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# From Ecstasy to Enthusiasm Some Trends in the Scientific Attitude to the Pentecostal Movement

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*This article is an abbreviation of part of the author's dissertation at the University of Uppsala, Sweden.*

(Editor)

When the Pentecostal movement reached Sweden in 1907, it was treated with much arrogance and condescension in the secular press. That could, of course, be expected but more astonishing was the fact that early Swedish scholarly research uncritically took over this negative picture. Prof. Emanuel Linderholm,<sup>1</sup> church historian and Dr. Efraim Briem, religious psychologist, described from a mostly religious historical and religious psychological perspective the Pentecostals as ecstatic persons, who out of conscience performed their religion, and parallels to this behaviour were sought in Old Testamental primitive prophecy and in non-biblical cultures. An early American example of this scholarly attitude of annoyance and amusement was Alexander Mackie's *The Gift of Tongues: A study in Pathological Aspects of Christianity* (New York 1921), where the glossolalia was identified with 'pagan ideas and pagan practices'.<sup>2</sup> Very illustrative for the scholarly attitude was that Pentecostalism was a matter predominantly for religious psychological research.

This very negative picture of Pentecostals generally endured for about 50 years. The monumental work of the Norwegian systematist Einar Molland *Christendom* (London 1959) described the glossolalia as 'meaningless words uttered by ecstasies'.<sup>3</sup> A Swedish Church history survey, also used in theological education as late as 1974 talked about 'the ecstatic phenomena' within Pentecostalism.<sup>4</sup> Scholarly research really had given its important contribution to present Pentecostalism as 'ecstatic' and out of conscience, a strange bird in the religious p. 71 world, made up into packets with mormons, theosophists and Jehovah's Witnesses.

The book *par excellence* which opened for a more positive scientific attitude was Prof. Walter Hollenweger's *Enthusiastisches Christentum* (Zurich 1969), translated into English *The Pentecostals* (London 1972). Some headings immediately reveal a different attitude from Linderholm, Briem and Mackie: 'Charismatic revival within the established churches: a new chance?' 'Religion of the proud poor' and 'Islands of humanity'. Hollenweger denoted—and that was a new way of approaching Pentecostals—that the movement should not only be understood as a compensation or an opiate for people with

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<sup>1</sup> Linderholm, Emanuel, *Pingstroerlsen i Sverige. Extas, under, apokalyptic i nutida svensk religiositet*, Stockholm 1925 och Briem, Efraim, *Den moderna pingstroerlsen*, Stockholm, 1924.

<sup>2</sup> Mackie 1921, p.25.

<sup>3</sup> Molland 1959, p.302.

<sup>4</sup> Tergel 1974, p.293.

low social strata. Pentecostalism has, according to Hollenweger, a lot to give even to the highly educated who are 'disappointed with a kind of worship which adds the problems of the theologian to their own professional problems'. Even these educated people long for 'direct prayer and a simplification of religious faith in the form of spontaneous and personal relationships' and these people find 'in pentecostal worship exactly what they need. For it does not teach people to think, but to believe'. Hollenweger describes this 'island of humanity' as a spiritual milieu, which gives the poor 'a home, a relative economic security, care when they are sick and basic educational opportunities' and a spiritual milieu for managers of large factories, engineers, diplomats, artists and university professors where they get help 'to discover the other side of their personality, the original spontaneous and individual human element and to experience it in the framework of a liturgy, which controls it, but which is spontaneous in form'.<sup>5</sup> Hollenweger therefore represents an attitude to the Pentecostal movement diametrically opposite to that of the scholars of the 1920s. Where Pentecostalism for them had a detrimental effect on its members, it is for Hollenweger very beneficial. Where Linderholm and Briem had psychiatrists to evaluate and condemn the new movement, Hollenweger instead recommends a collaboration between Pentecostal faith and psychiatry. Hollenweger states, 'perhaps a Pentecostal pastor who because of his understanding of the Bible is more open to this situation of psychosis may be able to give more help than a psychiatrist!'<sup>6</sup> Talk about a scientific revolution! Where the Swedish scholars—and they were some of the first scholars in the world to evaluate the Pentecostal movement—considered Pentecostalism to be spiritually a wild movement, consisting of p. 72 uneducated people, Hollenweger instead regards this evaluation of the uneducated 'proud poor' within Pentecostalism as its most prominent contribution. Yes, so prominent, that this contribution is more valuable than the pneumatology. Hollenweger with his mighty work really promoted that Pentecostalism became 'house-trained' in the scientific world.

This new *modus vivendi* for the Pentecostal movement was also illustrated in another book from the same year 1969 by the Swiss sociologist Christian Lalive d'Epinay in his study of the Pentecostal expansion in Chile, *Haven of Masses* (London 1969). In this book, written on behalf of the World Council of Churches, d'Epinay in conformity with Hollenweger regards the high evaluation of the poor people as an important reason for the explosive growth in the South American context. Pentecostalism to this people gives a 'certain type of human dignity'<sup>7</sup> and 'in rescuing the individual, Pentecostalism brings to him a human dignity refused him by society'.<sup>8</sup> d'Epinay in his analysis makes use of the anomie-conception of the French sociologist Emile Durkheim to be able to explain how the Pentecostals succeeded in filling the socio-religious needs in the Chilean society of the 1930s. Without any personal connection to Pentecostalism the author evaluates the Pentecostal movement in explaining its explosive growth due to its spontaneity, its belief in man's possibilities and ability to reach the lower social classes. Why do so many Hindus in Durban associate with Pentecostals? Why don't they in the same way associate with the other churches? These are the two main questions in *Pentecostal Penetration into the Indian Community in South Africa* (Durban 1975) written by Prof. G. C. Oosthuizen. In this

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<sup>5</sup> Hollenweger 1972, p.472f.

<sup>6</sup> Hollenweger 1972, p.382.

<sup>7</sup> d'Epinay 1969, p.35.

<sup>8</sup> d'Epinay 1969, p.44.

local study Oosthuizen draws the same conclusion as both Hollenweger and d'Epina have drawn before him. The natural integration of the laity into the life of the congregation is a very important factor behind the Pentecostal growth. Furthermore—the Pentecostal fellowship creates a home for people being evaluated: 'human dignity is what he seeks and this is found in the knowledge that ... he is supported, he is being encouraged. Their Saviour and Lord has no marginal figures.' To be a member of a Hindu ethnic group in a Western-oriented society can provide a feeling of alienation, a feeling, which is removed in the Pentecostal fellowship. Oosthuizen furthermore stresses as other attractive factors the spontaneity and the evangelistic activity and—perhaps astonishingly—the healing services within Pentecostalism. The Hindus who p. 73 associate with Pentecostals witness that they are disappointed with the answer of Hinduism or lack of answer to the question of man's suffering. And in this situation Pentecostalism is said to provide an answer and a realism, where Hinduism for them represents only unreal mythology.<sup>9</sup> Pentecostalism, according to Oosthuizen—and here he is also talking the same language as Hollenweger and d'Epina—is the movement of 'the proud poor', who feel participation,<sup>10</sup> a sub-culture, which gives security, a fellowship without social barriers. The Pentecostals feel that they are doing something positive, their worship is therapeutic and healthy—there are some other positive judgements from Oosthuizen. He summarizes his interesting local study by saying, that 'the established churches have however to take note of the methods used by the Pentecostal churches' and simultaneously he doubts whether the established churches might be able to reach such success among the Hindus in Durban as the Pentecostals have reached.<sup>11</sup>

Before we continue, we must honestly make clear that these three mentioned books are not a devout admiration of the Pentecostal movement. Hollenweger for example is very critical of an exclusive attitude shown by many Pentecostal congregations and d'Epina is especially critical of the non-political standpoint taken by many Pentecostals in Chile.

Anyway, these three chosen books are illustrative examples of revaluation to Pentecostalism within the scientific world. Where we in the 1920s met expressions like ecstasy, out of conscience and fanatic, we in the 1970s read words as healthy, therapeutic, dignity, security and spontaneity. These three quoted books could without difficulty be supplemented by many other researches. Vinson Synan's serious approach in *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States* (Grand Rapids 1971) is another example from the church historical field and even the religious psychological research has got another theme. William J. Samarin's linguistic studies in e.g. *Tongues of Men and Angels* (New York 1972) regards Pentecostalism as a functioning feature of a complex behavioral movement and plays down the psychological interpretations. According to Samarin 'glossolalia represented extraordinary practice, but its practitioners were not necessarily abnormal people!' p. 74

The new attitude to Pentecostalism from the scientific world could consequently be summarized in the following four theses:

1. Theological investigation deals with Pentecostalism more than ever.
2. Pentecostalism is not dealt with from only a religious psychological viewpoint but even from a religious sociological as well as a church historical point of view.

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<sup>9</sup> Oosthuizen 1975, p.310.

<sup>10</sup> Oosthuizen 1975, p.324.

<sup>11</sup> Oosthuizen 1975, p.346.

3. The main impression of the investigation is more positive and open compared to earlier investigations about the Pentecostal movement.
4. This trend can be observed internationally from c.1970.

When this trend clearly can be noticed, the reasons behind it must be searched and I want to contribute to this discussion by suggesting four plausible factors.

## **1. THE EXPANSION OF PENTECOSTALISM**

The books of d'Epinay and Oosthuizen dealt exactly with that question: 'Why are the Pentecostals growing, while other churches are stagnating?' This question is raised also in other books, especially from the Church Growth field such as Peter Wagner, *What are we missing?* (Carol Stream 1973), Justo L. Gonzales *The Development of Christianity in the Latin Caribbean* (Grand Rapids 1969): Winston Elliot, *Sociocultural change in a Pentecostal Group* (Knoxville 1971), Arno W. Enns, *Man, Milieu and Mission in Argentina* (Grand Rapids 1971) and William R. Read, *New Patterns of Church Growth in Brazil* (Grand Rapids 1965). A growing movement evokes interest. In many so-called mission countries today Pentecostalism de facto is the spiritual movement, which grows most rapidly. Church historians and religious sociologists after Henry P. Van Dusen talk about Pentecostalism as 'the third force' alongside Catholicism and Protestantism. The Mission outreach evokes interest, respect and admiration also from the theological investigators.

## **2. PENTECOSTALISM IS NO LONGER AN EXCLUSIVE SECT**

The sociological character of Pentecostalism has changed during its almost 80 years of existence. Many Pentecostals admit that the movement in fields of theology and praxis has become more established and institutionalized. The movement of the 1980s is not the same as the more radical movement of the 1920s. This process of institutionalization is due to the growth of the movement. A spiritual power, which today has c.5–6 million adherents in Brazil and p. 75 c. 100,000 in Sweden and all the time is growing is a rather large part of the population and has because of its high percentage many contacts with society. A study about Pentecostalism today must deal with both the spiritual movement itself and the development of that society where it is found. In my own thesis about the Pentecostal movement in Sweden, *The Pentecostal Movement and the Newspaper DAGEN 1907–1963—from sect to Christian society 1907–1963* (Sveg 1977) I could point out that Pentecostalism in the encounter with society and especially the secularization in that society, was changed and abandoned some of the principles which they had defended with great emphasis in the 1910s.

## **PENTECOSTALISM HAS BECOME AWARE OF ITS OWN HISTORY**

3. If we use a religious sociological terminology, Pentecostalism today is in its third generation. This terminology can surely be discussed, while it must be difficult to talk about borders between generations in a movement which is growing all the time.

From c.1970 we can, however, notice an increasing interest in the history of Pentecostalism. Congregations reaching the times for jubilees very often publish small histories and at the universities Pentecostals are studying church history with special reference to the history of their own movement. At least this is a very typical development in Sweden these days. Another example is that before 1975 no dissertation on Pentecostalism was presented in Sweden, but after that year about 10 have been edited.

In Sweden also very recently, to the memory of the 100th birthday of its doyen Lewi Pethrus, an Information Centre has been opened, where documents about Pentecostalism, magazines, minutes and other information will be available for researchers. We have also been informed that the branches of American Pentecostalism have made up advanced plans for founding a Pentecostal Resource Centre with the corresponding aim as the Swedish Information Centre.

#### 4. THE CHARISMATIC RENEWAL

The co-pentecostalism has surely contributed in creating an increasing interest in investigations about the Pentecostal movement. A study about the charismatic renewal always has to visit the old Methodist Church at Asuza Street 312 in Los Angeles. The book of Hollenweger is one illustrating example of the fact that the charismatic renewal has inspired a study about Pentecostalism. He starts in a special way by describing the charismatic renewal and after that description he goes over to a theological and sociological analysis of Pentecostalism. **P. 76** Perhaps the charismatic renewal—born in university milieu—more than any other factor has inspired an increasing interest and a more open attitude toward Pentecostalism.

To summarize an interesting development—from first hand three books about Pentecostalism I have shown and tried to explain the revaluation which Pentecostalism has received from the scientific world during the last decade. Where the Swedish scholars Linderholm and Briem in the 1920s with the terminology 'ecstasy' expressed their negative attitude to this new movement, the scholars of the 1970s discover positive elements in that same movement—an ability to reach the lower social strata in the society, the evaluation of the laity, a therapeutic and healthy milieu, a spontaneity and a freedom of the Spirit, a spiritual power, which established churches can be lacking and an enthusiasm, which is very attractive—in Santiago and Durban.

Many reasons lie behind the development 'from ecstasy to enthusiasm'—the expansion of Pentecostalism—in some areas of an explosive kind—the changed sociological character of Pentecostalism, the increasing interest in history from Pentecostals themselves and the importance of the charismatic renewal to promote the pneumatology and soteriology of Pentecostalism. The first scholar to make a path for a scientific revaluation after half a century of negative judgements was Walter Hollenweger with his mighty work *Enthusiastisches Christentum* in 1969. He was, however, followed by many other scholars and today Pentecostalism as 'a church of disinherited'—to quote Reinhold Niebuhr—is met by an increasing interest and evaluation from church historical, religious sociological and religious psychological research. Theological research, at its best, is open to new informations and revaluations. The attitude to Pentecostalism has proved this good will to revaluation from the theological field. This revaluation may surely give the Church and Theology something healthy and therapeutic.

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## Book Review Articles

### EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION TODAY VOL I AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE AND EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION TODAY

*Paul Bowers (Ed.)*

#### **Vol II Agenda for Renewal**

*Paul Bowers (Ed.)*

(Evangel Publishing, Nairobi, Kenya, and The Paternoster Press, 61pp and 62pp, limp, stitched, \$0.00)

Reviewed by Chester E. Wood, Bethel College, St. Pauls, Minnesota, Deerfield, U.S.A, in *Trinity Journal* Vol. 4, N.S. No. 1 (Spring 1983)

Is there hope for theological education in the twenty-first century? From what quarter will come fresh insight in the renewal of pastoral training? Western evangelical theologians serving as missionaries in theological education in the so-called third world expect that these churches will provide new life to the body of Christ. Therefore, these two slim volumes of papers describe a new day in theological education. Among the recurring themes are character formation (spiritually), renewal, excellence, measured outcomes, accreditations, social concerns, contextualization and hermeneutics.

*An International Perspective* (Vol. I) is a collection of five papers read at the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship, March, 1980, in England. The editor, Paul Bowers, explains that 'the consultation was designed to generate a comprehensive, critical review of the present state and future prospects of evangelical theological education, looked at globally' (p.2). The eighteen participants represent evangelical theological or accreditation associations from Africa, Asia, Europe, Central America, Latin America, North America and the South Pacific. The consultation led to the formation of