

**“The Spirit Bade Me Go:”
David du Plessis and the Missionary Character of the Charismatic Movement**

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Over the course of three days in November 1959, David du Plessis stood before the assembled students and faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary to share the annual Missions Lectures. “I am happy to witness to the fact that I have known this life in the power of the Spirit for many years,”¹ he stated, impressing upon his hearers the vitality of classical Pentecostalism. His presence there was thanks to John Mackay, former leader of the seminary, who had formed a friendship with du Plessis over the course of the preceding decade. Having become interested in the growth of Pentecostalism both worldwide and in Latin America—his previous field as a missionary—Mackay benefited from his new connection. Du Plessis for his part took full advantage of such an opportunity to share the message of Pentecost with any who would listen. The remarks he delivered during the Missions Lectures were not simply a descriptor of general Pentecostal action for outside parties, but representative of his own heart as well:

I am not anxious for a recognition of Pentecostals, but I am keenly desirous for a recognition of the Pentecostal experience, and I pray that the Holy Spirit himself will move into the churches and have His rightful place in the lives of the ministry and membership.²

While the featured presence of a Pentecostal preacher in this bastion of mainline American Protestantism is unusual for the time, it also makes sense. Outside awareness of the revival movement and the work of enterprising insiders like du Plessis came together during the previous decade to make an event like the 1959 Princeton Missions Lectures a reality. As these lectures occurred—brief though they were—they were representative of not only the growth of charismatic

¹ David J. du Plessis, *The Spirit Bade Me Go* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1970), 35.

² *Ibid.*, 47.

Christianity but a portent of its future. Both their content and very existence denote an emphasis vitally important for the life and work of du Plessis: missions.

The plan of this brief paper, then, is to consider the possibility of interpreting David du Plessis and the Charismatic Movement in a particular manner.³ Quite simply: du Plessis, a major bridge figure between classical Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Movement, understood himself to be a missionary engaged in “full gospel” missions. Furthermore, du Plessis operated as if he was continuing the work of earlier Pentecostalism rather than participating in an entirely new movement. This framework impacted the shape of his life’s work and methods, including—significantly—his willingness to operate outside traditional Pentecostal borders and engage in innovation and the contextualization of the Pentecostal message. Such efforts predicted and presaged much about the growth and direction of charismatic Christianity at mid-century and in the decades since.

The subtitle of this paper—“David du Plessis and the Missionary Character of the Charismatic Movement”—quite consciously references James Goff’s 1988 work *Fields White Unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism*.⁴ Within, Goff claims, “the dynamics of this missionary thrust formed the identity of the movement through the early years of growth at Azusa Street and continued to influence Pentecostal thought even after the initial period of optimism faded.”⁵ On this point historian Grant Wacker concurs, noting “pentecostals knew that the Lord had chosen them and them alone to lead a vast movement of global spiritual conquest...no storefront meeting place seemed too small or too impoverished to send out missionaries.”⁶ This

³ While his efforts in support of the Charismatic Movement even then underway can be interpreted as a primarily Spirit-based ecumenical expression, the heart of du Plessis’s work fits best not under the rubric of church unity, but instead the missionary call. My own previous work is representative of the former perspective. Joshua R. Ziefle, *David du Plessis and the Assemblies of God: The Struggle for the Soul of a Movement* (Boston: Brill, 2013).

⁴ James R. Goff, Jr., *Fields White Unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1988).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶ Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 263.

same persistent influence echoed throughout du Plessis's life and work, revealing an essential aspect of not only his journey but the interplay between classical Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Movement.

David du Plessis experienced firsthand the results of the Pentecostal fervor for missions in his homeland of South Africa. Two ambitious converts—Thomas Hezmalhalch and John G. Lake—traveled there in the early 1900s to spread the Pentecostal revival. Du Plessis's family embraced the movement as a result of such efforts, and by 1916 his father helped construct a missionary station near Mount Tabor.⁷ In the years following, his son David entered into formal ministry by means of the Apostolic Faith Movement, serving (amongst other roles) as an evangelist.

From a relatively early point du Plessis developed international relationships with other representatives of world Pentecostalism. He spent time in the United States in 1937 at the invitation of an Assemblies of God leader,⁸ and was involved in the first Pentecostal World Conference held in Zurich in 1947.⁹ A boundary-crossing "Spirit-filled" entrepreneur, he embodied much of the ethos of like-minded Pentecostal missionaries of his time. For example, in the American-based *Pentecostal Evangel* in 1938 he opined about "Advertising the Gospel": "Friends, you aren't expected to preach. Just be a constant witness for the Lord...Your task is not complete when you have given your testimony once after being saved...If God's people everywhere would begin to advertise...a mighty revival would sweep over every country in the world."¹⁰

By 1950 du Plessis had emigrated to the United States. During this time he began exploratory contacts with the World Council of Churches and others. Feeling led to share about Pentecost, he found a receptive audience in people like John Mackay who soon involved him in the

⁷ David J. du Plessis, "A Brief Life Sketch of David J. du Plessis," TMs, ca 1978, David du Plessis Center for Christian Spirituality, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

⁸ Ziefle, "A Partial Timeline of the Life and Travels of David J du Plessis, With Emphasis on the Peak Years of His Ecumenical and Charismatic Activity," in *David du Plessis and the Assemblies of God*, 185.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ David J. du Plessis, "Advertising the Gospel," *Christ's Ambassadors Herald*, February 1938, 3.

growing ecumenical conversations of the day. Though the Assemblies of God—now his home denomination—grew concerned about his expanding professional circles, du Plessis continued interacting with many individuals from the mainline Protestant tradition. Eventual ejection from the Assemblies for associating with theological outsiders, troubling for him as it was, nevertheless allowed him new freedom to move and minister in the midst of the emerging Charismatic Movement within mainline Protestantism. This same latitude helped du Plessis interact with the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of the later 1960s. Throughout the 1970s until his death in the mid-1980s, du Plessis was a ubiquitous voice in conversations about the Charismatic Renewal. Seen as a whole, his legacy was a legitimately missionary one—spreading the message of Pentecost the world over.

David du Plessis’s missionary orientation had not merely to do with the general shape of his life but also with the specifics of thought, word, and action. He was an individual singularly focused on what he perceived to be his evangelistic calling. Writing in the *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate* in 1948, du Plessis encouraged others onward in this direction: “We feel sure,” he stated, “that if pentecostal saints, leaders, churches, and movements will unite their efforts for WORLD EVANGELISM [sic], they will be moving in the will of God, and great blessing will follow”¹¹ His zeal was therefore aligned with this persistent theme within classical Pentecostalism. This was both heightened and focused by an encounter with evangelist Smith Wigglesworth in 1936. As du Plessis later recalled,¹² Wigglesworth said the following: “Through the old-line denominations will come a revival that will

¹¹ David J. du Plessis, “The Lord Doeth This,” *Pentecostal Holiness Advocate*, 27 May 1948, 5.

¹² It is worth noting that the verity of the story’s specifics are debated. See, for instance, Brinton Rutherford, “From Prosecutor to Defender: An Intellectual History of David J. du Plessis, Drawn From the Stories of His Testimony” (Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2000). Even so, the fact that it became such an important touchstone in du Plessis’s life is important.

eclipse anything we have known throughout history...He is going to use you in this movement. You will have a very prominent part.”¹³ For du Plessis this story was a touchstone.

The notion that he was a man commissioned for the authentically Pentecostal work ahead of him was echoed in a 1959 letter to supporters. There, he provided a missions travelogue of sorts detailing his ecumenically charismatic activities: “It seems the Lord has reserved these special adventures in a cluster to round off a whole year of spiritual activities in Protestant Movements and Institutions [sic]. It has been my delightful privilege to discover again and again that the Holy Spirit was at work in the most unexpected places.”¹⁴

As with all Pentecostals, the book of Acts—organized according to the missionary frame of Acts 1:8¹⁵—held a special place for du Plessis. It is not surprising, then, that he entitled one of his books *The Spirit Bade Me Go*. This biblical phrase derives from an episode in Acts 11 wherein Peter is impelled by a divine vision to first share the Christian message with Gentiles. By framing his book in this same light, du Plessis correlated the boundary crossing mission of Peter with his own as he shared the Pentecostal message outside its traditional bounds. The same language is notably used in a 1962 letter referencing his ministerial ejection by the Assemblies of God: “I never would have believed,” he wrote, “that they would drop me for a ministry into which THE SPIRIT BADE ME GO [sic].”¹⁶ The lens of Acts 11 thus highlights du Plessis’s sense of purpose as a Pentecostal missionary. As he continued to work outside the bounds of classical Pentecostalism he indicated “finding more and more open doors to minister in Protestant churches” and having an opportunity

¹³ David J. du Plessis and Bob Slosser, *A Man Called Mr. Pentecost* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1977), 2-3.

¹⁴ David J. du Plessis to "Beloved Friends," TMs, circular letter, November 1959, David du Plessis Center for Christian Spirituality, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

¹⁵ “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” (KJV)

¹⁶ David J. du Plessis, “News Letter,” *The Texas Herald*, October 1962, David du Plessis Center for Christian Spirituality, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

to “liberate their minds by the truth of the word...[that] Jesus...is the way, the truth and the life. Furthermore, He alone remains the Baptiser in the Holy Spirit.”¹⁷

Clearly, both the impulses and language of mission were alive and well for David du Plessis. Even so, the way in which he functioned as a missionary was somewhat different from more traditional evangelistic models. Indeed, some might wonder whether missionary is an appropriate title for him at all, for much of his work was done in and amongst existing Christian believers. But this, of course, misses the main thrust of his mission: Pentecost. For it is not simply the Christian gospel of salvation with which he was concerned, but the so-called “full gospel” of Pentecostalism. Centered upon the person and work of Jesus, this four- or five-fold collection of ideas posits Christ not only as Saviour, but also Baptizer in the Holy Spirit, Healer, Coming King, and (in some traditions) Sanctifier. These doctrines are heralded by historian Donald Dayton¹⁸ and others as the virtual building blocks of classical Pentecostalism.

In du Plessis’s mind, the experience of Spirit Baptism was the aspect of this “fuller” gospel most desperately needed by outside Christianity. The conversion he sought was therefore not to Christ, but to a deeper level of the Christian life. As he recalled sharing with a group of ecumenical leaders in the 1950s: “the truth as I see it is this: You have the truth on *ice*, and I have it on *fire*...if you will take the great truths of the Gospel out of your theological deep freezers and get them on the fire of the Holy Spirit, your churches will yet turn the world upside-down.”¹⁹ Preaching about the Pentecostal approach “frankly, clearly, and simply without compromise”²⁰ was therefore a vital part of his purpose.

¹⁷ David J. du Plessis, “Hundreds of Ministers 'Receiving',” *Pentecost*, June-August 1963.

¹⁸ Donald Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*, (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury, 1987), 173.

¹⁹ du Plessis, *The Spirit Bade Me Go*, 17-18.

²⁰ David J. du Plessis, “The 'Changed Climate' Towards the Pentecostal Testimony,” *Pentecost*, December 1961-February 1962, 8.

David du Plessis in his role as a missionary of the “full gospel” of Pentecostalism made constant reference to the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian believer. In this way he pointed towards the Charismatic Movement that emerged around him. As early as 1948 he utilized the language of going “back to the churches” to describe his perspective. Recalling a time when turn-of-century Pentecostals had been ejected from the church groups to which they previously belonged, du Plessis called for a return. As he stated: “The Lord told Jacob to go back home. The Pentecostal movement is headed for the churches...they are cold and need warmth.”²¹ Such rhetoric not only carried with it a deep sense of missionary direction, but could also intimate the resumption of a much older calling. Reflecting upon classical Pentecostalism together with what was then occurring, du Plessis “regret[ted] the fact that the ‘original’ 20th Century Pentecostal Movement [sic] became just another ‘denomination.’”²² Thankfully, he concluded, “God has kept the MOVEMENT [sic] alive by moving into the old denominations by HIS Spirit [sic].”²³ He felt God was using him to continue what had been started a generation earlier. Du Plessis’s field of operation, though in territory now unfamiliar to classical Pentecostals, was simply part of a larger story that might be said to be prematurely punctuated. The mission, content, and purpose were, in his mind, the same. This narrative of renewal, favoring continuity over discontinuity, proved foundational for his efforts. Du Plessis’s mission, therefore, was the same as he perceived the Holy Spirit’s work to be: empowering the Church and drawing her together—whether at Azusa, the World Council of Churches, or the Vatican.

Feeling empowered to be an authentic Pentecostal missionary, albeit in a new sense, du Plessis broke a significant number of boundaries to accomplish his task. At first, he merely went

²¹ Church of God (Cleveland, TN), “Minutes of the 42nd General Assembly of the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee),” August 1948, 21.

²² David J. du Plessis to “My Dear Brother in Christ,” TMs, n.d., David du Plessis Center for Christian Spirituality, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

²³ Ibid.

beyond the confines of his South African denomination, the Apostolic Faith Mission. Interaction with Pentecostal leaders and other groups was an early part of this, as was his role as secretary in the Pentecostal World Conference. International borders held little importance for du Plessis as he sought to fulfill his understood calling. Over the course of his life he would come to travel extensively.²⁴ As time progressed conversations with mainline Protestants, the World Council of Churches, and Roman Catholics far outshadowed earlier efforts, and he worked closely with those holding theological systems vastly different from classical Pentecostalism. When threatened with censure for his activities, he weighed his options and decided that crossing a boundary to those he served meant that he would have to leave behind those who had previously offered him a home. While this, of course, does not necessitate viewing du Plessis as some kind of hero, it does mean understanding how deeply he sought to accomplish the task ahead of him. Preserving Pentecost in some static and contained form was antithetical to his understanding; perpetuating Pentecost was rather his way forward.

In his role as a missionary of charismatic Christianity, du Plessis joined hands with new partners in the field. Just as a Christian worker in an unfamiliar land would be wise to cooperate with the indigenous population, du Plessis looked to so-called “mainline” Christians for guidance in his efforts. John Mackay, mentioned earlier, was one of his first partners. He was involved with du Plessis at the 1952 International Missionary Conference in Willingen.²⁵ During this era, du Plessis came to find a welcome reception among ecumenists. From the 1950s onward he interacted regularly in interdenominational circles.²⁶ As the Charismatic Movement within American Protestantism grew in notoriety in the 1960s, du Plessis truly lived up to his name—“Mr. Pentecost”—interacting significantly with leaders and churches in the revival movement. Working

²⁴ See, for instance, Ziefle, “A Partial Timeline...”

²⁵ See du Plessis, *The Spirit Bade Me Go*, 14-15, 29.

²⁶ Amongst other places, see du Plessis, *Mr. Pentecost*, 175-189.

with Protestants and then Catholics was not necessarily easy for du Plessis, who reflected how he “had been guilty of judging the spirits of others falsely...Have I ever prayed, ‘Forgive us Pentecostals our sins as we forgive those Protestants and Roman Catholics that have sinned against us?’ Indeed not.”²⁷ Yet forgive he came to do, a decision which led to participation in the Protestant Charismatic Movement, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, and the establishment of ecumenical dialogue with Rome.²⁸ Du Plessis thus came to relinquish prejudices he shared with many Pentecostals despite the significant cost it would have upon his relationship with them.²⁹ Regardless of its familiarity for David du Plessis, classical Pentecostalism was not worth holding onto if it meant relinquishing his role as a missionary of the Spirit.

Missionary work is often deeply involved with tasks of translation and contextualization. As missiologist Andrew Walls reminds us, “Christianity has been saved for the world by its diffusion across cultural lines...there have been several different Christian civilizations already; there may yet be many more. The reason for this lies in the infinite translatability of the Christian faith.”³⁰ Conscious or not, such a translation principle was at the core of du Plessis’s efforts to explicate the language, practice, and beliefs of Pentecostals to those outside the proverbial fold. Du Plessis was no academic, and therefore these explanations often took the form of more earthy analogies. In one related episode he engaged in conversation with a Roman Catholic priest, sharing the maxim “God

²⁷ David J. du Plessis, “The Renewal of Christianity Must Be Both Charismatic and Ecumenical,” *Korea Pastoral Change Catechetical Newsletter*, June 1981.

²⁸For more on the Dialogue, see C. M. Robeck, Jr. and J. L. Sandidge, “Dialogue, Roman Catholic and Classical Pentecostal,” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, revised and expanded. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), 576-582.

²⁹ This was not without struggle, as a plaintive question asked to colleagues indicates: “Just a week ago, June 21, in Springfield, Mo., I appeared before the brethren of the Ex. Presbytery of the Assemblies of God. I came away from the meeting with mixed emotions of sorrow, frustration and fear. After 90 minutes of friendly discussion it was clear that the brethren could offer me just ONE alternative. EITHER I stop ministering in the Churches and Institutions of the National Council and World Council of Churches as I have been doing for the past 10 years, OR I MUST “withdraw” from the Assemblies of God, before August 1. I ask you...WHAT SHALL I DO?” David J. du Plessis, “Personal and Confidential,” TMs, June 29, 1962, David du Plessis Center for Christian Spirituality, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

³⁰Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (New York: Orbis, 1996), 22.

has no grandsons,”³¹ ostensibly to point out the need for an experience of conversion no matter one’s family or ecclesial background. His explanation of the process by which a person lives as a son (or daughter) of God was an attempt to translate his perspective on faith into another Christian language. So too when speaking in a Roman Catholic sanctuary, du Plessis addressed the topic of Mary, a contentious figure for non-Catholics. Rather than enter the expected fray, du Plessis creatively responded that since Mary is the mother of Jesus, and the Church is the Bride of Christ, “after the marriage supper of the Lamb...I’ll be quite happy to acknowledge Mary as Mother-in-law of the church.”³² Accessible and openhanded, his improvisational approach and turn of phrase is representative of his attention to the mission rather than more proximal distractions.

Du Plessis’s efforts at translation and contextualization could also lead him into interesting interpretations. Consider his reframing of the start date for the Church: not at Pentecost, as is traditionally offered, but instead in the moment Jesus breathed on the disciples in John 20. Du Plessis claimed that the room in which Jesus stood in John’s gospel was the “the first glorious maternity ward of the Holy Spirit.”³³ Sharing this to help explain more about charismatic Christianity to his hearers, he went on to note that if “Pentecost...was not a maternity ward, it was a baptismal font; and how can you baptize anything that hasn’t even been born?”³⁴ In the same way he felt the complicated discussion of Spirit Baptism vis-à-vis conversion needed clarification. Here, du Plessis drew a distinction between taking a drink of water (i.e. the Spirit) when one becomes a believer, and being submerged in water (i.e. the Spirit) during Spirit Baptism.³⁵ While the use of

³¹ du Plessis, *The Spirit Bade Me Go*, 61-68.

³² David J. du Plessis, “Know What You Have,” TMs, n.d, David du Plessis Center for Christian Spirituality, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA. When told by someone that they had “never heard that before,” du Plessis responded, “Neither have I, but I like it.”

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid. “Jesus offered NOT a baptism, he began by offering you a drink, and I cannot understand why we now link the drink to the baptism. And this is the problem: is the drink a baptism or is the baptism a drink? And that’s what helped me, for a baptism is UPON you and I’ve never seen a drop get into the candidate. I’ve

metaphors like baptism and water as placeholders for other realities and experiences can be confusing, du Plessis' use of this framework shows how he was thoughtfully looking to translate Pentecost. Speaking of his particular approach to the topic of Spirit baptism, pastor/theologian Ron McConnell claimed that it “reflect[s] a dramatic difference, in terms of theological understanding, from the traditional Pentecostal position...du Plessis has removed a major hurdle by also insisting that we acknowledge the indwelling Holy Spirit in every born-again Christian.”³⁶ Whether McConnell overstates or misunderstands the classical Pentecostal position or if it is simply a matter of “correcting this old confusion” of “terminology,”³⁷ du Plessis actively attempted to make the Pentecostal testimony as clear and accessible as he could.

David du Plessis worked hard at creative communication with his partners not as an academic exercise or effort in innovation, but because his mission impelled him. Reframing, reformulation, and translation were all part of this process. Whether Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, or otherwise, du Plessis wanted what he understood to be the Spirit at work in their midst.³⁸ Whatever he could do to help others engage this reality took precedence, and ecclesial barriers need not apply. He very specifically worked with others in their own settings without requiring them to organize their faith in the same way that he did. Quite specifically, he told his hearers to remain in their churches—empowered by the Holy Spirit, but growing where they had been planted. As du Plessis wrote in 1961, “I find that whenever I present this message frankly,

watched priests baptize babies, I've never seen them get a sip....Even in immersion the water comes on you and never into you, and already I think you begin to see it.”

³⁶ David J. du Plessis and Ron McConnell, “Charismatic Experience and Christian Theology: An Attempt at Theological Reconciliation,” TMs, ca 1977, David du Plessis Center for Christian Spirituality, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ In David J. du Plessis, “The Astonishing Move in 'Liberal' Churches,” *Voice of Healing*, October 1960, 11 he reflected “More than ever, I am convinced that the Holy Spirit is doing a work which many are unable to discern because of prejudice. I know, because for many years it was so difficult for me to recognize the work of the Spirit in other than my own society.”

clearly, and simply without compromise, saying: ‘This is God’s promised blessing for you and you do not have to leave your church to receive it,’ everyone is ready to listen and to discuss it.”³⁹

Such an approach might be contrasted with the Assemblies of God, which seemed more concerned with possible confusion of doctrine or practice. Their ejection of du Plessis represented a line in the sand for a group that, at the time, chose to err on the side of caution and purity.⁴⁰ Their perceived mission, it seems, was to protect the received faith rather than risk perceived compromise. Both approaches are reminiscent of how James Goff characterized early Pentecostals at their origin: “infused with a zeal for missions,” yet with a “stricter theological creed...within an often hostile community of Christian denominations.”⁴¹ Each looked to the origin of the Pentecostal revival as key for their understanding of how to interact with others in the present, with du Plessis intuiting great continuity between the perceived openness of that earlier time and what he was seeing in the ecumenical world.⁴² The Assemblies, by contrast, like missionaries who carried culture with them, was more conservative in their orientation and looked to more sectarian roots, preferring others come to them instead of letting them go on their own way.⁴³

Having made the case that David du Plessis understood himself as a culturally adaptive missionary and operated largely in that capacity, one may wonder what this has to say about the larger shape of the Charismatic Movement around him. After all, du Plessis, while prominent, was only one figure amongst a host of others active during its formative decades. Further, the

³⁹ du Plessis, “The ‘Changed Climate’...,” 8.

⁴⁰ For an extended discussion of this, see Ziefle, 137ff.

⁴¹ Goff, 164. Goff, of course, is referring most specifically to the insistence upon tongues as initial physical evidence as this “creed.” While this is not necessarily the larger presenting issue for this discussion, the larger sentiment still applies to a certain segment within Pentecostalism.

⁴² David J. du Plessis, “Ecumenical Institute Lectures,” TMs (lectures delivered at Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland, 16 November-4 December 1959), David du Plessis Center for Christian Spirituality, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA. He stated: “Jesus sent the comforter. Now that is typical Pentecostal. That is just what the Pentecostals have always witnessed about and always claimed and so on, and here now in a Presbyterian church, without the aid of a Pentecostal, or the presence of a Pentecostal at all, the same things takes place and the blessing comes.”

⁴³ See, for instance, Ziefle, 149-150.

movement has continued to change and grow in the years since as other leaders have emerged. Du Plessis, for his part, occupies but one portion of a much larger story. Even so, his actions reveal much about Pentecostalism and broader charismatic Christianity. The specifics of his life are therefore not as important as the direction in which it points: missions.

In large part the Charismatic Movement represents the continuation of a heightened Spirit-driven missionary emphasis whose origin may be traced back at least as far as the Pentecostal revivals of the early 20th century. All told, this is a helpful way to understand not only the life of David du Plessis, but the larger religious community of which he was a part. Consider its legacy over the course over a little more than one hundred years: from humble origins and small numbers to worldwide influence and demographic growth. Recently the World Christian Database has estimated over 640 million Renewalists around the globe—approximately 107 million of whom are classified as Pentecostals, with the remainder designated as Charismatics and Neocharismatics.⁴⁴ The size of this group indicates the increasing dominance of a religious tradition which is, to borrow the title of a recent book, “made to travel.”⁴⁵ The translatability and growth of its passionate faith exhibits a Spirit-focused missionary emphasis akin to du Plessis’s own.

In many locations charismatic Christianity has adapted powerfully to local environments. In sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, African Independent/Initiated Churches have embraced Spirit-based faith traditions with vigor. As Cephias Omenyo wrote concerning the AICs in the midst of his discussion of worldwide Pentecostalism, they “are known to be the first to attempt to thoroughly contextualise Christianity by making a smooth transition from primal religious expressions of faith

⁴⁴ “Christian Renewal,” World Christian Database, <http://yeshebi.ptsem.edu:2101/wcd/esweb.asp?WCI=Results&Query=306&PageSize=25&Page=10> (accessed 2 September 2016).

⁴⁵ Murray Dempster, Byron Klaus, and Douglas Petersen, *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011).

in the African context to Christianity.”⁴⁶ Their work and the efforts of others stands as testimony to the continued entrepreneurial and missionary nature of charismatic Christianity at large. While some of these converts and adherents have entered classical Pentecostal denominational families, the majority have not, remaining (as per the World Christian Database) under the umbrella of Charismatic or Neocharismatic.⁴⁷

To say that much of the Charismatic Movement and its inheritors are, like du Plessis, missionary in orientation is not the same as to claim that he was the cause of this reality. Rather, both the man and the movement drew on powerful themes at work within historic Pentecostalism. His life provides a useful entrée into these themes and exists as a helpful interpretive lens. More than that, his efforts are paradigmatic of an approach still inhabited by millions the world over.

The continued translation, transfiguration, and de-centering of the Charismatic Renewal is deeply reminiscent of David du Plessis’s own Pentecostal heart. Churches and adherents across the world grow and thrive in local contexts, operating in a manner that takes referent from both the world of the Spirit and the deep concerns of life below.⁴⁸ Many segments of charismatic Christianity have quite clearly inhabited Henry Venn’s classic “three-self” model, even adding self-theologizing in many locales. Though movements like the prosperity gospel or aspects of syncretism/combination⁴⁹ raise questions for some, even these are indicative of a faith tradition focused on advancing contextually across the field of its Spirit-based mission.

⁴⁶ Cephas Omenyo, “Pentecostal-Type Renewal and Disharmony in Ghanaian Christianity,” in *Global Pentecostalism*, ed. D. Westerlund (New York: I. B. Taurius, 2009), 58.

⁴⁷ “Christian Renewal,” World Christian Database.

⁴⁸ Allan Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 222-223, is helpful on these points, noting the popularity of “Word of Faith” teaching can be connected to indigenous needs. See also page 169 with regard to “‘realized eschatology’...God’s kingdom present in the here and now.”

⁴⁹ Douglas Jacobsen, *The World’s Christians: Who They Are, Where They Are, and How They Got There* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), describes tension in Australia, where “some white Christian leaders express concern that [majority Pentecostal/Charismatic] Aboriginal Christianity is not ‘orthodox’...a syncretistic mix of Christianity and Aboriginal religion.” Anderson, 7 helpfully reminds us that “Pentecostalism in all its different forms is permeated with syncretism of all kinds, from a mixture of American capitalism and the ‘success’ ethos of the Western world, to the shamanistic and spiritistic cultures of the East and South.”

Admittedly, not all sectors of charismatic Christianity were as adaptive as du Plessis. Classical Pentecostalism, particularly in the form of the Assemblies of God, had specific difficulty in this area. The tensions that exist within broader charismatic Christianity, however, point not merely to the specifics of individual crises. They recall sectarian realities present from the earliest days of the movement. Yet even in parts of the tradition that tend in this direction, there is still an emphasis on spreading forth the “full gospel.” It is not, therefore, a question of whether to do so, but how: via pure forms and safe denominational boundaries or more open adaptation.

Grant Wacker’s claim that early Pentecostals practiced an “ecumenism of the carnivore”⁵⁰ represents one end of this tradition, a role filled by the Assemblies of God in du Plessis’s 1962 controversy. The other more ecumenical side is reminiscent of early Pentecostal Charles Parham’s desire to leave “sectarian churchism” and “denominationalism”⁵¹ as well as Frank Bartleman’s recollections of an Azusa Street revival where even “the ‘color line’ was washed away in the blood of Christ.”⁵² Though the verdict of history at the time of du Plessis’s disfellowshipping by the Assemblies of God may have been unclear, his work and success in the decades since and the larger shape of the Charismatic Movement bear witness to the kind of open and pragmatic missionary stance that seems to have won the day. Contextualization and indigenization are, within Renewalism, triumphant over the mission of the more spiritually imperialistic.

In conclusion, David du Plessis occupies an important role within the Charismatic Renewal of his time and ours. His life and actions provide a window into the ethos of a pioneer in the Charismatic Movement who adapted his own Pentecostal background for those he felt needed to experience the “full gospel.” As he did so, he not only utilized the content of his faith tradition, but

⁵⁰ Wacker, 178.

⁵¹ Charles F. Parham, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness*, 4th ed. (Joplin, MO: Joplin Printing Company, 1944; reprint, *The Sermons of Charles F. Parham*, New York: Garland Publishing, 1985), 19. This said, he was not overly successful in that endeavor, as he arguably created an entirely new sect.

⁵² Frank Bartleman, *Azusa Street*, Reprint. (Northridge, CA: Voice Christian Publications, 1962), 51.

its foundational emphasis on missions. He assumed continuity rather than discontinuity between the early Pentecostal mission and the later revival, in the process pointing towards a constituent aspect of charismatic Christianity broadly. The Charismatic Movement as a whole, existing in the same orientational space as du Plessis, has embraced this missionary ideal throughout its history. Choosing to move in a diffuse and open direction in distinction from more sectarian approaches, it is pervasive across the globe and—in all its diversity—is still discernibly of one piece. It has been a movement where unity in the Spirit and organizational independence is to be favored over structure, and in which traditional denominations may actually be the exception to an emerging rule. David du Plessis was no stranger to such ideas, drinking from them deeply as he stood at the headwaters of classical Pentecostalism. “Mr. Pentecost” was truly at home as he fulfilled his perceived calling to spread the word of a charismatic Christianity that was adaptive, open, and free. The renewal movement to which he dedicated his life continues along this path as it persists in being deeply missionary at its heart.