

Church on the Way in Spirit and in Truth

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"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me..." Jesus reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue in Nazareth as Luke tells the story.¹ What happens next foreshadows both the crucifixion and resurrection, the destruction of the Temple, diaspora, and a new way of understanding both church and synagogue. What happens next is a near-lynching, as those gathered to hear the hometown carpenter's boy made good turn into a mob at his indicting interpretation of Second (post-exilic) Isaiah: this good news has broken free of the past and of the Jewish religious leaders' hold on it.

For this, they would have thrown Jesus from a cliff, had it been in their power to do so. These texts (from Isaiah and from Luke) bear a hard but freeing truth for the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church² of the 21st Century.

This paper attempts to follow Jesus from the brow of that cliff (through the midst of an angry, frustrated mob) in search of a notion, a comprehension of what it means to be a Tabernacle church with a Temple foundation, celebrating the Good News both in House Churches and Forums, in Jerusalem and Nineveh, where there is no Gentile or Jew, in our present postmodern time of exile.³ On this eve of Pentecost, as I reflect on Jesus' proclamation of God's Realm on the move toward us⁴ and our nearness to it,⁵ the **notion of church as Pentecostal Pilgrimage** provides a way of understanding both what is happening to the church in this present postmodern reformation,⁶ as well as how God might be calling the church to live into a future that seems disconnected from our recent past.

Pentecostal Pilgrimage as a metaphor embraces many notions of church and could manifest in different ways depending on the specific cultural context which a community of faith identifies as home. The Jewish Festival of Pentecost celebrates the first harvest and anticipates continued blessings - the now and not-yet quality of Realm of God/Heaven. The Christian appropriation of this festival celebrates both the presence and the movement of the Holy Spirit among and beyond the people of God - gathered and dispersed. Methodists have always understood the Christian life as a journey and process, asking not whether one has arrived but whether she is "going on to perfection." So Christian

¹ Luke 4:18a CEV, quoting Isaiah 61:1a

² Four marks of the church in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381.

³ Walter Brueggemann, "Rethinking Church Models through Scripture," *Theology Today* 48, no. 2 (1991): 138. Brueggemann connects the present postmodern crisis of the Christian Church with God's (not Babylon's) "[termination of] the Temple project."

⁴ Matthew 3:2 and parallels

⁵ Mark 12:34

⁶ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 14. "If it is not the end of religion, it certainly seems to be the end of what was conventionally understood to be American religion."

discipleship may be understood as a lifelong pilgrimage. But that pilgrimage cannot be undertaken alone, so we join with other pilgrims on the Way.⁷

Both of these terms (Pilgrim and Pentecostal) can also be understood as a prophetic witness against the church as it presently understands itself - and as a call to pull up stakes and journey to a land/place where God will show us - but not tell us before we get there.⁸ All journeys require thoughtful choices about what to take and what to leave behind, and even round-trip journeys result in coming home to a place transformed because we are no longer the same. We undertake a pilgrimage seeking transformation - but not obliteration. A Pentecostal Pilgrimage trusts and embraces the guidance of the Holy Spirit, gracing the pilgrims with gifts we need for the journey.

This paper follows the path of a kind of Pentecostal Pilgrimage, in three stages, using three of Ian Barbour's four criteria for assessing theory.⁹ The first stage - preparation for the journey - explores the **coherence** of the notion of church with other accepted models and notions of church, principally those identified in "Models of the Church" by Avery Dulles. This stage also articulates the rationale for such a pilgrimage, given the secular and theological culture of the present church. The second stage - exploring on the way - examines the **scope** of this notion, using five of the seven descriptors of "the work of the church" from Dr. Carl Savage's first lecture in this course,¹⁰ having examined two of them in the first stage. The third stage - reflecting on the way ahead - describes the **fertility** or potential of this notion to guide future pilgrims - including this pilgrim as I serve as pastor of an aging, declining United Methodist congregation called Asbury in New Castle, Delaware.

Barbour includes a fourth criterion for assessing theory or model: how closely it **agrees** with the data, in this case, of a church caught in between times, in a postmodern context where people identify as "spiritual and not religious."¹¹ Before we begin preparations for this pentecostal pilgrimage, we must articulate the rationale for such a pilgrimage, given the secular and theological culture of the present church. David Kinnaman, President of the Barna Group, a "research organization focused on the intersection of faith and culture,"¹² uses three journey metaphors to identify 16-29 year olds who are either migrating from the church or not bothering to enter: nomads, prodigals, and exiles, who respectively see Christian faith as optional,¹³ not an viable

⁷ See Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22. This description (People of the Way) was Luke's favorite designator for the early movement of followers of Christ.

⁸ See Genesis 12

⁹ Carl Savage, Lecture 1 from LOGON 922: "Models for a Future Church" course, quoting Barbour, Ian, *Religion and Science*, First Harper Collins Revised Edition, (New York: Harper Collins, 1997).

¹⁰ Savage, Carl, Lecture 1

¹¹ A Google search of this phrase (in quotes) returns 846,000 results. Our postmodern culture has collectively authored it.

¹² According to the barna.org website "Research" page (barna.org/research), accessed May 4, 2013.

¹³ David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church - and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: BakerBooks, 2011), 23.

option, having “deconverted,”¹⁴ and who feel lost but hopeful that faith can be restored.¹⁵ Kinnaman argues that these hopeful exiles “are the people most able to help [the church] navigate these changes,” a cultural landscape that results “[a]s Christianity moves from the mainstream to play a more marginal role in our culture, and as North America becomes more religiously pluralistic.”¹⁶

The age of the “come and see” church gives way to a “go and make” nomadic community defined by one who is “the way, and the truth and the life.”¹⁷ Kinnaman’s prodigals will not be coming back, so we wait for their return in vain. The exiles, in his schema, bear prophetic witness (like Jesus in the Nazareth synagogue) to a new kind of journey of engaging, relevant faith practice beyond the walls of any gathering place. This crisis of faith (for everyone) invites us to move from a place of stagnant faith to a place God will show us. For Kinnaman, the guidance along this pilgrim way emerges from the relationship between young and old members of the faith community, in which each celebrates a kind of apprenticeship in the other - all empowered, gifted and led by the Holy Spirit.

Kinnaman’s partner in his groundbreaking study of 16-29 year old unchurched and de-churched youth and young adults, *unChristian*, Gabe Lyons, also wrote a follow-up book to that study: *The Next Christians*. Lyons places even more stress on the leadership of this new generation in the next church, calling the passing form of the church to an exodus from the pews to live as “small communities of faith, known as the church dispersed, [who] are giving the world a comprehensive view of what it looks like for Jesus to show up in a *Community* today.”¹⁸ Both Kinnaman and Lyons write about faith as a journey made up of diverse travelers in different places, all of whom are trusting God’s Spirit to lead and to validate the pilgrims and the pilgrimage.¹⁹

The New Testament uses the word *ecclesia* to refer to the church,²⁰ a Greek word combining the verb “to call” and a prefix meaning “from” or “out from”, implying movement that Christians typically interpret as movement from the secular world to the sacred sanctuary. In *God - The World's Future*, theologian Ted Peters notes that “Avery Dulles interprets *ecclesia* to refer to ‘an assembly or convocation and more specifically the

¹⁴ Kinnaman, 66.

¹⁵ Kinnaman, 78.

¹⁶ Kinnaman, 86.

¹⁷ John 14:6, NRSV

¹⁸ Gabe Lyons, *The Next Christians: The Good News About the End of Christian America* (New York: Doubleday, 2010), 163.

¹⁹ Kinnaman, 187, concludes: “This is a good time to reemphasize one of the most important themes of our findings: every spiritual journey is unique. ...Every story matters” and Lyons, 179, writes of the Next Christians: “They certainly don't flaunt it in the faces of those who aren't as far along on the journey. They simply live it out and invite others to join in along the way.” I am interpreting a spiritual trust (trusting in the Holy Spirit) in this valuing of diverse people and places on the “journey”.

²⁰ Matthew 16:18 as an example of Church (with big “C”) and Romans 16:5 as an example of a small “c” church - a local congregation.

convocation of the saints that will be realized to the full at the eschaton."²¹ Here, the assembly is itself a spiritual pilgrimage from the time in which it gathers (physically) to a time beyond time - God's *telos*.²²

Peters writes about the eschatological tension between the now and the not yet relationship between the gathered people of God and the final consummation of time in God. "The tension is caused by the future Kingdom of God challenging the present state of affairs as judge and as lure."²³ Perhaps the greatest gift of the present crisis of postmodernity involves a reminder that the church cannot stand outside of this tension, but must like world embrace God's judgment and respond to God's lure - calling the church not to a settled assembly of the righteous but to a pilgrimage that bears, shares and discovers faith - from faith to faith²⁴- following God's Pentecostal calling. "Like an electric arc between two terminals," Peters writes, "the church is called to bear the light between Easter and the consummation."²⁵

The notion of a Christian church on the move, guided by the Spirit, agrees well with the data of both first century and 21st century cultural and theological contexts, in the assessment of recent theologians and cultural research/analysts. Like the recently freed Hebrew slaves praying in fear on the beach between Pharaoh's army and the sea, God calls the Christian church today to rise from a place of complacency to march²⁶ into a way God makes out of no way.²⁷

Confirmed that we must make this journey, we make our preparations by exploring the **coherence** of this notion of church with other accepted models and notions of church.

In his 1974 study of ecclesiology, *Models of the Church*, Cardinal Avery Dulles outlined five models or symbols (to which he added a sixth) that "suggest attitudes and courses of action... intensify confidence and devotion... [and that] make the Church become what they suggest the Church is."²⁸ In identifying five and adding a sixth model, Dulles recognized that no one model could serve as a faithful expression of the church in every age and cultural context. *Models* stands as a powerful theological achievement not because it defines the perfect model of church, but because it provides a way of

²¹ Ted Peters, *God - the World's Future: Systematic Theology for a New Era*, Second ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Pr, 2000), 273. (Quoting Avery Dulles' *Models of the Church*, 109.)

²² A primitive Greek word for "end," "fulfillment," and also "a toll" as in a custom or tax to pay for the journey. See Mark 13:13; Luke 1:33, 18:5 and 22:37.

²³ Peters, 274.

²⁴ Romans 1:17

²⁵ Peters, 317.

²⁶ Exodus 14:13-15. I love this enigmatic passage about complacency, imagination, collaboration, and living prayer.

²⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991). Also Wolfgang Meider, *Making a Way Out of No Way: Martin Luther King's Sermonic Proverbial Rhetoric* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2010), Chapter 15, pp. 171 and ff.

²⁸ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, Expanded ed. (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1987), 21.

examining and evaluating the way models of church give meaning and understanding to any incarnation of church. Dulles based this evaluation on seven criteria:

1. Scriptural basis
2. Christian tradition [including “time-tested” models we have experienced]
3. Capacity to give Church members a sense of their corporate identity and mission
4. Tendency to foster the virtues and values generally admired by Christians
5. Correspondence with the religious experience of men [sic] today
6. Theological fruitfulness (ability to solve problems where other models failed)
7. Fruitfulness in enabling Church members to relate successfully to members outside their own group [evangelism and ecumenical partnerships]²⁹

The notion of church as Pentecostal Pilgrimage brings together the Scriptural sagas of God’s Covenant with Abraham and Sarai, the Exodus, Exile and Return, as well as Jesus’ sending of the 70, his own Passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the Pentecostal birth of the Church in Acts, and the itinerant missionary journeys of the apostles. In *God - The World’s Future*, Peter’s notes the powerful linguistic, identity, and mission change in this relabeling: “Instead of calling them ‘disciples,’ which means students, they are now called ‘apostles,’ which means those who are sent.”³⁰

During the Exodus, God gave the Children of Israel exquisitely detailed instructions for a portable shrine, the Tabernacle (from the Hebrew *mishkan*, which means “dwelling place”).³¹ The Children of Israel assembled the Tabernacle from an abundance of gifts and offerings; it delineated the center of the encampment, the center of their order of march as they traveled, and the very center of Jewish cultic life and practice, shrouding their sacred ark of the covenant and setting the stage for daily offerings and atoning sacrifices. The presence of God’s Spirit filled the Tabernacle with smoke, and God’s presence led the people in the wilderness by a cloud in the daytime and a pillar of fire by night.³²

To be sure, this Tabernacle gave way to the Temple in Jerusalem. But as Assyria and Babylon executed God’s judgment, the prophets guided the Israelites into a new understanding of God’s realm, of Zion, and of a Temple in the sacred Torah, prophets and writings, as the post-exilic Children of Israel became “an intensely textual community.”³³ The sacred texts, and the Jewish midrashic tradition of interpretation that coalesced with them - not in the Temple but in the synagogue - set the stage for an itinerant Rabbi named Jesus.

The early New Testament understandings of *ecclesia* were not of a building or Temple, but of a people who became church wherever they gathered (mostly in homes).³⁴

²⁹ Dulles, 183.

³⁰ Peters, 277.

³¹ Exodus 25:9

³² Exodus 13:22

³³ Brueggemann, 135.

³⁴ See Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; and Philemon 1:2

They understood themselves to be living stones,³⁵ but by the end of the first century, began to identify churches by the cities where the people of the Way³⁶ gathered. In the early Christian church, and for much of church history, “People of the Way” may have been a more accurate description of the apostles and itinerant leaders of the churches than the *laos* or people of God, for whom “Way” described a metaphorical, spiritual journey.

Traditionally, this gap between leaders and people widened as church came to mean “building” and ministry increasingly meant professional, ordained service, evangelistic, or missionary work on behalf of the church (while the *laos* stayed put and attended, learned, and served in the building). Still, many of the buildings were (and are) launching places for evangelism and missions, so the Church gathers and sends the church. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue, “metaphorical concepts... structure our actions and thoughts.”³⁷

Dulles identifies traveling metaphors that structure his second model, Mystical Communion, which he calls a “pilgrim church” on the way to the eschaton.³⁸ Of all of Dulles models, the Mystical Communion best serves as a traditional basis for the notion of church as Pentecostal Pilgrimage. In describing this model, Dulles writes that “Christians commonly experience the Church more as a companionship of fellow travelers on the same journey than as a union of lovers dwelling in the same home.”³⁹

The Apostle Paul writes of this companionship along the way, a diversity in unity, using the metaphor of a human body composed of many parts - united by the Holy Spirit who gifts each member/part of the body with identity, purpose, and power.⁴⁰ Dulles also draws on a Pentecostal understanding of the pilgrim church that is the Mystical Communion as it understands revelation. “The Holy Spirit opens us to look on the world with the eyes of Christ, and to see life as he saw it.”⁴¹ This inner and outer vision from the Holy Spirit gives Pentecostal Pilgrims a sense of identity and mission (corporate and individual), the third criterion Dulles gives to evaluate any model or notion of church.

Certainly the symbol of a common spiritual journey of transformation, undertaken in the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, encourages all pilgrims in a life of discipleship, or righteousness, Dulles’ fourth criterion. Many notions of church emphasize nurture (growth and discipleship) or outreach (evangelism and mission) at the expense of the other. Pentecostal Pilgrims learn and grow in discipleship as they engage in the journey. Celebrating the Next Christians’ focus on the Way beyond any building or program, Gabe Lyons’ vision of a “church dispersed” recalls the parable of the Sheep and the Goats in Matthew 25:31ff, where Christ-followers unconsciously and without pretension encounter Christ as they serve the “least.”

³⁵ 1 Peter 2:4-5

³⁶ See references in note 7 above. The Greek *hodos* translated “Way” in these passages means “a way, or road” and is also translated as: highways, journey, path, and street.

³⁷ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 55.

³⁸ Dulles, 111.

³⁹ Dulles, 61.

⁴⁰ 1 Corinthians 12

⁴¹ Dulles, 180.

Discipleship - following and growing in Christ - as a way of mission beyond the walls of a church building resonates with a growing number of people who crave authentic, relevant spirituality but not the institutional maintenance and practices of religion. The notion of church as Pentecostal Pilgrimage understands the spiritual impulses of people who have grown weary of insular, self-serving religion, inviting them to journey to the past, to what Brueggemann calls a “recovery of memory and rootage” (that religion falsely assumes), and to a pilgrimage to the now and not yet of an apocalyptic hope in God’s Realm.⁴²

This notion shines in all of the ways the Institutional model (in particular) fails, demonstrating the “theological fruitfulness” in Dulles’ sixth criterion for any faithful understanding of church. Dulles defines two “future trends” that must be part of the solution offered by any subsequent conception of church: democracy and decentralization/pluralism.⁴³ The Pentecostal experience opened up the People of the Way to recognize and to celebrate God’s spirit poured out on all flesh.⁴⁴ in a kind of Pentecostal Pilgrimage in scripture, the prophetic vision of Joel 2:28-29 finds its way to an incarnation in Paul’s celebration of the democracy and pluralism in Galatians 3:28.

As Fyodor Dostoyevsky famously depicts in “The Grand Inquisitor,” Chapter 5 in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the Church as Institution prefers to operate without the revelatory meddling of Jesus Christ as the Holy Spirit teaches his followers everything and reminds them of the word of Jesus. Church as Institution expects people to make the journey to membership within its walls; the Pentecostal Pilgrims engage in mission and ministry in a dialogic relationship of mutual respect, guided by the Holy Spirit to experience wholeness in God’s Realm that encompasses and eclipses any and all conceptions of church.

The notion of church as Pentecostal Pilgrimage corrects other notions and models of church precisely because it points beyond itself - as few other notions can. This pilgrimage has a destination and a destiny: the *telos* in God, where there will be no need of Temple or Light.⁴⁵ Along the Way, pilgrims can welcome partners in all walks of faith and non-faith, respecting each individual journeyer and the path they must take to meet God who is coming and has come to us all. Like hikers moving in different directions, or in the same direction at different paces, pilgrims led by the Spirit rejoice in the encouragement and growth that come from encountering strangers on the Way - holding them loosely, sharing bread and stories, giving and receiving direction, and entrusting each other to the Holy Spirit.

Pentecostal Pilgrims share their excitement and passion for the Lord of the Dance in humility borne of many turnings on the Way - welcoming partners for some or all of the Way, but also respecting other paths, other pilgrimages - always trusting the Holy Spirit to guide all pilgrims on the Way. This notion practices evangelism and ecumenism as forms of hospitality, celebration and respect, in the spirit of Jesus who taught his disciples that

⁴² Brueggemann, 134.

⁴³ Dulles, 199-201.

⁴⁴ Peter, preaching in explanation of the Spirit’s gifts to the people at Pentecost in Acts 2:17, quoting Joel 2:28.

⁴⁵ Revelation 21:22-23

“whoever is not against us is for us.”⁴⁶ As the pilgrims celebrate unity in diversity among those who journey together on the Way of Christ, they recognize a much larger unity in the diversity of human striving. This is the seventh criterion of a faithful conception of church, according to Dulles.

Evangelization seems at odds with an ecumenical spirit, as it makes exclusive claims for particular faith practices and beliefs of insiders. Dulles connects these two forms of relating to outsiders in his final criterion - one by invitation and the other by collaboration. Kinnaman notes that younger Christians in exile refuse to respect the old boundaries between insider and outsider: they “rethink theology and practice in at least three areas: evangelism, denominations, and the ‘other.’”⁴⁷ The Pentecostal Pilgrimage notion of church creates a way of comprehending a church “movement” with shifting boundaries that move with the people of God on the pilgrim way.

Not only do the boundaries move and shift with the movement and calling of the Spirit, they do not take on the same kind of permanence as in other models, particularly institutional models and paternalistic notions of church, such as the Father Knows Best mega churches gathered around charismatic teaching pastors whose glow eclipses Christ’s light, mesmerizing the faceless “flock.” Pilgrims on the Way value and respect the transformation the Holy Spirit has in store for each individual - refusing to define that value for another.

In *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry*, Rachel Joyce describes the mutual evangelism that obliterates lines that separate faithful and unfaithful in a unity of deep respect that begins to look like love:

“He understood that in walking to atone for the mistakes he had made, it was also his journey to accept the strangeness of others. As a passerby, he was in a place where everything, not only the land, was open. People would feel free to talk, and he was free to listen, to carry a little of them as he went.”⁴⁸

Pilgrimage transcends boundaries and discovers God’s presence as a gift of relationship rather than a prized possession that can be kept from others or grudgingly shared. The Holy Spirit gives shape and direction to the journey, as pilgrims coalesce along the path of a calling - so both evangelism and ecumenics celebrate a sharing of the joy of the journey - always trusting in the prompting and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This final preparation for the journey, a comparison of the coherence of this notion of church with other accepted models, leads to the second stage of exploring on the way by examining the **scope** of the notion of church as Pentecostal Pilgrimage, using seven descriptors of the work of the church, two of which (evangelism and ecumenics) have been reviewed in Dulles’ final criterion above. This leaves the following five descriptors:

⁴⁶ Mark 9:40

⁴⁷ Kinnaman, 177.

⁴⁸ Rachel Joyce, *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry: A Novel*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 2012). (Audible Edition, 2012), Chapter 8 - 2:41:29.

1. Admission of members
2. Missionary activity (service - transformation - participation)
3. Sacraments
4. Worship
5. Authority (coherence, discernment and direction)

Membership on the Pilgrim Way depends far more on the Spirit than on administrative validation. What matters most involves walking on the Way rather than assent to creedal statements and formal enrollment. In addition to being Spirit-authenticated, membership in the notion of church as Pentecostal Pilgrimage involves multi-faceted and multiple paths, short-cuts, rest stops, advance scouts/spies (with faithful and unfaithful reports), way stations, side journeys, detours, Red Sea/Jordan crossings, wilderness wonderings (and perhaps also battles, victories and defeats, alliances, intermarriages, and syncretistic amendments along the way). All moving on to perfection.

The transcending of boundaries on this journey of faith renders the member/non-member distinction to a place far less importance than in other models of church. Alternative Worship curator/creator Cheryl Lawrie describes the impetus for creating worship spaces in public spaces resulting from the “sickness” she felt “that we’d made something so hard for her to come to”⁴⁹ in a traditional church setting. So the church makes a journey to set up a tabernacle in wilderness places (like a parking garage) of the ordinary where God’s story might intersect with every story.

Lawrie and the teams that work with her curate worship spaces with grace, seeking to honor many perspectives, including “those who decide [risking the possibility of grace is] just too hard.”⁵⁰ These pilgrims share membership with those who cannot make the journey in a particular way, defying the logic of what the church has called membership. Membership in a Pentecostal Pilgrim community of faith involves shared encounters of the Holy along the Way, rather than creedal assent or institutional viability (if the institution falls silent, the stones will shout).⁵¹ Rituals create space (in place and time) for these shared encounters.

Shared rituals become the heart of worship on the pilgrim journey, because of their power to hold unity and diversity in sacred tension. Around a Table set with wine and bread, fresh vegetables for those who cannot afford or access them, voter registration forms, art that evokes and provokes, books for children to learn how to read, or tools to build a home for those who don’t have one, pilgrims gather to remember and to be re-membered by the Spirit, who guides us into all truth.

And since the Spirit blows where it will,⁵² these Tables are open, inviting all who gather around them to give and to receive - and to be re-membered in the Spirit. The Pentecostal nature of this faith (and life) pilgrimage redefines membership as vocational rather than administrative: pilgrims are rolling stones - wholly unconcerned about whether

⁴⁹ Jonny Baker, *Curating Worship* (Seabury Books (Kindle Edition), 2011), 51.

⁵⁰ Baker, 57.

⁵¹ Luke 19:40

⁵² John 3:8

their name is on some roll. They answer God's calling, God's loving, relentless lure, that beckons them to pursue honesty, unity, the "possibility of grace,"⁵³ and greater wholeness en route to God's realm that draws ever nearer.

This vocational membership in the Body of Christ leads to a whole-life orientation to worship and faith, as pilgrims recognize themselves as "called, not employed."⁵⁴ A Pentecostal Pilgrimage embraces a sense of purpose and **mission** on the Way as God's remembering them enables them to live into the new creation Christ ushers in, making all things new. As Pilgrims gathered and graced by the Spirit, these next Christians live out the conviction that "[w]hen goodness is revealed, the world gets one more opportunity to catch a glimpse of God's restoration work in progress... the work of the divine emanating from everyone."⁵⁵

Seen in this light, mission forms the foundation of life, not merely some adjunct disconnected from daily living. Pentecostal Pilgrims understand their lives in light of God's mission of salvation for all creation. This mission is both larger than life (or any individual life) and incarnated in each life and creation of God. This incarnational missional orientation of life incorporates every action and task and purpose into the life and work of God. So mission becomes not merely what a person might do with her life, but how she does everything - at work, among friends or family, or with strangers.

The needs of our world and the places where God's realm has not fully broken into being overwhelm us. Yet to be incorporated into God's mission of love and salvation means that what you notice, what pulls at your heart, involves you in this larger struggle in a meaningful and purposeful way. We notice pain, separation or injustice, and we recognize a contribution God calls us to make, so we follow the path of this pain for others and for ourselves. We trust that we act in a larger collaborative miracle that is God's Realm, so we are free from the tyranny of effectiveness. God has already accomplished the work of this new creation: pilgrims walk boldly in this wonderful light.

Like so many of the aspects of this notion of church, missional activity blurs the typical lines that demark the helper from those who are helped. Pilgrims led by the Spirit practice an openness and a trust in transformation - for others and particularly for themselves. Their labor of love in mission typically leads to a fresh insight into their own blindness and brokenness: the mission brings healing to them as they attempt to bring healing to others. On the Pilgrim Way, mission functions primarily to bring people together whom injustice separates. Here is where we meet and serve the living, risen Christ.

"These small communities of faith, known as the church dispersed, are giving the world a comprehensive view of what it looks like for Jesus to show up in a Community today"⁵⁶ writes Lyons, as he describes the next Christians. The Pilgrim Church is the Church dispersed, like salt and light, but it also experiences salt and light in the places of pain to which it bears the light. One of the pastors of the Hot Metal Bridge Faith Community in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Jim Walker, advocates a sense of *koinonia* that

⁵³ Baker, 57.

⁵⁴ Lyons, 67.

⁵⁵ Lyons, 100.

⁵⁶ Lyons, 163.

transcends walls in worship and in mission (hence the metaphor of a bridge for the church). He encourages Christians to be in ministry “with” rather than “to” the Other.⁵⁷

Pilgrims collaborate with God and with the Other in mission not to bring about a more peaceable, just and loving realm (God has already brought it about), but to participate in that realm. Their eyes are open and their ears hear and respond to the cries of despair around them in their neighborhoods and in the global community. Whether any particular faith-inspired action in ministry with others happens to be sponsored by the wider community of faith or not, each pilgrim on the Way responds to the prompting of the Spirit, welcoming others to join or following a lonely path in the faith that God’s love will transcend and transform that loneliness - as a gift to the giver and receiver.

Pentecostal Pilgrims are first responders, recognizing that mission is the heart of worship. Pastor Tim Lucas of Liquid Church told a conference about foregoing worship in a building in order to participate in a community mission project one Sunday. Though it was not a typical Sunday at Liquid, which promotes itself in ways that tend to overshadow and ignore its place in a larger church, Lucas’ testimony about the power of mission to transform the church as well as the world justifies quoting him at length:

We still do the Sunday show. We still do the show, you’ve seen our stuff. But what we’re learning is to know God is to defend a cause that’s bigger than any given Sunday [here, he references Jeremiah 22:16 - defending the cause of the poor is how you will know me, says the Lord]. ...In the past year God’s been teaching us something vital. ...The more and more our church has actually **put aside our show to serve the world’s poorest** with no strings attached, **the more and more we’ve experienced of God himself.**⁵⁸

This **sacramental** sense of experiencing God in ordinary encounters expands the understanding of sacraments beyond any two or seven in the notion of church as Pentecostal Pilgrims. Because sacraments are not only outward and visible signs of an inward and visible grace, but also are set-apart practices delimited by specific elements, celebrants and participants in the institutional church, the blurring of the lines of the pilgrim notion of church dramatically reshapes an understanding of the theological concept and the practice of the sacramental life of the church.

As in Dulles’ model of church as sacrament, the pilgrim church notion conceives of the church as a sign and as the presence of God in those who gather, communicating this presence in a similar way to the traditional seven sacraments. But this examination of the scope of this particular notion of church by examining five descriptors of the church in action focuses on the understanding and practice of specific sacraments, specifically baptism and communion. The sense of fluid membership discussed above changes the way the notion of pilgrim church regards and practices the one-time converting or inducting sacrament of baptism.

Many non-denominational expressions of church in America that understand themselves to be true notions of church (“refreshing” as opposed to stagnant, as Tim Lucas puts it at Liquid Church) regularly practice and celebrate rebaptism of “converts” who

⁵⁷ Jim Walker, Jim, Bishop’s Mid-Winter Retreat for the Peninsula-Delaware Annual Conference pastors, Ocean City, MD, January 8-9, 2013. From my presentation notes.

⁵⁸ Video of conference presentation accessed via <http://liquidwater.com/> accessed on February 21, 2013.

have been baptized in other “stagnant” Christian communities of faith. They stand in a long Anabaptist tradition that does not recognize infant baptism as valid, of course, but they also invalidate other baptismal practices in stale, lifeless traditions of the Christian church.

A notion of church as pilgrimage recognizes that faith is a journey with markers and moments of movement both toward and away from God. Baptism by water and the Spirit recognizes what can be a pivotal marker for many Christians in this journey, but all pilgrims crave ways to commemorate other conversions to deeper faith, to a return from prodigal wondering, or exile. A Pentecostal pilgrim church finds powerfully symbolic ways to mark these conversions as pilgrims work out their salvation with fear and trembling.⁵⁹

Baptism stands as the symbol-grace event par excellence, because of its long tradition and powerful evocative connections with birth and death and daily washing - two things we try to forget we have done and will do, and one we daily perform without much thought. A pilgrim church guided by the Spirit practices baptism, surely, but according to the dictates of the Spirit and those who desire this cleansing, healing, drowning and emerging experience to make sense of the new creation in which they discover themselves - not according to the gatekeepers of the church.

This is not new. The Ethiopian eunuch and court official tells Philip as much as he asks him: “What can stand in the way of my being baptized?”⁶⁰ Later in Acts, when Peter witnesses the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out on Cornelius and the Gentiles gathered with him, he exclaims: “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water.”⁶¹ Pilgrims on the Way, recognizing the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Other, will not use sacraments as gateways to be guarded but as celebrations to call attention to what God is doing among the whole of creation.

In this way, the church celebrates God’s presence in sacramental ritual that enacts the presence of God in all creation, and rehearses an awareness of this presence especially in ordinary practices, places and people. The communion meal rehearses this awareness in confession (of blindness), offering (of simple “elements” in anticipation of transformation), thanksgiving (for God’s love fully incarnate in Jesus Christ, and through Christ, in all creation), blessing, breaking (sharing), and receiving.

In his fine book, *Body Politics*, John Howard Yoder interprets Jesus’ invitation and institution “whenever you drink/eat” from Paul’s testimony in 1 Corinthians 11:25-26 to mean “whenever you have your common meal.”⁶² Then he connects breaking of bread in Acts with the pooling and sharing of all goods in common. The one symbol-act of blessing and breaking (sharing) bread catalyzes a new kind of household economy over which Jesus presides and all goods become the first fruits of an in-breaking realm of God.⁶³ So much more happens here than ritual - yet ritual informs a way of being in the world as so much more for our having taken part in this sacrament.

⁵⁹ Philippians 2:12

⁶⁰ Acts 8:37

⁶¹ Acts 10:47

⁶² John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World*, Kindle ed. (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2012), location 392 of 1622.

⁶³ Yoder, location 439 of 1622.

Pilgrims on the Way revive the understanding of the ongoing sacrament of communion as nourishment for our souls, bodies and our imaginations - fired by the Holy Spirit to experience connections between the Table and the economy of God's realm as it breaks into, indicts, and upends the economy of this world. Pilgrims recognize Christ as the presider at his Table - with no intermediaries because all people represent and remember him to the world, proclaiming his death until he comes. A pilgrim church reads Christ's "whenever" in every meal and encounter, following Christ's gracious lead to make room for the Other at all tables, and to recognize ourselves as the Other who holds out grateful hands to receive.

In celebrating the sacraments (both, seven, and the myriad sacraments of creation), the pilgrim church points and participates/manifests the now and not yet quality of God's realm. This notion of church recognizes as holy that which tends toward life in this realm - and celebrates the sacramentality of all of life. This notion of church trains sacramental eyes both to marvel at God's presence in and beyond all things and people and to travel light on the journey, investing nothing with inherent holiness without "testing the spirits."⁶⁴

The Pentecostal Pilgrim church invites all to the Table using the spirit of the invitation from the Iona community of faith:

*This is the table not of the Church but of the Lord. It is to be made ready for those who love him, and who want to love him more. So, come, you who have much faith and you who have little, you who have been here often and you who have not been for a very long time, you who have tried to follow and you who have failed. Come, not because it is I who invite you: it is our Lord. It is his will that those who want him should meet him here.*⁶⁵

Worship for the Pilgrim church anticipates, celebrates, and participates in this meeting of God and God's people, a sacrament that like so many other aspects of this notion of church blurs the lines that typically separate sacred and profane, holy and ordinary in church conception and practice. Alternative worship gatherings curate spaces juxtaposing these polar opposites in ways that disturb and provoke in order to see each in light of the other - and thus to see each with new eyes.⁶⁶ Worship on pilgrimage catches pilgrims by surprise, gathering them to worship on the Way in unlikely places and times, so that worship, like prayer,⁶⁷ becomes an unceasing practice. Wherever and whenever worship happens, pilgrims gather their stories around the story of God's improbable love for us all that impels us onward and other-ward in the power and presence of the Spirit. In God's light we see light.⁶⁸

God's light shines in every pilgrim scattered and gathered in worship. The pilgrim church lives out Paul's vision of worship as a kind of pot luck supper where the Holy Spirit inspires people to offer a bewildering array of contributions to the Table laden with gifts -

⁶⁴ 1 John 4:1

⁶⁵ John Bell, *Wee Worship Book*, Revised ed. (Wild Goose Publications, 1999). Holy Communion Liturgy B.

⁶⁶ Baker, 157.

⁶⁷ 1 Thessalonians 5:17

⁶⁸ Psalm 36:9

hymns, words of instruction, revelation, and tongues and interpretations.⁶⁹ Worship becomes a feast of God's presence among the throng of pilgrims in all walks of life and stages of the journey. Worship leaders function as air traffic controllers and emcee's instead of chief performers in a main event.

The spontaneous, participatory nature of Pentecostal Pilgrim worship results in a plethora of intimate gatherings, where strangers discover their relatedness through a common search and love for God. Songs of praise and thanksgiving, the bewildering facets of the stories of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, read, enacted and proclaimed by every member of the gathered people of God, the meal of thanksgiving, reconciliation, remembrance, and renewal that enables us to offer ourselves as a holy and living sacrifice of love to our God and to a world God so loves - as the Spirit gifts and guides us - these are the hallmarks of pilgrim worship in the Pentecostal power of the Holy Spirit.

Other notions of church celebrate the metaphor of "gas station" worship where empty sheep check in for a spiritual filling to top them off for another week. They come to be mesmerized and to live vicariously through a gifted Other who does not breathe the breath of God on them but who breathes rarefied, gifted air they can never aspire to respire. So they leave emptier than they came. In one of the churches we studied, over 600 people gathered around a gifted "teaching pastor" for over six hours on a Friday for a Bible study called Boot Camp. While they certainly knew more about what this pastor thought about the passages considered (just like Sunday sermons), they graduated even less equipped to do the works of ministry than they arrived.

In contrast to this performance-based notion of worship that defines and confines the worship experience in nearly all current notions of church, the Holy Spirit clothes every Pentecostal Pilgrim with power from on high - giving them a new song and a new story to tell the world. Worship celebrates God's presence on the Way through many and varied stories that transform the storyteller and those who gather not only to listen but to help birth the story in the presence of God in the gathered. *Expression* defines Pilgrim worship - not experience. Through this expression of praise, confession, proclamation, thanksgiving and offering, Pentecostal Pilgrims practice the preparation to give a reason for the hope they have in walking the Way of Jesus.⁷⁰

God's presence in and through pilgrim worship subsumes all other loves and loyalties and transforms those who share stories and encounters on the Pilgrim Way and those who receive. Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs⁷¹ help the pilgrims express feelings sighs and groans too deep for words⁷² as worshippers trust the Spirit to pray through them

⁶⁹ 1 Corinthians 14:26-33 stands as my favorite image and metaphor of worship truly in the Spirit - I have experienced this kind of worship on retreats. No one wanted it to end - we entered a place apart from time as the Spirit bore witness through our stories and songs and dances and poems. And this was among a group of men!

⁷⁰ 1 Peter 3:15 - I like the TNIV translation best: "But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...."

⁷¹ Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16

⁷² Romans 8:28

and to give them the words to say.⁷³ Worship in Spirit and in truth involves not right location⁷⁴ or right style (as in our current worship wars) but right participation of all, as on the Day of Pentecost, when the Spirit invested *everyone* with the power and calling to speak so that all people could hear in a language they could understand.⁷⁵

Regardless of what language we speak, the notion of church as Pentecostal Pilgrims celebrates each person and each journey as sacred and holy - and recognizes primarily the **authority** of the Holy Spirit to teach, convict, gift, guard and guide along the Way. In this notion of church, the people of God are Spirit-led, Spirit-enlivened, Spirit-authenticated (confirmed), and invested with power and presence of God. Among the people, the Holy Spirit gifts servant leaders to empower the saints for the work of ministry⁷⁶ that is abundant and eternal life on the Way.

Servant leaders encourage and authorize - giving voice to the whole community of Pentecostal Pilgrims. They consistently elevate and empower others to identify, embrace and exercise their spiritual gifts for the good not only of the Body of Christ but for the sake of the world. They trust that God has made all people in the divine, creative image of God,⁷⁷ and lead as catalysts rather than by example. As prophets speak truth on behalf of God, and as Jesus Christ does not speak on his own, but as the Father who dwells in him works,⁷⁸ leaders among Pentecostal pilgrims speak on behalf of the Holy Spirit in all people.

Richard Adams writes about this kind of group-validated authority in his novel, *Watership Down*. After the Chief introduces an apparently novel idea, the group realizes that he speaks for them all. "He was simply the one—as a Chief... ought to be—through whom a strong feeling, latent throughout the warren, had come to the surface."⁷⁹ This kind of leadership embodies a sense of prophetic witness in all of God's people while avoiding the blindness of both spiritual narcissism and the tyranny of the majority.

⁷³ Matthew 10:19b-20 and parallels. This verse seems taken out of context, but think about the nature of courtrooms and witnesses, so that the truth will out. Perhaps worship gatherings and courtrooms are not so different after all (especially today when the only people who wear robes to work are Judges and Pastors!)

⁷⁴ John 4:19-24 - Dare we believe Jesus' gracious and revolutionary announcement: the time is coming - and is now here. This day. The promises of scripture - of the prophets in and through the fiery pilgrimage of exile - are fulfilled.

⁷⁵ Acts 2:1-11 - in our own time this miracle involves listening people into speech as much as speaking in different tongues/languages. A pilgrim Pentecost miracle would involve not speaking like a hurricane, but igniting the still small voice of so many who have been silenced by the stories of others - so that these small voices may recognize in the telling of their stories God's presence and power.

⁷⁶ Ephesians 4:11-13 (The Spirit gifts "some... to equip the saints for the work of ministry" - NRSV). More than any other scriptural reference, this passage has defined for me what it means to serve God and God's people as an ordained pastor and leader - giving away power that was never mine to begin with, decreasing (like John the Baptist) so that Jesus may increase in others: his body in the world.

⁷⁷ Genesis 1:27. Have we even begun to plumb the depths of this bold statement of creation? Not only has God made us in the divine image, imbuing us with creative, loving potential, but we can only realize this potential in relationship with one another.

⁷⁸ John 14:10 - see also Colossians 1:19-20, my favorite Christological passage in the New Testament.

⁷⁹ Richard Adams, *Watership Down*, Kindle ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2009), 169.

Servant leaders who live out foot-washing, slave-of-all⁸⁰ authority in the pentecostal pilgrim church celebrate the Holy Spirit's voice in every member of the community of faith. Dava Sobel opens his book, *Longitude*, with the tragic story of how four of five ships in Admiral Sir Clowdisley Shovell's squadron and 2000 sailors perished on the shoals of the Scilly Isles near England on October 22, 1707. The fleet navigators were all mistaken about the location of the fleet, and the one man who could have saved them all, a lowly sailor who alone had correctly calculated their immanent danger, was hanged for insubordination after warning his Captain - a day before all but one of them drowned.⁸¹

This story of a journey highlights what servant leadership has to do with the pilgrim church on the Way. All pilgrims do not argue over the destination, but all pilgrims help in discerning the path⁸² to this destination, and of spotting dangers along the Way, through their diverse perspectives and spiritual gifts. Throughout the Bible, this kind of discernment involves wisdom regarding times, seasons,⁸³ and distinguishing between good and evil behavior.⁸⁴ In *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell interprets a disastrous string of air accidents for Korean Air passenger jets from 1989-1999 in part to strict hierarchical cockpit communication steeped in Korean Confucianism that prevented junior officers from speaking the truth when their Captain failed to see danger.⁸⁵

The notion of a church on the Way, led by the Holy Spirit who empowers all people, shapes the understanding and practice of leadership and authority as it does the other six descriptors of church examined above. Having explored both the coherence and scope of the notion of church as Pentecostal Pilgrimage, I now turn to the third stage of this journey - reflecting on the way ahead - imagining the **fertility** or potential of this notion to guide future pilgrims.

The church in our time and season is undergoing a reformation that we cannot fully understand because we live in the midst of this sea change: we cannot see the forest for the trees. What we do know involves too many signs of decline and loss - and a frightening state of disorientation in which feedback loops we have come to cherish no longer "work" or help us navigate as beacons of light in our culture. The ground has shifted beneath us and our maps no longer show us the way in this dramatically altered landscape.

Many of the 15 churches we have toured via their internet "presence" have taken bold steps to live as church in the midst of this reformation. *Two thirds* of them (COR, Liquid, LifeChurch, New Direction, St. Luke's, Myers Park, Grace Community, St. Joan of

⁸⁰ Mark 10:42-45 and parallel

⁸¹ Dava Sobel, *Longitude: The True Story of a Lone Genius Who Solved the Greatest Scientific Problem of His Time* (New York: Walker, 1995), 11-13.

⁸² Job 38:20

⁸³ Matthew 16:1-4 - Red sky at night, sailors (or shepherds) delight; red sky in the morning, sailors (or shepherds) warning! Also 1 Chronicles 12:32

⁸⁴ Ezekiel 44:23 and Hebrews 5:14

⁸⁵ Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success*, 1st ed. (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2008), Chapter 8.

Arc, Allen Temple, and Casa de Alabanza) define faithfulness in terms of numerical response, both in terms of people (members, participants and affiliate partners) and financial resources. These “XXL Size” Parishes, to use the words of the German Catholic Theologian’s Statement, “Church 2011: A Necessary New Departure,”⁸⁶ unwittingly foster a McDonald’s/Disney corporate-consumer culture of church with little room for anyone unwilling or unable to fit into the mold of pre-defined (by the CEO/pastor) spirituality.

At the other end of the spectrum, we visited two communities of faith (Grace at Ealing and Journey) that throw out nearly all of the rules and markers by which church communities are traditionally and typically known in order to explore, experiment and fail forward.⁸⁷ After 20 years, Grace at St. Mary’s Ealing still struggles with some of the rudiments of community formation and deliberately creates space for much smaller and intimate gatherings than it’s host church, St. Mary’s. Journey embeds a celebration of imperfection into its name. Grace leaders had “always considered Grace to be fragile and vulnerable to closure at short notice”⁸⁸ and were taken by surprise at having reached their tenth birthday, to say nothing of their twentieth. Journey’s pastor and leaders jettison much of the structure of Christian tradition and denominational identity as they celebrate a creative freedom in worship and daily life. Yet they feature an extensive set of bylaws on their website that reads like the fine print on a car loan application.

These church tours represent a wide spectrum of being church, from well-defined, well-oiled theological machine to a celebration of creative exploration that often crosses the border into chaos. No one church model can encompass such diverse expressions of the *ecclesia* in our time, but any notion (a fuzzier, more flexible concept of model) of church with fertile potential in this reformation must express the concept of spiritual creativity in the context of a coherent identity and purpose.

In the notion of church as Pentecostal Pilgrimage, the Holy Spirit empowers the church with creative freedom while guiding the church into all truth - a launching place and a *telos* to which all creativity points. The sense of church as a pilgrimage implies both a journey with a destination and a kind of wilderness wondering: the journey is as much about the experience on the Way as it is about wherever it is we imagine that we are going. Both aspects of this notion, Pentecost and Pilgrimage, embrace intensely personal experience as well as communal identity and experience.

Pentecost and Pilgrimage evoke other images for the future of the church. Though they didn’t know it then, the disciples gathered in the upper room praying and waiting to be clothed in power experienced the birth of something both discontinuous and deeply rooted in the Jewish tradition of faith. Like Jesus’ recent experience, Pentecost was both crucifixion and resurrection for a faith that was about to experience the complete and final (for 2000 years and counting...) destruction of it’s center, the Temple and Priesthood. The

⁸⁶ M. Junker-Kenny, translator, “Kirche 2011: Ein Notwendiger Aufbruch,” with 311 signatories, 240 of whom are theological professors, accessed online at http://www.memorandum-freiheit.de/?page_id=518 on May 11, 2013.

⁸⁷ John Maxwell, *Failing Forward: Turning Mistakes into Stepping Stones for Success* (Thomas Nelson, 2007). I like the title and theme of this book and another by Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (Jossey-Bass, 2011)

⁸⁸ Various authors, Grace Webpage: “A history of grace” (<http://www.freshworship.org/node/424>) accessed April 16, 2013.

Holy Spirit catalyzed this transformation with power resident in every believer - who became a priesthood of all believers, living stones building a new Temple,⁸⁹ each of whom became a Temple of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁰

A pilgrimage involves a journey to the past in order to claim a new future grounded but not confined to the past. A pilgrimage connects past and future by a pathway on which the pilgrims experience transformation both ways. The pathway - the pilgrimage - opens up a dialogue between past and future through which creative transformation becomes possible in the present. Just as pilgrims cannot return to the past, but only relics of the past along an ancient way, they cannot return to the place from which the journey began either. On pilgrimage, they experience death and resurrection. Like the magi, they return by a different way: they have been transformed on the Way.⁹¹

As I write this paper, Time magazine features the Millennial generation on its cover as "The Me Me Me Generation" in its May 20, 2013 edition. Joel Stein writes that these teens and twenty-somethings "are not into going to church, even though they believe in God, because they don't identify with big institutions..." and goes on to report that one third of them, "the highest percentage ever" report no religious affiliation.⁹² The cliché warns that the church is always one generation away from extinction: the Millennials may be that generation - leaving the church *because* of their devotion to God - and calling the church to a journey of discovery and transformation - a Pentecostal Pilgrimage on the Way that leads to life.

⁸⁹ 1 Peter 2:4-5

⁹⁰ 1 Corinthians 6:19

⁹¹ Matthew 2:12

⁹² Joel Stein, "The New Greatest Generation: Why Millennials Will Save Us All," *Time*, May 20, 2013, 34.

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