

Changing Paradigms in Pentecostal Education (Glopent, February, 2009)

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Introduction

In this brief paper I will first outline old Pentecostal paradigms of education in the period roughly before 1939. I will then look at intermediate paradigms in the period up to about 1975. Finally, attention will be given to more recent developments within Pentecostal education.

The word ‘paradigm’ is well enough known to require little explanation. Its recent usage dates back to Thomas Kuhn’s description of scientific thinking: scientists work within a paradigm (normal science) until a startling innovation makes the paradigm unsustainable, after which the new paradigm became normative.¹ The paradigm of Newtonian physical science operated in the 19th century until Einsteinian physics took over early in the 20th century. David Bosch used the concept of paradigms for his book, *Transforming Mission*, and it appears to be from here that Hans Küng’s borrowed the notion for his big book on Christianity.² The only point that needs to be made in this discussion is to ask ourselves whether paradigms are mutually exclusive. In one view, everything under the old paradigm has to be translated into the new paradigm after a period of transition. In another view, two or more paradigms may co-exist in a postmodern way. At the point of transition it is not clear, then, whether an old paradigm is being replaced so that the new paradigm becomes the only framework within which work is conducted or whether the new paradigm simply operates as an alternative to the new one so as to allow inter-paradigm dialogue.

Old paradigms

Pentecostalism at the start of the 20th century came into existence within at least two educational settings: Charles Fox Parham’s establishment at Topeka, Kansas, and Pandita Ramabai’s establishment at Mukti, India. In the UK, very rapidly after the first outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Sunderland, the Bible School (or schools because there was one for men and one for women) came into existence for the training of missionaries.³ After American Assemblies of God constituted itself in 1914, it addressed itself to educational issues.⁴ It would be incorrect, then, to characterise early Pentecostals as entirely anti-education.

The actual curriculum within these colleges has been well analysed by Douglas Jacobsen.⁵ Taking Meyer Pearlman and Ernest Williams as examples of the period he is able to show that they constructed systematic theologies of Pentecostalism that were ‘scholastic’, building up the doctrines in any interrelated fashion through the accumulation of biblical texts with little regard to context.⁶ Pearlman in his 1937 publication states that ‘the material in this

¹ Thomas Kuhn (1962), *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

² Hans Küng (1995), *Christianity: the religious situation of our time*, London, SCM. David Bosch (1991), *Transforming Mission: paradigm shifts in theology of mission*, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis.

³ Donald Gee (1967), *Wind and Flame*, Croydon, Assemblies of God Publishing House, p 61, gives a date for the first Bible School as 1909 in Paddington, London.

⁴ E. V. Blumhofer (1985), *The Assemblies of God: a popular history*, Springfield, MO, Radiant Books, pp.63-72.

⁵ D Jacobsen (1999), Knowing the doctrines of the Pentecostals: the scholastic theology of the Assemblies of God, 1930-55, in E Blumhofer, R P Spittler, G A Wacker (eds), *Pentecostal Currents in North American Pentecostalism*, Illinois, University of Illinois Press, pp. 90-107.

⁶ Meyer Pearlman (1937), *Knowing the Doctrines of the Bible*, Springfield, MO, GPH; Ernest Swing Williams (1953), *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols, Springfield, MO, GPG.

book is a combination of biblical and systematic theology' and he used biblical texts and sometimes expounded biblical passages to support his views. There is no reference to the Azusa Street revival or to miracles or to any other aspect of Pentecostalism. Nor is there an attempt to refute, demonise or attack other believers or social groups. The attitude behind the book is one that shows Pentecostalism belongs within the mainstream of the church historically conceived.

Two other writers are pertinent here. The first is Donald Gee. After consideration of the purpose of spiritual gifts and the functioning of each gift individually in 1 Corinthians 12 individually Gee published his book *Concerning Spiritual Gifts*. He had early seen the connection between ecclesiology and ministry-gifts and between ecclesiology and spiritual gifts. His publications on the church began as a magazine series in January 1929⁷ until it was published as a book in 1930.⁸ *Concerning Shepherds and Sheepfolds* remained in print for at least the next 20 years. The second is Harold Horton whose book *The Gifts of the Spirit* was first published in 1934 and then reprinted in a new edition later that year and then in a second edition in 1946.⁹ Here is a supernaturalist exposition of the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit as outlined in 1 Corinthians 12.

So these four writers, Pearlman, Williams, Gee and Horton contributed to second-generation Pentecostal theology. The two Americans attempt a systematic, rounded account; the two British writers expounded key biblical passages to which Pentecostals brought important fresh interpretations. This material found its way into the curricula of the bible colleges that were in action at this time. In short, first phase Pentecostal training establishments had the following features:

- They functioned as a form of upper-secondary/ tertiary education in an age without universal secondary education;
- they offered systematic Bible teaching using inductive methods (deducing doctrines by assembling texts without much regard for their context);
- they frequently combined residential training with practical activity like open air meetings, visitation and Sunday preaching;
- their fervent spiritual tone was usually maintained by student prayer meetings and collective worship;
- their lecturers were pastors and itinerant preachers, which ensured a non-dialogical pedagogy;
- where the colleges were attached to/funded by a Pentecostal denomination, they were expected or required to teach denominational distinctives.

Intermediate paradigms

The intermediate period saw the diversification of Pentecostal education. Pentecostal Bible Colleges broadened their curricula to become theological colleges by seeking and gaining accreditation from the academy. After internal resistance Pentecostals accepted that the courses they offered should submit themselves to assessment by non-Pentecostals and, where accreditation was given, courses began to look like theological courses in secular institutions. Bible School curricula began to insist upon extensive bibliographies, big libraries and the

⁷ *Redemption Tidings*, 5.2, February 1929.

⁸ *Redemption Tidings*, 6.3, March 1930. Gee wrote the book during his five and half week voyage to Australia in 1928. Ross, *Gee*, p.36.

⁹ The introduction and acknowledgement makes reference to Howard Carter's 'schedule of private notes', Harold Horton (1934), *The Gifts of the Spirit*, London, privately published.

learning of biblical languages with the result that students who completed these courses could seek admission to research degrees in secular institutions. At the same time ministerial training continued in the well-resourced institutions of North America, though its practical aspects began to have affinities with professional training in other walks of life.

Of all countries the USA was the most richly endowed with Pentecostal educational institutions. This is partly because its Pentecostal churches were large, denominationally cooperative and well-funded but also because the American populace invested heavily in education. ‘Going to college’ was a rite of passage and part of the American dream. The funding of higher education in United States was largely from private endowments with the result that everybody understood that, if substantial Pentecostal institutions would be built, they had to be funded in the same way as the prestigious universities that dotted the American map. Moreover, since each denomination in United States aspired to run its own universities -- there were Baptist, Methodist, Roman Catholic campuses -- Pentecostals were not breaking new ground when they began to transform their Bible colleges into universities. With university status came a multiplicity of faculties supported by Pentecostal educational philosophies that gradually stretched to cover the spectrum of human knowledge.¹⁰

As Pentecostalism spread across the globe during the 20th century and began to flourish in Latin America and Asia, and as the gross national product in these parts of the world climbed, education aspirations grew: what America had today, other countries expected to reach in a generation. The consequence of this was that the older style of American institutions operated in poorer countries while the newer style operated in the wealthier countries – provided there was a sufficient number of churches to sustain this expansion. In short,

- Pentecostal education diversified into a variety of institutions, including universities;
- this education was delivered according to secular accreditation criteria;
- ministerial training was retained;
- across the world other Pentecostal churches followed the example of the USA.

New paradigms

The final historical period, Pentecostal universities continue to grow although they found themselves competing with secular universities that were often better funded. They may have emphasised their Pentecostalism by giving more resources to the theology department or by attempting to create programs in journalism or at other interfaces with society.

In some places Pentecostals set up Graduate Schools that served a cluster of Bible schools. The Graduate Schools might offer masters programmes and doctorates and relied upon a higher level of accreditation than the Bible Schools could reach. Graduate Schools of this kind could develop autonomously while allowing their feeder Bible schools to continue the traditional role of serving a flock of churches by training their ministers. In situations where Bible schools and a Graduate School operated in coordination, practical steps had to be taken to match the two curricula.

From the 1970s onwards megachurches began to appear -- they earlier became visible in South Korea which blazed a trail in this direction. The megachurch was like the department store: it offered everything the Christian might need from sports facilities for children, a restaurant, Christian holidays, broadcasting, and an extensive range of specialist ministries.

¹⁰ An evangelical foray into the philosophy of education can be found in, Michael L Peterson (2001), *With All Your Mind*, Notre Dame, IN, University of Notre Dame.

Often the megachurches pastor considered that he (it was almost always was a man) should set up a Bible School. This ensured that the young people of the church did not have to leave home in order to obtain degree-level qualifications and the best of the graduates were able to stay on the church campus and gradually be absorbed in the growing ecclesiological structure. At their worst the megachurches reflected the idiosyncrasies of the mega-pastor and offered a lopsided curriculum. At their best the megachurches ensured their resources were deployed to enable a genuinely balanced curriculum that also included practical experience for the students. Such experience might be in the form of music, dance or drama. There are, for instance, mega-churches in Singapore that offer both ministerial training and worship programs that demand high levels of musical and artistic expertise, and both these kinds of expertise can be coupled with knowledge of electronics. In this way megachurch may have the beginnings of a multi-faculty liberal arts college adjoined to it.

From the 1970s onwards parachurch organisations also began to function and to offer educational programs. YWAM set up the University of the Nations in Hawaii and there were other examples of such patterns. The parachurch organisations were sometimes dependent upon money given by the churches and at other times sold their services to government agencies or NGOs. In essence these agencies were subordinated to the pressing needs of the hour. They may have offered young people experience in evangelism, childcare or in drug rehabilitation and, inevitably, there was rivalry between mega-church pastors and parachurch groups.

The arrival of the internet and rapid digital communication created extensive opportunities for distance learning that could be enriched by pod casts, Skype phone calls, complicated web sites with chat rooms, online libraries and other downloadable materials. The internet could extend a conventional campus-based college to new students who interfaced electronically with their peers and their tutors. As a result campus-based students were surrounded by a penumbra of electronically-connected students. Moreover the campus-based students could benefit from the conditions created by distance learning so that, if campus-based students missed lectures, they could catch up by going online and tapping into the distance learning provision.

Undoubtedly the effect of the secular academy upon Bible schools was to broaden and liberalise them by bringing critical thinking to the forefront.¹¹ This produced tension with the revivalistic aims of Pentecostalism, and various models were proposed to show how burning Pentecostal spirituality might coexist with conventional pedagogies.¹²

Even so, there were tensions in the other direction when Pentecostal colleges began to veer towards the business community. Leadership courses that drew heavily upon business models of management, goal setting and incentives could be translated into church leadership courses that were a long way from the biblical text.

Before the worldwide recession of 2009, there was enough money to allow extensive travel between Western and non-Western countries with the result that staff at non-Western institutions began to become aware of the bias within the curricula they taught. For instance, church history in Kenyan colleges might continue to be taught from Euro-centric books with

¹¹ See also Keith Warrington (2008), *Pentecostal Theology: a theology of encounter*, London, T & T Clark, pp. 156-161.

¹² L. C. Wanak (2000), Theological education and the role of teaches in the 21st century: a look at the Asia Pacific Region, *Journal of Asian Mission*, 2, 1, 3-24.

the result that the history of the church in Africa was hardly mentioned. As a first step, it was necessary to re-think the design of church history courses so as to allow them to address their historical context.¹³ In short, the new paradigms,

- continued to favour Pentecostal universities with well-equipped theology faculties;
- drew upon the megachurch and its associated training programs;
- saw the appearance of parachurch training packages;
- benefited from the arrival of the internet and sophisticated distance learning;
- often accepted business models of leadership and transplanted these into the church;
- enhanced self-awareness and the construction of curricula appropriate to African, Asian and Latin American contexts.

¹³ See Jenny Kay (2006) Maximising the effectiveness of pastoral training in Africa: with particular reference to Nairobi Pentecostal Bible College and the FECABU churches in Burundi, MTh dissertation, University of Wales, Bangor.