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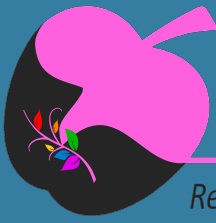
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Queering Pentecost(alism)

Advocating for Inclusion of Affirming Pentecostal Congregations

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Resumen

La comprensión y las construcciones modernas de la sexualidad desafían la hegemonía heteronormativa de la mayoría de las denominaciones cristianas. El pentecostalismo enfrenta desafíos similares. Para las personas cristianas LGBTIQ+, las congregaciones afirmativas han sido espacios de refugio para contrarrestar las doctrinas y enseñanzas destructivas relacionadas con la sexualidad, el matrimonio, la membresía y la participación en la iglesia. La taxonomía del pentecostalismo típicamente incluye cuatro movimientos dentro del pentecostalismo. Postulo un quinto tipo de pentecostalismo —las Congregaciones Pentecostales Afirmativas—, el cual interrumpe y desmantela las construcciones exclusivas de la sexualidad y afirma una fe inclusiva.

Palabras clave: Pentecostalismo, Iglesias afirmativas, Teologías queer, Congregaciones pentecostales afirmativas.

Resumo

A compreensão e as construções modernas da sexualidade desafiam a hegemonia heteronormativa da maioria das denominações cristãs. O pentecostalismo enfrenta desafios semelhantes. Para os cristãos LGBTIQ+, as congregações afirmativas têm sido locais de refúgio para combater doutrinas e ensinamentos destrutivos relacionados à sexualidade, casamento, associação e participação na igreja. A taxonomia do Pentecostalismo normalmente inclui quatro movimentos dentro do Pentecostalismo. Eu postulo um quinto tipo de pentecostalismo —as congregações pentecostais afirmativas— que perturba e desmonta construções exclusivas da sexualidade e afirma uma fé inclusiva.

Palavras-chave: Pentecostalismo, Igrejas Afirmativas, Teologias Queer, Congregações Pentecostais Afirmativas.

Abstract

Modern understandings and constructions of sexuality challenge the heteronormative hegemony of most Christian denominations. Pentecostalism faces similar challenges. For LGBTIQ+ Christians, affirmative congregations have been places of refuge to counter destructive doctrines and teachings related to sexuality, marriage, membership, and participation in the church. The taxonomy of Pentecostalism typically includes four movements within Pentecostalism. I postulate a fifth type of Pentecostalism —Affirmative Pentecostal Congregations— which disrupts and dismantles exclusive constructions of sexuality and affirms an inclusive faith.

Keywords: Pentecostalism, Affirmative Churches, Queer Theologies, Affirmative Pentecostal Congregations.

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Introduction

It was during college that I got involved in various Christian ministries, attended several religious retreats, led numerous Bible studies on campus, sung in the gospel choir, and served on leadership teams in my local church and campus ministries. As I explored different Christian faith communities, I was introduced to pentecostalism through a campus ministry and subsequently visited several Pentecostal churches throughout North and South Carolina. It was also during college that I started to acknowledge that I was gay. I prayed for God to «deliver» me from these feelings and desires because of what I heard through various sermons about «the sin of homosexuality» in many Pentecostal churches I attended. However, no matter how much I prayed, no amount of suppression or distraction worked.

Fortunately, there was never a moment where I questioned God's love for me because of my sexuality. My experience is not the case for so many other LGBTIQ+ men and women who feel abandoned by God because God created them gay – as they are taught to believe in their churches. After a couple of years of research, prayer, and a sense of peace from God, I finally came out to myself. I will never forget that day in 1999 as I was driving home from work on Interstate 95 going north in North Charlotte, NC. While driving, I started to pray and ask God whether he loved his gay son, and I heard in my spirit a clear answer and direction: «yes, I love my gay son, go and feed my sheep.» Shortly after hearing this clear message, I decided to attend seminary to learn more about Christianity and how to reconcile my faith and sexuality.

I became aware of a seminary in California affiliated with the Campus Crusade for Christ campus ministry I started during my undergraduate program. As I prepared to start seminary in California, I recall searching the internet for resources on being gay and Christian. In addition, I searched for a new church

community in the Los Angeles areas, but I knew I wanted to attend a church that was designated as welcoming and affirming. To my surprise, I discovered that there was an affirming LGBTIQ+ Christian denomination, Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) that was founded in Los Angeles as well as a network of affirming churches throughout Southern California called Christ Chapels. I reached out to the pastor at Christ Chapel of the Valley in North Hollywood, California, Rev. Jerrell Walls. Pastor Jerrell invited me to the church. However, before I visited Christ Chapel, I attended MCC Long Beach and was surprised it was a Pentecostal church with a predominantly LGBTIQ+ congregation. MCC Long Beach—now named Glory Tabernacle—was the first affirming Pentecostal church I attended. I later discovered Christ Chapel of the Valley was also a Pentecostal church. These two congregations were characteristic of Pentecostal churches with lively worship or gospel music, dancing, speaking in tongues, prophecy, and demonstrative preaching. Interestingly, both Christ Chapel of the Valley and Glory Tabernacle pastors grew up in Pentecostal churches, one Foursquare and the other Assemblies of God.

How does the growth of Pentecostalism, the growth of affirming and welcoming Christian communities, and global expansion of LGBTIQ+ rights intersect? Can someone be Pentecostal and gay? These questions are at the heart of my personal experiences and the purpose of this article. In this article, I examine the approach of «queering Pentecost(alism)» relative to the growth of affirming Pentecostal congregations in the United States of North America and Africa. I will start with a discussion of three scriptures that provide a foundation for the full inclusion, affirmation, and participation of LGBTIQ+ Christians within Pentecostal churches and denominations. After the biblical exegesis, I will include an overview of the suggested method, followed by a comparison of affirming Pentecostal churches and organizations in the U.S. and Africa.

The Case for Inclusivity

Inclusive Pentecost(alism)

When discussing the topic of LGBTIQ+ inclusion in Christian church life and ministry, one typically hears one of three responses or rebuttals: a) full acceptance: «affirming and welcoming», b) passive tolerance: «don't ask, don't tell» with limited ministry engagement, or c) rejection and correction: «homosexuality is not compatible with Christian scripture and those who claim to be gay need to repent and be restored».

All three of these responses are informed by a certain theological history as well as understandings of gender and sexuality, one grounded in certain Christian traditions, reason, doctrine, and experience. These three responses are rooted in both Methodist and Anglican theology. As Steve Harper in *Holy Love: A Biblical Theology for Human Sexuality* (2019) elaborates:

Theology arises from something prior to itself – a cultural concern, a pressing issue, a personal interest, a communal challenge. This is one reason why John Wesley made experience part of his theological interpretation, by adding to the already existing Anglican trilateral of scripture, tradition and reason. Experience was his way of noting that theology is not ultimately about belief but rather about life (p. 1).

Pentecostalism draws heavily on Sacred Texts. Let us begin by stating that Pentecostalism is defined as «the working of the gifts of the Spirit, both on phenomenological and theological grounds» (Anderson, 2014: 6). Specifically, Pentecostalism is characterized as both the «experience of the working of the Holy Spirit and the practice of spiritual gifts» (Anderson, 2014: 6). This experience and practice are based on the scriptures recorded in Joel 1.4-2.25 and the accounts of the early revivals of the

twentieth century. Pentecostal believers understand the Pentecostal movement in the early twentieth century as the «latter rain» prophesized in the book of Joel, especially chapter 2.28-32, whereas the «early rain» refers to when the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2. There are parallels with the experiences in Acts 2 that were prophesized in the first two chapters of Joel, and the experiences identified during the early 1900s. It is well documented that the early Pentecostal revivals of the twentieth century challenged social norms by the inclusion of all races, genders, and classes. In Joel 2.28, the Holy Scriptures state:

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

Pentecostal followers believe that this prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, it is recorded in Acts 2.1-4:

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like a blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

These two scriptures provide historical context to the Pentecostal movement and insights to certain doctrines regarding the Holy Spirit, Spirit baptism, speaking in tongues, and signs and wonders (Hollenweger, 1997). Additionally, they also signify that the Christian community is one of inclusion. In both Joel and Acts, the aspect of inclusion is consistently present. The prophecy indicates the Spirit will be poured out on «all flesh» and on the day

of Pentecost sons, daughters, young, old, and servants were all filled. The Holy Scriptures say that «they were all together [...] All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit» (Acts 2.4). There are no stated qualifiers in Holy Scriptures.

Inclusive Church(es)

In addition to the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, for Pentecostals engaged in the issue of the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ individuals, it is important to talk about conversion and salvation. Most Pentecostals believe LGBTIQ+ individuals must change their sexuality to be a Christian. This aspect of having prerequisites for salvation is as old as the Christian faith.

The first century Christian believers and leaders struggled with a similar question of the inclusion of non-Jews, referred to as «Gentiles». This controversy was resolved at the Council of Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 15. The previous chapters in Acts, —chapters 10-15— provide the historical context on how the early Christians arrived at the decision to include Gentiles in the Christian fellowship.

The ecclesiastic leaders within the Christian communities of the Early Church in their first century were suggesting non-Jews had to become Jews first to be saved. In other words, they commanded Gentiles had to be circumcised and follow the law of Moses. However, the Apostles Peter, Paul, and Barnabas all gave accounts of what the Holy Spirit did among the Gentiles.

Finally, the Apostle James settled the matter with the confirmation from Peter's testimony: «we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will» (Acts 15.11). Timothy Johnson (1996) brings attention of the significance of this decision:

Remember please, the stakes: The Gentiles were ‘by nature’ unclean, and were ‘by practice’ polluted by idolatry... The decision to let the Gentiles in “as such” [...] came into direct conflict with the accepted interpretation of Torah and what God wanted of humans (p. 90).

The inclusion of Gentiles would seem logical if the God of all creation is involved in salvation. Why would the God of all creation only provide salvation to part of God’s creation, specifically, only to the Jews and those who follow the law? John 3.16-17 is helpful in providing perspective, it states:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

Those verses indicate that salvation is provided to anyone who believes. Further, the same ecclesiastic leaders in the first century conveniently forgot that Jesus said the law was fulfilled when one loves their neighbor (Mt 5.17, 2 Co 5.21, Gal 5.13-18).

The Bible that most Protestants use has 66 books and almost 1,200 chapters. Yet, many use only six passages to condemn LGBTIQ+ believers. Those passages are commonly referred to as the «texts of terror» —a term coined by Phyllis Trible (1984)— or «cobbler passages.» In fact, they cover less than six chapters but nonetheless are used to justify the exclusion of LGBTIQ+ individuals.¹ Johnson (1996) provides a clear example on how the Christian Church evolves in its doctrines and teachings. There are modern instances to add to the example provided by Johnson such

¹ The six cobbler passages/terror texts are Genesis 19, Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, and Judges 19 in the Hebrew Bible; and Romans 1:24-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, and 1 Timothy 1:9-10 in the Christian Bible (Shore-Goss, 2002).

as the Christian Church's previous position on issues of slavery, race, women in leadership, divorce, and remarriage.

Similarly, the Pentecostal movement challenged these social norms and long clobbered religious beliefs which are now widely accepted in faith communities. Take the role of women in the church. Although divisive, the Pentecostal movement offered a different experience and perspective. The Pentecostal movement has had several prominent women leaders such as Florence L. Crawford, who was one of the first leaders with William Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival. Crawford is also the founder of the Apostolic Faith Mission denomination in Portland Oregon (Blumhofer, 2002). Other examples include Aimee Semple McPherson, founder of the Foursquare denomination (Barh, 1979) as well as healing evangelist Kathryn Kuhlman (Artman, 2019).

These examples highlight the importance and role of biblical exegesis and interpretation. It appears using a historical-critical exegesis approach to understand and apply Holy Scriptures to these modern issues. However, compared to those issues, the literal exegesis approach apply to the issue of homosexuality and the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ individuals. Most Pentecostals —and Christians in general— arrive at different conclusions for other issues that science, reason, and experience have provided new insight, but not for LGBTIQ+ inclusion. Walter Wink (1999) stated in this regards:

Clearly we regard certain rules as no longer binding and other things we regard as binding are not mentioned at all in the New Testament. While the Old Testament accepted divorce, Jesus forbade it. Surely no Christian would recommend reviving the levirate marriage. So why do we appeal to proof texts in scripture in the case of homosexuality alone, when we feel perfectly free to disagree with Scripture regarding most other sexual practices?

Obviously, many of our choices in these matters are arbitrary (pp. 42-43).

Despite the ongoing differences and challenges, the Christian Bible suggests that Christianity is a faith of inclusion rather than exclusion. LGBTIQ+ have been hurt by the misused of Holy Scriptures. Yet, there are three verses in which LGBTIQ+ Christian clearly witness the support for an inclusive message.

The first verse is Romans 10.13, which states, «Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.» The word «whosoever» is a powerful word for anyone who believes they are outside of the confines of God's love for who they are. Regarding the inclusion of all people, no matter your gender, ethnicity, and social status.

The second verse is Galatians 3.28-19, which offers confirmation where it is recorded that «There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for all are one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.» Particularly for Pentecostal LGBTIQ+ believers, this is link to what traditional Pentecostalism understands about God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12.2-3. For Pentecostalism, the promise to Abraham included seven blessings —also known as «seven-fold blessing»—, which are: (1) Respect: «I will make you a great nation»; (2) Fame: «I will make your name great»; (3) Honor: «I will make your name great»; (4) Wealth: «you will be a blessing»; (5) Favor: «I will bless those who bless you»; (6) Protection: «I will curse those who curse you»; and (7) Descendants: «all the families will be blessed through you» (Pentecostal Tabernacle International, 2015). For LGBTIQ+ individuals, these seven blessings are a balm to rejection, isolation, and hurt caused by exclusion from their faith communities.

Finally, the third verse is Colossians 3.11, which reinforces the gospel of inclusion and states: «And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.» In other words, there are no difference for the love of God to all peoples, regardless of their origin, education, ethnicity, or nationality. LGBTIQ+ Pentecostals understand that also gender and sexual orientation are never barriers for accessing the unconditional love of God.

These three verses of the Holy Scriptures describe a salvation without condition with the invitational call to everyone, the inclusive call to «whosoever.»

Social Construction of Gender and Sexuality

Why has the Christian community at large struggled with the inclusion of the LGBTIQ+ believers in the faith community, specifically for the context of this article, the Pentecostal community? As described above, part of the answer is how Christians decide which approach to use in translating and interpreting the Holy Scriptures. Another reason for the dissonance between full inclusion of LGBTIQ+ individuals and theological perspectives is related to how Christians understand gender and sexuality.

Adrian Thatcher (2015: 5) indicates that before the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the ideas and concept of gender were non-binary, in fact women were considered the lesser or inferior version of men. He goes further and explain that sexuality and the knowledge of sexuality are products of European modernity. In fact, a careful inspection of the issue of same-sex relations in Christianity leave us with the truth that they were only condemned in the eleventh century (Jordan, 1997; Córdova Quero,

2004). This is the landscape that theologians entered the conversation on sexuality and gender.

Within academic circles —especially with gender studies and philosophy scholars—, the post-structuralist and deconstructionist Michel Foucault is acknowledged as the person who advanced and influenced the history of ideas related to gender, especially sexuality. Foucault's work was centered around power and knowledge and how power produces knowledge. He posits that sexuality is a product of power knowledge and social systems constructed—and continue to construct— sexuality for power and control (Turner, 2000: 39-40).

With sarcasm, Foucault famously announced that 1870 was the year the homosexual became a person, «a species.» This is based on an 1869 article by Carl Friedrich Otto Westphal titled, «Die Konträre Sexualempfindung» [contrary sexual sensations] (1869-1870). According to Foucault (1990), homosexuality as a construct was previously:

defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts [...] the nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history. . . we must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species (p. 43).

In addition to Westphal's 1869 article, there was another pamphlet at the same time by Karl Maria Kertbeny that was favoring the exclusion of a section of the Prussian criminal code that would criminalize sex between same-sex partners. This pamphlet by Kertbeny was the first time «this idea-that some

individuals' sexual attraction for persons of the same sex was an inherent and unchanging aspect of their personality» (Mondimore, 1996: 3).

In addition to this short historical context to the word «homosexual» and modern understandings of sexuality, it is important to acknowledge that science, reason, and changing social norms all informed the ideas of gender and sex and in turn influenced faith communities.

Queer Theory and Queering Pentecostalism

What is queer theory and its association with the Pentecostal movement? A common first response would be that there is not an association and the two are incompatible according to Pentecostal doctrine, history, and practices. As discussed earlier, issues concerning gender and sexuality continue to challenge many faith communities, including Pentecostalism. Some would say there is not a specific challenge and the Pentecostal faith community is called to be separate from modern social norms and the acceptance of «homosexuality» due to holiness standards. However, modern society, changing social norms, and the growth of welcoming and affirming Pentecostal churches and networks prove otherwise.

Just as the Day of Pentecost recorded in the Christian Bible and the early Pentecostal revivals of the twentieth century were inclusive events as discussed earlier, queer theory is a critical tool with foundational aims of inclusion, visibility, and acknowledgment while deconstructing the ideas of cis-heteronormativity and stable identities or genders (Jagose, 1996). Queer theory critiques politics, categories, identity, history, liberalism, the academy, subjectivity, and theology to achieve these aims; it challenges the binary, essentialism, and what is categorized as normal (Turner, 2000).

The phrase *queer theory* was first used by Teresa de Lauretis as part of a symposium in 1990, that led to her as the guest editor and author of the introduction for a special issue of the feminist and cultural studies journal *Differences: Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities* (Jagose, 1996). As a critical theory, queer theory is interdisciplinary and draws on several cultural and social movements such as feminism, womanist movement, civil rights, women's rights, LGBTIQ+ rights, and post-colonialism (Turner, 2000). De Lauretis (1991) was specific on her aim of queer theory; it is a theory that challenges heterosexuality as the norm, uses gender to interrogate the projection that lesbian and gay studies is a monolith, and finally, how race is constructed to influence sexual subjectivities.

At the base of the theory is the word «queer»; which traditionally has had a derogatory connotation such as «odd,» «weird,» «not normal or normative,» or «strange» (Jagose, 1996). However, the word «queer» as well as queer theory are both focused on disrupting, dismantling, disturbing, and uncovering the voices, perspectives, experiences, and lives of marginalized communities, especially the LGBTIQ+ community (Turner, 2000).

Similarly, Pentecostalism disrupts, dismantles, disturbs, and uncovers the Christian narrative and experience relative to the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians. Therefore, it is suggested that one can utilize queer theory and its methods to not only disrupt the tradition, but also to uncover, redeem, and recast the tradition's inclusive roots leading to the full inclusion of LGBTIQ+ Pentecostals.

Growth of Pentecostalism and Inclusive Christian Communities

Pentecostalism has been the fastest growing movement of Christianity. According to the results of a Pew Research report

written by Conrad Hackett and David McClendon (2017), there are an estimated 2.3 billion Christians in the world, followed by 1.8 billion Muslims. Of the 2.3 billion Christians in the world, there are an estimated 600 million identified as Pentecostal (Pew Research Center, 2011). However, Pentecostals trail behind other Christian denominations and other religious faiths when it comes to inclusive doctrine and praxis regarding full inclusion of gay and lesbians within their communities. This may be ironic given the inclusive history of Pentecostalism outlined earlier in this article.

A Pew Research Center 2014 Religious Landscape Study asked Pentecostals whether homosexuality should be accepted or discouraged, 63% stated homosexuality should be discouraged whereas 28% indicate homosexuality should be accepted (Pew Research Center, 2015). This study confirms a correlation between the literal translation of the Bible and historical-context approach; for the respondents who indicated homosexuality should not be accepted, 78% stated that the Word of God should be taken literally and 72% believe humanity has not evolved. This study provides additional context of why a majority within the Pentecostal traditions do not support the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ individuals.

However, there is hope because 28% of Pentecostals expressed support for those who identify as gay and the Pew Research Center reports that 54% (an increase from 44% in 2007) of all Christians are accepting of homosexuality (Murphy, 2015). This increase in acceptance is reflected in the direction that many mainline denominations have changed their doctrines and are now inclusive of LGBTIQ+ Christians in full ministry of service, including the United Church of Christ, the Episcopal Church in the United States, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, Mennonites, the Presbyterian Church USA, and Quakers.

Conversely, if the mainline denomination is not fully inclusive, several organizations and affiliated churches serve as beacons of hope for the eventual full inclusion. The same is true for different religions.

It is noteworthy that the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC) —founded in 1968 by Rev. Troy Perry— is the first denomination born to welcome and ordain LGBTIQ+ believers. Rev. Perry’s religious provenance was the Pentecostal movement (Melton, 1991).

Given that landscape, the question emerges: Are there affirming Pentecostal denominations, congregations, or associations? Certainly yes. As one can deduce with 28% of Pentecostals expressing support for LGBTIQ+ individuals, the availability of affirming Pentecostal communities remains minimal. However, the awareness and support for LGBTIQ+ believers among Pentecostal churches is steadily growing.

The following table (Table 1) lists the diverse groups that have emerged among Christian denominations and different religions:

Table 1: List of LGBTIQ+ Groups in the U.S.

LGBTIQ+ Group	Christian denomination/Religion
A Common Bond	Jehovah’s Witnesses
Affirmation: LGBTQ Mormons, Families & Friends	Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons)
American Baptists Concerned	American Baptist Churches
Apostolic Intercessory Ministry	Pentecostal Churches
Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists	Baptist Churches
Axios	Orthodox Churches

LGBTIQ+ Group	Christian denomination/Religion
Brethren/Mennonite Council for Lesbian & Gay Concerns	Mennonite Churches
Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns	United Church of Christ
Dignity	Roman Catholic Church
Evangelicals Concerned Inc.	Evangelical Christian Churches
Fellowship of Reconciling Pentecostals International	Pentecostal Churches
Gay, Lesbian and Affirming Disciples (GLAD) Alliance	Disciples of Christ
Integrity USA	Episcopal Church/Anglican
Kinship International	Seventh Day Adventist Church
Lutherans Concerned	Lutheran Churches
More Light Presbyterians	Presbyterian Churches
Rainbow Baptist	Baptist Churches
Reconciling in Christ Program	Lutheran Churches
Reconciling Ministries Network	United Methodist Church
The Evangelical Network	Evangelical Christian Churches
Gay and Lesbian Arabic Society	Islam
Gay Buddhist Fellowship	Buddhism
Gay Men's Buddhist Sangha	Buddhism
Interweave	Unitarian Universalism
Queer Muslims	Islam
Rainbow Wind	Paganism
The Queer Jihad	Islam
World Congress Keshet Ga'avah	Judaism

Source: Hartford Institute for Religious Research (2000).

A Fifth Pentecostal Type: Affirming Pentecostal Congregations

Allan Anderson in *An Introduction to Pentecostalism* (2014: 25-39) provides an accessible history of the Pentecostal movement. He traces the current day Pentecostal landscape—inclusive of classical Pentecostals, Charismatic, Neo-Charismatic streams—through different origins. They include Methodism and the holiness movement, revivals in India, Korea, and Keswick, the Welsh Revival, the healing movement, and the Azusa Street Revival.

One of the common issues with studying Pentecostalism is defining who is a Pentecostal. The taxonomy of Pentecostalism has been debated, but Anderson (2010) states that there are four common types:

1. *Classical Pentecostals*: those that trace their history to the early twentieth century revivals such as Azusa Street including holiness Pentecostals such as Church of God in Christ, Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), Assemblies of God, Foursquare Church, Oneness Pentecostals, and Apostolic Pentecostals, among others (pp. 17-18).

2. *Older Independent and Spirit Churches*: those in China, India, and Africa and Charismatics, defined as Pentecostals within mainline denominations, among others (pp. 18-19);

3. *Older Church Charismatics*: those within Roman Catholicism and other Independent Catholic Churches, Anglicanism and mainstream protestant churches, among others (p. 19); and

4. *Neo-Pentecostal and neo-Charismatic Churches*: those that include parachurches, Word of Faith churches, the Vineyard churches, Calvary Chapel churches, among others (p. 19).

I include these four types to provide context for what I confidently argue as a fifth type that has been conveniently ignored and excluded, namely, Affirming Pentecostals Congregations. These congregations would cross all four types outlined by Anderson (2010); however their statement of faiths would provide a differentiator to merit a separate type. Following, I will provide a comparison of this proposed fifth Pentecostal type focused on affirming Pentecostal networks and congregations in the United States and Africa.

Welcoming and Affirming Pentecostals: The United States

The Reverend Troy Perry —a Pentecostal minister asked to resign from his church because of his sexuality— was the forerunner to affirming Pentecostal churches and organizations in the United States. Reverend Perry is the founder of the United Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC). MCC is a Christian denomination with a primary ministry to the LGBTIQ+ community, family and friends. MCC was the answer to many LGBTIQ+ people who were rejected, abandoned, and isolated by their churches and denominations in the late 1960s, early 1970s.

In the first service in October 1968, twelve people gathered in Perry's living room of his Huntington Park home and gave \$3.18 in the offering (Christian Century, 1996). Since its beginnings in 1968, UFMCC today has grown to be comprised of more than 43,000 members in 300 congregations in 22 countries around the world (UFMCC, 2013). MCC congregations vary in worship and doctrine, and there are dozens of MCC congregations that identify as Pentecostal.

The first LGBTIQ+ affirming Pentecostal organization was founded by William H. Carey in 1980, called National Gay Pentecostal Alliance (NGPA). Over more than twenty years of service, NGPA claims to have sponsored churches throughout the United States, Nigeria, and the Ukraine (Carey, 2011).

Currently, there are six affirming and inclusive Pentecostal denominations or networks of churches in the United States that provide insights to the history, experience, and growth within these communities. The six communities are: Affirming Pentecostal Church International (APCI) (FaithlifeWiki, 2009, «Affirming Pentecostal Church International», 2020), the Covenant Network (2019), the Global Alliance of Affirming Apostolic Pentecostals (GAAAP), and the Fellowship of Reconciling Pentecostals International (RPI) (2020), The Evangelical Network (TEN) (2019), and The Fellowship and Affirming Ministries (TFAM) (2018b).

Those six network of churches in the United States reflect three of the Pentecostal types Anderson outlined; they represent individuals from the classical Pentecostal tradition, Charismatic, and neo-Charismatic types and collectively represent over 100 congregations and thousands of LGBTIQ+ Pentecostals and their families. Like the overall growth trajectory of Pentecostalism, these welcoming and affirming Pentecostal organizations and networks are also growing in parallel.

The Covenant Network has 16 congregations across the United States, one in Australia, Mexico, and Puerto Rico; and TEN has nine congregations across the United States, one in Canada, and seven ministry organizations that serve the LGBTIQ+ communities.

TFAM has 37 congregations across the United States and eight global affiliates in Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Cote d'Ivoire, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Asia while RPI has nine congregations and two international affiliates, one in the Philippines and one in Bogota, Colombia.

GAAAP —now New Journey Ministries— at its height listed seven congregations but like many Pentecostal networks went through internal strife and currently exists as one congregation;

and finally. On the other hand, APCI claims to be the world's largest LGBT affirming Pentecostal organization with dozens of congregations in the United States, Africa, South America, and Mexico (FaithlifeWiki, 2009).²

Although there are probably dozens of Pentecostal churches and organizations that are affirming, there are few sources that attempt to document this proposed fifth Pentecostal type.

In terms of doctrine and practice, with the exception of unapologetically claiming to be an affirming or inclusive Pentecostal church or organization, all of these networks had similar statement of faiths with a few distinctions such as defining holiness, healing, and deliverance. RPI added a statement about different relationships, specifically detailing intimate relations, marriage, and divorce. The Covenant Network included further details on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, the Evidence of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, Sanctification, and divine healing.

For TFAM, in addition to providing definitions of their distinctions of social justice, radical inclusivity, worship and the Arts, and healthy individuals, the organization specifically express they are primarily —but not exclusively— an African American community. Interestingly, TFAM provides a historical critique of exclusion within the African American Christian community with a historical synopsis of how chattel slavery informs oppression in the larger church, including the exclusion of LGBTIQ+ believers. TFAM states their «overarching goal is creating, sustaining, and celebrating community on the margin» (TFAM, 2018a).

² According to their Wikipedia page, I was able to locate the Presiding Bishop Erik D. Swope-Wise's Facebook page. On a post dated January 17, Bishop Swope-Wise (2015) claims APCI «have churches/ministries in 27 countries», but there are no specifics how many are in Africa. Bishop Wise lists his current home location as Lekki, Lagos, Nigeria.

Welcoming and Affirming Pentecostals: Africa

The broader conversation on the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ believers in the life of African Christian churches is a new phenomenon. Although Christianity has been a faith tradition on the continent for thousands of years, the impact of colonialism and imperialism have long muted the concerns of LGBTIQ+ inclusion. In fact, daily survival is prioritized while addressing the social, political, and economic challenges of the continent as a result of colonialism and imperialism.

Nevertheless, the African continent has slowly followed the ecclesiastical issues of sexuality, gender, and now race/ethnicity. There are some similarities between the United States and Africa regarding the journey to LGBTIQ+ inclusion within the life and ministry of Christian denominations and churches. For example, the Anglican and Lutheran communities in the United States voted to affirm LGBTIQ+ individuals within their communities. Many churches in the United States who disagreed with the direction of their denominations left the denomination and formed new ones or became independent, so did their African counterparts (Dreier, 2019). However, not all African Anglican and Lutheran congregations left the denomination. There are welcoming and affirming Anglican and Lutheran congregations in Africa, too.

Due to war, famine, drought, economic crises, and «brain-drain» migration, the US-network model of affirming Pentecostals or organizations is relatively new. Those in Africa have mostly had to focus on learning to be African in the wake of mass exploitation and subjugation from imperialism and colonialism. Unfortunately, pastors and church leaders from the United States have decided that Africa was their next project and have been busy importing their brand of Christianity to Africa. Many of these pastors are usually conservative and evangelical with the intent of «saving the heathens» in Africa. They bring their conservative views of gender,

identity, and sexuality without any regard to the rich African traditions, cultures, and religions that may challenge their perspectives. It is a modern form of imperialism, except it is Christian imperialism and spiritual colonialism. Neville Hoad in *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization* (2007) confirms that «imperialism has been dictating what Africans should and should not do with their bodies for at least 200 years in order to enter the community/communion of the human» (p. 67).

Further, Nathan Hale Williams brought attention to the counter movement to these American Evangelicals in the blog post, «Black Pastors Launch African Tour to Counteract Rick Warren’s Anti-Gay Movement» (2019). This counter effort was led by Pastor Joseph Tolton from TFAM. Pastor Tolton stated,

as black gay Christians who identify with Pentecostal worship and as people of social justice, we are countering the work of conservative, mostly white American evangelicals who are doubling down on their attempt of spiritual colonization of Africa» (Williams, 2019).

Given the history of colonialism in Africa and subsequent political, economic, social, and religious issues the continent continues to resolve, this awareness and intentional resistance is critical for the African people.

While there are efforts to transport Western Christian ideologies and practices to Africa, the counter efforts are accelerating through organizations such as TFAM. Adriaan van Klinken (2017) provides the first in-depth inquiry on how TFAM is countering the predominately white anti-gay agenda from US Christians. He documents the work of The Fellowship Global (TFG) —which is the global ministry of TFAM— and how the ministry is partnering with local pastors and activists to train and support affirming Pentecostal church leaders (Van Klinken, 2017:

222). TFG created United Coalition of Affirming Africans (UCAA), a Pentecostal African organization to help localize ministry services in Africa. To date, TFG has ministries in Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, and Democratic Republic of Congo (Van Klinken, 2017: 224).

Uniquely and unapologetic Pentecostal, TFG's leader, Pastor Tolton, addresses the difference in the work that UCAA affiliated churches and ministries offer Africans compared to what the Western—usually meaning predominately white—human rights organizations offer LGBTIQ+ Africans. One distinction is how Western human rights organizations discredit the role of religion in the lives of LGBTIQ+ Africans. Pastor Tolton reflects,

We have an experience that we literally cannot explain, and that is our interaction with the Holy Ghost. And that's the piece that I think distinguishes us and rally pushes over the edge, because when other folds come to worship with us, they feel something incredibly familiar, and they can't deny the presence of God (Van Klinken, 2017: 227).

Besides TFG, there are two additional prominent organizations that are affirming in their scope of work but are not necessarily unapologetically Pentecostal as TFG. The two organizations are Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM) based in South Africa and the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT).

In the case of IAM, although the organization is based in South Africa, there are several Affirming Pentecostal churches they partner with outside of South Africa to advance the message and work of full LGBTIQ+ inclusion within Christian churches and denominations in Africa.

For EATWOT, one of its primary goals is to provide theological context for countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin American by scholars from those countries rather than from Western scholars.

Focus areas for EATWOT are addressing inequalities, oppression, poverty, marginalization, and domination (Bae, 2007: 2). These focus areas are where EATWOT can offer academic partnership with ecclesiastical efforts from local congregations and originations such as IAM and TFG. Van Klinken (2017) confirms this possibility given that EATWOT is,

strongly committed to a liberation-based interpretation of Christianity, including in the areas of gender and sexuality. Building on this tradition, EATWOT could possibly play a role in developing a Pan-African theology that affirms homoeroticism and promotes sexual diversity and justice (p. 234).

In addition to the pan-continent or country-based inclusive organizations, there are several affirming Pentecostal churches in Africa and new congregations are being established each year. Most of the existing affirming congregations are churches affiliated with the US affirming Pentecostal networks mentioned above, including MCC congregations. APCI and TFAM have several ministries and churches they sponsor in Africa. However due to potential harassment, persecution, or death in certain countries, the availability of information is limited. As the Pentecostal movement continues to grow and accelerate in Africa, the proposed fifth Pentecostal type, namely, Affirming Pentecostal Congregations, is growing and expanding in parallel.

Conclusion: Leaving Egypt for Canaan Or From Moses' Ministry to Joshua's Ministry

In the Bible, Egypt is symbolic of bondage, oppression, and liberation. The oppression from Pharaoh and his taskmasters caused the Israelites to cry out to God to deliver them. God did just that, he sent Moses to deliver the Israelites. God told the

Israelites through Moses that he would deliver them and give them land.

Notwithstanding, after Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, they still had a journey to their promised land, called Canaan. They had to travel through the wilderness before they arrived at the promised land. It was in the wilderness where God saw who was with him and who was against him. The Israelites seemed to have forgotten what God did for them, they murmured, complained, and started building idols to worship. The generation who came out of Egypt died in the wilderness because of their murmuring and complaining. It was only their children's generation that entered the promised land 40 years later.

Queering this Egypt account, Reverend Perry of MCC is the Moses to the gay and lesbian Christian community, including Pentecostals. As the church continued to put LGBTIQ+ believers in bondage over their sexuality, the gay and lesbians cried out to God and it appears that one of God's answers was Reverend Perry. Nonetheless, just as the Israelites had to travel through the wilderness, so did LGBTIQ+ Christians, that is, for those who remained in the faith.

I believe some LGBTIQ+ Christians have gone through their wilderness years, referring to the possibility of multiple «wilderness» experiences, and are entering the promise land. Our promise land being full inclusion, just like the inclusion of all at Pentecost and the early twentieth century Pentecostal revivals. God did not allow Moses to enter the promised land with the generation born in the wilderness. Moses was instructed to mentor Joshua and it would be Joshua to lead the Israelites into the promise land.

Just as there are multiple «wildernesses» the LGBTIQ+ community has multiple Joshua's bringing the LGBTIQ+ believers into their Canaan. Moses' ministry was to bring the God's people

out, just as Reverend Perry was able to bring the LGBTIQ+ Christian community out of the closet and into the mainstream.

However, it was not easy once people of God crossed the Jordan river into their promised land for God had told them that they had to fight all the «ites» in the land: Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and the Jebusites (Jos 3.10). I believe that the LGBTIQ+ Pentecostal community can take note of this direction from God and although God gives a leader for both Egypt and the promised land, there will still be battles to fight.

In this article —by queering the Pentecostal tradition and uncovering God’s call for the «whosoever»—, I advocate for a fifth Pentecostal type: Affirming Pentecostal Congregations. That type of Pentecostalism describes and captures the LGBTIQ+ voices, experiences, and impact in the Pentecostal movement. Pentecostalism continues to grow around the world; with it, so does affirming congregations. The day of Pentecost and the Pentecostal movement was characterized by inclusion; they included all genders, ethnicities, ages, and social statuses. This type of disruption will always challenge the established norms and cultures of the day, as it did on the day of Pentecost and will continue throughout the modern-day Pentecostal movement.

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