

# Toward an Indian Pentecostal Missiology in the Globalized World: Navigating Religious Pluralism and Skepticism

Enoch S. Charles\*

In our continually shrinking global village, we cannot ignore either the advance of science or the presence of religious others. – Amos Yong<sup>1</sup>

Christian mission in the twenty-first century Indian context has its unique challenges. Along with the perennial issues of religious pluralism, extremism, multiculturalism, one could also factor in a rising religious skepticism that is homegrown, but also influenced by contemporary globalizing factors such as New Atheism. This means, the Pentecostal<sup>2</sup> church in India—the spiritually vibrant and one of the fastest growing church movements in the global South—should address these challenges effectively in order to continue its mission successfully. In short, an Indian Pentecostal Christian should be prepared to handle challenges like religious pluralism as well as religious skepticism (powered by scientific rationalism). Traditionally, Indian Pentecostal missiologies have only focused on religious pluralism. In this light, I argue two main theses in this paper: first, in terms of outlining the problem—India is home to a steadily rising religious skepticism which is indigenous, yet precipitated and influenced by Western enlightenment secularism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well as contemporary globalizing factors such as New Atheism in the twenty-first century. And Indian Pentecostal missiology cannot afford to ignore this religious skepticism, while focusing all its energy on religious pluralism. Second, as a proposed solution to the problem raised—in terms of taking a first few steps toward developing a robust Indian Pentecostal missiology that engages religious pluralism as well as religious skepticism, I envision the Indian Pentecostal missiological witness as a “passionate prophetic dialogue in many tongues and many practices” using the work of Amos Yong, Stephen Bevans, Roger Schroeder, and Jonathan Y. Tan and supported by Indian Pentecostals such as Geomon George, Ivan Satyavrata, and Wesley Lukose.

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\* Enoch S. Charles is a PhD Candidate in Theological Studies at Regent University School of Divinity, Virginia Beach, VA. He is currently working on his dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Michael D. Palmer entitled, “Toward a Pneumatological Moral Theology of Divine Assistance: An Apologetic Dialogue with Naturalistic Ethics” and expects to graduate by May 2018. Enoch teaches theology and Christian apologetics as an Adjunct Faculty at Bethel College, Hampton, VA, and at Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA. He serves as the Chapter Director for the campus based apologetics ministry, Ratio Christi, at Regent University.

## Section 1: Local and Global (Glocal) Rationalism and Skepticism of Religion in India

In this first section, I draw from the German ethnologist Johannes Quack, who has offered an in-depth study of the modern rationalist<sup>3</sup> movements in India while tracing their historical roots and links with the nineteenth and twentieth century Anglo-American enlightenment thinkers. Then, I provide some evidence for the influence that contemporary globalizing atheist movements with their leading spokesmen such as Richard Dawkins and the late Christopher Hitchens have on the Indian rationalists. I also point out the heightened activity and increased prevalence of Indian-based atheistic groups in the internet and social media.

I begin by turning my attention to Johannes Quack's doctoral dissertation published in 2012, *Disenchanted India: Organized Rationalism and Criticism of Religion in India*.<sup>4</sup> In this much needed study of Indian rationalism and organized criticism of religion, Quack explores the historic roots of the modern rationalist movement in India. Here one finds a long history of freethinkers who have challenged the religious status quo of their day and age like the *Cārvāka*, Buddha, Mahaveera, the *Ājīvikas*, the *Mimāmsa*, and the classical *Sāmkhya*.<sup>5</sup> For example, one could learn from the surviving fragments of the Bārhaspatya sūtras (third century BCE) that the *Cārvāka* or the *Lokāyata* (worldly ones) emphasized the materialistic and naturalistic values, rejecting the domain of the supernatural and the existence of afterlife and soul.<sup>6</sup> Though skepticism of religion and naturalistic philosophies (*svabhāviktā*) are nothing new in India, Quack, with sufficient evidence from Indian thinkers such as Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, inclines toward the view that the roots of the modern Indian rationalist movement could be traced to nineteenth-century Enlightenment, when India was colonized by the British Empire.<sup>7</sup>

### Influence of Nineteenth-Century British and American Enlightenment Thinkers on the Indian Rationalist Movement

Quack proceeds to trace the influence of nineteenth-century British rationalists and anti-religionists like Robert Owen, George Jacob Holyoake, Charles Bradlaugh, and Annie Wood Besant along with organizations such Rationalist Press Association (RPA) and their impact on Indian rationalism. American thinkers like Thomas Paine, and Robert Ingersoll were also popular in India.<sup>8</sup> American and British rationalist thought posed a serious threat to the missionary efforts in India as the Methodist bishop John Fletcher Hurst remarked that many learned Indians drifted toward these anti-theistic rationalist thinkers and their publications such as the *National*

*Reformer* and the *Philosophic Inquirer*.<sup>9</sup> Quack quotes Bishop Hurst, who describes the scene in colonial India in 1891:

In India a purely secular education and an acquaintance with Western science are taking from the people their ancestral religion and destroying all faith. Infidelity, atheism, and universal skepticism are being introduced along with European literature and culture; unless we hasten to give them the Gospel of Jesus Christ they will be cast adrift without chart or compass, on a sea of doubts and errors.<sup>10</sup>

### Key Twentieth Century Indian Rationalists

Some key national figures of the Indian rationalist movement in the twentieth century are E. V. Ramaswami (Periyar), M. N. Roy (Narendra Nath Bhattacharya), and Gora. E. V. Ramaswami (1879-1973) founded the Self-Respect (*Suya Mariyathai*) movement in 1925. Periyar was influenced by Marxian philosophy and that of Ingersoll.<sup>11</sup> Periyar's mission could be summed up in these words: "I resolved to eradicate the evils of casteism. I decided to fight God and superstitions."<sup>12</sup> Quite fittingly, the following words are engraved in his tombstone in Chennai: "There is no god, there is no god at all. He who invented god is a fool. He who propagates god is a scoundrel. He who worships god is a barbarian."<sup>13</sup>

Narendra Natha Bhattacharya (M. N. Roy, 1887-1954) founded the Indian Radical Humanist Movement which came under the wings of International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), in which (the latter) he served as Vice President to the famed British atheist Sir Julian Huxley, who then was the President. Today IHEU is the biggest umbrella organization embracing humanist, atheist, rationalists, secularists, freethinkers, and similar organizations worldwide; most of the contemporary rationalist organizations are part of the IHEU.<sup>14</sup>

Goparaju Ramachandra Rao (1902-1975), better known as Gora, was an atheist activist, educator, and social reformer in India. Gora founded the Atheist Centre in 1940 in Mudnur village at Krishna district, Andhra Pradesh and began seeking opportunities to interact more closely with Mahatma Gandhi. In a personal interaction with Gandhiji, Gora offers the following rationale for choosing an atheistic approach to his social work:

My method is atheism. I find that the atheistic outlook provides a favourable background for cosmopolitan practices. Acceptance of atheism at once pulls down caste and religious barriers between man and man. There is no longer a Hindu, a Muslim or a Christian. All are human beings. Further, the atheistic outlook puts man on his legs. There is neither divine will nor fate to control his actions. The release of free will awakens Harijans and

the depressed classes from the stupor of inferiority into which they were pressed all these ages when they were made to believe that they were fated to be untouchables. So I find the atheistic outlook helpful for my work.<sup>15</sup>

### Nehru's Scientific Temper and the Modern Indian Rationalist Movement

One leading Indian intellectual in the twentieth century, who was not part of this rationalist movement yet exerted huge influence on the rationalists, is the first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru. He was educated in England at Harrow and Cambridge, and was appreciative of modern science and its influence in the progress of the Western culture. He felt that Indians must learn to think and act in a scientifically literate manner and overcome the religious superstitions and other supernatural, mystical, and uncritical ways of life. All these considerations came to be known as "scientific temper," and this forms a major part of the rhetoric of the Indian rationalists.<sup>16</sup> Nehru's letter to his daughter Indira Priyadarshini (Gandhi) on February 3, 1933 from prison has a special place in establishing the arguments of the Indian rationalist movement. In part Nehru writes:

Organised religion, in Europe or elsewhere, has various dogmas attached to it which its followers are supposed to accept without doubt or questioning. Science has a very different way of looking at things. It takes nothing for granted and has, or ought to have, no dogmas. It seeks to encourage an open mind and tries to reach truth by repeated experiment. This outlook is obviously very different from the religious outlook, and it is not surprising that there was frequent conflict between the two.<sup>17</sup>

### Contemporary Rationalist Organizations and Leaders

Nehru's philosophy ("scientific temper" and the perceived conflict between science and religion), thus, became a building block for rationalist organizations like ANiS (*Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti*, Organization for the Eradication of Superstition) founded by Narendra Dabholkar.<sup>18</sup> ANiS works to eradicate religious superstition and trickery, and the promotion of science in the society. Sanal Edamaruku is the president of both Rationalist International and Indian Rationalist Association. He has carried out investigations which have helped expose many frauds, mystics and godmen. BBC has called him "India's Top Miracle Buster."<sup>19</sup>

*Nimrukta* is another recent organization founded by Ajita Kamal in 2008. The *Nimrukta* community talks about "Atheism, Rationalism, Skepticism, and Naturalism" as their four pillars

with the purpose of “promoting Science, Freethought, and Secular Humanism in India and South Asia.”<sup>20</sup> *Nirmukta* remains as a vibrant online community with website, online forums, magazine (“Indian Skeptic”), blogs, YouTube videos, and social media groups.<sup>21</sup> Their annual “Think Fest” conferences are attended by many free thinkers and skeptics. ANiS and *Nirmukta* are members of the Federation of Indian Rationalist Associations (FIRA). Narendra Nayak, the current president of FIRA is another influential Indian rationalist, who actively promotes the “scientific temper” through his numerous workshops and online presence via *Nirmukta*.<sup>22</sup>

### Contemporary Globalizing (New Atheist) Influences on Indian Rationalism

Edamaruku’s *Rationalist International* was supported by the late Christopher Hitchens. Also Edamaruku’s contributions and his exposing of false miracles and superstitions were recognized by the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Science and Reason.<sup>23</sup> Noted British “New Atheists” Richard Dawkins and A. C. Grayling along with the Harvard Psychologist-atheist Stephen Pinker spoke at the 2012 Jaipur Literary Festival in Rajasthan, India, celebrating and defending Western enlightenment values such as autonomy, reason, free-thinking, and secular humanism while deriding traditional religion and authority.<sup>24</sup> Dawkins himself had expressed support for *Nirmukta* in India, and as a result, they participated in the “OUT” campaign of the Richard Dawkins foundation, where atheists are encouraged to come out in public. Some of *Nirmukta*’s original articles have appeared earlier in Richarddawkins.net. *Nirmukta* was a participating website on Richard Dawkins foundation’s non-believers giving aid program.<sup>25</sup>

### Core Claims of Indian Rationalists

Quack observes many similarities in the “formal structures, activities, and ideologies” between the Indian and Western rationalist organizations. He writes:

In both the cases, atheism, rationalism, and naturalism are seen as feeding into one another and into a rejection of everything supernatural. . . . The “supernatural” includes virtually all beliefs and practices generally labeled “religious” in the modern understanding of the term. Religion is to be separated from “secular” social realms, such as that of politics. Secular politics are considered to provide the most just form of governance. Religion is further opposed to science. From the development and progress of modern sciences, the Indian atheists and rationalists draw their most central conviction: *there is nothing supernatural in the world; in principle, everything can be explained through science* (emphasis mine).<sup>26</sup>

### Statistics on Indian Rationalists

In India, self-identified atheists are about 2.5 percent, yet a study of Indian scientists and academics revealed a far higher level of disbelief in that elite subpopulation with 12 percent categorized as positive atheists and 13 percent agnostics.<sup>27</sup> This shows that atheism and agnosticism is still a minority phenomenon in India, and there is a greater element of skepticism among the Indian scientific community than the general public. However, this does not mean it can be ignored missiologically in our globalized world. I would like to end the first section with a case study that helps us to understand how these dynamics of rationalism and scientific temper play a role in the Indian public sphere today.

### The Case of Uma Shankar and the Task Ahead for Indian Pentecostals

In 2015, there was a news headline in India where a Christian civil servant, Uma Shankar, was targeted for his evangelistic efforts. One of India's well-known TV anchors, Arnab Goswami, in a live TV interview, criticized the faith-healing services that Mr. Uma Shankar conducts as "Quackery." Rather Goswami challenged Shankar to use his "scientific temper" and stop these healing prayers.<sup>28</sup> Here you have this Christian government official, who is publicly challenged for his religious beliefs and practices that are cherished by Pentecostals. This leads me as an Indian Pentecostal to ask: where is the Pentecostal theological engagement of this "scientific temper" in the public square in defense of the Pentecostal faith and its spiritual practices? Are Pentecostals in India ready to dialogue with the scientifically-minded rationalists and skeptics who dismiss away miraculous phenomenon as superstition, and equate reports of Christian faith healings with those made with false god-men and gurus who pervade the Indian religious sphere? Do we have a coherent missiology (or apologetics in the Indian Pentecostal context) to address this religious skepticism and also defend the Pentecostal worldview? What is the status of Indian Pentecostal missiology today? Having presented the problem and raised relevant questions, we now can turn our attention to the next section of the paper.

## **Section 2: Toward a Robust Indian Pentecostal Missiology: Indian Pentecostal Mission as "Passionate Prophetic Dialogue in Many Tongues and Many Practices"**

I begin here with a brief survey of the works of three Indian Pentecostal theologians and missiologists, who have made very significant contributions to Indian Pentecostal missiology or

contextual theology of mission in the last decade—Ivan Satyavrata, Geomon George, and Wessly Lukose.<sup>29</sup> While constructively engaging the Indian fulfillment theological tradition and advocating its significance for the mission of the Evangelical and Pentecostal church in India, Satyavrata’s work offers us a great and viable model to engage Hinduism (and even other Indian religious traditions) from a theologically sound and missiologically sensitive perspective. Geomon George’s insightful approach highlights the significance of the Pentecostal mission in religious pluralism, and the unique role Pentecostalism plays in engaging the primal religious and spiritual contexts of India. Wessly Lukose’s contextual missiology—based on his study of Pentecostal mission in the state of Rajasthan—is a competent analysis, and offers one a useful paradigm for indigenous as well as glocal Indian Pentecostal mission.

While religious pluralism has remained as the foremost concern of these missiologies and contextual theologies (and rightfully so), I feel the need to engage the growing number of scientifically minded rationalists and atheists of India. This prompts us to search for a more robust Indian Pentecostal missiology that engages both pluralism and skepticism of religion. Developing this missiology is an urgent task as the rising religious skepticism in India is able to affect (and it already does) many educated young believers of the Pentecostal church, and also render the Indian urban-elite more resistant to the spread of the gospel as it has happened in the West. Credibility of the Pentecostal faith continues to get challenged in the public sphere as noted in the Uma Shankar case. This pushes us to take concrete steps for bolstering the Indian Pentecostal missiological endeavor. In this regard, I propose to envision the Indian Pentecostal missiological witness as a “passionate prophetic dialogue in many tongues and many practices” using the work of Amos Yong, Stephen Bevans, Roger Schroeder, and Jonathan Y. Tan while continuing to draw from the theological insights of Ivan Satyavrata, Wesley Lukose, and Geomon George.

### Mission as “Prophetic Dialogue”

For moving the task forward, the idea of conceiving mission as “prophetic dialogue” by the Catholic missiologists, Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, plays a foundational role. This is what Bevans and Schroeder say about their idea, “prophetic dialogue.”

Mission is done in dialogue. Mission is done in prophecy. The two go together. While we can distinguish them to better understand the whole, we cannot and dare not separate

them. Mission is prophetic dialogue. It is dialogical prophecy. The question is not "is it one or the other?" The question is rather *when* should the dialogical aspect of missionary service be emphasized or employed more fully and *when* should one act or speak prophetically in action, in words, in confrontation. . . . One needs to be in touch with the sources of creativity, the Holy Spirit, to know just how to proceed.<sup>30</sup>

In the remaining section of this paper, I seek to expand the paradigm: Indian Pentecostal mission conceived as a "passionate prophetic dialogue in many tongues and many practices." And we begin by unpacking the "dialogue" aspect of this paradigm.

### 1. Indian Pentecostal Mission as "Dialogue"

Bevans and Schroeder conceive the missionary dialogue as "spirituality" or sense of "contemplation" which enables the missionary to perceive his or her unique context in a new way. This spirituality develops a kind of sensitivity and attentiveness to the "social, cultural, religious, and political aspects of the situation, as also attentiveness to the 'signs of the times' through which the Spirit of God is speaking, teaching, and guiding."<sup>31</sup> The scope of this dialogue includes dialogue with the poor, dialogue with particular contexts including dialogue with religions.<sup>32</sup> We need to extend this discourse to the rationalists and skeptics as well.

To supplement this spirituality of dialogue in terms of attentiveness to the other, Amos Yong's pneumatological theology of interreligious hospitality becomes useful. For Yong, "Christian mission in terms of hospitality means not only hosting people of other faiths but risking being guests of such strangers," and also being vulnerable to them.<sup>33</sup> This kind of hospitality powered by the Spirit of God injects a new sense of mutuality and relatedness in interreligious and interfaith dialogue. In light of our needs, I would like to extend Yong's proposal in such a manner that this hospitality reaches out not only to our religious neighbors, but also to the Indian rationalists. This dialogue could be envisioned in at least three different ways: dialogue with the popular religious contexts, dialogue with the religions, and dialogue with the sciences and the Indian rationalists.

#### Dialogue with the Popular Religious Contexts

Geomon George brilliantly captures how Indian Pentecostal spirituality contextualizes itself to the spiritual needs of the people, and addresses the popular religious belief systems (especially those of the Dalit religions). George points out that in Pentecostal mission, people's

beliefs in the world of spirits, bad omens, and curses are not rudely discarded or rejected with a cold indifference as happened in the case of several Protestant missionaries from the West, who approached the Indian religious context from an enlightenment model of spirituality and way of viewing reality.<sup>34</sup> Renowned missiologist and anthropologist Paul Hiebert had a similar observation based on his own experience in rural India: “When the tribal people spoke of fear of evil spirits, they (western missionaries) denied the existence of spirits rather than claim the power of Christ over them.”<sup>35</sup> But Pentecostal spirituality and mission, with its unique ability to dialogue with the world of the spirits through various “power encounters,”<sup>36</sup> seems to be an effective solution to this missionary dilemma in engaging with the popular religious traditions at a level that many of these non-Pentecostal approaches to mission failed to engage.

### Dialogue with the Religions

Pneumatological theologies of religion have been proposed by the likes of Pentecostal and Charismatic theologians like Amos Yong, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, and Clark Pinnock<sup>37</sup> that open up the possibility of the Holy Spirit’s work and presence outside the explicit Christological and confessional boundaries of the Christian tradition within a Trinitarian framework.<sup>38</sup> These pneumatological approaches to inter-religious dialogue advocate the Christian engagement of the other religious traditions through discernment rather than through any *a priori* views about the religions. This means that people of other faiths need to be heard first on their own terms, even while (Pentecostal) Christians would also be invited or even required to testify in their own tongues. The key here is to be able to comprehend other religions according to their own self-understanding, without prejudging or defining them according to our own Christian (or Pentecostal) theological categories (for example, in exclusivist, inclusivist, or pluralist terms).<sup>39</sup> Dutch Reformed Inter-cultural theologian Benno van den Toren acknowledges the significance of these pneumatological theologies of religion as they “contribute to a true attitude of dialogue when Christians encounter believers of other religious traditions.”<sup>40</sup> The commitment to Christ “invites Christians to share what is most dear to them, yet, the Spirit gives them the expectation that they themselves have much to gain from truly listening to others. Witness and dialogue are therefore both part of inter-religious encounters.”<sup>41</sup> Church of God bishop and theologian Tony Richie argues that Pentecostal testimony, considered as “Holy Spirit inspired and empowered

speech," provides a unique category that helps to engage the religious others in respectful, yet unreserved speech.<sup>42</sup>

In the Indian context, dialogical postures toward other religions have been already developed through the Indian fulfillment theological tradition, where serious attempts have been made to engage the indigenous non-Christian traditions with sensitivity and care.<sup>43</sup> As effectively argued and pointed out by the Indian Evangelical-Pentecostal theologian Ivan Satyavrata, the fulfillment tradition shows tremendous promise and potential for Indian Pentecostals to engage in interreligious dialogue and mission.<sup>44</sup> I believe that the Indian fulfillment theological tradition, which is thoroughly Christocentric, would serve as a valuable dialogue partner to the pneumatological theologies of religion explored earlier, and help the Indian Pentecostals in sharpening their tools for inter-religious dialogue and discernment. Because the same Spirit who makes us invitational, dialogical, open to learning and correction, and non-prejudicial while engaging the religious other, is the One who passionately seeks to proclaim and make Jesus, the Christ, known to everyone so that none would perish.

#### Dialogue with the Sciences and the Indian Rationalists

Pentecostals are not only able to engage the world of spirits and religions, but they are able to enter in reasonable theological dialogue with the sciences. For Yong, this is possible because of the hope and confidence that comes from the Spirit of Pentecost. Just as the Spirit redeemed the various tongues and languages for the glory of God (Acts 2:11), Yong makes a theological extension to postulate that the Spirit of God is able to redeem the various cultures, religions, and sciences.

Therefore, the Spirit who gives the capacity to speak in a foreign language also enables, by extension, participation in a foreign culture, a different semeiotic system of beliefs and practices, and even in some aspects of an alien religion, so that one can experience and testify to those realities to some degree "from within." If in more exegetical terms the Spirit's outpouring on the Day of Pentecost redeemed the various languages for the purposes of God, my more theological interpretation and application to the religion-science and interreligious dialogues would be to embrace the "redemption" of both domains of human knowledge and experience, but attempt to present and discuss them in ways that respect their distinctive languages and perspectives. Hence I say that our dialogue with science and other faiths allows and even invites our engagement with them on their own terms. . . . I therefore suggest also that the same Spirit whose outpouring on the Day of Pentecost enabled the speaking in foreign tongues might today enable genuine engagement with the sciences and with other faiths.<sup>45</sup>

In a similar way, one could have confidence in the Spirit of God who leads us into all truth, is able to redeem the stunted worldview of those rationalists and scientists who deny the supernatural.

Hence, in spite of sharp differences in fundamental metaphysics and ontology, under the guidance of the Spirit, a Pentecostal dialogue with the rationalists could proceed, for example, by developing a theology of healing or divine action in dialogue with the medical and natural sciences. Developing such “Pentecostal theologies of science” would serve to strengthen the faith of fellow Pentecostals and even non-Pentecostal Christians. It also builds credibility for Pentecostal faith in the secular Indian public square that extols the scientific-temper. Right now, the elite-secular consciousness of India takes a jolt when they see an intelligent civil servant such as Uma Shankar claim healings and miracles, and they are eager to dismiss it as “Quackery.” But with a robust interdisciplinary Pentecostal theology of healing or divine action in place, Pentecostals can engage in intelligent conversations in the secular public square and “offer a reason for the hope that they have, in gentleness and respect” (1 Pet. 3:15).

But Yong warns that this kind of interdisciplinary engagement does not mean to “inappropriately synthesize or syncretize the research lab and the congregation.” Rather following the lead of Michael Polanyi and Lesslie Newbigin, Yong is convinced that this interdisciplinarity is achieved as a result of a “mutual indwelling”—“believers indwelling not only the scriptural narrative but also their own scientific cultural praxis”—and by emphasizing and recovering the teleological dimension in the scientific disciplines.<sup>46</sup> As Pentecostals prepare to engage in serious dialogue with the sciences, Yong recommends seeing the task of scientific inquiry itself as a divine gift and “one avenue for the outworking of the Christian scholarly vocation” since the work of science is about illuminating “the nature of creation in anticipation of the coming reign of God.”<sup>47</sup> Even though every secular intellectual or rationalist might not be convinced, these scientific theological engagements will go a long way to improve the image of the Pentecostal faith in the Indian public sphere, and it will also testify to the power of the Holy Spirit and the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ that can redeem any language or culture or scientific discipline for the glory of God.

## 2. Indian Pentecostal Mission as "Prophecy"

For Bevans and Schroeder, mission is not only dialogical, but also prophetic. The "prophetic" element in mission manifests in several ways: speaking forth without words (witness), speaking forth with words (proclamation), speaking against without words (being a counter-cultural or contrast community), and speaking against in words (speaking truth to power).<sup>48</sup> For an Indian Pentecostal, this prophetic element in mission could be realized in many ways. Lukose points to the lives of Pentecostals in Rajasthan, whose lives speak forth prophetically without words (witness)—they are prepared to face persecution and even martyrdom.<sup>49</sup> Their lives are a powerful witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Pentecostals also exercise discernment of the spirits and their contexts. When needed, Pentecostals are unafraid to engage in power encounters with spirits and the demonic, and usher in the Kingdom of God, deliverance, peace, and healing for people trapped in bondage and a satanic curse.

And as Pentecostals engage different religions and sciences in dialogue, Yong states "Language and culture, science and religion, must all be tested and discerned, even as each is potentially a vehicle for mediating the truth, beauty, goodness, wondrousness, and even grace of God."<sup>50</sup> Pentecostals, with their ever-present trust and reliance on the Spirit of Pentecost, are called to prophetically engage the religions and the sciences, advocating spiritual discernment. Likewise, Pentecostals, in their engagement with the rationalists, should be bold to challenge the underlying philosophical assumptions of modern science and its widely prevalent metaphysical naturalism, "the cosmos is all there is." Pentecostals in India should take clues from leading South Asian Christian authors such as Vinoth Ramachandra and Vishal Mangalwadi who fearlessly engage the public square with the scandalous truth of the Christian gospel, and defend Christianity from Hindu nationalists, secularists, conspiracy theorists, and scientific materialists who attempt to taint the Christian faith and mission.<sup>51</sup>

Just as the Indian rationalists have been boldly championing the cause against the evils of the caste system in India, Pentecostals could enter into "prophetic dialogue" with them, and partner with them to speak out against these social evils. In the nationwide movement against corruption, Pentecostals could stand in solidarity with other like-minded organizations for these social causes.<sup>52</sup> Pentecostals have to stand with other Christians in India especially to protect and defend the rights of minorities, including Muslims, Sikhs, and others that are under risk with the rise of Hindutva nationalism. Pentecostals should also prophetically challenge the imperialist and

arrogant tendencies of traditionally practiced Christian mission. Thus, the Indian church could be a leading prophetic voice for peace and harmony among Hindus, Muslims, and Christians in India.<sup>53</sup> I would add that the Indian Christians in general, and the Pentecostals in particular, have to earn the trust and confidence of the religious skeptics and rationalists, like Dr. Dabholkar of ANiS, who have been targeted and persecuted. Prophetic action is definitely pivotal from the Pentecostals in terms of reaching out to these rationalists and skeptics, and joining hands with them wherever necessary.

### 3. Indian Pentecostal Mission as a “Passionate” Endeavor

Pentecostal mission has always been construed as a passionate mission in proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom. Using the work of Jonathan Tan, I argue that the Indian Pentecostal mission is not only prophetic and dialogical, but it is also deeply moved by the suffering and brokenness of people around. For the Christian gospel to overcome the negative and life-destroying aspects of human *pathos*, Indian Pentecostals need to immerse themselves in the daily lives of their fellow Indians—non-Christian and Christian alike— sharing their daily struggles, and imaging Christ to them.<sup>54</sup> By being fully immersed among the people of India and sharing their lives, Pentecostal Christians are well placed to sow the seeds among the peoples that would possibly open them up to the redeeming grace of the gospel. Without this passionate commitment (*orthopathos*) in mission, only a cold, creedal, and cerebral gospel is preached.<sup>55</sup>

Along with the Spirit of God that intercedes for us with groans that cannot be uttered (Rom. 8:26), Pentecostal Christians are called to passionately intercede for the suffering people around them. Wessly Lukose shows that Pentecostals’ empathetic engagement with others, particularly in their life crises, motivates them to use their spiritual gifts to help their neighbors meet their needs.<sup>56</sup> Pentecostals, thus through their natural instinct to pray fervently and passionately intercede for the spiritual, physical, and material needs of others (salvation, baptism of the Spirit, healing, prosperity), could enter into a unique dialogical relationship with religious others, and even the non-religious rationalists, thereby identifying with them in their suffering.

In this light, I would like to highlight the impact and influence of Indian Pentecostal ministries focusing on compassion and social justice like Bombay Teen Challenge and Project Rescue that not only share in the *pathos* of the poor, rejected, neglected, and the oppressed, but also use the gospel as a tool for holistic transformation.<sup>57</sup> Much more than mere prayer and

spiritual deliverance is accomplished here in these contexts. These ministries are powerful and living examples of this passionate Pentecostal witness in India.

#### 4. Indian Pentecostal Mission: A Witness of "Many Tongues and Many Practices"

Amos Yong's Acts 2 metaphor, "many tongues and many practices," seems very appropriate for the complex missionary task in a multi-religious and multi-cultural country like India. Also, the paradigm of "many tongues and many practices" serves to undergird the conceptualizing of Indian Pentecostal mission as "Passionate Prophetic Dialogue." Yong argues that a Pentecostal theology of mission is empowered by the many tongues and the many practices of the Spirit-filled people of God. Such an approach will guard the mission against one dominant voice, a single set of mission strategies or a politically correct missiology.<sup>58</sup> The Spirit leads the charge, enabling the church in a "passionate prophetic dialogical" witness in multiple ways.

Pentecostal mission, empowered by the Spirit, is never contained by limited human strategies. The Spirit's touching and redeeming many tongues and enabling many practices offers hope for the mission theologian. Dialogue, prophecy, and affective engagement are all powered by the same Spirit. At the same time, different kinds of people—rationalists, skeptics, scientifically-minded, religious pluralists—all of them could be engaged with the Spirit's empowerment of the various tongues and practices. Such a mission will be contextual in and through. Wessly Lukose sums this aspect very well:

The Holy Spirit knows the context, and He guides His people in different situations, and the contextual needs are met by the Spirit. The Spirit enables his people to meet the challenges of contextual mission, and it is His world, His people, His mission, and His missionaries. . . . A pneumatological basis of contextual missiology serves multiple purposes, as it takes into consideration several aspects of mission, including evangelism, social action, and engaging with people of other faiths.<sup>59</sup>

We will add the rationalists and skeptics there as well. It is my hope that this missional paradigm of a *passionate, prophetic dialogue in many tongues and many practices* could possibly form a useful starting point for the development of a robust Indian Pentecostal missiology that engages both religious pluralism and skepticism.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, I have strived to defend two theses: first, I have argued that there is a rising religious skepticism in India, which is glocal in nature, and the Pentecostal church in India has to address this. Second, I have argued that the missional paradigm of “passionate prophetic witness in many tongues and many practices” could help us in the development of a robust Indian Pentecostal missiology that engages both religious skepticism and pluralism in this globalized world. I also offer some further directions for research in the future. First, there could be an in-depth sociological study on how religious skepticism is affecting the Indian church, particularly the Pentecostal church. This current study did not venture into such sociological, ethnographic, and empirical analysis. For more concrete Pentecostal missiological engagement of religious skepticism, such studies would prove vital. Second, instead of a simplified vision of perceiving all the rationalist groups and organizations in India under the same umbrella (as those that advocate the scientific temper, oppose religious superstition, and are influenced by Western enlightenment thinking), the unique historical, philosophical, social, and cultural contexts of each of these different groups have to be studied in depth in order to improve the effectiveness of any possible missiological dialogue.<sup>60</sup> Third, the impact and influence of religious skepticism and scientific rationalism in the largely populous global Indian diaspora has to be studied. This has huge implications for the world-wide Pentecostal mission. Fourth, there could be more Indian Pentecostal theological and dialogical engagement of religion and science together.<sup>61</sup> How about conceiving a Pentecostal engagement of Christianity, *Advaita* Hinduism, and the sciences (for example, biology, psychology, neuroscience, anthropology), addressing questions like what it means to be a human (male and female)? Or what about an interdisciplinary Pentecostal theology of healing in dialogue with modern science while in comparison with the ideas of yoga and magic in native Hindu traditions? How about developing a Pentecostal divine command ethic in conversation with the ethics of *dharma* (duty) found in the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the naturalistic ethics of evolutionary sociobiologists, psychologists, and neuroscientists? Such intellectual explorations of the Spirit would go a long way to help people like Uma Shankar to defend their faith more convincingly in the public sphere and build credibility for the Indian Pentecostal mission, and open up new opportunities and avenues of engagement. Finally, this proposal, while emphasizing religious skepticism and religious pluralism, does not intend to ignore several other realities in the Indian missiological sphere such as Hindu nationalism, multi-

culturalism, post-colonialism, religious extremism, casteism, and terrorism. All these have to be addressed missiologically—sometimes dialogically and other times, prophetically. Thus, the search for a robust Indian Pentecostal missiology in this globalized world is always on.

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<sup>1</sup> Amos Yong, *The Cosmic Breath: Spirit and Nature in the Christianity-Buddhism-Science Triologue* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2012), 243.

<sup>2</sup> In this article, “Pentecostal” primarily refers to the Classical Pentecostal church tradition that emphasizes the baptism of the Holy Spirit along with the gift of speaking in tongues.

<sup>3</sup> In his research, Quack prefers using the word “rationalists” which is representative of all atheists, humanists, and freethinkers who believe in the dispelling of superstition, the promotion of reason, the advancement of human values, and the flourishing of the human spirit through a democratic approach, and the assertion of human dignity. This essay follows the same usage of this term, “rationalist.”

<sup>4</sup> Johannes Quack, *Disenchanted India: Organized Rationalism and Criticism of Religion in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); the dissertation was through Ruprecht-Karl University of Heidelberg, Germany.

<sup>5</sup> Johannes Quack, “India,” in *Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, ed. Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 653–54.

<sup>6</sup> Ramkrishna Bhattacharya, “Cārvāka Fragments: A New Collection,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 30, no. 6 (December 2002): 597–60 as quoted in “Unbelief in Ancient India –The Bārhaspatya-Sūtras (Third Century BCE)” in *Voices of Unbelief: Documents from Atheists and Agnostics*, ed. Dale McGowan (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2012), 10.

<sup>7</sup> Quack, “India,” 654–55.

<sup>8</sup> Quack, *Disenchanted*, 69–71.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 75–76.

<sup>10</sup> John F. Hurst, *Indika: The Country and the People of India and Ceylon* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1891), 476, as quoted in Quack, *Disenchanted*, 76.

<sup>11</sup> Quack, *Disenchanted*, 83.

<sup>12</sup> Quack, “India,” 657.

<sup>13</sup> Quack, *Disenchanted*, 81; see figure 8.1.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 84–85.

<sup>15</sup> Gora, “An Atheist with Gandhi,” in *Voices of Unbelief*, 157.

<sup>16</sup> Quack, *Disenchanted*, 86.

<sup>17</sup> H. Narasimhaiah, *Science, Nonscience, and the Paranormal* (Bangalore: Bangalore Science Forum, 1987), 11, as quoted in Quack, *Disenchanted*, 87.

<sup>18</sup> “Maharashtra Andhashrddha Nirmoolan Samiti,” <http://www.antisuperstition.org> (accessed Jan 18, 2015). ANiS was founded by Dr. Narendra Dabholkar. He was an outspoken rationalist, who was tragically killed by Hindu extremists on August 20, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> “BBC World Service - Outlook, India's Top 'Miracle Buster,” [http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0211msr?ct=t%28BBC\\_Reports6\\_29\\_2014%29&mc\\_cid=785627a25b&mc\\_eid=678eea1046](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0211msr?ct=t%28BBC_Reports6_29_2014%29&mc_cid=785627a25b&mc_eid=678eea1046) (accessed Jan 18, 2015).

<sup>20</sup> “About | Nirmukta,” <http://nirmukta.com/about/> (accessed Jan 18, 2015). Nirmukta is a Sanskrit word that means “Freed” or “Liberated.”

<sup>21</sup> See “Freethought Media Network,” <http://nirmukta.com/freethought-media-network/> (accessed May 4, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> <http://nirmukta.com/tag/narendra-nayak/> (accessed May 4, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> Richard Dawkins Foundation for Science and Reason, “Meet the Amazing TAMers: Sanal Edamaruku Part 1,” YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=845kgSwzo5U> (accessed Jan 18, 2015). One also see part 2 of the interview here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogsYgB5d2W4> (accessed Aug 22, 2015).

<sup>24</sup> See “Speakers,” <http://archive.jaipurliteraturefestival.org/speakers2012/> (accessed Oct 11, 2017).

<sup>25</sup> See Ajita Kamal, “Richard Dawkins: On Promoting Science & Freethought in India,” YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6UVWtY-sYYw> (accessed Jan 18, 2015). Since September 2014, *Nirmukta* has no longer been an endorser of Richard Dawkins. See “Out Campaign – India,” <http://nirmukta.com/out-campaign-india/> (accessed May 5, 2017).

<sup>26</sup> Quack, “India,” 658.

<sup>27</sup> A. Keysar and B. A. Kosmin, *The Worldviews and Opinions of Scientists in India* (Hartford, CT: Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture, 2008), 13.

<sup>28</sup> Watch “TIMES NOW's Editor-in-Chief Arnab Goswami talks to C Umashankar about his preaching videos?,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sadco4g8-j4> (accessed Oct 11, 2017).

<sup>29</sup> See Ivan Satyavrata, *God Has Not Left Himself Without Witness* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2011), Geomon George, *Religious Pluralism: Challenges for Pentecostalism in India* (Bangalore, India: Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2006), and Wessly Lukose, *A Contextual Missiology: Pentecostalism in Rajasthan, India* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013).

<sup>30</sup> Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 55.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>33</sup> Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis books, 2008), 132.

<sup>34</sup> George, *Religious Pluralism*, 2–3.

<sup>35</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle,” *Missiology: An International Review* 10, no. 1 (Jan. 1982): 44. Hiebert points out the inability of the western two-tiered view of reality (comprising religion and science) infected by a rationalistic, enlightenment mindset that ignores the third level (or the middle tier) of the spirit world that is so integral to the worldview of many indigenous cultures.

<sup>36</sup> See Hiebert, “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle,” 45. Hiebert suggests “power encounter” as the means to engage the “middle” world of the spirits that is ignored by rationalistic western missions.

<sup>37</sup> See Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirits: A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002); Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); Clark Pinnock, "An Inclusivist View," in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralist World*, eds. Dennis Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 93–123; Clark Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995); Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions* (Aldershot, UK, and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2004).

<sup>38</sup> Evangelical theologians, in general, have been cautious and divided in their responses to some of these pneumatological theologies of religion that tend to bracket out explicit Christological categories for inter-religious dialogue and discernment by seeing the economies of the Son and the Spirit as closely related with, yet not completely bound to each other (for example, using Irenaeus's analogy of the "two hands" of the Father). Such a move, it is believed, opens up the possibility of speaking of the presence and work of the Spirit outside the explicit Christological, confessional boundaries of the Church (even among the beliefs and practices of other religions) and attempts to correct the Christomonism (pneumatological subordination) and some other imperialistic tendencies that has haunted Christian mission through the centuries. For a careful, constructive, yet critical engagement of these pneumatological theologies of religion, please see Gerald R. McDermott and Harold A. Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions: An Evangelical Proposal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 55–57, 73–76, 82–84, 158–59. McDermott and Netland point out that these pneumatological theologies make the Christian approach to other religions more invitational, relational, and also Trinitarian. On the other hand, these Evangelical theologians have argued that removing explicit Christological categories in inter-religious dialogue and discernment opens up the risk of relying on subjective human evaluations that lack a sound Christological and Scriptural criteria for linking the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit to expressions of goodness, truth, and beauty present in other religions. Moreover, since one's Christian commitments are always present (in explicit or implicit ways), developing a neutral criterion for dialogue and discernment becomes impossible (75–76). It is also argued that there is the added risk of succumbing to a perception that divine saving grace is mediated through the beliefs and practices of other religions (159). It is important to note that pneumatological theologians such as Yong have responded at length to several of these reviews on their work and have done their best to argue, defend, and even sometimes revise their proposals by staying true to a Trinitarian orthodoxy, consistent pneumatological framework, and Christian ecumenism. For example, see Yong's review of McDermott and Netland's book, "Toward a Trinitarian Theology of Religions: A Pentecostal-Evangelical and Missiological Elaboration," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 40, no. 4 (2016): 294–306. Here he unequivocally affirms his Trinitarian faith and intention not to separate the mission of the Son and the Spirit by saying: "the Father sends both the Son and the Spirit and that the Spirit reconciles all through the Son to the Father" (303). Yong also advocates a thoroughly pneumatological proposal to complement the work of McDermott and Netland (299–303).

<sup>39</sup> Amos Yong and Tony Richie, "Missiology and the Interreligious Encounter," in *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, eds. Allan Anderson, Michael Bergunder, André Droogers, and Cornelis van der Laan (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), 256.

<sup>40</sup> Benno van den Toren, "The Relationship between Christ and the Spirit in a Christian Theology of Religions," *Missiology: An International Review* 40, no. 3 (July 2012): 276.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Tony Richie, *Speaking by the Spirit: A Pentecostal Model for Interreligious Dialogue* (Wilmore, KY: Emeth Press, 2011), 4.

<sup>43</sup> Fulfillment theology is broadly based on a theory of the relation between Christianity and other religions which holds that all religious traditions have partial access to truth, to spirituality and to transcendence, but Christianity has access to them in their fullness. In a nutshell, it calls for a positive engagement of Indian religions in stark contrast with the eighteenth and nineteenth century imperialistic mission theologies in India that sought to denounce the Indian religious traditions.

<sup>44</sup> See Satyavrata, *God Has Not*.

<sup>45</sup> Yong, *Cosmic Breath*, 27.

<sup>46</sup> Amos Yong, "Pluralism, Secularism, and Pentecost: Newbegin-ings for *Missio Trinitatis* in a New Century," in *The Gospel and Pluralism Today: Reassessing Lesslie Newbigin in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, eds. Scott W. Sunquist and Amos Yong (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 161–62.

<sup>47</sup> Yong, "Pluralism, Secularism, and Pentecost," 164.

<sup>48</sup> Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 43–47.

<sup>49</sup> Wessly Lukose, "A Contextual Missiology of the Spirit: A Study of Pentecostalism in Rajasthan, India," (PhD Diss., University of Birmingham, 2009), 304–05.

<sup>50</sup> Yong, *Cosmic Breath*, 22.

<sup>51</sup> See Vinoth Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths: Theology and the Public Issues Shaping Our World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), Vishal Mangalwadi, *Missionary Conspiracy: Letters to a Postmodern Hindu* (Minneapolis, MN: The MacLaurin Institute, 1996). Ramachandra and Mangalwadi have also written several other books, articles, and blog posts that prophetically engage the South Asian/Indian religio-political sphere from a distinctively Christian worldview.

<sup>52</sup> For example, Pentecostals could openly recognize and acknowledge the anti-corruption stance of political entities such as the *Aam Aadmi Party*.

<sup>53</sup> Gerald M. Boodoo, "Catholicity and Mission," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 65: 118 as quoted in Jonathan Y. Tan, *Christian Mission Among the Peoples of Asia*, American Society of Missiology Series 50 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 155.

<sup>54</sup> Tan, *Christian Mission*, 150.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Lukose, "Contextual Missiology," 287.

<sup>57</sup> To get a glimpse, one can see David and Beth Grant, *Beyond the Soiled Curtain: Project Rescue's Fight for The Victims of the Sex-Slave Industry* (Springfield, MO: Onward Books, 2009).

<sup>58</sup> Amos Yong, "Many Tongues, Many Practices: Pentecost and Theology of Mission at 2010," in *Mission after Christendom: Emergent Themes in Contemporary Mission*, eds. Ogbu U. Kalu, Peter Vethanayagamony, and Edmund Kee-Fook Chia (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 57.

<sup>59</sup> Lukose, "Contextual Missiology," 292–93.

<sup>60</sup> I thank Dr. Paul Lewis for pointing this out when I presented this paper at the Society for Pentecostal Studies annual meeting in Lakeland, Florida on March 13, 2015, and also for agreeing to publish this paper. I am grateful to Drs. Amos Yong, Mark J. Cartledge, Michael D. Palmer, Graham Twelftree, Wolfgang Vondey, and Sarita Gallagher for their support and encouragement in a variety of ways in the presenting, writing, and revising of this paper. And I claim full responsibility for any errors in this piece.

<sup>61</sup> For example, these projects could be inspired by Amos Yong's *Cosmic Breath*, where he engages Christianity, Buddhism, and science in a "dialogue." While these engagements are highly complex, undoubtedly, they will prove beneficial to those engaged in dialogue with the religious other or the non-religious other.