

**Pentecostalism and sustainability:
conflict or convergence?**

Kylie Sheppard
B.Eng(Env) (Hons)

This thesis is presented for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

of
Murdoch University

2006

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

.....

Kylie Louise Sheppard

Abstract

Sustainability has become a prominent global project through which peoples and nations are seeking to alleviate poverty and stop environmental degradation. This thesis explores the contribution that Pentecostalism, a global religious movement of some 500 million people, can make to this project at the several levels of practice, political-economy and philosophy.

After an initial chapter where the challenges and dimensions of the sustainability project are outlined, the development and characteristics of Pentecostalism as a dynamic global movement are reviewed. This sets the context for a central empirical case study of Citipointe Christian Outreach Centre (a Pentecostal megachurch in Brisbane, Australia). Survey data, content analysis of sermons, and in-depth interviews show how one particular congregation is engaging with the social, economic and environmental issues of sustainability. I conclude that although Citipointe's engagement with sustainability issues at a practical level is weak, their demonstrated commitment to community building and the congregation's shared worldview indicate potential for a more constructive engagement. In light of global Pentecostal praxis I suggest that Pentecostalism holds greater potential to engage with sustainability than is being realised at Citipointe.

This thesis contributes to our understanding of how and why Pentecostals are already engaging in social, economic and environmental issues. More broadly, it develops our understanding of the role Pentecostal Christianity can play in sustainability. This thesis proposes that while Pentecostalism can contribute to sustainability at the level of practice, it can make a deeper contribution by addressing the worldview challenge of sustainability. Pentecostal Christianity does this because it can keep the sustainability discourse open to a wider discussion about God, truth and the purpose of life, rather than limit it to matters of science, technology and public policy.

Table of Contents

Declaration	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Acknowledgements	viii
Abbreviations	ix

INTRODUCTION **1**

PERSONAL BACKGROUND	1
Research approach	3
RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND AIMS	5
CITIPOINTE CASE STUDY	6
Justification for a single-case study	7
Research instruments	8
THESIS OUTLINE	9

CHAPTER ONE: SUSTAINABILITY - A GLOBAL CHALLENGE **11**

INTRODUCTION	11
UNSUSTAINABILITY	11
Multilevel challenge	12
The sustainability project	18
COMPETING APPROACHES TO SUSTAINABILITY	20
Ecomodernism	20
Radical ecology	21
Religion	23
CHRISTIANITY AND THE SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGE	25
Current Christian responses	26
Focus on Pentecostalism	30
CONCLUSION	30

CHAPTER TWO: PENTECOSTALISM - A GLOBAL MOVEMENT **32**

INTRODUCTION	32
PENTECOSTAL SCHOLARSHIP: A GROWING FIELD	33
Broadening cultural and disciplinary perspectives	34
Increasingly varied topics	34
SHARED ORIGINS	40
Experiential Christianity	40
Outpourings of the Holy Spirit	41
Theology	43
A GLOBAL MOVEMENT	47
Movement features	48
Interacting with modernity	50
Diverse expressions	54
COMMON PRACTICES AND BELIEFS	61
Nonacademic, oral theology	62
Conflict or convergence with sustainability	71
CONCLUSION	79

CHAPTER THREE: PENTECOSTALISM IN A SOCIAL CONTEXT **81**

INTRODUCTION	81
SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT	82
Social inclusivity	83
Poverty alleviation	90
Political participation	100
Widespread use of mass media	106
Environmental action	110
FEATURES OF SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT	112
Triggered by contextual struggles	113
Grassroots, embodied and diverse responses	113
Individuals and structures	115
THE CHALLENGE OF SUSTAINABILITY FOR PENTECOSTALISM	115
Environmental action and sustainable prosperity	117
Deepen engagement with the political-economy	118
Propose a suitable metanarrative	120
CONCLUSION	120

CHAPTER FOUR: PENTECOSTALISM IN AUSTRALIA **122**

INTRODUCTION	122
CHRISTIANITY IN AUSTRALIA	122
Historical sketch	123
Shaping public life through conflict	127
AUSTRALIAN PENTECOSTALISM EMERGES	129
A home grown movement	129
Limited engagement in Australian public life	133
Current dynamism	135
AUSTRALIA'S PENTECOSTAL MEGACHURCHES	136
In relationship with the suburb and city	139
Branded and marketed corporations	139
Extensive facilities	142
Contemporary, attractive worship	144
Engaged with Australian society	147
THE CHALLENGE OF SUSTAINABILITY TO AUSTRALIA'S PENTECOSTAL MEGACHURCHES	159
CONCLUSION	162

CHAPTER FIVE: CITIPOINTE COC **164**

SUNDAY AT CITIPOINTE	164
Food, coffee, books and CDs	167
A massive auditorium	168
Vibrant worship and relevant preaching	169
THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF COC	172
Clark Taylor and COC	173
COC's emphases	175
COC post-Clark Taylor	180
AN AUSTRALIAN MEGACHURCH	181
Demographic features	181
Corporate structure	182
Social engagement	183
CONCLUSION	189

<u>CHAPTER SIX: CITIPOINTE CASE STUDY METHODS</u>	191
INTRODUCTION	191
INTERPRETATIVE APPROACH	191
Research questions framing the case study	192
DATA COLLECTION	194
Survey of practices	196
Investigating worldviews	200
ANALYSIS	204
CONCLUSION	207
<u>CHAPTER SEVEN: CITIPOINTE PRACTICE AND SUSTAINABILITY</u>	208
INTRODUCTION	208
SUSTAINABILITY AT THE LEVEL OF PRACTICE	209
Environmental issues	209
Social sustainability: community strength	218
CONCLUSION	235
<u>CHAPTER EIGHT: CITIPOINTE PREACHING AND SUSTAINABILITY</u>	237
INTRODUCTION	237
PREACHING CONTEXT AND APPROACH	238
Change people's core belief systems	239
Strategy for effective preaching	240
PREACHING ANALYSIS	244
Overarching themes	245
Key emphases	247
SUSTAINABILITY ANALYSIS	255
Preaching diverges from a sustainability vision	255
Underlying positive potential for sustainability	260
CONCLUSION	267
<u>CHAPTER NINE: CITIPOINTE AND SUSTAINABILITY</u>	270
INTRODUCTION	270
ATTENTIVE TO RAMSEY'S PREACHING	270
HOLISTIC PROSPERITY	272
Money and material possessions	272
Greater forms of prosperity	274
Not formulaic	276
Blessed to be a blessing to others	277
CHANGING THE WORLD	280
Kingdom of God accompanied by spiritual and material change	280
Cultural immersion not separation	282
Use existing resources	285
Unempowered to engage with global issues	288
ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC	289
Aware of environmental issues	290
Anthropocentrism and sin	291
Stewardship of non-human Creation	292
Limited impact on individuals' practice	296
CONCLUSION	298

CHAPTER TEN: REARTICULATING SUSTAINABILITY - A PENTECOSTAL VIEW	301
<hr/>	
INTRODUCTION	301
CITIPOINTE’S LIMITED ENGAGEMENT WITH SUSTAINABILITY	301
Worldview converges with sustainability vision	303
Implications for other Pentecostal churches	305
RESOURCES IN GLOBAL PENTECOSTALISM FOR DEEPER ENGAGEMENT WITH SUSTAINABILITY	307
Reflect Pentecostalism’s global nature	307
Develop the kingdom of God framework	313
REARTICULATING THE SUSTAINABILITY AGENDA	315
Beyond instrumentalism	316
Deep philosophical challenge	316
APPENDICES	320
<hr/>	
Appendix A Citipointe group consent letter	321
Appendix B Sustainability survey	324
Appendix C Survey cover letter	343
Appendix D Content analysis recording sheet	344
Appendix E Interview questions – general	346
Appendix F Interview questions – Mark Ramsey	392
Appendix G Coding questions	412
Appendix H Relative importance of values	416
Appendix I Content analysis summary data	418
BIBLIOGRAPHY	423
<hr/>	

Acknowledgements

Foremost I acknowledge the intellectual support and encouragement provided by my supervisor Dr Ian Barns.

To Sarah Bell who helped me find entry points into my research project, and Kathryn Buselich who has shared my research journey, a heartfelt thankyou.

This study was brought to life by the members of Citipointe Christian Outreach Centre who generously gave up time to complete surveys and be interviewed. Thankyou to Mark and Leigh Ramsey for allowing me open access to research at Citipointe, and to Andy Gourley for facilitating the fieldwork.

This thesis has benefited from the input of many readers of earlier drafts of this work who offered criticism that helped me clarify what I wanted to say. In particular, thankyou to Brian Mulheran, Sam Hey, and participants at the 2005 European Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Association Conference who were a sounding board for preliminary ideas.

This study would not have occurred without the financial assistance provided by the Australian Postgraduate Award, a top-up scholarship from Murdoch University, and the writing space generously made available at the Institute for Sustainability and Technology Policy.

My ongoing debt of gratitude is to my friends, and particularly my husband David Sheppard, whose generous spiritual and material provision has made finishing this research not only possible, but enjoyable.

Abbreviations

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACL	Australian Christian Lobby
AJPS	Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies
AOG	Assemblies of God
COC	Christian Outreach Centre
ECI	Evangelical Climate Initiative (US)
EEN	Evangelical Environmental Network (US)
EFP	Environmentally friendly product
EPCRA	European Pentecostal Charismatic Research Association
EPTA	European Pentecostal Theological Association
ESA	Evangelicals for Social Action
GNH	Good News Hall
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
JPT	Journal of Pentecostal Theology
JPTS	Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series
JSSR	Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion
NAE	National Association of Evangelicals (US)
NCLS	National church life survey
NCSD	National Centre for Sustainable Development
NGO	Non-government Organisation
NSW	New South Wales
PCS	Pentecostal Conference of Australia
SPS	Society for Pentecostal Studies
UN	United Nations
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNDP	United National Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
Universal Church	The Universal Church of the Reign of God
US	United States of America
WBCSD	World Business Council for Sustainable Development
WCC	World Council of Churches
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WHO	World Health Organization
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development
WWI	World War One
WWII	World War Two