

Essential Truths

The PAOC Statement
of Essential Truths || Commentary

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The Theological Study Commission has requested the United Kingdom's preferred style for selected words and punctuation. Scripture verses referenced in the SOET have been highlighted with **bold font**.

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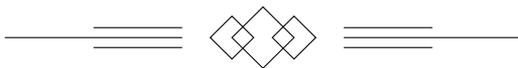
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Statement of Essential Truths

Amended by General Conference, May 2022





ARTICLE 5 | STATEMENT OF ESSENTIAL TRUTHS

Preamble

This version of the Statement of Essential Truths represents the result of an extensive collaborative process to rephrase and refresh what is most essential to us. As before, we make no claim that this statement covers all biblical truth, nor that the human phraseology employed here is inspired. We recognize as we did at the outset of our movement that there is some diversity of theological thought among us, but we remain committed as a Pentecostal community to the historic creeds of the church, to evangelical convictions of faith, and to the Full Gospel that Christ is Saviour, Healer, Spirit-Baptizer, and Soon Coming King.

Triune God

There is one God, the creator, who exists eternally in unity as three equal persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.¹ The triune God is loving, holy, infinite, just, and worthy of all worship.²

The Father accomplishes his plan of salvation through both redemption and judgement.³ All things will be subject to him, and his kingdom will have no end.⁴

The Father sent the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of Mary when she was a virgin.⁵ Jesus became fully human while remaining fully God.⁶ Anointed by the Spirit, Jesus revealed the Father and the kingdom of God by his sinless life, teaching, and miracles.⁷ After he died for our sin, God raised him from the dead, and he is now at the right hand of the Father.⁸

1. Matt 28:19; 2Cor 13:14

2. Exod 34:6-7; Psa 99:4-5

3. Exod 6:6; Rom 1:16-18

4. Psa 103:19; Rev 11:15; Eph 1:10

5. Matt 1:18-25

6. John 1:1, 14; Col 1:19; Heb 2:17

7. John 1:32; 14:7-10; Luke 4:18-19

8. Acts 2:32-33; Rom 8:34

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son and gives life throughout creation.⁹ The Spirit draws people to repentance and new life in Jesus Christ.¹⁰ Through the Spirit's indwelling, the Father and the Son are present to all believers, making them children of God.¹¹

Bible

The Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is the written revelation of God's character and saving purposes for humanity and for all creation.¹² As God's revelation, the entire Bible is true and trustworthy, and is the final and absolute authority for belief and conduct.¹³ The Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible enables its interpretation and application.¹⁴

Creation

God created and sustains the heavens and the earth,¹⁵ which display God's glory. Formed in the image of God, both male and female, humankind is entrusted with the care of God's creation as faithful stewards.¹⁶ As a result of human rebellion, sin and death entered the world, distorting the image of God and all of God's good creation.¹⁷

Angels were created as supernatural beings to worship and serve God.¹⁸ Along with Satan, some angels chose to rebel and oppose the purposes of God.¹⁹ Christ gives believers victory over Satan and these demons.²⁰

Salvation

Salvation is available to all people by the loving, redemptive act of the triune God.²¹ Through obedience to the Father,²² Christ gave himself as a ransom.²³ Christ, who had no sin, became sin for us offering himself and shedding his blood on the cross so that in him we might become right with God.²⁴ The life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ²⁵ provide the way of salvation for those who, by God's grace, repent from their sin and confess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.²⁶

Salvation means to receive the Spirit, to be forgiven, reconciled with God and others, born again, and liberated from sin and darkness, transferring the believer

9. Psa 104:21-30; Acts 2:33

10. John 16:7-15

11. Rom 8:14-17; 1John 3:24

12. Psa 119; John 20:30-31; Rom 15:4

13. 2Tim 3:16-17; Heb 4:12

14. 2Pet 1:20-21; John 16:13; 1Cor 2:12-13

15. Gen 1:1; Col 1:15-17

16. Gen 1:26-27

17. Rom 5:12; 8:20-22

18. Heb 1:14; Psa 103:20

19. Rev 12:7-9

20. Acts 10:38; Eph 6:10-13

21. John 3:16; Gal 4:4-7; Titus 2:11-14

22. John 8:28-29; Phil 2:8; Heb 5:8

23. Mark 10:45; 1Tim 2:6

24. 2Cor 5:21; 1John 3:16

25. Rom 4:22-25; 5:19; 6:4-5; Heb 7:24-28

26. Rom 10:9; 1John 1:9; Acts 3:19; 4:12

into God's kingdom.²⁷ Our experience of liberation includes healing — whether spiritual, physical, emotional, or mental — as a foretaste of our future, complete restoration.²⁸ Those who remain in Christ and do not turn away are assured of salvation on judgement day by the indwelling Holy Spirit,²⁹ who sanctifies and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.³⁰

Spirit Baptism

On the Day of Pentecost, Jesus poured out the promised Holy Spirit on the church.³¹ As his return draws near, Jesus continues to baptize in the Holy Spirit those who are believers.³² This empowers them to continue his work of proclaiming with speech and action the good news of the arrival and coming of the kingdom of God.³³ This experience is available for everyone, male and female, of every age, status,³⁴ and ethnicity.³⁵

The sign of speaking in tongues indicates that believers have been baptized with the Holy Spirit³⁶ and signifies the nature of Spirit baptism as empowering our communication, to be his witnesses with speech and action as we continue to pray in the Spirit.³⁷

The Church

Jesus Christ is the head of the church.³⁸ All who are united with Christ are joined by the Spirit to his body.³⁹ Each local church is an expression of the universal church whose role is to participate in the mission of God to restore all things.⁴⁰

Central to the church is the shared experience of the transforming presence of God.⁴¹ The church responds with worship, prayer, proclamation, discipleship, and fellowship,⁴² including the practices of water baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism by immersion symbolizes the believer's identification with Christ in his death and resurrection.⁴³ The Lord's Supper symbolizes Christ's body and blood, and our communion as believers. Shared together, it proclaims his death in anticipation of his return.⁴⁴

27. Eph 2:13-16; Col 1:13-14, 19-20; 1Pet 1:3

28. Isa 53:4-5; 1Pet 2:24; Psa 147:3; Rom 8:23

29. Eph 1:13-14; 1John 4:13; Heb 6:5-6; Phil 3:12-14

30. 1Thess 4:3-4; 1Cor 6:11; Rom 12:1-2; 1Pet 1:2

31. Luke 24:49; Acts 2:33

32. Acts 2:38-39; 8:14-17; 19:1-6

33. Luke 4:18-19, 43; Acts 1:8

34. Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:17-18, 39

35. Acts 10:45-46

36. Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6

37. Acts 1:8; 2:11-43; 4:31; Rom 15:19; 1Cor 14:15

38. Col 1:18; Matt 16:18

39. 1Cor 12:12-14

40. Acts 1:8; Matt 28:18-20; Acts 13:1-3; Rev 21:5

41. Acts 2:42-43; 1Cor 12:7; Matt 18:20; 2Cor 3:17-18

42. 1Pet 2:9-10; Col 4:2-6; Acts 2:42

43. Rom 6:3-8; Matt 28:19

44. Matt 26:26-29; 1Cor 11:23-26

The Spirit gives all gifts to the church to minister to others in love for the purpose of bearing witness to Christ and for the building up of the church.⁴⁵ The Spirit also empowers leaders, both female and male, to equip the church to fulfil its mission and purposes.⁴⁶

Restoration

Our great hope is for the imminent return of Christ in the air to receive his own, both the living who will be transformed, and the dead in Christ who will be resurrected bodily.⁴⁷ Christ will complete at his second coming the restoration begun when he initiated God's kingdom at his first coming.⁴⁸ Christ will liberate creation from the curse, fulfil God's covenant to Israel, and defeat all powers that oppose God.⁴⁹ Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.⁵⁰

Ultimately, God will judge the living and the dead.⁵¹ Such judgement is God's gracious answer to humanity's cry for justice to prevail throughout the earth and is consistent with God's character as loving, holy, and just.⁵² The unredeemed will go away into eternal punishment, but the redeemed into eternal life.⁵³ The redeemed will enjoy the presence of God where there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain.⁵⁴ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!⁵⁵

45. Acts 8:5-7; 1Cor 12:4-11; 14:12; Heb 2:3-4

46. Eph 4:11-16; Matt 20:25-28; Acts 2:17-18; 6:2-4; Rom 16:7

47. 1Thess 4:14-17; 5:1-2

48. Matt 13:24-41; Rev 11:15-17; Acts 1:6-7; 3:20-21; Rom 11:25-27

49. Rom 8:19-21; 1Cor 15:20-26

50. Phil 2:10-11; Isa 45:23

51. Acts 10:42; 1Pet 4:5

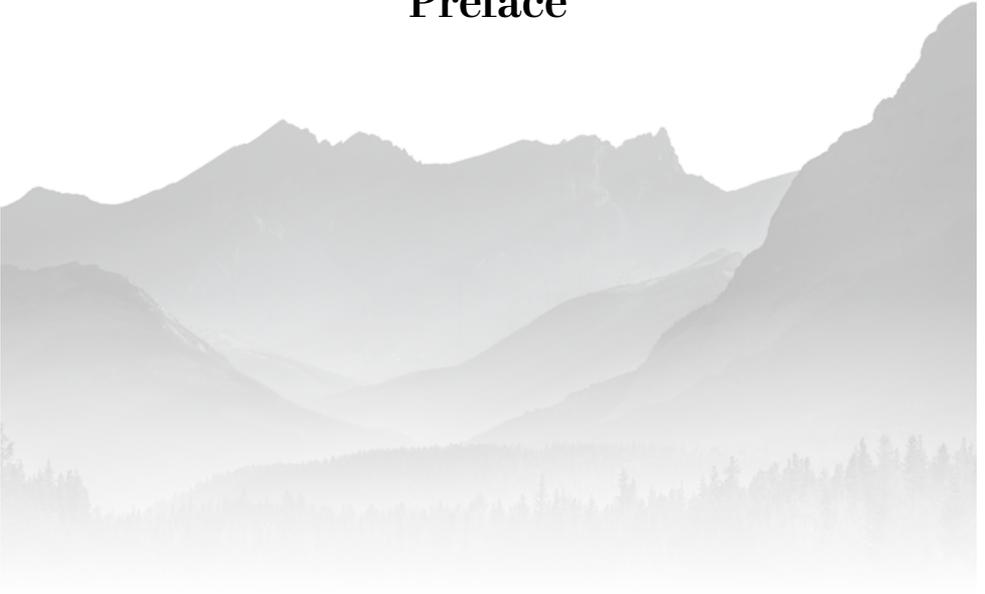
52. Mal 2:17-3:1; Rev 6:9-11

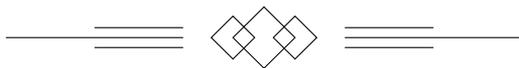
53. Matt 25:46; Dan 12:1-2

54. Isa 25:8-12; Rev 21:3-4

55. Rev 22:20

Preface





by Van Johnson

Essential Truths

The PAOC Statement of Essential Truths Commentary

The PAOC has had a long history of adopting and adapting an official statement of beliefs and practices. The SOET commentary is a new addition to this process. There have been three primary versions of the statement (1928, 1980, and 2022), and the first two were edited slightly along the way. Despite the differences between them, each version has served to identify common convictions for our proclamation and ministry. It has circulated under various titles—the *Statement of Fundamental Truths* (SOFT) became the *Statement of Fundamental and Essential Truths* (SOFET), which begat the *Statement of Essential Truths* (SOET).

The adjustments through the years have been reactions to both cultural changes and shifting theological currents. This applies to the current SOET, too. Note, for example, a concern for creation care in the Creation section, as well as a determination to re-emphasize the significance of women in ministry in The Church section.

SOET is different from previous versions of our statement due to its preference for narrative style. Its many affirmations tend to describe the actions of the triune God and what our resulting actions should be. Some have described our narrative style as postmodern. We think of it as an ancient practice consistent with the approach of the biblical writers, who centred their writing on the events of what God had done in history through Christ and the Spirit.

This narrative approach suits our tradition in several ways. First, it matches the priority we have placed historically on the biblical text itself for life and practice. The statements in SOET depend heavily on biblical phrases and ideas. For example, we finally settled the ongoing debate during the district-wide consultations in 2019 about what to say about heaven and hell by quoting the words of Jesus found in Matthew 25:46. Second, it suits our tradition in that we

find direction for belief and practice in the narrative sections of the biblical text, not just in those biblical passages often deemed more oriented towards teaching—like the Pauline letters. It seems appropriate that we state our beliefs in narrative fashion as well.

Until now, there has been no commentary on what changes were made in previous statements. It might be helpful, then, to delineate the parameters of this new venture. As befitting a commentary, priority is given to what is in the text of SOET itself. As befitting a commentary on a denominational document, the content of SOET is our official position. The commentary is secondary insofar as it attempts to capture the intention of the SOET document. It is interpretation meant to be suggestive and helpful for teaching and preaching. We make no claim that the explanations of the SOET are necessarily the official ones, nor that the comments contained herein are the only ones to be made.

Why produce a commentary for SOET? A commentary was warranted in view of the seven-year process that produced SOET. It seemed to be the natural outcome of many consultations held over the years about the content of SOET—about what should be included or not included. In fact, you will find the substance of many of those exchanges reflected in the commentary. During the process, we also heard about a growing interest in the articulation of a Pentecostal theology, one that would stand alongside the common convictions we hold with other evangelicals and with the historic church.

To capture our consultative process, we structured the commentary around each of the seven sections of SOET and divided them into three parts: *Context*, *Commentary*, and *Afterword*. *Context* provides insight into what prompted the choice of content in each section, and the wording used to express it. When appropriate, we used the opening section to identify the Pentecostal perspective for the commentary that would follow.

In the *Commentary* section, every phrase in SOET receives attention, as do all of the Scripture references used in the footnotes. In writing SOET, we attempted to keep the number of footnotes reasonable. There is not a footnote to support every word, phrase, or idea, but the references chosen support the main ideas of each affirmation of belief. To make the commentary user-friendly, all words and Scripture references cited from SOET are **in bold**. Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version, 2011.

The *Afterword* presents further discussion of related concerns and topics, without attempting to fill in the theological ideas not covered in SOET. As SOET is selective in reflecting “essential truths,” so is the commentary. Rather, the *Afterword* contains reflections on some of our wide-ranging discussions across Canada, along

with some pertinent ideas circulating in Pentecostal scholarship.

The length of each section of the Commentary varies according to the amount and variety of comments they generated during the refresh process, wherever those discussions occurred. Venues could have been a Theological Vitality section at General Conference, a district-sponsored presentation at one of our schools or churches, or at a General Executive meeting. Additionally, the valued contributions of the reviewers of earlier drafts of this book led us to add lines and paragraphs, and sometimes even pages.

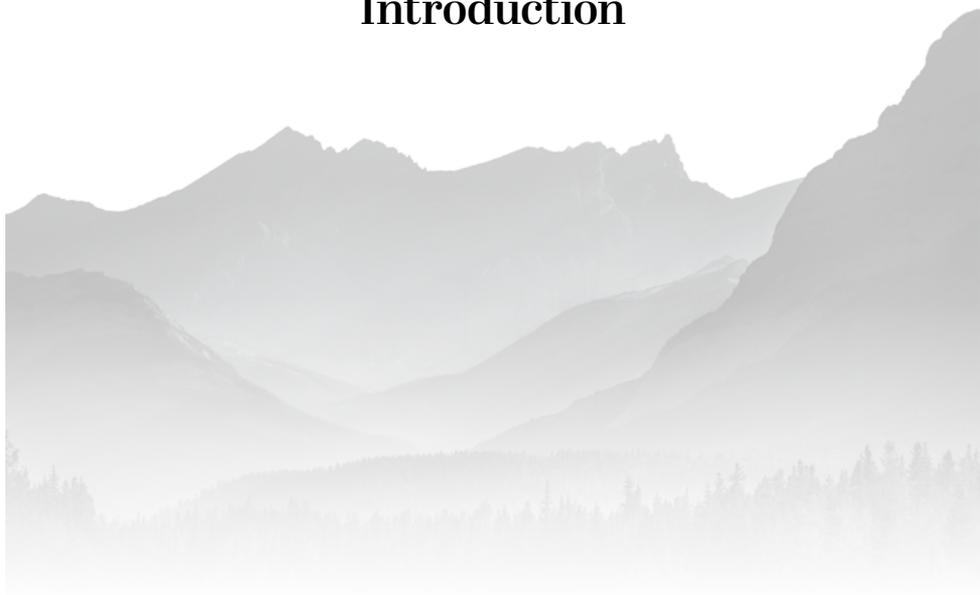
Who is this for? The intended audience includes the pastor/teacher, those preparing for ministry, and of course, the many in our congregations who want to know what we believe. To that end, we have strived for clarity of expression in our explanations. Although SOET did not include exhortations that would encourage believers to certain behaviours, the commentary explains the beliefs in SOET and, occasionally, suggests ways to apply SOET to the life of the church.

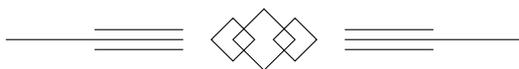
Who is it by? The writing of SOET was done by a team who worked in constant consultation with others; the writing of the commentary followed a similar approach. Each of the seven sections was assigned to a different member of the Theological Study Commission, and then they were charged with working with a small team of writers and reviewers. The teams comprised denominational leaders, teachers in our schools, and pastors. Given the variety of contributors, you will find a variety of expressions and writing styles. Let me express my gratitude to each one of them. One name deserves particular mention, since his contribution to the SOET Commentary is not only reflected in the section he worked on. Andrew Gabriel did far more than write the Context and Afterword for the Triune God section. He was also a primary consultant for many sections of this book.

I would like to honour Roger Stronstad, who went to be with the Lord as this book was being written. He was an original member of the Theological Study Commission until poor health limited his involvement. His book, *The Charismatic Theology of Luke*, although written decades ago, remains the most influential biblical study done by a Pentecostal on Luke's writings. He wrote it at a time when Luke and Acts were increasingly being considered one unit of two complementary parts, in which the interpretation of one informed the other. Roger identified patterns between Luke and Acts that have heavily influenced the Spirit Baptism section. For example, the anointing of Jesus with the Spirit in Luke 3 is the template for understanding the Spirit baptism of the 120 in Acts 2. As Jesus' anointing was an empowerment to proclaim the gospel, so was Spirit baptism for his followers. Roger insisted that the Day of Pentecost was not about salvation, nor sanctification, but it was an equipping for service that emphasized Spirit-inspired speech. His influence

is seen in both the SOET section on Spirit Baptism as well as in this commentary because he clarified for us the missional emphasis that continues to drive us forward as a movement.

Introduction





by David Wells

To be a theologically vital Fellowship of churches and ministries is of high value to The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC). Within our Pentecostal family, we have consistently pursued goals related to spirit and truth, even as we wrestle with the tendencies to drift from truths that are essential. Similar to what the Spirit encouraged the first-century churches of Revelation 1-3 to do, we have chosen to refresh our commitment to our Lord and his truth and to revive what was most vital when God raised us up as a movement over a century ago.

As the Preamble to the *Statement of Essential Truths* (SOET) notes, **this version of the Statement of Essential Truths represents the result of an extensive collaborative process to rephrase and refresh what is most essential to us.** The SOET is one outcome of a broader initiative to encourage theological vitality within our Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada family. While a refreshed, reformatted statement was envisioned, the greater goal was to see our Fellowship's theological vitality enhanced by putting our historic Christian and Pentecostal distinctive theology at the forefront of our Fellowship's attention. A solid, living, and active understanding of truth is vital for our worship and discipleship.

Essential Truths is an intentional continuation of this initiative and is intended to engage not only credentialed leaders but also church boards and other members of our constituency. It concerns the purpose of a *Statement of Essential Truths*—why we emphasize these seven segments of truth, and the rationale for the wording used. It is important that this Statement be understood and accessible as it is an essential component of our shared mission and of our credentialing and church membership processes.

We desire that individuals and groups—facilitated by pastors and teachers—actively engage with the SOET and this book for their discipleship and worship. *Essential Truths* will complement the SOET and be useful for the purposes of membership classes, credentialing, and discipleship.

The Preamble of the SOET further states, **As before, we make no claim that this statement covers all biblical truth, nor that the human phraseology employed here is inspired. We recognize as we did at the outset of our movement that there is some diversity of theological thought among us, but we remain committed as a Pentecostal community to the historic creeds of the church, to evangelical convictions of faith, and to the Full Gospel that Christ is Saviour, Healer, Spirit-Baptizer and Soon Coming King.**

As a Pentecostal movement, we have always emphasized the need to stress “essential” theological truths while allowing for diversity. For example, the PAOC’s 1928 statement, as noted in a Theological Study Commission presentation during our online General Conference 2020, stated, “The human phraseology is not inspired or contended for, but the truth set forth is held to be essential to a full gospel ministry.”

Neither the SOET nor this companion piece fully elaborate on the areas of truth presented. Pastors and teachers who share the content will also desire to provide additional application appropriate to their audience and context. The “essentials” are essential for our churches, credentialed leaders, and members. We welcome a diversity of applications, and it is expected that the rich nuances found in the teaching of historic, evangelically aligned, and full-gospel Christianity will also be shared.

In all that we do with these materials, I pray the primary goal will be for the truth to transform us to be more like our Lord—personally and as the people of God. Together, as a movement of disciplined followers of Jesus, we will do our best to present ourselves to God as those approved, workers who do not need to be ashamed, and who correctly handle the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

My prayer for us remains,

“Gracious Father, thank you for not leaving us to ourselves in our amazing and challenging journey of discipleship. By your Word and Spirit, you speak, teach, and guide us personally and corporately. Lord, convict us of our disregard of your truth and enable us to re-engage it in a living, active manner so that the life and truth of Jesus is evident in our lives. For your glory, Amen.”

Chapter 1

Triune God

There is one God, the creator, who exists eternally in unity as three equal persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.¹ The triune God is loving, holy, infinite, just, and worthy of all worship.²

The Father accomplishes his plan of salvation through both redemption and judgement.³ All things will be subject to him, and his kingdom will have no end.⁴

The Father sent the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of Mary when she was a virgin.⁵ Jesus became fully human while remaining fully God.⁶ Anointed by the Spirit, Jesus revealed the Father and the kingdom of God by his sinless life, teaching, and miracles.⁷ After he died for our sin, God raised him from the dead, and he is now at the right hand of the Father.⁸

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son and gives life throughout creation.⁹ The Spirit draws people to repentance and new life in Jesus Christ.¹⁰ Through the Spirit's indwelling, the Father and the Son are present to all believers, making them children of God.¹¹

1. Matt 28:19; 2Cor 13:14

2. Exod 34:6-7; Psa 99:4-5

3. Exod 6:6; Rom 1:16-18

4. Psa 103:19; Rev 11:15; Eph 1:10

5. Matt 1:18-25

6. John 1:1, 14; Col 1:19; Heb 2:17

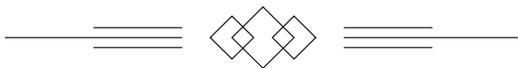
7. John 1:32; 14:7-10; Luke 4:18-19

8. Acts 2:32-33; Rom 8:34

9. Psa 104:21-30; Acts 2:33

10. John 16:7-15

11. Rom 8:14-17; 1John 3:24



Context

Unlike in previous PAOC doctrinal statements, this section on God is placed first, before the doctrine of Scripture, as God is the source of all revelation—everything flows from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The PAOC's first *Statement of Fundamental Truths* (1928-1980) devoted 28 per cent of its text to a section on "The One True God." This was primarily because it took extended space to explain the Trinity in response to Oneness Pentecostals who incorrectly thought that the doctrine of the Trinity indicated that God was three *separate* persons, beings, or gods.

While the impact of Oneness Pentecostalism is not a current issue in the PAOC, the PAOC continues to affirm the doctrine of the Trinity. As a result, paragraphs one, three, and four in this section of the SOET all refer to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, underscoring the unity of the divine persons—there is only one God. At the same time, this section presents the doctrine of the Trinity not as a logical puzzle, but as undergirding the reality of salvation and our relationship with God. The doctrine recognizes God the Father, reaching out through the Son and the Spirit, to save the world out of love (John 3:5, 16; 2Cor 13:14).

The statement on the Triune God remains the longest section within the SOET. This is in part because it covers multiple doctrines: the Trinity, God's attributes, and the persons of God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. But this section does not say everything about the triune God. In some respects, the entire SOET is a doctrine of the triune God—after all, all of "theology" is about God. As a result, you will find the Father, Jesus, and the Spirit mentioned in numerous places throughout SOET.

In comparison to our previous SOFET (1980-2022), this section uses more contemporary language, such as "worship" instead of "homage." The first paragraph adds a summary description of God's attributes. The third paragraph adds a

Pentecostal emphasis on Jesus being anointed by the Spirit, which is foundational for understanding our own experience with the Spirit. Finally, whereas the paragraph on “The Holy Spirit” in the previous SOFET emphasized the divinity and personhood of the Spirit, the fourth paragraph of this section adds some initial description regarding the work of the Spirit, on which the rest of the SOET will expand.

Commentary

There is one God, the creator, who exists eternally in unity as three equal persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

The triune nature of the **one God** who is **the Creator** of all things is an essential affirmation of Christian theology that sets it apart from other religions and cults. We find the oneness of God from the beginning to the end of Scripture, with the nature of God being progressively revealed throughout the story, especially when it comes to God’s plan culminating in Christ. Deuteronomy 6:4 declares God is one, and the New Testament reaffirms this (Mark 12:29; Rom 3:30).

We recognize that God **exists eternally** as the **three equal persons** of the **Father, Son, and Holy Spirit**. By God’s design (Heb 1:1-2), the Old Testament only hints at the triune nature of God’s being (Gen 1:26; Psa 110:1). The New Testament, however, references the three persons of the Trinity explicitly in the accounts of the virgin birth (Luke 1:35), Jesus’ baptism (Luke 3:22), the Great Commission (**Matt 28:19**), and in the letters (**2Cor 13:14**). The Father, Son, and Spirit also share the name of God, *YHWH* (the Hebrew tetragrammaton, *Kurios* in Greek), as found in Exodus 3:12-16, which explains *YHWH* as God of the Abrahamic covenant. While *YHWH* most often refers to God the **Father**, the **Holy Spirit**, too, is called the Spirit of *YHWH* (Isa 61:1; Luke 4:18). In 2 Corinthians 3:16-18, he is explicitly called *YHWH*. Jesus, **the Son**, is also identified as *YHWH* by both Paul (Rom 10:9-13) and Peter (Acts 2:21, 36), as they both quote Isaiah 28:16 and Joel 2:23 (cf. 1Cor 12:3). God the Father’s sharing of his name with the Son (John 17:12) demonstrates the **unity** within the godhead and the greatness of Jesus’ name (Phil 2:9-11).

The triune God is loving, holy, infinite, just, and worthy of all worship

When God declares the name *YHWH* to Moses in **Exodus 34:6-7**, he emphasizes his love, which is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, and true—similar to traits Paul associates with the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) and with love (1Cor 13:4-8). The attribute of love sums up God’s very being (1John 4:8), a love manifested to us through the giving of his Son (1John 4:9). **The triune**, eternal nature of God as

loving is defensible on the basis that God must have someone to love in order to always be selfless. An eternal Father **loving** an eternal Son removes any possible contradiction.

Psalm 99:4-5 declares God's attributes of justice, righteousness, and holiness. Angels continually proclaim God as **holy** (Isa 6:3; Rev 4:8), referring to the Lord's uniqueness and majesty. God is incomparable; all created beings have a beginning, have limitations, and are under God's authority (Isa 40:25-28; 45:22-23). God is the first and the last (Isa 41:4), the beginning and the end (Rev 21:6). God is **infinite**; nothing is impossible for God (Luke 1:37). God is **just**. We recognize God's justice in relation to his love, as God keeps covenant for thousands of generations (**Exod 34:7**). In the essential nature of God's rule, righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne; love and faithfulness go before him (Psa 89:14). God's nature leaves only one appropriate response: God is **worthy of all worship**.

The Father accomplishes his plan of salvation through both redemption and judgement

The Father is the source of salvation (John 3:16), which is in accordance with his revealed purpose and love (Eph 1:3-6). His **plan of salvation** includes **redemption** of those who place their faith in him and **judgement** on his enemies. Israel's exodus from Egypt serves as an example of the salvation God would bring about for all people in Christ. In **Exodus 6:6**, God promises to redeem his people from the Egyptians with great judgements. The plagues God sends upon Egypt serve to judge the Egyptians for their wicked treatment of Israel but are also the means through which people are released from bondage. At the same time, the judgements are not completely destructive, as Egypt deserved, but leave room that they might know that *YHWH* alone is God (Exod 9:14-16). **Romans 1:16-18** explains that the gospel—what God has done for humanity in Christ—is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes. In both justice and love, God judges people for their wickedness while also revealing their need for redemption. The Father's plan of salvation offers redemption to all people, so that they may be rescued from judgement against sin. Even as Egypt faced plagues that gave them opportunity to repent, so temporal judgements in the present give people time for redemption in Christ before the final day of judgement, when God will justly recompense humankind for what they have done (Rom 2:5-6; see the Restoration section). To effect our redemption, the Father transfers us from the authority of darkness to the kingdom of his Son (Col 1:13-14); yet complete salvation awaits the Son's return (Heb 9:28).

All things will be subject to him, and his kingdom will have no end

The fact that God is the king who rules over all is explicitly taught throughout Scripture (**Psa 103:19**). The creation account illustrates the sovereignty of God when he designs creation, including humanity, to enter his Sabbath rest (Gen 2:1-3; Heb 4:3-9). This is a picture of the **kingdom** of God where God reigns over all. It is the Father's purpose that **all things will be subject to his Son (Eph 1:10)**, which brings about not only salvation, but also the very purpose of creation. God's kingdom ruling over all is a central theme of the biblical story. His Son, Jesus Christ, is the appointed king who will reign with him forever **and his kingdom will have no end** (Psa 2; **Rev 11:15**).

The Father sent the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of Mary when she was a virgin. Jesus became fully human while remaining fully God

The nativity accounts explain how **the Father sent the Son, conceived by the miraculous agency of the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary when she was a virgin (Matt 1:18-25; Luke 1:28-35)**. This demonstrates that Jesus' conception was without the agency of man and was a fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy that a virgin would give birth to a son who would be called Immanuel, God with us (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23). The Father's plan in sending the Son and the Son's submission to the Father (John 4:34) show their unity (**Col 1:19**).

In Jesus Christ, God the Son **became fully human while remaining fully God**, thus enabling him to be our Saviour, High Priest, and Lord (Phil 2:5-11). For all eternity, the Son of God existed in equality alongside the Father, but he became flesh to dwell with humanity (**John 1:1, 14**). As a human, Jesus became tired (John 4:6) and thirsty (John 19:28). He "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God" and people (Luke 2:52), and he submitted to the will of the Father (John 6:38). Jesus was "fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people" (**Heb 2:17**). At the same time, we recognize Jesus' divinity in his power over nature (Matt 8:23-27) and death (John 11:25, 40-44), as he forgave sin (Luke 5:20-25), and as he received worship (Matt 14:33). The Bible proclaims him as our God and Saviour (Tit 2:13; 2Pet 1:1), noting that "God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him" (**Col 1:19**). The incarnation reveals the love of God (1John 4:9) and **accomplishes** salvation for all humanity who accept him (Gal 4:4-5).

Anointed by the Spirit, Jesus revealed the Father and the kingdom of God by his sinless life, teaching, and miracles

Jesus lived full of the Spirit (Luke 4:1). **Jesus** was **anointed by the Spirit**, a key witness that Jesus is the Messiah (**John 1:32**). He has come to fulfil the Messiah's mission (**Luke 4:18-19**), effectively destroying the works of the devil (Matt 4:1; 1John 3:8).

Jesus' character and perfect obedience **revealed the Father** (**John 14:7-10**), demonstrating that he and the Father are one (John 10:30). **His sinless life, teaching, and miracles** display **the kingdom of God** as he focuses on submission to the Father's will (Heb 10:7). He taught that the kingdom is available and called people to repent and believe the Good News (Mark 1:15). Jesus' miracles testify to the Father's compassionate heart and his power to overcome the effects of sin, bringing renewal to his creation.

After he died for our sin, God raised him from the dead, and he is now at the right hand of the Father

The death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus are the central features of the Good News. Paul says that he determined to know nothing among the Corinthians "except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1Cor 2:2). Christ's death is the basis on which God forgives us. Jesus **died** to atone **for our sin**, but he had to be **raised from the dead** that we might be justified by God (Rom 4:25). The resurrection demonstrates the power of God, as Jesus triumphs over death, never to die again; he is the living Saviour who reigns forevermore (Rev 1:18).

The ascension refers to the completion of the resurrection where God the Father seats him at his **right hand** as our living Saviour, King, and High Priest (Psa 110:1-4). It was upon his ascension to **the right hand of the Father** that he presented himself as the sacrifice to declare innocent all who receive him (Heb 9:24). As the ascended one, Jesus pours out the Spirit upon his people, empowering them for life as his witnesses, and he ever lives to make intercession for us (**Acts 2:32-33; Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25**). God's salvation plan, which involves the sending of his Son—who died, was raised, and is now seated at his right hand above all rule and authority—demonstrates beyond all doubt that God is for us, and nothing can separate us from his love (Rom 8:31-39). His death, resurrection, and ascension guarantee that death is defeated, there is a future resurrection for believers, and we will reign with him for eternity (John 11:25-26; 1Cor 15:21-23; 2Tim 1:10; Rev 20:6).

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son and gives life throughout creation

Since the Father gave the ascended Son the Spirit, who then poured the Spirit out on all flesh (**Acts 2:17, 33**), the work of Pentecost is truly the work of the

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This trinitarian work is also not limited to humanity but proceeds to give **life throughout creation** (see the Creation section). In the beginning, the Spirit of God prepared for the creative activity of the word of God to go forth (Gen 1:2-3). It has always been the sending of the Spirit that creates and renews life (Job 33:4; **Psa 104:21-30**). Even as all who are in Christ are a new creation (2Cor 5:17) and have received the firstfruits of the Spirit, we long for God's work to be extended and completed **throughout creation** (Rom 8:23). The Father declares that he is making all things new (Rev 21:5). This is a newness of life that can only be known by obediently coming to the Son he has sent and receiving the Spirit he pours out (John 7:37-39). All who have been given new creation life by the Spirit also play a role in spreading God's glory to the rest of creation (Rom 8:21).

The Spirit draws people to repentance and new life in Jesus Christ

The Spirit plays an integral part in God's plan of salvation at every step in the process. There is hope for humanity only through Jesus Christ. Therefore, upon his ascension, Jesus pours out his Spirit upon the disciples, equipping them to be his witnesses to a lost and dying world (Acts 1:8). God's people give testimony of him (John 15:26-27), and **the Spirit** also testifies (Acts 5:32). He **draws people to repentance and new life in Jesus Christ** by convicting them of sin, righteousness, and judgement (**John 16:7-15**). The Spirit gives understanding concerning the need for Jesus, his righteous work of redemption, and the reversal of the enemy's work—enabling people to turn to him and find life. The heart of the repentant is cleansed by the Spirit (Acts 15:8-9), who applies Christ's redemptive work and then indwells them.

Through the Spirit's indwelling, the Father and the Son are present to all believers, making them children of God

God's gift of the Holy Spirit brings the very real presence of **the Father and the Son** to those who receive Jesus as Lord (John 14:16-19, 23). Indeed, we know that God is **present to all believers** and "lives in us ... by the Spirit he gave us" (1John 3:24). **The Spirit's indwelling** makes us the temple of the living God, rendering the physical temple obsolete (1Cor 3:16; 6:19-20; 2Cor 6:16). This fulfils a key component in God's plan: God will dwell with humanity. "My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Ezek 37:27; cf. Lev 26:12; Rev 21:3). God promised David that his son would build a house for God and God would establish his kingdom forever (2Sam 7:13). Those whom God has saved from all nations are stones in the temple (1Pet 2:5). We who were formerly not a people are now the people of God (1Pet 2:10), "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (1Pet 2:9).

The Spirit's indwelling is also pictured as new birth (John 3:3, 5), so that all who believe in Jesus become **children of God** (John 1:12-13). God's presence offers believers a new intimacy, by which they confidently call out, "*Abba, Father*" (**Rom 8:14-17**). The mind of Christ is available to Spirit-led children (1Cor 2:16) so they will have the wisdom to keep his commandments (Ezek 36:27; **1John 3:24**) and walk as Christ did (1John 2:6).

Afterword

The first paragraph summarizes God's attributes as loving, holy, infinite, and just. While other attributes could be listed, one might view God's holiness as an overarching descriptor of God. Likewise, some theologians use categories like "love" and "infinite" to summarize God's attributes, with "love" including attributes like compassion and patience, and with "infinite" including attributes like eternal and omnipotent. The inclusion of "just" in this paragraph is, in part, an early affirmation in the SOET of God's justice in response to societal concerns regarding justice.

The second paragraph affirms all things will be subject to him. This might give the impression that God is not ruling and reigning now. The commentary above indicates that this is not the intent. Rather, the words "will be subject" are bringing out the typical Pentecostal emphasis on the "now" and "not yet" of the kingdom of God. That is, God has always reigned, and yet, the kingdom of God has now come in Jesus Christ and the sending of the Spirit, even though the kingdom of God is still coming and yet to be fully consummated at the second coming of Jesus Christ. In the meantime, Satan, the god of this world, attempts to blind the world to this glorious coming reality (2Cor 4:4), but his time is limited.

The third paragraph, which focuses on Jesus Christ, aims to bring attention to both the divinity and humanity of Christ. Both affirmations are important for our faith. The Son of God existed from all eternity and remained fully God in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus was not only human, as some might claim. He is the divine Son of God, the Lord. Therefore, this paragraph on the person of Jesus Christ appears within the Triune God section. As divine, Jesus, too, is worthy of all worship.

At the same time, Jesus became fully human in the incarnation without losing his divinity. As a human, he was an Israelite man who was anointed and empowered by the Spirit, thereby fulfilling Israel's hopes for the Messiah who was to come. As a human, Jesus is a prophet, priest, and king. As a human, Jesus is our example of what it means to live in relationship with and in obedience to the Father and to be led by the Spirit. Just as the Spirit empowered Jesus in his ministry, we

may participate in the empowerment that he received from the Spirit in order to continue his work. Indeed, the Christian life is about becoming Christ-like, living a Spirit-filled life.

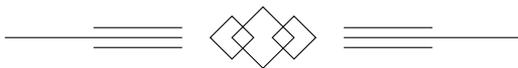
With respect to the first sentence in the fourth paragraph in this section, those in the Western Church (Catholic and Protestant traditions) historically confessed that the Spirit proceeds from “the Father *and the Son.*” While some might think it insignificant, the wording “and the Son,” with its associated theological implications, was rejected by the Eastern Church. This was a key reason that the Eastern and Western Church excommunicated one another in the year 1054, and it continues to be a significant issue today. To implicitly address this concern, the SOET affirms that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *through the Son.* Those in both the Western and Eastern Church traditions have often viewed this wording as an acceptable compromise as well as theologically accurate. In addition, this wording, along with the rest of the fourth paragraph, expresses Pentecostal theological sensitivities that the Spirit is not passive, but an active person within the Trinity and in relationship to us today.

Chapter 2

Bible

The Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is the written revelation of God's character and saving purposes for humanity and for all creation.¹ As God's revelation, the entire Bible is true and trustworthy, and is the final and absolute authority for belief and conduct.² The Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible enables its interpretation and application.³

1. Psa 119; John 20:30-31; Rom 15:4
2. 2Tim 3:16-17; Heb 4:12
3. 2Pet 1:20-21; John 16:13; 1Cor 2:12-13



Context

The Pentecostal movement's commitment to the Bible is anchored in nearly two millennia of Christian belief in the Bible as God's Word. Moreover, Canadian Pentecostalism stands within the Reformation tradition of Protestantism that made *sola Scriptura* one of its rallying cries, emphasizing the authority of the Bible over church tradition. When theological liberalism began to question the Reformation commitment to the authority and historicity of Scripture, a division arose in Protestantism. Conservative groups (including the Holiness denominations) reacted strongly by affirming Scripture as the foundation for Christian belief and practice. It was from the Holiness wing that the North American Pentecostal movement was born.

Pentecostal beginnings in the U.S. and Canada were rooted in the centrality of the biblical text. As the example from a small Bible college in Topeka, Kansas, in the fall of 1900 shows, reading the Bible preceded their Acts 2 experience. Students were instructed by Charles Parham to explore the evidence for the baptism of the Holy Spirit from the biblical record, and they determined that tongues was its evidence. As a result of their inductive study, a number began to pray and subsequently received the baptism of the Holy Spirit with speaking in tongues.

In Canada, the earliest Pentecostal newsletters show how the first Pentecostals used the Bible to interpret all that the Lord was doing among them—whether Spirit baptisms or healings, whether prophetic words or gifts of faith. *The Promise* newsletter from Toronto (1907-10) and *The Apostolic Messenger* from Winnipeg (1908) are filled with biblical references, whether in the teaching portions or in the many testimonies contained therein. Even their titles are instructive. *The Promise* is from Acts 2:39, which is toward the end of Peter's Pentecost sermon; *The Apostolic Messenger* indicates identification with the New Testament message as proclaimed by the apostles themselves.

The Bible continues to have “pride of place” among Pentecostals, as is readily seen by the prominence given to the preaching of the Word in church and by the many pastoral exhortations to read the Bible regularly in private. Indeed, the Pentecostal conviction that the Bible affects all aspects of life explains the traditional Pentecostal affinity for narrative portions of the Bible. Biblical stories are perceived as life lessons; it is not that Pentecostals simply prefer stories, *per se*. They value stories because the biblical ones make sense of their own stories. In this process, the individual’s story gets taken up, or becomes a part of, the great biblical narrative of God’s saving work. The Bible tells us how to live lives of significance.

Throughout PAOC history, the development of pastors and leaders within our Bible colleges has centred around a biblically-based curriculum. Historically, our church-based Christian education curricula have focused on encouraging biblical literacy for all age levels. As biblical knowledge has declined in our broader post-Christian culture, we continue to affirm the supremacy of the Bible.

As the Pentecostal movement grew, its leaders were careful to align themselves with a broader evangelical commitment to biblical authority. They did, of course, challenge the prevailing cessationist views held by many within the evangelical community that the things of the Spirit—such as speaking in tongues, miracles, and the other gifts of the Spirit—had ceased to function after the time of the early church. Instead, Pentecostals argued that their experience was biblically based. In fact, some early Pentecostal writers referred to the experience of tongues as “the biblical evidence” of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Although Pentecostals have been accused of learning from their experiences rather than from the Bible, Pentecostals perceive the Word of God as their interpretive source for belief and practice.

In SOET, the section on the Bible immediately follows that of the nature of God. God exists prior to all else; all revelation is initiated by God. The doctrinal affirmations in SOET flow from the revelation of God and the content of that revelation is mediated to us through Scripture. While we can perceive something of God’s power and nature through creation (general revelation, e.g., Rom 1:20; see the Creation section), we come to know him salvifically through Scripture (special revelation).

Like the PAOC’s previous doctrinal statements, SOET affirms the inspiration and authority of Scripture. At the same time, it refreshes some of the earlier language that spoke of the Bible as “infallible” and “without error.” In part, this is because the belief in inerrancy (i.e., without error)—as expressed in the previous SOFET, and as understood by many conservative evangelical scholars—applies fully only to the original writings or autographs. During the centuries-long process of copying the originals by hand, some discrepancies between originals and copies

emerged. Since we no longer have the original writings, but only manuscripts of copies of the Bible, the affirmation that the Bible is “without error” is of somewhat limited value.

At the same time, SOET supports the general spirit behind the terms “infallible” and “without error.” But rather than using these terms that tell us what is *not* in the Bible, SOET employs positive terms of affirmation as it proclaims that the Bible is true and trustworthy. This dual affirmation aligns with Pentecostal sensibilities, emphasizing the truth of God’s Word, and that it can be trusted to guide our daily lives and give us confidence about our future lives with God.

A final word about how Pentecostals read and preach the Word is in order. The value we assign to personal Bible reading evidences our belief that all of us—no matter the level of theological knowledge or years of Christian experience—may hear the word of the Lord when reading the Bible. Much of that confidence derives from our belief that the Holy Spirit, who inspired the Scriptures, will enable the one who reads to hear from God, especially when one takes a prayerful approach to the text. Moreover, it should also be said that Pentecostals appreciate the dynamic that occurs when we hear the Word together in community, a dynamic that may cause our collective hearing to become more acute. The Word is heard as convicting and prodding, assuring and consoling, providing direction, and revealing the presence of Jesus, the *logos*, to us. We hear the Word together, it is applied by the Spirit to our specific contexts, and then we respond together. The word of the Lord requires of us a response: we repent, we pray, we intercede, we minister to each other with the gifts of the Spirit, we sing, and then we go out with vision and missional intention.

Commentary

The Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is the written revelation of God's character and saving purposes for humanity and for all creation

The qualification that **The Bible** is **both Old and New Testaments** attests that both testaments have equal status as the Word of God. There have been attempts, both old and new, to suggest that the Old is inferior to the New. SOET contains none of that sentiment. They may differ in content and form, but together they comprise the sacred text.

The Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures, is a vital part of the Christian Bible. Its 39 books, from Genesis to Malachi, provide an unbroken link between the creation of the world and the culmination of God’s saving purposes through Jesus. It contains God’s earliest promise of salvation (Gen 3:15) and chronicles the redemptive history of humanity through God’s chosen people, Israel. It contains

many prophecies that are ultimately fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus. It is significant to note the dependence of the New Testament on the Old Testament. There are over 280 direct Old Testament quotations and around 800 allusions to the Old Testament in the New.

The New Testament consists of 27 books. These books, from Matthew to Revelation, circulated individually throughout the apostolic era (first century AD). At the time of the writing of Peter's second letter, some of Paul's letters were already being compared favourably in status to that of the Hebrew Scriptures (2Pet 3:15-16). By the end of the second century, an almost complete list of the books that would later form the New Testament are found in a document referred to as the *Muratorian Fragment*.

SOET asserts that the Bible is God's **written revelation**. When we speak of revelation, we refer to the unveiling of something not previously known or the presentation of knowledge that an individual could not acquire by reason alone. The fact that God chooses to reveal himself is to say that God takes the initiative to make himself known to humanity. At times, God directly revealed aspects about himself, his will, or the future (Gen 41:25; Gal 1:12). At other times, God revealed himself through his actions, such as in his saving of the Israelites from slavery and in his sending of Jesus Christ (John 14:9). Many of the things that God revealed were eventually written down and became the Bible (Deut 30:10; Hab 2:2; Rev 1:1).

Both Testaments reveal the consistent **character** of God. He is introduced to us as the one who creates, establishes, and keeps his covenants, and the one who redeems his people. His attributes include his holiness, love, justice, and mercy (see the Triune God section). Even when his chosen nation was being judged for her apostasy, many prophetic oracles looked forward to the day when God's good plans for his people will be realized (Jer 29:11). The Old Testament writings continue to be a source of instruction and hope: "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope" (**Rom 15:4**).

Along with revealing the character of God, the Bible speaks to his over-arching **saving purposes for humanity and for all creation**. With the introduction of sin into the world, we encounter the first promise of redemption (Gen 3:14-15). Through the accounts of the patriarchs that follow, God begins the task of forming a people for himself, with the defining actions of Israel's deliverance from Egyptian captivity and the subsequent gift of the promised land. As a result of the shortcomings of Israel, there emerges in Scripture a prophetic strain pointing towards the Messiah, whose work will encompass the transformation of the human heart, reconciling humanity to God.

The fulfillment of all this begins with Jesus; in the four Gospels are accounts of his birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension. Note **John 20:30-31**, where the writer's stated intention for recording Jesus' miracles was to bring people to faith in him: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). The missional consequence of God's reconciling work through Christ is seen in the Book of Acts, as the Holy Spirit filled the early disciples to carry on Jesus' mission, and fledgling churches were founded in cities from Jerusalem to Rome. The letters (epistles) of the New Testament then seek to "flesh out" the impact of Jesus' death and resurrection for God's people, as well as the presence of the promised Spirit in new communities of faith. The Book of Revelation, written for a church in the midst of intense persecution, reveals Jesus as the Lord over history, and of course, over the church. In the latter chapters of Revelation, we see visions of God's original intent for creation—the elimination of the effects of the fall, and the creation of a new heaven and earth (Rev 21:1).

As God's revelation, the entire Bible is true and trustworthy, and is the final and absolute authority for belief and conduct

Because the Bible is the written record of God's past revelation and is also inspired by God (more on this below), we can speak of the Bible as God's revelation. And because it is **God's revelation**, we also affirm that **the entire Bible is true and trustworthy and is the final and absolute authority for belief and conduct**. There are some very significant implications to reflect on from this short sentence.

First, we affirm the importance of the **entire Bible**. All 66 books are beneficial or "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (**2Tim 3:16**). Christians should read and study the entire Word of God and thereby avoid the error of establishing a "canon within a canon"—that is, privileging or regarding certain parts of the Bible as more authoritative, although certain sections may be more readily applicable. Pentecostals may identify with narrative texts such as Acts—like the Reformed do with Romans and Galatians, and the Mennonites with the Sermon on the Mount—but all Scripture has authority. A singular focus on one aspect or only some books of the Bible robs the reader of the richness of the entirety of God's Word.

Second, we affirm that the Bible is **true**. This affirmation is rooted in the character of God. As God is true, so is the Word of God. The truth of God's Word is affirmed in the Old Testament. **Psalms 119** is a long testimony to the truth of God's Word (e.g., Psa 119:142, 151). This claim is echoed by Jesus and the authors of the New Testament (John 17:17; 2Tim 2:15). God's Word is true, including God's written

Word. An affirmation of the truthfulness of Scripture does not deny that there are questions which are raised by the serious student of the Bible. Concerns about the reliability and historicity of biblical accounts are addressed through academic disciplines such as textual criticism, which attempts to reconstruct the original autographs by comparing manuscripts, and by the ongoing work of archeology in the historic lands of the Bible. It should also be noted that the accuracy of biblical accounts should be judged by ancient standards and by the type of literature that was used to convey God's Word.

We also affirm that the Bible is **trustworthy**: God's Word is true, and thus it may be trusted as a guide to life. It speaks to the deepest needs of humanity and invites us to live our lives in light of its teaching. Once again **Psalms 119** is a witness to the trustworthiness of God's Word: "My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life" (119:50). In **2 Timothy 3:16-17**, the trustworthiness of Scripture is seen in the dynamic of being "profitable" in a multi-faceted way: for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness.

The Bible is the stable foundation upon which our lives are built, and because it has its source in God, it is **the final and absolute authority** for us. It has the right, ability, and power to direct us. God has spoken and continues to speak and exercise his authority through the Bible. It provides us with the knowledge of God and with wisdom. According to **Hebrews 4:12**, "the word of God is alive and active" and "it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." That knowledge calls us to a posture of faith and belief; wisdom is the outworking of that belief in our lives. "Your word," the Psalmist celebrates, "is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path" (Psa 119:105).

Today many people resist any "authority" outside of themselves and view any external "authority" only as oppressive. The Bible, however, was not written to force us to act or believe against our will. The Bible is not an oppressive authority. It is a liberating authority that promotes life. It was written, for example, "that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31) and "that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope" (**Rom 15:4**). When we speak of the authority of the Bible, we are speaking of a life-giving authority, because the Bible comes from God through the Holy Spirit's work. We know that "The Spirit gives life" (John 6:63).

The Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible enables its interpretation and application

The truth and authority of Scripture is predicated on the fact that it is **inspired**. On the one hand, the Bible is a book written by humans. This is illustrated by the fact that it was written in more than one language, with different writing styles,

and in various genres. On the other hand, the Bible is more than just another “inspired” piece of classic religious literature, written with deep spiritual insight. Much like those who heard Paul’s preaching “accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God” (1Thess 2:13), we also recognize the Bible as God’s Word. It is inspired in the sense that “all Scripture is God-breathed” (2Tim 3:16). Just as breath comes out of our mouths when we speak, when God’s Word comes forth, it is accompanied by God’s breath, who is **the Holy Spirit**. 2 Peter 1:20-21 describes this process with respect to Old Testament prophecy, or “prophecy of Scripture.” The passage states that “prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

Finally, we affirm that it is **the Holy Spirit who enables its interpretation**. In the broadest sense, it has been the creative work of the Spirit that has provided us with the knowledge and resources that have served the church in its ongoing task of interpreting Scripture. These resources include commentaries that aid us in our reading of ancient biblical texts so that we might understand what was communicated to the original audiences (more on this in the Afterword). Along with this, the Spirit helps us recognize and affirm the truths of Scripture (1Cor 2:12-13). As the Christian prayerfully approaches Scripture, the Spirit brings truths from throughout the Bible to the attention of the reader. We affirm the promise given by Jesus in **John 16:13**: “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth.” The dynamic of interpretation is both objective, using tools and methodologies, and also subjective, as the Spirit guides our hearts and minds.

The community of faith plays a role in this process, too, providing a necessary level of accountability for preventing errors that could arise from an overly subjective approach to interpretation. Since the Spirit does not reside in only one person or in one group, the authority to discern and proclaim God’s Word does not reside in one person or one group. Discernment resides in the wider body of Christ. Here are two examples. In the final declaration of the Council at Jerusalem, they explained that consensus was reached as a result of the guidance of the Holy Spirit upon them all: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (Act 15:28). Also, we note Paul’s concern that his gospel proclamation be affirmed by the leadership in Jerusalem (Gal 2:2).

The Spirit also works through the reading and proclamation of Scripture by facilitating the **application** of the interpreted text. In Paul’s summary of the work of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 2, he acknowledges the Spirit’s role in bringing us to an understanding of what God has done for us (v. 12) and enabling us to proclaim it to others “in words taught by the Spirit” (v. 13). Understanding what God has done for us not only aids our proclamation, but also informs our decisions about other

activities befitting a community of the Spirit. A conviction to move in a certain direction or to change a certain behaviour are examples of how the Spirit works in applying Scripture to our lives, both individually and collectively.

Afterword

As we reflect on our understanding of the primacy of Scripture, we can ask: “Is there a place for ongoing revelation, and what role does it play in relation to the Bible?” As a Fellowship that values the continuation of the gifts of the Spirit (see The Church section), we certainly welcome the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in our communities. The Holy Spirit continues to reveal things today, just like God revealed things to individuals in the Bible (Gen 41:25; Luke 2:26). We recognize that the Spirit speaks, for example, through gifts like prophecy and messages in tongues/interpretation (1Cor 12 and 14). Insofar as it has God as its source, ongoing revelation has some authority once it is confirmed. Yet, we rely on the constraints of Scripture for the proper exercise of the gifts. As the SOET affirms, the Bible is the final and absolute authority for belief and conduct. As canon, it is the measuring rod by which we judge the content of verbal *charismata*. Moreover, we affirm that the canon of Scripture closed at the end of the first century when the apostles and their immediate followers died. And so, just like the author of Revelation says about that specific book, in general, no one can add to the words of Scripture (Rev 22:18-19).

With earlier Pentecostals, SOET affirms a “high view of Scripture.” That is, we recognize it is true and trustworthy and authoritative for our lives. This is in contrast with a “low view of Scripture,” which views the Bible as only another human religious book. At the same time, we need to foster a deep view of Scripture to help people recognize not only the past work of God in the inspiration of Scripture, but also the authority of God at work through the Scripture today. We need to foster the expectation that when we read the Bible, we can encounter God’s Word, which is “alive and active” (Heb 4:12). This is vital, as it is God’s Word that shapes our desires and affections so that we would even want to live according to the teachings of Scripture in the first place.

Consistent with this high view of Scripture is the way we interpret the Bible, in other words, our hermeneutic. Within the Pentecostal scholarly community, there has been much discussion about this and how our view of interpretation compares with that of many evangelicals. On the one hand, we share an appreciation for the ongoing significance of what a biblical text meant when it was written by an ancient author to an ancient audience. This type of interpretation prioritizes authorial intent. What was Isaiah or Matthew, for example, intending to communicate? A pursuit of authorial intention is the preoccupation of good study commentaries,

where we find statements like: “The author chose this word because it meant ‘this’” or, “What Paul was trying to say here is ‘that.’” Such interpretation is invaluable. If we want to say we know the Lord’s voice, that is, what the Lord *is* saying to the church, we had better have a good idea about what God has *been* saying. If we are going to preach the Word, let us first hear it in its original context.

That said, like the pursuit of original autographs, the scholarly pursuit of authorial intent is important but, at times, elusive. None of the originals have survived; all the authors of the Bible are dead. None of us should claim to have omniscience about the intents of biblical authors who are now with the Lord. The Spirit, however, remains, the one Jesus said would teach us (John 16:13).

The role of the Holy Spirit in interpretation is emphasized in SOET. In line with a Pentecostal hermeneutic, there may be a broader range of interpretation to a biblical text than what the author intended. Not only can we not be sure of the original intention of the author, but we need not assume that any given author understood the full import of what he was inspired to write. That is, we need not assume that the Holy Spirit is limited in conveying the word of the Lord by the limited understanding of its author nor by our limited understanding of the author’s intent.

The statement that the Spirit enables interpretation as well as application reflects our confidence in the interpretive role of the Holy Spirit. It is no secret among us that such an approach may be abused, intentionally or unintentionally, wherein unbiblical views or non-Spirit-led beliefs are advocated. As said in the commentary above, there are community safeguards. Beyond the safeguard of hearing the entire counsel of God and not just that of specific passages, Pentecostals recognize the presence of the Spirit among a Christian community, not just in a particular leader or prophet.

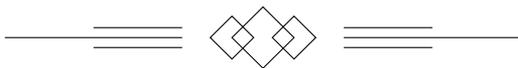
Yet, we are also very aware that there are moments when the Spirit brings a text to life for us in meaning and application—bringing life and direction that the original author never imagined. But that is unsurprising, for the Spirit who first inspired the text is with us still.

Creation

God created and sustains the heavens and the earth,¹ which display God's glory. Formed in the image of God, both male and female, humankind is entrusted with the care of God's creation as faithful stewards.² As a result of human rebellion, sin and death entered the world, distorting the image of God and all of God's good creation.³

Angels were created as supernatural beings to worship and serve God.⁴ Along with Satan, some angels chose to rebel and oppose the purposes of God.⁵ Christ gives believers victory over Satan and these demons.⁶

1. Gen 1:1; Col 1:15–17
2. Gen 1:26–27
3. Rom 5:12; 8:20–22
4. Heb 1:14; Psa 103:20
5. Rev 12:7–9
6. Acts 10:38; Eph 6:10–13



Context

The SOET's paragraph on creation is, from one angle, somewhat revolutionary. This is simply because there is now a distinct section of teaching on creation. While earlier iterations of the PAOC's Statement included sections on humanity and angels, the 1980 SOFET included only one reference to the whole of God's creation, which appeared in the section called The End of Time. In contrast, both Scripture (Gen 1:1) and historic Christian confessions (e.g., the *Apostles' Creed*) open with an affirmation of God's work of creation. The present SOET gives increased emphasis to creation. The new material—that is, statements not previously found under sections on humanity, angels, or sin—is limited but essential: God is the Creator and Sustainer of all creation; we have been entrusted with the care of God's creation, and all of God's creation has been distorted by sin and death.

This repeated focus on the whole creation, and the location of previously separate confessions about humanity, angels, and sin under Creation, puts more emphasis on God as Creator and on his work with all of creation, shifting SOET from an anthropocentric to a more broadly creational perspective. This move was, in part, an attempt to speak to our current context with its concerns for creation care. The creational perspective is also reflected in other sections of the SOET. Specifically, the section on the Triune God references the Spirit's life-giving work in creation, and the Restoration section points toward all of creation being restored as it is liberated from the curse. This latter affirmation is anticipated in the discussion about liberation from sin and darkness in the Salvation section.

From another angle, of course, the SOET's section on Creation introduces no new belief. Though not always included in previous Statements, consideration of the universe as God's good creation has been an ingredient in Pentecostalism from the beginning. Early Pentecostals understood the beauty of creation and its order as evidencing the Creator. They understood that humans were created by God,

carrying the very image of God. They understood that this immensely beautiful world was spoiled by human sin, affecting humans and the rest of creation.

Early Pentecostals also recognized the spiritual realities of creation. They were keenly aware of good and evil in the world—of angels and demons. Other Christian traditions may not address angelology and demonology to such an extent as Pentecostals, but acknowledging the supernatural realm makes sense for us. Pentecostal spirituality accepts the biblical worldview which recognizes the direct involvement of powers and principalities on earth. While recognizing the presence of evil and demons in the world, Pentecostals have always proclaimed that, through Christ, believers have victory over and liberty from demons. This is, in part, because demons are part of creation and, therefore, ultimately subject to God who is the Creator and Restorer of all things. To restore all things, God will one day defeat sin and death—capitalized as “Sin and Death” in the commentary in the Restoration section to indicate how the New Testament, especially Paul, sees sin and death as cosmic powers to be defeated.

The Creation section in the SOET is both a timeless and a timely statement. It is essential for establishing the dignity of all humanity, the goodness of creation, the reality of evil and brokenness in our world, and the hope of the restoration of all things. Once again, it is the framing of these longstanding affirmations by a fuller sense of God’s work in the whole of creation that is novel in our new *Statement of Essential Truths*.

Commentary

God created and sustains the heavens and the earth, which display God’s glory

The statement on creation begins by highlighting that **God created and sustains the heavens and the earth**. The language here intentionally echoes the opening verse of the Bible (**Gen 1:1**), with the additional truth that God not only created the heavens and the earth, but sustains all of creation as well. The statement affirms that it was God and God alone who created the heavens and the earth. It is not any God, but the triune God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. For in Christ “all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (**Col 1:15–17**). The Spirit of God also had a role in creation, hovering over the face of the waters when the earth was dark, formless, and empty, bringing order out of chaos (Gen 1:2), and giving life and breath to all living creatures (Gen 2:7; Psa 104:27-30). The opening phrase, then, affirms that the triune God was the Creator; in the

Afterword we address theories about how God created and the role of science in our understanding.

In the beginning, God created everything—the heavens and the earth—out of nothing. This includes time and space. The eternal God was involved in such a dateless act. The act of creation is thus beyond historical assessment. The legitimacy of a historical event depends on whether there is at least some evidence that it occurred. Historians resort to various sources like archaeology to provide evidence. But creation—in the beginning and before time—cannot be so authenticated; its legitimacy depends not on such evidence but on faith (Heb 11:3). We cannot compare this creative act with any other theories about the origin of the world, including evolutionary theory. God’s creative act belongs to an entirely different paradigm.

Because God created the heavens and the earth, they **display God’s glory**: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge” (Psa 19:1-2). The distinction between special and general revelation has already been noted in the section on the Bible. Under this section on Creation, we affirm that through “general” or “natural” revelation (i.e., the created universe), God displays his glory. It is described as “general” revelation because it is amenable to all; everyone can see and hear it (Rom 1:19-21). God, the architect of all creation, has placed his attributes on display for us. This is not to say that creation itself is divine but only that God makes creation to reflect aspects of his glory. The scope of such revelation extends from the beauty and majesty of the heavens to the intricate design of DNA. The rightful response to witnessing God’s glory on display in these ways is one of awe and worship.

Formed in the image of God, both male and female, humankind is entrusted with the care of God’s creation as faithful stewards

In all of God’s creation, there is a special place for **humankind**. After creating the earth and filling it with plants and animals, God desired to make humans in his likeness so that they would have authority and responsibility over the rest of creation (**Gen 1:26-27**). This truth does not apply only to a select group, but it is true of all humankind, **both male and female**. This is because all humankind has been **formed in the image of God**. There is no hierarchy here. Every person has dignity because they are image-bearers of their Creator. Moreover, just as God is relational, we are created in God’s image as relational beings, both male and female.

To be clear, being God’s image-bearer is not a mere status, but also a divine calling, an identity that comes with a role to fulfil within creation. Humankind,

bearing the image of God, **is entrusted with the care of God's creation (Gen 1:26–27)**. Our role as image-bearers is not one of arrogant domination of the earth, exploiting it for our own gain. Caring for God's creation means that we are called to be **faithful stewards**. We do not rule over the earth on our own authority or for our own ends. Instead, we care for it as representatives of our sovereign Creator, whose name is majestic in all the earth (Psa 8).

As a result of human rebellion, sin and death entered the world, distorting the image of God and all of God's good creation

While we can recognize the beauty of heaven and earth, which display God's glory, it is just as obvious that our world is plagued by **sin and death**. It was **as a result of human rebellion** that **sin and death entered the world**. The first humans, apparently dissatisfied with their role as image-bearers of God, wanted to be like God themselves, so they rebelled against God's design. It was through this act that "sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned" (**Rom 5:12**). Sin and death enter the world, **distorting the image of God**. In a sense, human rebellion is, in itself, an act of distorting the image of God.

The consequences of human rebellion, however, are not just for humankind, but **all of God's good creation** feels the effects. On the one hand, everything that God made was good in its original state. God declared on each day of creation that it was good (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). He climaxed his pronouncements by declaring that all that he had created, including the first humans, was "very good" (Gen 1:31). On the other hand, as a result of sin, "creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time" (**Rom 8:20–22**). Humankind was **entrusted with the care of God's creation** but is instead responsible for its frustration.

At this point, we need to stay clear of notions that tend to degrade the earth or ignore our present life in it. On the one hand, one could be enthralled with anticipation of the Rapture. This anticipation, combined with the belief that the earth will be replaced by a new earth (2Pet 3:10), tends to lessen one's sense of responsibility for caring for today's earth. On the other hand, one could look at the increasing climate catastrophes, as well as economic and political calamities, and concede that the world is just getting worse. This could lead one to believe that there is no hope for creation, or for things to change. However, the Bible does not

call us to escapism or to despair: we still have a responsibility to God's creation, and there is still hope.

For example, in his letter to the Judeans who were in exile in Babylon (Jer 29:4–11), Jeremiah told them to avoid both isolation and assimilation, maintaining their spiritual identity and values while becoming good citizens of the community (Jer 29:4–5, 7). Furthermore, they were to reject the deceptive hope of false teachers who offered quick and easy solutions, and instead embrace the hope of God's promise of a brighter future (Jer 29:10–11). We, too, are called to be good citizens in the community and to “seek the peace and prosperity of the city” (Jer 29:7), as we serve the Lord in this world, caring for his creation. We, too, look to the future with a sure hope and deep conviction that God will keep his promises, and that God **will liberate creation from the curse** (see the Restoration section).

Angels were created as supernatural beings to worship and serve God

The second paragraph in this section on Creation turns to the supernatural. Pentecostals have always believed that there is more to creation than meets the eye. The SOET asserts that **angels were created as supernatural beings**. Angels are “spirits” (**Heb 1:13–14**) that do not have “flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39), even though they occasionally appear to people (2Kgs 6:17; Luke 2:13; Heb 13:2). While they are supernatural, they are a part of God's creation (Neh 9:6; Col 1:16). Therefore angels, including fallen angels, are limited and finite beings. They are not eternal, all-powerful, or omnipresent—only God is. And so, we do not worship angels (Col 2:18), just as we do not worship anything else that God has created.

Just as humankind was formed in God's image and given responsibility over God's creation, God created angels **to worship and serve God**. This truth spans both the Old and New Testaments. The writer of Psalm 103 ends with a series of invitations to praise the Lord, including: “Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word” (**Psa 103:20**). The writer of Hebrews asks, rhetorically, “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” (**Heb 1:14**). These supernatural beings continue to worship and serve God as seen in John's heavenly vision (Rev 5:11–14).

Along with Satan, some angels chose to rebel and oppose the purposes of God

However, **along with Satan, some angels chose to rebel and oppose the purposes of God**. This great heavenly rebellion is written about in **Revelation 12:7–9**: “Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient

serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth and his angels with him.”

Christ gives believers victory over Satan and these demons

It is the fall of these angels that introduced a demonic factor into the world, which attempts to destroy the divine image in humans, affecting human spirituality. Again, does that mean there is no hope? No, for **Christ gives believers victory over Satan and these demons**. It is not by our own power or ability that we gain victory. Peter reflects on how Jesus was able to go around “doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil,” pointing out that it was because God anointed Jesus “with the Holy Spirit and power” (**Acts 10:38**). As believers we are instructed to put on the full armor of God so that we may be able to stand our ground when the day of evil comes (**Eph 6:10–13**). Again, it is not that we gain victory by ourselves. It is Christ who, through the indwelling Spirit, empowers and enables us. He gives us confidence and hope, empowering us to be an avenue of hope for a world in utter desperation.

This victory is assured, and therefore, we have hope. Even after sin and death entered the world, distorting the image of God and all of God’s good creation, God did not give up on humanity or the earth. He continues to sustain his creation, and there is liberation from sin and darkness through Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross (see the Salvation section). In an age that is bereft of hope, we should not dismiss creation as irredeemably evil. Instead, we should offer the Good News of Christ’s victory, and the hope we have of full restoration of humankind and creation. We should recognize the image of God in all humankind, both male and female, and remember that God has entrusted us with the care of God’s creation. God is still calling us to partner with him as faithful stewards. Such a partnership involves taking care of both humanity and the world.

Afterword

The SOET, like the PAOC’s previous statements of belief, does not present a position on *how* God created. There is no mention of any specific system of creation—no young earth or old earth creation, no theistic evolution or intelligent design, and no discussion of the gap-theory or literary framework theory. Taking into consideration the scientific developments in the last one hundred years, as well as developments in biblical interpretation, the present SOET continues to leave the door open to various understandings of God’s act of creation. Instead of articulating a particular system, the statement simply affirms the Bible’s teaching that God created and sustains all that exists. But we may still have questions about the relationship between science and the Bible.

For some, science is seen as an enemy—a secular field that has eroded trust in the Scriptures and in God as Creator. But as we have seen, we can discover God’s glory, not only through “special” revelation, but through “general” or “natural” revelation. We can stand in awe of God’s work when we admire detailed images of galaxies far away, or the intricate structure of DNA. Studying these things may, at times, challenge our traditional interpretations of Scripture, but they can also lead us to deeper worship of the God who created and sustains it all.

Still, science has its limits. Though it can tell us how things work, we need to evaluate the validity of scientific explanations about the origins of creation. We also need to be clear that science is not equipped to answer metaphysical questions of our existence—questions about why we exist and the meaning of life. For that we need theological answers, so we turn to the biblical accounts for insight on why the world exists—why *we* exist. Furthermore, while science can teach us many things, there will always be mysteries that stem from our human limitations. God makes this abundantly clear to Job through a series of rhetorical questions, beginning with “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?” (Job 38–39). God’s full majesty is beyond our comprehension.

While some are hesitant about the claims of science, others are hesitant when it comes to the supernatural. They love science and see the world only through naturalistic phenomena that can be studied scientifically and explained rationally. Some may even be embarrassed by talk of angels and demons. But, as Pentecostals, we know that there is more to the universe than the natural realm. We believe that the same God who created and sustains our physical world also created and sustains a supernatural realm. Just as we are God’s image-bearers here on earth, there are angels tasked with serving God in the supernatural realm.

While we may view the natural and the supernatural as separate realms, the ancient Israelites and the New Testament believers would have seen the natural world as full of divine activity. This is an important reminder as we consider all of God’s creation. We are dust formed in the image of God. But we are also the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. And we have the divine invitation and responsibility of caring for the work of God’s hands (Psa 8).

Salvation

Salvation is available to all people by the loving, redemptive act of the triune God.¹ Through obedience to the Father,² Christ gave himself as a ransom.³ Christ, who had no sin, became sin for us offering himself and shedding his blood on the cross so that in him we might become right with God.⁴ The life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ⁵ provide the way of salvation for those who, by God's grace, repent from their sin and confess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.⁶

Salvation means to receive the Spirit, to be forgiven, reconciled with God and others, born again, and liberated from sin and darkness, transferring the believer into God's kingdom.⁷ Our experience of liberation includes healing — whether spiritual, physical, emotional, or mental — as a foretaste of our future, complete restoration.⁸ Those who remain in Christ and do not turn away are assured of salvation on judgement day by the indwelling Holy Spirit,⁹ who sanctifies and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.¹⁰

1. John 3:16; Gal 4:4-7; Titus 2:11-14

2. John 8:28-29; Phil 2:8; Heb 5:8

3. Mark 10:45; 1Tim 2:6

4. 2Cor 5:21; 1John 3:16

5. Rom 4:22-25; 5:19; 6:4-5; Heb 7:24-28

6. Rom 10:9; 1John 1:9; Acts 3:19; 4:12

7. Eph 2:13-16; Col 1:13-14, 19-20; 1Pet 1:3

8. Isa 53:4-5; 1Pet 2:24; Psa 147:3;

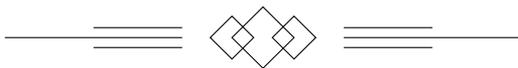
Rom 8:23

9. Eph 1:13-14; 1John 4:13; Heb 6:5-6;

Phil 3:12-14

10. 1Thess 4:3-4; 1Cor 6:11; Rom 12:1-2;

1Pet 1:2



Context

Since Pentecostalism's inception, our drive to share the truth of God with all cultures (Matt 28:19-20) has been fuelled by the Good News that "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). As Pentecostals, we passionately proclaim that salvation is something universally available to all. In Christ, God made a way to resolve the universal predicament—that human sin and rebellion have subjected humanity, and all of creation, to death and the power of Satan, alienating us from God (Col 1:21-22).

Early on, Jesus' death—"even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8)—became the centrepiece of the salvation story. All four Gospels dedicate substantial space to the passion (suffering and death) narratives, positioning the cross and the resurrection as the climax of the Jesus story. At the same time, the Bible makes clear that Christ's work on the cross is not a primitive act of appeasement but a glorious act of love by the triune God (see the Triune God section). God the Father lovingly initiates a way of salvation from his judgement on sin; God the Son voluntarily destroys the power of sin, bearing our sins to the grave in our place; God the Holy Spirit raises Christ from the dead and restores him to glory.

Although the cross is the centrepiece in salvation's story, the Bible and Christian history reveal a varied tapestry of what Christ's crucifixion means. Just as with the previous SOFET, the present SOET does not privilege a particular atonement theory. Instead, the SOET uses biblical language to communicate much of the Bible's rich variety of atonement imagery. Among other images, in his crucifixion, Christ serves as our *model*, as his followers are told to take up their cross (Luke 9:23); our *ransom*, as we are bought at a price (1Cor 6:20); our *liberator*, as Christ disarms all spiritual powers (Col 2:15) and destroys the devil's work (1John 3:8); and our *substitute*, as Christ bore our sins in his body on the cross (1Pet 2:24).

As Pentecostals, we acknowledge that salvation is a divine action that requires human responsibility. Salvation belongs fully to our God (Rev 7:10). It is a gift that no human can earn or achieve. But it does demand human repentance and response. Responding to salvation gives believers, so called in this world, a foretaste of realities that have not yet fully materialized. Salvation is past (atonement), present, and future. Through salvation, believers now experience spiritual empowerment for witness and holy living, healings and the miraculous, and assurance of their hoped-for eternal life. They know abundant life now, and look forward to the resurrection of their bodies in the promised world to come.

Commentary

Salvation is available to all people

The message of **salvation** is a message of God's unlimited love for **all people**. God loves "the world"—that is, the whole of his broken, sinful creation that has rebelled against him (**John 3:16**)—and he sent his son to save it (**Gal 4:4-7**; John 3:17). Jesus Christ "died for all" people (2Cor 5:15), God graciously "offers salvation to all people" (**Titus 2:11**), and he expresses his desire for "all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1Tim 2:4).

by the loving, redemptive act of the triune God

Although the concept of salvation typically draws our attention to Jesus, salvation is a **loving, redemptive act of the triune God**. In love, God the Father initiates salvation by sending the Son to bring life to the world and rescue it (**John 3:16**). In humility, God takes on "flesh" (John 1:14) in the person of Jesus Christ so that it is God reconciling the world to himself in Christ (2Cor 5:19). Knowing he must die (Matt 16:21), Jesus is not a helpless victim but a voluntary servant. In the power of the Spirit (Heb 9:14), he battles the forces of evil and obeys his Father by freely embracing death, from which the Holy Spirit raises and restores him to glory (**Phil 2:8-11**).

Through obedience to the Father

Jesus acknowledges that in going to the cross and being "lifted up," he obediently submits to the authority of his **Father (John 8:28-29)**. Jesus "learned obedience" (**Heb 5:8**) and was "obedient to death" (**Phil 2:8**). The concept of Christ's **obedience** connects with the Triune God and Creation sections of the SOET. As a divine person, Jesus the Son has the same essence as the Father and the Spirit but is *not* the Father nor the Spirit. He is fully human. As a human, his obedience is a perfect embodiment of God's originally intended good creation.

Christ gave himself as a ransom

That Christ **gave himself** reinforces his active agency in the act of salvation—he was not a passive victim but a voluntary participant. He laid down his life on his “own accord” (John 10:17-18). That he gave himself as a **ransom** alerts us to the presence of other spiritual forces. For whom was Jesus ransomed and from what? Biblical “ransom” language comes from the freeing of slaves. It reflects the biblical perspective that humanity has been enslaved by and must be freed from satanic powers—“the god of this age,” the devil, death, and sin (2Cor 4:4; Rom 6:14, 16, 18). Christ offers himself as a ransom for all people (**1Tim 2:6**; cf. **Mark 10:45**). Those whom Christ ransoms are not set free to serve themselves, however. Instead, Christ’s ransom is a transfer of ownership. Believers cease to be slaves to sin and become instead “slaves of God” (Rom 6:22). As Paul tells believers, “You are not your own; you were bought at a price,” (1Cor 6:19-20). Additionally, Christ’s ransom extends beyond people and applies to all creation, trembling in anticipation of its liberation (Rom 8:20-21). This liberation will ultimately take place at the Restoration, when all satanic powers are finally put in their place (1Cor 15:24-26).

Christ, who had no sin, became sin for us

Christ’s sinlessness is essential to his work on the cross, for only as “unblemished” could he bear away the sins of others (Heb 9:14; Lev 22:19). Again, showing his full humanity, Jesus was “tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin” (Heb 4:15). God made him **who had no sin** to be **sin for us**, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (**2Cor 5:21**). He does this for us—both on our behalf and in our place. He is our substitute and representative before God, exchanging his righteousness for our sin, exchanging his life for ours (**1John 3:16**). We are delivered from “the dominion of darkness” and brought into the kingdom of the Son “in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (**Col 1:13-14**). As Isaiah proclaims, “he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (**Isa 53:5-6**).

offering himself and shedding his blood on the cross so that in him we might become right with God

In **offering himself**, Christ serves as both our “great high priest” (Heb 4:14), who offers the sacrifice, and as the sacrifice itself, which is for all time (Heb 10:10-14). Christ becomes the “sin offering” that makes atonement and brings forgiveness

(Lev 4:23-26). He is the sacrifice of atonement, through the **shedding of his blood on the cross** (Rom 3:25; Heb 2:17). Christ's blood establishes a "new covenant" (Luke 22:20; Heb 9:14-15) and secures an eternal redemption (Heb 9:12)—the price for God's church (Acts 20:28) and for all believers (1Pet 1:18-19). God makes peace through Christ's blood, shed on the cross (**Col 1:19-20**), making us **right with God** (Rom 5:1, 9). We participate in this by being **in him**. Our salvation cannot be isolated from our union with Christ, for believers are united with him in a death like his and anticipate being united with him in a resurrection like his (**Rom 6:5**; 1Cor 15:22).

The life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ provide the way of salvation

The life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ tell the story of **the way of salvation** for humanity and all creation. This story shapes the Gospels and appears throughout the New Testament as it preserves early Christian teachings about Jesus (e.g., Phil 2:5-11). Jesus' **life** was one of obedience through which "the many will be made righteous" (**Rom 5:19**). Through disobedience, both Adam and Israel failed to embody what God intended when he created humanity. But, where they failed, Jesus, as "the last Adam" (1Cor 15:45), succeeded through obedience—by living a sinless life of Spirit-enabled faithfulness to God and providing salvation for believers who become united with him. Additionally, Jesus' life models, for believers, the moral and spiritual life they are to live out as God's image is reformed in them. Paul says, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1Cor 11:1), and Jesus concludes his great commission with the command to make disciples by "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt 28:20).

As noted above, Jesus' **death** on a cross is a self-giving act of love that brings atonement, puts to death the authority of sin and satanic powers, and removes the curse resulting from human rebellion (Gal 3:13).

Jesus' **resurrection** and **ascension** are also integral to our salvation. If "Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1Cor 15:17) because he "was raised to life for our justification" (**Rom 4:25**). Raised by the Spirit (Rom 8:11), Jesus overcomes the power of death. He is the "firstfruits" and sure hope of the believer's own bodily resurrection in the future restoration (1Cor 15:20-23). Jesus' ascension to God's right hand establishes Jesus' kingly authority to restore God's good creation, subordinating all powers and authorities to God (Eph 1:19-23; Col 2:15). As the ascended one, Jesus "lives forever" and "has a permanent priesthood" so that "he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (**Heb 7:24-25**). In addition, from the right hand of God, Jesus sends believers the Spirit to give them new life and

justify them (**1Cor 6:11**; Tit 3:5-7). He empowers believers through Spirit baptism to proclaim God's kingdom with speech and action (Acts 2:32-33).

Significantly, Jesus self-identifies as **the way of salvation**, not *a way* (John 14:6). Similarly, Peter affirms that “there is no other name under heaven ... by which we must be saved” (**Acts 4:12**). Such exclusivist language does not sit well in our contemporary, pluralistic world. But both Jesus' Roman world and Israel's earlier Mesopotamian world were also pluralistic. Both worlds were suspicious of and hostile to Jewish and Christian exclusive worship of only one deity. In the Old Testament, Israel was founded on the confession that there is only one true God: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deut 6:4). Above all, the Old Testament prophets indict Israel for violating this central conviction (e.g., Jer 10:1-16). The New Testament reinforces confessing only one God, “For there is One God and mediator” (1Tim 2:5; cf. 1Cor 8:4). The New Testament describes Jesus as “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation” (**Col 1:15**) and “the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word” (Heb 1:3). Therefore, since Jesus is truly God, exclusivist claims to salvation make abundant sense.

for those who, by God's grace, repent from their sin and confess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord

We can only be saved because of **God's grace**. Grace refers to the fact that God's love toward us is unmerited—we do not deserve how God forgives us, transforms us (1Cor 15:10), and empowers us (Acts 4:33). So, we can say that God's grace is expressed “in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:7). When we are made alive with Christ, it is by grace that we are saved (Eph 2:4-5). Overall, our salvation is a “gift of God” and not the result of our own efforts. Instead, we are saved by grace, through faith (Eph 2:8-9; Acts 15:11). Even our faith is a result of God's grace because it is the Spirit who enables one to confess that “Jesus is Lord” (1Cor 12:3).

To receive the free gift of salvation, people are called to confess their sins (**1John 1:9**) and to **repent** (Acts 2:39). Repentance requires that people turn **from their sin**, and then “turn to God” so that their “sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (**Acts 3:19**). People are also called to **confess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord** (**Rom 10:9**; Gal 2:16). When we place our faith in Jesus, it means that we trust him for our salvation and trust him enough to follow his ways and teaching (Matt 16:24). Confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord means a person recognizes Jesus is in very nature God (Phil 2:6, 11), and that he is the one they will serve and obey. Importantly, the activities of repentance and confession do not merit salvation but are the acts that accompany faith. In other words, if

we truly place our faith in God, we will turn to him and turn away from our sin in repentance (Acts 20:21).

Salvation means to receive the Spirit

Believers **receive the** promise of the **Spirit** by faith at the moment of their **salvation** (Gal 3:2, 14, 4:6; **1John 4:13**). The initial indwelling of the Spirit is distinct from Spirit baptism, a secondary work of the Spirit in the life of the believer (see the Spirit Baptism section). The Spirit's initial indwelling testifies to believers that they are children of God (Rom 8:15-16) and seals them with a guarantee of their future redemption (**Eph 1:13-14**). The Spirit works continuously and dynamically to save believers by justifying, renewing, and sanctifying them for holy living and witness until their ultimate redemption (**1Cor 6:11**; Tit 3:5-7; 2Thess 2:13; 2Pet 1:3).

to be forgiven, reconciled with God and others, born again, and liberated from sin and darkness, transferring the believer into God's kingdom

To **be forgiven** means being released from the penalty of having rebelled against God's revealed moral order—something all humans have done (Rom 3:23), for “there is no one who does good, not even one” (Psa 14:3). Reconciliation restores or makes right the relationships that became ruptured through human rebellion. We are **reconciled** vertically, restoring the relationship between humans and **God**, and horizontally, restoring our relationships with **others** (**Eph 2:13-16**). Significantly, God's love for his creation was not conditioned on his having first been reconciled to it. Reconciliation is God's initiative (2Cor 5:18-19), motivated by his love. “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8).

To be **born again** acknowledges that the reconciled relationship with God, through Christ, positions believers as renewed humanity. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2Cor 5:17). Being born again locates the source of the believer's new life as from above. It is generated by the triune God, through the Spirit, by belief in the Son who is sent by the Father (**John 3:3-6, 16**). To be **liberated from sin and darkness** speaks to more than the believer's new position or status before God. In the Old Testament, salvation typically refers to rescue from difficulties, usually from oppressive enemies. Mostly, it emphasizes depending on God rather than humans for rescue. In the New Testament, salvation also refers to the believer's rescue from oppressive enemies—specifically, from supernatural, satanic powers. Believers are rescued, **transferring** them from an oppressive, satanic kingdom **into God's kingdom**. Believers experience this transfer as a “living hope” (**1Pet 1:3**) of the

future restoration, when all of God’s enemies will be finally conquered and God’s reign will be complete (1Cor 15:25-28). Believers experience this foretaste now as the church—through their shared experience of God’s transforming presence, exercising gifts of the Spirit, and empowerment to witness for God’s kingdom through Spirit baptism.

Our experience of liberation includes healing — whether spiritual, physical, emotional, or mental — as a foretaste of our future, complete restoration

The word translated “to save” (*sozo*) communicates “restoration” or “wholeness,” extending to **spiritual, physical, emotional, mental**, and social realms. In the New Testament, *sozo* is sometimes translated as “to heal” or “to make whole,” as in Matthew 9:21-22, Mark 5:23, and John 11:12. In Acts 4:9, Peter speaks of having “saved” or “healed” a lame man by enabling him to walk. The word is sometimes translated “healed” or “cured,” but the same word is used in **Acts 4:12** to proclaim that “there is no other name by which we must be saved.”

In Mark 4:35-5:43, Jesus advanced God’s kingdom by exercising authority over the chaotic elements in creation, demonic forces, bodily sickness, and death. Christ’s ultimate victory over evil came through his wounds on the cross (Col 2:15), “so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (Heb 2:14-15). Such a victory identifies Jesus with the “suffering servant” of Isaiah, who “took up our pain and bore our suffering ... he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities ... [so that] by his wounds we are healed” (**Isa 53:4-5; Psa 147:3; Matt 8:14-17; 1Pet 2:24**). Today, believers experience only a **foretaste** of that complete, whole salvation. For salvation awaits a **future, complete restoration** with the final defeat of Death (1Cor 15:26) and “the redemption of our bodies” (**Rom 8:23**). Meanwhile, although believers remain subject to physical death and attack, they are not like those without hope (1Thess 4:13) but patiently endure suffering for the sake of the gospel (2Tim 4:5), experiencing otherworldly healings and miracles in their midst (John 14:12; Gal 3:5).

Those who remain in Christ and do not turn away are assured of salvation on judgement day

Salvation is guaranteed as a future inheritance (**Eph 1:13-14**) for **those who remain in Christ**. On the one hand, the condition of “remaining” implies believers have some option to **turn away**, as the commands to persevere (Matt 10:22; Rom 11:20-22; **Phil 3:12-14**) and some of the warning passages of the Bible suggest (e.g., **Heb 6:5-6; 10:39; Matt 10:33; 2Tim 2:12**). On the other hand, Christ is able to keep

believers from stumbling (Jude 1:24) and the Holy Spirit has “sealed” believers (**Eph 1:13-14**; 1John 4:13) for their future inheritance. Jesus expresses the tension in John 15:1-8. Identifying himself as a “vine,” Jesus warns believers that his Father will throw away unfruitful branches and “prune” fruitful ones (John 15:1-2), while assuring believers they are safely “pruned” already (John 15:3, using a wordplay in Greek between “clean” and “prune”). He then instructs them to “remain” in him as a condition of remaining fruitful, repeating the warning that unfruitful branches will be cut off (15:4-8). In other words, believers are safely **assured of salvation** so long as they remain in Christ.

Salvation has past, present, and future components. **Judgement day** is a reminder that salvation awaits its full consummation for the restoration of all things, where believers are assured that, finally, they *shall be saved* (Rom 5:9-10; 14:10). After initially professing faith in Christ, believers are assured that they *have been saved* (Eph 2:5, 8; 1John 5:13). Through the church and Spirit baptism, believers experience the transforming presence of God, the Spirit’s gifts to minister to others in love, and the Spirit’s empowerment to witness and for Christ-like living and service—all of which testifies that believers *are being saved* (2Cor 5:9-10).

by the indwelling Holy Spirit, who sanctifies and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service

The **indwelling** of the **Holy Spirit** washes and **sanctifies** believers (**1Cor 6:11**). Sanctification means that the Spirit makes believers holy as the Spirit renews their minds (**Rom 12:1-2**) and **empowers believers for Christ-like living and service** (**1Pet 1:2**). The Spirit produces the character of Christ in believers, so they will abandon their sinful desires and, instead, witness and serve with self-sacrificial love (Gal 5:16-25). Sanctification is not instantaneous. Believers are commanded to “learn” to conduct themselves with holiness (**1Thess 4:3-4**), continuously offering themselves as “a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” (**Rom 12:1**).

Afterword

Pentecostalism’s missional focus makes the message of salvation central to our practice as well as to our beliefs. Unlike Christian traditions that see salvation simply as an individual’s ultimate spiritual standing before God, as Pentecostals, we have always included this world’s experiences in our expectations of the Good News being lived out in our lives in a manner God has prepared for us (Eph 2:10). These might include physical healings, social and racial reconciliations, and sanctifying power for holy living. We also share the commonplace New Testament perspective that salvation includes liberation from supernatural powers. Salvation

is not just something we learn about—a new status or position before God. Salvation is something we experience as God's Spirit frees us to new ways of living and anticipation of God's kingdom to come.

Pentecostals continue to grow in the ability to formulate our theological positions while honouring the historic creeds and the diversity of evangelical convictions. We understand salvation involves multi-faceted dimensions. At the core, it is out of *love* that God initiated the redemption of his lost creation by sending his Son—who voluntarily entered the arena of hostile forces to liberate creation. The whole of God is involved in the whole process. Though our sin had separated us from a holy God, Jesus Christ took upon himself the sin, judgement and death we deserved. Out of love, Jesus gave himself up for a new humanity, the church that his loving, sacrificial death and resurrection initiated (**Eph 2:13-16**; 5:25). As we grow in our comprehension of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, we will fully grasp what it means to be disciplined followers of Jesus—lovers of God and others. Our salvation will be tangibly demonstrated.

As part of a pluralistic and multicultural world, we may wrestle uncomfortably with the exclusivist claims that Jesus is *the* way to salvation. To avoid offence, we might entertain the real temptation to promote Jesus as *a* way of salvation. But, as people committed to a high view of the Bible, this does violence to our understanding of the exclusive nature of Israel's God and Christ. Israel covenanted to maintain exclusive, Yahweh-only worship, as the first three of the Ten Commandments exemplify. This distinguished Israel from their polytheistic neighbours, and Israel's failure to maintain that exclusivity was frequently the reason Israel's prophets condemned them. The New Testament similarly calls people to exclusive worship of Israel's God, now revealed through Jesus the Messiah. Even Paul, who allowed Gentiles coming to Jesus to maintain many of their cultural practices, maintained that abandoning their gods was non-negotiable (1Thess 1:9-10). Faith in Jesus is God's only revealed way of salvation for all peoples, Jews and Gentiles alike.

As a Canadian Fellowship, we cannot help but be touched by the importance of reconciliation today when we see the hurt caused to our Indigenous sisters and brothers. We are reminded that reconciliation is a component of salvation that is not only vertical—between believers and God—but also horizontal—between believers and one another. This concept coheres with salvation's address to our common humanity and condition of sinfulness (Rom 3:9), and to the persistent call to forgive one another, to love one another, and to build up Christ's body in unity. Reconciliation is salvation being practised in the community of God.

Finally, as Pentecostals we sometimes wrestle with the assurance of our personal salvation. How many of us have returned multiple times to the altar to

really get saved this time? On the one hand, it is important to acknowledge that there truly is a judgement coming for what we do as believers (2Cor 5:10). On the other hand, the apostolic witness also comforts wavering believers with the assurance of their eternal life (1John 5:10-13; cf. 4:13). The past, present, and future aspects of salvation offer believers the assurance that as they remain in Christ—not behaving perfectly but seeking to walk in his ways and relying on him exclusively for salvation—we can be certain of our ultimate salvation in the end. It is a guarantee.

Spirit Baptism

On the Day of Pentecost, Jesus poured out the promised Holy Spirit on the church.¹ As his return draws near, Jesus continues to baptize in the Holy Spirit those who are believers.² This empowers them to continue his work of proclaiming with speech and action the good news of the arrival and coming of the kingdom of God.³ This experience is available for everyone, male and female, of every age, status,⁴ and ethnicity.⁵

The sign of speaking in tongues indicates that believers have been baptized with the Holy Spirit⁶ and signifies the nature of Spirit baptism as empowering our communication, to be his witnesses with speech and action as we continue to pray in the Spirit.⁷

1. Luke 24:49; Acts 2:33

2. Acts 2:38-39; 8:14-17; 19:1-6

3. Luke 4:18-19, 43; Acts 1:8

4. Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:17-18, 39

5. Acts 10:45-46

6. Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6

7. Acts 1:8; 2:11-43; 4:31; Rom 15:19; 1Cor 14:15



Context

The term **Spirit baptism** replaces the traditional phrase “baptism in/with the Holy Spirit.” No change of meaning is intended; rather, it is an attempt to refresh the wording by using a term that has become popular. The phrase “Spirit baptism” pairs well with “water baptism,” an association that we owe to John the Baptist, who used the term “baptism” to refer to both his baptism with water for repentance and Jesus’ baptism with the Holy Spirit. As it has become common to refer to “water baptism” instead of “baptism in water,” we are promoting the same for Spirit baptism. Comparing these baptisms evokes rich imagery of an immersion in the Spirit that befits an encounter with the Spirit of God.

No theological idea has had a greater influence on the formation of the Pentecostal ethos than the belief in the restoration to the church of Spirit baptism. Although other Christian traditions have incorporated baptism in the Holy Spirit in various ways into their beliefs and practices, it is the combination of Spirit baptism with tongues that characterizes the uniqueness of the Pentecostal approach, along with the eschatological context (an awareness of living in the last days) in which the combination is made. The restoration of Spirit baptism among Pentecostals in the early 1900s indicated to them that the end times had arrived. They were convinced that the last period of human history was upon them, and that Spirit baptism was power to respond to the urgency of the times with effective witness to the world. Pentecostalism, then, comprises a missional spirituality that expresses itself collectively as a revival movement.

Whereas the previous SOFET focused on a variety of aspects of Spirit baptism, this version brings us back to the Lukan emphasis of Spirit baptism as empowerment for witness—the biblical foundation for the early missional impulse of Pentecostals. Other elements of Spirit baptism will be noted in the Afterword.

Structure. More than in any other section of SOET, the structure follows the

adage that “form follows function.” It is appropriate, then, to say a few words about it. To begin, Spirit baptism merits its own section in SOET because of its particular importance within the tradition. Second, its placement in a separate section following the Salvation section reflects the traditional Pentecostal notion that Spirit baptism is an encounter with the Spirit distinct from salvation—usually separated from it in time. Although, there is nothing to prevent the experiences of salvation and Spirit baptism from occurring within a short period.

Both the distinction in SOET between salvation and Spirit baptism, and the order in which they are treated, reflect the structure found in the two-volume narrative of Luke-Acts. In Lukan studies, it is now common to interpret the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts together, with Luke’s gospel informing the interpretation of Acts. The patterns that encompass the two volumes reinforce continuity, especially as these patterns concern the work of the Spirit with Jesus and then with his followers. References to the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts stress the Spirit as power.

In Luke 3, the Spirit anoints Jesus to begin his messianic work. It was an experience of empowerment, not a change of status before God. He was the Son of God both before and after the Spirit’s anointing. Similarly, in Acts 2 the experience of the 120 was not about status change nor about moral transformation. They were followers of Jesus, sons and daughters of God, before and after Spirit baptism. The coming of the Spirit marked their empowerment to continue what Jesus began to do and teach (Acts 1:1). They became Spirit-empowered witnesses.

Consequently, the Day of Pentecost was not salvific for the 120, which makes suspect the notion that it marked the birthday of the church—an idea common among evangelicals. This view is sometimes called “conversion-initiation”: conversion to Christ and initiation into the body of Christ. It often makes no distinction between reception of the Spirit in salvation and reception of the Spirit as empowerment. In such a view, the disciples, including the apostles, do not become Christians until the Day of Pentecost. To say the least, this sounds strange to Pentecostals, who naturally relate to the disciples as fellow followers of Jesus and learn from them what to do and what not to do. For example, we benefit from studying the successful missions of the 12 (Luke 9) and the 70 (Luke 10), which involved proclamation in word and deed, including healing and exorcism. We benefit from the instruction Jesus gave them about how to conduct a mission, and how he debriefed them afterwards. And we receive encouragement from the fact that there were two missions because they demonstrate that the mission of Jesus extends beyond the inner circle of 12 disciples to 70 others—people like us. In summary, perhaps we should say that the Day of Pentecost marked the empowering of the church rather than its inception.

One final structural note about this section: the arrangement and content of the two paragraphs on Spirit baptism emphasize priority. The first one examines the nature of Spirit baptism itself before an explanation in the second paragraph about the connection between Spirit baptism and speaking in tongues. Prioritizing the gift of Spirit baptism over the sign of tongues 1) reminds us that speaking in tongues is a sign pointing beyond itself to the goal of the experience, and 2) discourages the tendency to focus only on speaking in tongues, thereby grieving the Holy Spirit, who empowers the individual for ministry.

Sanctification. In SOET, sanctification is dealt with in the Salvation section rather than in this one. Sanctification is the process of becoming more like Jesus or becoming holy. There is no denying that an encounter with God through Spirit baptism should inspire a renewed desire to pursue holiness. Testimonies down through the decades show how often one leads to the other. Yet, our brand of Pentecostalism, sometimes called Finished Work Pentecostalism—that is, the work of the cross effects both salvation and sanctification—insists that sanctification is part of the salvation experience. The sanctifying work of the Spirit begins at conversion and continues throughout a believer’s life toward greater Christlikeness.

Historically, some Pentecostal groups have insisted that Spirit baptism is reserved for those who have already been made holy. In their view, the Christian progresses from conversion to a separate and subsequent experience of holiness and only then to Spirit baptism. In contrast to this, the view of the PAOC is that any believer is a candidate for Spirit baptism, even those Christians who resemble the Corinthian believers of Paul’s day. The New Testament Corinthian church is *the* illustration that Spirit baptism, and other manifestations of empowerment, like the practice of spiritual gifts, are no guarantees of a preexisting condition of holiness, nor even of a healthy and growing Christ-like character. The Corinthian believers who were lauded in the first chapter of 1 Corinthians for the prominence of spiritual gifts among them (1Cor 1:4-7) are labeled as immature and carnal a few chapters later (1Cor 3:1-3). Of course, the Corinthians also serve as a warning that spiritual immaturity lessens the effectiveness of spiritual gifts. There is discussion in the Afterword about the interplay between Spirit baptism and becoming more Christ-like.

Sign language. In Pentecostal theology, Spirit baptism and speaking in tongues are regularly connected. From the beginning, however, there was some diversity about how that connection was understood and what terms best expressed the relationship. For example, both “sign” and “evidence” were used to describe the function of speaking in tongues, but evidence terminology eventually became prominent. A variety of adjectives were attached to it: biblical evidence, initial evidence, and even initial physical evidence. The popularity of evidence language

for Christian experience preceded the beginning of the Pentecostal movement. Among the Holiness people of the 1800s, there was debate about which evidence indicated the experience of holiness.

Evidence language has a long history among us as an expression of validity, i.e., to speak in tongues is evidence of a valid experience of Spirit baptism. To encourage the continuance of our emphasis on Spirit baptism, SOET shifts the focus over to relevance. After all, someone may consider something true but irrelevant. By reverting to *sign* language, SOET stresses the *significance* of speaking in tongues. Simply put, tongues as sign indicates both reception of Spirit baptism and the significance of what has been received.

When speaking of the connection between tongues and Spirit baptism, previous PAOC doctrinal statements used “initial physical sign” and “initial evidence.” Insofar as these terms placed the emphasis on “initial,” the emphasis was on temporal sequence. SOET, however, differentiates between them qualitatively, without neglecting the traditional affirmation that we know someone is baptized when they speak in tongues. That is, one may distinguish the sign of tongues from other aspects of Spirit baptism, because even though many phenomena may accompany the experience of the Spirit-baptized life, they do not all equally indicate the significance of Spirit baptism as empowered communication, as will be discussed in the Commentary below.

In consideration of those among us who have not experienced Spirit baptism, a final comment about the language we have used for Spirit baptism is important. Pentecostals have been misunderstood (or rightly accused!) of insisting that only they have the Spirit or that only they have significant experiences with the Spirit. For that reason, we have intentionally de-emphasized the terminology of being “filled with the Spirit” or “Spirit-filled” in recognition that these terms are typical expressions used by many Christians to express a life in Christ as led by the Spirit. The Spirit we encounter at conversion indwells and guides all believers (see the Triune God section). Although it is biblical, especially in Luke/Acts, to pair the terms Spirit baptism and Spirit-filled, we chose to use Spirit baptism more frequently to define the particular work of the Spirit signified by tongues, thereby leaving room for other Spirit-related expressions that describe the many wonderful works of the Spirit of God.

Commentary

On the Day of Pentecost, Jesus poured out the promised Holy Spirit on the church

Pentecostals model their experience of Spirit baptism on **the Day of Pentecost** experience of the 120 disciples in Jerusalem. The historical account in Acts 2

grounds both the Pentecostal expectation that speaking in tongues will accompany the experience as well as their understanding that Spirit baptism is an eschatological reality that defines their identity. Peter's statement that Spirit baptism is an indicator of the last days (Acts 2:17) inspired modern-day Pentecostals to view themselves as last-days people. Pentecostals have drawn their identity from Acts 2 more than from any other chapter in the Bible. There, they find an explanation for their collective experience and calling, as a movement, to proclaim the gospel with urgency.

As John prophesied (Matt 3:11), **Jesus** is the baptizer in the Holy Spirit. After his water baptism, Jesus received the Spirit (Luke 3:22) to fulfil his messianic work. He now baptizes with the Spirit those who will continue his work.

The rain imagery behind the wording **Jesus poured out the promised Holy Spirit** is from Joel 2, a text that figures prominently in two sections of Peter's Pentecost sermon (**Acts 2:11-43**). Peter quotes Joel's prophecy that the Lord would pour out the Spirit on all flesh (**Acts 2:17-18**). He then restates the pouring out as the action of the ascended Jesus, who has received from the Father the **promised Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33)**. Jesus called the Spirit the promise of my Father (**Luke 24:49**; Acts 1:4). Like the first Christians, Pentecostals are recipients of the promised Spirit, so with good reason, the first Canadian Pentecostal newsletter (1907) was named *The Promise*. This theme of a fulfilled promise highlights again that Spirit baptism is an eschatological reality that fulfils Old Testament expectations that the Spirit would be poured out (Isa 32:14-15; 44:3; Ezek 39:29; Zech 12:10).

Rain is used as a biblical metaphor for God's blessing, both literally and figuratively. In Deuteronomy 11:14, God promises the Israelites that if they are faithful, he will send rain upon the Promised Land they are about to enter. Rain patterns in Israel were divided by season, autumn (early rain) and spring (later rain), to coincide with planting and harvest. The figurative use of seasonal rain for God's blessing in terms of his abiding presence is found in Hosea 6:3. The literal and figurative are combined in Joel 2: autumn and spring rains for an abundance of grain and wine (vv. 23-24); and a pouring out of the Spirit on all to prophesy (v. 28).

For Pentecostals, as with some in the Holiness movement that preceded them, this later or latter rain was understood as the very blessing that they were experiencing. The Day of Pentecost was interpreted as the early rain, with the latter rain being the final outpouring before the return of Christ. Here we have an early Pentecostal eschatology, that is, a Pentecostal understanding of the end times. The experience of the Spirit reinforces belief in the imminent return of Christ. Rain is falling—Jesus is near. Unfortunately, we have been somewhat reticent to use this imagery because the term “latter rain” became associated with the controversial Latter Rain Movement that began on the Canadian Prairies in the 1940s.

The recipients of Spirit baptism are identified in two complementary ways: as **the church** in the first sentence and as **those who are believers** in the one following. Both indicate that the recipients are already Christians. SOET does not present Spirit baptism as initiation into salvation. SOET affirms that salvation and empowerment are distinct experiences even though they both involve the Spirit (see the Salvation section). In other words, Spirit baptism happens to those who have already received the Spirit in connection with their conversion. It is an additional transformative experience for the believer.

By referring to believers, the individual nature of the experience is brought out; that the Spirit comes upon the church emphasizes the significance of Spirit baptism for the community. As individuals, we are empowered to be witnesses to those we encounter. Yet, empowerment comes upon individuals within the body of Christ so that together, the church can be the witness God intended. The social nature of this experience should not be missed (more in the Afterword). The church becomes an empowered community, constituted by members who are Spirit baptized. In this way, as a community, these members become witnesses for the kingdom of God. As we will see, the sign of speaking in tongues has significance for the individual as well as the entire community.

As his return draws near, Jesus continues to baptize in the Holy Spirit those who are believers

The Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 was an eschatological moment; it was a sign of the end times. In quoting the prophecy of Joel, Peter begins with, “In the last days” (**Acts 2:17**). **As his return draws near** reminds us that the coming of the Spirit coincides with the nearness of his return. Three biblical texts support the assertion that **Jesus continues to baptize in the Holy Spirit**. The Day of Pentecost experience continues through time and spreads geographically: “the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off” (**Acts 2:39**). This includes those in locations such as Samaria (**Acts 8:14-17**) and Ephesus (**Acts 19:1-6**), Winnipeg and Ottawa, Vancouver and Montreal, and Moncton and Hay River.

This empowers them to continue his work of proclaiming with speech and action the good news of the arrival and coming of the kingdom of God

Like two parts of a story, the Lukan narratives of Luke and Acts were written to show the continuity between the ministry of Jesus and those of his followers. In part one, the Gospel of Luke shows what Jesus began to do and teach (Acts 1:1), and in part two, the Book of Acts tracks Jesus’ followers as they continue in his words and deeds. We continue what Jesus began because he **empowers us to**

continue his work by baptizing us with the same Holy Spirit who anointed him (**Luke 4:18**).

Our work is defined as **proclaiming with speech and action the good news of the arrival and coming of the kingdom of God**. The dual nature of proclamation as speech and action (or, word and deed) is a summary of Christ's ministry. In **Luke 4:18**, Jesus reads, in his hometown synagogue, a passage from Isaiah that he applies to himself: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor."

By concluding his reading from Isaiah with, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21), Jesus announced **the good news of the arrival** of God's kingdom. The Isaianic promise of freedom for the captives and healing for the broken-hearted (Isa 61:2; **Luke 4:18**) found fulfilment as the blind received sight and the oppressed found acceptance. Spirit baptism empowers witness in speech and action. Therefore, as with the first disciples, it is incumbent on us to be Spirit-empowered witnesses who speak the gospel and show its power to save, heal, and restore as we pray with individuals for salvation and healing and restoration (Acts 8:12-13).

The **kingdom of God** broke into the kingdom of this world during Christ's earthly ministry. While we celebrate the kingdom's **arrival**, we also anticipate its **coming**. The portrayal of the kingdom as having arrived and yet to come is the New Testament perspective, which is often expressed as "the already" and "the not yet" of the kingdom. References to the kingdom of God abound in the descriptions of Jesus' ministry. For example, it appears as a summary title for Jesus' preaching (Matt 4:23; 9:35; Luke 8:1); it is also the subject matter for his Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:20) and the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:3, kingdom of *heaven*). Thus, we continue the proclamation of the good news of the kingdom of God that Jesus identified as his purpose (**Luke 4:43**).

What is the nature of the church's witness to the kingdom of God? Her witness is that the kingdom of God has arrived in the coming of Jesus Christ and the sending of the Spirit, and that one day the kingdom will be visible to all as it covers the earth. To that end, the church is a living preview of the future, serving as a demonstration of a transformed community constituted by obedience to the Father and love for one another. This view assumes, of course, that the church is involved enough in the local community to actually be a witness.

We here emphasize a point critical for Pentecostal theology—where the kingdom is, those on the margins are elevated. Jesus said that the kingdom of God is good news for the poor (**Luke 4:18**; 6:20), a category that encompasses more than poverty, as is seen by Matthew's term of poor in spirit (Matt 5:3) and by Jesus' ministry to those who are excluded from inner circles by their social

class or infirmity. Our witness is that everyone, no matter their status, has equal opportunity to participate in a transformed community. As salvation is for all, so is Spirit baptism.

This experience is available for everyone, male and female, of every age, status, and ethnicity

Similarly, we affirm that Spirit baptism **is available for everyone** rather than reserved for the few. To emphasize this, the import of the term **everyone** is spelled out: **male and female, of every age, status, and ethnicity**. The first three represent Peter's citation of Joel on the Day of Pentecost: **male and female**—sons and daughters; **age**—young men and old men; and **status**—even servants (**Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:17-18**). The final aspect, every **ethnicity**, accounts for what happened after the Day of Pentecost. The inclusion of Gentiles as later recipients of Spirit baptism, such as Cornelius and his household, proved that the promise was not solely for Jewish followers (**Acts 10:45-46; 15:8-9**). To reemphasize, "The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off" (**Acts 2:39**).

The sign of speaking in tongues indicates that believers have been baptized with the Holy Spirit

Paragraph two in the SOET statement about Spirit baptism is a description of the connection between Spirit baptism and speaking in tongues. The first clause defines the connection with the term "sign." **The sign of speaking in tongues indicates that believers have been baptized with the Holy Spirit**. When God is present or when God acts, a sign is often given. In the Old Testament, for example, a pillar of cloud by day and another of fire by night were signs of God's presence in the wilderness (Exod 13:21). In the New Testament, John describes Jesus' miracles as signs given to testify about his identity (John 20:30-31). Likewise, when the Holy Spirit empowers an individual in Spirit baptism there is a consistent sign: in this case, a verbal response to the Spirit's presence, i.e., the **sign of speaking in tongues** (**Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6**).

This consistent sign has functioned among us not only in theory but also in practice. Consider our traditional way of praying for people to receive Spirit baptism. The supportive prayer for an individual to be baptized in the Spirit, often with laying on of hands, shifts to thanksgiving when the seeker begins to speak in tongues. Speaking in tongues serves as confirmation for both the individual believer and the church, testifying that Jesus is still baptizing individuals and empowering his church (again, **Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6**).

and signifies the nature of Spirit baptism as empowering our communication

The sign of speaking in tongues is meaningful not just as indicating reception, but as an indicator of the nature of Spirit baptism itself. It **signifies the nature of Spirit baptism as empowering our communication**. To speak in tongues is to engage in Spirit-empowered speech that exceeds the ability of the speaker. In this way, speaking in tongues points to the nature of the gift itself, which is to engage in witness that exceeds our ability.

There are two ways that the connection between speaking in tongues and Spirit baptism is evident in Acts 2. First, after speaking in tongues, Peter proclaimed the gospel so effectively that 3,000 were converted (**Acts 2:11-43**). Peter engaged in two empowered acts of speech: he spoke in tongues, then preached in Aramaic—the common language of Peter and his audience. It is noteworthy that the mass conversion was a result of the Spirit-empowered sermon rather than the tongues spoken by the 120 disciples, although the latter did draw a crowd. It functioned as a sign that God was doing something miraculous. Acts 2 illustrates tongues as a sign of Spirit baptism, and empowered proclamation as its goal.

Second, the connection in Acts 2 is also seen by the type of tongues spoken. On the Day of Pentecost, the tongues spoken were a form of witness in and of themselves. The various tongues spoken were heard as declarations of praise to God: “we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues” (**Acts 2:11**). The tongues that were being spoken by the 120 were in the various dialects of the diasporic Jews who had gathered in Jerusalem from across the Roman empire to celebrate the feast of Pentecost. This phenomenon, when someone speaks a language understood by others but not by the speaker, is called *xenolalia*. The much more common form of tongues speech, when what is spoken is unknown to both speaker and audience, is called *glossolalia*.

While Acts 2 is the singular New Testament reference to speaking in tongues as *xenolalia*, Pentecostal history is replete with illustrations of *xenolalia* occurring in worship services. Someone recognizes the tongue being spoken and hears a message that points them to God. What Pentecostal missionaries learned early on, however, is that one cannot speak in tongues in a foreign land and expect the gospel to be heard. On the Day of Pentecost, however, the crowd heard repeated declarations that God was at work behind the miraculous event. Tongues, spoken by the 120 disciples as praise to God, were heard as witness or testimony.

To summarize, Spirit baptism enables one to communicate beyond one’s own ability, and this communication goes beyond what is being said. Also, the “sign” nature of tongues indicates to the community that Jesus has again poured out his

Spirit for power to witness. Finally, when, on occasion, tongues is *xenolalia*, it functions as a testimony to outsiders that God is present and at work.

to be his witnesses with speech and action as we continue to pray in the Spirit

When Jesus identified the Spirit's presence as enabling his own proclamation of the kingdom of God, he told his followers that they would be empowered witnesses, too (**Acts 1:8**). Based on the pattern of Jesus' ministry, Spirit-baptized communication **to be his witnesses** is twofold: **with speech and action**. As did Jesus, we expect empowered speech that will be accompanied by miracles that confirm our proclamation of the gospel. This happened in Acts: the proclamation of the disciples was accompanied by miracles. Likewise, the Apostle Paul testified that his ministry was a combination of word and deed (**Rom 15:19**).

Acts 4:31 is instructive. It links witness with being Spirit-baptized, or as Luke says here, filled with the Spirit. And it attests that the experience of being empowered by the Spirit is not just a single initiatory event, but a continual one. The disciples were filled on the Day of Pentecost as they spoke in tongues (**Acts 2:4**), and as Acts 4 reports, it happened again. The disciples were hauled before the authorities on account of their preaching. Upon release, they rejoined the company of believers, and after praying together, they were filled and their witness to the risen Christ continued.

As a conclusion to the Spirit Baptism section, the final clause **as we continue to pray in the Spirit** affirms an essential Pentecostal conviction that the experience of the Day of Pentecost should be a continual one in the life of believers. "Pray in the Spirit," a common term among Pentecostals for speaking in tongues, is a composite of several slightly different expressions found in **1 Corinthians 14:15**, Jude 1:20, and Ephesians 6:18.

Of these texts, only 1 Corinthians 14 includes teaching about this type of prayer, which appears in a section where Paul is addressing the different dynamics of speaking in tongues in church as opposed to doing so privately. The context, it might be noted, is a concern about the group dynamics of speaking in tongues. Speaking out loud in a service with unknown words becomes a hindrance to the Spirit's work of building up the gathered saints, "unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified" (1Cor 14:5). While expressing concern about proper usage, he affirms the value of "praying in the Spirit" when he says, "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you" (1Cor 14:18). He also describes the dual nature of his prayer life as praying with the mind—words he understands—and praying in tongues, or, what he calls "with the spirit" (**1Cor 14:14-15**). As there is no indication in the early Greek manuscripts of the New Testament as to whether

a word is capitalized or not, we are left wondering whether Paul means *his* spirit or *the* Spirit—or perhaps, a combination of the two. The eminent Pentecostal biblical scholar Gordon Fee was prone to use “s/Spirit” in his commentaries because of the intertwining of the Christians’ spirit with the Spirit of God, which seems appropriate here. We pray with our spirits as the Spirit enables such prayer. What is also noteworthy is Paul’s understanding of praying with the s/Spirit (praying in tongues) as empowerment, as a building up of the individual who is praying (1Cor 14:4). Speaking in tongues, then, is a continual sign of the believers’ empowerment.

Afterword

There is more to be said about Spirit baptism because the Holy Spirit is a person. The biblical terminology of filling should not be misunderstood. The act of empowerment is not an impersonal transaction like filling up a gas tank, which enables a driver to choose where to drive and at what speed. When it comes to Spirit baptism, the Spirit is the one in control, who gives power to do what he prompts as we are led by the Spirit. From this point of view, our prayer for “more of the Spirit” is essentially a plea that the Holy Spirit might get more of us. It is a growing sensitivity and obedience to the Spirit’s leading that generates a sustained and effective ministry. And, of course, the leading of the Spirit is inseparable from the work of the Father and the Son.

With this in mind, the commentary about Spirit baptism as missional empowerment may be recast within a trinitarian framework; the Spirit empowers us to fulfil Jesus’ desire that we become witnesses of the kingdom of God. SOET emphasizes the missional over other aspects of Spirit baptism, potentially raising a concern that Spirit baptism has been reduced to simply speaking in tongues, in effect, replacing the gift of Spirit baptism by the sign that points to it. Pentecostalism didn’t circle the globe because believers stood at church altars praying in tongues. Rather, it did so because they re-engaged our world as empowered witnesses after having prayed.

That the Holy Spirit is a person whom we encounter in Spirit baptism defines the nature of Spirit baptism as relational. It is an encounter with God the Spirit, and as such, it will have multiple effects on the recipient. So, it is understandable why we have a long history of associating sanctification with Spirit baptism. Although Spirit baptism doesn’t automatically make one holy, the Spirit encourages us to be more like Jesus. This is the common testimony of many, from the earliest years until now. Although the sanctification process begins at salvation, the encounter with the Spirit in Spirit baptism prods us to become more Christ-like—what Paul calls “the fruit of the Spirit.” As the Corinthian example reminds us, however, the connection

between Spirit baptism and growing maturity is not assured. To put it another way, the effectiveness of our witness is not assured, because the spirituality of the one who witnesses contributes to the authenticity of the communication.

Similarly, the experience of Spirit baptism influences our affections. Early Canadian newsletters record the testimonies of those who described Spirit baptism as having increased their sense of intimacy with Jesus. This is unsurprising: the Spirit encountered in Spirit baptism leads us to Jesus. While we often pray to the Spirit, and sometimes praise the Spirit, we tend in song and prayer to direct our deepest emotions of longing and love toward Jesus—which pleases the Spirit who makes Jesus real to us.

The work of the Spirit to aid us in prayer is another personal dimension of Spirit baptism. “Praying in the Spirit” is associated with different types of prayer, likely because the Spirit prompts actual communication between us and God. Thus, the communication varies according to the situation. Paul associates speaking in tongues with a range of words—prayer, praise, and giving thanks (**1Cor 14:15-16**). We may not know what we are expressing, but the Spirit knows and prompts the type of prayer that fits the occasion: sometimes “hallelujah,” sometimes “praise the Lord,” sometimes “deep groanings,” and sometimes intercession. Here, we might think of “deep groanings” as the groanings of the Spirit who intercedes for us and through us in alignment with God’s will and purposes (Rom 8:26-27).

These more personal elements of Spirit baptism are related to the broader scope of Spirit baptism as witness. Spirit baptism cannot be neatly compartmentalized into what benefits me and what benefits others. In other words, the strengthening of the individual is for the service of God and the benefit of others. Is there truly any part of our lives—lives that we dedicated to God when we came to Christ—that is separate from his calling to be witnesses to his transformative work in the world? All that we are and do is our testimony to the life-changing power of God. As our own Andrew Gabriel commented in reference to **Acts 1:8**, “After all, Jesus did not say that when the Holy Spirit comes upon us we will do the act of witnessing, but that we will be witnesses.”

Finally, two related matters raised above merit some consideration: 1) the collective character of witness, and 2) the nature of that witness in word and deed. To supplement the traditional emphasis on individuals as Christ’s witnesses, let us reconsider the witness of a church community. We know how effectively the Spirit ministers to us whenever we gather in worship. We also know that the Spirit draws even visitors to Jesus through worship and the Word. Rather than limiting evangelism to what happens when visitors come to church, though, how might we go to them as an empowered community? What does our Pentecostal imagination

tell us when we think about how the Spirit might minister through us when we gather for witness? In keeping with the dual nature of witness, what service might we offer, in word and deed, to the communities we live in?

The idea of engaging our culture with a collective witness, in word and deed, seems appropriate for Pentecostals. It is a vocation for which we have been divinely equipped, although the ways and means will vary depending on the context. *In deed.* Many of our churches already dedicate time and money to ministry within their communities in terms of benevolence. How do we add Spirit-empowered proclamation to those ministries in a way that is appropriate for a Spirit-empowered church, and applies specifically to each context? The goal is to recapture Jesus' ministry of Spirit-empowered proclamation among the lost, demonstrating the reality of the kingdom of God with words of hope, and miracles of healing and deliverance. We know how to conduct healing services for the body of Christ. What if we offered a healing service for those in our community?

In word. How do we use our empowered collective voice? What would Spirit-empowered witness look and sound like? What social issues should we address as part of our prophetic witness to a transformed future? The challenge we face is not just in raising a collective voice, but in being heard. With the omnipresence of social media, the noise in our culture has reached a nearly deafening cacophony that is amped up from multiple directions with dissonant viewpoints. Nevertheless, Spirit baptism is powerful proclamation, a prophetic word that will be heard above the din and cut to the heart of God.

Indeed, there is more to say about the Holy Spirit than what is contained in this section. Spirit baptism is only one aspect of the Spirit's work. Repeated references to the Spirit are found throughout SOET, starting in the Triune God section.

The Church

Jesus Christ is the head of the church.¹ All who are united with Christ are joined by the Spirit to his body.² Each local church is an expression of the universal church whose role is to participate in the mission of God to restore all things.³

Central to the church is the shared experience of the transforming presence of God.⁴ The church responds with worship, prayer, proclamation, discipleship, and fellowship,⁵ including the practices of water baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism by immersion symbolizes the believer's identification with Christ in his death and resurrection.⁶ The Lord's Supper symbolizes Christ's body and blood, and our communion as believers. Shared together, it proclaims his death in anticipation of his return.⁷

The Spirit gives all gifts to the church to minister to others in love for the purpose of bearing witness to Christ and for the building up of the church.⁸ The Spirit also empowers leaders, both female and male, to equip the church to fulfil its mission and purposes.⁹

1. Col 1:18; Matt 16:18

2. 1Cor 12:12-14

3. Acts 1:8; Matt 28:18-20; Acts 13:1-3; Rev 21:5

4. Acts 2:42-43; 1Cor 12:7; Matt 18:20; 2Cor 3:17-18

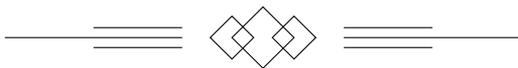
5. 1Pet 2:9-10; Col 4:2-6; Acts 2:42

6. Rom 6:3-8; Matt 28:19

7. Matt 26:26-29; 1Cor 11:23-26

8. Acts 8:5-7; 1Cor 12:4-11; 14:12; Heb 2:3-4

9. Eph 4:11-16; Matt 20:25-28; Acts 2:17-18; 6:2-4; Rom 16:7



Context

We turn our attention to the subject that may have the most impact on our daily practice of faith: the church. As a community of Spirit-filled Christ-followers, it is through the church that we encounter God's presence, learn God's Word, fellowship with God's people, and minister through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is through the church that we find our place and purpose in the kingdom. Contrary to some who think "church" is a brick-and-mortar building that people "attend" on a Sunday morning, the church is a global movement of redeemed people. As a redeemed people, Jesus said he would build us together into a "spiritual house" that would continue to stand, even against the "gates of hell." As members of this spiritual house, we actively participate in God's mission to bring his message of the kingdom to lost people in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The gathering of the local church is central to our Pentecostal practice of faith. From the earliest days of the movement, the local church has been a key place where believers experience the Holy Spirit. In 1906, when Ellen Hebden opened her storefront mission in downtown Toronto, people would gather to worship, pray, testify, and share the Lord's Supper. It was a place where the mighty presence of God's power was evident. The mission grew to become a local church and a witness for Christ in the community for generations. Around the same time, A. H. Argue held gatherings at his home in Winnipeg, Manitoba, where people would seek to receive Spirit baptism and speak in tongues. Soon the Argue home could not contain the crowds, and they relocated to a downtown mission that became a vibrant and growing local church—Calvary Temple. R. E. McAlister, editor of the *Canadian Pentecostal Testimony* (Dec. 1920), wrote that the local church is where the "power of the Holy Spirit" is "falling like rain."

As the movement spread across the country, Spirit-filled leaders worked tirelessly to establish a Pentecostal "witness" (local church gathering) in every

community across Canada. It was within the context of the local church that people would experience the presence of God; it was from the context of the local church that Jesus was proclaimed to the community. Often displayed on the walls of little Pentecostal church buildings and mission halls, banners declared a familiar message: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” For early Pentecostals, they believed that what Jesus did in the Gospels, he still does today—and he does this work through his body, the church.

Now in our second century as a Fellowship, the PAOC continues to prioritize the local church as a means of fulfilling its mission of making disciples through the transformative presence of the Holy Spirit. A hunger and thirst for the presence of the Holy Spirit is one of the primary unifying core values of our movement and is expressed in the SOET. In corporate worship, Pentecostals seek and expect to experience the felt presence of God. Without the prescribed liturgies as used in some other traditions, our worship expressions may look different in each local context. However, our collective craving for a move of God is an essential part of our mutual identity. Every local church, no matter how small or large, is marked by the presence of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the local church is also identified by the following core values: sound doctrine, every-member ministry, loving relationships, Spirit-empowered evangelism, anointed proclamation, and a practical expression of Christian faith. Although there are no perfect churches, the priorities of the Fellowship remain steadfast: that each local church proclaim and practise the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Commentary

Jesus Christ is the head of the church

When Scripture teaches that Jesus “is the head of the body, the church” (**Col 1:18**), it indicates that the church is a vibrant, living entity whose identity is completely dependent on its source: Jesus Christ. **Jesus Christ is the head**, and believers are the figurative extension of his body here on earth. Christ is the source of its identity across time periods throughout history, across geographical contexts, and across denominational lines. From the early church to our contemporary period, Jesus has and will always be the head of this church, and Jesus is the one who will build it (**Matt 16:18**). Wherever we find a church—whether in Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Antarctica, Europe, or Oceania—Jesus Christ is its head. And whether a church identifies as Pentecostal or some other denomination, wherever Jesus is the head, that is where we find the church. While a pastor or superintendent may serve the body of Christ as a leader, the head of the church is Jesus Christ.

Jesus is not only the source of the church's identity as the **head of the church**, but he is also the Lord of the church. When Paul describes Jesus as the head, he puts this language within the context of Christ's lordship over the entire universe—all things “visible and invisible” (Col 1:16). Jesus is the divine Son of God who sustains the universe, brings reconciliation and peace in the universe through his death on the cross, and is the Lord and source of life for the church (Col 1:15-19).

All who are united with Christ are joined by the Spirit to his body

The identity of the church is not only dependent on the divine person of the Son, Jesus Christ. While the Father sent the Son to the world, the Father also sent the Spirit to the world. As a result, those who are made alive **with Christ** (Eph 2:5; Col 2:13) as they put their faith in Jesus (John 3:16; Rom 3:22) are **joined by the Spirit** to the one **body** of Christ, his church (**1Cor 12:12-14**; John 14:16-17; Phil 3:3). As members of Christ's body, with its differing parts, “to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (**1Cor 12:7**). Paul uses language denoting each person as a part of the body of Christ, figuratively describing each one as an ear, eye, hand, or foot, and even parts that you cannot see (1Cor 12:15-26). Each person provides an important contribution as the body of Christ.

We not only belong to each other as part of Christ's body, but the health of the church depends on all of us. When one part fails to serve others with its gifts, we all suffer the consequences. But when each part uses its God-given gifts, the body becomes a healthy church maximizing its potential.

Each local church is an expression of the universal church whose role is to participate in the mission of God to restore all things

Just as there is one body of Christ (**1Cor 12:12**), there is only one **universal church** that Christ is building (Matt 16:18). This one church finds unique expressions in particular places within **each local church**, just as Paul spoke of the “church of God in Corinth” (1Cor 1:2) and the church in Nympha's house (Col 4:15).

As a part of Christ's body, each local church seeks to **participate in the mission of God**. God's “mission” refers to God the Father sending the Son and the Spirit (John 3:16; 15:26) into the whole world to bring the kingdom of God to earth in anticipation of the day when God will finally **restore all things** (**Rev 21:5**). The church's role is to evangelize, disciple, baptize, and teach people (**Matt 28:18-20**). Its role is also to send believers to new locations as ministers of the gospel (**Acts 13:1-3**) to start and nurture new churches (Acts 14:21-23). God's mission, and therefore the church's mission, includes seeking the kingdom of God on earth in our communities and around the world through acts of compassion, such as caring for the needy (Acts 6:1-6;

James 1:27). In all of this, the church seeks to love the world (John 3:16) as it engages in Spirit-empowered witness to the risen Christ (**Acts 1:8**).

Related to the previous point and in anticipation of the discussion below on spiritual gifts, it is important to note that the church, as the body, accomplishes its mission in the world with love and through its spiritual giftings. Each believer is gifted by the Spirit. These gifts are not merely for our own benefit, but for the common good. We are expected to serve and build others with our gifts, which ultimately contributes to the restoration of God's kingdom in our world. And the foundational way we accomplish this mission is through our love for one another. Our love for one another must be reflected in our patience, kindness, humility, unselfishness, willingness to forgive, and celebration of others in their success (1Cor 13:4-7). A healthy body of Christ is one where all do their part in a loving manner that reflects and extends the values of the kingdom in our world.

Central to the church is the shared experience of the transforming presence of God

Central to the Pentecostal ethos is the idea that God meets with his people in a powerful and profound way when they gather for corporate worship. Pentecostals generally lean away from the view that some traditions maintain, which understands salvation as mediated by the church via members of the clergy. While Pentecostals do not share the understanding of salvation as being directly mediated by the church, Pentecostals affirm that believers are spiritually nourished through the life and practices of the church, as the Spirit-filled community of believers. Pentecostals place strong value on the gathering of God's people. God demonstrates his significant and transformative work through corporate worship and the charismatic gifts of the Spirit, which edify the body (**Matt 18:20; 1Cor 12:7; 2Cor 3:17-18**). In response to the ongoing transformative work of God, both personally and collectively, the church gathers for fellowship (**Acts 2:42-43**).

The church responds with worship, prayer, proclamation, discipleship, and fellowship

Pentecostals align with the historic practices of the Christian church but have responded to these practices uniquely. First of all, Pentecostals have responded with corporate **worship**. This is one of the primary facets of the gathered community of believers. Music and singing are often considered synonymous with worship, when, in fact, the definition of worship is much broader. Music and singing are *part* of authentic Pentecostal worship in a communal sense. However, worship encompasses a broad swath of other elements as well: prayer, preaching,

discipleship, fellowship, and along with what have traditionally been referred to as the ordinances of the church, water baptism and the Lord's Supper.

For Pentecostals, the theological grounding of corporate worship also includes an experiential emphasis on Spirit baptism and the charismatic gifts. In this sense, **worship** is the way in which believers fulfil one of the functions of the church. As a royal priesthood, we “declare the praises of him who called [us] out of darkness into his wonderful light” (**1Pet 2:9**).

Liturgy is the form or structure of corporate worship in any particular Christian tradition. Worship is the way in which Pentecostals express their liturgy. Pentecostals tend to resist highly structured forms of liturgy, opting instead to maintain certain consistent practices. These “norms” are essentially aspects of Pentecostal liturgy. Prayer is part of this corporate experience as well.

Prayer is directed petition to the Lord, which bears in mind and accepts his will. Prayer can be persistent, given the knowledge that God can, and does, intervene in human circumstances, changing what would otherwise be the natural outcome. This is not to be confused with the so-called “word of faith movement” that suggests that positive or negative confession produces results. Classical Pentecostalism does not maintain that there is power in the believer's speech to “claim” things by faith. This kind of focus steers away from the centrality of Christ and his Word. It places the emphasis solely on the individual person and his or her speech, which can be in alignment with human desires and not necessarily the will of God. This kind of theology is not well situated within a Classical Pentecostal understanding of prayer that balances the sovereignty of God and his supernatural power with the cries of his children who make their prayers and petitions known to him (Phil 4:6). As such, Pentecostals hold in tension the belief that prayer is vital to the Christian experience (both personally and corporately), and that God can and does supernaturally intervene in human lives while acknowledging that prayer does not guarantee a particular result.

Further, corporate prayer has always featured prominently in the gathered community of believers, based primarily on the way the early church was established in the Book of Acts. In the early church, believers “joined together constantly in prayer” (Acts 1:14), and this devotion to prayer was a normal practice of the early church (**Acts 2:42; Col 4:2-6; 1Tim 2:1, 8**). Corporate prayer is vital to the fellowship of the church and demonstrates unity as its members collectively call upon the Lord.

Along with prayer, **proclamation** serves as an identifying feature of the church and its liturgical expression. Pentecostal preaching prioritizes the centrality of the Word of God and contributes to the corporate discipleship of believers. While

preaching contributes to **discipleship** and ensures the transmission of Pentecostal beliefs, the community of believers, through their fellowship with one another, also contributes to this discipleship. The Spirit works in and through all believers, which leads to a mutually edifying Spirit-filled community wherein God's people can encourage, support, love, bear one another's burdens, and spur one another on towards good deeds. This Pentecostal approach to discipleship is understood as a work of the Spirit but is facilitated within the **fellowship** of the community.

including the practices of water baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism by immersion symbolizes the believer's identification with Christ in his death and resurrection

Throughout the history of Christianity, Christians have been baptized as a physical sign of a spiritual transformation (Acts 2:38-39; Acts 22:16). Jesus instructs his followers to disciple and baptize believers in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit (**Matt 28:19**). Christians follow the example of Jesus and thus believe that all followers of Jesus should be baptized (Matt 3:13-17). Pentecostals, in particular, support **water baptism** by full **immersion** wherein a Christian is fully submerged in water, symbolizing **identification with Christ in his death** and burial. The Christian is raised out of the water, symbolizing **identification with Christ in his resurrection**. Water baptism is a visual symbol of what happens to a believer spiritually: "Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him" (**Rom 6:8**).

In water baptism, a believer makes a public confession of faith, denouncing sin and the former self and embracing new life in Christ. While baptism is not salvific, it does symbolize repentance and cleansing from sin. This association is made in various New Testament texts (John 3:5; Acts 2:38; **Rom 6:3-8**; 1Pet 3:21), although the primary explanation for how baptism represents both dying to sin and new life in Christ is found in Paul's teaching in Romans 6:1-14.

The Lord's Supper symbolizes Christ's body and blood, and our communion as believers. Shared together, it proclaims his death in anticipation of his return

Another historic practice of the church that Pentecostals adhere to is that of the **Lord's Supper**. The practice of the Lord's Supper is a deeply significant act. The communion of the church is readily observed as believers corporately share the emblems of the bread and the cup, symbolic of **Christ's body and blood**. Beyond SOET's affirmation that the gathering around the table of the Lord is emblematic of the communion between believers, it is also worth considering how it represents the incorporation of Christ's followers into the life of the triune God. Communion exists

between believers and the triune God, as well as between the members of the church community. The communal response to the work of Christ is a spiritual encounter with Christ, drawing believers together in reflective thanksgiving, while also maintaining an eschatological perspective—that is, a view of the end times—as believers together proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes (**1Cor 11:23-26; Matt 26:26-29**).

The Spirit gives all gifts to the church to minister to others in love for the purpose of bearing witness to Christ and for the building up of the church

The church bears **witness to Christ** on earth. To enable the church to live up to its calling, the Spirit powerfully and tangibly manifests his presence in the believing community through what are commonly known as “gifts” (Paul also refers to gifts as “service,” “working,” and “manifestation”; 1Cor 12:1-7). Pentecostals have always celebrated the Spirit’s working among them, and so “spiritual gifts” need to be considered an essential part of Pentecostal theology and spirituality. SOET, however, recognizes that Christians have not always agreed on the nature, accessibility, and practical use of the gifts, and so restricts itself to essential points on which PAOC Pentecostals can agree.

First, the **Spirit** is identified as the source of **all gifts**, and so all manifestations (**1Cor 12:7**) of ministry in the church need to be viewed as originating from the Spirit. The use of the adjective “all” highlights that a diversity of gifts is to be expected and honoured in the church. There is no ministry in the church, no matter how visible or hidden, mundane or extraordinary, that should be under or over-valued since the Spirit allocates the gifts as appropriate (**1Cor 12:11; Heb 2:3-4**). True to its Pentecostal heritage, SOET rejects the idea of a cessation of any of the gifts. In contrast to other Christian traditions that might reject revelatory (e.g., prophecy and tongues) or miraculous gifts as operating in the present, Pentecostals expect all the Spirit’s gifts to be in operation, and encourage believers to seek to be used in ministry in supernatural ways, as part of **bearing witness to Christ** (**Acts 8:5-7**; see the Spirit Baptism section).

Absent from SOET is any stipulation that Spirit baptism is the “gateway” to certain “spiritual gifts” (**1Cor 12:4-11**), which is a view that some Pentecostals have held, distinguishing these gifts (ironically along with cessationists) from the so-called “grace gifts” of Romans 12:6-8. However, this separation of the spiritual gifts of 1 Corinthians 12 from the grace gifts of Romans 12 is a difficult interpretation to support, especially when both passages include prophecy in their listing. The background for this “gateway” position is likely the shared experience of many early Pentecostals and the order in which they experienced things of the Spirit. First they received grace (forgiveness and new spiritual life) and then Spirit empowerment for

service, linked to tongues. So, it made sense for them to assume that the gifts listed alongside tongues in **1 Corinthians 12:4-11** only became available via the same means as tongues, namely by Spirit baptism. So, while the absence of reference to Romans 12:6-8 in the citations here may provide room for the “gateway” position to be held among SOET adherents, it is recommended that dogmatic insistence on this be avoided.

Second, the **purpose** of the gifts and how they are to be exercised is made clear: the Spirit acts to enable believers **to minister to others** in tangible ways, according to existing need. In other words, gifts are never provided for the purpose of entertainment or spotlighting certain members of the church. While gifts can be misused in this way (1Cor 13:1-3; 14:6-25), such action opposes the Spirit’s intention and should be rejected. Instead, the Spirit’s goal is to ensure that Christ is revealed through the community, and that believers are being cared for (**Acts 6:2-4**) and built up in their faith and service (**1Cor 14:12**).

Also, not to be missed is the modifier, **in love**, which determines the means (or “way”; 1Cor 12:31) by which gifts are to be expressed. Paul includes an entire section on love (1Cor 13) in his discussion of gifts because he does not want the church to miss the point that self-promotion and unreflective pragmatism are not to be the sole or even primary criteria for discerning whether the Spirit is having his way or not within the church. Pragmatism, or judging on the basis of results, only measures the most efficient way to get the desired outcome; it does not question the values or theological assumptions involved. Further, Pentecostals have assumed that the Spirit’s activity in the world will be tangible in some way, and therefore they supposed that desired and expected “results” could serve as a criterion for endorsing particular ministry strategies and activities. But Paul reminds us that the results we see (and want to see!) need to be tested against the loving character of the Trinity. Indeed, unless the gifts are operating according to the patient, gentler, and humbler way of love as defined by Paul, it may be that the Spirit is less involved than might be assumed no matter the type of “results” a church community might happen to be experiencing.

The Spirit also empowers leaders, both female and male, to equip the church to fulfil its mission and purposes

SOET addresses the question of church leadership. While all believers have gifts, some believers are set apart to serve in a unique capacity by the Spirit—**to equip**, help, administrate, mentor, and encourage the community’s members for service to one another. **Ephesians 4:11-16** is cited in this regard, but only as explicitly supporting the idea of the Spirit providing leaders to equip the saints.

While this passage is used by some Pentecostals to support a so-called “fivefold” leadership ministry model for the church, SOET contains no endorsement or rejection of this model. More important for SOET is the “who” question concerning leadership in the church. The SOET section on Spirit baptism explicitly states that there are no restrictions on who the Spirit will use to bear witness, in word and action, to the message of God’s kingdom (**Acts 2:17-18**). Here again, this point is emphasized with a particular application in mind: **female and male** are equally enabled by the Spirit to lead **the church**. The word order here, with women being specified first, accents the PAOC’s commitment to this position. The reference to **Romans 16:7**, identifying a woman, Junia, as an early-church apostle, adds an exclamation point! Finally, the citation of **Matthew 20:25-28** reiterates the way Pentecostal leaders are to function, not abusing power and authority, but modelling their lives and ministry after Jesus, who came to serve and give his life.

Afterword

In the past few decades, Pentecostal theology has developed considerably. The area with the least development to date, however, is the doctrine of the church (ecclesiology). Fortunately, more Pentecostal scholars are now giving attention to this important area. It is a worthy area of study, since, as noted in the Context section, the church community has always played an integral role in Pentecostal spirituality. While the predominant emphasis among Pentecostals has been intense, personal, and transformational encounters with the Spirit, these encounters with the divine are most frequently reported as having been in the context of (and encouraged by) the believing community. An individual’s experience of new birth, Spirit baptism, and healing most often happens in the context of communal worship. The development of a theology of the church, its worship, mission, and service, then, merits further attention and exploration.

One area of ecclesiology that has received more consideration in the past few decades is the recognition that the Pentecostal church tradition is but one among many others around the globe. Early Pentecostals, in some ways, demonstrated a sense of connection to the wider church. They initially tried to downplay denominational doctrinal distinctives and practices in hope that the experience of Spirit baptism would unite the church. It soon became evident, however, that this appeal to experiential spirituality would not bring the hoped-for unity. All too often, early Pentecostals faced rejection from other churches. In response, they formed their own denominations, and throughout the 20th century, increasingly adopted fundamentalist suspicions concerning ecumenical ventures, that is, different Christian denominations working together in relationship to promote unity.

Fortunately, this suspicion has largely faded. Formal and informal involvement in wider church relationships and dialogue have become more common. Perhaps the most significant formal example of this has been the Pentecostal-Roman Catholic dialogue, which has been ongoing since the early 1970s. Pentecostals are demonstrating a maturation in their theology and self-understanding. They are better able to recognize and acknowledge how they have been—and continue to be—beneficiaries of other Christian traditions, while also offering their unique Pentecostal perspectives as a gift to the broader church.

Corporate worship has always been central to Pentecostal spirituality, since it was in this context that the felt presence of God was anticipated. Worship, for Pentecostals, has never been a means to an end, but more so an end in itself—meeting with God to enjoy his presence together. For this reason, Pentecostals need to exercise caution when too quickly importing more pragmatic models, which might use worship as a means towards some other end (e.g., attracting a crowd), since this runs the risk of disconnecting the worship experience from its Pentecostal roots. Further, since worship is formational, the model adopted will inevitably shape the participants into a spirituality perhaps different from what was intended. For example, while making sure the gospel message is intelligible to our surrounding culture is certainly a New Testament value, a worship service *primarily* aimed at attracting a contemporary audience might find a contemporary concert model to be an appealing option. With this model, however, there is a risk that those on stage will be perceived as the only necessary “active” worshippers. This may, over time, lead to reduced participation from congregants, who may assume that the crowd (i.e., those not on the platform) is less likely to demonstrate various public gifts under the inspiration of the Spirit. No doubt, this is a challenge that is apparent to many of us as we attempt to maintain our Pentecostal emphases in new formats.

It is also notable that Pentecostal corporate worship has been expressed predominantly in three forms: singing, preaching, and the altar service. Singing and preaching are still a large part of Pentecostal worship, but times gathered around the altar are perhaps becoming less frequent in some settings. Church leaders will need to wrestle with whether the altar service is a necessary or contingent element for preserving Pentecostal spirituality. At the same time, Pentecostals would also do well to draw upon other worship practices available in the broader Christian tradition, giving more attention, for example, to more liturgical (formally structured) forms of prayer and the Lord’s Supper.

Doing so will help Pentecostals in at least two ways. First, it will help us better appreciate our place within the broader Christian theological and spiritual

tradition—in which the Spirit has been guiding believers into deeply reflective worship and formational practices throughout the centuries and around the globe. We can glean from the Spirit’s work from diverse traditions and contexts. Second, Pentecostals can learn to value longer-term repetition in worship practices, tied to key biblical and theological themes and cycles, alongside innovation and spontaneity. Both approaches may be used by the Spirit, and the strength of the former lies in its recognized longer-term spiritual and psychological formational benefits. While drawing from the repetitive practices of formal liturgy may seem like an awkward fit for Pentecostals, we may very well have more in common with this approach than might be initially thought. Pentecostals have a long history and passionate tradition of repetition in singing choruses, gathering at the altar, laying on of hands in prayer, and other worship practices—we have been powerfully shaped by them. So, both repetition and spontaneity should be viewed as strengths of worship.

Concerning ministry and leadership in the church, Pentecostals have much to offer the wider church in recognizing the Spirit’s gifting activity in the church. First, Pentecostals emphasize that all gifts of the Spirit are operative today. Pentecostals love to repeat “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8), meaning that we can expect the same miracles, healings, and revelatory words from Christ’s Spirit today, just as the early church experienced in the book of Acts. A word of caution is needed, however. Pentecostals are prone, like the church in Corinth that Paul accused of being immature, to becoming enamoured with the extraordinary (spectacular) gifts of the Spirit, while under-valuing or failing to practically acknowledge the more mundane gifts as equally having originated from the same Spirit. Understanding gifts as temporary resources provided by the Spirit towards the greater end of building up the saints and expressing God’s kingdom in this present age will help Pentecostals mature in this area (1Cor 13:8-13).

This should not be understood to mean that unusual gifts should be set aside for the more mundane (or that which makes us more comfortable or “acceptable” to a contemporary audience), as if that’s what Paul meant by mature spirituality. Rather, Paul’s admonition is that all the gifts should be celebrated, and that, in doing so, we should not make celebrities out of those used in more unusual ways. The Spirit’s ways are diverse, and every gift and believer is to be valued. And, as Paul suggests, the ones deserving of more honour are perhaps the ones that receive the least public notice.

Second, Pentecostals can help the broader church recognize the Spirit’s activity in gifting both women and men for ministry leadership at every level in the body of Christ. This is still an area of debate and controversy in wider evangelicalism,

and even among some Pentecostals. But this is one area where the Pentecostal predisposition to pragmatism helps us better understand Scripture and contribute to the mission of the church. Pentecostals have observed that the Spirit indeed uses women in church leadership with great effectiveness. Further, early Pentecostalism was frequently led by women preachers and teachers. Our historical and present experience of the Spirit, then, makes Pentecostals suspicious of any church polity and biblical interpretation that would attempt to restrict the role of women in the church in any way. Pentecostals can encourage the wider church to also recognize that the Spirit was given at Pentecost so that both “sons and daughters will prophesy” (Acts 2:17-18).

Restoration

Our great hope is for the imminent return of Christ in the air to receive his own, both the living who will be transformed, and the dead in Christ who will be resurrected bodily.¹ Christ will complete at his second coming the restoration begun when he initiated God's kingdom at his first coming.² Christ will liberate creation from the curse, fulfil God's covenant to Israel, and defeat all powers that oppose God.³ Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.⁴

Ultimately, God will judge the living and the dead.⁵ Such judgement is God's gracious answer to humanity's cry for justice to prevail throughout the earth and is consistent with God's character as loving, holy, and just.⁶ The unredeemed will go away into eternal punishment, but the redeemed into eternal life.⁷ The redeemed will enjoy the presence of God where there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain.⁸ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!⁹

1. 1Thess 4:14-17; 5:1-2

2. Matt 13:24-41; Rev 11:15-17;
Acts 1:6-7; 3:20-21; Rom 11:25-27

3. Rom 8:19-21; 1Cor 15:20-26

4. Phil 2:10-11; Isa 45:23

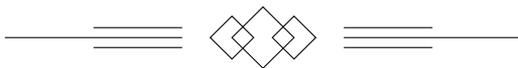
5. Acts 10:42; 1Pet 4:5

6. Mal 2:17-3:1; Rev 6:9-11

7. Matt 25:46; Dan 12:1-2

8. Isa 25:8-12; Rev 21:3-4

9. Rev 22:20



Context

In any recounting of the Pentecostal tradition in Canada, it is impossible to over-emphasize the importance of eschatology—a consideration of the last days. The same could be said for the New Testament, which was written during a time of intense expectation that the end was near because, in some ways, it had already begun. Jesus the Messiah had come. When Pentecostals went to Acts 2 to understand the nature of Spirit baptism, they took to heart the implication of Peter’s quotation from Joel 2 that the coming of the Spirit was a sign of the last days. If the Spirit falling on the 120 was an indicator of the last days, how much more did the coming of the Spirit again, almost two millennia later, indicate the lateness of the hour? The Spirit was once more being poured out as before; the return of Christ was at hand.

There was some discussion during the writing of SOET as to whether eschatology should come first in the statement because our historic posture as a movement is forward-leaning in its future orientation. It is our future orientation that explains so many aspects of Pentecostalism. We worship with the anticipation of seeing him soon; we live with holiness and sacrifice with the expectation that the next world is the future worth living for; and we witness with focus and urgency because of what God is doing now, in anticipation of what he will bring to completion. Simply put, hope in God’s future caused our movement to move. Was there any essential aspect of early Canadian Pentecostal belief or practice that was unrelated to their sense of being in the last days? Eschatology is a central aspect of spirituality within the Pentecostal tradition.

It should be highlighted that the return of our Lord is a deeply personal matter for Pentecostals. The description of the end times in the Restoration section of SOET rightly addresses the cosmic scope of God’s salvific work, which includes all of creation, not just those created in the image of God. That said, the starting point for Pentecostal eschatology is personal and experiential. As an experiential form of

Christianity, Pentecostalism is predisposed towards a lived eschatology. When we sing about Jesus that “he walks with me, and he talks with me,” we actually believe it is true. The abiding presence of the risen Jesus is an eschatological reality—Jesus has defeated death; he now lives that we might live also. We know Jesus, and for that reason, we long to see him. Eschatology is personal amidst its cosmic proportions.

To understand biblical eschatology is to take into consideration the ancient cosmology that informed it. The cosmos consists of heaven, earth, and under the earth, and these three are not independent spheres. In particular, the powers of heaven, be they good or evil, influence life on earth. The powers that oppose God are often personalized. This is evident in Paul’s writings, for instance, where there is talk of principalities and powers that need be defeated before the kingdom of God encompasses heaven and earth. Eschatological victory is not over people—who do sinful things—as much as over the powers that ensnare them, especially Sin and Death. Inasmuch as Satan is the god of this world, the termination of his reign over the earth is a personal defeat of him and his angels. The commentary follows this line of thinking. Sin and Death are capitalized, with recognition that sin is not just what fallen people commit, but a power that dominates all people until freed by Christ in his death and resurrection. As seen in the Creation section, there is already victory in Christ for believers. When we come to Christ, we are no longer slaves to Sin.

The kingdom of God is a present reality in our church communities. Every conversion, every healing, and every deliverance testifies that the kingdom is here in an anticipatory fashion. (Note the statement in the Salvation section that healing is an indicator now of future and final healing.) The end has begun, and the end is glorious, not terrifying. Every worship service, every prayer meeting, and every time we feel God’s presence among us is a foretaste of the day when God will dwell with us. Indeed, we might even say that our acute sense of the imminency of Christ’s return is generated by our awareness of his presence among us now. We know his return is imminent because God’s immanent presence is calling us home. The soon return of Christ is on the eschatological charts, but even more significantly, it is in our hearts.

Restoration is this section’s heading because it is an apt summary of God’s work to restore what was lost in the Garden of Eden. What God called good in the creation account was twisted out of shape by sin and rebellion, which included the corruption of the image of God in humankind. World history chronicles sin’s dire and enduring effects on all of creation. The Book of Revelation gives us a glimpse of the future: a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21:1). Creation restored. By the term “restoration,” then, we intend to affirm a final act of salvation that transforms

humanity and all the rest of creation. This restoration is essentially relational: God once more will dwell with humanity in an unimpeded and everlasting relationship, and all remnants of the rebellion within creation will be expunged. Eternal punishment, then, however understood, is essentially permanent deprivation of relationship with God.

The hope for Christ's return and the restoration of all things is always at risk of losing its importance with the passage of time. The longer the wait, the more the temptation to settle in—even for Pentecostals who were reared in a climate of intense expectation of the end. The SOET reaffirms our hope in his soon return and encourages us to re-engage that event in our preaching and church planning. To that end, we elected to avoid using any specific eschatological system in this section of SOET lest the preference given to any one system dissuade some from preaching about eschatology at all. By eschatological system, we mean an attempt to identify all the events of the end of history, and order them by time and sequence. The popularity of systems wax and wane with the changing climates of social and religious belief. Instead, SOET focuses on the events themselves: the return of Christ, the resurrection, the judgement, and the nature of the afterlife. The intention is to encourage the preaching of eschatology as both future hope and present reality in a way that is formative for our beliefs, practices, and affections. Eschatology should be lived.

More will be said about the various eschatological systems that can claim biblical support in the Afterword. Suffice it to say, the Dispensational teaching that the return of Christ has two phases—a rapture to gather the saints in the clouds and a return to earth with the saints after a seven-year tribulation—is not stated in SOET. That said, there is nothing in the Restoration section that would contradict nor discourage the use of that system by our pastors and churches.

One of the more intriguing debates during the SOET refresh process concerned our articulation of eternal punishment. In 2019, those of us on the PAOC's Theological Study Commission presented a draft of SOET in each district of the PAOC to report on our progress and gauge receptivity. When the year began, we were using "the lake of fire" to express eternal punishment. The debate was heated: yes, we should keep it because we need to emphasize the reality of hell; no, it is only an image and too jarring as an expression of God's judgement. Alternate wording was suggested, which drew from the array of images available in both the Old and New Testaments to express what is ultimately beyond our comprehension. The matter was finally settled to the satisfaction of a majority: SOET would draw from a succinct statement from Jesus (Matt 25:46), which contrasted eternal life with eternal punishment. In the commentary, these two outcomes are explained in

relational terms, as the presence of God or its absence.

Two structural notes are worth attention. As eschatology is about the beginning and the end—how the end of the world completes God’s work in the beginning—the opening and closing of this section was carefully chosen. The first phrase recalls one of the most cited New Testament texts about the return of Christ. In referencing 1 Thessalonians 4:17, we affirm that this statement recaptures our hope for his return. As the commentary notes below, there are different ways to interpret this text that Paul wrote to assure the Thessalonians that the dead would not be left behind when Jesus returned. It is a bold opening no matter the interpretation brought to it. And the last phrase of SOET completes the expression of hope stated at the outset with a prayerful request for Jesus to return: “Come, Lord Jesus!” All that to say, SOET falls behind no previous versions of the Statement in proclaiming our great hope.

Commentary

Our great hope is for the imminent return of Christ in the air to receive his own

The essential disposition of both the early church and the early Pentecostals was **hope**. “Hope” as it is expressed in the Bible is not wishful thinking, as in “I hope my team wins the playoffs.” Hope is an expression of absolute confidence that whatever one is waiting for *will* happen as part of a guaranteed process. Thus, a seed planted and properly cultivated *will* produce a plant; we “hope” for the plant’s appearance through its inevitable process of growth, but the result is sure. For the early church, hope in Christ’s return—and ultimately his putting to right a world gone wrong—was the sort of guaranteed certitude that sustained believers through even difficult times of trial and persecution and inspired them to share the Good News of their hope with others.

That Christ’s return is **imminent** is the central conviction that Jesus’ hoped-for return could happen at any moment. Jesus told believers to “be ready,” warning them that he will come back unexpectedly—like a thief in the night (**1Thess 5:1-2**). Consequently, believers had best be found faithfully going about the Father’s business whenever he does return.

To affirm our hope and longing for his soon return, we use a phrase based on **1 Thessalonians 4:17**, one of the most cited texts about the second coming. The idea that we are caught up to meet the Lord in the air is reflected in the phrase **the imminent return of Christ in the air to receive his own**. This text has generated much theological consideration. For many, this language from **1 Thessalonians 4:17** is a clear indication that believers will be “raptured”—that is to say, taken

up—and removed from the earth before a seven-year Great Tribulation. Others are less confident that the Bible so clearly divides history into neat dispensations, or that this verse references a pre-tribulation rapture, or that there is one last great tribulation. Instead, they suggest this passage marks the consummation of all history when God shall be “all in all” (1Cor 15:28). In either interpretation, this text affirms our hope that he is coming for his people.

both the living who will be transformed, and the dead in Christ who will be resurrected bodily

Hope is extended to **both the living and the dead**, meaning that even death does not cut us off from eternal fellowship with those sisters and brothers who predecease us. Our grief over lost loved ones in the Lord is temporary. We anticipate being reunited in a new reality for which we are prepared by being **transformed, if living, or resurrected bodily, if dead**—in like manner to Jesus. When Jesus rose from the dead, he rose bodily from the tomb and left the tomb empty. He appeared somehow transformed to his disciples, supernaturally appearing and disappearing. Unrecognized until revealed, he still bore the marks of his crucifixion on his flesh. Risen, Christ became the “firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (**1Cor 15:20**), that is, the first to be resurrected and the one whose resurrection guarantees a resurrection harvest of all believers into a bodily, transformed existence. Unlike some ancient heresies that despised the material world in favour of a purely spiritual one, the believer’s transformation and bodily resurrection remind us that we are materially part of God’s good creation, and that God’s material creation is good (see the Creation section).

Christ will complete at his second coming the restoration begun when he initiated God's kingdom at his first coming. Christ will liberate creation from the curse, fulfil God's covenant to Israel, and defeat all powers that oppose God

Christ’s work of **restoration** goes beyond his death and resurrection. The ascended Christ continues to labour on behalf of God’s good creation so that **Christ will complete at his second coming** the work of establishing **God’s kingdom** (God’s sovereign reign) that **he initiated at his first coming** (**Rev 11:15-17; Acts 1:6-7; 3:20-21**). That kingdom encompasses all of creation, of which humans are a part. Meanwhile, God’s kingdom grows slowly, almost imperceptibly, like a tiny mustard seed that eventually blossoms into a massive plant. The kingdom grows alongside unredeemed persons and powers that will continue to oppose God until he finally sets them right, at the end (**Matt 13:24-41**).

Christ completes his restorative work in a number of ways. At his second

coming, **Christ will liberate creation from the curse**, restoring God's peace and harmony (*shalom*) within the created order. Wolf will lie down with lamb and children will play in vipers' nests without harm (Isa 11:6-9). The anticipatory groanings of all creation are met by liberation (**Rom 8:19-22**). Such anticipation includes its "eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed" (**Rom 8:19**). A revelation of the children of God at Christ's second coming will demonstrate how Christ does **fulfil God's covenant to Israel**. God's children shall comprise both Jew and Gentile (**Rom 11:25-27**), from all nations (Isa 2:2; 56:7)—all peoples having been blessed through Abraham's seed (Gen 22:18) through the blood of Jesus (Eph 2:11-13), and having had God's law written on their hearts (Jer 31:33; Deut 30:6).

Through his death and resurrection, Christ brought his kingly sovereignty to bear over all opposition, but this did not conclude his work. Absolute **defeat** awaits **all powers that oppose God**. Ascending to God's right hand, Christ continues to exert his kingly authority as he finishes putting all powers in their place. He is re-ordering the world according to God's ordered design until, at the end, God's order is established and God is "all in all" (**1Cor 15:28**). The final supernatural power that Christ will put in its place is Death, after which time it will finally be the end (1Cor 15:26). Until that time, Death continues to inflict creation with such effects as sickness, sorrow, crying, pain, and even death itself (**Rev 21:4**).

Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father

Isaiah makes clear that there is no God but the Lord, Yahweh—a title and position the early church clearly ascribed to Jesus Christ (**Isa 45:23; Phil 2:10-11**). In the end, not just believers but "all" **will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord**. This does not mean that all will be saved but that all will recognize and acknowledge the truth of Christ's identity and rightful kingly reign. This recognition by all who have lived is to **the glory of God the Father**, who sent Jesus and made him Lord. Believers can have assurance of their salvation through their confession of Christ as Lord and by receiving his Spirit, who testifies to us that we are God's children (Rom 8:16).

Ultimately, God will judge the living and the dead

Although saved, believers must still conduct themselves "in a manner worthy of the gospel" (Phil 1:27), being prepared to give an account for their deeds before the judgement seat of Christ (2Cor 5:10). With all powers finally put in their place (**1Cor 15:25**), none retain any hold over either the living or the dead. God will judge or discern between those he finds rescued or redeemed by Christ—whether dead or alive—and those, by default, who remain bound with the defeated powers and

Death, destined to share their fate (**Acts 10:42; 1Pet 4:5**).

Such judgement is God's gracious answer to humanity's cry for justice to prevail throughout the earth and is consistent with God's character as loving, holy, and just

The concept of **judgement** has negative overtones in today's world. Who of us is sufficiently righteous or impartial enough to judge another? But the word judgement here is a reminder that God is not "us," and that it is his standard of "right" against which humanity is measured. Yet, alongside misgivings expressed about judgement, there is **humanity's cry for justice to prevail throughout the earth**. Universally, humans display an innate concept of God's right and wrong; a sense of morality and justice appears in every society.

The innate, universal human cry for justice calls for a response. God's judgement, then, is a **gracious answer** that **is consistent with God's character as loving, holy, and just**. Judgement is a blending of God's love through Christ, and the rescue plan of salvation, with God's holiness and justice in setting right what had gone so terribly wrong. God's holiness and justice finally address the victim's cry for fairness—"Where is the God of justice?" (**Mal 2:17**)—including those victims who experienced injustice because of their commitment to Jesus (**Rev 6:9-11; Matt 5:10**). By assuming ultimate responsibility for judgement, God displays his character as loving, holy, and just by releasing believers from pursuing vengeance and freeing them to practise forgiveness as God practises it (**Matt 5:43-47; 6:14; Rom 12:17-21; Col 3:13**). In Christ, there is rescue for the oppressed and oppressor alike who once shared a common bondage to such powers as Sin and Death.

The unredeemed will go away into eternal punishment, but the redeemed into eternal life. The redeemed will enjoy the presence of God where there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain

With Christ as their firstfruits, that is, as the one who first conquered death through resurrection, the **redeemed** are freed from the powers of Sin and Death that separated them from God. Such believers have their names written in God's book and possess the hope of bodily resurrection, for those "who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake" (**Dan 12:2; Rev 13:8**). **The unredeemed**, those who ultimately reject Christ and remain in bondage to the powers of Sin and Death, do not possess assurance of eternal life, but face the prospect of **eternal punishment**—that is, alienation from God and his good order of renewed creation.

A variety of biblical images may serve to express eternal reward and punishment. What is emphasized here is what underlies them all; they are all related to the presence or absence of God. Reward is associated with God's presence,

punishment with his absence. To be in God's presence is to enjoy the fullness of life in all its aspects; to be excluded from God's presence is to suffer the deprivation of life itself, the conditions of anti-life. What the redeemed anticipate, then, is not alienation, but rather to **enjoy the presence of God**. When **death** has been swallowed up forever (**Isa 25:8-12**), they will live in a world that exists without its effects of **sorrow or crying or pain** (**Rev 21:3-4**).

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

Ultimately, the final restoration of all things depends not on the believer but completely on God, in Christ, reconciling the world to himself (2Cor 5:18). Believers, individually and corporately as the church, are invited to participate principally in uttering prayer to that effect. Consequently, we pray, and conclude our Fellowship's Statement by uttering a prayer that echoes the prayer offered by the first followers of Jesus: *Maranatha*—"Come, Lord Jesus" (**Rev 22:20**).

Afterword

An emphasis on eschatology is seen throughout SOET. And by eschatology, of course, we mean the period at the end of history that began when Jesus Messiah came to earth, and continues until God's kingdom comes in its fullness. How we perceive the end times affects our beliefs, our practices, and our affections. For example, we treat Spirit baptism eschatologically: as empowerment to be witnesses of a kingdom that is coming and has come (see the Spirit Baptism section); and further, we see the presence of healing in our communities as a witness to our future and full restoration (see the Salvation section).

In Saskatoon at the 2014 General Conference, the Theological Study Commission hosted a Theological Vitality session on eschatology and Dispensationalism. The question we debated was: Is Dispensationalism still working for us? Is our traditional adherence to the eschatological system of Dispensationalism encouraging a consistent and passionate proclamation of Christ's return and of our missional response, or is it not? Pentecostals have a reputation for pragmatism, and so we put it to the test in that session. The feedback we received suggested there was considerable openness among us to a non-systems-based approach to end times events. We pursued this approach when the project to refresh our SOFET began in the following year. But from the start, we decided that whatever form our eschatological section would take, it would be amenable for those wishing to preach a Dispensational eschatology. Consequently, no statement in SOET's Restoration section is a direct contradiction to Dispensational tenets. Nor does SOET advocate for an alternate modern system. By focusing on primary eschatological events, we

leave the structuring or systematization of them to the discretion of our preachers and teachers.

In light of Dispensationalism's role in historic Pentecostalism, a few words might be said here about how it has supported many of our convictions. Although some of the ideas contained in Dispensationalism were in circulation before its formulation, it came together as a system in the U.K. in the 1830s and spread to North America soon afterwards. It was adopted by many North American Pentecostals in the early 1900s, and it has been the official system for proclaiming the end times in the PAOC until now. It has served us well insofar as it has emphasized the any-moment return of Jesus as the hope of the church—and the only hope for the world, even though the world may look elsewhere for salvation and justice.

The primary attraction of Dispensationalism for Pentecostals lies in its dual affirmation that Jesus' return is our great hope, and he is coming soon. Seen from this perspective, Dispensationalism is a modern variant on what has been called historic Premillennialism, that is, the expectation of the earliest church that Jesus was coming soon and that only then would millennial-like conditions pervade all of creation.

Furthermore, to the advantages of the Dispensational position we may add the confidence it provides for God's ultimate victory. The charts and diagrams, for which the system has become known, create confidence in God's sovereignty over events by picturing the seemingly chaotic events of world history as seven eras or dispensations, each following a pre-ordained trajectory. It comes as no surprise, then, that some of its most ardent defenders come from advocates of predestination. We may affirm with the Dispensationalist the sovereignty of God over all creation, while maintaining our conviction that it is the creative disruption of the Spirit, bringing life out of chaos and challenging the norms and systems of this world, that is integral to God's plan to bring about restoration. The Spirit moves in unpredictable ways.

That said, Dispensationalism is not a perfect fit for Pentecostalism—and to be fair, no pre-existing eschatological system is ever a perfect fit for a new movement of the Spirit. It makes no room for the primary idea of Pentecostal identity, that it is a restoration movement raised up in the last days as the power of the Holy Spirit is restored to the church, both through Spirit baptism and the gifts of the Spirit. Certainly, periodic revivals of the church may fit within the Dispensationalist scheme; what does not fit so easily, if at all, is the idea of a restoration of the New Testament era in the fashion just described. The trajectory of the church within Dispensationalism is towards apostasy, not rejuvenation. It may come as no surprise, then, that many Dispensationalists are cessationists—those who believe

that miracles and spiritual gifts, including speaking in tongues, ceased in the first few centuries of the church. That is not to say that all Dispensationalists are cessationists. After all, many of us have preached Dispensationalism. Or to put it another way, in our pragmatism, we have used Dispensationalism to our advantage where it suits us while adapting and even ignoring other aspects.

Dispensationalism emphasizes an inevitable decline of conditions on earth as the end draws near. This includes, as mentioned, a falling away of many from the faith—the apostasy of the church. In this scenario, pessimism about the foreseeable future pervades, although optimism about his return remains vibrant. Rightly so, Dispensationalism warns us of the danger of the church falling away from God. There is another danger, too. Pessimism might encourage withdrawal and protectionism rather than engagement with the world in the power of the Spirit. For Pentecostals, pessimism about what will happen before Jesus returns must not overwhelm us because the Spirit is still working among us. To quote many a coach of hockey or football, “the best defence is a good offence.” We have a long tradition of both heeding warnings about decline while being encouraged by what the Spirit is doing: many of us have preached Dispensationalism and held revival services within the same month. Apostasy may come to some churches, but it need not come to ours.

There is plenty of biblical support for the reality of tribulation on earth. We read in the New Testament of social upheaval and extreme and destructive physical conditions on earth. We read in church history of times of persecution and even martyrdom. We also read the news, where death and destruction and the onslaught of evil remain current events. But, we are Pentecostals. Our reading of the world situation should include present signs of progress and hope as the Spirit moves among us and around the globe. Such hope spurs us to engage the world. We affirm that in the last days Jesus is still pouring out his Spirit. These are difficult days, but also days of great opportunity for the advancement of the kingdom of God. Joel 2:28-29 (often quoted by Pentecostals), with its references to the Spirit being poured out, is followed by Joel 2:30-31 (not so often quoted) with its ominous notes about impending judgement and signs on the earth to that effect. The two are paired together in this depiction of the end times: progress and decline, hope and warning. So what will we do in the time that is left to further the work of Christ before he completes it? What good can we do now as a testimony to what will come later?

Pentecostals affirm that God’s Spirit is encircling the earth, making the future kingdom of God visual in transformed individuals and communities. Our first response to the nearness of the end has always been the salvation of the individual. We are a revival movement first and foremost. What with the shortness of time

and the empowerment of the Spirit, saving the lost was the logical response. Now that we have been proclaiming the soon return for over a century, we realize that the delay of the soon return—while still to be anticipated at any moment—provides opportunity for more engagement in the communities where we minister. We have opportunity to act as witnesses of the kingdom of God by our advocacy now of the social conditions that will one day prevail in the kingdom of God—not just by what we do in our churches but also in our surrounding communities (there is further discussion of this in the Afterword of the Spirit Baptism section).

We have not included a statement about a future millennium in SOET. Once more, this is an attempt to avoid committing all of our pastors to a particular system of eschatology. The various popular systems of eschatology are often defined by using the millennium as a reference point: premillennial, postmillennial, and amillennial. This is not the place to describe these systems, nor to advocate for any particular one. Suffice it to say, the two systems that dominate the global Pentecostal/Charismatic landscape are the premillennial and the postmillennial. Premillennialism in all its forms, both historic and modern Dispensationalism, are ultimately pessimistic about the amount of progress to expect before the end of history, but solidly optimistic about the future that Jesus will introduce at his return. Postmillennialism, that Jesus will return after millennial-like conditions prevail, brings a different type of optimism, that the church can rise up and bring transformation to the world before Jesus returns. What a contrast of visions!

Our stated hope for Christ's soon return naturally aligns us with the sentiments associated with historic Premillennialism, which affirms that before the millennium, before heaven on earth, the Lord must return—"pre" the golden age. This position was common in the early church, who located their confidence in what only Christ could accomplish to set the world right. SOET reflects that type of hope.

We are witnesses of a great and glorious future, but one that only Christ can bring about. Indeed, our hope for the future has many implications for the present. As you will have seen by now, SOET and this commentary are filled with references to the future because they inform our beliefs, practices, and affections until he comes. SOET contains statements of faith, rather than exhortations to certain behaviours or other practical outcomes. The end of SOET is an exception to this pattern. It exhorts a response. It ends with a full-throated invocation that expresses our deepest longing: "Come, Lord Jesus!"

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Essential Truths

The PAOC Statement of Essential Truths || Commentary

“The recently adopted *Statement of Essential Truths* is one outcome of a greater initiative to encourage theological vitality within our Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada family. This resource will complement the SOET and be useful for the purposes of membership, credentialing, and discipleship. In all that we do with these materials, I pray the primary goal will be for the truth to transform us to be more like our Lord—personally and as the people of God. Together, as a movement of disciplined followers of Jesus, we will do our best to present ourselves to God as those approved, workers who do not need to be ashamed, and who correctly handle the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).”

David Wells

General Superintendent of The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada