

MINISTERIAL INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

SEMINAR II

Theme: “The Foundations for Pentecostal Faith and Practice”

A New Agenda for Evangelical Theology

**Written by:
Larry G. Hess**

INTRODUCTION

Evangelical theology today must have passion and fidelity. It must move beyond a debate between the forward-looking “Reformists” and the backward-looking “traditionalists.”

Theology possesses no independent knowledge; theology represents the Word of God revealed in Jesus Christ, recorded indelibly in inspired Scriptures, and witnessed to in the church through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Evangelical theology is being renewed today around the world through Pentecostal/Charismatic movements as they recover forgotten truths. Evangelical faith is rooted in the faith of the early church which was Trinitarian, Christological, and Spirit-filled—according to “the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3).

Evangelical theology was born in prayer, nourished in worship, and filled with the exuberant joy of the Holy Spirit.

Evangelical theology is in a crisis in many countries. In America, much of our culture is so vested in liberalism that it becomes hostile to evangelical institutions and

individuals. The American culture and American evangelicalism could be in for a major collision in the future, much already has taken place in Western Europe.

If Harry Cox is correct, Pentecostalism is reshaping evangelicalism in the twenty-first century. If the evangelical movement is going to thrive in the future, it must seek to understand the impact of Pentecostal Spirituality upon all evangelicalism.

I. THE RISE OF PENTECOSTAL SPIRITUALITY

The Pentecostal movement is marked by the two themes of Spirit-baptism and spiritual gifts. For Pentecostals, today as with the disciples of the early church, the Baptism in the Holy Spirit is the anointing which enables a believer to participate effectively in the missionary enterprise of the church.

Some have said that Pentecostalism is an experience in search of a theology. Such a judgment is not valid. Pentecostalism emphasizes a direct relationship to God with corresponding expectations of divine revelation and supernatural acts of ministry. Pentecostal worship is participatory, and its preaching is more anecdotal and narrative than schematic and formal. Early Pentecostalism demonstrated a genuine reverence for the work of the Spirit.

Pentecostalism has moved through several phases. First, Pentecostalism was marked by dramatic events, dynamic testimonies, enthusiastic preaching, and minimal organization. Second, denominations were formed and expanded in order to counter the problems of disorganization, and to coordinate missionary evangelism. In this phase, it was important to formulate doctrinal statements of faith and to perfect church

polity. This rapid growth and expansion demanded the establishment of institutions and programs for ministerial training/education. Pentecostals were known as evangelists and missionaries, not as scholars, which created a tension with higher education. Pentecostals have now come to place a high level of importance on Christian higher education.

For Pentecostals the Book of Joel has special significance. The apostle Peter quoted Joel's prophecy from 2:28 as being fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Pentecostals embraced the major themes of the Book of Joel, which are lamentation, salvation, and judgment. Lamentation and repentance lead to salvation and an anticipation of the coming Kingdom of God. Pentecostals heard the call of Joel for communal lamentation, and faithfully practiced it with groaning, wailing, and speaking in tongues. They have always believed in "praying through" in the light of impending judgment. Pentecostal spirituality was born in a sense of urgency and eschatological vision.

Perhaps today Pentecostals need a re-visioning of their heritage. Many people, even within Pentecostalism, point to an accommodation of the middle-class American values of individualism and consumerism as the reason for the waning of such a radical vision of the coming of Christ. This individualistic consumerism discourages the spirit of unified vision which should characterize the body of Christ, causing a loss of eschatological focus. This loss of eschatological focus among Pentecostals has led to a loss of lamentation, and has also facilitated the seduction of the church by modernism.

In Steven Land's excellent book, *Pentecostal Spirituality: a Passion for the Kingdom*, Land proposes a re-visioning of Pentecostal spirituality through the lens of the eschatological trinity. Passion for the coming Kingdom means passion for the coming King.¹ Larry McQueen wrote, "Pentecostal eschatology is not so much a program of predicted events as it is a testimony of living in the tension crested by the spirit of the end breaking into the present."² It may be correct to say that Pentecostalism is a sub-division of evangelicalism. If so, how should Pentecostalism impact or change evangelical Christianity?

II. HOW PENTECOSTALISM HAS IMPACTED EVANGELICALISM

The evangelical movement in the Protestant world has been powerful in preaching the Gospel. This movement has been faithful in preaching on sin and salvation, the atonement, and the authority of the Bible as the infallible Word of God. Pentecostalism challenges evangelicalism to be faithful to the spiritual reality of the evangelical revivals, and their own basic Biblical convictions.

The accounts of the early evangelical revivals sound more like the phenomena of the Pentecostal-charismatic movement than the modern evangelical movement. Evangelical history is full of healings, physical manifestations accompanying conviction and conversion, visions, and prophecy. However, much evangelical

¹ Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology, Supplement Series 1, editors John Christopher Thomas, Rick D. Moore, and Steven J. Land (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 197-208.

² Larry R. McQueen, *Joel and the Spirit: The Cry of a Prophetic Hermeneutic*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology, Supplement Series 8, editors John Christopher Thomas, Rick D. Moore, and Steven J. Land (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), p. 97.

theology today has either disapproved or excluded any spiritual significance to these phenomena.³

Evangelicalism has been a great proponent of essential Biblical truths, while at the same time undermining present-day manifestations of supernatural power by a spirit of critical rationalism. Out of this struggle came the Pentecostal movement, though it is remarkable that Pentecostalism survived the many early struggles with fundamentalism, neo-orthodoxy, and evangelicalism. The Pentecostal movement and the charismatic renewal both represent God-given opportunities to escape from confining ideological “boxes” and understand more clearly God’s divine purposes and power.

The Christian church today needs the authentic Biblical witness of evangelicals. We also need a theology that allows the full power of the Holy Spirit to energize the body of Christ.

Pentecostalism has had a positive and powerful impact on evangelicalism around the world, and has been described as the fastest-growing religious phenomenon of the century. “Pentecostal spirituality is the future,” says Werner Hoerschelmann of the Lutheran Church in Hamburg, Germany. Konrad Raiser, general secretary of the World Council of Churches said, “The present growth of Christianity is almost entirely due to Pentecostal and evangelical churches ... This means for the World Council of Churches that it has to open itself to these new manifestations of Christian existence,

³ Peter D. Hocken, “A Charismatic View of the Distinctiveness of Pentecostalism,” in *Pentecostalism in Context: Essays in Honor of William W. Menzies*, edited by Wonsukma and Robert P. Menzies, Journal of Pentecostal Theology, Supplement Series 11, editors John Christopher Thomas, Rickie D. Moore, and Steven J. Land (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), p. 104.

Christian church, and Christian witness.”⁴ Harvey Cox’s book, *Fire from Heaven*, addresses the rise of Pentecostal spirituality and the reshaping of religion in the twenty-first century.⁵

Fundamentalists like G. Campbell Morgan spoke of the Pentecostal movement as “the last vomit of Satan.”⁶ Fundamentalism was a reaction against the liberal theology of the 1800s and early 1900s. It came along after the birth of the Pentecostal movement. Pentecostalism broke away from fundamentalism as early as 1928. Pentecostalism in the 1940s established an alliance with evangelicalism, which was a “milder form of fundamentalism.”⁷ Pentecostals, such as the Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee, became charter members of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in 1943, but were not well accepted by most non-Pentecostal churches. Leaders like Harold Ockenga argued repeatedly that Pentecostal and holiness groups should have an equal voice in NAE.

The Church of God has been privileged to contribute to the leadership of the NAE, especially in the past fifteen years. Dr. Ray H. Hughes (former general overseer) served as chairman of the NAE in the 1980s, and Dr. R. Lamar Vest (former general overseer) is a past chairman and president of NAE. Also, Church of God leaders have and are serving as chairmen of various NAE commissions.

⁴ Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), p. 3.

⁵ Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1995).

⁶ Hollenweger, p. 191. See footnote 3, “*The Fundamentals*, 12 vol. 1910-15. The quote by G. Campbell Morgan without primary documentation appears in Synan, *Holiness-Pentecostal*, 144; Spittler, ‘Fundamentalists,’ 110.”

⁷ Hollenweger, p. 192.

In regard to areas such as pacifist convictions, political involvements, and Biblical criticism, involvement with evangelicalism has brought certain risks to Pentecostals. Because of criticism and other modern liberal approaches to the study of Scripture, Pentecostals distanced themselves from academic theology. Until recently academic theology did not seem interested in what the Spirit is doing today.

Within Pentecostalism today there are theologians of every area of specialization who are writing, teaching, leading associations and impacting evangelicalism in many ways. Pentecostals are leading the way today in racial reconciliation and ethnic ministry.

Pentecostals have, in the past, been described as evangelical-fundamentalists who are anti-intellectual and anti-ecumenical. To the contrary, Pentecostals now lead the way in many educational activities and ecumenical organizations. Many Pentecostals are engaged in a critical reassessment of their own roots and approaches to ministry. Pentecostals today place a greater value on training and theological education, while still keeping the focus on the importance of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The growth and overall success of Pentecostals and charismatics have somewhat influenced evangelicals to change their approach to ministry in areas such as worship and praise, music, youth ministry, practical training and internships, leadership, etc.

III. HOW PENTACOSTALISM CAN IMPACT EVANGELICALISM INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Religious faith in America is in crisis! Joel's cry of lamentation should resonate throughout all of Christianity. It is a time of moral and spiritual crisis. Historic protestant denominations in America are facing calamity in regard to individual's religious preferences and loyalties.⁸

The greatest hope of the church in America is in reaching the young generations (ages 13-33), sometimes called the "baby busters," "the echo boomers," or the "survivors." Mainline Protestants and evangelicals have not been successful in the 1990s in developing a loyal following among this younger generation. The only groups more successful than holiness/Pentecostals in America in reaching these younger generations have been Unitarians, New Agers, and Catholic groups.⁹

The survivors, or baby busters (ages 13-33), generation is the most likely today to switch from one church to another (sixty percent are switchers). The baby boomers (ages 34-52) have about twenty percent who are switchers today.¹⁰

Most evangelical denominations other than the Pentecostal and holiness groups are losing members, and are not reaching these switchers either. Many people in America have become disillusioned and now reject the Christian faith. The denominations/groups most affected by this disillusionment are the Catholics,

⁸ Regele, *Death of the Church*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, A Division of Harper/Collins Publishers, 1995, pp. 147-149.

⁹ Regele, p. 151.

¹⁰ Regele, p. 154.

Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians. Most of these are what we call mainline denominations who are not identified as evangelicals.¹¹

These floating, indifferent, and disillusioned people represent seventeen percent of the American population. In this day of drastic change, shifting paradigms, and moral flux, Pentecostalism has the opportunity to model methods and qualities which will build the church in the twenty-first century.

For years the gap has been widening between what is needed and how we have responded as evangelicals. It is time to close the gap. We have a choice to make. There are things which must die if we are to reach this generation, but death is always painful. However, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12:24, 25, NIV). Again Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it” (Luke 9:23, 24, NIV). This is why we need to hear again the cry of a prophetic voice and recover the lamentation of Joel. The promise of the Spirit in the Book of Joel was given in response to the lamentation of the people of Judah.

Pentecostalism should lead the way for all evangelicals to regain a sense of the times, and of the return of Christ. The Spirit has been quenched through cultural, moral, institutional, and theological accommodation. Pentecostals should model prayer

¹¹ Regele, p. 174.

and theological reflection. The Book of Joel is an urgent call for Pentecostals to engage in the theological discipline of lamentation. Pentecostal theology should host a constant check against academic presumption and prideful neglect.¹²

IV. A PENTECOSTAL RESPONSE TO THE EVANGELICAL CRISIS

The twentieth century evangelical movement in America grew out of a sincere and urgent desire to identify with the faithful tradition of the church and the faith “once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3). The emerging direction of evangelical Christianity presents the church with a crisis that hangs over the horizon. The current challenges are plain and potentially lethal. The authority of the Biblical Gospel is being undermined.

Evangelicals must begin to close the gap between what is and what ought to be! We talk a lot about revival, especially among Pentecostals. A. W. Tozer once commented that if revival is more of what we are already doing, then evangelicalism most definitely does not need a revival!

Evangelicalism is not healthy in conviction or spiritual discipline. Our defenses have been let down. Much damage has already been done and a greater crisis threatens ahead. Post-modern ideologies challenge the authority of Scripture. Some evangelicals have compromised on issues such as homosexuality, abortion, mercy killing, etc.

How should Pentecostals as evangelicals respond to this crisis?

¹² McQueen, p. 98.

- Pentecostals must reaffirm their commitment to the authority of Scripture.
- Pentecostals must return to prayer, holiness of life, and the practice of spiritual discipline.
- Pentecostals must call for repentance and lamentation as a check against spiritual presumption and prideful neglect.
- Pentecostals need to be a witness to the church and the world in the last days. (As we recover our eschatological commitment we can be a prophetic community.)
- Pentecostals, as a prophetic community, must maintain their commitment to speaking in tongues as the initial evidence of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit.
- Pentecostals must be characterized by equity and justice. The contemporary Pentecostal church must be a counter-culture which denounces political manipulation and commoditization of persons. Racial and cultural barriers must come down.
- Pentecostals, and all evangelicals, will stand on the outside of twenty-first century culture and look in. (We are not in the mainstream of modern culture. However, we can be an alternative to the godless lifestyles of a post-modern world.)
- Pentecostals can model a new commitment to practical ministerial training.
- Pentecostals must focus on local church ministry and the development of lay leaders if our denominations are to survive.
- Pentecostals must face the spiritual and moral leadership crisis and train a new generation of pastors who are full of the Holy Spirit and equipped to provide credible leadership.
- Pentecostals must not simply promote their own personal agendas. (Our goals must be to be faithful to the Gospel, and to function in the power of the Holy Spirit.)

In order for Pentecostals to impact evangelicalism we must always ask ourselves the tough questions, such as:

- Do we love our traditions more than we love the Gospel itself?
- Are we really open to the move of the Holy Spirit?
- Have we become irrelevant?
- Are we keeping pace with change?
- Are we trying to minister to a generation that no longer exists?

- Is our preaching Biblical and relevant to our world?
- Do we have real character and integrity as leaders?
- Have we lost our passion for the Kingdom?
- Are we willing to confess our sins?

If Pentecostalism is going to really impact evangelicalism then we must not abandon the grand story of the pure Gospel, which alone can speak to the deepest needs and longings of the human heart. We must re-order our priorities and find out how we can be most effective in Kingdom service.

Finally, Pentecostals must seek to be a vital part of the evangelical community which together can impact our world with the Gospel of Christ.

CONCLUSION

We have said that for Pentecostalism to impact all of evangelicalism, we must close the gap between what is and what ought to be. As Pentecostals we believe in the supernatural and miracle-working power of God. We believe that God can bring life out of death. There are things which must die, things we need to abandon and let go of. This must be a spiritual experience that produces new life and vision.

Lamentation acknowledges that the answers are beyond us, and trusts that God will one day make all things right. Ethical, racial, and cultural barriers to ministry must be overcome in order for Pentecostal-charismatic churches to have the far-reaching impact we should have on evangelicalism.

The contemporary Pentecostal movement brings specific gifts to the body of Christ. It is time for Pentecostals to rise to the opportunities to fulfill a prophetic and apostolic role in impacting this world for Christ.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barna, George. *The Second Coming of the Church: A Blueprint for Survival*. Nashville, Tennessee: Word Publishing, 1998.

Cox, Harvey. *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1995.

Hocken, Peter D. "A Charismatic View of the Distinctiveness of Pentecostalism," in *Pentecostalism in Context: Essays in Honor of William W. Menzies*. Edited by Wonsuk Ma and Robert P. Menzies. Journal of Pentecostal Theology, Supplement Series 11. Editors John Christopher Thomas, Rickie D. Moore, and Steven J. Land. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997.

Hollenweger, Walter J. *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide*. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997.

Hughes, R. Kent, John MacArthur, Jr., R. C. Sproul, et al. John H. Armstrong, general editor. *The Coming Evangelical Crisis: Current Challenges to the Authority of Scripture and the Gospel*. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1996.

Land, Steven J. *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*. Journal of Pentecostal Theology, Supplement Series 1. Editors John Christopher Thomas, Rick D. Moore, and Steven J. Land. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993.

McQueen, Larry R. *Joel and the Spirit: The Cry of a Prophetic Hermeneutic*. Journal of Pentecostal Theology, Supplement Series 8. Editors John Christopher Thomas, Rick D. Moore, and Steven J. Land. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995.

Regele, Mike, with Mark Schulz. *Death of the Church*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, A Division of Harper/Collins Publishers, 1995.