TOXICITY IN CLERGY LEADERSHIP: AN EMERGING PHENOMENON OF LEADERS' PERSONAL POWER IN THE PENTECOSTAL CHARISMATIC CHURCH

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Abstract

Toxicity in clergy leadership is a growing problem in Asian Pentecostal Charismatic churches. This article seeks to understand the problem of toxicity. I propose that the concept of toxicity might be productively understood as an issue of power. Building on a set of empirical data, the findings describe patterns of power and demonstrate an inclination among clergy leaders to exercise personal power beyond role and function. The exercise of personal power within relational structures has implications for congregation followers.

Introduction

Christian leadership literature is replete with the focus on spiritual and ethical aspects of leadership. When one approaches the subject of Christian leadership, the assumption is that a clergy leader would, by virtue of one's faith assent, practice standards that reflect Christian values and behavior, which will have constructive influence on followers and the progress of the church. We might then ask: How does one understand clergy leader behavior and practices that cause members of the congregation to feel vulnerable?

Kenneth Gangel's recent work on church leadership is significant and controversial at the same time. Gangel's *Surviving Toxic Leaders* is one of the few books in congregational studies literature to reference the term *toxic* to describe some church and Christian leaders. He makes a critical point on the "hiddenness" of toxic behaviors and practices in churches and among Christian leaders: "Defective Christian leaders rarely get their picture in *Time* or *Newsweek* for defrauding employees or driving their

ministries into bankruptcy, but make no mistake about it, we have toxic leaders in our midst."[1] Gangel further states that the purpose of the book is to "understand the biblical and spiritual consequences of toxic leadership and attempt to at least cut the percentage of toxic leaders in the ranks of evangelical ministries,"[2] implying that toxic leadership has become a problem in evangelical churches despite the lack of data to substantiate the claim.

My interest in researching toxic leadership grew out of two motivations. The first motivation is an uneasy observation that congregation followers are increasingly being subjected to a certain paradigm of leadership in this faith tradition. In an Asian ministry context within the Pentecostal Charismatic tradition, confidential stories from friends, peers, and colleagues were laced with pain, distress, and guilt about leaving their churches due to differences and difficulty in following certain leadership practices. Some notable comments, such as "I did not dare to talk to my pastor" or "I did not know that my pastor may be wrong," imply that their clergy leaders would deny or even neutralize differences of opinion and feedback. Second, followers have legitimate concerns about leader behaviors, actions, and practices. In a particular Asian Pentecostal Charismatic church context, follower difficulties relating to leadership practices are primarily discussed in private and off the record as many of these followers do not have safe spaces to have voice and be heard.

The purpose of this article is to gain clarity on what Gangel notes as the problem of toxic church leadership, within a context of Asian Pentecostal Charismatic congregations from followers' experiences. From the literature, I will attempt to describe and present a perspective on the problem of toxic leadership in relation to power. In examining followers' experiences, I hope to demonstrate the presence and indicators of toxic leadership

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[1] Kenneth O. Gangel, *Surviving Toxic Leaders: How to Work for Flawed People in Churches, Schools, and Christian Organizations* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2008), 1.
[2] Gangel, 1.

in this specific context by presenting some research findings on patterns of clergy leadership practices and the currency of power. In the final part of the article, I offer a perspective regarding a unique issue of the leader's personal power in Pentecostal Charismatic tradition.

Toxic Leadership and the Agency of Power in the Church

Characterizations of toxic or harmful leadership remain limited despite a growing number of studies that seek to understand the darker side of leadership.[3]

Barbara Kellerman, the James MacGregor Burns Lecturer in Public Leadership at Harvard Kennedy School, suggests that unethical leadership is a key indicator of toxicity, when leaders: (a) put their own interest first and treat subordinates like pawns in a chess game or a means to a goal or vision, (b) do not exemplify good virtues while expecting followers to do so, and (c) do not exercise leadership in the interest of common good.[4] Followers experience hurt that results from a lack of discernment between right and wrong and violation of common codes that define relationships and conduct. I propose that these three leadership traits may be viewed as attributes of power. In a religious or church context, clergy leaders are often agents of power by virtue of role, position, and responsibility.

Another perspective from leadership studies nuances specific leadership behaviors and qualities that impact followers, where leaders "…inflict some reasonably serious and enduring harm on their followers and organizations."[5] Jean Lipman-Blumen's multidimensional model of toxicity allows for the possibility that leaders vacillate between toxic and constructive leadership and that a leader might start off

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[3] Christine Harlen, "Does the Concept of Toxicity Travel?" *Representation* 47(3) (2011).
[4] Barbara Kellerman, *Bad Leadership: What It Is, How It Happens, Why It Matters* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press, 2004).
[5] Jean Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 18.

on the right footing but veer toward toxicity over a period of time.[6]

Lipman-Blumen further suggests that it is important to differentiate between two types of leadership toxicity: seriously toxic leaders and unintentionally toxic leaders. The difference between the two lies in behaviors that reflect intention to harm, compared to behaviors that exhibit an enhancement of self at the expense of others.[7] Both of these behaviors contain elements of power posturing. Toxic leaders are capable of using power to enrich themselves or to harm followers with certain actions. Yet Lipman-Blumen's important contribution to the discussion on toxicity rests on the issue of the leader's intentions. Deliberate intention to cause harm is considered more damaging on the toxicity scale. Framing the discussion in terms of power issues, when differences and disputes are present in a leader-follower relationship, especially in crisis and conflict situations, a leader can intentionally posture power to reach a desired outcome and, in the process, harm followers "by deliberately undermining, demeaning, seducing, marginalizing, intimidating, demoralizing, disenfranchising, incapacitating, imprisoning, torturing, terrorizing, or killing.…"[8]

Thus far, I have presented descriptions, albeit working definitions, from selected literature on toxic leadership. Prominent leadership literature portrays toxicity in terms of unethical behavior or actions. These unethical behaviors or actions suggest the use of power to establish a desired outcome or effect. In moving toward the discussion on empirical data, I anticipated the possibilities of unethical behavior as one type of church leadership practice that hurts followers.

In the church context, the literature highlights the problem of church leadership that relates to the creation of

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[6] Jean Lipman-Blumen, "Toxic Leadership: A Rejoinder," *Representation* 47(3) (2011): 340.

[7] Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*, 18.

[8] Lipman-Blumen, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*, 19.

fear, guilt, manipulation, abuse, authoritarian-type leadership, and leadership that undermines Christian ethics and witness. Table 1 illustrates different approaches in church studies literature relating to leadership toxicity in terms of behavior.

TABLE 1
Summary of Perspectives on Toxicity
in Church Leadership[9]

	Arterburn & Felton	Enroth	Dupont	Johnson & VanVonderen	Blue	Anderson
Approaches	Religious addiction	Control-oriented leaders	Cult of personality	Authoritarian and power-driven	Insecure abuser, Narcissistic abuser	Authority shift from leadership to leader
Emphasis/ Effect	Special powers	Spiritual tyrants, Abuse	Abuse of power and authority	Spiritual abuse	Power abuse	Spiritual abuse, Dehumani-zation
Leader Behavior	Controlling, Dictating, Manipulation	Guilt, Fear, Manipulation	Defensive, Grasping	Coerce, Exploit, Manipulate, Dominate,	Control, Coerce, Exploit	Gain control, Reinforce authority
Distortions of Theology and Leader's Authority	Above accountability, Claims of specialness/ set apart through Scriptures	Misuse of Scripture, Legalism	Legalism, Performance, Christianity	Misuse of Scripture	Legalism, Majoring on minors, Misuse Scriptures	Conceal own human needs and weaknesses

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[9] The author names listed in this table refer to the following texts, respectively: Stephen Arterburn and Jack Felton, *Toxic Faith: Experiencing Healing over Painful Spiritual Abuse* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Shaw Books, 2001); Ronald M. Enroth, *Churches That Abuse* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1993); Marc Dupont, *Toxic Churches: Restoration from Spiritual Abuse* (Ada, Mich.: Chosen, 2004); David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen, *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1991); Ken Blue, *Healing Spiritual Abuse* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995); Ray S. Anderson, *Minding God's Business* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986); *The Soul of Ministry: Forming Leaders for God's People* (Louisville, Ken.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

The authors cited in Table 1 describe leader behaviors of gaining and reinforcing control. Among them, Ron Enroth provides an example of a leader's control mechanism in terms of rigid behaviors, legalistic rules, isolationist environment, self-serving behavior, abuse of spiritual authority, and spiritual manipulation. This control posture induces fear, guilt, compliance, and uniformity.[10] These studies have also highlighted what I would term as distortions of theological beliefs and biblical teaching to justify the leader's actions of wielding power by virtue of his or her position and role. At least two studies highlight the theme of authoritarianism.[11] According to David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen, followers are expected to obey and submit or conform to the standards of the leader, controlled by unspoken rules that undergird the governance of the church by the leader.[12]

Church studies' literature[13] also highlights a significant issue of the leader's authority. Depending on how Scriptures are understood in a given context, specific teachings or commands are employed to justify the clergy leader's legitimate authority, enforce actions, and exercise power over followers.

The descriptions of leadership styles and behaviors in this literature are suggestive of the presence and problem of power. According to Roy Kearsley, power is a "sociological reality" in the church. Despite rules, procedures, and even doctrinal beliefs, power prevails in every aspect of negotiations in the church. Kearsley describes the presence of power that drives decisions and goals in the church:

> Consideration of power relates at every point to all the processes of church life including positive ones . . . . The uncomfortable truth is that power in churches often serves as the real cause of changes, whether positive or negative. Even in our highly democratized

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[10] Enroth, 29, 31, 196. I have also analyzed his case studies in the various chapters of the study.

[11] Johnson and VanVonderen; Blue.

[12] Johnson and VanVonderen, 20–21.

[13] Enroth, Dupont, and Blue.

society, power rather than policy often still turns out to be the single most decisive factor in strategies developed by social groups. It can rise as the most immediate and pressing factor in every undertaking, despite accompanying solemn discussions about theology, finance, and management.[14]

Power also does not always mediate negative impact on followers.[15] But when leaders and followers compete over resources, or dissent over issues and decisions, the impulse to control and posture power is strong. The result is that "leader and members show…unpreparedness for power's sometimes destructive impact."[16]

Employing vivid descriptions, Ray Anderson highlights harmful aspects of control mechanisms, authoritarianism, and distortions of theological beliefs and biblical teachings from clergy leaders entrusted with the care of souls:

> The leader who exploits the spiritual motives and desires of a church member for the sake of producing loyalty and uncritical support commits spiritual abuse. …The leader who manipulates the agenda, coerces the decision-making process and creates adversaries between people so as to "divide and conquer" grieves the spirit of a people and commits spiritual abuse. The pastor who uses biblical texts and ecclesial authority to gain a competitive edge in conflict situations commits spiritual abuse by "making wrongful use of the name of God" (Exodus 20:7). To be put on the losing side of an argument against God is to suffer spiritual abuse![17]

The discussions on church studies literature highlight a key concern—that clergy leaders can hurt or harm followers when they use and wield power through a variety of leadership behaviors in the church, if these behaviors are not tempered by trust, grace, and love.

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[14] Roy Kearsley, "Church, Community and Power," Ashgate, http://public.eblib.com/EBLPublic/PublicView.do?ptiID=438753.

[15] Stephen Sykes, *Power and Christian Theology* (London: Continuum, 2006).

[16] Kearsley, 4.

[17] Anderson, *The Soul of Ministry*, 192.

Up to this point, the literature provides frames for articulating and predicting toxicity in church leadership in terms of power. This leads to logical questions about the workings of power in the church, its flow, and its impact on followers. To understand the dynamics of insidious power, I draw upon Anson Shupe's sociological study on clergy malfeasance.

Shupe's work locates the working of power within formal religious structures and its impact on followers, for better or worse. Shupe's study[18] suggests that religious institutions are trusted hierarchies where leaders are mediators to God on behalf of the faithful followers. In other words, clergy leaders wield tremendous power by virtue of their spiritual position. Thus, power takes on an interceding function in religious structure.[19] By articulating power as a relational dynamic where clergy mediate on behalf of followers, Shupe observes that power may also be used to manipulate and exploit followers in what he described as *opportunity structures*. The clergy leader mediates power through his or her spiritual function and reinforces power inequities within a hierarchy of relationship in the ecclesiastical system. These relationship structures "facilitate the perpetration of deviance by protecting the deviants from detection while posing built-in vulnerabilities in the standing social arrangements."[20]

The significance of Shupe's study is the identification of the clergy-leader as a power broker within the ecclesiastical system. Shupe's discussion about the problem of power lies within the dimension of unlawful acts or conduct, with reference to sexual abuse, physical abuse, "religious" acts, or control that impinges on human rights and decency, as well as overt financial misappropriation. These unlawful acts

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[18] Anson D. Shupe, *In the Name of All That's Holy: A Theory of Clergy Malfeasance* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1995); *Wolves within the Fold : Religious Leadership and Abuses of Power* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

[19] Shupe, *In The Name of All That's Holy*, 25–26.

[20] Shupe, *In The Name of All That's Holy*, 29. Ref John Lofland, *Deviance and Identity*, Prentice-Hall Sociology Series (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 67, 73.

betray fiduciary trust in the clergy or priest's function. At the same time, a key limitation in Shupe's theory is a lack of reference to "sublime use of power," which does not fall into categories of unlawful conduct or betrayal of fiduciary trust, but nevertheless power that can adversely impact followers.[21]

While Pentecostal churches generally espouse the congregational system, the leadership image of the clergy leader in this tradition appears to fit closely with Shupe's description of a power broker. In the case of the Pentecostal Charismatic tradition, the larger-than-life quality of the Pentecostal clergy leader transcends the boundaries of the ecclesiastical system. Accordingly, Pentecostal leaders who possess "the ability to express themselves with great facility, as well as…majored in the use of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit" are looked upon as speaking on God's behalf, where "their word was sometimes viewed on a par with that of Scripture itself."[22] If indeed the clergy leader possesses such authority and power, the challenge for these leaders needs to be framed in terms of prudent choices, good intentions, and benevolent actions that bear on the followers they lead.

Building on the above conversations in the literature, I identify patterns of power workings from clergy leaders' reflexive behaviors and actions as they relate to followers in a variety of situations and decisions, in several empirical case studies.

Clergy Leadership and Phenomenology of Power

The following empirical study employs a combination of qualitative interviews and case studies. The sets of data were extracted from a larger study that examined leaders' power strategies and uncovered a predictable sequence of countervailing power.[23]

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[21] Kearsley, 31.

[22] David J. Garrard, "Leadership Versus the Congregation in the Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 29(2) (2009).

[23] Lim, S. P. (2014). *Touch not the lord's anointed: Toxic leaders and reflexive followers in pentecostal charismatic churches in Asia* (Order No. 3617626). Available from

This study is also limited to Pentecostal Charismatic congregations in an Asian context. A total of thirty-four individual congregation followers who have had significant encounters with at least four key clergy leaders from four separate local churches were interviewed[24] in depth. An analysis of the interview data led to the discovery of specific patterns of leaders' use of power that negatively impacted followers.[25] Followers experienced hurt through these practices.[26] A summary of these patterns of practices in Table 2 indicates at least six patterns of power that negatively impacted followers.

TABLE 2
Phenomenology of Leaders' Personal Power

Patterns of Power in Leader Behavior and Actions
1. Theological validation of independent power
2. Disguised and questionable financial practices
3. Overt manipulation and intimidation
4. Inconsistent application of protocols and policies (conflict of interests)
5. Strategies that deny communication or prevent feedback
6. Misrepresentation of scriptural teaching

Dissertations & Theses @ Fuller Theological Seminary (1525980009), retrieved from
http://search.proquest.com/docview/1525980009?accountid=11008.
[24] The use of qualitative methodology seeks to understand "the deeper structures of the phenomena we study." Karin Klenke, *Qualitative Research in the Study of Leadership* (Bingley, U.K.: Emerald Group Pub., 2008), 4.
[25] The process of understanding the data involved grouping similarities of leadership actions as emerging patterns of practices.
[26] Two caveats undergird the interpretation of the data. First, not all followers experience the whole range of leadership practices that posed obstacles and risks. Second, the patterns are not limited only to specific practices in Table 2. These patterns are listed as they appear in all the three congregations studied. I also illustrate the data and discuss these patterns in relation to the leader's personal power capacity in Tables 3 through 8.

The data further suggests that these clergy leaders' power extends to all aspect of church life apart from the religious or priestly function. The extent of personal power will now be unpacked in the following discussions of specific themes augmented by tables and vignettes.

The first pattern relates to clergy leaders' personal power in the use of biblical teaching or preaching to validate their authority and control. Table 3 illustrates this pattern:

TABLE 3
Reports of Leadership Practices:
Theological Validation of
Independent Power

Theology that Validates Independent Power*	
F12 & F20	During conflict times, (the leader) will preach "touch not the Lord's Anointed"
F17	The vision given to the church through the leader, a "divine" order (meant) no questioning. Just follow.
F33	Don't touch the Lord's Anointed. …People could not disagree because of the weight of this teaching. …They have a theology that says that because they are senior pastors, they are above you and they are accountable only to God.
F24	Vision (implying also authority) came from the founder leader who received the vision from God. As such, one cannot oppose or diverge from the leader who bears God's word.
F30	The leader would have the final say on all matters using the "thus saith the Lord" rhetoric.
F30 *F = a follower informant	The pastor espoused "Touch Not the Lord's Anointed" as a veiled threat to enforce submission. The pastor superimposed a picture of himself on the front side of a sheet of paper while the reverse side had a picture of Jesus' face. If anyone criticized or opposed the leader, they were really opposing and criticizing Jesus.

One prominent and common operational principle is "Do Not Touch the Lord's Anointed." From the vignettes, it would appear that these clergy leaders applied specific teachings to justify their personal power to act in God's stead. These leaders possessed power to direct the vision of the church and had the final say on all matters related to the direction, goal, and focus of the church. According to one follower, F30, the leader even alluded to the possibility of divine retribution for a lack of submission or obedience to God's "anointed" one. The issue of toxicity here is that leaders were accountable only to themselves and to God for their actions. Followers neither had permission nor freedom to question directives and orders, as these commands were perceived to originate from divine source and the commands were administered by the leader that God had chosen.

The second pattern relates to decisions and administration of church financial matters, suggesting clergy leaders' use of personal power to execute questionable tactics and conceal information. The pattern is illustrated in Table 4.

TABLE 4
Reports of Leadership Practices:
Disguised and Questionable
Financial Practices

Disguised and Questionable Financial Practices*	
F17	Disillusioned by the pastor's action of transferring money from mission fund into personal ministry fund. " I think I stopped giving when the whole thing started about the transfer of money to his private ministry…the one that broke me…I was very disappointed"
F20	"In terms of accounts, not really detailed…don't tell you where the monies go to." He "…saw that there was a transfer of amount into the leader's personal ministry." The mission pastor and church treasurer did not know about it. Asked for a meeting with the board of deacons. Most of them did not know anything about the transfer.
F15	Concerned about the issue of transparency and accountability in the use of funds and financial governance.
F33	Tithes and offerings were not deposited into the same church account. Operational expenses for running the church as well as salaries came from the general offering. On top of that, the pastors managed the tithe account. The committee had no jurisdiction regarding this separate account.
F26	The founder leader would call the church plant and enquire how much money had been received and said they will have to send up to fifty percent of the church income to the leader. For some churches, it was compulsory to contribute toward the mortgage of the founder leader's home.
F31	"The leaders took all the money for themselves."
F17 *F = a follower informant	The church plants had to tithe to the leaders and if the leaders incurred additional expenses, church plants would be asked to contribute to these expenses.

The four key clergy leaders in this particular research context generally possessed power to authorize financial transactions on behalf of and in the interest of the church. Congregation followers expected their clergy leaders to demonstrate aboveboard, ethical standards not unlike corporate financial governance. To their dismay, certain clergy leaders sought to conceal certain financial practices and influenced financial protocols to their advantage and benefit. One example of inappropriate influence on financial protocols is reflected in F33's comment about sketchy practices that did not specify or balance monies that were collected from tithes and offerings. Many members did not know that there were two separate channels of monies collected through tithes and offerings in F33's church. Tithe income belonged to the leader, and the church committee had no jurisdiction over this resource. Offering income belonged to the church; it was for operational expenses, and it was managed by the church committee. The leader received a salary from this resource, in addition to tithe income.

From where followers stood, clergy leaders' actions of applying financial practices and protocols to benefit their personal positions raised disconcerting questions of trust, motives, and ethics. These uncomfortable questions were ignored, sidestepped, or excused. From the cases of F17 and F20, their voices, reasoning, requests, and pleas were rejected and censured, with the help of the church board. Followers remained at risk regarding prolonged inappropriate financial practices by clergy leaders, especially when those practices were sanctioned or carried out with the help of other abetting supporters.

Followers have also encountered specific forms of personal threat and maneuvers toward clergy leaders' desired outcomes. This third pattern of the use of power is illustrated in Table 5.

TABLE 5
Reports of Leadership Practices:
Actions Related to Overt
Manipulation and Intimidation

Overt manipulation and intimidation*	
F10	His removal from board of elders: "charges of departing from the faith and disorderly conduct...wrote a letter to inform…no official communication from the deacon about setting up a commission to investigate me…They denied my request for specific witness."
F17	Before major decisions, the leader would meet with some members individually before board meetings commence to get individuals to support a motion or decision.
F17	Membership terminated because he spoke up and submitted a memo of appeal to the church. There was no explanation from the church; instead, he was cited an obscure reason from the constitution.
F17	The leader was a "super strategist" and "used" the members' participation in corporate prayer and worship at the conclusion of the business meeting to signify concerted agreement on the decision on building project.
F33	The leader denounced the committee as "devilish" for trying to dictate and rule over.
F26	The leader froze the church plant's account without her knowledge, and she had no idea where the monies had gone except that the leader took steps to secure them.
F24	Refusal to comply with requests for money will result in blacklist: "ignore you, make life miserable for you, won't share resources with you, and not invited to certain meetings."
F30 *F = a follower informant	Use of revelatory knowledge to reinforce fear and to emphasize the point that people should not touch the Lord's Anointed. The leader told F30 that God even revealed what F30 wore in the privacy of his own bedroom.

The vignettes above illustrate the use of threats in the form of manipulation or intimidation of followers who diverged from clergy leaders' demands. Some examples from Table 5 consist of: (a) a severe charge of "departing from the faith" leveled against a follower, (b) a veiled threat of exclusion and sidelining followers for refusing to comply with requests, and (c) the use of revelatory capability to reinforce fear, which appears to demonstrate a condescending posture.

Certain clergy leaders maneuvered toward a desired outcome by wielding disparate influence and executing actions based on prior knowledge. When F26 gave notice of resignation from the church plant, the leader of the church-planting movement acted tactically to take possession of the church plant's bank account by rejecting the committee that had oversight of the bank accounts, ignoring certain protocols that were put in place—all unbeknownst to F26 and the rest of the church plant congregation. According to F26, this act contradicted the principle of autonomy that the leader espoused and concluded that the church-planting leader acted with lack of consideration to the surprised and demoralized congregation. In the end, followers who did not acquiesce to clergy leaders would face threats to personal well-being.

The fourth pattern of power is inconsistency in the application of protocols and policies. Followers found that leaders' actions and rhetoric suggested a conflict of interest between the church/group's interest and personal interests. This pattern is shown in Table 6.

TABLE 6
Reports of Leadership Practices:
Inconsistent Application of
Protocols and Policies

Inconsistent application of protocols and policies—conflict of interests*.	
F10	Use position and authority to transfer money into personal account.
F17	No proper voting for the decision on church building.
F17	Inconsistency between the way money is spent on senior pastor's interests and the continued call to giving.
F11	Hard-line stance taken by senior leader that the church accounting principles are based on a different standard compared to secular accounting principles, as worldly standards.
F26	"Churches were told (by the pastor) who to vote for…especially the treasurer…so that checks will go through without any questions."
F30 *F = a follower informant	Regarding the leader's own salary, the leader will propose a figure and have the treasurer present it in such a way that it appears to be coming from someone else.

From these cases, a common conflict of interest relates to financial matters. The vignettes documented in Table 6 present examples of leaders' irregularities and ambiguities in the application of protocols. There is a sense of the clergy leaders' entitlement to act above and beyond operational protocols and community expectations (i.e., the use of power for the clergy leader's agenda or interests). One example from F10 shows a clergy leader who acted in personal accord to transfer some church mission fund for personal ministry budget. This same leader also strongly asserted that his principles, which set the tone for the church's accounting standards, were superior to corporate

accounting standards. Where this pattern of power is present, the concern is that followers' and congregation needs and interests would be secondary or inferior to the clergy leader's agenda.

The fifth pattern of the workings of power relates to clergy leaders' strategy to deny communication or prevent feedback. Table 7 highlights quotes and vignettes of followers' experience that relate to leaders' use of personal power to reject communication or feedback.

TABLE 7
Reports of Leadership Practices:
Strategies That Deny
Communication or Prevent
Feedback

Strategies that deny communication or prevent feedback*	
F15, F21, F12	"One has no right to question money given to the church."
F33	"The leader made statements to the fact that when you give money you don't question how it is used."
F26	"If anyone raise any resistance towards the way money was spent, the person will be out (removed)."
F30	He was put in "cold storage" when he started asking questions about the disbursements and receipts of monies.
F30 *F = a follower informant	Regarding the project to build a new building, it came through the leader's vision and what God had shown the leader. People then cannot question the vision.

The vignettes above suggest that clergy leaders asserted power to overcome queries and perceived challenges to their authority. The data again points to a common issue related

to financial control and transactions. These clergy leaders became displeased when followers queried financial governance and how monies were designated and expended as shown in the experiences of F26, F30, and F33. These same leaders rejected any form of dialogue by communicating a directive that followers had no right to question the use of money given to the church. In a similar stance, these leaders would also assert the same directive when followers sought an explanation regarding the leaders' vision and plan.

The sixth pattern of power relates to clergy leaders misrepresenting scriptural teaching. Vignettes from Table 8 illustrate a pattern of this misrepresentation.

TABLE 8
Reports of Leadership Practices: Misrepresentation of Scriptural Teaching

*Misrepresentation of scriptural teaching**	
F17	Teaching on giving: not robbing God and that God's storehouse should be filled. (This is set against the teaching and rhetoric that one cannot question the monies that have been given to the church.)
F14	"Too many calls and forms of giving. The message was quite often about giving." For her it was a problem of stewardship: the leader's posture in seeking funds and the way money was used.
F26	The leader taught and practiced the analogy of Elijah and Elisha. The protégé waited for the anointing to be passed on. Used to justify training where training is like being beaten into submission.
F31	"Forcing meaning the text to make it say what they want it to say."
F30

*F = a follower informant | Teaching on giving related to making a vow to God and that God does not delight in people who break the vows. "The problem is on pressuring people to give so that God will bless them." |

The earlier discussion presented in Table 3 highlighted the pattern of clergy leaders who use the power of rhetoric to justify their authority and divinely appointed position. It would be no surprise that these same clergy leaders would also misrepresent biblical teaching to influence congregation followers into monetary giving as shown in Table 8. Apart from one case that highlighted misrepresentation of scriptural text to justify the goal of submission in a training program, followers raised concerns about their clergy leaders' teachings on giving. These teachings appear to influence followers to give to leader-driven causes, at specific, opportune times. Furthermore, in some cases, the call to give was validated by the statement that one should not rob God and that members needed to fill God's storehouse. These followers did not reject the spiritual responsibility of giving and financial stewardship; instead, their concerns related to the distortion of Scriptures regarding giving. One follower, F14, was concerned that there were "too many calls and forms of giving. The message was quite often about giving." If one was to relate this pattern of misrepresenting scriptural teaching to influence financial giving to other related patterns (#1 and #2 in Table 2), the picture emerges that certain clergy leaders placed high priority on the appropriation, control, and execution of financial resources. In some of these cases, it would appear that clergy leaders would divert church financial resources toward personal needs and agendas.

In summary, I have shown that at least six distinct patterns of the use of power negatively impacted congregation followers. From these cases, clergy leaders are capable of posturing power to reinforce control and authority over the congregation, to serve personal or other agendas, and to uphold a unilateral structure of relationship and deference.

The Dynamic of Personal Power in Pentecostal Charismatic Churches

The purpose of this paper was to gain clarity on the problem of toxicity in Christian and clergy leadership, from the literature and the lens of congregation followers' experiences. I have established from the data in the previous section the patterns of power which clergy leaders used to gain and reinforce control. I propose that the personal power dynamic features prominently in clergy leader interactions with followers within each autonomous Pentecostal Charismatic local church congregation. The subtle and insidious character of personal power frames the issue of toxicity in Pentecostal leadership practices. Clergy leaders within the Pentecostal Charismatic tradition have a certain advantage in their relationships with followers and use power disparately beyond the scope of duty and responsibility. These clergy leaders carry out subtle and indirect destructive practices, enabled by a relational advantage mechanism. The study has shown that some clergy leaders are adept at using power in personal and often autonomous capacity in these practices:

a. To influence and conceal financial decisions and practices, which occurs as the pastor or senior leader personally extends authority over other areas of church governance.
b. To execute different forms of threats when followers diverge from leaders' expectations and wishes, as well as to maneuver toward a desired outcome.
c. To enable actions that reflect a conflict of interest between community and personal interests.
d. To reject and overcome queries perceived as challenging the leader's authority.
e. To distort scriptural teaching.

Furthermore, these clergy leaders' personal powers extend to all aspects of church life apart from the religious or priestly function. For many Pentecostal Charismatic churches in this particular Asian context, the clergy leader is

also the chief executive officer (CEO) of the church. Clergy leaders of these local churches have the powers of decision and oversight in the governance of financial matters. It is incumbent upon the clergy leader as CEO of the church to lead within the boundaries of organizational protocols and best practices. Yet, the findings seem to suggest emphatically that some clergy leaders act in their own accord with regard to financial decisions (although existing constitutional procedures in many of these churches reference protocols for dealing with financial matters) and exercise questionable behavior in relating with followers.

The personal power dynamic might also stem from the tendency of certain clergy leaders to elevate their spiritual position and function, leading to the creation of individual spiritual hierarchies. The theme "Do Not Touch the Lord's Anointed," which featured significantly in Table 3, illustrates clergy leaders' assertion of personal power to act on behalf of God within the congregational structure of Pentecostal Charismatic churches.

In theory, Pentecostal leadership specifically rejects strength and power. The Scripture text that many Pentecostal leaders and preachers appeal to as the standard for leadership is Zechariah 4:6, which reads "'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the lord of hosts." Pentecostal leaders are encouraged to "be led completely by the Holy Spirit,"[27] which means that authority and power rest solely in God's hands. When Pentecostal leaders confuse dependency on the "power of the Holy Spirit" with "reliance upon power of position or office or even to claims of 'charisms' inadequately or wrongly discerned,"[28] there are attending dangers and harm.

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[27] Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., "A Pentecostal Perspective on Leadership," in *Traditions in Leadership: How Faith Traditions Shape the Way We Lead*, ed. Richard J. Mouw and Eric O. Jacobsen (Pasadena, Calif.: De Pree Leadership Centre, 2006), 139.

[28] Robeck offers this concept of Pentecostal leadership: "At a very basic level, leadership is not viewed merely as an innate human characteristic. …It is not a set of abilities that can be learned….At its root, Pentecostal leadership is something bestowed by the sovereign God of the Bible. Those who are given

I would like to suggest three implications of the study on our understanding of toxicity, resulting from use of power among clergy leaders and dangers or harmful impact on followers. First, there is a pattern that relates to influence and control of resources, particularly finances. The use of power here raises the question of how some Pentecostal clergy leaders, who started off on the track of service and ministry, are inclined to advance their personal agenda and assign higher priority to financial resources and capital. These same clergy leaders will not hesitate to apply power to control and benefit from resources that belong to the whole community. Second, threats on followers vary in degree, but they share the same goal. Manipulative and intimidating actions are obvious threats to followers' well-being. Other actions reflect a more furtive and subtle use of power to reject and deny the follower through the use of protocols. Still other clergy leaders have strategies to refuse communication and feedback. These patterns raise the question of the extent to which leaders are willing to use power and how these actions reflect the heart's intent, focus, and motives. Third, some leaders display a pattern of espousing, representing, and teaching selected biblical teachings to influence or enforce follower submission. Garrard addresses this issue as the problem of "exaggerated respect" for leaders when Pentecostal leaders' words are frequently equated with Scriptures.[29]   This pattern raises questions about the clergy leader's fiduciary responsibility to shepherd the flock with sound and trustworthy teaching, to steer the church, and to direct followers' faith in the right direction.

In conclusion, this study highlights the problem of legitimacy of power and dangers of uncritical application of personal power by some Pentecostal clergy leaders. Motivations, attitudes to power in relational arrangements, and default behaviors need to be critiqued through a

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ecclesiastical authority…those who are recognized as leaders within the church, are recognized as leaders precisely because of the spiritual power that is manifested in their lives." Robeck, 139.

[29] Garrard, 91.

theological lens that portrays the vision of persons and community in ecclesial relationship. In doing so, we may perhaps bring forth an alternate paradigm of leadership that promotes flourishing and trust.

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