

EDITORIAL:
THE FAMILY IN PENTECOSTALISM

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It was a great pleasure for the *European Research Network on Global Pentecostalism* to hold its annual conference at Uppsala University for the very first time in May 2011. In the historical surroundings of this ancient university an international group of scholars met together to consider the extremely important theme of the family, which was a unique discussion in the history of Pentecostal Studies. A good number of papers explored various aspects of this subject area and delegates were invited to submit their papers for publication in this special volume of *PentecoStudies*. The five articles in this collection represent only some of the scholarship that emerged from the conference and many of them build on existing work and suggest an important future research agenda. They represent theoretical research as well as contextual studies based in Eastern Europe, Africa and Latin America.

A keynote address was given by Amos Yong, who is probably the most prolific Pentecostal theologian at this moment in time, and it appears as the opening article of this issue. In his article Yong outlines recent thinking about the family by practical theologians and social ethicists. He observes that within Pentecostalism, however, there has been limited reflection on the nature of the family and its place in church and society. Social scientists,

especially those studying non-Western family circumstances, have raised the matter as a priority for the empowerment of women in particular. Yong picks up the eschatological dimension of these recent studies and develops this trajectory for a distinctly Pentecostal perspective on the family. He does this by looking once again at the book of the Acts of the Apostles and interprets the early church in terms of a family living in the last days of God's redemptive activity. As part of this eschatological context there is gender equality, age equality and an extension to the boundary of the family unit. The church is a household formed by the Spirit of God as part of the renewal of the created order. Thus the church as family can be understood as the children of (eschatological) promise, especially in light of the fatherhood of God conceived within a Trinitarian framework. This contribution concludes by raising questions from the Pauline corpus and invites further reflection by Pentecostal theologians and scholars of Pentecostalism.

Torsten Löftstedt's article considers how gender roles are enacted among Pentecostals in Russia and Belarus. The Russian Church of Christians of the Evangelical Faith (RCCEF) and the United Church of Christians of the Evangelical Faith (UCCEF) are the two denominations under analysis. It is a study based on material produced by the Pentecostals themselves, and includes formal doctrinal statements as well as sermons, and official websites. These sources seek to base their own justification for gender roles upon biblical passages concerning the family and the church. Historically, the early Pentecostals demonstrated a tendency towards egalitarianism between men and women but latterly it can be suggested that a patriarchal attitude appears to be most dominant. Women are encouraged to engage in work outside the home at a later stage in their lives and to devote themselves to the family in their early years of marriage. Generally, the role of the church pastor is regarded as a male one, although there are some female pastors, especially in rural settings, women can also be found teaching in theological colleges. There appears to be something of a stalemate, with no real energy to change the status quo, but this does not mean that women are marginalized. On the contrary, there are many other roles with which women are engaged, not least a central place in the family and the church. This is important in a religious culture in which the husband is regarded as the priest of the household, which has some support in Christian tradition if not explicitly from biblical texts. Nevertheless, despite what might be regarded as patriarchalism, Pentecostal women appear to be genuinely empowered in their family and church contexts, which raises important questions concerning Western values.

Richard Burgess builds on his expertise of Nigerian Pentecostalism by reflecting on the experience of street children in Lagos and in particular the response of two Pentecostal groups to the plight of these extremely vulnerable young people. The two projects are Habitation of Hope (a project of the Redeemed Christian Church of God) and the Freedom Foundation (a Non-Governmental Organization [NGO] founded by This Present House). He explores how Africans conceive family life and the reasons why these children find themselves living on the streets in the first place, for example because of family breakdown, parental ill health, abuse and poverty. The kinds of projects devised and employed by Pentecostals living in Lagos are described and the beliefs and values behind their action are analysed and explained. Burgess uses the notion of “spiritual capital” (or motivating basis of faith) in order to conceptualize the nature of this altruistic behaviour as a theology of compassion. It is understood as being an important part of the mission of the church to participate in the mission of Christ. In this context, the church is conceived as an extended family in which orphans can find a home and become once again integrated into a set of caring relationships.

Naar Mfundisi’s article is based on research into the nature of Zambian Pentecostalism. In this piece she looks at the important subject of HIV/AIDS and how Pentecostals are engaging with the issues of stigma and support. Mfundisi considers how two Pentecostal churches, Northmead Assembly of God and Gospel Outreach Fellowship, have responded to the pandemic. These churches provide different kinds of programmes from pastoral care and counselling to medical clinics and educational resources. This is an important contribution in a country which has very little by way of public services. Mfundisi captures the motivation of the Pentecostals involved in these social ministries as they seek to share their compassion. This work is explored in relation to the nature of the family in an African setting and the impact that HIV/AIDS has had on the Zambian family. These organizations also address the family directly and provide advice and support to spouses and the treatment of newborn children. When this is allied to the educational programmes it is found that they can assist in the reduction of stigma for those people suffering with HIV/AIDS. Pastoral care can assist the family, allowing those most economically active to continue to bring money into the family thus alleviating poverty as well.

Finally, Daniel Frei’s article offers an analysis of the family in Chilean classical Pentecostalism. It is a study of the Iglesia Evangélica Pentecostal de Chile founded by Willis Hoover in 1909. In this study Frei analyses the nature of socialization both in the family and in the church. In the

Latin American context the family stands above the needs and aspirations of individuals and this is even more accentuated when the natural family is also connected to the wider family of the church. Indeed, in this context the church is very much seen as a family into which new members can be integrated as brothers and sisters. This is especially important in a context in which many members come from desperately poor and sometimes violent households. The social role that Pentecostal churches play has been recognized by the state but it is the socialization processes that appear to drive the nature of the community as new members are not only integrated but empowered to share their identity with others. If their own families join the church then they become micro units of the larger church family, thus socialization is understood to operate at different levels. In this context the role of the pastor and his wife represent an idealization of gender relations and a model for the family of the church and for individual family units. In this context women are empowered within a patriarchal casing, thus illustrating the “Pentecostal gender paradox” coined by Bernice Martin.

These essays explore issues in the study of the family among contemporary Pentecostal communities around the world. There are common themes in the analysis of culture and the legitimation of gender roles using theological resources. In many respects the agenda provided by Amos Yong could be used to reflect constructively on each of the different contextual studies in order to address the issues that they raise at an even deeper theological level. It is hoped that this collection of essays energizes a conversation on the family among Pentecostals and the scholars of Pentecostalism because one thing is for certain: Pentecostals need the family and would not be the same without it. The question is: what kind of family is needed and how should it be configured? This is the ultimate question and one that will continue to demand scholarly attention in the years to come.