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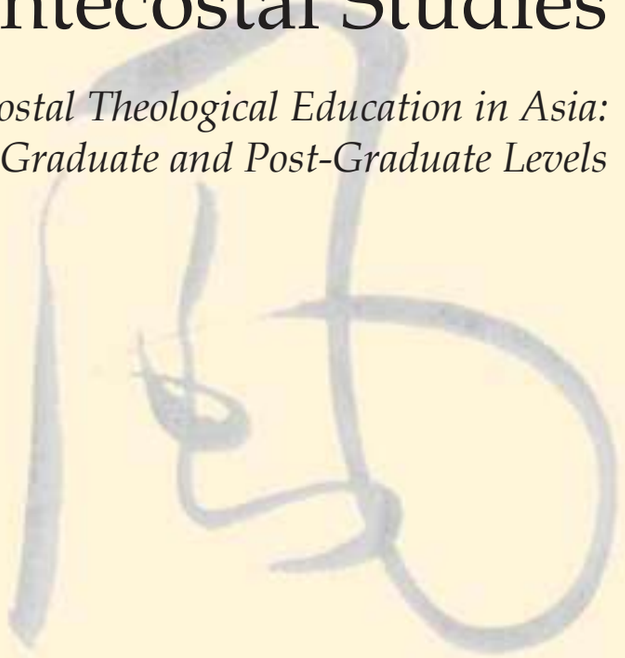

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Pentecostal Theological Education in Asia: The Graduate and Post-Graduate Levels

by Dr. Dave Johnson

The Pentecostal/Charismatic (PC) Movement, with all of its variations and despite its many schisms, continues to experience explosive growth that shows no signs of slowing down. PC leaders all over the globe are deeply aware of the need to train workers to disciple new believers, plant more churches and fuel the continued growth. For example, my own denomination, the Assemblies of God (AG), has been involved in theological education or ministerial training since the early days of the Pentecostal Movement at the dawn of the 20th century. While no statistics are available on the aggregate number of ministers that have been trained over the last century, the AG currently has 396,417 ministers and 372,343 churches in 252 countries, territories and provinces all over the world.[1] If even half of these ministers have received formal training in a Bible school at one level or another, including seminaries with postgraduate programs, the impact of theological education on the AG has been immense. Currently, the AG has 2,538 Bible schools and 137,510 students,[2] suggesting that the AG's commitment to theological education remains strong. When schools and ministers from other organizations within the Pentecostal-Charismatic (PC) traditions are factored in,[3] the impact of theological education on the global PC movement may well be beyond calculation.

Yet, despite the ongoing commitment to training ministers, there appears to be a dearth of academic literature reflecting on the subject of theological education in the PC movement. This edition of the journal represents our modest effort to help fill this lacuna. This edition is dedicated to the graduate and post-graduate levels. There are two reasons for this. One, this appears to be the direction in which many schools in the PC movement are moving and our intent here is to give reflection on

[1]https://warehouse.agwm.org/repository/flipbook/vital-statistics/(accessed December 7, 2020).

[2]Email from Jacob Underwood, AGWM Research Analyst, to the author, December 8, 2020. The stats here and in the next footnote do not include AG schools and students in the United States.

[3]I am not aware of any aggregate statistics available.

how education at this level might be conducted. Second, as I note in my article here, the graduates and scholars involved at this level have a significantly greater per capita influence than those educated at a lower level, which places upon those who work at this level a much greater degree of leadership responsibility in the areas of theological education and elsewhere. Furthermore, the reflections written here are set mostly in our Asian context, which is consistent with the purpose of the *AJPS*.

Vee J. D-Davidson leads off this edition by reminding us that there is much more to theological education than academics. She contends that theological education, as any spiritual quest, should be supra-cultural, but differing worldview beliefs and resulting practices can easily limit favorable outcomes for theological training for students in the Majority World. Engagement with concepts that are new to the student can be hindered when the concepts are presented in ways with which some Majority World settings are comfortable but which are unfamiliar to others.

One size does not fit all. She goes on to add that "self-awareness on the part of both teacher and student can make a crucial difference in the teaching and learning" process. Similarly, the uniting potential of Pentecostalism's emphasis on the Holy Spirit can be the starting point from which to facilitate engagement with new and creative ways of learning. Drawing on a variety of cultural orientations that can impact successful learning in multiple-culture situations, she offers universal principles to facilitate awareness, understanding, and overcoming of such barriers.

Amos Yong follows with an excellent article entitled, "Theological Education between the West and the 'Rest': A Reverse 'Reverse Missionary' and Pentecost Perspective." Yong is quick to note that Pentecostal theological education is gradually coming into its own, but, like other evangelical schools, bears heavily the imprint of the post-Enlightenment, post-Christendom western or, in his words, "Euro-American-centric" orientation, even in the Majority World—as is also noted by other authors in this edition. While he acknowledges that, to a certain extent, this is unavoidable, he raises the question as to whether this will continue as the Pentecostal movement is now in its second century. He also posits that Pentecostal theological education in the 21st century will not only serve the needs of the Pentecostal movement but also the "church ecumenical." He calls his view "a reverse 'reverse missionary' perspective," reflecting on his own experience as an immigrant from Malaysia to the United States when he was ten years old. Yong is known to reflect on what Pentecostal Theological Education outside of the West is and could be in the future.

My article comes next and is the first of two articles that attempt to demonstrate the need for and value of creating and maintaining a research culture on our graduate school seminary campuses in the Majority World. Since some literature has already been published, most notably by Langham, that deals with how a research culture can be started, enhanced and maintained, I focus a large part of my article on the lesser addressed areas of publishing and marketing the results of a research culture, drawing strongly on my experience as the editor of this journal and the director of the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary Press (see www.aptspress.org) since 2012. In doing so, I contend with and make suggestions on how to deal with resolving the staggering lacuna of published literature dealing with Majority World issues.

Josfin Raj's excellent article, 'Production of Knowledge' as a Vocation of Pentecostal Theologians at the Postmodern Turn: Nurturing Research Culture Among Pentecostal Theological Educators in India," follows the same general theme as mine but gives specific focus to India, where the PC Movement has seen strong growth in recent decades and where the cultural and religious climate call for substantial theological, missiological and pastoral reflection.

Raj notes that the tradition of theological research in India differs substantially from that of Europe. In Europe, theological research was developed in the university setting whereas in India the setting was more missional and open. He contends that there are three streams that dominate theological reflection in India. The first and oldest is that of the Senate of Serampore College (University), a school that was started by William Carey. After India gained independence in 1947, theological reflection began to shift toward an indigenous *Ashram* model and focused on political and economic issues. In the 1960s the theological emphasis began to focus on groups like the Dalit and other marginalized groups, including the importation of liberation theology from abroad. Toward the close of the article, Raj demonstrates how these streams hamper Pentecostal theological research in India and how Pentecostals have, to this point, not yet overcome these barriers.

Daniel Topf then follows with a panoramic perspective of the history of Pentecostal theological education, focusing especially on identifying the barriers that Pentecostals faced as they spread out and began training workers all over the world. He identifies four significant barriers. (1) The early missionaries' philosophy and experience of theological education was rooted in developments of the late 19th century, namely colonialism and various revival movements. (2) In some cases, theological education was deeply impacted by political issues, especially in places like China. (3) Once colonialism ended, the Pentecostal movement experienced great growth and theological

education and became much more indigenous, but often had to face the reality of issues like poverty. (4) More recently, Majority World scholars have gained their terminal degrees and entered the global theological discourse, which is still often dominated by the West, an issue also dealt with in other articles in this edition. Topf then goes on to describe how Pentecostals dealt with these issues, noting that they were remarkably flexible, innovative, resilient and adaptable in the process. He concludes by admitting that he has only scratched the surface of these subjects and argues that much more needs to be done. He also states that Pentecostal theological education provides an excellent platform for a plurality of theological perspectives.

Finally, Temesgen Kahsay concludes this edition with an article on one of the hallmarks of Pentecostalism, the role of the Holy Spirit. In this case, he fulfills the theme of this journal by writing on the role of the Spirit in theological education. Basing his premise on Acts 1:8, Kahsay states that it is "reasonable to surmise that Jesus' mandate to the church is integrative; it consists of both the content of the gospel the church should preach and the power to practice and embody the gospel; it integrates and interweaves both belief and action, doctrine and application, theory and practice; it is holistic and non-reductionistic."

For Kahsay, there are two aspects of the mandate that Christ gave to the church. The first is to go into all the world full of historical and cultural realities and with diverse religious ideologies. The second is that the church is made of up people from these realities, who have been transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. With this mandate in mind, Kahsay then raises and attempts to answer three questions: What is the role of the Holy Spirit in theological education or more specifically what is the role of the Holy Spirit in a Pentecostal theological education with respect to the mandate of the church and its engagement in the Asian world? What are the departure points for conceiving a Pentecostal theological education in Asian contexts today? How does a "Pentecostal theological education conceive the role of the Holy Spirit" in its design and practice?

He then addresses these questions through a paradigm that a Pentecostal theological education in the Majority World should be conceived as a bridging enterprise between the role of the Holy Spirit as presented in Scripture, mainly the NT, and the social, cultural and religious contexts and underlying worldviews of the people in the Majority World. In doing so, he enriches Pentecostal pneumatology for a global community.

I am thankful for the contribution of each of our authors to this vital topic. But, in surveying the global PC landscape of theological education, it is evident that much, much more needs to be done. Please

join us in writing and publishing on this critically important subject. God willing, the next few years will see us publishing a volume on theological education at the Bible college and institute level and another one on the critical area of non-traditional Pentecostal theological education.

As usual, I welcome your comments. You can contact me through our website, www.aptspress.org, at any time.

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