



# **PENTECOSTAL** **EDUCATION**

---

A JOURNAL OF WAPTE  
*the World Alliance for Pentecostal Theological Education*

**Volume 5**  
**Numbers 1 & 2**  
**(2020)**

*Pentecostal Education*  
A Journal of the World Alliance for Pentecostal Theological Education  
Vol. 5, Nos. 1 & 2 (2020)

ISSN: 2375-9690

Copyright © 2020 Individual authors and World Alliance for Pentecostal Theological Education

All the issues are found on <https://wapte.org/resources/pentecostal-education/>

### **Aims and Scope**

*Pentecostal Education* (formerly *The Pentecostal Educator*) semiannually e-publishes scholarly and practical articles related to theological education within the Pentecostal tradition to encourage the continuing maturation of Pentecostal theological education. It is intentionally practical, applied, and international.

### **Editors**

Senior Editor: Paul Alexander ([paulalexander@trinitybiblecollege.edu](mailto:paulalexander@trinitybiblecollege.edu))

Executive Editor: Miguel Alvarez ([moalvarez@msn.com](mailto:moalvarez@msn.com))

Review Editor: Jon Dahlager ([jon.dahlager@agmd.org](mailto:jon.dahlager@agmd.org))

Associate Editors: Doug Lowenberg ([doug.lowenberg@agmd.org](mailto:doug.lowenberg@agmd.org)) and Wonsuk Ma ([wma@oru.edu](mailto:wma@oru.edu))

Resource Coordinator: Ulrik Josefsson ([ulrik.josefsson@pingst.se](mailto:ulrik.josefsson@pingst.se))

### **WAPTE Officers**

Paul Alexander, Chair

Ulrik Josefsson, Vice Chair

Alex Fuentes, Secretary

Weldyn Houger, Treasurer

Stephen Fogarty, Executive Committee Member

Barry Saylor, Executive Director

### **WAPTE Board**

Paul Alexander (North America)

Miguel Alvarez (Latin America)

William K Chelliah (Eurasia)

Jacob Cherian (Eurasia)

Jon Dahlager (Latin America/  
Caribbean)

John Davidson (North America)

John Easter (Africa)

Weldyn Houger (North America)

Ulrik Josefsson (Europe)

Kirk Kauffeldt (North America)

Douglas Lowenberg (Africa)

Wonsuk Ma (North America)

Gary Matsdorf (North America)

Pasi Parkkila (Europe)

Steve Fogarty (Asia-Pacific)  
Alex Fuentes (Asia-Pacific)  
Carl Gibbs (Africa)

David Ramirez (North America)  
Gary Seevers (North America)

### **Instructions for Authors**

All submissions to *Pentecostal Education* should conform to the latest edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* including its use of footnotes for all citations. For abbreviations of biblical and other ancient material, as well as transliteration of all non-Roman scripts, see *The SBL Handbook of Style*. Manuscripts should be written in English with consistent spelling throughout and using 11.5 point Garamond, single spaced lines. Submissions should not exceed 5,000 words in length (though longer submissions may be considered). All submissions should be emailed as Word (.doc) attachments to [moalvarez@msn.com](mailto:moalvarez@msn.com). Please include a brief biographical sketch, a 100-300 word abstract, and 3-4 keywords.

Use two levels of **headings**. They should be flush left, and not numbered.

### **This is the First Level Heading**

*This is the Second Level Heading*

**Manuscripts** which are submitted without sufficiently meeting the above criteria will be returned to the author without publication. All submissions must not be currently submitted to, or previously published by, any other journal. If accepted, the author agrees to grant the journal *Pentecostal Education* a publishing right, while the copyright of the content is held by the author. The manuscript will not be published elsewhere in any form, in English or any other language, without prior written consent of the publisher.

### **Instructions for Reviewers**

For information regarding interest in being a reviewer and to learn what volumes might be currently available for review contact the Review Editor Jon Dahlager.

### **Index**

*Pentecostal Education* is indexed by Christian Periodical Index.

### **Acknowledgments**

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>).

Cover Design by Nathan Walstad and Jiwon Kim

## Contents

Editorial <i>Paul Alexander</i> .....	1
A New Beginning: An Editorial <i>Miguel Alvarez</i> .....	3
Having Gone, Disciple All Nations: Context, Canon, Commission, and Charisma <i>Doug Lovenberg</i> .....	5
Interpretation of the Scripture: Exploring a Latin American Method <i>Miguel Alvarez</i> .....	17
Fostering Vocation in the Here and Now: A Case Study <i>Soh Hui Leng Davina</i> .....	33
Ten Characteristics of Pentecostal Theological Education in the Twenty-first Century <i>Daniel Topf</i> .....	45
The Christian Campus Community as a Vehicle of Transformational Discipleship: Training Emerging Christian Leaders for Community Transformation <i>Barry L. Saylor</i> .....	59
Reviews .....	69





***Pentecostal Education (PE)*** invites submissions to be published this specialty journal. A review may be a manageable first publication for the leaders of Pentecostal institutions to encourage their young faculty members.

*PE* welcomes relevant studies based on experience and field-data, substantiated by literary evidence. For any question, please contact the executive editor.

*PE* is YOUR publication!

*PE* Editorial Team

## Editorial

Welcome to this edition of *Pentecostal Education*, the journal of the World Alliance for Pentecostal Theological Education. This is the first edition of the journal that was previously known as *The Pentecostal Educator*. The change of name is deliberate and strategic. It allows a greater scope of articles and more accurately reflects the mission and vision of WAPTE.

It is my privilege to introduce the new editorial team for the journal. Dr. Miguel Alvarez, serves as the Executive Editor. Dr. Alvarez is a Honduran Pentecostal scholar with the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) who serves as President of Seminario Bíblico Pentecostal Centroamericano (SEBIPCA) in Guatemala. Dr. Jon Dahlager (Latin America), Dr. Doug Lowenberg (Africa) serve as Associate Editors alongside Dr. Wonsuk Ma, who also serves as the chair of WAPTE's Resource and Research Committee. Dr. Ma is a Korean Pentecostal scholar and the Dean of the College of Theology & Ministry and Distinguished Professor of Global Christianity at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, OK. Dr. Ulrik Josefsson (Europe) also serves this committee as the Resource Coordinator. Both the journal and our global constituency of Pentecostal Educators will be well served by these fine individuals.

As the Chair of WAPTE I would like to use this opportunity to encourage you to find out how we can serve you and consider an active role in our Alliance. We welcome your written response to any article in this publication, new articles to be submitted and your interest in our work generally.

Paul R Alexander  
Senior Editor



## APTEA on the Move in 2020

Report from the Association of Pentecostal Theological Education in Africa (APTEA) and their triennial gathering in late February.

 Membership Application



### About

The World Alliance for Pentecostal Theological Education (WAPTE) is a global cooperative fellowship of Pentecostal and Charismatic theological associations, denominational offices and missions agencies that provide educational services to theological and/or ministry training schools. It exists to assist and encourage member organizations in their endeavor to promote the development of Pentecostal theological education and leadership training. WAPTE serves as the Education Commission of the Pentecostal World Fellowship (PWF) and organizes the Theological Consultations for the triennial Pentecostal World Conferences. [More »](#)

### Join Email list

Name

First Last

Email \*

Subscribe

### Upcoming Events

→ No events

### Recent Posts Widget



From WAPTE's Chairman

Jun 22, 2020



WAPTE Board

Jun 22, 2020



A Word from Asia-Pacific

Jun 22, 2020

## A New Beginning: An Editorial

We are delighted to introduce this edition of *Pentecostal Education* to our readers. In this issue we have excellent articles written by experienced Pentecostal scholars who are deeply involved in theological and missional education. Our writers engage topics that are relevant to the movement. We cover themes related to the Christian commission, hermeneutics, and discipleship as well as theological formation and education. These topics further motivate us to be creative and invite writers from around the world to help us expand the ideas of the people of the Spirit. Obviously, a task like this requires dedication and support from people committed to the vision of this journal. Thankfully, we have that team in place.

This journal is global in scope. Through it, readers will find opinions from different voices located at different locations of the world. Due to the multiple demands for an international representation, the editorial team carefully plans and selects those voices that express the thoughts of different people worldwide. It is our desire that the ideas of this journal serve as inspiration to the new generation emerging in times like this.

Today we affirm that we are bearers of a transformative message in the time of this pandemic. In our world, people are being affected in various ways by a virus that has paralyzed the world. As people protect themselves and search for creative ways to protect their health, this journal appears with words of reflection and hope. The message and ministry of Pentecostalism find its best opportunities for service in difficult times. Moreover, the Holy Spirit reminds us of the words of Christ, “Behold, I am with you every day, until the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20).

The journal, *Pentecostal Education*, aims at making a significant contribution to Pentecostal schools. We would like to think that students and teachers will receive this publication with a learning attitude. Hence, our writers are taking into consideration the internationality of theological education. We are motivated to think that this journal could become a travel companion to some on their path to learning and in reflecting on the way they think of expanding the kingdom of God.

I would like to acknowledge the excellent work of our dedicated editorial team. I appreciate the work of our associate editors: Dr. Doug Lowenberg, Dr. Jon Dahlager, and Dr. Wonsuk Ma. Both the journal and our global Pentecostal educators will be well served by these fine scholars. We would expect that other colleagues will send their articles so we can continue to publish the journal on a regular basis. Your manuscripts will be welcomed by us.

May the grace and favor of the Lord be with you, our readers!

Miguel Alvarez  
Executive Editor



# ASIAN JOURNAL OF PENTECOSTAL STUDIES

[www.aptspress.org](http://www.aptspress.org)



# Having Gone, Disciple All Nations: Context, Canon, Commission, and Charisma

Doug Lowenberg

## Abstract:

Most modern translations of Matthew's Great Commission statement (Matt. 28:19-20) read, "Go and make disciples." In this paper, a fresh examination of the context of the original audience and the words and grammar of the Greek text are made. The implications of this interpretive approach are applied to the training programs in our Pentecostal Theological institutions.

**Key words:** Great Commission, Antioch, aorist participle, disciple, nations

Guided by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Matthew concluded the writing of his Gospel quoting the words of Jesus: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20 NIV). Not only is it highly significant that Matthew ended his writing with the statement of Jesus' Great Commission, it is shocking, yet deliberate, that he did not add any reference to Christ's ascension. Matthew's inspired intention was to leave the words of Christ's missional mandate reverberating in the minds of his readers—very possibly the Church in Antioch,<sup>1</sup> the first great mission-sending church (Acts 11:20-23; 13:1-4), and the church of the 21st century.

## Context

Before giving attention to the actual words of the commission, a comment on the original historical context and audience of this Gospel is required. D. A. Carson states, while admitting that one cannot be certain of the first readers,

---

Doug Lowenberg ([doug.lowenberg@agmd.org](mailto:doug.lowenberg@agmd.org)) serves as executive director of APTEA and chair of the Bible/Theology department at Pan-Africa Theological Seminary, Lomé, Togo.

<sup>1</sup> For discussion on the location where Matthew's Gospel was first read and from where it was disseminated, see R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 15-19; David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NCBC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 51-52; Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (2d. ed.; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 45; Everett F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 174. France posits that the location of writing could be somewhere in Syria or Palestine but the exact location is unimportant. Meanwhile, Tenney concludes, "While absolute proof that the Gospel originated at Antioch is lacking, no other place is more suitable for it" (*New Testament Survey*; rev. ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 151.

“Most scholars take Antioch as the place of composition. Antioch was a Greek-speaking city with a substantial Jewish population; and the first clear evidence of anyone using the Gospel of Matthew comes from Ignatius, bishop of Antioch at the beginning of the second century. . . . The only reasonably certain conclusion is that the Gospel was written somewhere in the Roman province of Syria.”<sup>2</sup> If Antioch was indeed the receiving church for this ancient biography,<sup>3</sup> it brings into question the general assumption that Matthew was a Jew writing to a primarily Jewish audience attempting to prove from Old Testament references that Jesus was the fulfillment of Jewish prophecies regarding their long awaited Messiah.<sup>4</sup>

Matthew certainly writes from a Jewish-Christian worldview and addresses issues related to the impact Judaism and Pharisaism were having on the church.<sup>5</sup> But if the Gospel was composed for the church in Antioch, based on Luke’s account (Acts 11:20-23), many of the believers from the very founding of this church were Gentile. Ralph P. Martin comments, “Matthew’s church is quickly becoming predominantly Gentile.”<sup>6</sup> He adds that one must consider “the missionary motif which runs through the Gospel, stretching from the visit of the Magi (2:1-12), anticipating the wider outreach of the good news and the appearing of Christ’s light to the Gentiles.”<sup>7</sup> In fact, it seems the missional motif of the book starts in 1:1 and continues to 28:20. Jesus Christ is the son of David and the son of Abraham (1:1)—capturing the imagery of the promise made to David of an heir who would be king of an eternal kingdom and would rule the nations (2 Sam. 4:13, 16; Ps. 2:8); and a seed of Abraham who would be a source of blessing to all the nations (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:18; Gal. 3:8). Jesus’ genealogy, confirming him as the legal descendent of David, includes four Gentile women (1:2-16). The first people mentioned in the Gospel who came and worshipped him as “king of the Jews” were Gentile Magi from the east (2:1-12). This Gospel describes the fulfillment of God’s promise to send a King and Savior for all humankind (Is. 42:1-4; 49:6; Zech. 9:10; the perspective that the Old Testament prophesied a Savior for “all nations” is asserted by Jesus himself; Luke 24:46-47). It seems clear that Matthew, the well-educated Jewish tax collector, through his years of being disciplined by Jesus and later filled, transformed, and guided by the Holy Spirit, became an apostle and advocate for the proclamation of the good news intended for all people. And the church to whom he wrote, if Antioch, had the ongoing responsibility of continuing

---

<sup>2</sup> D. A. Carson, *Matthew 1-12* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 21-11.

<sup>3</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Matthew* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 24-25.

<sup>4</sup> Hill comments that many scholars argue that “Matthew’s Gospel is written from a Jewish-Christian standpoint, in order to defend Christianity, to make it acceptable to Jewish-Christian readers, and to prove that Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews” (*The Gospel of Matthew*, 40).

<sup>5</sup> Keener, *Matthew*, 33.

<sup>6</sup> Ralph P. Martin, *The Four Gospels* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 232.

<sup>7</sup> Martin, *The Four Gospels*, 228.

what the Holy Spirit started among them through the call of Barnabas and Paul (Acts 13:1-4) to proclaim this gospel to all nations with the promise that Immanuel would be with them until the end of human history (Matt. 28:20).

## Canon

There are several nuances in the Greek grammar of the commission that merit consideration due to their possible impact on the intended meaning of the text. The “therefore” reflects back to Christ’s words of welcome to his startled, partially worshipping disciples: “All authority in heaven and on the earth have been given to me” (Matt. 28:18). During his earthly ministry, Jesus demonstrated authority over the forces of nature and every spiritual and human predicament. But now, following the humiliation and weakness represented in his death on the cross, there may have been questions in the minds of his disciples about their Master’s sovereignty. Having conquered the powers of sin and death in his resurrection, Christ announced his supremacy over every sphere of the created order. He followed this triumphal declaration with the command known as the Great Commission. The one with all authority had the right to command his followers where to go and what to do. As Randy Hurst has noted, “When the Lord commands anything, there is no choice about which commandments to obey. Lordship requires complete obedience. Nothing less.”<sup>8</sup>

The first word in the Greek text of verse 19 is translated in the NIV “go.” This word, an aorist participle, if translated literally, could read “having gone” and the passage translated, “Having gone, disciple all the nations.” While both translations are possible following rules of Greek grammar, most English

---

<sup>8</sup> Randy Hurst, “Our Mission: Reaching, Planting, Training, and Serving,” in *Mission, Vision, and Core Values* (ed. John L. Easter et al.; vol. 1 of RPTS Missiological Series; Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God World Mission, 2016), 31.

<sup>9</sup> πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε can be translated “therefore, go and disciple” or “therefore, having gone, disciple.” The first word is an aorist participles. Participles are verbal adjectives. The verbal component has two aspects: *time of action* and *kind of action*. As an adjective, it modifies the subject of the sentence, Christ’s disciples. Aorist verbs express undefined action (neither progressive or complete) in the present or past. But the aorist participle typically indicates action antecedent to or prior to the action of the main verb of the sentence (see R. Summers, *Essentials of New Testament Greek*; rev. Thomas Sawyer; Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995; 11, 97, 103). Friedrich Blass and Albert Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (trans. and rev. R. W. Funk; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 174, explain that a participle expresses the notion of completion often preceding the finite verb: “the completion of the action denoted by the participle, then the action of the finite verb.” The word πορευθέντες could be translated: You all [plural for the disciples] having gone. Applying these guidelines, Jesus commanded them to disciple the nations, but prior to the making of disciples, they had to go. This view finds support in Craig S. Keener, *Matthew* (IVPNTC; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1997), 400.



versions convert the participle to an imperative: Go and (make) disciples.<sup>10</sup> Should the verb “go” be translated as an aorist participle with action antecedent to the main verb, disciple, thus: “Having gone (already), make disciples”? Believing in the significance of the words and word order of the inspired text, one should consider the implications of this non-traditional interpretation: “Having gone, disciple all the nations.”

## Commission

The intended meaning of Jesus’ words, as penned by Matthew, could be emphasizing the process necessary for his disciples to fulfill the heart of the commission, which is to disciple all the nations.<sup>11</sup> If Matthew’s church and any church from that time forward were to make disciples among the diverse people groups of the earth, their first action would require a willingness to move out from the geographical location and culture where they are settled and comfortable before they could begin the disciple-making process.<sup>12</sup> Jesus was calling his Jewish disciples to bold, committed, long-term action rather than brief forays into foreign regions. The discipling of the nations required decisive, persistent commitment from Jesus’ followers to go from the familiar and become resident among new peoples, languages, and cultures.

During the few brief trips the disciples made with Jesus among non-Jews, it seems apparent that they were extremely uncomfortable (see John 4:27; Luke 9:52-56; Matt. 15:23). What would it mean for them to truly “go”? Today, with growing affluence and ease of travel, people from both the Majority and Minority worlds pursue personal experiences of going to a distant land for brief evangelistic experiences with no intention of going and remaining to make

---

<sup>10</sup> There are cases where an aorist participle should be understood to take on the same tense as the main verb which is what most translators have done with this text: go and make are both treated as imperatives. Yet, according to Machen, “In the majority of cases the aorist participle denotes action prior to the time of the leading verb” (J. Gresham Machen, *New Testament Greek for Beginners*; Toronto: The Macmillan Co., 1923), 207.

<sup>11</sup> For discussions on the relationship between the leading verb, disciple, and the three participles, having gone, baptizing, and teaching, see D. A. Carson, *Matthew 1-12* (EBC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 597; and Keener, *Matthew*, 402.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew uses this same word order in Matthew 2:8; 9:13; and 11:4 where go, an aorist participle, is followed by a command. “Go and inquire,” (2:8 πορευθέντες ἐξετάσατε) could read, “Having gone [to Bethlehem], inquire where . . .” The magi needed to get to Bethlehem, antecedent action, before they could begin their investigation about the birth location of the Messiah. “Go and learn,” (9:13 πορευθέντες δὲ μάθετε) could read “Having gone, learn” where Jesus instructed Pharisees to turn to Scripture, away from their judgmental attitudes towards him and his companions, then learn what JHWH meant with his words, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” To John the Baptist’s disciples, Jesus said, “Go and report” (11:4 πορευθέντες ἀπαγγείλατε), which could read, “Having gone [back to John], report.”

disciples. In light of missionary tourists jetting around the globe, do we need to revisit the meaning of “having gone”?

The main verb of the sentence is “make disciples” or literally “disciple”<sup>13</sup> (aorist imperative). Their commission demanded all the time, effort, sacrifice, and cultural adaptation necessary to help people from another culture become followers and students of their Master, Jesus Christ. The goal of the commission was to develop continuous learners who were being conformed to Christ in all dimensions of life.<sup>14</sup> To “disciple” required “having gone,” forsaking all to follow Jesus to reach the unreached of his world.

Further support for this view emphasizing committed, decisive action prior to the discipling process (rather than the word “go,” following the most common translation of an aorist participle, “having gone”—action prior to the activity described by the main verb) is provided by the words Jesus used later in the commission statement where he employed two additional participles (this time present participles, action that runs simultaneous with the activity of the main verb) to explain the method by which disciples were to be made: “baptizing”<sup>15</sup> and “teaching.”<sup>16</sup> To help people become loyal followers of Jesus, his emissaries first had to leave their familiar cultural setting. Having launched the discipling process, it was necessary to baptize new converts into the life and community of local believers and instruct them to obey all the teachings of Jesus.

For Christ’s disciples to carry out the commission of their Lord to disciple all nations, they first had to go—leaving behind the extended family, the familiar, and the comfortable—to follow their Lord without turning back. This action embodies the sense of apostolic function<sup>17</sup>—sent out by the Spirit, with

---

<sup>13</sup> μαθητεύσατε is an aorist active imperative second person plural translated: (you all) disciple or make disciples. The aorist tense, as an undefined kind of action, emphasizes discipling in the sense of point action; just do it, once and for all—make disciples.

<sup>14</sup> This kind of discipleship that transforms beliefs, attitudes, and lifestyle demands much more than evangelistic crusades, medical outreaches, and tabernacle construction. Christ commands his church to equip and send disciple-makers who commit to going, staying, learning, loving, and serving—“boots on the ground.”

<sup>15</sup> The present participle, βαπτίζοντες, could be used temporally and translated with the helping word while or as: as you are baptizing. Typically, the present participle denotes action concurrent with the action of the leading verb (Machen, *New Testament Greek for Beginners*, 105). But it seems more logical and contextual that the function of the participle is adverbial – modifying the action of the main verb. A modal participle “may signify the manner in which the action of the main verb is accomplished” (H. E. Dana and J. R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*; Toronto: The Macmillan Co., 1955), 228. How are people discipled? By baptizing and teaching.

<sup>16</sup> διδάσκοντες, teaching, is a present participle like baptizing. Baptizing precedes teaching.

<sup>17</sup> For a thorough discussion on the meaning of apostolic function, see Alan R. Johnson, *Apostolic Function in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Missions* (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2009).

the endorsement, support, and prayers of the church, to official represent the one sending them with the singular goal of accomplishing his purpose: among a “nation” (*ethnos*, a unique culture; an ethnolinguistic people group) who has never heard the gospel, do whatever is necessary to make disciples.

The next step in the process was baptizing converts into the household of faith where they would be loved and nurtured in order to worship God with all of their hearts and serve others. The second step implies the necessity of forming a body of believers, a local, indigenous church into which new converts could be integrated and edified. The indigenous church was to fully identify with the local people and culture through the establishing of their own leaders and leadership systems, outreach to their own communities, support for those who worked hard at preaching and teaching, development of their own contextual theologies and expressions of worship, compassionate care for their own people and communities, and the sending of their sons and daughters to their unreached cultural neighbors near and far.

The third step stressed teaching the new believers to continuously keep all that Jesus commanded his disciples. This dimension of making disciples infers the need for training that encompasses everything Jesus taught and modeled including doctrine, attitude, moral and ethical behavior, anointing, service, witness, and sacrifice. Teaching was to take place in local synagogues where believers gathered, newly planted churches, public buildings, private homes, and beside rivers, in order to raise up grounded followers of Jesus.

To whom were Jesus’ followers to go in order to carry out their discipling ministry? All the nations.<sup>18</sup> The commission at the end of Matthew’s Gospel stands in stark contrast to Jesus’ earlier instructions to his disciples. Jesus previously told them not to go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans but concentrate on the lost sheep of Israel (Matt. 10:5-6). Could it be that at this earlier phase of their development, his own Twelve were unprepared spiritually and culturally for the challenges they would encounter in

---

<sup>18</sup> πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, all the nations, represented the Gentiles, the many unique ethnic groups outside of the people of Israel. Keener, *Matthew*, 401, comments that all nations could signify distinct groups of people rather than the modern concept of nation-states; Jesus’ command was an appeal for his followers to bring the good news to each culture with sensitivity and clarity. Some hold the opinion that ἔθνη (nations, plural; ἔθνος, singular) refers to the Gentiles as one blended mass of humanity distinguished from the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. However, there is strong scriptural evidence that God both created and endorses the cultural-linguistic uniqueness of every people group on earth. Genesis 10 lists the table of nations. Deuteronomy 32:8 refers to the division of the world into nations. John’s vision of heavenly worshipers (Rev. 5:9; 7:9) acknowledges the distinct groupings of humankind formed around various affinities: tribes (φυλὴ, people as a national unity with common descent), languages (γλῶσσαι, tongues, a group of people with linguistic unity), people (λαός, people as a political unity with common history and law), and nations (ἔθνος, people with ethnic cohesion) exalting Jesus Christ, the Lamb who was slain to provide salvation for all (see K. L. Schmidt, “ἔθνος in the NT,” *TDNT* 2:369-372).

living among the ethnically diverse peoples of the world? At that time, they were too ethnocentric and prejudiced, lacking understanding of the full scope of God's eternal intentions to provide salvation for every person and distinct people group (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:18; Isaiah 49:6; Matt. 24:14; Rev. 5:9; 7:9).

For his Jewish disciples standing on a mountain somewhere in Galilee, who were the nations? They represented the socio-cultural-linguistic units of society beyond "the house of Israel" whether geographically or culturally near or far. Their final command from the resurrected Lord was to leave the country of their birth, move centrifugally, and settle among the distinct ethnic people groups of the world until each one had indigenous individuals and communities vibrantly expressing praise to their Creator and Savior,<sup>19</sup> and sharing the good news with their families and neighbors. For Matthew's readers in Antioch, the command was to move out from Asia Minor to Africa, Asia, and Europe and become resident among those tribes and nations with no living witness.

Today, 40 percent of the world lives in geographic and cultural locations where there is little or no witness of the gospel.<sup>20</sup> Spirit-filled believers have not gone. Discipleship has not taken place. From our Pentecostal Theological institutions, gifted graduates have stayed in already established churches and familiar cultures.

## Charisma

This imperative in the canon of Scripture, inspired by and interpreted with the assistance of charismatic insights from the Spirit, who at times challenges one to question the traditional readings and activities of the established church,<sup>21</sup> may create some spiritual discomfort. Yet, to be Pentecostal is to be missional. Perhaps we need to return to the writings of Ralph Winter,<sup>22</sup> Donald

---

<sup>19</sup> See John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> Johnson, *Apostolic Function*, 4.

<sup>21</sup> John Wesley aptly states, "Scripture can only be understood through the same Spirit whereby it was given" (*Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament*, vol. 1; Bristol: William Pine, 1765), viii. Rickie D. Moore, having studied God's self-revelation in Deuteronomy, observes that God makes himself and his will known through written word, the Ten Commandments and other forms of canon, and through charismatic revelation in terms of his abiding presence, the Spirit poured out on Israel's leaders, and theophanic manifestations. Moore proffers, "Deuteronomy remembers the paradigmatic revelatory moment of Horeb where God both wrote and spoke his word, in order for this same revelatory synergism to be manifest in the present and carried forward into the future" ("Canon and Charisma in the Book of Deuteronomy," in *Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Reader*, ed. Lee Roy Martin; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 28.

<sup>22</sup> For numerous works by Ralph Winter, see the lead article in this edition.



McGavran,<sup>23</sup> Charles Kraft,<sup>24</sup> and Paul Hiebert,<sup>25</sup> who in the early 1980s began calling the church back to the clarity and radicalness of Jesus' commission. Winter's understanding of the evolution of modern Protestant missions, initiated by William Carey in England, 1792, clarified our own current missiological context. Laborers were sent from the West first to foreign coastal regions, later to the vast interior expanses, and most recently to the ethno-linguistically diverse peoples.<sup>26</sup> Now God has raised up the Pentecostal church in the Majority world to take the lead in *missio Dei*. But no matter who we are or where we start, the going and discipling comes with great cost and requires lasting commitment. There is great disparity in the distribution of the laborers making disciples among the unreached peoples. Does the inequity of workers among the unreached indicate that Christ's church and our Pentecostal training institutions have minimized the necessity of "having gone"?

In our schools, we must be clear with our definitions. What is missions? Who are missionaries? Who and where are the unreached? It has become very common for "missions" to describe any Christian activity beyond the walls of the church. But to fulfill the great commission, the church must be intentional in equipping and sending her members across cultural barriers to evangelize, disciple, and plant the indigenous church.

If every Christian is a missionary, no one is truly a missionary. A missionary is one called and sent by the Spirit as an apostle to cross linguistic and cultural barriers to make disciples of Jesus. Going across town or across a border to bring good news to a cluster of your own people, using your own language, is valuable and may have eternal dividends, but it is better classified as evangelism. Distance is not the critical factor. A missionary is a person heeding Christ's commission to go for the long haul, penetrate cultural and spiritual barriers that keep people in bondage and isolation, to make followers of Jesus.

## Application

Our first term of missionary service was in Burkina Faso, late 1980s, with the goal of learning Mooré to evangelize and disciple Muslims. We discovered a powerful indigenous, Pentecostal church consisting mostly of Mossi believers while other tribes and language groups remained unevangelized. Mossi church planters aggressively established Mossi cultural churches using Mooré across the country and beyond, but other ethnic groups were not attracted by the foreignness of what they saw and heard. As far as a burden for reaching Muslims, many Christians viewed them as existing outside the realm of Christ's

---

<sup>23</sup> Donald A. McGavran, *The Bridges of God*, rev. ed. (New York: Friendship Press, 1981).

<sup>24</sup> Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979).

<sup>25</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, "The Flow of the Excluded Middle," *Missiology* 10 (1982): 35-47; *Cultural Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976).

<sup>26</sup> Ralph D. Winter, "Four Men, Three Eras, Two Transitions: Modern Mission," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* (3d. ed.; ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne; Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 1999), 253-261.

grace. We noted barriers unintentionally erected by a church culturally monopolized by one ethnic group overlaid with religious prejudice and indifference towards Muslims and other ethnic groups.<sup>27</sup> Our missiological lens shaped by Winter helped us identify the challenges that needed to be addressed if disciples were to be made of every nation.

In the late 1990s, we became directors of Addis Ababa Bible College (ABC) in Ethiopia. The mission statement crafted for the school reflected our missiology: “Making disciples of Jesus to reach the nations as people of the Spirit and people of the Book.”<sup>28</sup> Reading Scripture through a missiological, Pentecostal lens in a training context helped us determine what levels of instruction were needed (diploma, bachelors, masters) and what the curricula needed to include in order to equip students with the ability, vision, and commitment to go and then disciple the nations of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.<sup>29</sup>

Training harvest workers in our Pentecostal theological institutions is a key instrument for completing the Great Commission. Students can be trained to cross linguistic, cultural, and tribal barriers with a gospel message made relevant and understandable to the receptor audience.<sup>30</sup> They can discern the key factor establishing the primary affinity for clusters of people whether it is ethnicity, language, culture, location, education, or economic realities. The locations of Bible schools can be determined strategically with some established where revival has already exploded— to conserve the harvest. Others can be started

---

<sup>27</sup> The spiritual and cultural development of the Burkina Faso Assemblies of God has continued to the present. Over the last few decades the church has leaped over ethnocentric bounds and religious prejudices to plant indigenous churches among every people group in the country. Many Muslims have come to saving faith in Jesus Christ and are pastoring and planting churches among their own and other tribal units.

<sup>28</sup> Through the influence of training, we believe we can equip men and women with skills, commitment, and vision to become more like Jesus in word, deed, and attitude, and encourage them to go beyond the current scope of the church to the peoples and regions of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. Training with the goal of earning diplomas and degrees has never been the ultimate purpose for establishing Bible schools, but rather the increased capacity and commitment of national workers to participate in fulfilling the Great Commission (see Mark 3:14).

<sup>29</sup> According to the Joshua Project, there are 123 people groups in Ethiopia, 34 considered unreached. Of 110 million Ethiopians, 18% are classified as Evangelical. “Ethiopia: Joshua Project,” [cited 1 November 2019]; online: <https://joshuaproject.net/countries/ET>.

<sup>30</sup> Bible schools must equip students with a sound hermeneutic, such as the grammatical-historical approach, which enables them to discover the intended meaning of the canon while integrating a Pentecostal hermeneutic that recognizes the necessity for Holy Spirit’s discernment (charisma) to identify what the Spirit is speaking through the text to address the needs of the contemporary context.

on the edge of regions where people live without a witness.<sup>31</sup> Spirit-empowered, biblically trained workers can function as catalysts for revival and church planting. Materials translated into major local languages can enhance training and place tools in the hands of students who penetrate people groups where written resources are lacking.<sup>32</sup>

Through the years, we have worked closely with our national churches (NC) in East Africa recognizing that training must be closely aligned with the vision and mission of the NC. We have tried to navigate the dynamic relationships between indigenous church principles and missional partnerships. By ensuring that leadership, vision, and support are provided by local churches, the necessity of accountability between indigenous workers and the NC is maintained, and the work remains sustainable while avoiding well-intentioned, foreign donors who create crippling dependencies that stifle church growth and impede proper accountability relationships. Being committed simultaneously to indigenous church planting among the unreached and the training of national workers corresponds with Paul's apostolic model. In Ephesus he founded the church and then established a discipling school where he taught for at least two years. As a result of Paul serving the NC in the role of missionary trainer, the entire region was evangelized by his students (Acts 19:9-10).

To bring fulfillment to Christ's commission, the mandate must be clearly understood and implemented. All national churches struggle with the faulty idea that any ministry outside the doors of their church is missions. Completing the task begins with an understanding of the objective (discipling the nations) followed by the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit to go. Disciples from every people group must be raised up, indigenous churches planted, and local apprentices trained. Every ethnic church must send their own sons and daughters as near-neighbor evangelists and disciple-makers reaching the next people group. There will never be enough workers from the West to accomplish the task. Every NC in the Majority and Minority world has its mandate from Christ to send her members over cultural-linguistic hurdles to proclaim the gospel and make disciples.

We live in an amazing context of redemptive history where God has turned the attention of the church to the unreached peoples. Each of us in our given contexts must heed the commission of our Lord inscribed in the canon of

---

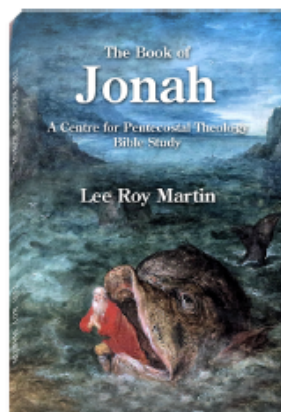
<sup>31</sup> We have located some of our extension Bible schools in centers where tremendous revival is occurring. At the same time, we started a school in Djibouti, our Muslim neighbors to the east, to train both Ethiopians, Djiboutians, and Somalis in Bible and missions, and to catalyze and sensitize them to disciple their neighbors. In the future, we plan on establishing schools near the borders of Sudan and Eritrea from which trained emissaries can cross porous borders.

<sup>32</sup> In Ethiopia, with the help of Africa's Hope, we are translating Discovery Series materials into Amharic (the official language), Afan Oromo (the largest spoken language), Somali (one of the largest UPGs in Ethiopia), and Tigrinya (the language of Eritrea, a closed country on the northern border) and using these training materials as the curriculum to prepare missionaries and pastors to expand God's kingdom.

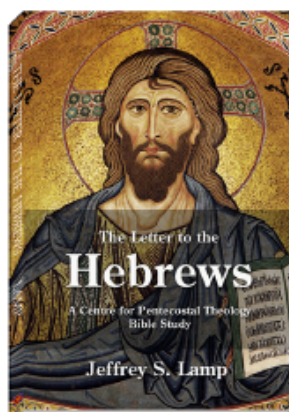
Scripture, train workers to live in the charisma of the Spirit, and go where others have not yet gone—to disciple the nations.

## Centre for Pentecostal Theology Bible Study Series

Published by CPT Press



*The Book of Jonah*  
by Lee Roy Martin  
ISBN 978-1935931539  
132 pages



*The Letter to the Hebrews*  
by Jeffrey S. Lamp  
ISBN 978-1935931737  
182 pages



- For individual readers and for group study
- Part I – Bible study
- Part II – lesson outlines
- Four-step learning process
- Includes questions for discussion

This new Bible study series from CPT Press is written for pastors and lay persons who desire to live a Spirit-filled life that is formed and directed by Holy Scripture. Although the studies are presented in popular language, they are based upon sound exegesis of the original Hebrew and Greek texts.

Available now on Amazon.com.

CPT Press publishes books by and for Spirit-filled believers.



## Interpretation of the Scripture: Exploring a Latin American Method

Miguel Alvarez

### Abstract:

Latin American Pentecostalism also found its way to study the biblical text, amidst other Christian traditions that intersected in the history of this Christian movement in Latin America. In this presentation, we argue that to understand Latin American Pentecostalism, one must study the method in which historical Evangelicalism, Classic Pentecostalism and Roman Catholicism influenced the minds of the interpreters of the Bible in this region. In this study, we describe how a method of interpretation of Scripture that is typical of Latin American Pentecostalism was formed.

**Key words:** biblical interpretation, Pentecostal hermeneutics, Latin American Christianity

The purpose of this essay is to reason with regard to the way in which Latin Americans read and interpret the biblical text. In effect, I am proposing an integrative method that describes the process by which Latinos study Scripture. This discussion will include historical roots, theological references, as well as practical aspects and elements related to Latino identity. The study is focused on three Christian traditions that are traditionally recognized as having the greatest influence in Latin America — Catholic, Evangelical, and Pentecostal.

This study makes no attempt to combine points of view, ideas or academic assessments of differing Christian views that assume a certain compatibility when combined coherently, such as eclecticism.<sup>1</sup> Rather this is an attempt to conciliate diverse theories and thoughts, taking from each what is most important in order to break existing contradictions.

More specifically, this document proposes a dialogue over points of view with regard to biblical interpretation, taking into account the three sources of interpretation most recognized among Latinos. Historically, the majority of

---

Miguel Alvarez ([moalvarez@msn.com](mailto:moalvarez@msn.com)) is Honduran/American missionary, serving as President and Professor of Theology and Mission at the Seminario Biblico Pentecostal Centroamericano of the Church of God, in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala. He also edits *Hechos*, a Spanish Journal for Latin America.

<sup>1</sup> Eclecticism is a conceptual focus that does not hold rigidly to a paradigm or set of suppositions. It is based, rather, on multiple theories, styles, and ideas to obtain complementary information on a topic, or simply applied different theories in specific cases. It also attempts to reconcile different theories and existing thoughts, taking from each one what is most acceptably important in order to break existing contradictions. See Arnold A. Lazarus, "In Support of Technical Eclecticism," *Psychological Reports* 21.2 (1967): 415-416.



Latin Americans have lived with a religious background of Roman Catholicism. Even though some have left the Catholic Church to join evangelical or Pentecostal groups, their principles, as well as cultural, educational, familial, social and religious values continue to be Catholic, as an antonomasia figure of speech. The reasons are clear since for more than 500 years, Roman Catholicism has prevailed over the Latino culture and society.<sup>2</sup>

This study aims to present a portrait of the Latino reality with regard to its connection to and integration in the Christian faith. Over the years, the Latino community has received teachings from Catholic, Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, to mention the movements of greatest influence. Thus, to carry out a study such as this it has been necessary to review some works by Catholic, Evangelical, as well as Pentecostal authors. As a result of the methodology employed, the reader will observe that in the Latino community there are multiple theological combinations, which can also be seen in the field of biblical interpretation.

## Historical Roots

With regard to Protestantism and its more significant ramifications among Latinos, these movements have perhaps 100 years of historic activity.<sup>3</sup> With regard to time, the Catholic Church reached the Latinos 400 years before the Evangelical and Pentecostal movements, which is significant with regard to the influence of the Christian traditions on Latin American soil. This important historical framework allows to better understand the Christian Latino profile. In the context of this study, it is possible to state that Latinos can be Evangelical or Pentecostal, but in general they will reflect the Catholic background of the culture, society, education, and family, something that distinguishes them as different from other Christian contexts.

On the other hand, in this presentation we will differentiate between Evangelicals and Pentecostals for two reasons: First, they are two separate movements with some doctrinal differences, and second, because of the different manner of relating to the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Although this discussion does not enter into the field of Pneumatology, it is important to mention, since among Latinos in general these differences are not taken into account. Nevertheless, they are evident in the implementation of doctrinal teachings and ministerial practices in the congregations. It is also important to note that some Pentecostals, particularly the more traditionalists, insist on being identified as Evangelical, whereas the neo-Pentecostals are not interested in that traditional identification precisely for their new way to

---

<sup>2</sup> See the satirical work by Eduardo del Río, *500 Años Fregados Pero Cristianos* (México, DF: Editorial Grijalbo, 1992), 42. The author relates myths, traditions and historical details that can only be expressed through the art of caricature.

<sup>3</sup> Angelina Pollak-Eltz and Yolanda Salas de Lecuna, eds. *El Pentecostalismo en América Latina entre Tradición y Globalización* (Quito, Ecuador: Ediciones Abya-Yala, 1998), 7.

interpret the church, Scriptures, and the manner in which they exercise their ministry.

With the rise of Pentecostalism in the 20th Century, the Latin American communities experienced a significant shift in their appreciation of Christianity.<sup>4</sup> As an example, the Pentecostals stressed a more militant spiritual experience in living out the Christian faith. And in their re-encounter with the biblical text, the Spirit made the written Word come to life in the lives of the believers and the community itself.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the authority of the sacred text and the revelation of the Holy Spirit, the Latino Pentecostals also included historical precedents of the Christian tradition and the community of faith in the interpretation of Scripture. The result is a dynamic interpretation, seen as a process that ultimately leads to a discernment of God's will for His people in a determined historical context.

Historically, the Evangelical and Pentecostal missionary movements brought to the Latino communities a North American evangelical and cultural perspective. The American missionaries arrived with a historic evangelical background that was birthed in Great Britain but developed in the United States. Upon entering the Latin American world, with its dominant Roman Catholic religious and cultural influence, the American Evangelical and Pentecostal encountered significant theological contradictions.<sup>6</sup> Of course, the backdrop of the contradiction was the new Evangelical and Pentecostal "converts," the result of evangelization among the Latino Catholics.

To best understand this phenomenon, we employ a dialectical perspective<sup>7</sup> in which the following contradictions are presented: Latinos generally come from a Roman Catholic background (thesis). On their part, the Americans come from an Evangelical background (antithesis). The current Latino community has incorporated hermeneutical principles from both backgrounds (synthesis). For the purposes of this discussion I should state that my intent is not to promote one extreme or the other. Rather, my objective is to explain what is distinct about Latin American Evangelical and Pentecostal movements.

The geographical and historical context places them in a position that provides a different perspective with regard to the Christian life. In this framework, one can imagine in Latin America a combination that could be Catholic/Evangelical or Catholic/Pentecostal. In some cases, it could even be

---

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Pablo Aberto Deiros, *Historia del Cristianismo en América Latina*, (Quito, Ecuador: Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana, 1992), 775.

<sup>5</sup> See the point of view of Manuel Antonio Garretón, ed., *América Latina: Un Espacio Cultural en el Mundo Globalizado* (Bogotá, Colombia: Convenio Andrés Bello, 2002), 238.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, José Ignacio Saranyana and Carmen José Alejos-Grau, eds., *Teología en América Latina: De las Guerras de Independencia hasta Finales del Siglo XIX (1910-1899)* (Madrid, España: Editorial Iberoamericana, 2008), 294.

<sup>7</sup> A good resource for understanding how to employ the dialectical method is found in Raúl Rojas Soriano's book, *Investigación Social: Teoría y Praxis* (México, DF: Plaza y Valdés, 2002), 162.

tripartite, that is Catholic/Evangelical/Pentecostal, which would come to be the synthesis of a dialectic confrontation between the most prominent Christian faith movements in the Latino community.

THEOLOGICAL CONTRADICTIONS (Dialectic Method)		
Thesis	Latin American Evangelicals and Pentecostals	Roman Catholicism. Culture, education, society, religion.
Antithesis	North American Evangelicals and Pentecostals	North American Evangelicals and Pentecostals. New spiritual experience.
Synthesis	Convergence of Opposing Theological Positions	Different Evangelicals and Pentecostals. Incorporate principles from both backgrounds.

Table 1

The previous discussion requires the finding of a point of convergence that would explain theologically the Evangelical and Pentecostal movements that arose among Latinos after the dialectical encounter between both currents of modern Christianity in Latin America. After the incursion of classical Pentecostalism in Latin America, in the 1960s, new currents began to develop that combined Pentecostal and Catholic principles in church life, and particularly with regard to the interpretation of the biblical text. One example of these currents was the Charismatic Movement that was evident not only in the Protestant and Evangelical churches, but also in the Catholic Church itself. In this case, and for reason of space, we will center our study on the interpretation of Scripture, a new paradigm for the traditional hermeneutic that is crucial to an understanding of the new generation of Evangelical and Pentecostal Latinos. As we have explained, these movements have characteristics that are very typical of their background and historical context, and as such need to be taken into account when studying the biblical text.

Methodology

Traditionally, Latin Americans have studied Scripture either through the methods used by the Catholic Church, or by those historically taught by the Evangelicals and Pentecostals.<sup>8</sup> For reasons of space, this document will not treat the historical, traditional methods, but rather will focus on describing those elements that form part of a methodology that can be seen in the new

<sup>8</sup> An author who refers to the differences in biblical interpretation between Catholics and Protestants is Juan Driver, in *La Fe en la Periferia de la Historia. Una Historia del Pueblo Cristiano desde la Perspectiva de los Movimientos de Restauración y Reforma Radical* (Guatemala, Guatemala: Ediciones Semilla, 1997). Another important work in this field is the book by David Suazo Jiménez, *La Función Profética de la Educación Teológica en América Latina* (Viladecavalls, España: Editorial CLIE, 2012).

generation of Latino Evangelicals and Pentecostals. These elements form part of a method we have chosen to call integrative interpretation. In the following, we offer some of the most noticeable elements that form part of this integrative method that are concomitant with the teaching and preaching of the Latino community.

## An Integrative Method

In the book, *El Rostro Hispano de Jesús*, I describe in more detail what I call the integrative interpretation method. This needs to be understood as a process of interpretation that (1) integrates systematically the particular functions of the written revelation of the Word of God; (2) includes as well the active participation of the Holy Spirit with regard to understanding, illumination, and wise decisions that are in agreement with Scripture; (3) the interpreter studies the testimony of the history and the influence of tradition in the interpretation of the biblical text; and finally, (4) the interpreter submits to the spiritual authority of the community of faith, whose function is to ensure that all interpretation or action derived from such does not contradict nor negate the truth and efficacy of the written Word.<sup>9</sup> The integration of these four elements confirm the legitimacy of an interpretation that is complete and accessible to a diverse community such as the Latino one.

This method integrates divine and human activity.<sup>10</sup> For any interpretation to be accepted or confirmed, it should pass through this process of rigorous examination, which will indelibly legitimize or invalidate the interpretation of the text. There is no room for error when the elements of the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit, in addition to the history, tradition and authority of the community of faith, are dynamically integrated.<sup>11</sup> The interpreters may disagree

---

<sup>9</sup> This information is more widely discussed in my article “Hacia Una Hermenéutica Esperanzadora,” in Raúl Zaldívar, Miguel Álvarez and David Ramírez, *El Rostro Hispano de Jesús* (Barcelona, España: Editorial CLIE, 2014), pp. 99-169.

<sup>10</sup> John Calvin discussed at length the integration of the human and the divine. See, for example, the analysis by Darren Sumner, “Calvin on Jesus’ Divine-Human Activity,” in *Out of Bounds: Theology in the Far Country*. <http://theologyoutofbounds.wordpress.com/2012/04/24/calvin-on-jesus-divine-human-activity/> Accessed 11 June 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Kevin L. Spawn and Archie T. Wright, eds., *Spirit and Scripture: Exploring a Pneumatic Hermeneutic* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, UK: T&T Clark, 2012), 282. This book considers the academic treatment of biblical interpretation within the classical Pentecostal movement, which has demonstrated great numerical growth. The first part gives a historical summary of biblical interpretation in the Pentecostal tradition. In the second part, six Pentecostal scholars analyze the future of biblical interpretation in said tradition. The authors discuss several key questions: What is the role of the Holy Spirit in biblical interpretation? What are the presuppositions, methods and goals of Pentecostal biblical interpretation? In the third part, three non-Pentecostal theologians (Craig G. Bartholomew, James D.G. Dunn, R. Walter L. Moberly) analyze the propositions described by the Pentecostal theologians. These critical responses expand the study of biblical hermeneutics.

with regard to strategy, emphasis, and even on the implementation of revelation, but when it comes to an order of hierarchical importance, the Scriptures are supreme and over all other elements. Then comes the revelation of the Holy Spirit that confirms Scripture. Historical precedents and tradition legitimize the impact, while the spiritual authority and the judgment of the community of faith approve or disapprove of the practical application of the interpretation.

## **Intervening Agents in the Integrative Method**

The integrative method is similar to the pneumatic, which in its dynamic includes the Word, the Holy Spirit and the community of faith.<sup>12</sup> The difference between the two is that the integrative method includes historical testimony and the influence of tradition in the dynamic process of interpreting the text. In the Latino community, the inclusion of tradition is vital, precisely due to the Catholic influence in its theology.

In the Catholic Church, the study of history and tradition is necessary to understand the interpretive exercise of God's people throughout time. This is perhaps one of the areas of concern among Evangelical and Pentecostal interpreters, whose understanding of historical continuity may be influenced by denominational differences, particularly due to historical interest. The challenge here is to connect objectively the process of textual interpretation with the history of the Christian church and with the history of textual interpretation itself. The latter should be taken into account by interpreters of the Scriptures in order to study the historical evidences of a hermeneutical proposition that could affect all of Christendom and not just one segment.

In order for the process of interpretation to be objective, it is necessary that all interpreters remove their denominational hats and begin to see the church as one body with different members and different functions, but all contributing to the well-being of the same. I believe this is what was in the mind of the Holy Spirit as he guided Paul to write to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 12). For this to happen, the integrative method proposes the four previously mentioned agents. This method is inclusive and involves a dynamic activity that represents the agents that are part of the compositions and interpretation of Scripture.

---

<sup>12</sup> See Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic: Spirit, Scripture and Community* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2009). The author presents a detailed and comprehensive analysis of Pentecostal hermeneutics. He identifies the hermeneutical filter through which the Pentecostal story and identity is understood. Archer gives attention to the narrative and to the convictions of the community of faith. This model builds on the significance of the Bible text, the community of faith, and the role of the Holy Spirit.

LATINO INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE		
Integrative Method	Agents that participate in the Interpretation	Historical Source
	The Holy Spirit	The Trinity (GOD)
	The Holy Scriptures	The Biblical Text
	History and Tradition	Catholic/Latino Tradition
	The Community of Faith	Classical Pentecostalism

Table 2

In the case of Latinos, a large majority come from a Roman Catholic background in which tradition has been fundamental for understanding the church. A method that ignores the value of history or tradition would have difficulty in being accepted by the Latino community. The same could happen with other historic Christian entities. Of course, the diversity of theological and doctrinal positions among movements and denominations is obvious and, for that reason, generalization is not recommended in this case. Nevertheless, the study of tradition and the history of the thinking of God’s people has an invaluable benefit in the formation an idea with regard to the origin of doctrine and theology.

In our contemporary world, many decisions of a judicial, social, and spiritual nature are based on historical antecedents to strengthen their conclusions, especially those that are of a normative nature. In order to recommend a method that would be representative of Latino theologies, the same should include a complete evaluation of the traditions and the role of history in interpretation. In light of this, the dynamic of the elements that are part of the action of the integrative method are presented as follows.

*The Word of God*

The Word of God is the revelation of God to mankind. God communicates through Scripture, which is inspired and revealed through the Holy Spirit.<sup>13</sup> The Word of God has both a divine and human nature. It is divinely inspired by God through a series of individuals subject to human limitations.<sup>14</sup> In this way, the omnipotent God intervenes in human history and reveals himself as the divine Word documented by men, not through robotic dictation by God, but rather as persons who wrote about particular situations with regard to specific human issues, but while doing so, were documenting the Word of God. Two features are relevant to the present discussion.

<sup>13</sup> Carlos Tomás Knott, *Libro Divino, Amada Palabra* (Tarrassa, España, Editorial CLIE, 1997), 70. The author emphasized that when the Word is illuminated, the Holy Spirit enables the reader to understand what has been revealed and inspired in order to believe and obey God.

<sup>14</sup> Knott, *Libro Divino*, 62.

First, scripture is the verbal revelation of God. The unity between Jesus Christ and the Word is mystery understood through the revelatory activity of the Holy Spirit. The Word became flesh incarnate in Jesus. In this way, the Word is divine, and it is human, functioning in an integral manner. In Hebrews 4:12, there is a complete explanation of the activity of the Word: “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” Jesus Christ is the origin and the fulfillment of the Word. In the person of Jesus Christ, the fullness of the deity is incarnated in human nature subject to the limitations of the human world.

Second, the Bible has both human and divine natures. Just as in Jesus Christ both the human and divine natures were combined, in the same way Scripture combines both of these natures. This is how God makes himself accessible to humanity in order to make his purpose and his mission understood.<sup>15</sup> The fact the Scripture is both divine and human facilitates communication between God and man. In the person of Jesus Christ, who is the incarnation of Scripture, God the Father makes himself known to man within the human reality. Milton Jordán Chiqua argues:

The Scriptures, by being inspired, are in truth the Word of God. Regardless of its human presentation, Scripture does not cease to have a divine language, in which the human language is wrapped in the divine Word, or better said, it becomes the expression of divine languages. The human language, without ceasing to be so, has been assumed by God until it also is transformed into divine.<sup>16</sup>

As Milton Jordán describes, when a Latino convert's conclusions are assumed regarding the idea that there is no Word of God without human word. God is in every part of the inspired texts, even in the most minute details.<sup>17</sup> One of the reasons why the Latino believer venerates and makes holy certain activities and traditions is the belief that these elements involve divine activity. In the same manner, the Church and Scripture are both totally divine and totally human.

### *The Holy Spirit*

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. He is the source of all knowledge, understanding and wisdom. His objective for mankind, clearly

---

<sup>15</sup> It is highly significant that this topic has not yet been academically discussed in depth in Latin American evangelical and Pentecostal circles. Curiously, one of the closest attempts in Spanish is found in Catholic theological literature. Such is the case of the work of Ignacio Arellano, *Autos Sacramentales Completos: Estructuras Dramáticas y Alegóricas de Calderón* (Pamplona, España: Universidad de Navarra, 2001), 76.

<sup>16</sup> Milton Jordán Chiqua, *Introducción General a la Sagrada Scripture* (Bogotá, Colombia: San Pablo, 2011), 166.

<sup>17</sup> Jordán, *Introducción General a la Sagrada Scripture*, 166.

revealed in Scripture, is to guide man to the final destination of redemption offered by the Father in his Son, Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit reveals Christ in the Word, leading man to understand the gospel and to accept the plan of redemption by God through faith. The Holy Spirit builds and encourages faith, opening the understanding of the believer to ultimately know God in the person of Jesus Christ.

With the Pentecostal movement, the person and mission of the Holy Spirit achieve an integrative scope.<sup>18</sup> The Pentecostals recover the charismatic action of the Holy Spirit and complete the integral circle of the mission of the Trinity, in which the Father sends the Son, and the Holy Spirit reveals and glorifies the Son in his divine and human fullness for the redemption of mankind.<sup>19</sup> The following work of the Spirit is pertinent to the discussion.

Frist, the illumination of the Spirit is necessary to understand Scripture. The faith that understands the plan of redemption originates in the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit. It is he that awakens a need for God and who makes the Word accessible to the understanding of an individual in need of salvation. The Holy Spirit makes Scripture relevant and gives life to specific situations and contexts, as long as the revelation has the purpose of glorifying Jesus Christ and confirming the truth of God's revealed Word.

Second, the role of illumination is critical in interpretation. Of course, the process of interpretation of Scripture requires illumination as well as the direction and revelation of the Holy Spirit. The "depth of the riches of God" (Romans 11:33) can be available to the person whose motivation is conducive to understanding the truths of Scripture. The Holy Spirit<sup>20</sup> convicts man of sin and leads him to repentance (John 16:8). Through faith, a person accepts the offer of salvation and becomes a disciple of Christ to live according to the values, teachings, and purposes of the Word.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Alexis Riaud, *La Acción del Holy Spirit en la Almas* (Madrid, España: Ediciones Palabra, 2005), 163. This classic, Catholic work exposes the essential notions on the role that corresponds to the Holy Spirit in the work of sanctification. Curiously, much of the Neo-Pentecostal theology used among Latinos is saturated with these Catholic concepts about the mission of the Holy Spirit. In the particular case of this author, his work points to the doctrine of sanctification, which shows that not only the evangelical Wesleyan movement has influenced Pentecostalism in Latin America.

<sup>19</sup> See, Elizabeth Salazar-Sanzana, "Pentecostalism in Latin America: A Look at its Current challenges," in Harold D. Hunter and Neil Ormerod, eds., *The Many Faces of Pentecostalism* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2013), 114-125.

<sup>20</sup> Lucas Buch Rodríguez, *El Papel del Holy Spirit en la Obra Reveladora de Dios* (Roma, Italia: Edizioni Santa Croce, 2013), 203. The author affirms that "the development of tradition 'has in the Holy Spirit its primary active principle.'"

<sup>21</sup> Véase, Gregory J. Ogden, *Manual del Discipulado: Creciendo y Ayudando a Otros a Crecer* (Viladecavalls, España: Editorial CLIE, 2006), 37-45. This work on Christian discipleship forms part of a theological collection published in Australia. Fortunately, it has been translated into Spanish, but this kind of literature is fairly new to Latin American Evangelical theological circles.



SOURCES THAT ORIGINATE LATINO HERMENEUTICS			
	Traditions	Distinctive	Challenges
The Integrative method of interpretation takes into account the most influential traditions in the Latin American world	Catholic	History: Doctrine, theology, continuity, tradition	Revitalization of holiness and the spiritual life
	Evangelical	Holiness: Order in the church, <i>missio dei</i> , discipline	Connecting to the charismatic activity of the Holy Spirit
	Pentecostal	Revitalization de la activity of the Holy Spirit in the church: Creativity, new possibilities	Order in the church and finding its place in the historical continuity of the Christian faith

Table 3

The third is the revelation of Jesus Christ in Scripture. The truth about the person, mission, and purpose of Jesus Christ is revealed in the Word of God. This revelation occurs under the influence of the Holy Spirit on man's understanding. The Holy Spirit also fills the believers and equips them for effective service through spiritual gifts.<sup>22</sup> This has been a profound legacy from the American classical Pentecostalism to the Latino community.

*The Testimony of History and the Influence of Tradition*

The value of the testimony of history and the influence of tradition on the interpretation of Scriptures can be appreciated in the doctrinal and theological formation of Christian communities over time. Upon reviewing the dogmas, doctrines, and theological positions of the church, the interpreter of Scripture comes to see the importance of tradition in the history of thought of the people of God.<sup>23</sup> Tradition could have a positive as well as a negative side. The positive aspect encourages a healthy growth that allow the believer to understand Scripture in relation to his world. The negative side is that which holds back revelation and remains fixed on the static traditions of the past, which were relevant to previous generations, but with time have become irrelevant and of no value for the generations that followed.<sup>24</sup> The study of tradition should include the analysis of both positive and negative past traditions for the benefit of the present generation.

This agent also takes into consideration the methodology that has been utilized historically in the interpretation of sacred Scriptures. The historical-

<sup>22</sup> Leeper, Gregory J. "The Nature of the Pentecostal Gift with Special Reference to Numbers 11 and Acts 2", *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 6.1 (2003): 23-38.

<sup>23</sup> Juan Jesús García Morales, *La Inspiración Bíblica a la Luz del Principio Católico de la Tradición* (Roma, Italia: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2012), 173-179.

<sup>24</sup> This subject is widely discussed by Daniel Orlando Álvarez, *Mestizaje en Híbridos: Identidad Latina en Perspectiva Pneumatológica* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2018), 76-87.

critical method, grammatical-historical method, the inductive and others have been implemented particularly in biblical exegesis.<sup>25</sup> The integrative method relies on these methods for support and also to test the validity of the treatment given to the biblical text. In doing so, the integrative method recognizes the importance and value of the historical methods of interpreting the Word of God. With regard to exegesis itself, the integrative method employs the traditional methods, although interpretation utilized in expository preaching is primarily based on the inductive method.

The historical impact of Scripture on human history can be appreciated most through the doctrinal foundations and the theology that has been developed by the people of God over time.<sup>26</sup> The Nicene Creed, for example, has served as a doctrinal foundation for many centuries and has remained immovable as a testimony of the doctrinal development of the church. The study of ecclesial and theological currents of the church throughout history help the interpreter understand the doctrinal foundation and the historical thought of Christianity.

In the history of the influence of Scripture on God's people, a great amount of truths, dogmas, principles, and symbols have been preserved through tradition.<sup>27</sup> Obviously, tradition seen from a purely human perspective is framed in a diverse context of actions and decisions taken in different generations. To understand it, tradition must be analyzed in the context in which it developed.

In an objective interpretation of Scripture, it is necessary to study the history of the tradition and the historical thought of God's people. There are truths that were discovered a long time ago which cannot be ignored by the interpreter of today. The symbols and meanings found in the past have great value for those seeking historical evidence of the faith.<sup>28</sup> The balance between

---

<sup>25</sup> Regarding this subject, see the book by Bernhard Grom and José Ramón Guerrero, *El Anuncio del Dios Cristiano* (Salamanca, España: Ediciones Secretariado Trinitario, 1979), 161.

<sup>26</sup> Diego Irarrazaval Covarrubias, "Fe desde Abajo y Teología entre Culturas" *Albertus Magnus* 4.1 (2013): 99-119.

<sup>27</sup> John Barton, *La Interpretación Bíblica Hoy* (Barcelona, España: Editorial Sal Terrae, 2001), 25. The author presents the relation between the "critical" study of the Bible and the "pre-critical" and "post-critical" foci. He also analyzes the role of history in the study of the Bible, the relationship between Christian and Jewish investigation and the recent history in the Bible as literature. See also the work by Eduardo Arens, *Los Evangelios Ayer y Hoy: Una Introducción Hermenéutica* (Bogotá, Colombia: EEP, 2006), 205.

<sup>28</sup> José Saramago wrote a very polemic novel that makes a literary criticism of the manner in which some Christians' values and beliefs have been traditionally assumed. Saramago not only won the Nobel Prize for Literature with this novel, but also stirred an interest in a more objective study of the traditional religious values, especially the historical Catholic teachings, this being the reason for including this editorial information in this article. José Saramago, *O Evangelho Segundo Jesus Cristo* (Lisboa, Portugal: Editorial Caminho SA, 1991).

historical interpretation of tradition and the revelation of today leads to revealed truth in a healthy way for the needs in a contemporary reality.

*The Authority of the Community of Faith in the Interpretation of Scripture*

This element in the integrative method is based on the experience and counsel of the church. A healthy interpretation of Scripture will necessarily recognize the value of spiritual authority in the community of faith, the assembly of believer, or the congregation itself.<sup>29</sup> The church has a clearly established order which believers have a duty to honor. This helps maintain healthy relationships and permits the members to find their place in the congregation that the Holy Spirit has indicated.

The community of believers has the authority to evaluate the revelation that has been presented by a group or by one of the members of the community. The group's wisdom establishes a balance with all of the previous proposed elements and decides if the interpretation is correct or not. This was the procedure established by the apostle Paul in order to avoid disorder and disobedience in the congregations (1 Cor. 14:29). The testing by the community of faith is necessary to maintain order and health in the church.<sup>30</sup>

In the same way that Jesus Christ and Scripture are one, the church also has a divine as well as a human nature. Contrary to what dualism teaches, these natures are a constant in the revelation of God to mankind. It is God himself who chooses to intervene in human society, making himself available through Scriptures, visible in Jesus Christ, as well as revealed and understood through the Holy Spirit.<sup>31</sup> The church, therefore, has the mind of the Holy Spirit, who guides into all truth (John 16:13) and is able to decide in conformity with the mind of Christ in matters related to the interpretation and application of Scripture in the community of faith.

Obedience and submission to governing authority of the community of faith is indispensable in the application of the integrative method. The concept of membership is vital in order to cultivate an attitude of submission and group

---

<sup>29</sup> With regard to the spiritual authority of the community of faith in hermeneutics, see the classic work by David Paul Henry, *The Early Development of the Hermeneutic of Karl Barth as Evidenced by His appropriation of Romans 5:12-21* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 1-4.

<sup>30</sup> See Patrick R. Keifert, *Testing the Spirits: How Theology Informs the Study of Congregations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 114. The author provides information with regards to congregational participation in the process of Scriptural interpretation. It emphasized the function of church members in the making of decisions that affect the life of the congregation.

<sup>31</sup> María del Carmen Aparicio Valls, *La Plenitud del Ser Humano en Cristo* (Roma, Italia: Iura Editionis, 1996), 184. The author reflects on the accessibility of God to mankind in the Person of Christ, who is revealed to the human mind by the Holy Spirit. This position is similar to that manifested by biblical scholars in the Latino community.

health.<sup>32</sup> Latin American communities emphasize the importance of submitting every matter to the counsel of the community of faith in order to find balance in everything that affects the group or an individual member.

An example of the dynamic interaction in the interpretation Scripture utilizing the four agents is found in Act of the Apostles chapter 15. Following is a description of the action taken by the New Testament church.

## **The Practice of the Integrative Method Modeled in Scripture**

During the council at Jerusalem,<sup>33</sup> the believers gathered to resolve the fundamental theological matter of salvation by works, or by faith alone. Chapter 15 of the book of Acts served as a model for the church to employ an interpretation that includes the four basic elements of the integrative method: (1) The leading of the Holy Spirit, (2) the authority of Scripture, (3) the historical testimony of tradition, and (4) the consensus of the community of faith. That meeting resulted in the decision of the council as a corporal, integral response to the matter of whether or not Gentiles could be admitted with full communion in the church. As a result, James could declare with reliability, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (v. 28). The participants of the council at Jerusalem were certain of the direction and the authority of the Holy Spirit in their decisions. This is what also determines the central activity of the Holy Spirit in the hermeneutical task and all of the church life in general.

During that meeting, the council appealed to the centrality of the Scriptures, the leading of the Holy Spirit in the experience of the faith, the testimony of tradition and the history of the people of God, as well as the reasoned consensus of the community of believers. James declared with full certainty that the Scriptures were in agreement with the missionary report and the argument by Peter, and that all the prophets, in particular Amos, included the Gentiles in the family of the church in accordance with God’s eternal purpose (vv. 14-18; cf. Amos 9:11-12).

For their part, Paul and Barnabas also presented a field report and related the missionary experience in preaching the gospel among the Gentiles (v.12). Peter reminded the members of the council about his calling to preach to the Gentiles, particularly with regard to what happened when he visited Cornelius and his friends (vv. 7-11). It should also be noted here that James also appealed and made use of traditional testimony when he asked the Gentiles to at least observe four prohibitions from the law (vv. 20-21; cf. Lev. 17:8, 10-12, 13; 18:6-23). Peter added that the Gentiles should be accepted into the church as a result of sanctification by faith and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that they had also experienced (vv. 8-11). James then argued on the basis of the law and

---

<sup>32</sup> See W. T. Conner, *Doctrina Cristiana: las Doctrinas Fundamentales de la Fe Cristiana Expuestas con Claridad Bíblica* (El Paso, TX: Casa Bautista de Publicaciones, 2001), 55.

<sup>33</sup> See Arnold B. Rhodes, *The Mighty Acts of God* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2000), 318-319. His presentation on the Jerusalem Council is very interesting, according to Acts 15.

tradition that the Gentiles should not be required to undergo the practice of circumcision (vv. 13-21). It is obvious that under the direction of the Holy Spirit, the council came to an agreement with what was a positive resolution for the church.

It is clear that the method that worked in Scripture was integrative. It included the Word of God with the direction of the Holy Spirit, the testimony of history and tradition, and the confirmation by the community of faith. This same integrative method of interpretation can be applied today in all Christian communities, particularly in the Latino, where said methodology could function adequately and serve as a bridge for the diversity of theological positions among Latinos.

## **The Integrative Method in Practice**

Practical examples of the integrative method of interpretation can be seen regularly in a great number of contemporary churches. In general, every matter, be it doctrinal, spiritual, ethical or of a congregational nature, is submitted through prayer under the leading of the Holy Spirit, first of all to the examining authority of the Word. This is followed by consultation with the elders of the church to ensure that the interpretation of the Scripture and the statutes — doctrine, regulations, tradition — are observed in the practical life of the church, and that everything is in its place and in order.<sup>34</sup> This helps to maintain a healthy balance in all of the areas be they spiritual, organizational, ethical, social, or simply matters that have to do with good communication.

In difficult cases, the believers generally seek the leading of the Holy Spirit before proceeding. This action creates a spiritual awareness that is manifested in a spirit of reverence and humility. Then the matter is studied in the light of the Word of God to see if it is any way confirmed or contrary to Scriptural principles. In both steps there is a seeking for wisdom and the admonition of those that preside over the congregation. These determine if the judgment is correct or incorrect, if it contradicts or not the spiritual, biblical and ecclesial order. Each congregation has its base in the denominational statutes that have been established in order to maintain order in the church. In some cases, it is necessary to resort to a historical investigation or prior antecedents to see how the matter, or similar situations, was best handled by previous generations. This dynamic allows for the matter to be handled correctly and consistently so that in the end, all involved parties are satisfied with the congregational decisions. This method is integrative because it involves all the necessary agents that contribute to complete and balanced interpretation.


---

<sup>34</sup> Carolina Rivera Farfán and Elizabeth Juárez Cerdi, eds., *Más Allá del Espíritu: Actores, Acciones y Prácticas en Iglesias Pentecostales* (México, DF: CIESAS, 2007), 165. This work emphasizes the internal and social changes between the Protestant and Pentecostal movements in Latin America. Within that framework there is a Catholic hermeneutical base that serves as a foundation for biblical interpretation of contemporary currents within both movements.

As a matter of clarification, this integrative method in reality is not new in the practical life of the church. It has been practiced empirically, especially in those ecclesiastic circles in which biblical interpretation has not been so strict or rigorous. So, this methodological concept is not new. What I have done here, rather, is to organize methodologically what has been in practice for a long time. For example, the Pentecostal interpreters of the 20th century introduced formally the pneumatic method into the field of hermeneutics. From that platform, the pneumatic method became the most useful tool of contemporary churches for the interpretation of the Scriptures. Nonetheless, they failed to take into account the value of the testimony offered through historic precedents of interpretation and the traditions historically observed by the people of God. To compensate for this deficiency, some contemporary interpreters, in addition to using the pneumatic method, have relied on the inductive method for their preaching. They have also used empirically the resources of history and tradition to confirm the certainty of their interpretations. This is how the need has arisen for the integrative method which is necessary to justify the adequate use of all the agents that form part of a responsible treatment of the biblical text.

# Free resources for theological education

<https://wapte.org/resources/>



the World Alliance for  
Pentecostal Theological Education

Type your keywords...

[Home](#) [About »](#) [Leadership](#) [Members »](#) [Journal »](#) [News](#) [Events](#) [Papers »](#) [Resources »](#) [Contact](#)

## Resources

### General Resources

- WAPTE Accreditation and Endorsement Manual
- EBESCO (Online Library)
- ATLA (American Theological Library Association)
- SPS (Society for Pentecostal Studies)
- In Trust (Governance Resources)
- Asian Center for Pentecostal Theology

### Theology In General

<http://oadtl.org/>  
Open Access Digital Theological Library for theology, religious studies and related disciplines

<https://journal.equinoxpub.com/PENT>  
Pentecostudies, interdisciplinary studies in Pentecostalism

### Biblical Theology

<https://tyndalehouse.com/bible-tools>  
STEP Bible is packed full of features to help people study the Bible text, from reading and comparing different versions of the Bible to grappling with original language words, through using word clouds to track themes as they unfold in a book, STEP Bible can assist.

<https://www.logos.com/academic-basic>  
Logos Bible software (free). Logos automatically reads the Greek and Hebrew for you, showing you the original language lemma's meaning—and even how it parses.

<https://netbible.org/>  
Translation with verse-by-verse scholarly notes and links to topics.

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/>  
Compare major English Bible translations, Greek and Latin Bible texts

<http://www.bibleodyssey.org/>  
Educational on-line dictionary and resource page from Society of Biblical Literature

<https://www.nestle-aland.com/en/read-na28-online/>  
The standard scholarly Greek New Testament text online

<http://sblgnt.com/>  
Free Greek New Testament text (downloadable)

<https://nvmr.uni-muenster.de/>  
Images of all Greek New Testament manuscripts online

<http://www.ntgateway.com/>  
A directory of academic internet resources on the New Testament, hosted by Logos Bible Software and edited by Mark Goodacre.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>  
Ancient Greek, Roman and Latin texts

<http://www.judaism-and-rome.org>  
Ancient sources on Judaism and Rome

<https://biblehub.com/interlinear/genesis/1-1.htm>  
Bible with Strong's Concordance system

<https://www.internationalstandardbible.com>  
International Bible Standard Encyclopedia

### Resources

- Theological Associations
- Education Offices
- Denominational Offices
- Pentecostal Academic Journals

### Join Email List

Name

First Last

Email \*

# Fostering Vocation in the Here and Now: A Case Study<sup>1</sup>

Soh Hui Leng Davina

## Abstract

This study traces how a Pentecostal theological college in Singapore has attempted to foster students' vocation in the here and now, having recognized that the term "vocation" now broadly refers to one faithfully living out one's faith by serving God's people both within and outside the church walls. The article first introduces the contextual background of the college before it explores what has worked and not worked for ACTS College. It proposes the hospitable practices of care, inclusion, presence, and reciprocity as a way forward for helping students discover and fulfil their God-given vocation.

**Key words:** calling, vocation, vocational discernment, hospitality

## Introduction

January 2, 1980 was the day I enrolled in Bible college. My twenty-seven college mates and I had abandoned our earthly ambitions and answered a divine call. Our vocation was a "higher" calling to full-time ministry as pastors, Christian education directors, or missionaries. It is now 2019. For the past thirty-nine years, I have tried my best to be faithful to my call to a teaching ministry and have lived out my vocation primarily as a Bible college teacher.

However, my concept of calling and reason for enrolling in a Bible college differ somewhat from that of my current students at the college where I teach. Most of my students have a so-called secular career and have enrolled for theological studies not because they have a calling to full-time ministry but simply as a response to God's call to be faithful disciples, to be better informed and equipped for service in various church ministries. Further probing revealed that some students regard their paid jobs as their vocation.

From the above narratives, we can observe that "vocation" has different connotations at different times. At this present time, there are students who do make a distinction between secular vocations (or career) and spiritual calling. However, current conversations on vocation and calling speak of Christian vocation as "God's call to live for the praise of his glory . . . and to serve God's

---

Soh Hui Leng Davina ([davina@acts.edu.sg](mailto:davina@acts.edu.sg)) teaches New Testament and Christian education at ACTS College, Singapore.

<sup>1</sup> The original version of this article was a paper presented at the Global Forum of Theological Educators, "Vision and Viability in Contexts: Theological Learning and Formation," held in Crete, Greece, on May 20–24, 2019.



purposes in every context of life.”<sup>2</sup> “*Vocation* is our divinely given life purpose embracing all dimensions of our human existence and the special dimensions of service Christians undertake in the church and world.”<sup>3</sup> It is thus time for theological institutions to rethink how we can teach about vocation and guide students in their journey of vocational discernment.

In this study, I will use a Pentecostal theological college in Singapore, ACTS College (ACTS), as our case study. Started as a center primarily to train workers for full-time ministry, it has seen a shift in its student demographics in recent years. To address this changing student landscape as well as understanding of vocation, ACTS has attempted to break the traditional mindset that associates theological education only with full-time ministry and has been experimenting on how it can better recognize and foster students’ vocation. This paper seeks to assess the college’s attempts to foster vocation in the here and now. It first introduces the contextual background of ACTS before it explores what has worked and not worked for ACTS. It concludes by offering some thoughts on what might work for ACTS.

## Contextual Background of ACTS

Desiring a national Bible school to serve the needs of its denomination, the Assemblies of God of Singapore established the Bible Institute of Singapore (BIS) in 1977.<sup>4</sup> When the Singapore Ministry of Education (MOE) recognized BIS as a religious institution in 1998, its name was changed to Assemblies of God Bible College (AGBC). Then in 2014, AGBC was incorporated as a limited company and is now known as ACTS College. Though it began as a local denominational school, ACTS has been serving Pentecostal and charismatic communities both locally and internationally. It is accredited by the Asia Theological Association as well as the Asia Pacific Theological Association and has graduated more than four hundred students since its inception.

### *Its Evolving Mission*

In the first catalogue of BIS printed in the early 1980s, it was stated that the purpose of the college was to “provide basic training in [b]iblical studies for those intending to enter into the gospel ministry as pastors, missionaries, evangelists and teachers.”<sup>5</sup> This purpose remained unchanged over the years until 1998. Under its new name as AGBC, the college then existed to provide “a full-orbed curriculum of theological and ministerial studies for those intending to serve the Lord effectively as pastors, teachers, evangelists,

---

<sup>2</sup>R. Paul Stevens, “Vocational Guidance,” in *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity: A Comprehensive Guide to Following Christ in Every Aspect of Life*, ed. Robert Banks and R. Paul Stevens, Graceworks ed. (Singapore: Graceworks, 2011), 1095.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 1094 (original emphasis).

<sup>4</sup>ACTS College, *Prospectus 2017–2020* (Singapore: ACTS College, 2017), 2.

<sup>5</sup>Bible Institute of Singapore, *Catalogue* (Singapore: Bible Institute of Singapore, 1981), 1.

missionaries or lay persons worldwide.”<sup>6</sup> This mission of the college was only changed almost two decades later, in 2015. Now, “ACTS is a place for men and women who are willing to deepen and broaden their commitments to God. At ACTS College, each one encounters God and seeks to fulfill God’s call.”<sup>7</sup> It is “a global learning community that seeks to empower leaders to succeed in transforming lives and society.”<sup>8</sup>

It is interesting to note that the history of the college itself bears witness to an evolving definition of “calling” (from a call to full-time ministry to a call to serve God wherever one may be). Existing under the name of BIS, the college focused on persons who had a calling to full-time ministry. The first four students of BIS entered with a vocation to full-time pastoral ministry and all of them were involved in pastoral work upon graduation. By the time the college was renamed as AGBC in 1998, it had already recognized that there were lay persons who desired theological training. This could partly be due to the college’s conviction of the Pentecostal theology of ministry that the exercise of the five-fold spiritual/ministry gifts in Ephesians 4:1–11 is for equipping all Christians for ministry. “Ministry is not limited to some paid full-time leaders in the church. Every Christian has a role and can contribute responsibly to the body of Christ.”<sup>9</sup> Since 2015, the prospectus has even broadened the mission of the college “to prepare men and women for a Spirit-filled ministry that transforms lives and society.”<sup>10</sup> Theological education, or training for ministry, is for everyone, not just for those with a calling to full-time ministry. “Every Christian who desires to serve the Lord should be given access to ministerial formation, regardless of his/her vocation in a Christian faith community or the marketplace.”<sup>11</sup> This mission is more aligned to the current understanding of vocation/calling—faithfully living out our faith in the world, serving God’s people both within and outside the church walls.

### *Its Enrolment Trend*

In 2018, an average ACTS student can be described as a 36-year-old male who is a university graduate working in the marketplace with no calling to full-time ministry (see tables 1 and 2).

Calling	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018
---------	------	------	------	------	------	------

<sup>6</sup> Assemblies of God Bible College, *Catalogue 1998–2000: The Choice for a Fulfilling Education* (Singapore: Assemblies of God Bible College, 1998), 2.

<sup>7</sup> ACTS College, *Prospectus 2015–2017* (Singapore: ACTS College, 2015), 2.

<sup>8</sup> ACTS College, “Who We Are,” accessed March 4, 2019, <http://acts.edu.sg/who-we-are/>.

<sup>9</sup> Casey Ng, “Theological Education as Ministerial Formation,” in *Theological Education in Singapore: Retrospect and Prospect* (Singapore: Sower Publishing Centre, 2019), 60.

<sup>10</sup> ACTS College, *Prospectus 2015–2017*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Ng, “Theological Education,” 61.

Full-time	43.8	49.4	36.3	36.1	32.4	26.3
Non-full-time	56.2	50.6	63.7	63.9	67.6	73.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

*Table 1. English student population at ACTS by calling<sup>12</sup>*

Qualification	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018
University graduate	30.3	46.0	48.7	59.0	63.4	73.7
Non-university graduate	69.7	54.0	51.3	41.0	36.6	26.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

*Table 2. English student population at ACTS by highest qualification attained*

Nation-wide statistics in Singapore have also shown that Christianity consistently has the highest number of followers among university graduates.<sup>13</sup> With the Christian communities in Singapore being more educated, the task of discipling has become more challenging for the full-time minister and even the church lay leader. There is, in churches, an increased interest in learning beyond the basics. Moreover, the more academically inclined members in the Christian communities could be more earnest in seeking deeper theological understanding of their faith and for service. Since 2014, there has been an increasing number of university graduates enrolling for courses at ACTS.

Taking into consideration the changing enrollment trends, ACTS has moved from being a pastoral/ministerial training college to a leadership training college. It now offers undergraduate and graduate programs, conducting regular classes on weeknights to cater to a student body made up mainly of working professionals.

<sup>12</sup> Due to various constraints, I have limited my data collection to the English department of ACTS, and from 2008 to 2018. “Full-time” refers to those who have a call to full-time ministry. “Non-full-time” refers to those who do not have a call to full-time ministry, regardless of their involvement in church ministry and mission activities.

<sup>13</sup> Singapore Department of Statistics, *Census of Population 2000: Advance Data Release* (Singapore: Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade & Industry, Republic of Singapore, 2001), 38; Singapore Department of Statistics, *Census of Population 2010: Statistical Release 1; Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion* (Singapore: Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade & Industry, Republic of Singapore, 2011), 16; Singapore Department of Statistics, *General Household Survey 2015* (Singapore: Department of Statistics, Ministry of Trade & Industry, Republic of Singapore, 2016), 27.

## What Works for ACTS

Upon assessment, the factors that contribute to ACTS' success in its efforts to nurture students' vocation are: (1) high commitment level of students, (2) flexibility of class scheduling and curriculum offering, (3) intentional focus on vocational discernment, and (4) faculty from the marketplace.

### *High Commitment Level of Students*

ACTS is recognized by the Singapore MOE only as a religious institution. This enables the college to apply for student visas for foreign students. But unlike those who are studying in Singapore MOE-recognized higher education institutions, local students desiring to study at ACTS cannot apply for study loans or use their personal Central Provident Fund savings to finance their studies.<sup>14</sup> Considering the sacrifices to be made in terms of money and time, students seeking to pursue theological studies in ACTS are generally self-motivated and committed working adults with an earnest desire to be better equipped in God's service. Believing in the priesthood of believers, they are actively involved in ministries in the church and in mission work. However, they sense a need to be more biblically and theologically grounded, and to acquire basic skills that can help them to be more effective in their Christian service and witness.

As such, vocational discernment for the students in ACTS is not so much about helping them to chart their career paths, but to discover how they can maximize their talents in their Christian vocation.

### *Flexibility of Class Scheduling and Curriculum Offering*

The first is flexibility in class scheduling. Until 2015, ACTS primarily offered classes in the day. To make it feasible for professionals working in the marketplace to complete their studies within the stipulated time-limit for completion of a program, the college now mainly conducts classes at night (Monday–Thursday). The shift in 2015 to a more suitable and accessible premise, located near a Mass Rapid Transit station, now affords students an easier commute to the college after work.

Besides offering more night classes, ACTS also offers 2-week intensive classes at the beginning (before the regular night classes commences) and end of a semester, as well as during the mid-year vacation, to cater to working professionals. The intensive classes are so structured that students only need to apply for two days of leave for each intensive class, allowing them to complete more subjects without sacrificing all their work leave just for studies.

---

<sup>14</sup>Loke Hoe Yeong, "Singapore," n.d., 5 table 3, accessed February 20, 2019, <http://www.headfoundation.org/featuredresearch/Final%20-%20Singapore.pdf>. The Central Provident Fund is a mandatory savings plan that is contributed by both employers and employees in Singapore that can be used to fund their studies, housing, healthcare, and retirement.

The second is flexibility in curriculum offering. From its inception to 2017, the curriculum was heavy on pastoral-related courses. For example, Pastoral Ministries, a course that is designed specifically to equip students with a vocation to full-time pastoral ministry, was a required course in all the undergraduate and graduate programs. This compulsory course is now an elective, allowing students to choose other courses from the ministerial category, such as Small Group Ministry, Pastoral Counselling, Leadership, Life Coaching, Advanced Teaching-Learning, or Practice Teaching. Moreover, there are more social studies-related courses that are beneficial for all lay leaders, not just pastors. Thus, in consideration of the emerging needs of the current students, the curriculum has been expanded to include new courses like Engaging Culture, Engaging Marriage and Family, Engaging Human Diversities, Engaging Global Issues, and Engaging the Marketplace.

Recognizing that students in ACTS are working adults with different vocational callings, the flexibility of class scheduling and curriculum offering grants them an opportunity to be equipped with relevant skills needed to live out their Christian vocation.

#### *Intentional Focus on Vocational Discernment*

The first initiative is coaching for ministry. “Since the college is open to students . . . [with] different vocational calling[s], there is a new need to provide for development of vocational discernment—helping each student to discern his/her call and be equipped with the relevant competencies to fulfil God’s call.”<sup>15</sup> One intentional effort of the college towards this end is the provision of a non-credit “four-part series dealing with the spiritual dynamics in the personal growth and leadership development of the leader.”<sup>16</sup> The sequence of the series is as follows:

- Coaching for ministry 1: Discernment of Calling<sup>17</sup>
- Coaching for ministry 2: Stages of Leadership
- Coaching for ministry 3: Discovery of Gifting
- Coaching for ministry 4: Management of Lifelong Learning

The first part of the series, Discernment of Calling, sets the foundation by guiding the students in exploring and discovering their vocation. It begins by clarifying the meaning of vocation. Then it proceeds to show that vocation is a dynamic experience as well as a life-time process that can be subjected to

---

<sup>15</sup> Ng, “Theological Education,” 65.

<sup>16</sup> ACTS College, *Prospectus 2017–2020*, 21. These four-part non-credit modules are to be completed at level one and level two of both undergraduate and graduate studies (*ibid.*, 30, 33).

<sup>17</sup> The phrase “spiritual formation” is used in the prospectus but it has been renamed as “coaching” in the module brochure of the first semester, 2019.

revision and reinterpretation. Time is also set aside for reflection, making the session more than just a theoretical, academic teaching session.

Another initiative to help students discern their vocation is a new course, Learning in Christian Community, that was introduced early this year. Espousing a learning paradigm for an integrated holistic learning experience, ACTS is intent on creating a hospitable learning community whereby students can learn through: (1) connecting deeper with God and others, (2) becoming more Christlike, and (3) leading more effectively through vocational discernment.<sup>18</sup> Offered as a compulsory course that all students must complete in their first year of studies, this course seeks to set a foundation by providing a conceptual framework for why and what they are doing when students enroll for theological studies in ACTS. Since God calls and uses people in every walk of life, ACTS seeks to help the students to discover who they are and what God is calling them to do, that is, to find their vocation in life. The Gallup CliftonStrengths assessment is employed to help students discover the talents that have the greatest potential to be developed into strengths through intentional investment and align them with their vocation in life.<sup>19</sup>

Both of these foundational teaching sessions are designed in the hope that, by having a sense of their vocation and talents, students will have a clearer goal and purpose for pursuing theological studies at ACTS. The years spent in ACTS will then be formative in helping them to live out their vocation.

### *Faculty from the Marketplace*

Recognizing that we teach through the implicit curriculum, the college has engaged the help of qualified persons from the marketplace, professionals in their own right, to teach relevant courses in the college.<sup>20</sup> A university lecturer taught Organizational Leadership while a certified coach taught Life Coaching. Currently, ACTS has a bi-vocational faculty member who divides his working hours between a local polytechnic and ACTS.

Inviting marketplace professionals to lecture at the college is done intentionally because these professionals become the implicit lesson that ACTS desires to impart to its students. They serve as role models of Christians who have discerned God's call in the world of work and are faithfully living out their Christian vocation.

---

<sup>18</sup> Casey Ng, "Learning Encounter 2B: Strategies for Learning" (lecture, ACTS College, Singapore, January 10, 2019).

<sup>19</sup> Gallup and Tom Rath, *StrengthsFinder 2.0: Discover Your CliftonStrengths*, CliftonStrengths version (New York: Gallup Press, 2017), 20. "Investment" involves "time spent practicing, developing your skills and building your knowledge base."

<sup>20</sup> Elliot W. Eisner, *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Program*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002), 97. "The implicit curriculum of the school is what it teaches because of the kind of place it is" (ibid.).

## What Does Not Work for ACTS

Upon assessment, the three unfavorable factors that hinder ACTS' efforts in fostering students' vocation are: (1) unrealistic expectation of the college, (2) wrong perception of the college, and (3) shortage of time and manpower.

### *Unrealistic Expectation of the College*

Although ACTS attempts to break the traditional mindset that associates theological education only with full-time ministry, it still hears comments such as: "We no longer produce graduates who have the pioneering spirit to do church planting" or "Unlike our times, graduates today are not interested in full-time church ministry or mission work." Such comments from the college's stakeholders and faculty members reflect a failure to recognize that vocation is not limited to full-time pastoral ministry or missionary work.

### *Wrong Perception of the College*

The null curriculum—that is, "the options students are not afforded"—which, in the case of ACTS, is the absence of classes conducted in the day.<sup>21</sup> The years prior to 2015 saw a decline in student enrollment for day classes. Day classes became financially unsustainable because only a handful of students attended the day classes while the same course had to be offered at night as well. ACTS has had a lean teaching faculty and the lecturers were fatigued, having to teach both in the day and at night. For these reasons and to cater to students who are working during the day, the college hold classes only in the weeknights, except Friday night which is generally a "sacred" night dedicated for prayer meetings and church activities in most churches. This arrangement, however, deters people currently in full-time church ministry from enrolling for classes at ACTS because they have heavy ministry commitments almost every night. Due to this null curriculum, ACTS is now perceived, albeit wrongly, as a college that marginalizes those who have a calling to full-time ministry.

### *Shortage of Time and Manpower*

Although ACTS seeks to help students to discern their vocation, there are no specific steps to guide them to realize their vocation. For various reasons (namely, lack of manpower, lack of time on the part of both faculty members and students), students are not assigned a mentor throughout their course of studies. Though the students did the Gallup CliftonStrengths assessment in Learning in Community, there was not enough time within the course for personal follow-up (although one could pay for a coach from Gallup to help them succeed in using their strengths).

There is probably no quick fix to change what people expect of the college and how they perceive the college to be. Neither is there a simple solution to

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 106–107.

the shortage of manpower or lack of time. Certainly, ACTS would have to find creative solutions to improve the situation.

## What Might Work for ACTS

Reflecting upon my own vocation, I realize that my sense of vocation was slowly developed over the years in the various theological colleges that I attended. I ask myself, “How was that developed?” By the teaching, certainly, but the surprising factor is the hospitality extended to me by the community—especially the teachers who opened their lives to me, and showed me how they were called and what that calling meant for them; and my classmates who listened to my dreams, encouraged me to hope, and helped me to persevere in my calling.

Looking ahead, I believe that we will not produce students with a mature sense of vocation unless we include the practice of hospitality because that is what is needed in an exploratory journey, and that is how God deepens our sense of vocational calling in a community. Apropos to what has been discussed, I will attempt to show, in broad strokes, how the practice of hospitality, expressed through care, inclusion, presence, and reciprocity, might help ACTS in its efforts to help students discover and fulfill the vocation God has given them.<sup>22</sup>

### *Practice of Care*

To care is to attend to the other by being a friend and listening to him or her. Having to maintain professional teacher-student boundaries may make it difficult for teachers to befriend students. Yet, friendship opens up a welcoming communal space that helps to sustain students in their journeys of vocational discernment. As David Cunningham puts it, “Vocation is often born in the midst of relationship.”<sup>23</sup> “Our vocational journeys require the presence of friends who can accompany us, friends who are willing to help us along our way.”<sup>24</sup> With our companionship, students can persevere in their personal, not solitary, adventurous quest, knowing that we are there for them, that we truly care for them.

At the same time, in listening to the other, to his or her story, we practice hospitable care. As the friendship develops, students may feel it is safe for them to open their hearts and share their dreams and aspirations with us. Such a courageous act demands deep listening from us. Patiently, we listen—with our

---

<sup>22</sup> Much of this section is taken from my dissertation-turned-book, *The Motif of Hospitality in Theological Education: A Critical Appraisal with Implications for Application in Theological Education*, ICETE Series (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2016).

<sup>23</sup> David S. Cunningham, “In Various Times and Sundry Places: Pedagogy of Vocation/Vocation as Pedagogy,” in *At This Time and in This Place: Vocation and Higher Education*, ed. David S. Cunningham (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 326.

<sup>24</sup> Paul J. Wadell, “An Itinerary of Hope: Called to a Magnanimous Way of Life,” in *At This Time*, 213.



ears, eyes, and heart—to the spoken, and even unspoken, words. And when we “*listen someone [or something] into existence*,” we make room for “a stronger self to emerge or a new talent to flourish.”<sup>25</sup> By articulating what is in their hearts, the students are able to name their strengths as well as weaknesses and make progress in their vocational journeys.

### *Practice of Inclusion*

Since “vocational discernment is best negotiated in the community of others,”<sup>26</sup> several contributors in the book, *At This Time and In This Place*, advocate the concept of “mentoring communities.”<sup>27</sup> A mentoring community invites everyone in the college community—faculty, administrators, staff, and students—into the work of vocational discernment. Creating such a mentoring environment requires the practice of inclusion whereby everyone is welcomed, no matter where they may be positioned in the hierarchy of roles in the college. Everyone’s vocational journey becomes a faith story that can be shared to give students a broader perspective of vocation and calling that can guide them in their vocational discernment. Besides opening the students’ minds to a myriad of possible callings by God, the unexpected twists and turns in the plot of each faith story will help to dispel the myth that a vocational decision made is never irreversible. Furthermore, these mentoring communities “offer hospitality to the potential of the emerging self” and “access to worthy dreams of self and world,” reinforcing what the practice of attentive care seeks to achieve.<sup>28</sup>

### *Practice of Presence*

In the practice of presence, we let our “self” show up. We are fully present to the other with all that we are (which is our embodied presence) and all that we believe (which is our articulate presence); thus, making their students feel welcome. In their journeys of vocational discernment, students look to us teachers for advice and guidance. When we do not give our full attention, our “dis-embodied” presence makes our student-guests feel like intruders and guilty for having interrupted us in our work. Furthermore, our articulate presence—the way we live our lives—plays a role in showing students how to live out

---

<sup>25</sup> Mary Rose O’Reilly, *Radical Presence: Teaching as Contemplative Practice* (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1998), 21 (original emphasis).

<sup>26</sup> Quincy D. Brown, “Rituals, Contests, and Images: Vocational Discernment beyond the Classroom,” in *At This Time*, 269.

<sup>27</sup> Contributors of the book, *At This Time*, who made reference to mentoring communities or a mentoring environment are Quincy D. Brown, David S. Cunningham, Darby Kathleen Ray, Caryn D. Riswold, Hannah Schell, and Cynthia A. Wells. See the book for details.

<sup>28</sup> Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Emerging Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith*, rev. ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 93, as quoted in Hannah Schell, “Commitment and Community: The Virtue of Loyalty and Vocational Discernment,” in *At This Time*, 250.

one's vocation. In doing all the mundane things that we do as teachers (such as preparing lessons, grading papers, relating to students even outside class hours, and juggling with work demands and personal time), we become exemplars of someone who is living out his or her vocation as a teacher. The values we embody through our lives—conviction, courage, patience, persistence, hard work—will also teach the students what it means to persevere in one's vocation amidst heavy responsibilities and challenging obstacles.

### *Practice of Reciprocity*

The journey of vocational discernment is a journey in which “we never ‘arrive.’ We are always ‘arriving.’”<sup>29</sup> It is always a journey, never a destination.<sup>30</sup> Hence, this ongoing journey of exploration needs a hospitable reciprocal environment. The practice of reciprocity fosters partnership between teachers and students, beyond the classroom and graduation, through dialogue: (1) dialogue of life (sharing life together), (2) dialogue of action and collaboration (doing things together), (3) dialogue of exchange (exchanging ideas and views), and (4) dialogue of experience (reflecting on life experiences and spiritual experiences together). Dialogue, which is never a one-sided monologue, moves away from the traditional teacher-centered, top-down dumping-down approach by making space for a multiplicity of voices, thus providing opportunities for teachers to learn from and together with students, and for students to experiment and reflect, and discern more clearly the shape of their vocation.

## **Conclusion**

Over the years, the leadership at ACTS has been rather proactive in reading contextual trends and has striven to make changes in response to these trends. No longer serving just people with a vocation to traditional full-time ministry, ACTS is intentionally re-evaluating how it can better serve students who have the vocation to live out their faith by serving their churches and the marketplace. What works for ACTS is the high commitment of its self-supporting students, flexibility of class schedule, and explicit curriculum that includes courses to help students discern and live out their vocation, as well as its hidden curriculum that taps on the expertise of professionals from the marketplace. However, ACTS will have to find creative ways to mitigate the unrealistic expectation and negative perception of the college and overcome the limitations and constraints it faces. The journey of vocational discernment can be rough and daunting. Building a hospitable community—that practices care, inclusion, presence, and reciprocity—to walk this journey together might enhance ACTS' efforts in fostering vocation in the here and now.

---

<sup>29</sup> Renée M. LaReau, *Getting a Life: How to Find Your True Vocation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 143.

<sup>30</sup> Cunningham, “In Various Times,” 328.

# FREE DIGITAL RESOURCES FOR PENTECOSTAL STUDIES

<https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/>

# Digital Showcase

ORAL ROBERTS UNIVERSITY

[HOME](#)
[ABOUT](#)
[FAQ](#)
[APPLY NOW](#)
[REQUEST INFO](#)
[MY ACCOUNT](#)

## Pentecostal Mission and Global Christianity: Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series

Although Pentecostalism worldwide represents the most rapidly growing missionary movement in Christian history, scholars from within and outside the movement have only recently begun academic reflection on the mission. This volume...

[View More](#)

### Browse Research and Scholarship

[Follow](#)

- [Research unit, center, or department](#)
- [Journals and peer-reviewed series](#)
- [Featured Publications](#)

Began as a way to share artifacts from ORU's Holy Spirit Research Center freely, the Digital Showcase offers a growing collection of scholarly, creative, and historical works from the breadth of activity at Oral Roberts University and is ORU's Institutional Repository. Most items are available freely, some require ORU login, and all reserve copyright to their holders.

Views expressed in the items posted on the Digital Showcase are those of the contributors only. Their publication on the Digital Showcase does not express or imply endorsement by the Digital Showcase or Oral Roberts University.

### At a Glance

Top 10 Downloads  
All time

Recent Additions  
20 most recent additions  
Activity by year

### Paper of the Day

Igbo tribal practices of reconciliation and forgiveness as a way of interpreting and sustaining the sacrament of reconciliation in the...

Raymond E. Alaneme

Reader from: Monroe, Louisiana, United States

Word & Work, vol. 51, no. 11 (November 1929)

Holy Spirit Research Center ORU Library

Word and Work (Framingham, MA)

Recent Downloads  
2 of 7  
in the past hour

4,556 Total Papers    101,796 Total Downloads    67,509 Downloads in the past year

[Terms of Use](#)    [View Larger](#)

### Browse

[Collections](#)  
[Disciplines](#)  
[Authors](#)

### Search

Enter search terms:  [Search](#)

[In this repository](#) [Advanced Search](#)

[Notify me via email or RSS](#)

### Author Corner

[Author FAQ](#)  
[Submit Research](#)

ORU Library

Save a Project and Manage Online Issues

Start Your Degree 100% Online [Click here to begin](#)

[Click here to Learn More](#)

# Ten Characteristics of Pentecostal Theological Education in the Twenty-first Century

Daniel Topf

## Abstract:

Over one hundred years after its humble beginnings, the Pentecostal movement continues to expand, particularly throughout the Majority World. Pentecostals therefore must ask themselves how they will prepare their future pastors and ministers who will be needed to lead this growing number of congregations. Theological education has been a controversial topic for many Pentecostals—and for good reason, considering that doing theology in an academic setting can be both a blessing and a curse. In this reflective essay the author imagines what the ideal Pentecostal theological education for the twenty-first century might look like. The essay begins by emphasizing the importance of accessibility and then suggests that Pentecostal theological education also needs to be Spirit-filled, missional, contextual, practical, personal, accredited, current, interdisciplinary, and transformative.<sup>1</sup>

**Key words:** Pentecostalism, theological education, accessibility, interdisciplinary approach

## Introduction

When Pentecostals began to spread the gospel in the early twentieth century, they often only had limited access to formal education, including theological education. However, countless pastors, missionaries, and evangelists received training in various kinds of Bible schools, and this is one reason why the Pentecostal movement gained so much momentum, displaying astonishing growth on all six continents. Today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, global renewal Christianity is generally considered to include hundreds of millions of adherents, making it the second-largest expression of the Christian faith, after the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup>

A movement of this size can only be sustained if large numbers of ministers commit themselves to lead its churches. This, in turn, means that large numbers of people will have to be trained to become pastors, and many who are already church leaders will look to theological education as well in order to

---

Daniel Topf ([danieltopf@fuller.edu](mailto:danieltopf@fuller.edu)), originally from Germany, worked in China and Singapore, is now a PhD Candidate at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA and serves as a Regional Mobilizer for the mission agency World Team.

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Wonsuk Ma and Miguel Alvarez, who both provided feedback for this essay. Any shortcomings or inaccuracies remain, of course, my responsibility.

<sup>2</sup> Vinson H. Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Revival, 1901-2001* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 1-2.

receive the knowledge, encouragement, and credentials they need in order to step into the next phase of ministry that God has prepared for them. As the Pentecostal movement continues to mature, the demand for theological education of high quality and relevance will grow, particularly in the Majority World, where large numbers of pastors serve without having earned a degree. This leads to the question: what would the ideal Pentecostal theological education look like in the twenty-first century? Without aspiring to be comprehensive, this essay suggests that such a promising theological education will have to display ten key characteristics. According to these ten key characteristics, Pentecostal theological education needs to be (1) accessible, (2) Spirit-filled, (3) missional, (4) contextual, (5) practical, (6) personal, (7) accredited, (8) current, (9) interdisciplinary, and (10) transformative.

## **1. Pentecostal Theological Education Needs to Be Accessible**

The best theological education in the world is not worth anything if it is not accessible. Unfortunately, when it comes to theological education, it is often those who want it the most who have the least access to it. A great imbalance exists throughout the world today: in those regions where theological resources are abundant, churches are generally declining, which is why there is less and less demand for ministerial training. On the other hand, in those regions where the church is growing (primarily in various parts of the global South), there is a scarcity of theological resources. In light of this tragic imbalance, the question of accessibility needs to be addressed by advocating for global partnerships.<sup>3</sup> Those who have an abundance of resources will have to learn how to share these, looking for ways to have a greater impact with what God has entrusted them. Pentecostals have an advantage here because Pentecostalism is a truly global movement, leading to multiple opportunities for institutions of theological education to forge fruitful partnerships in which both sides can learn from each other.

In addressing accessibility, it will also be crucial to identify what specifically is hindering men and women of God from receiving the kind of theological education they need. In Pentecostal churches all over the world there are people who have a burning desire to serve the Lord and to get trained for the task of the ministry, but there are barriers that are holding them back from stepping into their full potential. What are some of these barriers? Among others, there are,

---

<sup>3</sup> See also Kirsteen Kim, “Unlocking Theological Resource Sharing Between North and South: The need for Missional Theological Education that Values the Whole Church,” *Lausanne Global Analysis* (November 2017): 6, no. 6, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2017-11/unlocking-theological-resource-sharing-north-south>.

- Economic barriers: People may not have the funds to go to a Bible school or seminary, and there are not enough scholarships.
- Language barriers: Most of the theological resources (like books and journals) have been published in Western languages (especially English). Those who do not know English are therefore at a clear disadvantage, and even if they do know English, they may still prefer to study in their heart language.
- Regulatory barriers: In Communist countries like China and Vietnam, and in many Muslim nations, Pentecostals have limited access to theological education because the government is not allowing the operation of independent Bible schools and similar institutions.<sup>4</sup>
- Psychological barriers: In some cases, people may have the desire to train for the ministry but do not go ahead with this plan due to lack of support—for instance, because their family is pressuring them to pursue a more lucrative or more respected career path.
- Technological barriers: Generally speaking, online platforms are helping in making theological education more accessible. However, not everybody has access to electricity and/or the internet—therefore, the reality of the digital divide needs to be part of any conversation regarding the accessibility of Pentecostal theological education in the twenty-first century.<sup>5</sup>

As this brief overview of points demonstrates, there are plenty of issues to be addressed when it comes to making theological education more accessible. No single denomination, school, or organization will be able to address these challenges on their own. Rather, it will take the united effort of all Pentecostals to look for ways to reduce barriers of access to theological education, such as by increasing the number of available scholarships, publishing theological materials in languages other than English, reducing the impact of the digital divide, and mentoring and encouraging those who are interested in theological education. The end goal of these combined efforts should be that all

---

<sup>4</sup> I experienced this to some extent when I was in living in Shanghai, China, and obtained my first theological degree through Global University (<https://www.globaluniversity.edu/>). I then went to Singapore in order to study at TCA College (<http://www.tca.edu.sg/en/>) and participated in a mission trip to an underground Bible school in Vietnam. Other than that, my perspective is mostly Western, considering that I grew up in Germany and am now living in the United States.

<sup>5</sup> The digital divide is most notable when differentiating between rich and poor nations. However, even in a developed country like the United States there are noticeable differences among various groups (such as low income households, minorities, and rural communities), as several reports by the Pew Research Center demonstrate (<https://www.pewresearch.org/topics/digital-divide/>).

Pentecostals desiring to be trained for the ministry will be able to receive a theological education in a Pentecostal setting.

## 2. Pentecostal Theological Education Needs to Be Spirit-Filled

By definition, any theological education that claims to be Pentecostal must place a particular emphasis on the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Shaped by long years of rigorous academic training, some Pentecostal scholars may be tempted to think that students come to their schools in order to learn about a specific theological insight, or what it takes to publish a paper in a prestigious journal. However, the fact is that many students joining a Pentecostal institution of theological education do so because they yearn for an encounter with God. That is why schools like the Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry (BSSM), the Harvest School of Missions conducted by Iris (the ministry founded by Heidi and Roland Baker), and the Discipleship Training School (DTS) offered by Youth With A Mission (YWAM) have become so popular. None of these schools offer an accredited degree, but young people, especially, are drawn to these ministries because they long to experience the work of the Holy Spirit in a tangible way.<sup>6</sup>

Consequently, Pentecostal institutions of theological education need to look for ways to create a culture and atmosphere that welcomes the Holy Spirit, an environment in which students, staff, and faculty are encouraged to hear from God and to expect divine intervention in the form of visions, deliverance, and healings. One of the practical steps toward creating such an atmosphere might be to move away from a weekly chapel service and to embrace a “house of prayer” approach instead. The International House of Prayer in Kansas City (IHOPKC) has achieved a remarkable emphasis on God’s presence by conducting 24/7 prayer for over twenty years now, and all over the world houses of prayer and prayer furnaces have been springing up—so this seems to be a theme the Spirit of God is currently emphasizing.<sup>7</sup>

By contrast, even the word “chapel” points to a different time and a different religious tradition. According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, chapel is defined as a “subordinate place of worship added to or forming part of a large church or cathedral, separately dedicated and devoted to special services,” as the word derives from the Old French *chapele* and from the Medieval Latin *capella*, meaning “chapel, sanctuary for relics.”<sup>8</sup> For a Pentecostal Bible school or seminary it might therefore be more appropriate to look for a different kind of setting in which people come together to seek and worship God. Such a setting centered on the idea of fervent prayer may also include

---

<sup>6</sup> See also the websites for these schools: BSSM (<https://bssm.net/>), School of Missions (<https://www.irisglobal.org/missions/schools/HS32>), DTS (<https://www.ywam.org/dts/>).

<sup>7</sup> As also described on the website of IHOPKC (<https://www.ihopkc.org/about/>).

<sup>8</sup> Online Etymology Dictionary (<https://www.etymonline.com/word/chapel/>).

certain architectural features, such as designating a prayer mountain or building a prayer tower. In the context of Pentecostal theological education, an example for the former would be Asia Pacific Theological Seminary (APTS) in the Philippines, while regarding the latter Oral Roberts University (ORU) is known for having a prominent prayer tower on its campus in Tulsa, Oklahoma.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. Pentecostal Theological Education Needs to Be Missional

From a Pentecostal perspective, the power and presence of the Holy Spirit cannot just be an end in itself. Rather, the Spirit is given as an empowerment for ministry, for missions. As Jesus said in Acts 1:8, “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” (NIV). Based on passages like these, early Pentecostals saw themselves as a missions-minded community. When the first Pentecostals were baptized in the Holy Spirit at places like the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, California, and the Mukti Mission in India, they immediately went out in order to share their experience with other people.

Accordingly, several prominent scholars of Pentecostalism, such as Julie C. and Wonsuk Ma, Allan Anderson, and Amos Yong agree: the Pentecostal movement is, in its very essence, a missionary movement.<sup>10</sup> That this heritage of focusing on missions has important implications for theological education is emphasized by Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen as follows,

If it is true that mission is far more than one of the many tasks that the church does—namely, that the church *is* mission, mission is something that has to do with everything the church is doing, its *raison d'être*—then it means that the ultimate horizon of theological education is the mission of the church. Pentecostalism with its eschatologically loaded missionary enthusiasm and yearning for the power of the Spirit has all the potential of redeeming that promise. Yet, a word of warning is in order here. While Pentecostals have rightly lifted up the needs of the mission as the key factor in shaping education, they have often done so in a way that has shortsightedly promoted merely “practical” tools of effectiveness. The urgency of mission does not mean, therefore, that it need not be theologically grounded or reflected upon. On the contrary, if mission is the mode of existence for the church, it means we should

---

<sup>9</sup> As mentioned on the websites of APTS (<https://apts.edu/facilities/>) and ORU (<https://oru.edu/life-at-oru/spiritual-life/prayer-tower/index.php>).

<sup>10</sup> Julie C. Ma and Wonsuk Ma, *Mission in the Spirit: Towards a Pentecostal/Charismatic Missiology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 7; Amos Yong, “Many Tongues, Many Practices: Pentecost and Theology of Mission at 2010,” in *Mission after Christendom: Emergent Themes in Contemporary Mission*, eds. Ogbu U. Kalu, Peter Vethanayagamony, and Edmund Kee-Fook Chia (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 44; Allan H. Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1-2.



continue careful theological reflection along with praxis of mission, both affirming our praxis and offering needed self-criticism.<sup>11</sup>

Kärkkäinen's assessment here gives food for thought for any Pentecostal Bible school or seminary, inviting to ask questions like: What are the theological foundations for Pentecostal missions? How do we teach our students to reflect on their missionary praxis? What practices in our mission agencies and churches lack a biblical basis and should therefore be critically reviewed? As the Pentecostal movement continues to grow and mature, it will be essential for Pentecostal educators to address these kinds of questions, so that the next generation of Pentecostal missionaries and ministers will be able to engage in missions in a responsible and sustainable manner.

#### **4. Pentecostal Theological Education Needs to Be Contextual**

One of the outstanding strengths of the global Pentecostal movement is how it has been able to adapt to a wide range of cultures, leading to truly indigenous expressions of the Christian faith all over the world. Contextualization has been a buzzword in missions for some time now, but, compared to other expressions of Christianity, Pentecostals have often been more successful in implementing these principles on the ground. One reason for this is that many Pentecostal missionaries were willing to entrust the local churches to national leaders early on, trusting that the Holy Spirit would empower them for this sacred task.<sup>12</sup>

However, while many Pentecostal churches quickly became self-directed, self-supported, and self-propagating, they still lack in one area: they are often not (yet) self-theologizing.<sup>13</sup> While many Pentecostal churches are truly indigenous, the same cannot always be said of Pentecostal institutions of theological education. The reason is that the resources these schools are using have often been published in the West (especially the United States). In addition, those teaching at these institutions often obtained their terminal degrees at seminaries and universities in Western countries—when they return, they therefore tend to teach Western theologies to their students, even though

---

<sup>11</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “Epistemology, Ethos, and Environment: In Search of a Theology of Pentecostal Theological Education,” *Pneuma* 34, no. 2 (2012): 245-61.

<sup>12</sup> The classical text for this is Melvin L. Hodges, *The Indigenous Church: A Complete Handbook on How to Grow Young Churches* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1976).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Timothy C. Tennent, “Theology and the Global Church,” in *Theology, Church, and Ministry: A Handbook for Theological Education*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2017).

these are usually facing an entirely different context in which people ask different questions because they are facing different kinds of issues.<sup>14</sup>

In order to address this challenge, Pentecostals will have to make renewed efforts to develop their own resources for their own contexts. This means that in the various regions of the world (such as Central America, South-East Asia, and East Africa) centers of excellence need to be established, so that Pentecostals will be able to obtain doctoral degrees in theology while staying within their own country (or at least within their own region). In addition, Pentecostal journals, academic conferences, and publishing houses are also needed throughout the Majority World, especially in those areas in which Pentecostalism is displaying most of its growth and vitality.

## 5. Pentecostal Theological Education Needs to Be Practical

Keeping in mind the reflections by Kärkkäinen quoted above, Pentecostals will do well in avoiding a kind of ministerial training that is purely pragmatic and borders more on indoctrination, rather than education. However, once sound theological foundations have been established and students are encouraged to think critically, it is essential for Pentecostal theological education to guide its students toward a fruitful ministry. Graduates of Pentecostal Bible schools and seminaries need to be passionate about serving the church, about building up the body of Christ, because it is for this purpose that these schools were established in the first place.

While Pentecostal educators must be self-critical regarding the shortcomings of their own movement, they should also learn from the mistakes made by other expressions of Christianity. In many cases, the theological education offered by the more established churches has been unhelpful, or even counterproductive. As Tim Dearborn famously wrote in an often-cited article regarding seminary students: “Too often they graduate feeling spiritually cold, theologically confused, biblically uncertain, relationally calloused and professionally unprepared.”<sup>15</sup> In light of these failures, Pentecostals need to develop their own models of theological education, and one of the ways Pentecostal theological education should be different is by offering practical experiences to their students, while they are still studying. Practical elements like field education, service opportunities, mission trips, case studies, internships, mentoring programs, workshops, and application-oriented

---

<sup>14</sup> For an African perspective on this challenge, see Nelson Kalombo Ngoy, *Neo-Pentecostalism: A Post-Colonial Critique of the Prosperity Gospel in the Democratic Republic of the Congo* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2019), 85-90, 118-19, 213-18.

<sup>15</sup> Tim Dearborn, “Preparing New Leaders for the Church of the Future: Transforming Theological Education through Multi-Institutional Partnerships,” *Transformation* 12, no. 4 (October/December 1995): 7.

assignments therefore need to be integrated into the entire process of Pentecostal theological education.<sup>16</sup>

## 6. Pentecostal Theological Education Needs to Be Personal

Many of the practical elements of learning described above are highly personal in nature. In emphasizing the personal dimension in theological education, the entire process could be envisioned as one based on the apprenticeship model. A group of students learning a particular skill or profession under the tutelage of a master in the field is an approach that has a long and honored history, which includes biblical precedents: Elisha was mentored by the prophet Elijah, Timothy learned by working alongside the apostle Paul, and Jesus made it a priority to invest in his twelve disciples over a period of three years.<sup>17</sup>

Given these biblical examples, it makes sense for Pentecostals to emphasize the importance of coming together in order to have a formative experience of growing in the faith. After Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples “all joined *together* constantly in prayer” (Acts 1:14a), and “when the day of Pentecost came, they were all *together* in one place” (2:1, emphasis added). This shows that events like prayer and receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit are communal in nature. Emphasizing the importance of community in Pentecostal theological education has become especially important in view of the technological possibilities that have developed due to the internet. Pentecostals have always been quick to take advantage of modern media to propagate their message, and the opportunities that online platforms offer for studying theology are certainly unprecedented—something that has become even more obvious in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic that began to hit countries all around the world in early 2020.

Nonetheless, I urge Pentecostal educators to proceed with caution when it comes to teaching theology via the internet. Of course, there are situations in which students have no access to a Bible school or seminary—in such circumstances, receiving an online education is obviously better than not receiving one at all. However, whenever possible, Pentecostals should make it a priority to form communities of teachers and learners coming together in a physical location, outside of cyberspace. There is simply no substitute for

---

<sup>16</sup> See also the emphasis on both cognitive and skills outcomes, “integration between theory and praxis,” and “an intentional equipping for ministry” in Miguel Alvarez, “Distinctives of Pentecostal Education,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 3, no. 2 (2000): 284-85, 288, and combining orthodoxy, orthopraxis, and orthopathy, as advocated by Paul W. Lewis, “Explorations in Pentecostal Theological Education,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 161-76.

<sup>17</sup> For a fascinating account of how Italian stone carvers get trained within an apprenticeship model, and how this might relate to the training of theologians, see Stanley Hauerwas, “Carving Stone or Learning to Speak Christian,” in *The State of the University: Academic Knowledge and the Knowledge of God*, 108-21 (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007).

concrete and personal interactions and experiences. Having a lively discussion in the hallway about a topic that was just raised in class, enjoying dinner at a professor's home, being prayed for with the laying on of hands—these are all priceless experiences with an educational component that simply cannot be replaced by a Zoom call or a video lecture.<sup>18</sup>

## 7. Pentecostal Theological Education Needs to Be Accredited

Having spoken about the power of the Holy Spirit and the value of community, it now may seem somewhat anticlimactic to discuss an administrative topic like accreditation. For Pentecostals who want to focus on a ministry-oriented kind of theological education, it can be difficult to see why accreditation should be part of their educational endeavors. After all, the accreditation process can be cumbersome and lead to stipulations and standardized processes that can seem limiting and restrictive. In addition, are not many established and accredited seminaries a warning example of how theological education should *not* be done, considering how limited their positive impact is on the overall growth and health of the body of Christ?

These objections cannot be easily pushed aside, especially not when one considers the famous study by the sociologist Christian Lalive d'Epinay who in 1967 published an article on the training and education of pastors in Chile. In this case study, Lalive d'Epinay compared the preparation and the ministry of Methodist and Presbyterian pastors with those from a Pentecostal background and concluded that the Pentecostals' apprenticeship model "of pastoral training is an important factor in the success of Pentecostalism," while "the system of 'training by seminary' is not without significance for the problem of the shortage of candidates for the ministry in the [mainline] Protestant Churches and for their stagnation."<sup>19</sup>

However, despite the shortcomings and potential pitfalls of formal theological education, there is still a case to be made for accredited institutions. To begin with, accreditation has tangible benefits, such as ensuring quality control and upholding standards—achievements that are difficult to maintain in an unaccredited school, especially over time. But let us assume, for argument's sake, that an unaccredited Pentecostal Bible school consistently succeeds in providing a high-quality education for its students—why should it still seek accreditation? I would argue that accreditation is crucial, so that students have a wider range of choices available to them once they graduate. The student graduating from an accredited Bible college may later desire to

---

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, the benefits of having students and scholars to come together at a place like Asia Pacific Theological Seminary (APTS), as described by David Lim, "The Challenge of Balancing Spirit and Academics in Asian Pentecostal Theological Institutions," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 17, no. 1 (2014): 91-93.

<sup>19</sup> Christian Lalive d'Epinay, "The Training of Pastors and Theological Education: The Case of Chile," *International Review of Mission* 56, no. 222 (April 1967): 190.

attend seminary and even study for a PhD one day. Or students may go on to graduate school in order to study a different subject as they desire to be a witness for Christ in a particular sector of society (outside the church). Both of these groups are needed: we need Pentecostal scholars with terminal degrees who can teach and write from a Pentecostal perspective, and we also need committed Pentecostals who understand the complexities of modern life and can speak to the issues of our time, whether they do so from the pulpit or from some other public platform.

## 8. Pentecostal Theological Education Needs to Be Current

If pastors and other Pentecostal leaders want to address current issues and be a prophetic voice in our time, they need to be up-to-date and well-informed. This need to be current must begin in the theological realm. As Amos Yong emphasizes, we now live in “a post-Christendom, postcolonial, and post-foundationalist networked world,” which is why both “theology and missiology cannot but be thoroughly relational, dialogical, multicultural, and multidirectional.”<sup>20</sup> Such an environment is radically different from the one theologians were operating in just a few decades ago; accordingly, administrators and professors of Pentecostal theological institutions need to take a close look at their curriculum, their library, and their syllabi, ensuring that they are updated on a regular basis.

In addition to theological issues, Pentecostal educators should also be familiar with current developments and trends that are increasingly shaping individuals and societies in the twenty-first century. Some of these crucial developments include,

- Urbanization: For the first time in all of human history, more people now live in urban than in rural areas.<sup>21</sup>
- The Fourth Industrial Revolution: Technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) and advanced robotics are rapidly progressing. Both blue-collar and white-collar jobs will be threatened by these developments, which therefore has important implications for everything related to education and training.<sup>22</sup>
- A multipolar world: While the United States dominated the twentieth century (economically, militarily, culturally, but also in terms of theology and missions), the twenty-first century will most likely have

---

<sup>20</sup> Amos Yong, *Renewing the Church by the Spirit: Theological Education after Pentecost* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020), 98 [page number in the manuscript].

<sup>21</sup> This “watershed moment in the evolution of human society” was reached in 2008. John Lorinc, *Cities* (Toronto, Canada: Groundwood Books, 2008), 7.

<sup>22</sup> I began exploring these themes in my article, “The Fourth Industrial Revolution and Its Impact on Pentecostal Higher Education,” *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research* 26 (February 2019), <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj26/topf.html>.

several strong players competing with each other, especially as China and India become large and powerful economies.

- Demographics: By the year 2050, the world population is expected to reach 9.7 billion people, leading to increased demand for drinking water, food, energy, and natural resources—especially in the countries of the global South.<sup>23</sup>

In light of these developments, the staff, teachers, and administrators of Pentecostal theological institutions need to become life-long learners and constantly update their skills, so that they are aware of the social, technological, political, economic, and demographic realities of their local and global contexts. Students studying at a Pentecostal Bible school or seminary should be able to sense that they are receiving an education that is current, that prepares them for the future—rather than one that is stuck in the past.

## **9. Pentecostal Theological Education Needs to Be Interdisciplinary**

Given the interconnected nature and complexity of current affairs and future challenges that will define the twenty-first century, it is crucial for Pentecostal theology students to be well-informed. Consequently, Pentecostal institutions of theological education need to create an environment in which students cannot only learn about the Bible, but about other subjects as well. In the history of theological education, there is a long tradition of drawing from other disciplines (such as philosophy) in order to be able to explain theological truths more accurately. More recently, other disciplines (such as psychology and anthropology) have also been beneficial in order to shed additional light on areas of research like counseling and missiology. One example of such an integrated approach in the evangelical context is Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, which not only has a School of Theology, but also a School of Psychology and a School of Intercultural Studies.<sup>24</sup>

Within Pentecostalism, the educational focus has mostly been rather narrow, but there are exceptions. Historically, several Pentecostal Bible schools have gone through a development in which they started as ministerial training centers but later became Bible colleges, liberal arts colleges, and even full-fledged universities, thereby offering their students a wide range of both undergraduate and graduate degrees. As the Pentecostal educator Jeff Hittenberger points out, these developments began in the United States, such as in the case of Southern California Bible School, an institution founded by the Assemblies of God in 1920, which later developed into a liberal arts college and, in 1999, became Vanguard University. However, more recently, this trend

---

<sup>23</sup> United Nations, “World Population Prospects 2019: Highlights” (June 2019), [https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019\\_10KeyFindings.pdf](https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019_10KeyFindings.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> See also the explanation on the website of Fuller Theological Seminary (<https://www.fuller.edu/about/>).

can also be observed in African countries, such as in Ghana where the International Central Gospel Church founded a ministerial training institute in 1988, which became Central Christian College in 1994 and today is known as Central University.<sup>25</sup>

Understandably, not every Pentecostal Bible school or seminary will have the vision or the necessary means to transform their institution into a college or university. However, schools that decide to only offer theological subjects could still look for ways to give their students exposure to other fields of inquiry, such as by establishing a partnership with a more comprehensive institution of higher education. In the twenty-first century, Pentecostal educational institutions need to prepare their graduates to not only serve the church but society as well, and in order to be prepared for such a task it will be beneficial for their students to be knowledgeable in areas like business, technology, and the arts.

## 10. Pentecostal Theological Education Needs to Be Transformative

In Isaiah, water is a powerful picture for the Holy Spirit. In the arid climate of the Middle East, water brings forth an astonishing metamorphosis: where there once used to be only desert, flowers and trees come forth as soon as there is water, thereby creating an oasis in the midst of a hostile environment (cf. Isa. 32:15; 44:3-4). Another image that is popular among Pentecostals is the vision of the dry bones, as recorded in Ezekiel 37. In this vision, Ezekiel at first only sees dead bones, but then God's Spirit breathes life into them—and suddenly the bones start coming together, tendons, flesh, and skin appear, and finally a living army of God's people stands before the prophet (Ezek. 37:1-10).

Graduates from Pentecostal institutions of theological education are called to be such agents of transformative and life-giving change. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, they will (hopefully) bring transformation to their churches, and these churches can then, in turn, bring healing and restoration to their communities—as an expression of God's *shalom* and a foretaste of God's kingdom, which is yet to come in fullness when Jesus returns.<sup>26</sup>

Of course, for students to become agents of transformation, they will first have to experience God's transformative power in their own lives. Pentecostal Bible schools and seminaries ought to be catalysts for experiencing this kind of revival and renewal. In fact, the value of community and spirituality is something that is increasingly being recognized, even in the context of secular higher education, as also the following quote demonstrates: “Many students . . . hold the expectation that college will be not only a place to learn but also a

---

<sup>25</sup> Jeffrey S. Hittenberger, “Globalization, ‘Marketization,’ and the Mission of Pentecostal Higher Education in Africa,” *Pneuma* 26, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 198.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Murray W. Dempster, “Evangelism, Social Concern, and the Kingdom of God,” in *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*, eds. Murray A. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 24-39.

place to become and belong. They want college to be a time of personal transformation, when they will become the person they long to be.”<sup>27</sup> If even secular colleges and universities are beginning to pay attention to these aspects related to personal transformation, how much more should Pentecostal educators make every effort that their Bible school or seminary is not only a place where students will learn, but also a place where they will become mature believers and develop a sense of belonging, forging spiritual friendships that will last for a lifetime.

## Conclusion

I began this essay by pointing out that Pentecostal theological education needs to be, first of all, accessible. Once learners have access to a Bible school or seminary, they will especially benefit from it if the institution is accredited and if its approach to education is Spirit-filled, missional, contextual, practical, personal, current, interdisciplinary, and transformative. In doing so, I emphasized what would characterize an ideal Pentecostal theological education, while at times also making suggestions how these characteristics might be achieved or strengthened.

However, it would be a mistake to perceive Pentecostal theological education as primarily an administrative or strategic task. As Parker Palmer has so masterfully pointed out, educators tend to ask the *what* question (“what subjects shall we teach?”) and maybe also *how* questions (“what methods and techniques are required to teach well?”). Then, going deeper, some people dare to ask the *why* question (“for what purpose and to what ends do we teach?”)—but many neglect the *who* question: “who is the self that teaches?”<sup>28</sup> Teaching, says Palmer, is ultimately not about technique, but flows from the inner life of the teacher, from the soul, encompassing intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions.<sup>29</sup> Pentecostals have an advantage in this regard, since theirs is a holistic spirituality that emphasizes the tangible and emotive aspects of the faith. Traditionally, the intellectual dimension of the faith has been less emphasized within Pentecostalism, but this, too, is being addressed.<sup>30</sup> Pentecostal Bible schools and seminaries on all six continents have the great privilege and responsibility to contribute to a renewal of the Pentecostal movement as it continues to unfold in the twenty-first century. *Come, Holy Spirit, and renew Pentecostal theological education in all the earth!*

---


<sup>27</sup> Arthur W. Chickering, Jon C. Dalton, and Liesa Stamm, *Encouraging Spirituality and Authenticity in Higher Education* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 154.

<sup>28</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, Twentieth Anniversary Ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2017), 4.


<sup>29</sup> Palmer, *Courage to Teach*, 5.

<sup>30</sup> E.g., Rick M. Nñez, *Full Gospel, Fractured Minds?: A Call to Use God's Gift of the Intellect* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005).






APTS PRESS  
presents



**CHECK OUT OUR !**  
*best selling book!*

*Roger Stronstad's*  
**SPIRIT SCRIPTURE AND THEOLOGY**  
NEW EXPANDED EDITION!  
*A Pentecostal Perspective*

New edition of Spirit, Scripture and Theology,  
is presented here again with a new chapter on  
prophecy.



**WWW.APTSPRESS.ORG**

**The Christian Campus Community  
as a Vehicle of Transformational Discipleship:  
Training Emerging Christian Leaders for Community Transformation**

**Barry L. Saylor**

**Abstract:**

This study addresses contemporary studies on emerging adulthood and Generation Z, including the National Study of Youth and Religion and its subsequent studies, to present an image of today's college and university students. It argues that the lived experience of contemporary students has uniquely shaped them for such a time as this, and also envisions the Pentecostal campus as a unique environment in which to foster the development of a missional attitude toward community. As an intentional community, the Pentecostal campus provides an atmosphere in which to disengage from secular culture in order to more effectively reengage the contemporary world upon graduation. Specifically, Pentecostal theological educators are challenged to immerse students into the kind of Christian community that supports formation of their Christian identity. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio*, which draws on Ferdinand Tönnies' theory of community versus society, is presented as a model for intentional community. Bonhoeffer's view of Christian community is presented alongside research on contemporary emerging adults to demonstrate that this community is both desired by this population and also that it will be important in shaping ministry in the years to come. It is argued that an intentional focus on community will better equip Pentecostal college and university students to minister to a disconnected world upon graduation.

**Key words:** Pentecostal theological education, emerging adulthood, generation Z, community transformation, campus life, spiritual formation

As the contemporary world grapples with the effects of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, many find themselves more disconnected than ever. For many, this has led to a heightened awareness of one's community, and an increasing level of creativity in creating these human connections.<sup>1</sup> It seems as though, now as ever, the importance of community is essential. As one who spends a great deal of time either researching or interacting with the current generation

---

Barry L. Saylor ([bsaylor@trinitybiblecollege.edu](mailto:bsaylor@trinitybiblecollege.edu)) serves as Associate Professor of Bible and Theology at Trinity Bible College and Graduate School in Ellendale, ND and as the Executive Director for the World Alliance of Pentecostal Theological Education (WAPTE).

<sup>1</sup> Emily A. Vogels, "From virtual parties to ordering food, how Americans are using the internet during COVID-19." Pew Research Group. April 30, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/30/from-virtual-parties-to-ordering-food-how-americans-are-using-the-internet-during-covid-19/>.

of college students, I find hope in our current circumstances, both in the ability of this generation and in the Pentecostal campus to address this challenge.

Before delving into the heart of this topic, it is important to set the groundwork for a work such as this. Anytime one attempts a generational study of sorts, there is the danger of speaking about “them” in a way that is not constructive. A recent social media exchange comes to mind. At a time when poking fun of Millennials was at its height, the Twitter hashtag #HowToConfuseAMillennial<sup>2</sup> was launched and, as social media often does, the multitudes responded in mass. Below are some examples of the first wave of content:

- Show them a phone book. #HowToConfuseAMillennial
- Turn off their autocorrect. #HowToConfuseAMillennial
- Hand them a job application form. #HowToConfuseAMillennial

But then a funny thing happened; these young people turned the tables, sharing what they find confusing, and even condemning, about the choices they face in this society:

- Destroy the housing market. Replace grad jobs with unpaid internships. Tell them to buy a house. #HowToConfuseAMillennial
- Crash their economy and then condescendingly ask why so many of them are living with their parents. #HowToConfuseAMillennial
- Tell them to follow their passions! As long as they aren’t passionate about art, writing, or anything creative. #HowToConfuseAMillennial
- Baby Boomers will tweet #HowToConfuseAMillennial then call us to fix their internet problems 30 seconds later.

Now, before this article devolves into its own unhelpful version of generational punditry, it is important to identify a kingdom problem in this social media exchange. What is apparent in all of these tweets? Each of them points the finger at *another* instead of identifying bonds that should unify, and in doing so, these generations of “tweeters” might have missed an opportunity to learn from one another.

I would propose that the emerging generation of Pentecostal students in our colleges and universities is attempting to teach us something about reaching their generation, perhaps even pointing inadvertently to the new normal of church ministry following the current global crisis. It is up to us to handle this transition with wisdom and grace and to seek to understand how best to speak the language of these emerging generations in our theology and in

---

<sup>2</sup> Kara Powell and Steven Argue, *Growing With: Every Parent’s Guide to Helping Teenagers and Young Adults Thrive in Their Faith, Family, and Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2019), 19-20.

training church leaders prepared to impact the world. In a book released less than a year prior to the outbreak of the virus, David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock contended that many in Western Christianity are attempting to prepare young people for a culture more closely resembling the world from which adults have come than the one in which young people currently live. In their words: “We believe many parents, educators, pastors, and other leaders are trying to prepare young Christians for Jerusalem, to keep them safe and well protected for a world they no longer live in.”<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the current global crisis accelerates this statement even further.

When I first presented this paper at the 2019 Pentecostal World Conference in Calgary, it was given as part of a broad examination of the role of Pentecostal theological education in training Christian leaders for community transformation. Ulrik Josefsson opened this discussion with the proposal that many outside of the Pentecostal movement, in fact possibly more than those within, seem to realize the instrumental role of this movement in global community transformation.<sup>4</sup> This statement aligns well with a general sentiment that Pentecostalism has become the leading Christian movement around the world. Mark Noll, writing from an outsider’s perspective, reports that Pentecostal experience has become the normative expression worldwide. He says, “With only some hyperbole, we might say that although some of the world’s new Christian communities are Roman Catholic, some Anglican, some Baptist, some Presbyterian and many independent, almost all are Pentecostal in a broad sense of the term.”<sup>5</sup> If it is true that the Spirit-filled movement has taken such a leading role within Christianity, it is imperative that those who train its next generations of leadership be wise and use this momentum to empower young leaders to preach the gospel, and to be beacons of justice, peace, and hope throughout the world.

## The Failed Secular Order

The first task in this initiative is to recognize the failed order of those who have stood against the Church and the opportune moment in which we live and operate through the empowering of the Spirit. Charles Taylor’s key work on secularism, *A Secular Age*, addresses the transition from the enlightenment through modernism by identifying a cultural shift he labels disenchantment. Taylor refers to this as a “titanic shift” toward an emphasis on immanence in secularism as “many people are happy living for goals which are purely

---

<sup>3</sup> David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019), 28.

<sup>4</sup> Ulrik Josefsson, “The Role of Pentecostalism in Community Transformation.” Presentation in the World Alliance for Pentecostal Theological Education Affinity Group at the Pentecostal World Conference, Calgary, AB, Canada, August 28, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 34.

immanent; they live in a way that takes no account of the transcendent.”<sup>6</sup> This shift has taken Western civilization from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith is one human possibility among others;<sup>7</sup> from the premodern world in which power outside of oneself was assumed, to the secular age where *all* is claimed to be found available in oneself.

James K. A. Smith summarizes Taylor’s idea well when he says, “According to secularization theory, as culture experiences modernization and technological advancement, the (divisive) forces of religious belief and participation wither in the face of modernity’s disenchantment of the world... [removing] the irrationality of religious belief and instead be[ing] governed by universal, neutral rationality.”<sup>8</sup> The certainty of a divine reality beyond humanity has existed throughout time, whether that be the god of Baal, the God of Judaism, the pagan gods of the Greco-Roman era, the Christian trinitarian God, the Muslim Allah, or eastern conceptions of divinity; the supernatural has been accepted throughout the ages. The advancements of the Enlightenment, the notions of modernity, and more recently the opposition of post-modernity have forced the very notion of faith (enchantment) aside, and quite frankly, were supposed to have improved modern societies; and yet, communities suffer in the face of such progressive notions. In a lecture at Duke University, one theologian noted the backward motion of such thinking, calling it, “The great unlearning of the languages of transcendence.”<sup>9</sup> This backward motion has moved mankind inward, into thinking that the only god worth relying upon – the sole source of societal answers—is oneself.

The secular world of the twenty first century is a world that has lost the enchantment of the ages. Mark Sayers, pastor of Red Church in Melbourne, Australia, calls it the “soft power” of a post-Christian culture: “They don’t bludgeon you out of your faith; they subtly coax you, each option quietly proclaiming a kind of gospel in itself, in which the good life can be yours.”<sup>10</sup> And yet this “godless utopia” that the secularists had promised is anything but. In the midst of the failed “secular experiment” stands a God of order and of peace and of justice; a God who transforms lives and communities. In the midst of the wreckage of our societies stands a generation yearning for reform;

---

<sup>6</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007), 143.

<sup>7</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> James K.A. Smith, *How (Not) to be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 21.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church’s Obsession with Youthfulness*. Ministry in a Secular Age (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), xii.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Sayers, *Disappearing Church: From Cultural Relevance to Gospel Resilience* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2016), 10-11.

eager for supernatural community transformation.<sup>11</sup> Pentecostal Theological higher education, then, must accept the call to raise up leaders equipped to be community transformers.

## Disengage to Re-engage

Helpful in understanding the initial role of Pentecostal theological education in this secular age is Douglas John Hall's proposal that one must disengage in preparation to re-engage with culture. Such a strategic posture is not an end in itself but "a strategic matter for the sake of refocusing and redeciding about [one]'s identity and mission."<sup>12</sup> This intentional posture is a manner of training emerging generations how to live in contemporary culture without becoming a part of it. For young Christian leaders to find their mission in ministering to the contemporary world, they must first find their identity in the Christian community.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer addresses this subject throughout his works on Christian community. Bonhoeffer recognizes a deeply theological component at play, saying, "Christian community is not an ideal we have to realize, but rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate."<sup>13</sup> For Bonhoeffer, Christian community was a Christian mandate into which all the church was called to enter.<sup>14</sup> Let us look briefly to Bonhoeffer's vision of community to further dictate our own.

## A Radical Commitment to Community

In his dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer draws on the sociological work of Ferdinand Tönnies who contrasts the idea of community versus

---

<sup>11</sup> Keep in mind that the current generation of college and university students has experienced quite a tumultuous period, particularly in American history. Many of these students were born around the time of the Enron scandal, were learning to walk and talk at the time of the dot-com bust of 2000, survived the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, were beginning to form a worldview around the time of the 2008 financial crisis, and are now entering their vocational training and/or career in the uncertain environment caused by the outbreak of COVID-19. Not only is this generation hungry for transformation, but they have been uniquely conditioned to be the ones to lead in this endeavor. This generation's circumstances have forced them to develop a level of toughness which caused one book to predict that these students "will have a strong work ethic similar to Baby Boomers and the responsibility and resiliency of their Generation X parents." Corey Seemiller and Meghan Grace, *Generation Z Goes to College* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 7.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching Among Exiles* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 80.

<sup>13</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works: Life Together and the Prayerbook of the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 38.

<sup>14</sup> For a classic study on Bonhoeffer's social theology see Clifford J. Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, Revised, subsequent ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

society. Bonhoeffer's thought can be summarized that the Western world has lost its emphasis on community in the escalation of the functional society and "the fetishizing of productivity."<sup>15</sup> Bonhoeffer follows Tönnies in seeing community as something wholly distinct from society, seeking a church that reflects community over the society "for the [community]...upholds and even creates personhood; the [community] wears at least some of the stripes of the family."<sup>16</sup> For Bonhoeffer, the church must hold to its identity as community and never give in to the outside pressure of becoming a utilitarian society. This is what sets the Christian community apart from the functional society.

For some this is a reminder of Augustine's *City of God*. Robert Wilken notes Augustine's view as a "perfectly ordered and harmonious fellowship in the enjoyment of God," a peace of "enjoying one another in God."<sup>17</sup> He summarizes Augustine's view saying that "the greatest gift the church can give society is a glimpse, however fleeting, of another city, where the angels keep 'eternal festival' before the face of God."<sup>18</sup> Much in the way Augustine recognized a unique component to Christian identity, Bonhoeffer distinguishes the Christian community, not only in faith but in practice.

What is it, though, that makes this kind of radical commitment to community so central to the role of Pentecostal theological education? Recent research suggests that younger generations in North America are less trusting of some of the foundational components of community. The Pew Research Center noted that American adults ages 18-29 "stand out for their comparatively low levels of trust" when it comes to confidence in both individuals and key institutions.<sup>19</sup> The very idea of community, which was once based on one's neighbors and institutions, has been diminished. To build leaders who will transform communities, then, we must first build communities which reinvigorate this principle. Pentecostal institutions of higher education must become *communities* of transformation that in turn launch leaders equipped with the vision to replicate this experience in their context.

## A Radical Commitment to Conversation

Central to Bonhoeffer's approach was a sort of dialogical community which intentionally engages in thoughtful discussion. For instance, Ferdinand Schlingensiepen notes that Bonhoeffer wrote a catechism designed to "help

---

<sup>15</sup> Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*, 50.

<sup>16</sup> Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*, 50.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 195.

<sup>18</sup> Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 210.

<sup>19</sup> John Gramlich, "Young Americans are less trusting of other people – and key institutions – than their elders." Pew Research Group. August 6, 2019.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/06/young-americans-are-less-trusting-of-other-people-and-key-institutions-than-their-elders/>.

create relational sharing through discussion.”<sup>20</sup> Bonhoeffer, as well as many others, was beginning to criticize Luther’s Shorter Catechism, which used a set of memorized questions and answers to drive home central biblical truths. Schlingensiepen explains Bonhoeffer’s divergent approach saying, “They used the traditional format of questions and answers, but these were not to be learned by heart, becoming instead a stimulus for discussion with the young people.”<sup>21</sup> This approach rejected either an abstract application or a rote form of memory bearing no connection to reality. Instead, Bonhoeffer promoted genuine discussion around the application of one’s faith.

It is interesting how Bonhoeffer’s dialogical approach relates to Israel’s mode of education. Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann notes that Israel’s exchange of information between adult and child took on a very un-authoritarian and yet very authoritative form.<sup>22</sup> Three characteristics can be identified which support this point: Teaching was open and easily dialogical (Deut 6:20-24), it was modeled on a sort of invitation for the child to ask questions, and the expected adult response included a form of testimonial evidence of their own faith.<sup>23</sup> The result was a natural dialogue throughout one’s development in which faith became a sort of gift that was waiting for the opportune moment at which a young person was ready to engage.

This understanding is increasingly applicable in contemporary North American culture. In the Barna Group’s recent study on Generation Z,<sup>24</sup> they noted an inherent distrust in one’s public persona. Perhaps it should not be surprising that a generation growing up in such a media-saturated, talking-point-centered society would demonstrate such a cynicism. Two Dutch cultural theorists recently addressed this issue, proclaiming that postmodern irony and cynicism have been replaced with what they are calling a “new sincerity.” This new stance “still wants to deconstruct, but not wantonly. Rather, by deconstructing beliefs, conventions, and traditions, it believes it can create a better world. It is cultural deconstruction with a messianic purpose. It believes we can have a better world, but it is not sure how to get there.”<sup>25</sup> This “new sincerity” sounds like the kind of response that might be hastened by the current global climate.

These studies, along with many others, serve as a reminder of the hope one can see in this emerging generation and yet the bleakness of their condition. For Pentecostal theological education, this intensifies the need for deep

---

<sup>20</sup> Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*, 92.

<sup>21</sup> Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906-1945: Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2010), 79-80.

<sup>22</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Creative Word: Canon as a Model for Biblical Education* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982), 16.

<sup>23</sup> Brueggemann, *The Creative Word*, 16-18.

<sup>24</sup> *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation*. Barna Group, 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Mark Sayers, *Disappearing Church*, 38.



relationships, for those who will come alongside of this generation and re-imagine what the church can do in the face of a failed secular agenda.

Kenda Creasy Dean took part in the landmark National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) in the early part of this century and followed up with a look at those whom the study identified as the “devoted.” The “devoted” were the 8% of young people interviewed who “attended religious services, weekly or more often, participated in religious youth groups, prayed and read the Bible regularly, and said they felt very close to God and that faith is extremely important in their lives.”<sup>26</sup> These were the young people identified by the NSYR as best prepared to live out their faith and to impact their world for Christ upon entry into the adult world. Dean’s presentation in her book, *Almost Christian*, is helpful in proposing the type of radical commitment to community that is the best fit for producing the kind of transformational leaders necessary to envision the church’s way forward.

One of the definitive factors that Dean recognized in this group of devoted young believers is a cultural toolkit which enabled them to navigate their world. Ann Swidler defines this cultural toolkit as “the symbols, stories, rituals, relationships, and worldviews that we pick up from our experience of the world around us – our default operating system – [used] to construct meaning and guide our actions in the world.”<sup>27</sup> The highly “devoted” of the NSYR demonstrated just these types of characteristics: confession to their tradition’s creed; belonging to a community that enacts the God-story; a calling by this story to a larger purpose; and hope for the future promised by this story.<sup>28</sup>

These factors point to the very refocusing of identity and mission necessary to become the new church that will reach this new generation. A radical commitment to community opens the door for students to discover an identity stilted by a failed secular order, while a radical commitment to conversation challenges students to develop their vision, to deepen their faith, and to prepare for their mission.

This is the kind of purposeful community that the Pentecostal campus must become: a campus that understands its intentional disengagement from a culture that has lost its divine imagination and that purposefully prepares to re-engage and to transform communities with the power of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostal campuses must demonstrate the kind of radical commitment to community that facilitates students in fully stepping into their Spirit-empowered identity and practicing the sort of radical commitment to

---

<sup>26</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 46. It should also be noted that this 8% aligns well with *Faith for Exiles* by Kinnaman and Matlock, which identifies 10% of these who have held onto their faith into their emerging adult years. In their study, these are identified as Resilient Exiles.

<sup>27</sup> Dean, *Almost Christian*, 48.

<sup>28</sup> Dean, *Almost Christian*, 49.

conversation that is essential to empower them in their vision, deepening faith, and mission.

## Conclusion

In many ways the college campus is an ideal environment for such preparation. Dean notes that the kind of development we are discussing here requires an integration identified in situated learning theory as “legitimate peripheral participation,” which “refers to the way newcomers become integrated into communities – namely, by participating in them.”<sup>29</sup> This kind of participation is best described as an immersive experience, a rather fitting description of the college campus. If campuses exemplify the principles of radical community and radical conversation described here – principles that are sorely lacking in many contemporary societies – we are rightly preparing students for their first steps toward community transformation.

On May 7, 2012, the *Atlantic* published an article by Jen Doll titled, “On the Importance of Having superheroes.” Doll reflects in the article on the cultural fascination in the U.S with superheroes. Based on the success of *The Avengers*, and other films in this genre, she says, “We want something bigger than us – these are like the steroid fables of our time, the giant, expansive, special-effects-laden lessons through which we can hope to look at humanity and do a little better in the human-world.”<sup>30</sup> Such a fascination with superheroes betrays a longing for supernatural power to help overcome human limitations in real life. Doll concludes, “The beauty of superheroes is that they’re aspirational while still at the same time relieving any pressure to actually become a superhero because, well, that’s impossible.”

Christians—especially Pentecostals—cannot rest easily in such a conclusion. Sharon Galgay Ketcham comments, “The Spirit’s presence and the inconceivable go hand in hand.”<sup>31</sup> Ketcham captures Theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg’s portrayal of the Spirit’s power as lifting us out of our limited selves and into a power that exceeds human ability. For when the Spirit is present, superhuman abilities are possible.

The central cultural challenge facing Pentecostal Theological education is an attack on the very thing which will treat the wounds of our communities: the power of the Spirit. Our world continues to thirst for the supernatural and to seek out something in which to believe. It is our task to raise up leaders who have intentionally disengaged from a failed secular culture in order to identify with the power of the Spirit - the only power that can transform communities. It is also our task to critically engage a generation that is facing challenges

---

<sup>29</sup> Dean, *Almost Christian*, 145.

<sup>30</sup> Jen Doll, “On the Importance of Having Superheroes,” in *The Atlantic*. May 7, 2012. <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/05/importance-having-superheroes/328461/>.

<sup>31</sup> Sharon Galgay Ketcham, *Reciprocal Church: Becoming A Community Where Faith Flourishes Beyond High School* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2018), 81-82.

unlike any known in recent history. As one author wrote in his hypothetical commencement speech to the class of 2020:

Fall to pieces. Delete your thesis.  
Break up the ships that chase golden fleeces.  
Your pure imaginations  
    will fight angelic wars  
    as the talons of the sunset  
    touch the socially distanced stars.  
Yours, all yours, is the future of America  
    and its promise without measure.  
No pressure.<sup>32</sup>

The current climate requires something different, perhaps something more than was formerly required of Christian higher education. As Pentecostals, we trust that this is to be found in the leading of the Spirit, but we also recognize that the Spirit often speaks through our circumstances and not only in spite of them. As campuses radically committed to community and radically committed to conversation, we position ourselves to engage a world that has become increasingly aware of its lack of connection. Through these commitments and the continued guiding of the Holy Spirit, today's Pentecostal colleges and universities have the opportunity to raise up the leaders of this increasingly influential movement who might not only change the church but stand the chance of changing the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

---

<sup>32</sup> James Parker, "The Advice that Most 2020 Commencement Speakers Won't Give," in *The Atlantic*. May 24, 2020.  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2020/05/the-advice-that-most-2020-commencement-speakers-wont-give/612040/>.

## Reviews

Vondey Wolfgang, *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel* (London: T&T Clark, 2017). Pp. 320 including Index. ISBN: 9780567275394 (paper).

This book was written by Wolfgang Vondey (PhD Marquette University). Professor of Christian Theology and Pentecostal Studies, and Director of the Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies at the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom. Vondey is an experienced scholar who has written several works on Pentecostal theology.

Needless to say, this is a unique book! After long years of serving in a Pentecostal denomination, you talk about these topics, and even hear people craving for a volume that explains Pentecostal theology in the academic yet understandable-by-the-grassroots' realm. It is a great reflection on Pentecostal thought and praxis. Its scope encompassed praxis, hermeneutics and Christian thought.

The author structured the book into two parts. The first, contains a description of the full gospel story. In this part Vondey discusses (1) salvation: the meeting of Jesus at the altar; (2) sanctification: the participation of believers in the life of God; (3) baptism of the Holy Spirit: the transformation generated by the Holy Spirit; (4) healing: the manifestations of signs and wonders; and (5) commissioned: the proclamation and enacting of the incoming kingdom.

In the second part, the volume contains an explanation of the full gospel theology. This section offers a template whereby theological teachers could explain Pentecostal theology in creative ways. (1) Creation: the work of the Spirit, redemption and cosmology; (2) humanity: the divine image, human agency and theological anthropology are discussed. (3) Society: In this section Vondey discusses civilization, the common good, and cultural anthropology. I like these topics for they fit on my 'integral mission' debate. (4) Church: a clear understanding of mission, movement and ecclesiology; and (5) God: Pentecost, altar and doxology. I have never seen a Pentecostal explanation of these elements like these. The author has done an outstanding presentation of God and his meeting with His folk at the altar. After all, He deserves all the glory and the honor! Vondey's unique way to explain the full gospel has caught the readers' attention. Hence, the metaphoric approach to the teachings of the altar are leading to deep discussions. Such discussions are taking the class back to the metaphors of the Feast of Pentecost, which was where everything started.

One of the themes that I found inspiring is Vondey's useful construal of (1) the Five Full Gospel narrative structure in the experience of salvation, where those key points are identified at the altar's experience (an encounter with God); and (2) that fact that what generates the Full Gospel's template is not the doctrinal confession itself, but the experience learned on the way, or such experiences that commonly emerge from living the faith.

Vondey had previously argued that the ‘full gospel’ cannot be considered simply as a doctrinal system, historically transmitted by previous movements.<sup>1</sup> To some extent, Pentecostalism narrates a set of practices and experiences resulting from the interpretation of its grass-roots, identified with the very life of Pentecostals throughout the world, which also calls for a ‘grass-root theology’.

In this volume, the reader will find that Pentecostal theology has (1) a symbol: the feast of Pentecost, and (2) a narrative (the template of Pentecostal theology): the five-full gospel as already mentioned. In other words, Pentecost is the symbol of Pentecostal theology, and the full gospel is its theological narrative.

Methodologically, Vondey shows the influence of the Cleveland School, by integrating the teachings of the full gospel and the symbol of Pentecost into a constructive theology that offers new possibilities and envisions a better future for humanity. This methodology enables the reader to understand the church, humanity and God's purpose for His creation. From a pneumatological perspective, the author produces a vibrant theology, positive and enriched by his academic ability that is complemented by his abundance of faith and experience.

For those looking for a volume that contains a systematic Pentecostal/Charismatic theology, this book is the answer. The author presents the main theological topics of Pentecostalism quite clearly, in a methodological order that meets the standards of contemporary academy.

Miguel Alvarez  
Seminario Bíblico Pentecostal Centroamericano  
Quetzaltenango, Guatemala

Vinson Synan, *Where He Leads Me: The Vinson Synan Story* (Franklin Springs, GA: LifeSprings Resources, 2019). Pp. 235, including Bibliography and Index. ISBN: 978-0-911866-99-5 (paper).

*Where He Leads Me* is the second autobiography of Vinson Synan (1934-2020), a noted Pentecostal historian who passed away in March 2020. His last position was Scholar in Residence and Program Director of Theology Ph.D. at Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, Oklahoma. The Bibliography section (221-22) lists 21 books authored and (co)edited by him,<sup>1</sup> although another co-authored book just appeared at the time of his memorial service. His previous major academic

---

<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Vondey, “Soteriology at the Altar: Pentecostal Contributions to Salvation as Praxis,” *Transformation* 34.3 (2017): 223-238.

<sup>1</sup> His number for the published books is 25 (plus the posthumous title), 74.

post was with Regent University. He was also known for his statesmanship in the ecumenical circles.

The book consists of 14 chapters. The first four chapters set him in the context of the International Holiness Pentecostal Church (IHPC). His father (Joseph Synan) led the family in Virginia into Pentecostal faith and later served as a bishop of IHPC (18-19).<sup>2</sup> Growing in a pastor's home in Hopewell, VA, rich in American (religious) history, he developed his interest in history from early childhood (11). And his Pentecostal identity was a given, particularly through his father's miraculous healing and his own baptism in the Holy Spirit during this formative period. Studying theology for ministry was, therefore, a natural course of action. His father's long relationship with Oral Roberts, initially in the same denomination (44-47), brought Vinson Synan twice to Oral Roberts University. The fourth chapter, "Academia," sets a stage for the author's more extensive influence, especially with the completion of his Ph.D. in history in 1967.

The remaining chapters take the author to a vast open plain of influence. His research on the Holiness roots of Pentecostalism broke new ground, providing a critical balance with William Menzies' work on Non-Holiness Pentecostal development.<sup>3</sup> The two became fast friends (80-81), and eventually, established the Society for Pentecostal Studies in 1971 with Horace Ward in the founding team. The inclusion of emerging Catholic Charismatic academics in the Society was a feat of courage and foresight for the three (82-85). The Society marked the beginning of a Pentecostal response to the widespread oxymoron "Pentecostal scholar" and perhaps the first intentional ecumenical initiative among the Pentecostal thinkers. In my view, chapter 5, "An Exploding Ministry," provides the importance of his two early decisions on the publication of his dissertation, which determined the nature of his life-long journey. Firstly, he was determined to have his doctoral dissertation published (80), even though it took extensive additional work to strengthen his study (80-82). Secondly, he added a section on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (86), which turned out to be a game-changer. *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (1971) not only established Pentecostalism as having Wesleyan-Holiness roots but has also become the most accepted Pentecostal history book. The book indeed elevated him to be a Pentecostal ambassador to the rapidly spreading Catholic Charismatic circles (86). Chapter 6, "Catholic Pentecostals," elaborates this incredible development, including his role in the Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue (95-99). Chapter 7 describes his expanding ministry both within the denomination and in Charismatic communities. As a member of the Charismatic Concerns

---

<sup>2</sup> He wrote his family history: Vinson Synan, *The Synans of Virginia: The Story of an Irish Family in America* (Juneau, Alaska: Xulon, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> William W. Menzies, *Anointed to Serve: The Story of the Assemblies of God* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1971).

Committee, he became responsible for the planning and execution of the 1977 Ecumenical Charismatic Conference in Kansas City. With 46,000 registrants, the conference displayed the unprecedented strength of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in the States (chapter 8, “From Glencoe to Kansas City”). The next chapter (“Ecclesiarch and Ecumenist”) predictably describes his expanding ministry, especially among the mainline Charismatic groups, including Catholics and Anglicans. On the home front, the author had to negotiate several issues within his denomination. Chapter 10, “The New Orleans Congresses,” chronicles the formation of the North America Renewal Service Committee (NARSC, 1985) and his leadership in the planning and managing of the New Orleans Congresses on the Holy Spirit and World Evangelization in 1987. This was the “largest and most important conference” he led (168).

“The Decade of World Evangelization” (chap. 11) presents the period of a transition from the Charismatic world to his academic career. The 1990 Indianapolis Congress marked the end of the large-scale national Charismatic gatherings. There were two smaller conferences (Orland in 1995 and St. Louis in 2000) while he began his academic career at Oral Roberts University (1990-94). Chapter 12, “Regent University,” features the twelve years of his deanship (and a decade as Dean Emeritus) at the School of Divinity of Regent University. Under his leadership, the school grew into a powerhouse in Renewal Studies with accredited D.Min. and Ph.D. programs. The “capstone” era of his academic career was climaxed by a conference in honor of his contributions and a subsequently published festschrift. The next chapter, “Empowered21,” covers the final leg of his career at Oral Roberts University as Scholar in Residence, trustee, and interim dean. As Billy Wilson, president of the university, was leading Empowered21, a relational network of Pentecostal and Charismatic (or Spirit-empowered) movements, Synan served on the Global Council and led a series of book projects mapping the movement.<sup>4</sup> In all these years full of activities, he continued his prolific writing. The last chapter, “Year of Jubilee,” uses the year 2017 as the landmark of his fruitful career as an academic and ecumenical statesman. The year marks, among others, the golden jubilee of his doctoral study, Catholic Charismatic Renewal, and Oral Roberts University. The book concludes with his praise to the Lord for his faithful wife and their children. He summarizes his life with the Salvation Army hymn: “Where He leads me, I will follow” (217-18).

As one may suspect, I read the book with a deep appreciation for his historian’s care and Christian honesty. There is much to learn from one’s life story. I faced two challenges, however, in reviewing the book. The first is that there is another autobiography published about a decade ago.<sup>5</sup> As the author

---

<sup>4</sup> See Vinson Synan and Billy Wilson, *As the Waters Cover the Sea: The Story of Empowered21 and the Movement It Serves* (Tulsa, OK: ORU Press, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Vinson Synan, *An Eyewitness remembers the Century of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen, 2010).

tried to avoid repetition, the reader should read both for a full picture. The second is the question of what to review. Because of the biographic nature of the book, I tended to review his life instead of the book itself. Regardless, this book invites young Pentecostal scholars to journey with a distinguished first-generation Pentecostal historian. And someone may like to write a third-party biography of his.

Wonsuk Ma  
Oral Roberts University  
Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA



