Theology of Mission* (Mary Land: University Press of America, 2002), 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Simon Samuel, "Transformation and Missional Vision of Pastor T.G.Koshy: Observations from a Critical Distance and A Very Fond Relationship." in Faith and Praxis: Essays and Reflections in Honour of Rev. Dr. T.G.Koshy (Manakala: Faith Theological Seminary, 2012), 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Ibid., 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Constantine N. Tsirpanlis, *Introduction to Eastern Patristic Thought and Christian Theology* (Minnesota: Liturgical, 1991), 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, N.Y: St.Vladimir's, 1985), 126. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Athanasius, *De Incarnatione,* 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspectives on the Nature of the Human Person,* trans. Norman Russel, (Crestwood, NY.: St.Vladimir's, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh,* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Baker, 2005),127. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)