The Anointing or Theological Training? A Pentecostal Dilemma

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to propose a solution to a dilemma that was characteristic of the Pentecostal movement from its inception, one that is still current, not only in some sections of the movement, but even in modern Evangelicalism. This dilemma is, should prospective ministers seek the empowerment of the Spirit for service in preference to theological education, or, should they pursue theological training as a principal means towards effective service? The article investigates the classical Pentecostal attitude to theological education, before examining later modifications to the original Pentecostal view. The classical position is then evaluated before a conclusion is drawn, namely, the anointing and theological training should not be regarded as contradictory, but rather, as complementary imperatives.

1. Introduction

The question as to whether Pentecostals, particularly those called to the pastoral or evangelistic ministry, need formal theological training, or whether the 'anointing' of the Spirit is sufficient, is one that was settled in some countries many years ago. However, in other countries, including South Africa, the issue is still a live one in certain Pentecostal

¹ The views expressed in this article are those of the author, and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

and evangelical Christian communities. This article attempts to (a) describe the classical Pentecostal position with regard to theological education, as opposed to the anointing, (b) investigate how that position changed over time, and (c) critique the classical Pentecostal stance *vis-a-vis* theological education. The article will conclude with a suggested solution to the dilemma.

2. Theological Education: the Classical Pentecostal Attitude

Donald Gee, the well-known Pentecostal Bible teacher and former chairman of the Assemblies of God of Great Britain, observed that many early Pentecostals were characterised by their lack of education (1961:51). Allan Anderson pointed out that in view of the tension that exists between academic integrity and spirituality, the history of Pentecostalism has been characterised by a tenuous relationship with theological education (2004:244). Prominent Pentecostal leaders such as the British evangelist and former miner, Stephen Jeffreys, had no theological training (Gee 1941:101). In early British Pentecostalism, personal consecration was generally considered to be all that was required for both discipleship and leadership (Gee 1941:99). The hostility of the early Pentecostals to theological education is illustrated by Gee's perception that the ministry of his day was frequently characterized by 'utterly arid intellectualism' (1961:51). Ruthven alluded to the antipathy of the Pentecostal pioneers and their followers to what was termed 'theological cemeteries' (i.e. seminaries) (n.d.:1). William Burton, a British Pentecostal missionary, who founded one hundred churches in what was then known as the Belgian Congo, recalled his criticism of a bishop with whom he once stayed in England. While Burton was reading his Bible, the bishop was reading an article on higher criticism in a church magazine. Burton advised the cleric to 'get back to God's Word' (1973:20). The Pentecostal attitude to education elsewhere in the world seems to have been similar. In the South American Pentecostalism of the early 1970s, for example, 56 per cent of pastors surveyed had not completed primary school (Wagner 1973:93). This was not considered a hindrance because Pentecostals emphasised the primacy of what they called the 'anointing' in the ministry of the Word (Gee 1963:34).

The main feature of this 'anointing' was the energising of the recipient to serve Christ effectively. The experience was received after regeneration. Pentecostals also applied the term to subsequent 'fillings' of the Spirit during or for special occasions (Pearlman 1981:316). However, in this paper, the term is used to denote the initial experience of being filled with the Spirit or baptized in the Spirit, with accompanying spiritual manifestations (Williams 1953:64). The anointing was conceived as being linked to another concept: the 'enduement of power for service' (Acts 1:8). This 'enduement of power' was associated with yet another Pentecostal doctrinal distinctive: the 'baptism in (or with) the Spirit' (Pearlman 1981:308-309). This 'baptism' was interpreted as being accompanied by the supernatural manifestation of speaking in tongues, and by the energising of the recipient for effective service (Pearlman 1981:310, 312). Amos Yong agrees that this represents the traditional Pentecostal position (2005:101). The statements of faith of the Pentecostal Protestant Church and the Full Gospel Church of God in Southern Africa accurately reflect this concept: 'We believe in the baptism in the Holy Spirit, empowering and equipping believers for service, with the accompanying supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit' (Pentecostal Protestant Church. Articles of Faith: Article 10) and 'We believe that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is...the enduement of power from on high' (Full Gospel Church. Doctrines of the Church: Section 16). Some Charismatic groups and believers hold a similar view (Mathole 2005).

In South Africa, Oosthuizen's investigation into the progress of Pentecostalism among the Indian community in Kwazulu-Natal revealed that in Pentecostal groups, where emotionalism was highly emphasised, intellectualism and theological training were disparaged (1975:262). Peter Watt, in his history of the Assemblies of God in Southern Africa, commented that in the Assemblies of God, Bible schools were sometimes referred to as 'sausage machines', and that 'no value was placed on academic education for ministers' (1992:43-44). The pioneers of the Apostolic Faith Mission in South Africa, and the early adherents of that movement, were also not well educated. Their doctrinal beliefs, therefore, tended to be experientially based (Hwata 2005:102). Knowledge derived from education was regarded as dangerous, in that it could quench the work of the Spirit (Hwata 2005:106). The evidence is therefore unambiguous: Pentecostals have sometimes characterised theological education as being no more than a 'dead intellectualism' (Anderson 2004:244). However, it should be noted that Jacobsen's view is that the early Pentecostals were not so much opposed to theology per se, as to the use of theological terminology without the appropriate religious experience to support the terminology. He commented that some Pentecostal leaders used to describe traditional theology as being akin to dry 'chips, shavings and wind' (2006:5).

The early Pentecostals' enthusiasm for genuine spiritual power and direct knowledge of God through personal experience is understandable, especially in the light of the early 19th century ecclesiastical context in both the U.S.A. and Europe. Brumback noted that many churches had departed from the historic position of the faith, and had succumbed to theological liberalism and the ideas of the

Enlightenment. In general terms, he described many churches as being characterised by formalism, non-experiential religion, 'worldliness', an over-emphasis on a professional clergy, class consciousness, and spiritual coldness (Brumback 1961:2-6). Meyer commented on the formality, 'religiosity', and the growing number of adults who no longer attended church in Victorian England (1969:271).

Some early Pentecostals, however, gave evidence of being anointed, and yet, were academically trained. For example, Dr Charles S Price, who was greatly used in evangelism and in healing the sick (Lindsay 1980:35), studied law at Oxford University in England. Sam C Perry joined the Church of God in Tennessee as one of the first university-trained preachers in that Church (Nichol 1966:230). Lillian B Yeomans was a Canadian medical doctor (Brumback1961:134-135). However, such examples remained the exception rather than the rule.

3. Changes in the classical Pentecostal position

Since approximately 1940, the perceptions of many Pentecostals regarding the necessity for formal theological training began to change (Nichol 1966:230). As early as 1920, some Pentecostal leaders had begun to realize that many Pentecostal young people and converts were not well grounded in Pentecostal and Christian principles, and that this was not advantageous (Nichol 1966:231). The Assemblies of God in the U.S.A. instituted short-term Bible training in 1915, but soon realized that permanent Bible schools needed to be established. Some opposed this initiative on the grounds that it represented a step towards formalism and towards substituting the mind of God for the mind of man. However, proponents of Bible school training responded with the following three arguments:

- 1. The mind of the Spirit was expressed in 2 Timothy 2:15: 'Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman who needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth' (AV). Only a thorough study of the Word could lodge within the mind that which the Spirit would later be able to bring to remembrance (John 14:26).
- 2. Samuel's school of the prophets and Jesus' three-year 'school' for his twelve disciples should be regarded as ample justification for latter-day Bible schools.
- 3. Some of the most anointed Pentecostal preachers had been trained at Bible schools such as the Nyack Missionary Training Institute and the Moody Bible Institute in the U.S.A. (Brumback 1961:226-227).

Pope maintained that one of the indications that a religious movement is progressing beyond a sectarian status is when it begins to insist on academic training for its ministers (Pope, in Nichol 1966:230). Oosthuizen noted in 1975 that there was an evolutionary period underway in South African Pentecostalism, in which theological training for pastors was becoming increasingly acceptable (1975:261). John Bond of the Assemblies of God completed a Bachelor of Arts in Theology at the University of South Africa. In so doing, he took a courageous stand against the anti-education stance that typified the South African Assemblies of God of the time (Watt, in Bond 2000). The Apostolic Faith Mission began to show a keen interest in theological education from 1949 and opened the Apostolic Bible College in 1950 (Hwata 2005:106).

In the U.S.A., in spite of the fact that the Assemblies of God passed a resolution during its General Assembly of 1949 that a university degree would never be a prerequisite for ordination, by the end of the Second World War, more than 2000 Pentecostal applicants had to be turned

away from Bible colleges (Nichol 1966:231). Similarly, in the United Kingdom, Gee described the Pentecostal Bible schools there as being filled to capacity. Furthermore, Gee (1961:41) claimed that 'thousands of our keenest, most consecrated, most spiritual, and most intelligent young men and women are devoting themselves to the study of the Scriptures' in such schools.

While there have been changes to the traditional Pentecostal view, there remain some, even today, who continue to adhere to the earlier position. Chan commented that even in recent times, Pentecostals have been afraid that the "letter" might kill the "spirit" (2000:12). According to the information service of the South African government, 'Hundreds of independent charismatic churches have mushroomed across the country' (Burger 2010). The attitude of the leadership of these churches to theological education is not uniform. The senior pastor of a Pentecostal independent church wrote in the following terms (Nathan 2011):

The long-accepted practice of training prospective ministers through Bible colleges and seminaries cannot be recognized as being scriptural, or as being the most effective means of achieving this objective. Tradition, Jesus taught, 'makes the Word of God of no effect', and this holds particularly true in the area of training ministers.

An elder (Sykes 2011) in an Assemblies of God church in Johannesburg, wrote the following:

I believe the 'head of the Body', the Lord Jesus, teaches and prepares us through the gift ministries He has given to the church. The ministries grow and develop in the body of Christ and are not taught outside of the body. Teaching and the development and 'proving' of ministries take place within the body of Christ. There is therefore no need for 'theological training' outside of the body of Christ. The fellowship is the greatest 'Bible School' there is, and has the greatest Teacher – the Lord Jesus Christ. The only text books that are needed are the sixty-six books contained in the Bible and the pattern of the Church and how it should operate and be taught are found in the New Testament.

Such views have survived even in some evangelical circles. For example, Mike Raiter, principal of Victoria Bible College in Australia, set out the opposition of some cross-cultural Christian workers to theological education in the following way, 'there is an increasing number of cross-cultural workers who have pursued little or no formal study and who would testify that they're coping just fine. Theological training, some say, is simply not necessary' (2009). Collins Sentumbwe, a Ugandan pastor, writing of the 1980s and 1990s in Uganda, commented, 'Sadly, this was the same time when the attitude that theological training was irrelevant, unnecessary and simply religious became popular. The assumption that the Holy Spirit showed himself powerfully by using illiterate, untrained, unskilled people was embraced by many' (2006).

4. Critique of the Classical Pentecostal View

4.1. Faulty exegesis

The following three examples of faulty exegesis illustrate why it was necessary to reconsider the classical Pentecostal view:

1. Ken Horn recounted how a woman approached him at the close of a service at which he had been the guest speaker. She claimed that in her church, they believed in the Bible, but not in doctrine (2004). Horn observed that it is impossible to believe in the Bible but not in doctrine, for whenever Bible teaching is undertaken, doctrine is involved (Horn 2004). Whenever one takes a stand on a particular interpretation of the Bible over against some other interpretation, then one is taking a doctrinal position. The danger is that if one's doctrinal convictions are unconscious and unreflected, they will also be unsystematic, arbitrary, and prone to misinterpreting the full counsel of God.

- 2. Deuteronomy 22:5, 'A woman must not wear men's clothing', provides another example of faulty exegesis within the South African Assemblies of God. This was interpreted as being a prohibition on women wearing trousers, rather than on forbidding transvestism or homosexual practices (Kalland and Barker 1985:270). The conviction that women should not wear trousers received a severe challenge during the 'hippy' revival in the 1970s. The crisis was precipitated by the attendance at services of the author's home church of large numbers of young men with long hair and young women without head coverings who dressed in jeans. Some had converted to Christianity, and consequently, flocked into church packing it to capacity. The church leadership was compelled to revisit its doctrinal stance on both the issue of women's clothing and men with long hair.
- 3. Daniel 12:4, 'Many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall be increased' (AV), is another example of a text that was exegetically misunderstood. 'Many shall run to and fro' was thought to refer to the great number of motorists thronging modern highways, and 'knowledge shall be increased' was believed to refer to the pronounced increase in secular knowledge characteristic of recent times. A more probable interpretation of the passage within its context is this: people will run to and fro in the end times, searching for answers to their questions about the last days, the answer to which they will

find in Daniel's prophecy. In so doing, their knowledge of the end times will increase (Wood 1976:321).

4.2. Contradictory theological positions

An additional dynamic that highlights both the necessity and importance of theological study was the contradictory theological positions adopted by some leading pastors and teachers of the writer's own denomination (Assemblies of God). The majority had not been trained theologically and, consequently, had seemingly adopted their biblical views somewhat arbitrarily and unsystematically. For example, one respected teacher proclaimed the merits of eternal security, while another condemned it as non-biblical heresy. The outlook towards opposing doctrinal views was often characterized by perplexity that such obviously 'self-evident' biblical truths could be misunderstood. Seemingly, there was no informed, let alone sympathetic, understanding of differing doctrinal positions. E S Williams, former General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God in the U.S.A., made the same point (1953:vii-viii):

I have noticed that some attack the beliefs of others, while they know little as to the reasons why others hold to beliefs which differ from their own ... Where there are differences among God's devout children, we do well, as far as we are able, to understand the nature of these differences.

4.3. Undesirable consequences emanating from the lack of formal training

The South African Assemblies of God, associated with James Mullan (distinct from the U.S.A.-based International Assemblies of God, also active in S.A.), were hostile to theological training. Several undesirable

consequences flowed from this. The following three examples provide further confirmation that the classical Pentecostal view was in need of modification:

- 1. The lack of formal training resulted in some enthusiastic young pastors becoming so disillusioned that they left the ministry (Watt 1992:44). Many of these ministers had an extremely limited repertoire of subject material for their preaching and teaching (Watt 1992:119).
- 2. James Mullan's practice of moving ministers from congregation to congregation within a time span of only a few years, did not encourage such ministers to deepen their biblical and theological knowledge. Many such ministers simply continually reused the material they had researched previously. However, once the members of congregations became better educated, the ministers found themselves at a disadvantage. Some congregations began to diminish in size as confidence in the ministers' grasp of biblical and theological issues waned (Watt 1992:119).
- 3. The ministers and their congregants' seeming lack of theological expertise also led to setbacks as a result of challenges from the doctrines of the Word of Faith groups such as Ray McCauley's Rhema Bible Church. McCauley based many of his beliefs on the teachings of Kenneth Hagin. McCauley was converted in the Norwood Assembly of God in Johannesburg, but then pursued his studies at Hagin's *Rhema Bible Training Center* in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He graduated in 1979 (Bond 2000). Some ministers and their members were unable to gainsay the teachings of these Word of Faith groups and, consequently, left the Assemblies of God and joined the 'Faith' groups (Watt 1992:120-121). However, not all leaders of the South African Assemblies of God shared James Mullan's conviction that Bible schools were

unnecessary. Nicholas Bhengu, the famous evangelist, was, like Mullan, a member of the Assemblies of God General Executive. He attended the South African General Mission Bible School at Dumisa (later known as the Union Bible Institute, Sweetwaters), from 1934 to 1936. In 1950, he opened the Pilgrim Bible School in Port Elizabeth (Millard 1991).

4. The following disparaging enquiry, directed by a senior denominational leader to a young Pentecostal Bible student, serves as a case-in-point: 'Is theological college filling you with head knowledge?' Yet, when this same minister was asked to preach at one of his former churches, he refused on the grounds that he had spent three years with them, and so, had nothing new to impart. Such theologically illiterate preachers tended to concentrate on the repetitive teaching of their favourite biblical doctrines and practical instruction on how to live the Christian life (Watt 1992:105).

4.4. A challenge to the classical Pentecostal view of Bible colleges and seminaries

The generalised view that Bible colleges and seminaries inevitably lead to arid intellectualism and loss of spiritual power should be challenged on the basis that the colleges should be no more than a means to an end. John Stott correctly observed that the Lord never intended knowledge to be an end in itself, but rather, as a means to an end (2006:79). Colleges are therefore not intrinsically inimical to genuine spirituality, by virtue of their essential nature. Factors such as the aims and content of the curriculum and the expertise, competence, attitudes, and spirituality of the staff are crucial. As seen from a kingdom perspective, colleges and seminaries can be good, bad, or somewhere in between. For example, Wagner observed that there is a Bible institute in Central America that has been highly successful in promoting evangelism and church planting for many years (1973:99).

4.5. The danger of a wholesale rejection of the faith of our predecessors

Karl Barth (n.d.:10) urged that both in the church and in theology, the commandment, 'Honour your father and your mother', should continue to be observed. Barth's point, that urges us to guard against a wholesale rejection of all that our predecessors in the faith believed, is a valid one. We should not be so arrogant as to think that God has revealed his truth to us only, and that he never revealed anything substantial to those who preceded us. A more fitting attitude would be one in which we prayerfully (with discernment) evaluate (from a biblical perspective) what others have taught in the past, and what our contemporaries teach and believe now. We should seek to know why some, who might love the Lord as much as we do, hold different doctrinal positions from our own. Our critique of their convictions can be defensible only when it is conducted in the light of a meticulous and unbiased understanding of the grounds upon which they base their views.

4.6. An inconsistent attitude towards 'book-learning'

Lastly, one would expect that those who oppose 'book learning', should themselves not write books. However, this is not always the case. A Pentecostal teacher, who immigrated to South Africa from England during the 1950s, vehemently rejected the spiritual value of commentaries and similar theological works. In spite of this, he did not shy away from authoring books himself, apparently, because he believed that whatever he wrote was necessarily doctrinally pure. In so doing, he was following the example of one of his lecturers in the Bible school that he had attended in England. This lecturer also rejected the theological writings of others, yet produced his own books.

5. Complementary Rather than Contradictory

Any attempt to substitute personal experience for biblical doctrine, and to favour orthopraxy over orthodoxy, should be rejected in favour of a sound balance between the two. There is no such thing as a pure theory, and there is also no such thing as a pure practice. Practice cannot exist without theory, and those who are unaware of this fall prey to exercising their practice under the direction of an unconscious, unreflected, and unsystematic theory. Theory must continually test practice and the insights of practice should be utilised to modify and improve theory (Wolfaardt 1975:11-12). The traditional evangelical position takes its stand unambiguously on the trustworthiness of the biblical record. There is a sense, therefore, in which evangelical theory based on scripture cannot be modified. However, it is important to beware of believing that one's own interpretations of the scriptures are entirely correct and free of error in every point. The insights of practice can therefore identify some of the areas in which our interpretation of biblical teaching falls short of pure doctrine. Seen in this light, theory is required to guide and test practice, while practice, as the concrete outworking of theory, is essential in providing theory with feedback about the validity of its tenets in pastoral, evangelical, and missionary contexts. An example of this is the abovementioned illustration of the challenge to a particular doctrinal position, posed by the presence of jean-clad women in a church that condemned wearing of trousers by woman, on the basis of a faulty interpretation of Deuteronomy 22:5.

Gee observed that a danger of theological training is that students may lose their evangelistic fervour, and be imbued with an exaggerated view of academic achievement and intellectualism. Gee's sober assessment is that evangelism, supported by supernatural signs and theological training, should be regarded as complementary, rather than contradictory components of the fully-orbed Christian mission (1961:42). In similar vein, John Stott commented incisively, 'I am not pleading for a dry, humourless, academic Christianity, but for *a warm devotion set on fire by truth*' (2006:18).

There is no doubt that God can use anyone who is obedient to him, irrespective of their level of education. Throughout history, both biblical and secular, he has used those who were educated, and those who were not. History, therefore, demonstrates that the issue should not be one of 'either or', but rather 'both and'. The Lord's requirements for ministry comprise his specific call and our obedient response. God's call will be accompanied by God's empowerment. Accordingly, there may well be circumstances in which untrained individuals are called to particular ministries, and these ministries may flourish and be successful. It is unwise, however, to make the exception the rule, by arguing that education as a general principle is unnecessary. The anointing without theological training can lead to a narrow and unloving rejection of fellow believers who differ on peripheral doctrinal matters. More importantly, it can also lead to error in both doctrine and practice. Billy Graham drew attention to this when he remarked that many Pentecostals would agree that their movement has, at times, been subject to embarrassing excesses (Brumback 1961:42). On the other hand, the danger of education without the anointing is a sterile intellectualism with a corresponding inability to bear genuine spiritual fruit. Both extremes should be rejected.

6. Conclusion

While the classical Pentecostal attitude to theological training was generally hostile, it is evident that, even in the pioneer period of Pentecostalism, there were Pentecostal leaders who were both anointed and educated. As the Pentecostal movement expanded, the conviction grew stronger that theological education was both desirable and necessary. This growing realization led to the founding of Pentecostal Bible schools. The critique in the article of the classical Pentecostal attitude to theological education demonstrated the soundness of this development. It was further argued in the article that the view that the anointing of the Spirit should be seen in opposition to theological training is faulty. While the Lord in his sovereignty can and does use those who are untrained, the ideal is that his ministers should be both anointed and trained. Those who advocate a return to the earlier Pentecostal position should take cognizance of this.

This article provided a critique of the classical Pentecostal view of theological education and proposed a possible solution to the dilemma between anointing and theological training, namely, that they should be complementary rather than contradictory.

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