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“Epistemology, Ethos, and Environment”: In Search of a Theology of Pentecostal Theological Education¹

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First Words: Is Bigger Always Better?

Educators like to imagine that education matters. We like to believe that the leadership of a congregation is improved when that person has a graduate degree and three years of study. We like to think that pouring resources into education is worthwhile. We argue that the more resources we devote to theological education, the better.²

Against this commonsense expectation, the Anglican seminar professor Ian S. Markman bluntly says that in reality, however, it is sometimes the case that denominations such as his own, which invests huge amounts of resources into theological education, are declining in membership and activity. Markman reports that the Presbyterian Church (USA) with some of the most highly acclaimed theological schools in the world (Princeton and Columbia, among others) has lost two hundred thousand members during 1999–2004 – the biggest loss during that time period among all mainline churches! On the contrary, Markham further observes, Pentecostals with “very limited and informal” training are growing rapidly all over the world, including some parts of the USA.³

This is of course not to establish any negative causality between the high level of education and low level of church activity – an intriguing PhD study topic in itself! – but rather shake any unfounded belief in the effects of higher education. Indeed, a classic study conducted in the 1960s by the Swiss sociologist Lalive d’Epinay showed that the traditional theological academic training received by mainline Methodist and Presbyterian pastors in Chile was far from making them more effective pastors and church planters when compared to the minimal amount of

1 This essay is a slightly revised version of my presentation at the World Alliance for Pentecostal Theological Education Consultation in Stockholm, Sweden, 25 August 2010. It was previously published as “Epistemology, Ethos, and Environment: In Search of A Theology of Pentecostal Theological Education,” *Pneuma* 34 (2012): 1-17.

2 Ian S. Markham, “Theological Education in the Twenty-First Century,” *Anglican Theological Review* 92, no. 1 (2010): 157.

3 Ibid.

education received by Pentecostal pastors and pioneers in the same location.⁴ Again, it is wise not to draw conclusions too hastily concerning the cause and effects. Whereas it can be the case that theological education itself may have a counter-effect on efficacy in church work, it may also be the case that it is rather a *poor* theological education that has had such effects. We'd better be reminded of the chiding remark by a theological schools' accreditation official on the effects of seminary education: "There is no other professional organization in the world that is as functionally incompetent as ... seminaries. Most of our students emerge from seminaries less prepared than they entered, biblically uncertain, spiritually cold, theologically confused, relationally calloused and professionally unequipped."⁵

Before Pentecostals start saying "Amen and Hallelujah! I knew that!," maybe they should pause and do some reflection. It seems to me there are very few Pentecostal churches that suffer from over-education! On the contrary, we could probably compile a long list of Pentecostal churches, planted and started well, that have become stagnant because of lack of a trained leadership facilitating and nurturing congregational and denominational life. Indeed, there is a dearth of academically trained leadership among Pentecostals, not only in the Global South where most Pentecostal churches (with a few exceptions such as those in South Korea) suffer from severe lack of economic and other resources, but also in Europe and the USA.⁶ Let me just take as an example the US Assemblies of God, one of the most established and resourceful Pentecostal bodies in the world. A recent study of educational levels among Assemblies of God clergy revealed that among senior pastors, 12% had no education beyond high school and 4.3% claimed no ministerial training at all. While 30.6% claimed some training in college or at a technical school, 27.4% had taken a certificate course or had completed some correspondence courses in ministerial training. Some 55.6% had attended Bible College, though only 41.3% completed a degree. While 12.4% held a master's degree, only 9.9% held a seminary degree [often in counseling] and 2.8% held an advanced degree in ministry.⁷ This example alone tells us that Pentecostals are coming to the task of considering the nature and role of higher education in theology from a very different vantage point than the mainline traditions.

4 Christian Lalive d'Epinay, "The Training of Pastors and Theological Education: The Case of Chile," *International Review of Missions* 56 (April 1967): 185–92.

5 The remark comes from Timothy Dearborn, Director of the Seattle Association for Theological Education, reported in Jon M. Ruthven, "Are Pentecostal Seminaries a Good Idea?" n.p., <http://www.tffps.org/docs/Are%20Pentecostal%20Seminaries%20a%20Good%20Idea.pdf> (accessed 7/12/2010).

6 For a fine essay with ample documentation on the history and current state of Pentecostal theological education, see Paul Lewis, "Explorations in Pentecostal Theological Education," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 161–76

7 "Fact* Survey Results: A 2000 Survey of Assemblies of God Churches" (Springfield, MO: Office of the General Secretary, 2000), 9. Copies of this survey are available from the Office of Statistics or from the Office of the General Secretary in Springfield, Missouri. I am indebted to my colleague at Fuller Cecil M. Robeck for providing me with this information.

As the title indicates, my focus will be on the *theology* – rather than, say, pedagogy or philosophy or finances – of Pentecostal theological education. Therefore, I have to leave many things unsaid. My main goal is to urge Pentecostal theologians and educators to collaborate in developing a solid and dynamic theology as the proper ground for theological education. Mainline churches are ahead of us in this work – understandably so since they have had more time to “practice.” There is much to learn from those explorations and experiments.

My argumentation moves in three main parts. First I will take a look at the epistemological options for Pentecostal theological education. Second, building on that discussion, I seek to discern some key dimensions in the ethos of Pentecostal education. Third, I will offer some reflections as to different environments for Pentecostal theological education.

Epistemology: Four “Cities”

In a highly acclaimed and programmatic essay titled *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Debate*, David H. Kelsey of Yale University outlines the underlying epistemology and theology of theological education using two cities as paradigms.⁸ “Athens” refers to the goals and methods of theological education that are derived from classical Greek philosophical educational methodology, *paideia*. The early church adopted and adapted this model. The primary goal of this form of education is the transformation of the individual. It is about character formation and learning the ultimate goal of which is the knowledge of God rather than merely knowing about God. “It is not primarily about *theology*, that is, the formal study of the *knowledge* of God, but it is more about what Kelsey calls *theologia*, that is, gaining the *wisdom* of God. It is the transformation of character to be God-like. The emphasis therefore falls upon personal development and spiritual formation.”⁹ The second pole of Kelsey’s typology, “Berlin,” is based on the Enlightenment epistemology and ideals. (This turn in theological education was first taken at the University of Berlin.) Whereas the classical model of “Athens” accepted the sacred texts as revelation containing the wisdom of God, not only knowledge about God, in the “Berlin” model, rational reasoning and critical enquiry reign. The ultimate goal of theological training is no longer personal formation based on the study of authoritative texts. Rather, it aims at training people in intellectual affairs.

It doesn’t take much reflection to realize that, as helpful as this scheme is, it only says so much. There is more to the picture of the underlying epistemology and theology of theological education. Two other models could be added to the equation before an assessment from a Pentecostal perspective is in order.¹⁰ My former colleague at Fuller Seminary Robert Banks has suggested a third model, which appropriately can be attached to the city of “Jerusalem,” as it

8 David H. Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993).

9 Brian Edgar, “The Theology of Theological Education,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 29, no. 3 (2005): 209.

10 I am indebted to the essay by Edgar, “Theology of Theological Education,” for helping find connections between the four models.

denotes the missionary impulse of the Christian church to spread the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. In an important work titled *Revisioning Theological Education*,¹¹ Banks argues that if Martin Kähler's classic dictum "Mission is the Mother of Theology" is true, it means theology should be missional in orientation. The ultimate goal and context of theological education should thus be missional, which at the end of the day fosters and energizes the church's mission. It is, however, more than what is usually taken as "missiological" education as in the training of foreign missionaries. It is about theological education building the "foundation," which is the mission of the church in all aspects of the church's life and work. This missional orientation is of course in keeping with the current ecclesiological conviction according to which mission is not just one task given to the church among other tasks such as teaching or children's work, but that the church is missional by its very nature, and thus, everything the church does derives from the missional nature.

Yet one further model can be added to the scheme. Named "Geneva" after the great center of the Reformation, this approach to theological education cherishes a confessional approach to theological education. It seeks to help the students to know God through the study of the creeds and the confessions, as well as the means of grace. Formation is focused on the living traditions of the community. "Formation occurs through *in-formation* about the tradition and *en-culturation* within it."¹²

What would a Pentecostal assessment on this typology be? Pentecostals certainly prefer "Athens" over "Berlin" and "Jerusalem" over "Geneva." So the question is settled. Or is it? I don't think so. We all agree that it would be too cheap to pick a couple of appealing choices and move from there. The issue is more complicated – and it has to do, I repeat, both with epistemology and theology.

The choice between the classic model of "Athens" and critical model of "Berlin" reflects the dramatic intellectual change brought about by the Enlightenment. From a Pentecostal point of view, two overly simple responses to the Enlightenment can be mentioned: First, it is bad! Second, it is inevitable! What I want to say here is that even though it would be safe and soothing to be able to go back to the pre-Enlightenment mentality in which the biblical authority, the uniqueness of Jesus, and other key faith convictions could be taken at their face value – and are being taken as such among the common folks not only among Pentecostals but in most all traditions as well – for an academically trained person living in our times it is not a feasible option. To pretend that the Enlightenment never happened is the worst kind of self-delusion.

What about postmodernity? Wouldn't postmodernity's critique and rejection of modernity's legacy come as a God-sent aid to those who are bothered with the rule of reason? Indeed, many Pentecostals have been turned on by the promises of postmodernity; I myself am much more

11 Robert Banks, *Revisioning Theological Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

12 Edgar, "Theology of Theological Education," 211.

reserved. Indeed, what is happening in the beginning of the third millennium is that there is a continuing debate, at times even conflict, between three poles when it comes epistemology. Following Ernest Gellner's suggestive book title, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*,¹³ they can be named as religion, modernity, and postmodernity. Whereas "religion" (cf. "Athens" and "Geneva") builds on authoritative revelation, "modernity" (cf. "Berlin") seeks to replace all faith-commitments for critical inquiry, and postmodernity de-constructs all big narratives in turning to everyone's own stories and explanations. "Religion" is between the rock and hard place. Neither modernity nor postmodernity looks like a great ally.

The lesson to Pentecostal theological education may be simply this: Even though Pentecostals with all other "Bible-believers" seek to build on the authoritative revelation of God in Christ ("Athens"), that cannot be done in isolation from the challenges brought about by both modernity and postmodernity. Pentecostal theological education should seek to find a way of education in which the challenges of both of these prevailing epistemologies are being engaged in an honest and intellectually integral way. Two other lessons that guide us in reflection on the ethos of Pentecostal theological education in the next main part of the essay, follow from this discussion. It is clear and uncontested that Pentecostals should incorporate the missional impulse ("Jerusalem") into the core of their education. Furthermore, I urge Pentecostals to also consider the importance of a confessional ("Geneva") approach, not exclusively, but rather as a complementary way.

Ethos: Four Polarities

Building on these tentative conclusions based on the epistemological discussion, let me continue my reflections on the theology of Pentecostal theological education by discerning and highlighting four dynamic continuums or polarities. Polarities are not just opposite ends, they are also processes and orientations in dynamic tension with each other. I think it is important to hold on to the healthy and constructive dynamisms when speaking of the theological education of this movement that was birthed by a dynamic movement of the Spirit. This is what makes the ethos of Pentecostal theological education. I name these four polarities in the following way:

"Academic" *versus* "Spiritual"

"Indoctrinal" *versus* "Critical"

"Practical" *versus* "Theoretical"

"Tradition-Driven" *versus* "Change-Driven"

"Academic" versus "Spiritual"

Everyone who has worked in the context of Pentecostal or any other revivalistic theological

13 Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1992).

training knows that there is a built-in tension between investing time on spiritual exercises or academic pursuit. In contrast, the “Berlin” model pretty much leaves that tension behind because only academic excellence is pursued. Everyone who has worked in “secular” theological faculties knows what I mean by this.

The “Athens” models suggest that knowledge and wisdom are not alternatives, nor can they be subsumed under each other. Knowledge is the way to wisdom, the true “knowing” of God. The noted American theologian Ellen Cherry describes this in a most useful way as she reflects on the lost heritage of the Augustinian and patristic way of doing and teaching theology: “Theology is to enable people to advance in the spiritual life. Spiritual advancement is the driving force behind all of Augustine’s works. Theories about God and the things of God (i.e., doctrines) are important and wanted, but they are to a further end: to enable people to know, love, and enjoy God better and thereby to flourish.”¹⁴ Augustine is a wonderful example to lift up here because alongside deep spirituality, he is also well known for his highly intellectual and analytic mind. Let me just take up one example. As you read his classic autobiographical *Confessions*, you will soon notice that in the true spirit of Pentecostal-type testimonials he shares about his life before turning to Christ and the dramatic change he underwent. At the same time, this book also contains one of the most sophisticated inquiries into divinity and theology, including the famous chapter 11 on the theology and philosophy of time! Spirituality and academics seem to go well together with the bishop of Hippo.

Whereas for Augustine and those likeminded theology was spiritual by its nature – an aid to help Christians know, love, and enjoy God – post-Enlightenment academic education, as conducted in the university-setting, has strayed so far from this ethos that recently courses in “spirituality” had to be added to the curriculum!¹⁵ As if studying God – *logos* about *theos* – were not a spiritually nourishing exercise in itself.

“Indoctrinal” versus “Critical”

Pentecostal preaching and testimonies are about persuasion – and often amplified with a loud voice! Not only that, but the Pentecostal way of discerning God’s will is geared towards nonmediated, direct encounters with God. In that environment, critical thinking, analysis, and argumentation often sit uncomfortably. Coupled with this is the Bible-school mentality of much of Pentecostal training which, in opposition to critical academic faculties in the universities, was set up to combat reigning liberalism. In other words, the “Berlin” model doesn’t seem to be a viable option in that kind of environment. Mark Hutchinson describes aptly the dynamic field in which Pentecostal theological education often finds itself in the midst of conflicting expectations:

14 Ellen T. Cherry, “Educating for Wisdom: Theological Studies as a Spiritual Exercise,” *Theology Today* 66, no. 3 (2009): 298.

15 See further, Cherry, “Educating for Wisdom,” 296–97.

It would be true to say that most leaders in our movement have little understanding of educational processes, and little expectation about the intelligence of their members. The model of the charismatic leader is to hear from God and then tell the people what he has heard. The concept that they may be in fact serving a *community* which can hear from God and which is capable of dealing with what they've heard is not a common one. And yet, the community model is precisely what a *uni-versity* is – it is a *community* of scholarship. With the prevailing church model, education tends to default towards indoctrination, with more emphasis on character outcomes and opinions than on intellectual formation and knowledge.¹⁶

There is a clash of cultures between the church and the academic institution; only the Bible school environment in most cases avoids this dynamic by going smoothly with the church culture. A Pentecostal academic institution of theological knowledge “exists as a place where definite, charismatic, revelational knowledge and certainty exist alongside and in interaction with the indefinite but progressive search for truth,” whereas a typical church setting calls for a definite, authoritative settling of the issues under discussion. In order to keep this dynamic tension in a healthy measure, “[l]eaders and pastors will have to acknowledge that their revelational knowledge and ecclesial authority is not absolute, while teachers will have to admit that their academic freedom and scholarly knowledge are not absolute goods.”¹⁷

A Pentecostal academic mindset should be able to make a distinction between two kinds of understandings of the term *critical*. The first meaning that usually comes to the popular mind is something like “tearing apart” or “breaking down” beliefs dearly held – as in radical forms of biblical criticism. That kind of use of critical faculties often replicates the naïve and unfounded understanding of rationality *à la* the Enlightenment in which one assumes the location in “no-man’s land” and is able to know something neutrally, without prejudice or bias. That modernist illusion is of course thoroughly prejudiced and biased. If postmodernity has taught us anything, it is that all of our knowledge is “perspectival”; there is “no view from nowhere.” This takes me to the other, more constructive, meaning of *critical*, which means something like “sorting out” or “weighing” between various opinions, options, viewpoints. On the way to a confident opinion or belief, the intellectual capacities are put in use to make sure one’s opinion is justified in light of current knowledge, experience, and wisdom.

The Pentecostal movement at large would be greatly helped by soberly trained leaders who have been taught how to exercise healthy criticism, including self-criticism. Pentecostals would, for example, learn that “bigger is not always better.” Even though it is not an easy task, by taking the “Athens” model as the basis and the “Berlin” model as a necessary aid, Pentecostal theological

16 Mark Hutchinson, “‘The Battle Hymn of the Republic of Learning’: Thoughts on Academic Freedom in a Pentecostal College,” *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* 9 (July 2005/6): 10.

17 Ibid.

education would benefit greatly. In practical terms this means teaching the basics of biblical and doctrinal criticism as part of the curriculum, doing historiography rather than hagiography when studying the past of the movement, subjecting prevailing leadership or church growth patterns and ideals to scrutiny, and so forth.

“Practical” versus “Theoretical”

A recent essay by the newly elected president of Union Theological Seminary (NY), Serene Jones, discloses the depth of the problem that has haunted theological education, particularly ministerial training, from the beginning, namely, how to balance “practical” and “theoretical” aspects. She makes painfully clear just how far academic theology too often has strayed from its practical task. Her title “Practical Theology in Two Modes” is an admission that systematic theology, her own discipline, needs practical theology by its side as a separate field of study, although at the same time she acknowledges that “everything we do in the divinity school is practical; it’s about faith and people’s lives.”¹⁸

The divide between theoretical and practical is another child of modernity. Although the distinction of course serves heuristic purposes and everyday needs – think for example of how useful it is to study first about traffic signs in class (“theory”) before venturing into actual traffic (“practice”). Common sense dictates that in some manner, the distinction should be maintained.

In the case of theological education as long as it has ministerial training as its goal, the *separation* cannot be accepted. Theological education that does not lead into the adoption of “practices” and virtues relevant and conducive to Christian life and ministry is simply a failed exercise.¹⁹

Theology is a peculiar form of cognitive reflection, for its goal is not simply the expansion of knowledge. Theology has a quite practical goal – what I would call the formation of religious identity. Theology must once again become an activity forming religious identity and character. For it to play that role, theologians must be engaged in reflection upon religious practices. Some of those practices will be located within religious communities, while others may be broadly distributed within society. Theologians need to attend both to the practices of congregations – worship, preaching and counseling, for example – and to societal practices that have religious and moral dimensions....²⁰

18 Serene Jones, “Practical Theology in Two Modes,” in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 195.

19 For an important discussion of “practices,” see *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002)

20 Ronald F. Thiemann, “Making Theology Central in Theological Education,” *Christian Century*, February 4–11,

When beginning a new course in systematic theology for seminary students, I usually tell the students that my discipline may be the most “practical” and “relevant” of all fields in the theological curriculum. Students often respond by asking, isn’t systematic theology rather about thinking, argumentation, doctrines? My counter-response affirms that but also adds that in the final analysis what else could be more “practical” to pastors, counselors, and missionaries than thinking deeply about what we believe, why we believe, and how we best try to formulate it. That is what shapes sermons, testimonies, worship, counseling, evangelism, finances, marriage, and so forth. Although such an exercise may not seem to be as “practical” in a shorter view as, say, basics of homiletics or church administration, its long-term effects may be far more relevant than one would assume.

I repeat myself: the study of theology that fails to positively shape a person’s identity, faith, character, and passion for God has simply failed its calling. An alternative is not to drop altogether the pursuit of theological education, but rather, to work hard for the revising and rectifying of training.

The focus of the “Jerusalem” model, missional orientation, comes to focus here. If it is true that mission is far more than one of the many tasks that the church does – namely, that the church *is* mission, mission is something that has to do with everything the church is doing, its *raison d’être* – then it means the ultimate horizon of theological education is the mission of the church.²¹ Pentecostalism with its eschatologically loaded missionary enthusiasm and yearning for the power of the Spirit has all the potential of redeeming that promise. Yet a word of warning is in order here. While Pentecostals have rightly lifted up the needs of the mission as the key factor in shaping education, they have often done so in a way that has shortsightedly promoted merely “practical” tools of effectiveness. The urgency of mission does not mean, therefore, that it need not be theologically grounded nor reflected upon. On the contrary, if mission is the mode of existence for the church, it means we should continue careful theological reflection along with praxis of mission, both affirming our praxis and offering needed self-criticism.

“Tradition-Driven” versus “Change-Driven”

“Tradition” is a bad word in Pentecostal vocabulary. Indeed, a main impulse that helped birth Pentecostalism was an opposition to the traditions, creeds, and rites of traditional churches. Pentecostalism breathes renewal and revitalization. Turning its attention to the future rather than the past, there emerged also a curious view of church history: basically it was a leap from the Book of Acts straight to the beginning of the movement in the twentieth century.

1987, 106–8, available at <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=360> (accessed July 11, 2006), n.p.

21 For an important call by a noted ecumenist from India to renew missional commitment in all theological education, see Christopher Duraisingh, “Ministerial Formation for Mission: Implications for Theological Education,” *International Review of Mission* 81, no. 1 (January 1992): 33–45.

As a result, Pentecostalism is known for innovation, creativity, boldness, “frontier spirit,” which have helped cultivate spontaneity, loose structures, and the use of unheard-of techniques. Ever-new discoveries in church growth, evangelism, leadership, and the like catch the imagination of Pentecostals.

Tradition represents everything stagnant, archaic, irrelevant, dead. Or does it? For Paul, in what may be the oldest section of the New Testament in the beginning of 1 Corinthians 15, it was of utmost importance to pass on tradition about Jesus and his salvific work. The term *tradition*, of course, comes from the Greek word to “pass on.” The Johannine Jesus promised that after his exit, the Holy Spirit would continue working in their midst to help them embrace and gain a deeper insight into Jesus’ teaching, “tradition.” In the Christian view, tradition is but the work of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit helps each new generation to delve more deeply and in a more relevant way into the knowledge, power, and mind of Christ.

Although a Pentecostal approach to theological education cannot be based solely or even primarily on the “Geneva” model, neither should it ignore or downplay its importance. There are two facets to Pentecostalism’s relation to tradition. First of all, the Pentecostal movement stands firmly on the tradition of the Christ’s church. Hence, a sufficient study of the whole of the church’s theological, creedal, and historical tradition should belong to the core of the curriculum. Second, Pentecostalism in itself represents a growing tradition. As much as new revivalistic movements seek to live in the denial of the inevitable, there is no denying the accumulating effects of tradition and traditions.

Any effective theological education needs to be a good training in the tradition. Given the social reality of knowing, we must work within a framework of texts and community. Each one of us is born into a family and learns a particular language. From day one, each person looks at the world in a certain way. Knowledge is the result of the hard work of communities that struggle with the complexity of the world and start arriving at a more plausible account.²²

As this word of wisdom from Markham illustrates, a proper attention to tradition also helps bring in the importance of community. Communal orientation is needed in order to redeem Pentecostalism, including its leadership, from hopeless individualism. This is nothing but the ecclesiological model of Acts 2.

22 Markham, “Theological Education,” 159.

The important task for Pentecostal theologians is to discern and bring to light the key elements of what makes Pentecostal tradition. What, for example, is the role of the baptism in the Holy Spirit in Pentecostal living tradition?²³ Change and tradition, new and old, should be kept in some kind of dynamic balance; that is a continuing challenge.²⁴

Environment: Four Locations

The term *environment* in this essay refers to two interrelated aspects of Pentecostal theological education. The first has to do with the setting in which the training is done, whether in a church-based Bible school, theological college, theological seminary, or in collaboration with “secular” university faculties such as in the Free University of Amsterdam. The second meaning of the environment relates to whether Pentecostal theological education is “Pentecostal” or, as it most often is alternatively, “Evangelical” with some Pentecostal tinsel. Let me begin with this latter meaning.

Anyone knowledgeable of typical Pentecostal theological schools knows that much of what is taught has little or no direct relation to Pentecostalism; it is rather borrowed materials from the Evangelical storehouses. Pentecostal dynamics and philosophy of education is due to the “reliance upon pedagogical and philosophical models that are more Evangelical (or fundamentalist) than Pentecostal ... [and] written resources on educational philosophy and pedagogy authored by Pentecostals for Pentecostal educators are lacking, especially for higher education.”²⁵ In other words: although Pentecostal students study in a Pentecostal environment, their education is not often distinctively Pentecostal. It is rather the extracurricular activities that are more Pentecostal in nature. As a result, Pentecostals become vulnerable to losing their distinctive nature and identity.

Behind this malaise is not only the lack of developed Pentecostal theology or textbooks but also a general orientation in much of Pentecostal theological scholarship that often tends to major in repeating uncritically the voices of Evangelicalism, at times even Fundamentalism – even though it is the Fundamentalists who have been most vocal opponents of anything charismatic! I am thinking here of Fundamentalistic views such as the doctrine of Scripture and inspiration (inerrancy), dispensationalist eschatology, and so on, which have been adopted without a concerted theological assessment of how well – or how badly – these views fit Pentecostalism.²⁶

23 See Lewis, “Explorations,” 162.

24 See further, Markham, “Theological Education,” 164.

25 Jeffrey Hittenberger, “Toward a Pentecostal Philosophy of Education,” *Pneuma* 23, no. 2 (2001): 226, 230; I am indebted to Lewis, “Explorations” (p. 172) for this citation.

26 For an enlightening analysis of the uneasy relationship between Pentecostalism and Fundamentalism, see Gerald T. Sheppard, “Pentecostalism and the Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism: The Anatomy of an Uneasy Relationship,” *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 6, no. 2 (1984): 5–34.

Henry Lederle of South Africa, himself a Charismatic Reformed, rightly remarks: “It is an irony of recent ecclesiastical history that much of Pentecostal scholarship has sought to align itself so closely with the rationalistic heritage of American Fundamentalism ... without fully recognizing how hostile these theological views are to Pentecostal and Charismatic convictions about present-day prophecy, healing miracles and other spiritual charisms.”²⁷ Now in principle there is of course no problem with borrowing from others. It would be only foolish to decline to drink from the common Christian wells and take advantage of other churches’ millennia-long traditions of theological reflection. However, the way Pentecostals have done that – and seemingly continue doing it – is what raises concerns. In most cases, I fear, Pentecostal theologians do not acknowledge the fact that what they claim to be presenting as a “Pentecostal” theological view is often nothing more than a “Spirit-baptized” Evangelical, often even Fundamentalistic, view taken from others with little or no integral connection to the core of Pentecostal identity.

Pentecostals have much to learn from older traditions. Let me take just one current example. In the above-mentioned essay, the Anglican Ian S. Markham carefully considers what are the key elements in his own tradition and, on the basis of that investigation, lays out three broad theological principles with regard to Anglican theological education: first, it should be creedal because of the centrality of the ancient creeds and later Anglican dogmatic formulae; second, it should be liturgical because of the center of the church life in worship and liturgy; and third, it should be engaged because of Anglicanism’s deep desire to engage the society at large, including politics, culture, arts, science, etc.²⁸ Now, these are not theological underpinnings for Pentecostal higher education. But I admire the clarity, consistency, and boldness of being true to one’s own tradition, without being hostile to others.

Building on one’s own identity and tradition is in no way an excuse or rationale for excluding others or fostering anti-ecumenical attitudes (those are prevalent enough without much training, unfortunately!). On the contrary, from the “foundation” of a clearly formulated identity and belonging to one’s community grows an irenic spirit towards others. In keeping with this goal is the set of guidelines from the global working group of theological educators who prepared a useful document for the Edinburgh 2010 World Missionary Conference in relation to theological educators:

- a. they should strengthen the denominational identity of future pastors and church workers, so that graduates will have a very clear understanding of the church to which they belong (*theological education as denominational initiation*);
- b. they should introduce students to the wider horizons of the worldwide church so that they will understand that they also belong to the ecumenical fellowship of churches (*theological education as discovery of catholicity*);

27 Henry I. Lederle, “Pentecostals and Ecumenical Theological Education,” *Ministerial Formation* 80 (January 1998): 46.

28 Markham, “Theological Education,” 160–62.

- c. they should prepare candidates to engage models of church unity, to reflect theologically on ‘unity in diversity’ and to ask how the relation between local or denominational identity and the ecumenical worldwide fellowship can be lived out (*theological education as enabling for ecumenical learning*).²⁹

As mentioned above, Pentecostal theological training by and large takes place in four different environments.³⁰ Both church-based Bible schools and biblical/theological colleges have rendered an invaluable service to the global Pentecostal movement. Indeed, one can safely say that without this network of grassroots-level training that owes its beginning to the end of the nineteenth century Holiness and other Evangelical movements’ example, the establishment of Pentecostal churches all around the world might not have been possible. Even today these schools play a critical role in ministerial training, as is the case, for example, in most Latin American Pentecostal movements. The mode of rationality in those settings is markedly different from that of higher education proper. Their frame of reference is practical, short-term training of workers rather than academic education based on research and new knowledge.

In this essay, my focus has been on the academic section of Pentecostal theological education as conducted in theological seminaries and theological colleges with graduate departments; as mentioned, there is also emerging a new breed of Pentecostal theological training, that located in “secular” university faculties.

Seeking a proper balance between the epistemologies of “Athens” and “Berlin” and consequently between the ethos of passing on tradition and critical scrutiny thereof, the important question regarding the relation of the church and academia emerges (“church” here stands for all levels of ecclesiastical life from local churches to global networks of national movements). Unlike university-based theology faculties – unless directly related to the given church as still in many Roman Catholic settings – that, in the name of the academic freedom, resist any kind of supervision from the church, Pentecostal theological institutions better nurture a constructive, mutual relation to the church. As discussed above, this kind of relationship is not without its challenges that have to do with two different rationalities and intellectual climates. The above-mentioned Edinburgh 2010 document summarizes in a most helpful way some of the key principles in this regard under the title “Theological education and the church – a relationship of service, ownership, and critical distance.” The document takes as its starting point the overarching principle of closeness and distance, which helps the church to be the church, and academia be academia, yet in a way that makes the relationship mutually conditioning:

29 “Challenges and Opportunities in Theological Education in the 21st Century: Pointers for a New International Debate on Theological Education,” Short version, Edinburgh 2010 – International study group on theological education, World Study Report 2009, p. 8, <http://www.oikoumene.org/gr/resources/documents.html> (accessed 7/13/2010).

30 In addition, there are locations that are difficult to classify such as the *Folkhögskola* (“Folk High School”) institutions in Nordic countries. which play an important role, for example, in Sweden and in Finland.

- a. There is no fundamental contradiction between the principles of academic learning or intellectual discipline on one hand and a church-related faith commitment on the other, although at times there may be tension between the two. It is the task of theological education to strengthen the commitment to Christian faith and to develop a proper understanding and practice of it, which may include liberating faith from narrow-minded or uninformed concepts and/or practices.
- b. Theological education has a critical and liberating function in relation to the existing church; with reference to both Biblical and Christian tradition, theological education can remind Christian communities of their proper tasks and key mandates.
- c. The church has a critical and alerting function over against theological education and the forms of cultural captivity and blindedness theological education can find itself in due to its particular environment and internal value systems. Serious complaints are being heard that the theological academy in the West has lost its world-wide, ecumenical perspective and its missionary impact, and that it is not sufficiently cognizant of emerging shifts in World Christianity today.
- d. Theological education therefore needs regular contact with the existing realities of church life, involvement and close touch with the challenges of mission, ministry and life witness of churches today, but it also needs critical distance and a certain degree of autonomy from the daily pressures of church work and from the direct governing processes and power interests of church institutions.³¹

Last Words: “An Unfinished Agenda”

Following the title of the late missionary-bishop Lesslie Newbigin’s autobiography, *An Unfinished Agenda*, suffice it to say that the continuing work towards a more coherent and comprehensive theology of Pentecostal theological education is a task for the worldwide Pentecostal movement.

That said, I would like to come back to the question I raised in the beginning of the essay, namely, is bigger always better? Jon Ruthven formulates this question in a helpful way: “Could it be that the extreme reluctance of Pentecostal leadership to bow to pressures for the establishment of theological seminaries has merit? Instead of dismissing them as anti-intellectual, perhaps we might pause to consider if these leaders were onto something.”³² Professor Ruthven himself teaches in a seminary/divinity school setting; this surprising question is thus not meant to dismiss or even downplay the importance of highest-level theological training for Pentecostals. The way I take it is that in the midst of many and variegated efforts to update the level of theological education among Pentecostals, it would only be counterproductive to be so carried over by this effort as to lose the bigger perspective. As a bumper put it succinctly: “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” The key is to work towards a form and content of theological

31 “Challenges and Opportunities in Theological Education,” 6.

32 Ruthven, “Pentecostal Seminaries,” n.p.

education that bears the marks of an authentic Pentecostal spirituality and identity.

Ultimately, “theological education is part of the holistic mission of the Christian church,” says the World Council of Churches’ Oslo (1996) statement to which Pentecostals can only say, “Amen and Amen.”

There is consensus among us on the holistic character of theological education and ministerial formation, which is grounded in worship, and combines and inter-relates spirituality, academic excellence, mission and evangelism, justice and peace, pastoral sensitivity and competence, and the formation of character. For it brings together education of:

the ear to hear God’s word and the cry of God’s people;

the heart to heed and respond to the suffering;

the tongue to speak to both the weary and the arrogant;

the hands to work with the lowly;

the mind to reflect on the good news of the gospel;

the will to respond to God’s call;

the spirit to wait on God in prayer, to struggle and wrestle with God, to be silent in penitence and humility and to intercede for the church and the world;

the body to be the temple of the Holy Spirit.³³

33 Cited in “Challenges and Opportunities in Theological Education,” 5.