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Pentecostal Education

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Introduction

In its beginnings Pentecostal education concerned the education offered to ministers and leaders of churches. Subsequently it expanded to include day schools, universities, other forms of training and is now an altogether broader mix of institutions and programmes within most of the countries of the world where Pentecostalism has taken root.

It is easiest to provide a brief account of the history and context of Pentecostal education before considering its essential features and special contribution to education as a whole.

History and context

As other articles in this issue make clear, the Pentecostal movement grew out of the matrix of holiness and revivalist movements at the end of the 19th-century in the United States of America but also in other parts of the world. There is no single point in time and space when the movement began although the tongues-speaking, mixed-race, experience-rich Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles (1906-1913) is usually seen as the main catalyst. However, in educational terms Bethel College in Topeka, Kansas, may be more significant since it was there in the period immediately after 1900 that Pentecostal doctrine was first defined.

For the purpose of analysis it is easiest to consider the United States, Europe and the rest of the world as three categories. Pentecostalism grew rapidly within the United States and, because of the strength of the American economy and the general religiosity of its people, the variety and scale of the Pentecostal educational presence is more substantial there than anywhere else in the world.¹ Pentecostalism reached Europe soon after 1907 but was largely resisted by the existing churches. In Protestant areas resistance was greatest in Germany and least in Scandinavia and intermediate in England with a result that the incidence of Pentecostal congregations and colleges is greater in Scandinavia than elsewhere. In Roman Catholic areas Pentecostalism was largely ignored although there are now Pentecostal colleges or training centres in Portugal, France and Italy. In Britain there are three specifically Pentecostal colleges and a large number of other training institutions that have been influenced by Pentecostal or charismatic doctrine and practice (Coleman, 2000; Kay, 2000)².

In the rest of the world Pentecostal and charismatic colleges can usually trace their origins either to missionary work from the West or to innovative indigenous schemes. Indeed the basic pattern for Pentecostal groups is usually of a collection of churches with one or more training centres. This pattern is found in the United States and Europe and, in a general way, can be found in religious groups of all kinds. Congregations that require ministers; ministers require training; training has been thought to require specific institutions. By the time any religious group has reached about 100 congregations it is likely to feel that it needs its own training programme and residential centre where this training may be offered. Sometimes the training programme comes early in the development of a religious group since it is assumed that the production of ministers will lead to a growth in the number of congregations. At other times a group of congregations begin to act in a co-ordinated fashion and to provide funding for the setting up of a training school that serves all the congregations jointly.

At any rate, Pentecostal education began firmly within the arena of ministerial training. The pattern of a national college with its supporting flock of churches is one that has been

¹ In the autumn of 2002, Assemblies of God had 14,858 students registered in its 19 colleges and universities (personal communication).

² Unpublished results of British Academy Small Grant 34643, W K Kay and A E Dyer.

encouraged by American Assemblies of God that has built 841 of these colleges in different parts of the world.³ Such a pattern is distinct from the pattern that was characteristic of Anglican missionaries within the Victorian era whose tendency was to build primary schools and subsequently to train teachers, a pattern whose traces can still be seen in England and Wales with its 6000 church schools and its dozen remaining church colleges.⁴

Historically, then, what sort of training was offered to ministers? Originally, ministers received basic Bible training that in the 1920s and 1930s came to include a form of systematic theology that has been called ‘Pentecostal scholasticism’ (Jacobsen, 1999). Here biblical passages and verses were grouped together to support interlocking doctrines. The texts would be assembled and harmonised to produce easily understood propositions. The good student learned the supporting texts and was able, for instance, to fit a doctrine of baptism with the doctrines, assembled in the same way, concerning the work of Christ or the nature of the church. The process has similarities with that mastered by trainee rabbis or medieval scholars of all kinds who used the writings of Aristotle as authoritative statements to prove or disprove any theoretical assertion.

While it is easy to condemn such training as narrow and mindless, it needs to be remembered that the education offered in most countries of the Western world in the latter part of the 19th-century and the early part of the 20th century seems to us to be bound up with perpetual memorisation of dates and names without any attempt to deduce wider principles of meaning. Science education was largely nonexistent and the progressive movement within education driven by Dewey, Montessori, Piaget and other educational reformers is a direct reaction to the unimaginative and utilitarian fashion that then prevailed (Boyd, 1964). It is hardly surprising that the education of ministers should have been stamped with the same unimaginativeness.

Pentecostal scholasticism was associated with a narrow Bible-based curriculum and with an unadventurous pedagogy. The redeeming features of this educational process, however, might lie with the raconteurial skills of rugged preachers or with the excitement generated by the actual conduct of ministry itself. More relevant to the understanding of this scholastic approach is the placement of Pentecostalism upon the religious spectrum. During the 1920s American Protestantism was caught between liberalism on one side and fundamentalism on the other (Dorrien, 1998; Larson, 2003). Liberalism accepted the findings of the German critical scholarship and fundamentalism, harking back to aspects of Calvinism, vigorously rejected them. In its heyday, and even subsequently, fundamentalism affected the wider confederation of American evangelicalism so that, even after fundamentalism lost its influence, evangelicalism retained the formal doctrinal propositions and mindset of the earlier period. To gain social and academic acceptability Pentecostalism allied itself with evangelical orthodoxy. The cost of this alliance threatened Pentecostalism’s experiential dynamic. And this was ironic because evangelicalism itself, especially in its Wesleyan form, embraced experience as an important confirmatory part of its theological scheme. Religious experience accompanied salvation and deepened holiness.

³ Personal communication from AG USA.

⁴ According to the DfEE (personal communication based on January 1999 figures), there are 6165 church primary schools in England and they educate 26.5% of the total number of children of primary age. Church secondary provision in England is lower, but still significant. There are 389 church secondary schools catering for 9% of pupils.

The challenge facing Pentecostal education concerns its identity. If it is true to itself, it will develop forms of teaching, formation, curriculum and resources that are experiential and flexible. If it accepts the dictates of evangelicalism, it is, as we shall see, in danger of losing its distinctiveness.

Institutional settings

Colleges

There is the possibility of confusion of terminology here. We use the term ‘school’ to refer to an institution that offers education to pupils under about the age of 16. But ‘school’ is also used in the university setting to refer to a collection of departments that have been blocked together for administrative purposes. At the beginning of the century a ‘Ministerial Training School’ or ‘Bible School’ might have been used to refer to a place where men and women received training after their compulsory education had ended. A Bible School might take students from age above 18 years. Recently, terminology has been clarified to the extent that sub-degree level tertiary education has taken place in ‘colleges’ and the word ‘university’ has been reserved for degree-awarding institutions.

So, at the beginning of the 20th century, Pentecostal groups operated schools which, over time, came to be called colleges. Originally the schools were rudimentary and educational levels simple. They prepared men and women for the practical aspects of ministry, particularly preaching. The situation in Europe and in the United States was not the same, however. In Europe degree-awarding institutions had been established since about the 12th century. These institutions developed into universities. In France, after a Papal charter had issued, the University of Paris was effectively under Papal control from about the 13th to the 18th centuries whereas, in much of the rest of Europe and particularly after the Reformation, the control of universities fell under royal prerogative or the aegis of local rulers (Bowen, 1975: 119)⁵.

In the United States no such tradition existed. The beginning of the 20th century saw an attempt by accrediting bodies at state, and eventually national, level to bring order to a chaotic situation in which academic qualifications were unstandardised. The process gradually produced recognised degrees in the huge variety of subjects that had been offered in the multiplicity of institutions that had sprung up in the period after the end of the Civil War (White, 2002).

So the answer to the question, ‘what is a degree?’ was different in Europe and America and probably different across Europe itself. There was no fixed terminology (in Europe the master’s degree was called a licentiate) and the relationship between academic and professional training was blurred. Originally, the degree might be used as an entrance qualification to certain jobs (for example in law or medicine) because there was a body of knowledge to be mastered by practitioners. But it might also be possible to obtain a degree in one subject and professional qualifications in another and, in this case, should the university or professional body responsible for setting standards?

Gradually the accrediting movement began to bring uniformity and rationality to the degree process and it did so by attempting to quantify and classify intellectual capacities that were

⁵ It is true that Francis I tried to improve the University of Paris in 1530, implying the importance of royal power but, until Napoleon’s reforms, the Pope’s influence was considerable.

essentially beyond definition.⁶ It is not easy to pin down what makes a first-class theologian or historian. In the end peer group judgement is necessary but this has to be offset by explicit criteria to prevent prejudice and excessive subjectivity. As a result the movement towards accreditation divided courses into more manageable units, each of which was related to learning outcomes or other measurable behavioural indicators. Modularity had arrived.

The older European degrees had been almost entirely within a single subject like history of French but, following accreditation, the American pattern of degrees made use of building blocks that allowed undergraduate courses to range widely over several disciplines. Eventually the American modular tradition prevailed in Britain and began to be acceptable within the rest of Europe, especially after the European Community saw the need for a harmonisation of qualifications. The three-year full-time bachelor's degree came to be seen as the natural precursor to the one-year full-time master's degree.

In Britain after the mid-1980s and the expansion of higher education, universities began to accredit degrees offered in independent colleges, including Bible colleges. Consequently a process occurred analogous to that which had taken place 50 years before in the United States. What was different in the 1980s, however, was that the accrediting universities were much less prescriptive about the content of courses than might have been expected. Bible colleges could teach according to their own theological traditions provided only that the structure of courses conformed to the university pattern. So Pentecostal education found itself acceptable within the mainstream of theological education. Indeed, in an era of post-modernity, every tradition was seen as having its own validity and right to existence.

Within these courses and colleges Pentecostal education first began to show itself simply by the inclusion of elements of Pentecostal history within the degree curriculum and also by the teaching of Pentecostal doctrine within courses on biblical studies. The Pentecostal position in relation to the continuation of the activity of a Holy Spirit within the church and the world in the contemporary age, marks it out against dispensationalist and modernist positions which deny the possibility that such spirituality might occur. Modernism, in its reliance upon an Enlightenment interpretation of human existence, rules out the possibility that God might break in upon the empirical realm. Dispensationalism, because its exegesis of biblical passages justifies dividing human history into miraculous and non-miraculous epochs, makes the same assumptions.

The training of schoolteachers has for many years included classroom practice. Trainee teachers are sent out into schools to teach under supervision before qualifying and being allowed to teach unsupervised. A similar practical element within degree courses is an obvious component for any form of training resulting in professional practice. The new university accrediting agencies saw the need for theological degrees that included a mixture between teaching within the lecture room and a practical apprenticeship within churches. But this practical component was the only experiential element within the degree curriculum. Something more radical was needed to ensure that the training of Pentecostal ministers contributed to the vitality of churches.

This radicalism is supported by Alan Anderson (2001) who has called for more contextual theology within Pentecostal education. Analysing his own South African background where

⁶ Professional groups could be involved on accrediting committees and therefore ensure that they worked with universities to establish common standards.

in the apartheid era a strict biblical interpretation coloured all ministerial training processes -- and seeing how wrong this was, he has come to advocate a more flexible approach that is sensitive to the needs of individual contexts. In other words a fixed body of knowledge should not be imposed upon students within various cultural settings. Rather the cultural setting should help to inform each programme of tuition. As a result Pentecostal education ought to vary from culture to culture and will adapt itself to local needs and situations. Moreover, Anderson takes the view that Western education has been deeply affected by a paradigm of autonomous rationalism and empirical scepticism that is foreign to the New Testament. Indeed the exportation of Western education continues the imperialism of the past and perpetuates the legacy of colonialism. So the Third World should develop its own 'theological paradigms to challenge and transform Pentecostal spirituality throughout the world'.

Such a call might be seen in the work of Lee Wanak. Writing from an Asian context Wanak (2000) concluded 'the task of the theological educator is to bridge the ancient text and the contemporary context, ancient pedagogy and the modern approaches to academic, spiritual and ministerial formation'. Making use of a social science meta-analysis he identified seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education. These included: encouragement of student-faculty contact; encouragement of cooperation among students; active learning; prompt feedback; emphasis on time on task; high expectations; and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning. He argued that values and goals should be used as criteria for evaluating and developing a curriculum. These values, in his view, would be developed from biblical perspectives including those that allow for the expression of prophetic and healing models of excellence. He argued for an holistic approach that insisted upon 'intentional interaction between theory and practice' so that there was no division between the superstructure of Christian doctrine and the infrastructure of Christian practice.

A rather different approach has been advocated by McKinney (2000). McKinney is not concerned so much for the content of education as for the spirituality of institutions in which that education is given. He wishes to make sure that the faculty members are sensitive to the Holy Spirit and give students a model of humble and disciplined lives. Indeed each teacher needs to develop a personal philosophy of ministry and education that focuses on prayer, repentance, obedience to divine command, and a desire to change the world through the renewal of the church. The chapel on the campus of training colleges can be central to this emphasis.

Such a call, in a more developed form, is found in the work of Del Tarr (1997) who argues against the domestication of the Holy Spirit, the neglect of spiritual gifts, the divorce between theological theory and personal reality and for 'a more holistic understanding of revelation that goes beyond the traditional static conciliar and evangelical understanding' (page 214). The professionalisation of clergy through formally accredited courses probably reduces openness to prophetic fire. No longer should spiritual insight be forced through a certain 'epistemological grid' to arrive at dull preordained conclusions. No longer should Pentecostals simply follow the general evangelical line in relation to social justice or repentance. Social conformity and respectability should not prevent Pentecostal churches standing against the abuse of political power.

Church-based training

These calls for spirituality or for a close connection between learning and authentic practice have naturally enough also led to calls for church-based training. Such a situation is similar

to that found where there are calls for the training of school teachers to take place entirely within a school setting. The practitioner element within training predominates and the theoretical element retreats. In the case of Pentecostal churches, church-based training can only occur where the church is substantial and, in effect, this means where there are congregations of at least 500 people and sufficient resources to provide trainers, training materials, opportunities for a range of ministerial activities and the prospect of future ministerial employment. Kensington Temple (later London City Church) set up a bible training school that, in the 1990s, quickly became one of the largest in the UK.

The Elim Pentecostal Church within Britain is beginning to devolve some of its training to large congregations although, once this is done, experience suggests that there will be the realisation that the historical and theoretical aspects of training have been neglected. In other words the danger of an entirely practical training is that its recipients become adept at carrying out procedures without understanding why these procedures are enacted, how they have developed over time or whether they may be changed. So there may be a pendulum swing between church-based training and college-based training when, over a decade or two, one type of training is preferred over the other before there is a swing back to the other position.

More recently the use of a *cell structure* within churches provides the framework for a close form of training that is focused on changing lifestyles rather than acquiring knowledge. Each cell is made up of units of a dozen or so people who meet once or twice a week and are answerable to each other. In this way there are no passengers or spectators within churches; everyone is a participant, everyone is being trained.

Universities

Just as schools became colleges, so colleges became universities. In essence the university is a multi-faculty college. So, by expanding its number of faculties, that is by typically offering courses within the humanities and the sciences, a college might become a university. This general principle applies in the United States and in Europe.

Pentecostal universities within the United States came into existence in a much less secular higher education system than is found in Europe (Sterk, 2002). Although the older European universities in origin are all, in some way, involved with the church, most are now free of church influence or control. Admittedly, bishops may be important in the appointment of staff in theology faculties in Germany and Cambridge colleges may employ deans who are Anglican clergyman but, in almost all university statutes, religious tests of employment are forbidden. Within the United States the separation between church and state ensured that most colleges or universities were founded not by public money but by wealthy individuals or organisations and these, of course, put their own ideals into the founding charter. Indeed all but one of American Colonial universities were founded by churches. For this reason there are a much greater number of obviously religious universities within the United States than in Europe or the rest of the world.

So Pentecostal universities fit into the landscape where there are already Baptist, Methodist and Roman Catholic universities. The healing evangelist Oral Roberts founded his University in 1964.⁷ Its mission statement says that the university was founded in direct obedience to God's mandate and to prepare students to go where the presence and power of

⁷ Actually Evangel University had been chartered in 1955, nine years before ORU.

God are not known. Partly as result of this strong missionary emphasis, Oral Roberts University has been careful to stress its high academic credentials. It offers undergraduate courses in business, education, nursing and the arts and sciences and postgraduate work in business, education and theology & missions. Its New Testament courses on mission state that the university ‘seeks to educate the whole person, with balanced emphasis placed on the development of mind, spirit and body’. Such a statement is clearly religious but also non-sectarian.

The American Assemblies of God’s six universities⁸, Evangel, Global, North Central, Southwestern, Northwest University and Vanguard, offer a range of undergraduate and masters degrees in a huge number of subjects including accounting, anthropology, broadcasting, drama, marketing, sociology, Spanish and chemistry and, between them, cater for around 8,500 students in the USA.⁹ Evangel alone has 80 programs in 10 academic departments. Yet the universities also make a point of offering biblical studies at undergraduate and graduate level; to ignore the academic study of the bible and the training of ministers would be unthinkable. While their mission statements include a set of biblical basics, their values include reference to the local church, the sanctity of marriage, justice, forgiveness, the dignity of all peoples as bearers of the image of God, integrity and those who are non-Christians.

The Church of God¹⁰ Theological Seminary in its mission statement declares its intention is ‘to prepare men and women for Christian ministry in today’s world’. Yet its theological teaching, while being clearly evangelical and Pentecostal, explores the New Testament innovatively (Thomas, 2002). Conventional New Testament studies have often been cast in the mould of straightforward examinations of the history of New Testament scholarship or of the problems of dating texts and deducing provenance. Instead, the New Testament has been broken up into four categories: stories of Jesus’ life, stories of the early church, the epistles and sermons of the early church, and the vision of the early church. These four categories indicate both the desire of the Church of God to return to New Testament models and a willingness to cut through the thickets of conventional scholarship. Stories of Jesus’ life, for example, might include the Gospels but would also have room for references to the life of Christ within the epistles. Similarly stories of the early church could be put together from different parts of the New Testament. Nevertheless the study the New Testament is dealt with under the five headings that include each book’s canonical context, its original context, its context in the church and its Pentecostal context. In this way the study of the founding documents of Christianity is deliberately matched against the Pentecostal community’s understanding of itself.

Philosophy of Education

In an interesting reflection on a possible Pentecostal philosophy of education Hittenberger (2001) examines five major educational theories so as to prepare the ground for a consideration of what a Pentecostal educational theory might be. By his analysis all educational theories can be categorised according to their metaphysics (theory of reality), epistemology (theory of knowledge), axiology (theory of values) and each case, also, the nature of the student and the role the teacher need to being considered.

⁸ And one Graduate School, AGTS.

⁹ Personal communication from AG USA about student enrolments.

¹⁰ The Church of God also runs Lee University and this has a strong Pentecostal ethos.

Making use of this taxonomy, it is arguable that a Pentecostal contribution might occur in relation to epistemology, especially in relation to religious experience. The notion that knowledge is available by the spiritual insight, or spiritual impartation, and that this form of knowledge is supra-sensible and disconnected from the empirical realm relativises the entirely materialistic presumptions of much educational practice. A Pentecostal theory would be open to spiritual experience while, at the same time, putting in place safeguards against unrestrained and untestable speculation and mysticism. Its epistemology would make use of the dual biblical concepts of *revelation* (especially 1 Cor 2.7-14) concerning the revelatory work of the Holy Spirit and of *testing* (1 Th 5.21). Alternatively in the words of Cheryl Bridges Johns, the Western Church ‘has lost sight of the pedagogical role of the Holy Spirit’ of which the Pentecostal experience is the ‘epistemological key’ (Johns, 1999).

It is arguable also that Pentecostal theory of education would attempt to link the moral aspect of education and the role of the teacher. In other words, a Pentecostal theory would be concerned with the use to which knowledge is put, the purpose of the whole educational enterprise, the ethical relationship between teacher and learner, and the connection between education and Christian living. In this respect a Pentecostal theory of education would be related to the more general proposition that all knowledge is unified, that ‘all truth is God’s truth’, and that all knowledge is subservient to the glory of God.

A different way of looking at the connection between Pentecostalism and educational theory is to characterise Pentecostalism as largely oral and demonstrative rather than written and dispassionate. If the ‘personal testimony’ is at the heart of Pentecostalism, this implies that the individual public statement about personal dealings with God in everyday life is the means by which the faith is expressed and transmitted. Each person has their own story, their own relationship with God, their own understanding of God’s interventions within their lives. The sharing of the narrative in emotional congregational settings, whether by speech or song, creates a common understanding of God, prayer, conversion and the trials of life. A Pentecostal theory of education can capitalise upon this narrative predisposition and attempt to ensure that non-religious learning also utilises the benefits of story (c.f. McDrury and Alterio, 2002). Indeed, according to Hollenweger (1992), the oral nature of Pentecostalism has parallels with the deconstructive biblical scholarship of Bultmann and others who attempted to discover what biblical pericopes looked like before they were captured in writing.

Conclusion

Just as Christianity as a whole made a contribution to every area of human knowledge and culture in the 2000 years of its history, so it reasonable to expect that Pentecostal Christianity, over the coming years, will make its contributions to the shape of academic life and general culture. To be true to itself Pentecostalism needs to develop from its own inner first principles those methods and aims which are expressive of its nature. Contextual theology is in danger of diluting this identity. Bricks and mortar and the escalating numbers of student enrolments are only one aspect of the importance of pentecostal education; the other concerns the intangible elements of theory, theology, practice, scholarship, integrity and purpose.

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