

The Rise of 'New Generation' Churches in Kerala Christianity

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1 Vignette

It is 9:00 a.m. on Friday morning, the official day of worship in many Muslim countries. Migrant workers and their families arrive in the hundreds to the Heavenly Feast worship service in Jleeb Al-Shuyouk, Kuwait, locally called Abbassiya, the enclave of Malayalee immigrants in Kuwait. This is one of the fastest growing churches in Kerala and in Kuwait. Men and women, youth and children, fill the 500-seat auditorium quickly. The worship leader, who is a young man in his twenties wearing jeans and a T-shirt accompanied by an electronic keyboard, leads the congregation in song. The multi-layered sounds from the keyboard make it seem as though there is an entire orchestra hidden behind the curtains. The majority of churches in Kuwait worships on the National Evangelical Church of Kuwait compound located in Kuwait City which functions as the official and legitimate place of worship. Because of the limitation of space on the compound, scores of churches meet in basements, hotels, villas, schools, and auditoriums such as the one I am visiting today.

The auditorium fills with the sound of audience's clapping along to popular worship songs sung in many of the Pentecostal churches in Kerala. The service is almost entirely in Malayalam, the language spoken in Kerala, interspersed with English phrases and worship songs. Throughout, the worship leader encourages the audience to shake hands with their neighbors with instructions for declarations such as, "I am going to be blessed today." The worship medley of more than ten hymns strung together flows from one song to the next, interspersed with shouts of "Hallelujahs." About an hour into the singing, the pastor comes on the stage. He appears to be in his late thirties, wears a short sleeve shirt and dark trousers, and continues to lead the congregation in the singing. He declares victory and deliverance over evil spirits, specifically calling out spirits of suicide and addictions. He goes on to declare, "We will see even greater things ... we will fill this hall, we will fill a stadium full of people. We will have worship in every language in Kuwait!" A spirit of expectation and anticipation is palpable in the room.

After the worship session, one of the members is invited to share his testimony. He explains that he and his wife were trying to have children for twelve years and how God answered their prayers and gave them a child. He described how before he came to faith, he was a person filled with rage and bad behavior, but he testifies to how the Lord transformed his life. Another member testifies of receiving healing from knee pain. The pastor comes back on the stage and invites all visitors to stand and he prays for the blessing of the dozen or so visitors. He invites those who are celebrating birthdays and anniversaries to stand and prays for them. Then, he reminds the church to support the video broadcast ministries of the parent denomination Heavenly Feast from Kerala. The Kuwait branch of the Heavenly Feast church alone sponsors more than 95 episodes out of 270 episodes. The pastor encourages the people to sponsor an episode on the occasion of their birthdays and anniversaries reminding them that the media ministries is a "big part of the harvest."

Moving on to the Communion service, or the Lord's table, the pastor invites servers, which unlike other Classical Pentecostal churches include men and women. He emphasizes that communion is offered for members who have received believer's baptism to contrast against infant baptism practiced in the traditional Eastern churches. Further, he specifies, the baptism is in the name of the Trinity (to respond to the Jesus-only groups). The bread and juice is passed to the congregants as the worship leader sings songs of celebration in recognition of Christ's victory on the cross, a significant change from songs of solemnity in Eastern and Classical Pentecostal churches which recount the suffering of Christ. Next, for offering, the pastor exhorts the congregation to be generous in their giving. He reminds them, "Give, and God will bless you with an overflowing blessing." The pastor continues, "We are giving not into the offering plate, but we are giving to the hands of Jesus." The excitement stirred for giving, calls to mind the prevailing critique of 'prosperity gospel' promising generous divine endowments in return for faith-filled and sacrificial giving.

Now about two hours into the worship service, before beginning the sermon, the pastor brings greetings from the founder Thanghu Brother. He says, "The servant of God loves you and prays for you. The apostle's heart is always with the church. He is thinking of you and praying for you." The ties of the congregation in Kuwait to Kerala and vice-versa are kept alive through the regular visits and communication from the leaders, regular television programming, and remittances to the homeland. The week's worship meetings are then announced with ladies' prayer-, cell group-, and area prayer groups meeting held almost every day of the week.

As he prepares to preach, he prays "Lord, may the word that we hear be a blessing in my life. You've hidden this revelation from the wise and revealed it to children." The sermon starts in 2 Peter 1:2 on the importance of grace and peace

in a believer's life. The pastor weaves together scripture and the narrative from Peter washing his nets (Luke 5). He exhorts, "When Peter was obedient, he was blessed! When you obey, there is a blessing. We will receive blessing if we set aside our intellect when we come to the Scriptures." He continues, "If you invite Jesus into your boat and give him the best place, you will be blessed. God's desire is to not just bless you here, but he has a greater place for you. God's desire for Peter is to make him a fisher of men." Before the sermon is over, the pastor preaches also from the Gospel of Matthew, the epistles to the Ephesians, Romans, then back to the Exodus, and finally concludes with Paul's shipwreck in Malta (Acts 28). He declares, "No one can destroy the purposes that God has for you. The situation will change. He that is in you is greater than he that is in the world. You just have to shake it off!"

The people are enthusiastic and vibrant. They rise to their feet and the worship leader and the keyboard is now back on stage leading the congregation in songs of praise with raucous clapping. The pastor leads in declaring curses broken, sick healed, jobs for those unemployed, and visas for those who are needing residency. Three hours later the service comes to a close and the crowd disperses back to the Indian immigrant neighborhood.¹

2 Introduction

The impact of the global growth and spread of Pentecostalism in the twentieth century can be traced on every continent (Pew Forum 2006; Dempster *et al.* 2011). Pentecostalism and charismatic movements are among the fastest growing religious movements, according to some sources numbering over 709.8 million believers or one-quarter of the world's Christian population. (Johnson and Zurlo 2020). The *Atlas of Global Christianity* estimates over 30 million of what it terms 'renewalists' in India alone (not counting many more members in the Indian diaspora), which include Pentecostals, charismatics and other independent renewal groups, accounting for over 50 percent of India's Christian population growing at a rate of 5.21% (Johnson 2009: 481). Despite the stupendous growth of the movement, the imperative remains for us to understand the growth of Pentecostalism at the grassroots and to account for the dynamism, complexity, varieties and nuances within Pentecostalism as well as its relation

1 The field research data were gathered as part of a larger research project that took place in India and Kuwait during the years 2012–2013 among thirty-five Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches in Kuwait. Translation from Malayalam to English was done by the author.

to other Christian denominations. The field of World Christianity turns our attention to the local narratives taking place within specific contexts to analyze movements within their historical contexts to discern the unique features of faith and practice in any given location as well as situate and interpret them in the light of wider trends and developments. Also, it stimulates reflection on the genealogies of terminologies, critically inquiring whether terminology, developed in one context, can adequately describe developments and movements in another context.

This chapter opened with a vignette of a worship service at Heavenly Feast, one of the prominent, so-called 'New Generation' churches that emerged in Kerala, India in the late twentieth century and that has a branch in Kuwait. The Kerala diaspora context in Kuwait presents a microcosm of the religious dynamics and diversities from the homeland.² The practice and organization of religion, religious belonging, and its dynamics flow organically between the diaspora and the homeland. Rather than seeing the diaspora context as wholly separate and distinct from the religious dynamics in the homeland, this chapter will demonstrate the seamless flows between the two locations. Taking the vignette as unit for reflection and analysis, this chapter, by placing India's 'New Generation' churches in their historical context, explores the terminological toolkit available for understanding these churches both in their local specificities and global connectivities.

3 'New Generation' Churches in Kerala

Pentecostal churches and movements, especially the newer movements, are flourishing across the globe. These movements, led by charismatic leaders with their emphasis on spiritual gifts and miracles, are transforming the religious landscape of traditional Kerala Eastern Christian denominations and even traditional Pentecostals or, what Johnson calls, 'Denominational Pentecostalism' (Johnson 2014: 274). The Heavenly Feast is an example of an indigenous Kerala 'New Generation' church that may be considered a sort of neo-Pentecostal church, being a new movement that does not neatly fit within previous denominations. The church is led by Mathew Kuruvilla, affectionately known as Thangu Brother. After experiencing physical healing, the former businessman

2 The diaspora community in Kuwait is inextricably tied to the homeland because of their transient or temporary tenure that necessitates the migrants' return to their homeland. The transient nature in Kuwait case does not afford any sense of permanency, in contrast to the experience of diaspora in other locations. Hence, the transnational orientation and belongings are strengthened between the diaspora and the homeland.

became an evangelist. He started a prayer fellowship in his office in 1998 and today it has become a global movement. More than three hundred churches have been planted in various parts of India and among the Indian diaspora throughout the Gulf states, Europe, and North America. Such a revivalist movement finds its way to the diaspora through personal ties with economic migrants in the Gulf and through television programs that reach Indian homes worldwide. Channels such as Power Vision, Harvest TV, and Surya regularly broadcast episodes, daily reaching homes of earnest seekers and believers in the homeland and across the diaspora. Furthermore, once congregations are established in the diaspora, the churches regularly host leaders from India for conventions, conferences, and revival meetings, further cementing the transnational belonging of the diaspora.

'New Generation' churches, such as of the Heavenly Feast, evoke the question of how to categorize these churches. Some, such as Ginu Oommen (2015) and Donald Miller (2016) have classified 'New Generation' churches such as the Heavenly Feast as neo-Pentecostal churches. By situating these churches in their historical context, this chapter investigates to what extent the notion 'neo-Pentecostal' and all the connotations that the word carries, is a suitable label to describe the distinct Kerala character and context of these 'New Generation' churches.

4 The Rise of 'New Generation' Churches in Kerala: A Historical Perspective

To understand the rise of 'New Generation' churches, we must situate them against the backdrop of Kerala's rich Christian history since they are responding and reacting to the various strands of Christianity in Kerala.

Christianity in India has a rich heritage, with some claiming that its history can be traced to the arrival of apostle Thomas in 52 CE. He is believed to have followed the trails of the Jewish diaspora that had a colony in Cochin, Kerala. Local tradition maintains that he preached to the Brahmins, the highest caste of Hindus, establishing seven churches in Kerala before traveling to the neighboring state of Tamil Nadu, where tradition claims he was martyred. Later in the fourth century, Thomas Cananea of Syria arrived on the coast of Kerala along with seventy-two Christian families and settled in Kerala. Their descendants became known as Kananaya Christians. Together with the local Christians who claim descent from the early converts of St. Thomas, the local Christian community came to be known as the Thomas Christians or Syrian Christians for their use of Syriac and links to the Church of the East.

The Catholic strand of Christianity had its start after the arrival of the colonizers and explorers in the sixteenth century. When Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese explorer, arrived on the coast of Kerala in 1498, he stumbled upon the Syrian Christian community. By 1599, Catholic missionaries sought to subsume the Syrian Christian community into the Roman Catholic Church. This succeeded briefly until some of the Syrian Christians broke the communion with Rome in revolt against the papal domination and disregard for the ancient tradition, giving rise to the Jacobite Church in 1653. Over the course of the next century, the church was plagued by many schisms resulting in multiple communities. Thus, the Thomas Christian community was divided between Orthodox West Syrians, the Roman Catholic and Nestorian branches of East Syrian episcopacy (Frykenberg 2008: 245).

The arrival of Protestant missionaries in the early eighteenth century signalled a new turn toward renewal in the Thomas Christian community. Abraham Malpan (1796–1845), who came to be known as the Martin Luther of the East (Mar Thoma 1968: 114), was vicar of Maramon when he came under the influence of Anglican missionaries from Kottayam College. Recognizing the need for reform in the Orthodox Church, Malpan engaged in multiple reforms in his local parish; he offered worship services in the native language of Malayalam instead of the ancient Syriac, removed statues of saints, abolished prayers for the dead, and thus welcomed renewal in the ancient church. The reform movement eventually led to a split in 1889, giving rise to the Mar Thoma Syrian Church. The ecclesial conflicts from the previous two centuries resulted in a church that was severely fragmented.

In response to the renewal and the evangelistic fervor that was sweeping through the Thomas Christian community, many young men and women set out as traveling evangelists throughout South India. Sadhu Kochunkunju Upadeshi (1883–1945), one of the key leaders within the Mar Thoma Church, became an evangelist writing numerous songs that shaped the theology and spirituality of Kerala Christians for the majority of the twentieth century.

While these events were taking place in Kerala, in nearby Tamil Nadu a vibrant church-planting ministry and revivals were taking place through the ministry of John Christian Arulappan (1810–1867). He was significantly influenced by a Plymouth Brethren missionary named Anthony Norris Groves. Through his evangelistic ministry, the first Brethren church in India was planted in Tirunelveli in 1842 (Lukose 2013: 29). Arulappan's church experienced a Pentecostal-like revival in 1860 accompanied by marks of prophecy, speaking in tongues and interpretation (McGee 1996: 113). Arulappan sent evangelists to Kerala who planted a Brethren congregation which became a precursor to the Kerala Pentecostal movement. After the death of Arulappan, the Brethren

movement restricted the use of spiritual gifts. The Mar Thoma church invited J. Gelson Gregson, who was a famous Keswick preacher, to speak in their churches. But his preaching on the importance of adult believer's baptism did not sit well with the church which traditionally practiced infant baptism and they did not re-invite him.

Another key leader to emerge during this time was the notable poet, Kunnampurathu Varghese Simon (1883–1944). He composed three hundred hymns and influenced Kerala Christianity greatly. However, his emphasis on adult water baptism led to his expulsion from the Mar Thoma church in 1915. He emphasized the need for holiness, piety, and separation from nominal churches, giving rise to a separatist movement called the Viyojitha Prasthanam. These churches and leaders became forerunners of the Pentecostal movement, prompting Indian church historian A.C. George (2001: 224) to observe, "The stage was set in Travancore for the Pentecostal movement of the twentieth century." Thus, at the dawn of the twentieth century, a wave of reform movements was sweeping through Kerala and Tamil Nadu with an emphasis on adult baptism that was a clear break from the Eastern Christian tradition's emphasis on infant baptism, the move away from traditional liturgy in Syriac to worship in the local Malayalam language, and an emphasis on holiness and separation from the world.

Indigenous Pentecostal evangelists were already at work in South India in the late nineteenth century, especially through the work of Ceylon Pentecostal Mission, later known as The Pentecostal Mission. The arrival of Pentecostal missionaries such as George Berg and Robert F. Cook, and their work alongside local evangelists, gave rise to several Pentecostal denominations such as the Assemblies of God and Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee). K.E. Abraham, who worked alongside Cook, founded the Indian Pentecostal Church which is arguably one of the largest Pentecostal denominations in India. He came from a Syrian Christian background, received adult baptism from K.V. Simon, learned about the baptism of the Holy Spirit from a tract written by George Berg, and received Spirit baptism through the ministry of C. Mannesse, a Dalit Pentecostal preacher (Das 2001: 83).

By the third decade of the twentieth century, there were four significant Pentecostal denominations in Kerala: Assemblies of God, Ceylon Pentecostal Mission, Church of God, and Indian Pentecostal Church. Each of these Pentecostal denominations were actively involved in church planting, sending missionaries throughout India. By the end of the twentieth century, several new movements emerged that shared the sociological and doctrinal markers of these Pentecostal denominations. Notable among them were Sharon Fellowship Church (1975) founded by P.J. Thomas, New India Church

of God founded by V.A. Thampy, and New India Bible Church founded by Thomas Philip.

'New Generation' churches developed at the turn of the twentieth century as a response to renewal that individuals were experiencing through prayer, miraculous healings, and an eagerness for mission and evangelism which the existing structures of the Eastern churches could not accommodate. The formalized clergy-laity distinction, well-developed liturgy, and widespread nominalism provided little room for active participation and spiritual vitality for these newly energized members. The Pentecostal churches, which were the previous destination point for many that wanted to leave traditional churches, were no longer attractive; they were fraught by internal political conflicts and dissonance with doctrinal nuances which will be discussed in the next section.

5 Doctrinal Roots of Kerala Pentecostalism and Their Relationship to 'New Generation' Churches

Each of the movements that preceded Pentecostalism influenced it greatly, giving rise to the unique doctrinal and practical emphasis in the Pentecostal movement in Kerala. The doctrine of believer's baptism, with its emphasis on adult baptism by immersion in the name of the triune God, developed in Kerala as the result of Protestant missionary endeavors. These efforts surfaced in Kerala through the ministry of Gregson and took root in the writings of Brethren missionary Volbrecht Nagel (1867–1921), becoming the cardinal doctrine of the Kerala Brethren fellowship. Many of those who would later become the early Pentecostal leaders left the Syrian Christian churches and joined the Brethren church and Viojitha Prasthanam. Thus, a major emphasis in evangelism to those within the Eastern and Catholic stream of Christianity related to the importance of adult baptism. This trajectory continued in Kerala Pentecostalism, since the majority of early Pentecostals came from a Syrian Christian ecclesial affiliation.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit features prominently in Kerala Pentecostalism and, until recently, was perceived as a distinctly Pentecostal emphasis. The experiences of speaking in tongues, prophecy, dancing in the Spirit, and visions were all common spiritual phenomena in the revivals of the nineteenth century in the Mar Thoma Church and the Brethren Church in Kerala. However, the churches did not provide affirmation for the continued practice and expression of these spiritual gifts. The doctrine of cessation (of miraculous gifts) embraced by the Brethren Church and the reluctance to embrace the spiritual phenomena in the Mar Thoma Church led many who experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit to leave these churches and join Pentecostal churches.

Another practice inherited by Kerala Pentecostalism that is elevated to biblical proportions regards the rejection of the use of jewelry, locally called ornaments. Many of the early Pentecostal leaders retained this practice from the tradition set by the Brethren Churches and the Viojitha Prasthanam. The oft-stated reason for the rejection of jewelry is maintaining equity between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. However, a practice that was initiated for reasons of social harmony and equality soon took on biblical connotations and urgency, which elevated it to doctrinal status in Kerala Pentecostal churches. In Syrian Christianity, a woman's gold necklace functioned as the symbol of marriage, akin to the Western wedding ring. A woman's adornment with jewelry, especially on her wedding day, also displayed the family's social and economic status. The persistent refusal to allow these symbols, citing biblical injunctions against jewelry, became a reason for strife in many early Pentecostal families. Narratives are told and retold of the sacrifices made by the early Pentecostal mothers and the ostracism they experienced from their families and the Syrian Christian ecclesial community, based on their refusal to allow adornment with jewelry.

To support their injunctions against jewelry, Denominational Pentecostals in Kerala refuse adult baptism and participation in Holy Communion to those wearing jewelry. These strictures create not only social rejection but also spiritual rejection. The refusal to allow participation in these sacraments excludes believers from participating in the community of God, as manifested in the church. The sacrifices and social ostracism of the early Pentecostals are viewed as a sacred heritage that must be continued and defended (Bergunder 2008: 184).

Closely related to the two doctrines discussed above is the fascination of Kerala Pentecostalism with holiness (*vishudhu*) and separation (*verpadu*) (See: Bergunder 2008: 181–190). They emphasize separating from the world, adhering to a narrow definition of the church, and espousing a remnant theology with an emphasis on eschatology. Furthermore, these members adhere to certain outward expressions of their separation from the world. Along with the abstinence of wearing jewelry, their clergy do not wear priestly vestments, and among some groups, members wear white garments for the worship services to signify purity and simplicity.

6 Mutual Exclusion

The key criterion for distinguishing between Denominational Pentecostals and 'New Generation' churches is their self-definition. Pentecostals in Kerala were initially quite leery of the 'New Generation' churches. Still, the signs and

wonders that characterized these revivalist meetings affirmed to them the authenticity of the movement. People gathered at these large-scale evangelistic campaigns in the thousands and would testify of miracles and healings. However, the people did not look and act like Pentecostals, with regard to their attire of plain or white clothes, or their use of jewelry. In these new movements, the clergy and people did not seem to follow these defining social characteristics of Pentecostals.

The 'New Generation' movements, in many ways, were a reaction to Pentecostals. First, they did not want to be associated with these churches. They charged them with being "traditional Pentecostals." The congregational nature of the ecclesial leadership among Pentecostal groups appeared to 'New Generation' groups as 'politics', devoid of spirituality. They contended that there was no difference between the Pentecostal church and the world. The critique is especially poignant because Kerala political discourse is heavily charged and Kerala Pentecostal denominations have been guilty of bitter strife and embarrassing lobbying for leadership positions and clergy appointments.

Second, the revivalist movements deemed the Pentecostal groups as hypocritical. The principle of abstaining from wearing jewelry is enforced in Pentecostal churches by refusing to serve communion and offer baptism to individuals who wear jewelry. The churches however made exceptions for certain members based on their social status. Believers wearing makeup and jewelry to church were charged by 'New Generation' churches as being worldly, while the consumerism and materialism exhibited by some undermined the principles of modesty and simplicity at the core of the doctrine. In 2010 the Church of God in Kuwait went through a split based on the pastor's openness to serve Holy Communion to members wearing jewelry. The pastor at the center of the controversy came to the church in Kuwait after having served among the Indian diaspora in the United States. A group within the church saw this as a weakening stance on holiness and parted ways. For Pentecostals, wearing jewelry in Pentecostal churches is viewed as diluting the faith and expressing disregard for the historical narratives of the early leaders. The revivalist movements, however, do not share the historical narratives of the early Pentecostal leaders. Thus, the divide separating Pentecostalism and 'New Generation' churches continues to grow by narratives of mutual exclusion.

Pentecostals react to the revivalist movements by considering them shallow, lacking sound biblical teaching, holiness, and separation (*visudhi* and *verpadu*). They decry the lack of discipleship and 'proper teaching' in the new revivalist movements, especially because the majority of the revivalist leaders are not theologically educated. They support their critique with narratives of

people who left the 'New Generation' churches to join the Pentecostals for its 'depth' in biblical teaching.

7 Methodological Consideration

How do we begin to conceptualize 'New Generation' movements in Kerala and among its diaspora? Before exploring possible conceptualizations of 'New Generation' movements, it is necessary to explore discussions of and proposals for Pentecostal taxonomy more generally. Global Pentecostalism is increasingly difficult to define because of the complexities and variety encompassed within its broad taxonomy (Anderson *et al.* 2010: 13). Some scholars employ the plural form of the term (Pentecostalisms) to highlight the variety of traditions represented by the movement (Hollenweger 2004: 125).

Bauman speaks of two distinct processes that one must consider when attempting to define Pentecostalism in India (Bauman 2015: 37–39). The first refers to "the Pentecostalization of Indian evangelicalism," highlighting how across India, Christians are influenced by Pentecostalism and distinctly Pentecostal marks such as speaking in tongues although not having any conscious or demonstrable connections to it. The second refers to the "Evangelicalization of Indian Pentecostals" referring to the diminishing importance of the distinctive Pentecostal traits among the well-established, and highly educated and presumably 'respected' Pentecostals. Agreeing with Miller and Yamamori, Bauman contends that these may be best seen as "routinized Pentecostals." (Miller and Yamamori in Bauman 2015: 39). In light of such complexity in identifying and defining Indian Pentecostals, Bauman affirms the importance of self-identification whether as 'Pentecostal' or 'Charismatic' (Bauman 2015: 39).

Definition of the Pentecostal movement and appropriate taxonomy depends on the criteria employed (Anderson *et al.* 2010: 13–27). Anderson identifies five types of definitions: typological, socioscientific, historical, theological, and family-resemblance.

Typological categories follow Burgess's three types of Pentecostalism: Classical Pentecostals, the Charismatic renewal movement, and neo-charismatics (Hollenweger 1997; Barrett *et al.* 2001; Burgess and Mass 2002: xvii). Classical Pentecostal groups are identified as historically rooted in the revival at Bethel Bible School in Topeka, Kansas, and the subsequent outpouring at Azusa Street through the ministry of William Seymour (Burgess 2002: xviii). The Charismatic renewal movement's roots are traced to the ministry of Dennis Bennett at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Van Nuys, California, in

the 1960s (xix). “Neo-charismatics” is a “catch-all category” (xx) that includes “Pentecostal-like independent churches” (Hollenweger 1997: 1). To these, Anderson (2010: 18) adds a fourth category, “Older Independent and Spirit Churches,” which includes the churches experiencing healing, prayer, and spiritual gifts apart from their association with the revival in North America.

The second type of definitions follows a socioscientific approach defined according to shared characteristics or phenomena (Anderson 2010: 20; see also Lee, Poloma, and Post 2013). The third, historical approach defines Pentecostalism as all movements that have diachronic and/or synchronic links that connect it with this 20th century revitalization movement that held firmly to a global revival and strong eschatological fervor. (Anderson 2010: 22). The fourth, the theological approach, defines Pentecostalism based on the movements that share a particular theology and emphasis on the Holy Spirit (Dayton 1987).

Anderson proposes a fifth type, which he calls family-resemblance. It incorporates typological, historical, theological, and sociological foci (Anderson et al. 2010: 27). This approach allows the researcher to understand Pentecostalism with historical roots, theological affirmations, and shared phenomenology.

While the classic three-part typological definitions (Hollenweger 1997; Burgess 2002; Anderson 2010) offer a heuristic framework to understand Pentecostal churches, there are several difficulties that hamper its applicability to the Kerala Pentecostal context. The biggest difficulty is the implicit assumption that the North American Pentecostal experience and historiography are normative for global Pentecostalism. Anderson’s proposal of “Older Independent and Spirit Churches” attempts to address this deficiency (Anderson 2010: 18). However, importing this category to Pentecostalism in Majority World contexts places the so-called ‘Classical Pentecostals,’ defined as movements tracing their lineage to Azusa Street, as authentic expressions, leaving Pentecostal movements that are indigenous to other contexts, in a somewhat lesser rest-category.

Todd Johnson, editor of the *Atlas of Global Christianity* and the *World Christian Database*, offers a three-part typology on global Pentecostalism (Johnson 2014: 274). Denominational Pentecostalism refers to those movements that emerge in the early part of the twentieth century. He defines them as “all associated with explicitly pentecostal denominations that identify themselves in explicitly pentecostal terms, or with other denominations that as a whole are phenomenologically pentecostal in teaching and practice” (Johnson 2014: 275). Charismatics are defined as “Christians affiliated to nonpentecostal denominations (Anglican, Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox) who receive the experiences above in what has been termed the charismatic movement”

(Johnson 2014: 275). Most significantly they remain within the mainline denominations rather than leaving to join Pentecostal denominations.

Independent Charismatics are those that while resembling the previous two categories do not neatly fit their definitions (Johnson 2014: 277). They have also been referred to as neo-Charismatics or neo-Pentecostals. Johnson defines these as those movements “who are not in Protestant pentecostal denominations, nor are they individual Charismatics in the traditional churches.” They are “pentecostal or semi-pentecostal members of the 250-year-old Independent movement of Christians, primarily in the Global South, of churches begun without reference to Western Christianity. These indigenous movements, though not all explicitly pentecostal, nevertheless have the main features of Pentecostalism.” They “exhibit pentecostal and charismatic phenomena but combine this with rejection of pentecostal terminology” (Johnson 2014: 277). In essence, they are not tied to denominational Pentecostalism or mainline denominations, but have left their prior membership to form their own networks.

Johnson's typology moves us beyond a geographic starting point to recognize the diverse starting points of global Pentecostalism, while still grounding the categories of global Pentecostalism within the historical development of the twentieth century. The typology he proposes identifies clearly a three-part progression from early Pentecostal denominations, later movements within mainline Protestant, Orthodox, and Catholic churches, and recent movements that are embracing a separate ecclesial identity apart from the previous two categories. While acknowledging the strengths of the terms suggested, there remains several challenges.

When discerning appropriate categories for local contexts, we must not assume a 'one-size fits all' typological approach. What qualifies as Classical or Denominational Pentecostalism must be defined with attention to the history of Pentecostalism in local contexts. The need is to clarify and expand the definition of these terms informed by local context. Furthermore, this typology must take seriously the self-definition of the various ecclesial fellowships. Following a socio-scientific approach, one might conclude that some groups fit squarely within the Pentecostal typology; however, their reluctance to self-identify as Pentecostal warrants reflection.

Thus, in this chapter, I consider Kerala Pentecostalism in primarily two categories: Denominational Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism. The term Denominational Pentecostals refers to those Pentecostal denominations that trace their lineage to Western Protestant missionaries as well as those indigenous movements that identify themselves with Pentecostal groups. Neo-Pentecostalism is seen as renewal movements that share the phenomenological

markers of Denominational Pentecostalism without the insistence on speaking in tongues as evidence and do not self-identify with Pentecostal denominations. Members and leaders of neo-Pentecostal groups typically do not hold prior ecclesial membership in Pentecostal denominations. In Kerala, they often emerge out of churches that are non-Pentecostal, such as those that identify primarily with the Eastern and Catholic Christian tradition.

8 Understanding 'New Generation' Churches

'New Generation' churches do not share the historical antecedents, early missionaries, or early indigenous leaders of Denominational Pentecostalism. Churches such as Heavenly Feast and Church of the Eternity have emerged since the mid-1990s as a response to the renewal experienced by members belonging to the Catholic Church, Orthodox Church, Jacobite Church, Mar Thoma Church, and other mainline churches, as well as conversion from other faiths. People join these churches when they experience physical healing or deliverance from evil spirits, attend revival meetings, or hear the gospel over television or through various other forms of media. Fueled by the currents of the "globalization of Pentecostalism" (Robbins 2004; Dempster *et al.* 2011), charismatic movements and healing evangelists emerged preaching a message of revival and healing. These churches stand in stark contrast to the insistence of Denominational Pentecostal churches that their members use no jewelry, yet they espouse the importance of believer's baptism and emphasize the gifts of the Spirit, including speaking in tongues, healing, and deliverance from evil spirits. Hence, they are called 'New Generation' churches by the Denomination Pentecostals in Kerala.

There are two types of 'New Generation' churches: denominational and independent. Denominationally affiliated 'New Generation' churches are part of a fellowship of churches that is organized as a network or a denomination, albeit in its early stages. With a large following garnered through revival meetings, churches are established in various locations. In a short time, these congregations are organized into a fellowship that functions as a denomination. When these churches are established in the diaspora, they remain connected to the charismatic leader and founder of the movement. In contrast, independent 'New Generation' churches do not have official membership or oversight from any fellowship or denomination. They remain autonomous but are held together through the personal social networks of the founder.

When the desire for spiritual vitality and ministerial engagement goes unmet within the traditional framework of the Eastern and mainline churches,

charismatic fellowships typically emerge as prayer fellowships.³ Although part of the phenomenon of 'New Generation' churches, a charismatic fellowship remains distinctly one fellowship, choosing to remain an informal movement rather than an institution and maintain membership within its prior ecclesial identity in the traditional church. Openness to spiritual gifts, prayer, intercession, and missional outreach characterize these fellowships. They are led by the laity and become avenues for leadership and ministerial practice for those who experience a call to ministry. Often, these informal prayer fellowships eventually break off from their previous ecclesial affiliations to form distinct churches.

9 Studies of 'New Generation' Churches

'New Generation' churches in Kerala Christianity have received very little attention in the literature so far with no thorough treatment of the subject to date. Prema Kurien, professor of sociology at Syracuse University, explores the growing influence of 'New Generation' churches and the impact of transnational migration on religion in the sending context (Kurien 2014). She analyzes the migration of people from Kerala to the Gulf States and their direct and indirect effects in transforming the Mar Thoma denomination. Kurien argues that the cultural and social change of international migration, financial prosperity, change in household experienced by migrant workers and their families place new demands and expectations of the church. Furthermore, the social problems rising from migration, familial breakdown, competitive consumerism, all contribute to the rise of what Kurien calls, "new evangelical and charismatic transdenominational movements" challenging the function of "traditional episcopal denominations" (Kurien 2014: 110).

Kurien further reflects on the change in migrant religiosity from traditional churches to neo-Pentecostal movements employing a three-pronged theoretical paradigm. First, she uses Stark and Finke's (2000) theory on religious economies to emphasize the rising competition from new religious suppliers in a dynamic religious environment. Next, DiMaggio's (1998) neo-institutionalism theory helps her to describe the resistance of long-established institutions to change preferring "stability and legitimacy" over "efficiency and growth" (Kurien 2014: 111). The third approach (Spickard 2004) highlights the difficulty of

3 Similar to the argument on the historicity of Classical Pentecostals, charismatic fellowships may be defined with respect to the history of the local context, without assuming their lineage from North American contexts.

hierarchical and centralized institutions to engage in transnationalism managing the complexity of cultures and locations in varied regions. In this way, she describes the innovation through media and technology and the malleability of neo-Pentecostal churches in contrast to the institutionalism of Eastern traditional churches such as the Mar Thoma and their reluctance to change.

Ginu Zachariah Oommen examines the growing importance of what he classifies as neo-Pentecostal groups in Kuwait, although with an overall negative assessment of the movement (Oommen 2011: 2015). He sees the growing influence of neo-Pentecostal churches as an opportunistic response to the social context marked by the region's political instability, hostile social environment, social alienation from host country, and economic insecurity among migrants (Oommen 2015: 16). He argues,

Consequently in Kuwait, 'popular religion' like neo-Pentecostals have attained an upper hand over the 'official religion' since the popular religion emphatically stresses on the prosperity gospel. The volatile situation is being exploited successfully by the former with a large number of immigrants especially the youth moving toward the new religious movement (ibid: 17).

Oommen describes the traditional churches as "highly organized, with a muscular hierarchy, ritualistic in nature and as oriental-ecclesiastical traditions" (ibid: 19). For this reason, he claims, Pentecostalism of the twentieth century "couldn't penetrate within the Syrian denominations and have made some inroads among the downtrodden and lower-caste sections in Southern India" (ibid: 19). Furthermore, he treats neo-Pentecostal churches as an extension of the American church. He claims, "The neo-pentecostal is also predominantly an American based movement and its theology is centered on the 'Prosperity Gospel'" (ibid: 20).

Oommen's claims are quite problematic for several reasons that I will outline below. For one, it is difficult, if not impossible, to demonstrate the connection of any 'New Generation' church in Kerala with Denominational Pentecostal groups in America. Whereas a clear connection can be found between Denominational Pentecostalism in the United States such as the Assemblies of God, Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee) with Denominational Pentecostal groups in India. Second, even a casual observer of Indian Pentecostalism can discern the significant impact of Pentecostalism in Kerala over the course of the twentieth century. In *The South Indian Pentecostal Movement in the Twentieth Century*, Bergunder (2008) identifies the Syrian Christian background of many of the early leaders and believers of Kerala Pentecostalism. Many of these leaders were ostracized by their families for leaving their prior ecclesial

background in Mar Thoma churches, Church of South India (CSI), Orthodox and Jacobite churches, and Catholic church to join Pentecostal churches. The Syrian Christian influence in Denominational Pentecostalism in Kerala was precisely what was contested because of the exclusion of *dalit* Pentecostals in the otherwise Syrian Christian dominated leadership of Pentecostal churches, giving rise to churches that were primarily *dalit*-led such as Church of God (Full Gospel) Kerala Region. Thus negating the assertion of the lack of Syrian Christians among Denominational Pentecostalism. Furthermore, it is one thing to claim that the neo-Pentecostal movement in Kerala shares salient features with the global Pentecostal/Charismatic movement and it is a whole another thing to claim that they are an "American based movement." And speaking of the origins of Heavenly Feast, Oommen's claim that the "cradle of the neo-pentecostalism is among the migrant workers in Gulf region" (ibid: 21) is difficult to sustain since the movement had its origins in Kerala.

To contrast, Kurien cites interviews with several interlocutors from the Mar Thoma church in Kerala discussing the powerful draw of Heavenly Feast (Kurien 2014: 123–124). They cite faith-healing claims of the preachers, spirited homilies of the preachers, lively singing and dancing in the churches, and gaining an intense spiritual experience that brought peace of mind as reasons for their attraction to the movement. They further describe the personal and pastoral care of their ministers and members, the informality in worship and singing with the use of drums and guitars, and lively and practically oriented sermons.

Samuel compares the pneumatological emphases between denominational Pentecostals and 'New Generation' churches, which he terms Neocharismatics. While sharing similar phenomenology of spiritual gifts, healing, exorcism, and spiritual warfare with denominational Pentecostals, 'New Generation' churches add the emphasis on prosperity or material blessings with a "wider understanding of the ministry of the Holy Spirit." (Samuel 2018: 255) Furthermore, Samuel notes the egalitarian praxis of the Heavenly Feast across caste and class distinctions which some Denominational Pentecostal movements found insurmountable (ibid: 236). He contends, these churches have been able to contextualize Pentecostalism to address "the daily Christian experience with struggles and pain" and that "shapes the pneumatology of the Neocharismatics" (ibid: 3).

Perhaps the rise of 'New Generation' churches at the turn of the twenty-first century and its growth in the first two decades of the century can best be understood to represent a wave of revitalization in Kerala Christianity (Street and Miller 2013: 21). After nearly a century of history of Pentecostalism in Kerala, the denominations are, arguably, undergoing institutionalization and routinization (Weber 2010: 363). Through structures of hierarchy and facilities for

theological education, the Pentecostal Churches have institutionalized and affirmed their positions of influence and recognition within the larger Christian community. With this inward focus, however, the churches lose their missional emphasis and spiritual vitality.

'New Generation' churches arose in the climate of growing institutionalization and routinization in the Denominational Pentecostal churches. These new churches expressed spiritual vitality and missional passion. Without any reluctance to utilize media, they took to the airwaves and employed technology to broadcast their message. Through power encounters, spiritual warfare, deliverance, and healings, they addressed the spiritual and physical needs of the people, the very features that characterized Kerala Pentecostalism in its inception.

Denominational Pentecostalism draws criticism from 'New Generation' churches because of its fissiparous nature and church splits, and the political infighting within the movement continued to grow at the turn of the century. For Denominational Pentecostals, displeasure with the leadership of the church often leads to an exodus of the dissenting group from the church. Often, the dissenters are given official recognition by their respective denominations and thus another church is formed. The situation of multiple Pentecostal churches affiliated with the same denomination and within close geographic proximity of one another draws condemnation from mainline Christians. Some critics of the Denominational Pentecostals compare the election of church officials to the hyper-enthusiasm characteristic of politicians.

'New Generation' groups also react negatively to Eastern Orthodox churches, mainline denominations, and the Catholic Church. They regard the traditional and liturgical Eastern churches as lacking in spiritual vitality. 'New Generation' churches are willing to set aside their ecclesial membership for experiencing exuberant worship and embracing the spiritual gifts. Thus, the 'New Generation' churches are caught in between the Denominational Pentecostals and mainline churches.

10 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to understand the development of 'New Generation' churches in Kerala Christianity shaped within a context of traditional Eastern Christianity and Pentecostalism. The chapter cautions us from creating an assumption of normativity of Pentecostalism's origin and features, instead inclining our ears to understand contemporary movements within local contexts shaped by the movements and denominations to which they are responding and reacting. Any attempt to define and describe global

Pentecostalism often comes with the acknowledgement of the diversity and complexity of the subject being described. Hence, in a World Christianity approach the validity of typological and methodological categories must be discerned by its ability to adequately describe local phenomenon. This assessment is then followed by description of local phenomenon, explanation, analysis, supplementation, and further proposals of typologies.

Shall we conclude, then, along with Oommen that these movements are radical religious groups and compare them in the same breath with Muslim groups such as Jamaat e Islami, Hindu fundamentalists such as the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh), and various other cults (Oommen 2011: 44)? Quite the contrary, 'New Generation' churches ought to be understood through the lens of renewal movements within the Kerala context and its diasporic communities and as an expression of spiritual vitality in a climate of institutionalization and routinization affecting traditional Eastern churches and Denominational Pentecostals. While on the one hand they reject the traditionalism of the Eastern churches, they reject the routinization in Denominational Pentecostalism, giving rise to new movements. These new movements present unique possibilities for renewal and revitalization and respond to the spiritual hunger of many religious seekers. Churches like Heavenly Feast address this deep yearning and hunger for deeper spiritual experience through worship, Bible teachings, revival meetings, and miracles. As incipient movements, however, they remain leery of established institutions and seek to sustain their movement instead through spiritual vitality. Although relatively recent as a movement, these new churches are increasing in membership. They are planting churches and expanding their network and influence on a significant scale. The deeper call for the church in Kerala is to move past language of exclusion of these movements to a deeper ecumenism marked by collaboration and partnership, allowing the vitality of these new movements to benefit the institutional churches, while affirming the catholicity of church in the face of increasing vulnerability of Christians in today's socio-political climate in India.

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