

PENTECOSTAL UNIVERSITIES: THEORY AND HISTORY

William K. Kay & Andrew Davies

Key Words: *Pentecostal University, Curriculum, Worldview and Teaching Methods.*

Introducing the University

Although there are several types of university, the accepted ideal is of a unified institution, comprising several faculties, that allows for the teaching and renewal of human knowledge in its entirety. It is a *university* rather than a *polytechnic*; it is a campus where all the disciplines of human knowledge, each with their own faculty, may rub shoulders and absorb the breadth of what has been discovered in the past and, through research, transmit what the human race needs for the future. Since, in its ideal form the university deals in the currency of all human knowledge and therefore with the sciences and arts together, theology is included; indeed, in the Middle Ages, theology was the architectonic discipline under which all other forms of knowledge were arranged and coordinated, and the university itself was a faith community. Many of Europe's oldest Universities, including Oxford, Cambridge and St Andrews in the UK, have explicitly Christian (often monastic) roots, and there are hints at this perhaps in the retention of some titles such as 'Rector', 'Dean' and 'Provost' for senior academic managers.

In practice, universities trained people for the professions including medicine, theology and law but also, from the start of the 19th century, added the sciences and laboratory experimentation so that new knowledge rather than simply the rearrangement of old knowledge was to be found within the university setting (Maxwell Lyte 1886; Boyd, 1964). New knowledge, discovered at the university, might then be included within the curriculum so that research-led teaching ensured universities were at the forefront of society's development. Beyond this, the university functioned as a place of free debate and enquiry, where ideas were tested and social problems might be theoretically solved (e.g. by economic analysis) or, when threatened

in war, by practical technology (e.g. by the building of computers to break enemy codes). The protection of free speech on university campuses was an important adjunct of, and condition for, free enquiry. The notion was that in the course of debate, good ideas would defeat bad ones and good theories would supersede bad ones.

This combination between research and the training of higher professions continue to be the staple of university activity (Peterson 1971; Asztalos, 1992). Although Western universities in the Middle Ages gave a central place to theology as 'queen of the sciences', by the 19th century this was all beginning to change. Universities were profoundly affected by the 18th century Enlightenment, the period when human reason dethroned canonical texts at the apex of authority. The old classical texts of Aristotle and Plato were demoted, and the Bible, subject to wide-ranging critique, also lost its pre-eminence.

The successful graduate was expected to exemplify the capacity for critique and rationality rather than for faith and moral character. Consequently the curriculum within the University tended to be arranged in such a way that descriptive and historical ideas were placed at the start of courses and analysis and critique at the end. The university had become secular indeed. The process of secularisation was extended and expedited in the 1900s by the establishment in the UK of what are now called the 'red brick' universities – the great civic universities such as Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Nottingham and Sheffield, which were initially funded by public subscription or philanthropic giving rather than religious foundation, and which shunned from the outset the religious tests and requirements which many of the historic universities had retained (Sheffield, for example, going so far in its statutes on this matter that it was unable to establish a Theology department, but instead focussed on the narrower field of Biblical Studies throughout its history). A further cluster of new institutions founded after the second world war focussed much more heavily on science and engineering and the emerging social sciences, with the arts featuring less prominently and Theology even less significant.

This is not to say that Theology completely disappeared from Western universities. At least until the start of the 1960s the older European universities retained theology departments and, in Britain, college chapels continued to function and worship was offered. However, newer universities increasingly ignored the Christian heritage of Europe and if they taught religion at all this was within departments of religious studies rather than theology, partially under the influence of Ninian Smart, who left the established Theology department at the University of Birmingham to found a Religious Studies department at Lancaster which was wholly secular in its approach and configuration. Religion became an object of study either by historical, anthropological or sociological methods. And, since the universities now ceased to be faith communities, theology sometimes had to justify its existence alongside philosophy or as a component of the study of secular history. Whereas in the Middle Ages, Theology had been thought of as the 'Queen of the Sciences', it was now accused of lacking rigour and objectivity, of being an academic subject that was dependent upon fundamentally non-academic suppositions and principles, and of serving the interest of only one part of the community – the Church.

Pentecostal Higher Education

The Pentecostal movement is normally dated from the start of the 20th century (Kay 2004). Its roots may reach back into Methodism, revivalism and other forms of non-conformity but the classical Pentecostal denominations were founded in the West between about 1910 and 1930. We define 'classical Pentecostal denominations' as those denominations which included within their founding documentation reference to the gifts of the Spirit today. There are classical Pentecostal denominations founded in other parts of the world than the West at later dates but many of these are in some way connected to the North American and British denominations. For the purpose of this paper, the point to be established is that the Pentecostal denominations have a relatively short history. The oldest of them is likely to be around 100 years old and as a consequence their buildings and institutions will only stretch back to 75 years at the most.

The earliest Pentecostal denominations, once they had stabilised and established themselves, began to consider ministerial training and did so by means of Bible colleges or other forms of seminary education whose main lectures focused upon the Bible but which also required students to participate in prayer, preaching, evangelism, mission and worship. Such colleges were often set at the level of secondary education and routinely offered school subjects like basic mathematics or grammar as part of their curriculum.

Over time, especially in North America, Bible colleges occupied substantial premises and might cater for several hundred students on well-appointed campuses. Once the early zeal for ministerial training had worn off or been fulfilled, young people coming from Pentecostal churches began to seek liberal arts education within Pentecostal colleges with, say, two faculties, one for theology and ministerial training and the other for journalism, teacher training, social work or other arts subjects. These new expanded Liberal Arts colleges might begin to operate at university level in the sense that they presumed their entrants had already received full secondary education before attending. The advantages of such a model were principally that with the additional student number that disciplinary diversification permitted, these colleges could sustain significantly-enhanced campus facilities and move beyond the hand-to-mouth existence that many of the Bible colleges had been used to. Suddenly, colleges which had been catering for a few hundred ministry studies students were attracting five or six times as many students; and those colleges that resisted the move from ministerial training to Liberal Arts in the earlier stages suffered a sizeable outflow of students to their larger and more prominent peers who had made the jump.

Furthermore, although the Pentecostal Liberal Arts college appeared a good solution for strong Pentecostal denominations, there were weaknesses within the model. For one thing, such colleges were unable to cope with all the subjects young people might wish to study. If the young Pentecostal wanted to be a dentist, an optician, a medical doctor, a quantity surveyor, an agricultural expert or any other of a number of options, the Liberal Arts college could not help. And secondly, the relationship between the theological side of a Liberal Arts college and the other side might be fraught with difficulty because the staff who taught students for social work, journalism,

primary school teaching, and so on, conformed to the professional guidelines of secular bodies rather than to the faith-based guidelines of the Pentecostal denomination which had set up the Liberal Arts college in the first place. And even the theological section within the Liberal Arts college might find itself unable to function satisfactorily. The danger for a Liberal Arts college was dysfunctionality, with what were effectively two or more institutions operating on the same campus without effective integration. Similarly, diversifying beyond ministerial training meant that the unity of purpose and sense of calling across the student body was lost, no matter how hard the institutions worked to retain a Christian ethos.

Pentecostal universities came into existence in North America rather than Europe because the size of the Pentecostal constituency in North America was larger and more prosperous. Liberal Arts colleges were able to expand their provision, sometimes by amalgamating several institutions and sometimes by organic growth. So, for example, in Springfield, Missouri, Assemblies of God combined its (undergraduate) Bible School, its (postgraduate) Theological Seminary and one of its oldest-established Liberal Arts institutions, Evangel University, in 2013 to produce a single institution of university status and character. In 1997 the Church of God's (Tennessee) Lee University grew out of a Liberal Arts college though, in this case, the denominational Seminary and University have remained separate institutions (the seminary having sought in recent years to broaden its appeal to the wider Pentecostal movement beyond Church of God too, as reflected in its renaming to 'Pentecostal Theological Seminary').

For Christian universities, there is a tension between the moral and spiritual values expected of students and the desire to be open to a broad range of potential applicants of many spiritualities and beliefs. There are various ways of meeting this challenge. Lee University set up a 'community covenant' that governs sexual practices, forbids drug-taking and other behaviours. In this way moral conformity to standards acceptable to the churches within the holiness tradition is made a condition of study. Evangel University has built a central chapel in which students are brought together for worship three times a week, a means by which it seeks to integrate academic excellence with a living faith.

In Europe, the Bible colleges obtained validation of their degrees from the secular universities with which they entered into partnership contracts, though the university was always the senior party. The British equivalent of the North American move to Liberal Arts was perhaps the many Anglican and Roman Catholic teacher training institutions which broadened their appeal and curriculum across the arts and humanities before seeking University status. The 'Cathedrals Group' of British universities represents these institutions, which include York, St John's, Liverpool, Hope, Chester and Newman universities, which all seek to retain and highlight their Christian heritage but in a rather wider context.

Curriculum and worldview

The integration of faith and knowledge in a single worldview is ideal. There have been attempts in the past to build this integration by the inclusion of compulsory introductory modules within the curriculum so that every student will pursue modules showing how different disciplines relate to Christian faith and doctrine. Where the timetabling of such models is too complicated to achieve, other options have been tried. For instance, attempts have been made to teach subject disciplines 'from a Christian point of view' with results that biology would be taught without giving the theory of evolution pre-eminence; history would be taught with attempts to show God's providential shaping of events and with attention to major watersheds like the Reformation; physics would be taught by reference to the compatibility between a big bang theory and divine creation; nursing might be taught by reference to the value of the unborn child and the ethical obstacles to abortion; economics might be taught in ways compatible to social welfare and human development i.e. broadly in keeping with biblical anthropology; languages might be taught in keeping with the Christian doctrine of hospitality; biblical languages would be given pride of place within a Biblical Studies department, and so on. In this way every curriculum subject would contribute to a composite Christian worldview. The difficulty here, however, is that academic disciplines are constantly interacting with secular perspectives so that it is impossible to police the teaching of the curriculum in higher education to ensure that no atheistic ideas are

taught, even if such a scenario were ultimately considered desirable. It is for this reason that an attempt to build a worshipping community without interfering with the actual content of the curriculum within the different subject areas is a simpler, more flexible and perhaps more practical solution.

Where a Pentecostal university is brought into existence, the position of the College of Religion (or some such name) must be safeguarded and treated as of equal importance to what will almost certainly be larger departments catering for literature, sport and social service. If the Pentecostal University is flourishing, the protection of the College of Religion is easy but in periods of financial constraint or dwindling of student numbers, there will be financial pressures on theology and a desire to amalgamate it with other departments in money-saving exercises. Those who govern universities and set their statutes need to be careful to protect the places of Pentecostal history, doctrine and Biblical languages within the University, to pay these staff at a desirable rate and to offer resources that enable creative and stimulating teaching.

At a theoretical level attention ought to be given to epistemology, that is, an understanding of the nature and limits of human knowledge. Pentecostal Christians take the view that direct contact with the Holy Spirit is possible with the result that knowledge from outside the empirical realm may be imparted. Ideally an openness to revelation by the Holy Spirit would coexist with an appreciation of the need for the testing of knowledge. This is a Biblical conception. Revelation is explained in various New Testament passages (1 Cor 2:11) and testing occurs directly in relation to the role of prophecy in 1 Thess 5:19-21 but also in relation to the congregational activity as in 1 Cor 14:29. Indeed the testing of prophetic utterance within a congregation is an early form of peer review. Thus one would hope a Pentecostal university would accept both the role of revelation and the role of empirical testing, especially since empirical testing is also of importance in scientific subjects and in the application of theories derived from social data. Had Marxist theory been subject to rigorous empirical testing, the world would have been saved a great deal of pain and anguish.

Teaching methods

There is a theoretical connection between our understanding of the nature of knowledge and the methods by which this knowledge is conveyed from one person to another. In the past, Christian understanding of knowledge was often directly or indirectly influenced by Platonic notions of a suprasensible ideal realm of which the natural realm accessible by our five senses is a copy. There is, in the ideal realm, a perfect circle or perfect triangle or perfect representation of beauty, and so on, that is found within the natural realm. Such a notion of knowledge fitted well with a belief in an infinite God in heaven in a spiritual realm that was ontologically similar to the Platonic ideal realm. There are, of course, many other notions of knowledge of which the most educationally popular is probably that derived from John Dewey who considered knowledge to be 'constructed' by each individual from sense data (Dewey, 1930). Followers of Dewey conceived of knowledge relativistically. Followers of Plato, by contrast, accepted the existence of absolute knowledge. Most Pentecostals would veer towards an absolutist position believing truth to be an absolute rather than a relative conception.

When we ask how such ideas might convert into teaching methods, it becomes apparent that if one is attempting to convey a vision of absolute knowledge, it is probable that the teacher is seen as an expert imparting knowledge to a younger generation; but if knowledge is constructed by each individual in turn, then teaching methods will focus upon discussion and the giving of certain 'intellectual tools' to allow everyone to construct their own intellectual world. In practice Pentecostals have been happy to combine the notion of lecturing whereby one expert communicates with many students and seminars where students themselves speak and their ideas are tested against the critique of their peers. The best seminars allow the instructor to act as a kind of referee or adjudicator.

In any event it is desirable to ensure full attention is given by learners to what they are taught and, in order to do this, teachers vary their presentations to retain the interest of the class. There may be speech, music, visual presentations, debate, reading of set texts together, and so on. So teaching methods are deliberately varied to avoid boredom and retain the attention of students.

At the same time it is also true that teaching methods must take account of the learning sequence in the subject matter being conveyed. Thus, it is necessary in mathematics to teach addition and subtraction before multiplication and division. In the teaching of languages it is necessary to understand the alphabet before one can write words; in short some subject matter lends itself to a logical sequence whereas other subject matter does not. So, in teaching the Old Testament one can begin either with an overview of the entire Old Testament and then drop down to the details of individual episodes and narratives or, conversely, start with individual episodes and narratives and build up to an overall picture. Some students prefer a small picture before they built the big picture; others prefer the big picture before they descend to minutiae. This is a matter of individual differences.

In a Pentecostal university one might anticipate the role of the Holy Spirit within the teacher (Kay 2004). New Testament expectations are that the Holy Spirit operates within the heart and mind of the believer and so one would expect creativity and sensitivity to be assisted by the Holy Spirit in order to adapt the teaching of particular topics to the student audience. Given that the Spirit of God is also the Spirit of life, one would hope to see the impartation of spiritual life through the instructional process. The process is not mechanical or dead but interactive, adjustable, and fired by love – love of the subject matter and love for the students. So within a Pentecostal University one would hope to see space being given for the operation of the Holy Spirit in the writing of lesson plans and lecture schedules.

Conclusion

Pentecostal universities may have an important role to play within the societies where they are placed. Universities are almost invariably elite institutions shaping with the future leaders of society and the future leaders of the church (Schwehn, 2002). They generate and interpret knowledge and help set the future trajectory of a nation. It is therefore important for Pentecostals who might seek ongoing influence on the culture of their nation to engage with Higher Education and reflect carefully on how they might shape the thinking and destiny of their young people. Taking the step of establishing a Pentecostal university, however, would require attention to many deeply-challenging practical and theoretical questions, as we have outlined.

Endnotes

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