

Joshua R. Ziefle, “Boldly Going...”

**Boldly Going Where No Pentecostal Had Gone Before: David
J. du Plessis and the 1959 Princeton Missions Lectures**
(History/Ecumenical)

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As Pentecostal trailblazer David Johannes du Plessis looked back over the course of his long life, one important detail often came to the fore: his relationship with Presbyterian John Mackay. Time and again he would detail the circumstances of their meeting, the way in which the ecumenically-minded Mackay shepherded him into the world movement and, many times, the friendship they maintained over the course of multiple decades. For his part Mackay’s life as an international Christian and experience as a missionary in South America led him to great appreciation of his friend and the Pentecostalism of which he was a part. Early on in this relationship, Mackay’s role as mainline seminary president and the assistance he gave du Plessis as he took his first steps towards the life for which he would become known was vital. Du Plessis’s later recollection of Mackay’s help at an early ecumenical meeting helps show this in great detail:

As I checked into that [IMC] meeting in Willingen, Germany, I recalled hearing that they never had a Pentecostal speaker there. Well, I thought, I probably won’t get that great a welcome; I’ll just check in for three days. But at the first coffee break, as soon as Dr. Mackay saw me, he came over and took my arm and led me over to the line for coffee, introducing me from the back of the line all the way to the front, as “my great Pentecostal friend.”¹

At the urging of John Mackay, du Plessis delivered a series of three lectures before the students and faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary fifty years ago this past November. The first of his kind to do so, du Plessis long held this moment as a touchstone for his life and work.² While the episode often appears in much of the associated secondary literature, little detail beyond the mere fact of his time there has ever been developed. As such this project will analyze the content of his presentation with an eye towards his status as an ecumenical Pentecostal and the leadership role he would soon hold in the burgeoning Charismatic

¹ David J. du Plessis, *Simple and Profound* (Orleans, MA: Paraclete Press, 1986), 162.

² du Plessis and Bob Slosser, *A Man Called Mr. Pentecost* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1977), 193. Speaking of the year 1959, he stated the following: “Added to the list was a three-week visit during May on the campus of Princeton Seminary as the guest of my good friend, Dr. Mackay, the president. And that visit was to be followed a year later by another, as the guest of Dr. Mackay’s successor, Dr. James McCord. My ties to Princeton continue to this day to be among my most cherished relationships.”

Movement. Special attention will be given to the content of the lectures and the manner in which he shared the message of Pentecost with those on the outside. Along the way, I hope to show how du Plessis's growing role as an ambassador-at-large for Pentecostalism can be seen through the methods he used to present the doctrine of the Spirit-led life as well as his ability to contain much of the Pentecostal message through the medium of story. In this, his own testimony functions as an important medium for these twin tasks. Therefore the project will begin with background on du Plessis's earlier life before focusing on the 1959 and the path that led him to Princeton. During that year his participation in the seminary's Student Mission Lectures represented an important episode in du Plessis's life and ministry that would set the course he would follow for years to come. In many ways, the series of talks marked a pivot in life and ministry that gave him the confidence, vocabulary and means to reflect upon his perceived calling and the road forward.

That du Plessis's own life began in the same few years as modern Pentecostalism and that he matured in the midst of the developing movement is more than a historical moment of serendipity, for as du Plessis interacted with brothers and sisters from within and without his own theological and ecclesiastical milieu both were to emerge changed from the encounter. Yet before the more contentious issues of ecumenical debate and the Charismatic Movement in the 1950s and 1960s, simpler relationships between the South African and his church world existed: that of student to mentor, servant to institution, and partner to partner. While therefore understanding du Plessis's place in the midst of advancing Pentecostalism and his work in ecumenical circles as seen through the window of the Missions Lectures remains the defining

task of this project, as this theme is developed it makes sense to look a bit deeper at the man himself.³

Du Plessis’s early life—indeed, the great bulk of his first four decades—was spent in his native land of South Africa. In the years surrounding du Plessis’s birth in 1905, developments were occurring half a world away that would come to have a defining impact on his life. In Los Angeles in 1906, a religious revival focused upon the Holy Spirit and associated giftings, signs, and wonders took powerful hold on those in attendance. As chronicler Frank Bartleman wrote, “The work was getting clearer and stronger at Azusa. Missionaries were gathered there from Africa, India, and the islands of the sea. Preachers and workers had crossed the continent and come from distant lands with an irresistible drawing to Los Angeles.”⁴ Some, impelled by a deep sense of fervor, went out from these meetings with a desire to share the blessings of the Spirit with the world. One such individual was John G. Lake, who when touched by the outgrowth of this new movement felt impelled to missions and soon traveled to South Africa to begin missionary work.⁵ It was there that together with fellow pioneer Thomas G. Hezmalhalch he helped found the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa. Filled with the Holy Spirit through the mission of the AFM, David’s father and his family found themselves in the Mount Tabor area of Basutoland around 1916 where his father was assisting in the construction of a

³ Especially in light of du Plessis’s worldwide exposure and notoriety during the 1960s and 1970s in the midst of the massive religious realignment that was the Charismatic Movement, it is worth remembering that these developments did not take place until he was well into his sixth decade. Indeed, more than half his life had already been spent by the time he entered the ecumenical field, not to mention the later explosion of the Spirit-led renewal in the mainline.

⁴ Frank Bartleman, *Azusa Street*, Reprint. (Northridge, CA: Voice Christian Publications, 1962), 50.

⁵ Allan Anderson, *Spreading Fires: The Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007), 167ff. See also J. R. Ziegler, “Lake, John Graham,” p. 828 in Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van Der Maas, eds., *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Rev. and expanded. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

missionary station.⁶ As young David pondered this state of his spiritual affairs during this time he struggled:

"I know the Bible," I anguished. "I know all about Jesus. But I don't know Him." Why I prayed, or my parents prayed, to me it was still a recital. God was always far away in heaven, never here. But for these people, these poor black villagers, He was always near at hand.

"If only I could know Jesus the way they do," I thought, my youthful heart hurting.⁷

A conversion credited to "the ministry of African (black) Christians"⁸ occurred not long after. In the days following, du Plessis received the gift of glossolalia the midst of a vision related to Christ's forgiveness.⁹

Du Plessis's life as he recounts it was one heavily influenced by a seeming call to service and ministry. While this same calling had impelled him to leave school in a fervor for ministry, he soon decided that to have done so was a bit premature. Later returning to his studies, he became, in his words, "the first Pentecostal in South Africa to obtain an education that high" and thus the most educated. This newfound prestige meant that "doors opened even more,"¹⁰ helping him in the process secure a position as the District Secretary of the Northern Transvaal District of the AFM in 1927.¹¹ By 1936, du Plessis was selected as the General Secretary for the whole of the Apostolic Faith Mission, an "insider's" post he held for the next decade through both the conclusion of the 1930s and the wartime of the succeeding years.¹² With this position inside denominational Pentecostalism, du Plessis was able to garner insight into the workings of the

⁶ du Plessis, "Life Sketch" and "Life Story of David du Plessis," MS photocopy, Du Plessis Archives, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

⁷ du Plessis and Slosser, *Mr. Pentecost*, 19.

⁸ du Plessis, "Life Story."

⁹ du Plessis and Slosser, *Mr. Pentecost*, 33.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹¹ du Plessis, "Life Story."

¹² Spittler, R. P., "Du Plessis, David Johannes," 590 in Burgess and Van Der Maas, *NIDPCM*, 589-593.

classic form and shape of the movement as well as make connections with other Pentecostal leaders at home and abroad that would come to impact him in important ways.¹³

Du Plessis's first long-distance trip on behalf of the Pentecostal movement took place in 1937. Having been invited by his counterpart J. Roswell Flower, the General Secretary of the United States based Assemblies of God, to visit their biennial General Council meeting in Memphis, Tennessee, du Plessis and an associate prepared for the trip.¹⁴ While there, du Plessis spoke on the theme "Christ Our Conquering Leader," noting of his topic

that one who believes on the Lord Jesus and his faith in His promises will receive God's blessing. He will give such a person the spiritual revelation, the knowledge of Himself, and the calling unto a life of victory and power through the Baptism of the Holy Spirit... I am so glad Jesus is the head of the church. I am glad He is the head of the churches in America, in England, in South Africa, in Canada. Why? Because that brings a common fellowship to all the churches which have only one head.¹⁵

Sounding such unitive themes was therefore an early habit of du Plessis's and, as well shall see, one that developed and matured as his own spheres of influence and exposure to the larger Christian world expanded.

As his first overseas trip, du Plessis's visit to America had personal impact in areas both mundane and sublime. Beyond simple exposure to a wider world than he had known before, the South African greatly increased his list of Pentecostal contacts and became more well known amongst Pentecostals. Rounding out examples of du Plessis' thoughts in the midst of his American excursion is one of his sermons delivered in a well-known Chicago Pentecostal congregation at the Stone Church entitled "The Master Hath Need." There he reiterated a story from his childhood about his father offering him up as a donkey when the call went forward from a needy missionary. Though likely an attempt at some levity on the part of his father, David used the example as an opportunity to speak about his sense of call: "That day Dad surrendered

¹³ du Plessis, "Life Story," notes that while in South Africa, he served as evangelist, pastor, editor of all publications and general secretary in the AFM.

¹⁴ du Plessis, "Testimony," MS photocopy, Du Plessis Archives, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

¹⁵ du Plessis, "Christ Our Conquering Leader," *Pentecostal Evangel* 27 November 1937, 20.

his oldest boy to the Lord’s work and he has never asked me to come back. He never expects me to make a name for myself in the world, but he expects me to be true to my calling.”¹⁶

As tensions in Europe and the world rose in the face of approaching war and finally exploded from 1939 to 1945, any plans du Plessis may have had for future trips or contacts were put on indefinite hold. When the war came to an end and travel and international relationships became more realistic possibilities, Pentecostals around the globe made moves to come together for an meeting of the Spirit-filled. At this Pentecostal World Conference in 1947¹⁷, du Plessis delivered an address entitled “Gather the Wheat, Burn the Chaff.”¹⁸ In the midst of these developments and during a trip to America in 1947, du Plessis offered up his resignation from the position of General Secretary of the AFM, in the process leaving behind a denominational post for work and ministry in intra-Pentecostal circles. Moving to Switzerland with his wife and family in 1948, they began “trusting the Lord for our support.”¹⁹ During this time Du Plessis became the organizing secretary for the Pentecostal World Conference, telling its leader Leonard Steiner “You just tell me what to do and I’ll do it. I’ll take over the work of the office on the condition that you are the chief and I’m working for you.”²⁰ At the May 1949 meeting of the group, he compiled a “Manifesto and Declaration” approved by the group which recognized among other things the need “to demonstrate to the world the essential unity of Spirit-baptized

¹⁶ du Plessis, “The Master Hath Need,” *Latter Rain Evangel*, February 1938, 5.

¹⁷ du Plessis, “Life Story.”

¹⁸ du Plessis, “Gather the Wheat, Burn the Chaff,” delivered at Pentecostal World Conference, Zurich, Switzerland, 1947. As du Plessis spoke, he talked of balance between extremes in Pentecost: “In our Pentecostal churches today, there seem to be two extremes. The Apostle has a word of warning for both. To those who object so fervently against the noise and disorder he says” “Quench not the Spirit” (I Thess. 5:19). To those who want nothing but these disorderly manifestations he says: “Despise not prophesyings” (I Thess. 5:20). If you refuse to have seemingly needless manifestations, chaff as you may think, you will never have gifts of prophecy. If you refuse to let the Lord fan the needless demonstrations from your life and will cling to the initial reactions only, you will never have the ripened fruit of the gifts of the Spirit.” In this one can begin to see his keen awareness of the tensions that different types of Pentecosts might bring about.

¹⁹ du Plessis, “Testimony.”

²⁰ du Plessis and Slosser, *Mr. Pentecost*, 141.

believers fulfilling the prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ: ‘that all may be one’ John 17:21.”²¹

After du Plessis and his family came to the United States as permanent residents in 1949 and he took up a teaching position at Lee College in Tennessee, Du Plessis’s Pentecostal curiosity and desire to make connections with moves of the Spirit around the globe seems to have goaded him to engage in examination and sometimes experience of not only the worldwide Pentecostalism in which he was specifically involved, but the general religious milieu of the land that was his new home.

In 1951 the various connections he had made within Pentecostalism and his desire to build up the body of Christ through what he saw as the work of the Holy Spirit culminated in his meeting with leaders of the World Council of Churches both in Toronto and their offices in New York City. Pastoring a church in Connecticut by this time, du Plessis felt a call to share the Pentecostal message with ecumenical world leaders and so traveled one morning to dialogue with them unannounced. As he recounted in his book *The Spirit Bade Me Go*:

In 1951 the Lord spoke to me and clearly told me to go and witness to the leaders of the World Council of Churches...When the offices opened on Fifth Avenue I was there. I announced myself and made sure there was no mistake about who and what I was—a Pentecostal, and one of the worst, actually the world secretary. In the train on my way I had decided to make things so hot that those I spoke to would have no trouble in knowing what I had to say, and I expected them to object and reject. But the hotter I made it the better my friends seemed to like it. This one friend kept saying: “Go on, tell us some more. We have been waiting for a fellow like you to come and talk to us.” This continued until lunchtime. I apologized for taking so much of their time. He said: “Do you eat lunch? When I said I did, he invited me to go with him. He would pay for the lunch if I would keep on talking. He took me back to the office and invited others in and made me repeat a whole lot of these things that I thought they did not want to hear. I was kept busy until closing time that afternoon. That was my first encounter with the WCC.”²²

While on the one hand his move towards this kind of engagement seems to have arisen somewhat suddenly, looking back at the South African’s progression to this point suggests otherwise. In any case, that there was great interest in what he had to say only served to

²¹ “Manifesto and Declaration,” 1947, Pentecostal World Conference, MS photocopy, Du Plessis Archives, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

²² du Plessis, *The Spirit Bade Me Go* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1970), 13-14.

encourage him further as missionary instincts and drive—present from his conversion and ministry as a teenage street preacher—suddenly found a whole new field in which to labor.

If the attitude of some at the WCC gave a lift to du Plessis’s initial forays as a ecumenical Pentecostal missionary, the response of Presbyterian John Mackay sent him soaring. Within a year of making contact with world ecumenical leaders, du Plessis began a relationship with the influential church leader that would last for decades. Following a positive introductory phone call from the South African, Mackay invited du Plessis to Princeton, where they discussed the former’s experience as a missionary in South America. In this conversation, du Plessis recalled his associate’s comment regarding Pentecostalism: “‘That,’ said Dr. Mackay, ‘was when I came to the conclusion that I would rather put up with the uncouth life of the Pentecostal, than be bound by the ascetic death of the formal churches.’”²³ Not content to let the conversation end, Mackay insisted that he connect with other ecumenical leaders “because you can bring them alive,”²⁴ and soon invited the Pentecostal pioneer attend the next meeting of the International Missionary Council (IMC) in Willingen, Germany. There, du Plessis noted a very positive reception at the hands of ecumenicals who seemed deeply interested in hearing from a representative of the Pentecostal world. Following introductions to the assembled leaders by John Mackay, he spoke to the group about his view of the power of the Holy Spirit and in the end “had interviews, by their request, with 110 of 210 delegates. This then placed me in touch with many of the ecumenical leaders and officers of the World Council of Churches.”²⁵ Though officially only an observer at the meeting, he seems to have done somewhat more than sit in silence and in the process got his first taste of the interdenominational life outside Pentecostalism.

²³ du Plessis, *Simple*, 155-6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 156.

²⁵ du Plessis, *The Spirit*, 14-15.

In the next few years, du Plessis maintained strong ties to his Pentecostal theological home even as his interactions with the ecumenical world grew. It is thus no surprise that he corresponded with his friend Donald Gee about his new experiences in such fields:

Last month I attended a Conference of the Foreign Missions Department of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States...This was supposed to be a gathering where liberals and modernists are strongly represented. I found it quite different...I was deeply stirred by the hunger in the hearts of old and young ministers that I met at this meeting. There were some that are considered world leaders in the Council of Churches. These men were most cordial in their conversations with us and wanted to know the secret of the success of the Pentecostal Revival throughout the world.²⁶

In the early years of the 1950s, du Plessis seems to have begun the diverse peripatetic lifestyle that would come to mark the rest of his life. The year 1954 might serve as a helpful example here. Starting out in South Africa, by March and April du Plessis's travel journal reveals attendance at a Billy Graham meeting followed by a visit with the Baptist Women's Society and at a Calvary Baptist Church. In July he once again attended the IMC Conference, this time on Staten Island.²⁷ That same month he was at Princeton for the 17th meeting of the Presbyterian and Reformed World Alliances, likely at the invitation of the seminary's president John Mackay.²⁸ In August he was able to attend the second conference of the WCC in Evanston, Illinois where, as he reported a few months later, "the most important thing was...the atmosphere of Christian fellowship and unity in which the delegates met and worked."²⁹ To round out the year, du Plessis was at a Springfield, Missouri meeting of the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America (PFNA) in October to deliver an address to gathered delegates.

His activities in 1954 alone show an important acceleration in his ecumenical efforts as he continually sought to expand his horizons from his base within Pentecostalism. This position seems to have been established as least as early as 1953, when in a coup likely unequaled at that

²⁶ du Plessis to Donald Gee, 22 January 1952, MS photocopy, Du Plessis Archives, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

²⁷ du Plessis, "Travel Journal," MS photocopy, Du Plessis Archives, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

²⁸ du Plessis, "Life Story."

²⁹ "The World Council of Churches," *Pentecost*, December 1954.

time or since, he as a Pentecostal minister received three letters of reference: one from the hyper-fundamentalist Bob Jones University noting “he is a man of good judgment,”³⁰ a second from the ecumenically-minded International Missionary Council which lauded his ability to “eschew sectarianism and present a positive Christian message,”³¹ and a third from the conservative National Association of Evangelicals that stated “Mr. du Plessis is known to us as a Christian gentleman of integrity, tact, and great leadership ability.”³² That du Plessis maintained contacts with all three and was able to garner their vote of confidence speaks loudly to his ability to bridge ecclesiastical and theological divides.

Continued contacts with Mackay and the community of Princeton Seminary solidified his role as guest Pentecostal there, evidenced by an extended visit to the New Jersey school in April 1956.³³ During that year, however, the most important meeting for du Plessis was one initiated by an ecumenical group that invited him to meet with them at a place called the Seabury House in Seabury, Connecticut. As an unofficial group that functioned within the IMC structure, the invitation noted that all proceedings at their meetings were done “off the record.” Their hope was that du Plessis would teach them

...of the relationships between the forces of what might be described as the Ecumenical Movement, and the forces, with special reference to foreign missions, of the so-called “independents,” the Pentecostals and others who are so often outside the cooperative movement of the more “conventional” (shall I say) Churches. You will see that in your present relationship to the Pentecostals, of whom I understand you are again the international secretary, and with your experience at Willingen and Evanston, you are in a unique position to make the presentation we want.³⁴

Du Plessis, feeling deeply the missionary fires, appears to have been only too happy to oblige this request. While there, he met with Protestant leaders interested in learning not only the more

³⁰ Bob Jones, Jr. to Whom It May Concern, 10 September 1953.

³¹ Charles Ranson to Whom It May Concern, 16 July 1953.

³² Rutherford L. Decker to Whom It May Concern, 30 October 1953.

³³ du Plessis, “Travel Journal.”

³⁴ J. W. Decker to David du Plessis, 12 June 1956.

technical issues as represented in their invitation, but more about the Pentecostal movement and related experience as well.³⁵

Before the 1950s came to a close du Plessis's star was to rise higher than ever before in what was arguably his greatest year and the central focus of this paper: 1959. His exposure during this time reached new levels while Protestant ecumenical interest in the world of the Spirit was equally elevated. In short, it was a unique and important year for du Plessis and all those with whom he was connected, both for the events that transpired and the way in which they helped set the stage for developments in the 1960s and beyond. Whereas du Plessis only a decade before had not yet taken his first steps outside the Pentecostal world, by 1959 he found himself at the very heart of Protestant higher education and ecumenical leadership. His presence spoke to the great curiosity of said groups as much as it did of du Plessis's own sense of calling to spread the message of the Spirit. By year's end, an important lecture series at Princeton Seminary and a later set in Bossey, Switzerland helped solidify him as the voice of Pentecostalism to the wider world even as they implicitly revealed some of his own self-understanding of the work at hand and plans going forward.

For his part du Plessis was aware that 1959 was a very special year: "this is the first year in my life that I was able to divide my time between Pentecostal movements and churches and what we generally speak of as Protestant churches. I have ministered just about as much in the

³⁵ Here du Plessis's memory of the invitation years later seemed to be faulty, revolving in his mind as it did around "the truth of the Pentecostal experience and the Pentecostal movement," *A Man Called...*, 181. At the same time, his extended discussion of the episode, including his recollection of an important question lends some credence to the idea that the assembled individuals were interested in more than their letter let on, *A Man Called...*, 182: "Please tell us, what is the difference between you and us. We quote the same Scriptures you do, and yet when you say those words they sound so different. We say the same things you do, but there seems to be a deeper implication in what you say. You have said nothing with which we want to differ and yet there seems to be a distinct difference somewhere."

one group as in the other group."³⁶ Elsewhere he lauded the time God had provided him in Protestant circles, for it had been his "delightful privilege to discover again and again that the Holy Spirit was at work in the most unexpected places."³⁷ As early as January, he anticipated an upcoming trip to Princeton and wrote to a local Pentecostal minister of his plans. Ever the missionary, he included in his correspondence the desire to coordinate a series of church services while he was a guest of the school. As he wrote, he mentioned his desire "to have prayer warriors near me. I feel that there should be a powerful Revival Meeting...so that I can take faculty and students there for a demonstration of the real Pentecostal power."³⁸

Before an April visit to New Jersey, du Plessis continued the frenetic pace of his travels, appearing in locales as diverse as Riverside Church in New York City and the Pentecostal Angelus Temple in California for a William Branham meeting.³⁹ Finally arriving at Princeton on 29 April after some correspondence back and forth with Mackay over the dates of his visit, du Plessis settled in for a few weeks just as the campus was ending its school year and bidding farewell to its retiring president. While there visiting with his friend he also interacted with various students and faculty.⁴⁰ On 30 April du Plessis's travel journal notes an evening at Mackay's home as well as meeting famous theologians Marcus Barth and Thomas Torrance. During his time on campus, he also attended a retreat with Mackay and twenty-five students at

³⁶ du Plessis, *Bossey Lecture I*, 1959, Bossey, Switzerland, MS photocopy, Du Plessis Archives, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, 2. This single statement is important, for it helps to show 1959 as a kind of pivot. Whereas before he had been more associated with Pentecostals proper, he from this point onward was at the very least splitting his time between the two groups, if not favoring the charismatics over the classical denominational Pentecostals.

³⁷ du Plessis, circular letter, November 1959, MS photocopy, Du Plessis Archives, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

³⁸ du Plessis to Richard Bergstrom, 19 January 1959, MS photocopy, Du Plessis Archives, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

³⁹ du Plessis, "Travel Journal."

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* and circular letter, November 1959 wherein he claims "I enjoyed three weeks of excellent fellowship with faculty and students in the Princeton Presbyterian Theological Seminary in New Jersey."

the nearby Liebenzell conference center.⁴¹ Though the details of said conference are unknown, it is not beyond imagining that du Plessis shared at least a bit of his Pentecostal testimony during this time.

In the midst of his friendship with Dr. Mackay, du Plessis garnered an invitation from the seminary to be the speaker at the 1959 Students’ Missions Lectures in November. In a letter from April of the same year, the president of Princeton Seminary wrote to him in glowing terms, claiming he felt “that God has raised you up to play a very special role in the ecumenical movement of our time.”⁴² Though Mackay had by the autumn already retired his post as president, the invitation had gone out to du Plessis as one of the closing acts of his tenure. The lectures themselves came after du Plessis, once again probably through connections with Mackay, attended the eighteenth meeting of the Presbyterian and Reformed World Alliance during August in Sao Paulo, Brazil.⁴³ In the run-up to his speaking engagement, Princeton’s *The Seminary* wrote of du Plessis and the lectures he had been chosen to deliver. On 30 October it stated the topics upon which he had been slated to speak and indicated he was “widely traveled” and had “shown marked interest in the ecumenical movement as it affects the Pentecostal groups.”⁴⁴ Du Plessis’s plan was to speak before students and faculty on three topics near and dear to his Pentecostal heart: “The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Individual,” “The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church,” and “The Holy Spirit in the Mission of the Church.” Given over three

⁴¹ du Plessis, “Travel Journal.”

⁴² John Mackay to du Plessis, 17 April 1959, MS photocopy, Du Plessis Archives, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

⁴³ du Plessis, “Life Story.” Circular letter, November 1959 notes “August found me in Sao Paul, Brazil, as Fraternal Pentecostal Delegate to the 18th General Council of the Presbyterian and Reformed World Alliance, with 400 delegates and observers from 53 countries of the world, representing 45-million Calvinists in the world. Thus Calvinism became the first Ecumenical Protestant Confession to recognize the Pentecostal Revival at the world level.”

⁴⁴ *The Seminary*, Princeton Theological Seminary, 30 October 1959, MS Photocopy, Seminary Archives, Princeton, NJ.

days, these lectures would upon completion represent an important milestone for du Plessis and continue to solidify his position as a leading figure in such matters.

In the first of his lectures, delivered on 2 November, the South African focused on the Holy Spirit’s influence on the personal level. Du Plessis lauded the experience of the Spirit as foundational and highlighted the concept not merely in the abstract but also shared related testimony from his experience:

I have known this life, I have known the power of the Holy Spirit for the past forty years. I was no less a sinner than the little African boys that I played with back there in 1916, than they were, but it was the power of the Holy Spirit as I saw him in the lives of Africans that had been heathen, pagan, and vile, but a tremendous change came about them when it could be truly said “old things have passed away, and all things have become new.” When I saw that, I knew it was not by merely hearing a story, but that something marvelous, something supernatural had taken place in their lives and that is what changed them.⁴⁵

As he proceeded, the South African also discussed the importance of the Holy Spirit’s agency in the life of the believer as opposed to our own will and desires. For him, “the energy of God that came at Pentecost is quite different from the efforts of good Christians to do their very best.”⁴⁶ If his hearers wanted to seek after the Spirit they had to realize they must wait for God’s leading as well. Since for du Plessis the latter day revival of Pentecostalism derived from the hand of God, only God could lead the individual—and the Church—into the deeper things of the Spirit. As he spoke to the gathered group of professors and future Presbyterian ministers this was a key concept upon which he focused:

Now, allow me to tell a little of my own experience. I had prayed much that that Lord would fill my life with his Spirit because I realized not so much because of the influence of my father and mother and other things around me, but for myself in studying the word of God, in reading the word of God, and particularly in seeing what had happened in the mission field...when I saw the work of the Holy Spirit in reaching the pagan, the illiterate, the heathen, steeped in his customs I then wanted so much of that power that I might by the Grace of God be used of Him, be an instrument in His hand, be a channel for Him through whom he could reach others. The emphasis, the very strong emphasis, is on witnessing.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ du Plessis, “The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Individual,” 2 November 1959, Student Missions Lectures, Princeton Theological Seminary, MS photocopy, Du Plessis Archives, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, 1-2.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 8.

Seeing himself and his trip to Princeton Seminary in the midst of the biblical reference to being witnesses in the widening circles of Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:4), du Plessis interpreted his travels in the year 1959 along this lines. Just like the apostles, he too felt sent out from his comfortable home to places far removed, all for the purpose of being a witness to Christ and His Spirit: "I am still witnessing, and that has been the real adventure in my life."⁴⁸

In the next lecture, which he entitled "The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church," du Plessis began with humor, sharing a brief anecdote from his meeting with Marcus Barth:

...he said, "Are you still a Pentecostal?" I said, "Yes, worse than ever." "What are you doing here?" "Well," I said, "I am here at the invitation of Dr. McCord [Mackay's successor at Princeton Seminary]." He said, "You mean Dr. McCord actually invited you, a Pentecostal leader and let you free on the campus here?" I said, "Yes." "Well, that's wonderful." I said, "Do you think so?" "Yes, if you will do one thing." "Well," I said, "tell me. I need advice." He said, "Do not acquire or employ the high, dry theological terminology that they use in these institutions, but" he says, "continue to speak the humble, simple, warm language of the Holy Spirit that reaches the hearts of men."

In some way paradigmatic of his approach—and likely his view of the Holy Spirit's—this brief vignette set the stage for what du Plessis saw to be the work of God needed within the churches. During this discussion of ecclesiastical matters he reiterated the need for he body of Christ to be built up, and to be done so transdenominationally by God's Spirit. Du Plessis lifted up spiritual gifts as vital for the community when he said "to me the ministry in the church is of tremendous importance."⁴⁹ Much later during the lecture, he stated further "everything must be for the edification of the Church. And the Spirit forever seeks to edify the Church."⁵⁰ How great it was, then, as du Plessis noted in middle of his lecture that:

...it is no longer necessary for Presbyterians to go to Pentecostal churches to see the Holy Ghost in action, at least not here in America. There are Presbyterian churches where the same manifestations are in evidence now. Not too far from here either. It is not necessary for the Episcopalians to go to Pentecostal meetings to see the power of God in action because they can go to an Episcopalian church and see the same power and the same

⁴⁸ Ibid., 8-9.

⁴⁹ du Plessis, "The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church", 3 November 1959, Student Missions Lectures, Princeton Theological Seminary, MS photocopy, Du Plessis Archives, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, 7.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 12.

manifestation. They can hear tongues and they can see or hear prophecy and the rest. The same applies to Methodists and Lutherans and other societies, and therefore I am greatly encouraged because the Holy Spirit is finding recognition and its rightful place in the established historic churches...⁵¹

As he shared these reflections du Plessis insisted he was done with the “come-outers,” those who in previous years had tasted of the Spirit’s blessings and left their home denominations. Now the call was to stay within one’s particular denominational group and see it renewed from within.⁵² Along these lines du Plessis shared a story that would become a set-piece of his—simply that “God has no grandsons.” Relating an episode wherein he heard the voice of God relating that very phrase to him and later realizing its full meaning in the midst of a curious conversation with a Roman Catholic priest, du Plessis came to the conclusion that experience of God—especially at a moment of crisis like conversion—is vitally important. As du Plessis phrased it, one must “of necessity have an encounter with Christ.”⁵³ The process of becoming a child of God was something that could only happen in the interaction of God and a person, and as such could not be taught one to another. Since this experience of faith could not be passed down, God had no grandchildren: “the Holy Spirit must be recognized in every generation...if every generation had been regenerated and if every generation had received the Holy Spirit as they did in the time of the apostles, this world would have had a different history.”⁵⁴ Just as Marcus Barth had encouraged him, du Plessis shared this message in the midst of an historic mainline seminary to challenge and encourage a rethinking of a purely historical and intellectual understanding of the faith. By remaining open to God’s Spirit, du Plessis felt there was space for each church and its members to be renewed and thus avoid the less than favored status as spiritual “grandchildren.”

⁵¹ Ibid., 9.

⁵² Ibid., 2. Du Plessis said, “There is only one thing we need to do that that is come out of the world insofar as being part of the world.”

⁵³ Ibid., 16

⁵⁴ Ibid., 17.

In his third and final lecture at Princeton Seminary, du Plessis broadened his scope somewhat as he focused on the Spirit’s work and the larger mission of the Church. Here he gave attention to some of the specifics of Pentecostal success in the mission field, noting the importance of passion in the midst of the Christian mission:

I am so happy that there are those now in ecumenical circles that realize to expect a very orderly, desirable move of the Spirit according to faith and order without ardor, is no longer possible...Dr. Mackay has repeatedly warned me never to exchange my ardor for order...⁵⁵

The Spirit for du Plessis remained vitally necessary to not only do the work of missions, but constituted the “motivating power” of the Church. In the midst of all this, even seeming divisions into various church or denominational groups need not be fatal:

...I found that in every town I went through, there are three Pentecostal churches. If there was only one movement, there would only be one church. I wonder whether sometimes it isn’t divide and grow...To me it is a wonderful orchard of fruitbearing trees all the way around. Oh, we can put a fence around it, but if you want to make one tree out of it, well—cut them down, tie them together and what you? [sic] Just one big old bush—no more fruit even.⁵⁶

As we have already seen, some references were made to what might be considered the beginnings of the Charismatic Movement, here given by du Plessis as a sign of this spreading fervor.⁵⁷ At the same time, du Plessis also outlined for all his hearers what he felt to be the key characteristics of the Holy Spirit at work in the world through the lives of believers: a sense of new life and power, worship with presence, a preparation of Christians for persecution, helping make all of Scripture glow with light and beauty, and a centering of the affections upon the Lord Jesus Christ.⁵⁸ All of these seem to have existed for du Plessis both as results of the mission of the Church at the same time they did as motivators for the mission going forward. It was

⁵⁵ du Plessis, “The Holy Spirit in the Mission of the Church,” 4 November 1959, Student Missions Lectures, Princeton Theological Seminary, MS photocopy, Du Plessis Archives, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, 1.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 14 noted “no longer are the missionaries from Protestant societies looking longingly at the work of the Pentecostals and desiring to have a similar, or hoping that the Lord might help them too. They have now in recent years begun to experience the very same blessing.”

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

ultimately these characteristics and this energy he wished to convey to his gathered hearers in his final lecture. In his own words, “until the membership of the church is revived, they will accomplish little. We need another Pentecost.”⁵⁹

Even while the seminary lectures formed the central portion of this most pivotal year, Du Plessis’s ecumenical work involved much more than Princeton. Immediately previous to his engagement there du Plessis again spent some time with ecumenical leaders discussing related issues at the Seabury House. Less than two weeks later the South African continued his one man Pentecostal embassy, this time to the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland. In April, du Plessis had received a letter from Charles West of the WCC indicating their interest in having him speak with them on topics related to Pentecostalism. As invited, he would spend “three weeks...to give a series of lectures on the Pentecostal churches, their theology and peculiar witness” before an ecumenical audience.⁶⁰ Never one to shy away from such opportunities, Du Plessis happily obliged this request and seven months later found himself before the ecumenical gathering.

At Bossey, one of the important emphases that appeared from the outset was—just as with Princeton lectures—the issue of calling. This is hardly surprising, for both the composition and delivery of both sets of lectures likely occurred simultaneously. As du Plessis spoke in Switzerland, he told hearers a bit of his story:

...I do not want you to feel that I condemn the churches. I did that long enough. I did that until the Holy Ghost challenged me about it, and I repented of it and asked God to forgive me, and so I condemn nobody at all, and I’m not here because I wanted to be—to finish my testimony I want to say that I’m here because that Holy Spirit challenged me to go into the ranks of the ecumenical movement, the World Council of Churches, liberal churches, call them anything you like, but to go there and humbly and simply give my testimony and then the Lord will do the rest...⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ibid., 16.

⁶⁰ Charles G. West to David du Plessis, 27 April 1959, MS photocopy, Du Plessis Archives, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

⁶¹ du Plessis, *Bossey Lecture I*, 12.

Receptivity to the voice of God and the Spirit’s call was for du Plessis a non-negotiable part of the Pentecostal—and Christian life. In a related way, the theme of experience comes to the fore in the midst of his lectures. Specific Pentecostal experience, while certainly highlighted, is also described by du Plessis as being of the crisis variety. In response to a question asking him to describe the experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit, he framed the matter thus: “the first crisis was my lack of an experience of the knowledge of salvation. The second crisis was my lack of power—my lack of the power that the scriptures speak about.”⁶² As Pentecostalism had an answer to this crisis in his life, by implication it was a prime candidate for initiating renewal elsewhere.

Apologetically speaking, du Plessis’s lectures at Princeton at later Bossey helped to explain more about Pentecostalism to an inquisitive audience of outsiders. To this end he in Switzerland emphasized against any detractors that Pentecostals themselves did not believe any new doctrine beyond that which had been traditionally taught throughout the history of the Church:

You will find as you go through the world and meet with them that have come out of Lutheran background and are strongly influenced by Lutheran doctrine, and they did not have to discard all that they had been taught there. They had only to put into practice what they had been taught. The same applies to those who come from Methodist background and from the Episcopalians or Anglican background, whichever they come from...⁶³

Continuing his discussion, he also offered his thoughts on the understanding of the invisible as opposed to visible Church. The Holy Spirit, he stated, was and could be at work far and wide for the same God was at work in all:

I find the members of what perhaps some have called the “Invisible Church”...I find members of that church wherever I have gone...Today, Pentecostals goodly acknowledge that the Holy Spirit is the only one that has the

⁶² du Plessis, *Bossey Lecture III*, 13.

⁶³ du Plessis, *Bossey Lecture II*, 3. Du Plessis goes on to note “the only group that really had difficulty...come out of Roman Catholicism,” words that take on some irony considering the great extent of the Charismatic Renewal in the next two decades. It is, perhaps, some indication here of the persistence of certain Pentecostal biases even in one who felt as open-minded and ecumenical as he did.

prerogative to decide who is in the church and who is not in the church. It is not the prerogative of man or of an organization, or any society of any church.⁶⁴

The building blocks of renewal were present and the Spirit was available—all that was necessary in du Plessis’s mind was a kind of remembering about the genesis, purpose, and trajectory of the body of Christ.

While in Switzerland du Plessis also discussed the topic of missions vis-à-vis Pentecostalism. In a particular lecture detailed with a host of numerical figures representing the worldwide movement, du Plessis commented that it “has spread in the most unexpected way,” with churches that “sprung up like mushrooms,” thereby necessitating them “to consider the reason for all the great varieties of Pentecostal groups.”⁶⁵ So too he urged in another talk that despite the great multiplicity of Pentecostal groups, their diversity should not be taken as a sign of splintering weakness. Instead, their development in such fashion might be understood as a source of great vitality and missions-mindedness: “divisions cannot really be called divisions because it was not the splintering of a central movement, it was rather the case of everyone coming in and starting his own brand.”⁶⁶ While seemingly disorganized, some of the fire that lay at the base of their growth deserved attention.

When considering du Plessis’s life thus far, it should be remembered that many of the themes that developed over time and would come to resonate in the 1960s had begun to coalesce in 1959—in specific, in the Princeton lecture series he delivered in the latter half of that year. Both there and later, one finds a type of Pentecostal missionary and ambassador-at-large that spoke about the Spirit-filled life only insofar as he was convinced it spoke to the whole of the Christian life regardless of denominational bounds. Deriving in many ways from his own sense

⁶⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁶⁵ du Plessis, *Bossey Lecture VII*, 1-2.

⁶⁶ du Plessis, *Bossey Lecture VIII*, 2.

of calling to the life of Christian service and mission in which he was engaged, he powerfully stressed the agency of the Holy Spirit in the leading and guiding of a Church that had gone cold and was in need of new fire. Time and again in the lectures of 1959, he was to seek common understanding on topics such as the need for an experience of God, a shared Christian history, and the person and work of Jesus Christ. If he was able to show how Pentecostalism illuminated these things and spoke powerfully into the present, he seems not to have hesitated.

In his lectures delivered at Princeton and Bossey—in many ways a single piece—du Plessis seems consciously to have rejected the tactic of supercession, or the notion that Pentecostals had reclaimed hidden truth and that all should become like them. Instead he operated from the position of renewal—i.e. that Pentecostals had rediscovered an important facet of the Christian life and sought to bring that joyous news to all. By so doing he seems to have been able to offer the correctives he felt necessary in general while avoiding specific denominational or theological critiques. If anything, his was a critique of practical theology or the lived experience and actions of the Church.

Of the reception of the 1959 Missions Lectures only scant contemporary evaluation can be gleaned. Du Plessis himself remained pleased with his performance at the school and the contacts he had made there, no doubt buttressed by comments such as those from Mackay’s successor, James McCord: “I greatly enjoyed...being reminded of your lectures given here in Princeton in the fall of 1959.”⁶⁷ Yet at the same time, correspondence from McCord to another individual casts doubt on the reception of du Plessis’s words, for

His lectures here were not well done. Since he had already been invited, I had hoped the he would deal with the history of the Pentecostal Movement and tell us something about its program today. Instead of taking this approach, he spoke primarily about the gift of tongues, his own career as an ecumenical representative of the

⁶⁷ James McCord to du Plessis, 22 January 1962, MS photocopy, Du Plessis Archives, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

Pentecostal bodies, etc. The lectures were not at all well received, and he has not been invited back to campus.⁶⁸

Another faculty member echoed these sentiments, "for he was evidently talking about something vital in the Christian faith, but without any depth."⁶⁹ Thus while it appears there was an element in Princeton that took umbrage at his non-intellectual approach, the place it held in du Plessis' mind and the encouragement of someone like Mackay remained important. Though sporadic, letters between the two were written back and forth throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Time and again Mackay would "look forward with keen anticipation to our meeting again" and asked "God [to] continue to bless you at work and home."⁷⁰ As the Presbyterian elder statesman continued to write to du Plessis in the 1970s, he noted "more than anyone that I know, you have been moving through the world in the great Pauline tradition, combining in your thought and spirit the evangelical and the ecumenical."⁷¹ While some letters were shorter in length and rather perfunctory in nature, most spoke clearly to the connection the two men felt and how such a denominationally wedded man as Mackay viewed the Charismatic Movement. Mackay's recollection of his visit to the charismatically oriented Oral Roberts University speaks to this: "I had a wonderful time on the campus, speaking several times to the student body...I was deeply moved by what I saw and felt and heard, the Holy Spirit is truly at work in what I believe can become a quite unique cultural initiator."⁷² In another letter to du Plessis a few years later, the 81 year old Mackay rejoiced that "the living Lord Jesus Christ is at work through the presence of the Spirit throughout Christendom," mentioning that he thanks God that "fellow Presbyterian ministers, who have experienced in recent years the fresh reality of the Holy Spirit have been

⁶⁸ James McCord to Robbins Barstow, 28 May 1962, MS photocopy, Du Plessis Archives, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

⁶⁹ Elmer Homrighausen to Robbins Barstow, 6 May 1962, MS photocopy, Du Plessis Archives, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

⁷⁰ John Mackay to du Plessis, 26 May 1966.

⁷¹ Mackay to du Plessis, 25 April 1975.

⁷² Mackay to du Plessis, 26 May 1966.

released from official harassment.”⁷³ As Mackay began his final years he wrote to du Plessis of a desire to write his memoirs, on one occasion stating “I am hoping within the next two years to complete an autobiography, the title of which will be ‘The Hand and the Road.’ In that book, when it appears, you, my beloved friend, will have a real place, and also the great movement in which you are a leading mentor.”⁷⁴

Without Mackay, certain of du Plessis’s ecumenical tendencies may never have come to the fore, or at least not have had the opportunity to do so as they did. As we have seen, Princeton Seminary’s response—at least as evidenced by two of its faculty— was not overwhelming. If anything, this negative reaction lends credence to possibility that it was Mackay and his encouragement in a place like Princeton that helped send du Plessis on his way in a manner much more difficult otherwise. As a denominational leader and ecumenical figure, Mackay helps to show once again the boundary stretching nature of the new and amorphous movement of the Spirit in action. Of this, an insightful article by Robert R. Curlee and Mary Ruth Isaac-Curlee helps to show the ways in which he and du Plessis worked together in the middle of a particularly problematic situation related to charismatic Presbyterians and their respective denominations.⁷⁵ Though, as they state, Mackay cannot be rightly classified a Pentecostal himself,⁷⁶ his supportive hand in the midst of its deliberations speaks even more loudly to the

⁷³ Mackay to du Plessis, 2 October 1970.

⁷⁴ Mackay to du Plessis, 1 March 1974. While this autobiography never appeared and in an interview with Mackay’s grandson it was noted that such polite claims were not uncharacteristic of the man, his statements here combined with the decades-long relationship the two men had cannot but speak to the kind of feeling he had for the charismatics and the apparent work of the Holy Spirit in the denominational churches. A forthcoming biography of Mackay by his grandson may shed some further light on these matters: John Metzger, *The Hand and the Road* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).

⁷⁵ Robert R. Curlee and Mary-Ruth Isaac Curlee, “Bridging the Gap: John A. Mackay, Presbyterians, and the Charismatic Movement” pp. 141-55 in *American Presbyterians* 72:3 (Fall 1994), 142ff. Mackay and du Plessis traveled to Austin Texas to consult with seventeen Presbyterian ministers about their position as charismatics within a larger denominational groups.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 142, 148. Noting his connections to Scottish evangelicalism, a spirituality conditioned by Spanish mysticism, and his appreciation for Latin American Pentecostalism, the authors assert Mackay was “never a tongues speaker but ever a ‘charismatic,’ in the best and broadest sense of the term...[one who] went on the line to help

possibility of openness and acceptance of the mainline and ecumenical world in the midst of the revival. The lectures to which he first invited du Plessis were thus a key piece of a larger puzzle.

The 1959 Student Mission Lectures were a culmination of the South African Pentecostal's continued steps from the global and ecclesiastical periphery towards the middle of American religious life as he sought to bring the word of the Spirit to those who would listen. The themes he uttered in the Princeton would reverberate throughout his later ministry. Though only some may have taken them to heart in 1959, the explosion of the Charismatic Movement in the years that followed heralds their importance. Du Plessis's life and faith journey had by then led to a place where he was as deeply entrenched in Pentecost as he was in matters of the whole *oikomene*. The struggles and triumphs inherent in these twin connections continued on in the 1960s and beyond. For now, it seems safe to say that the first fifty plus years of du Plessis's life reveal a man who felt both touched by God's Spirit and impelled by the same for ministry and mission. Peripatetic almost to a fault, he traveled widely in an attempt to make connections and further spread news of the reviving fire of the Spirit. While at first these efforts had been undertaken in his home country of South Africa, as the spheres of his exposure and influence widened he turned his attention to working for common cause amongst all Pentecostals and, ultimately, towards the witnessing of the Spirit to Christians in the ecumenical world. Du Plessis's open-minded and connective approach towards dealing with those outside his theological purview was always one of dialogue, and in many ways can be read as any easy extension of his call to ministry. That his eyes would sometimes refuse to see boundaries others would erect allowed him the ability to speak in those circles and at the same time be taken seriously by his listeners. As he shared his own story and personal religious impressions

nurture the Presbyterian charismatic movement into healthy existence." How far this charismatic experience went remains unknown; that he existed at the centers of Presbyterian power and had a great sympathy for and appreciation of the movement remains certain.

together with his desire to see the Spirit operate outside of classical Pentecostalism, the 1959 Student Missions Lectures at Princeton Seminary and the Bossey lectures which followed were strong encouragement that what he spoke of was already underway. As David du Plessis stood before a group of gathered Presbyterian seminarians and faculty that November, it was a kind of preparation for the new heights he would scale and fields to which he would be impelled. His words and the manner of his sharing during that time would prove once again the leading of the Spirit that would soon follow. Realizing that this was only the beginning of his notoriety and fame helps underscore the importance of understanding more about the life of this worldwide “Mr. Pentecost.”