

Pentecostal Ministry Formation (WAPTE Consultation 2013 Theme)

The Equilibrium between Human and Divine Efforts in Ministry

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Pentecostals have always based their ministry philosophy on Acts 1:8. The verse states “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Not only do Pentecostals seek the baptism in the Holy Spirit but they also believe that they will receive power when they are so baptized. Warrington says that the power includes effectiveness in “evangelism, a desire to follow Jesus more intently, to fulfill one’s God-given ministry more effectively, to seek God’s presence more intentionally, to experience the Spirit more fully or to function as a believer more strategically... the demonstration of that power has been largely related to three main areas; evangelism, personal transformation and charismata.”¹ The charismata cover acts beyond normal human abilities like divine healing and exorcism. The Assemblies of God describes divine healing as an integral part of the Gospel and the privilege of the believers.² Pentecostal ministers exercise this privilege in the normal course of their ministries. Pentecostal ministry formation must therefore provide, among other important spiritual formation elements and ministry competency subjects, situations to teach students how to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit and to minister in the power of the Spirit. Since “Pentecostals have always emphasized

¹ Keith Warrington. *Pentecostal Theology: A Theology of Encounter*. (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 116.

² Assemblies of God. *Our Position on Divine Healing*. (Paraclete 9.2, 1975), 7-13.

experiential Christianity rather than doctrinal confession”³, Pentecostal Ministry Formation must provide platforms for the students to experience the Spirit and learn to minister accordingly.

The Spirit does not control Pentecostals like robots when they minister in the power of the Holy Spirit. Rather, these ministers avail themselves as channels through which the Spirit flows. Mueller says, “The child of God must be willing to be a channel through which God’s bounties flow, both with regard to temporal and spiritual things. This channel is narrow and shallow at first, it may be; yet there is room for some of the waters of God’s bounty to pass through. And if we cheerfully yield ourselves as channels, for this purpose, then the channel becomes wider and deeper, and the waters of the bounty of God can pass through more abundantly.”⁴ Pentecostal ministry is thereby works of the Holy Spirit through human channels. The questions that arise from this are: ‘How much of ministry is by human effort and how much is by divine effort? How can the channel be widened for the Spirit to flow through even more?’ These questions will be examined in the course of this paper. It is the aim of this paper to suggest a method that could be used for Pentecostal Ministry Formation in theological institutes.

The apostle Paul in explaining the division in the Corinthian church says, “Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:1; NIV). Paul sees a continuum in spirituality ranging from being worldly to being Spirit-led. Every believer stands at a point between the two

³ Warrington, 14.

⁴ Wikiquote. *A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller* Written by Himself, Third Part. http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/George_Müller (Accessed May 4, 2013).

ends. The word 'worldly' (*sarkinoi*) emphasizes the believers' humanness and the physical side of their existence as over the spiritual.⁵ There is no suggestion of their sins, but the word simply points to their fallen physical selves. Fee explains that the Corinthians had been pursuing their own form of wisdom resulting in the problem in the church.⁶ Ministers could likewise, in their human tendencies, be relying on their own wisdom. Rather than waiting upon God to see how he may lead them, many rely on their intellect and other resources to get things done. Even when they do seek God in prayers, the answers from the Lord may seem so out of the norm that many do not readily obey the promptings. The 'impossibles' of God can be seen in the Bible. God gave Joshua directions to cross the River Jordan and to take the city of Jericho that were humanly impossible. Joshua had to subdue his human wisdom and trust God completely. This can only happen because Joshua had grown in his personal spirituality. He knew God well enough to place his complete faith in him. Joshua was standing at the Spirit-led end of the spiritual continuum. When believers stand towards the end of being worldly, they will rely on their human intellect. They will demand that their will be done. When they move along the continuum towards the other end of the spectrum, they become more God-dependent and will yield to the Lord by saying, "let your will be done". Pentecostal ministry is one that is carried out at the Spirit-led end of the continuum.

The battle between God's will and that of human beings has been fought since the beginning of time. Adam and Eve did not yield to God's will but exercised theirs by eating of the fruit from the forbidden tree. Achan did

⁵ Gordon Fee. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 124.

⁶ Fee, 121.

not flow with God's command not to touch the sacred things in Jericho but did what he wanted. Even Jesus had to fight this battle in the Garden of Gethsemane. Today, the battle rages on. Believers are constantly confronted with this challenge. It requires one to die to one's self-will so that the will of God may be fulfilled. This was what Müller experienced. When asked for the reason for the success in his ministry, he said "There was a day when I died, utterly died — died to George Müller, his opinions, preferences, tastes, and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame even of my brethren and friends — and since then I have only to show myself approved to God."⁷ Pentecostal ministry takes place when one dies to self so that the channel is wide enough for the Spirit to flow through. For this to happen, a minister has to be transformed from being self-willed to being Spirit-led. His/her position along the spiritual continuum has to be shifted closer to the Spirit end. The minister must be prepared for change. Change is however often difficult and a person must want this for change to take place. Willard mentions that the general pattern for spiritual formation should include a vision of the Kingdom, intention to be a Kingdom person and the means to become that Kingdom person.⁸ Similarly, to be a Pentecostal minister would require a person to have the vision of the ministry, intention to be such a minister and means to be such a person. Hence, Pentecostal Ministry Formation must start off with students fully understanding the essence of the ministry and wanting it for themselves. It is only then that the means for change could be effective.

⁷ A. T. Pierson. *George Müller of Bristol: His Life of Prayer and Faith*. http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/George_Müller (Accessed May 4, 2013).

⁸ Dallas Willard. *Renovation of the Heart*. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2003),85.

There are various means but this paper will only deal with three. The first is the need for transformation of the minister's worldview. We cannot be certain that students coming to theological seminaries are already transformed in their worldviews. Hence, students need to be made aware of the need for a change in the worldview from what they held before coming to Christ to that of Christianity. An important worldview change for the Pentecostal minister is that of trials and suffering. Generally people view trials and suffering negatively. Many think of them as a result of fate rather than opportunities for character growth. Some view trials and suffering as punishments resulting from the bad deeds of the past. The proper way of responding to trials is to firstly know that we are not alone in facing trials and suffering. Even Jesus had to face trials and suffered. Adamson says trials (*peirasmos*) is not just experienced by the redeemed but also by the Redeemer himself.⁹ Believers under testing should identify themselves with their Lord in their trials and persevere. Secondly, we should know that it is within God's will that we face trials so that we may grow to be true disciples. Richardson says, "trials form an essential plan for his people.... Believers know all the more in their suffering that they belong to God."¹⁰ Stulac points out that sufferings/trials and testing hold different significance and meaning. He explains that trials (*peirasmos*) leads to testing (*dokimion*). He says that the "object of testing is specifically the Christian faith."¹¹ As we face difficulties we may learn to lean on the Lord more. We realize that there are many things

⁹ James Adamson. *The Epistle of James: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 52.

¹⁰ Kurt A. Richardson. *James: The New American Commentary*. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 58.

¹¹ George M. Stulac. *James: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*. (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity, 1993), 36.

that are just outside our ability to control. We begin to realize our human limitations. There is a slow death to our will and we begin to learn to submit to God's will. Other worldview changes needed would include those concerning wealth and power. When one is rich, has a sizeable estate and the ability to influence many people, one may feel capable of handling issues all by one self. The reliance on God could be affected. Pentecostal Ministry Formation should therefore include lessons on worldview change.

The second mean is that of prayer. Jesus struggled in prayer with the tension between the two wills in the Garden of Gethsemane. Matthew 26:38–44 (NIV) records “Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.” Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.” When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.” “Jesus knows of his coming death and the gruesome method of his execution. Spiritually, he recognizes the even greater agony involved in bearing the sins of the world. Verse 39 (Matthew 26) epitomizes Jesus’ full humanity and demonstrates the complete extent to which he could be tempted....In his sinless, human nature he clearly perceives the horror of his coming execution

and very naturally and appropriately asks his Father if there is any way out.”¹² Jesus knew what the Father wanted him to do. Yet, he was reluctant to do so. It was only through struggling in prayer that he was ready to face death on the Cross. He prayed not just once but a total of three times. “In Jesus’ second session with the Father, he restates his earlier prayer but with a significant shift. He has come to grips with his Father’s will, so now instead of the positive ‘if it is possible’, he states it negatively, ‘if it is not possible’, and recognizes the fact that he must ‘drink’ the cup of suffering. So his only request is ‘your will be done’. He has overcome his own ‘flesh’ and his ‘spirit’ is not only ‘willing’ but focused on his divinely mandated destiny”.¹³ This would be the same for all of us. It is only through prayer that we will die to self. Quoting Delia Smith in the book ‘A Journey into God’, Imediedu says, “Prayer a mysterious thing that has its roots in God — is a relationship in which God is the initiator, constantly seeking to elicit a human response. It is on-going relationship, and like any other, it can’t be programmed or labeled and packaged. . . prayer is life, living, growing, developing but always in secret — like a tiny seed buried in the earth steadily yet imperceptibly thrusting itself upward to the light.” Imediedu gives this analogy to explain the definition: “During the dry season, the ground is very arid and dusty. If one walks on it with bare feet and stumbles, he/she is likely to injure himself/herself. During the rainy season, the earth is no longer dry and dusty but wet, morbid and open. The roughness of the ground disappears and it becomes friendly. It is *the mother par excellence*. It opens its palms and releases the seeds that

¹² Craig L. Blomberg. *The New American Commentary: Matthew*. (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 394.

¹³ Clinton R. Osborne. *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 981.

were trapped in it to germinate and produce luxuriant growth. The encounter causes integration of the earth surface to occur.” Inertly within every human being is that which God had created in us before the fall into sin. It includes the desire for a close relationship with God and a desire to obey him. Prayer unlocks that which is within us. Imediedu further goes on to say that as believers pray and grow towards spiritual maturity, one of the signs is docility to the Spirit: “the initiative to discern that which pleases God carries along with it the knowledge of the will of God just as Christ did the will of God till death on the Cross.”¹⁴ Land says, “Prayer is the primary theological activity of the Pentecostals. All worthwhile knowledge must be gained and retained prayerfully because only the Spirit can lead to all truth. Even correct knowledge will lead to presumption without constant, prayerful thanksgiving, intercession and praise. A church that rejoices, waits, and yields in the Spirit, a church that loves the Word and will tarry as long as it takes to pray through to the will of God, the mind of Christ and the leading of the Spirit, that church is Spirit filled.”¹⁵ Pentecostal ministers have to be people of prayer. When they are going through testing, it is in prayers that they know the will of God for the issue that they are facing. Mueller is known to be a man of prayer. He said, “I live in the spirit of prayer. I pray as I walk about, when I lie down and when I rise up.”¹⁶ It is only through this constant communion with God, that Pentecostal ministers will move towards the Spirit-led side of the spiritual continuum. It is often assumed that students coming to theological colleges

¹⁴ Michael E. Imediedu. *Personal Growth Through Prayers And The Sacraments*. African Ecclesial Review, 363-380. ATLAS series accessed 6 May, 2013.

¹⁵ Steven J. Land. *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*. (London: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 166.

¹⁶ Wikiquote. *A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller* Written by Himself, Third Part. http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/George_Müller (Accessed May 4, 2013).

know how to pray and do so regularly. The truth is that many do not. An article in *Christian Century* reports, “Over the past 20 or 30 years many Protestant seminaries have instituted spiritual formation programs that introduce the spiritual disciplines, including prayer, to their students. Borrowing from the history of (Roman) Catholic spiritual formation, these programs are considered an essential aspect of preparation for ministry, alongside learning the classical disciplines of biblical, theological and practical studies. As a consequence of these formation programs, it is not unusual to hear seminarians confess that it was in seminary that they learned how to pray for the first time—or learned how to pray all over again.... Yes, prayer can be taught. But it can also be caught. We need living models— individuals whose exemplary life of prayer can show the rest of us the way.”¹⁷ Faculties in seminaries need to model this for the students.

The third mean is the Word of God. The Bible itself exhorts the value of the Word. Psalm 119:105, for instance, tells us that the Word is a lamp unto our feet. It guides us in everything, including our ministry. Pentecostalism has traditionally placed emphasis on experience rather than the Word. Fee states, “in general, Pentecostals’ experience has preceded hermeneutics”¹⁸ This can lead to dangerous consequences as Warrington points out; “Two extremes are to be avoided. The one locks the Bible into an academic environment to which only the scholar may be admitted, the other is that which opens the floodgates of inappropriate interpretations of the text, initiated by a reliance on private interpretation.”¹⁹ Müller advises us to, “seek the will of the Spirit of God

¹⁷ *Prayer Lab*. (*Christian Century*, September 9, 2008), 7.

¹⁸ Gordon Fee. *Hermeneutics and Historical Precedence*, 122, quoted by Warrington, 192.

¹⁹ Warrington, 196.

through or in connection with the Word of God. The Spirit and the Word must be combined. If I look to the Spirit alone without the Word, I lay myself open to great delusions also.” The traditional extreme of relying too heavily on experiences has however given way in recent time to scholarship which if not handled properly has the potential to lock out the Spirit. Students must therefore be taught to balance the Word and Spirit. They should seek the leading of the Spirit but at the same time they must use what they have learnt from classes on the Bible and theology to check whether they are being led by the Spirit or the flesh.

Avenues in theological seminaries should therefore be provided for students to know themselves, understand the Pentecostal ministry, desire to be Pentecostal ministers, understand the need to change worldview, and seek the Lord in surrender of self. “To offer a form of theological education which follows the pattern of Western educational ethos with a high stress on the cerebral may not be the most appropriate for the student.”²⁰ Since Pentecostalism is one centred more on experience than dogma, classes should be a balance of theologies/theories and practical experiences where the Spirit is given room to move. Classes such as ‘Signs and Wonders’ should be ones where there is an expectation for miracles to take place. Teachers must themselves be Pentecostal ministers if they are to model the ministry for students.

There has always been a tension between the roles of theological colleges and churches in the spiritual formation of their people. The two institutions should collaborate to develop every student going to theological

²⁰ Warrington, 169.

colleges. Platforms for spiritual formation need not be duplicated between the church and college though unfortunately this has often been the case. It is common for chapels of theological colleges to be similar to that of church services. The session would be better used for Pentecostal Ministry Formation; for example, students could fast, pray, be ministered to by the Spirit and learn to minister to each other; giving words of prophecy and praying for the sick. College camps have also been too similar to church camps. Such camps could be prayer camps instead.

A trend in theological colleges in many countries of the world is that students spend little time in the college. They come just in time for classes and rush off immediately when lessons end. Students should be briefed during their first college orientation about the goal of theological education; it is not simply to impart head knowledge. Theological colleges exist to prepare men and women for ministries. This involves the heart and hands as well; spiritual formation and ministry competencies. Chapels and camps should be prioritized as core components in the curriculum so that Pentecostal Ministry Formation can take place.

Another worrying trend is that of e-learning. There is little ground for practice and the experiencing of the Spirit when students just do their study on-line through their computers or DVDs. Colleges that embark on this should consider how they could impart Pentecostal Ministry Formation to their students. One way could be to bring students through weekends of spiritual encounters where they can experience the empowering presence of God through corporate prayer, Spirit-led worship and celebration of the Eucharist.

The goal of most Pentecostal colleges is to see graduating students

being able to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit. This requires students to move from where they are at present to the Spirit-led end of the spiritual continuum. They would need to die to self so that the channel within them would be wide enough for the Spirit to move and minister. Theological colleges have a responsibility for such a Pentecostal Ministry Formation to take place.