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QUESTIONING EVERY CONSENSUS:
A PLEA FOR A RETURN TO THE RADICAL ROOTS OF
PENTECOSTALISM

Mathew Clark

1. Introduction

I believe that courage is the most important virtue, the foundation that underlies and gives reality to all other virtues and personal values. Without courage we become conformists. Conformity is not the fibre good and courageous leaders are made of.... Do not be frightened by the aloneness that may come with your holding unpopular positions. It is in aloneness that wisdom will visit you and smile upon you.

These are not, as a theologian might be entitled to expect, the words of Elijah or Jeremiah. They are quoted from a speech given in 1999 by Mamphela Ramphele, vice chancellor of the University of Cape Town.¹ Her context was the silence that has so often fallen on African societies once liberation has taken place. It is just such silent acquiescence, she insists, that allows former “heroes of the struggle” to become despots and dictators.

Her words are challenging to Pentecostal theologians for at least two reasons. The first, and more mundane, is that Pentecostalism is most vibrant today in precisely those countries which can be termed “postcolonial.” The second, and to my mind most relevant to the movement, is that Pentecostalism was at its beginning a powerful spiritual force because it inherited an ethos of radical difference and because its proponents were unflinching in refusing to be co-opted into any other agenda than the one for which they knew they had been

¹ M. Ramphele, “Our Democracy Is at Risk,” *Readers Digest* (April 2000), pp. 95-97 (97).

empowered by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. In this sense it was a prophetic religion, a religion similar to that of Elijah and Jeremiah.²

In this paper I would like to plead for a passionate commitment to Pentecostal theology as a radical alternative to the many conforming theologies and value systems that permeate our globalizing society. I am convinced that African, Asian and Latin American Pentecostals are in an excellent position to articulate this alternative, and that in so doing they may challenge the established western Pentecostal groups.

2. Radical Alternatives in Pentecostal Antecedents

Whether one detects a coherent line of Pentecostal antecedents from Pentecost until 1902,³ or is satisfied with investigating no further than the Methodist-Holiness roots of the movement,⁴ the prevalent ethos that one finds will be of an unashamed alternative to the prevailing consensus of the day. This was true of the Montanists, especially as articulated by Tertullian; of the early Reformers such as Wycliffe and Huss; most certainly of the Anabaptists, and even of the early Luther. John Wesley was an enigmatic figure in his age, showing that to make a difference it is essential to be different. The Holiness movement and its attendant revivals in the nineteenth century showed a splendid disregard for the forces of secularism and religious liberalism that were rampant at that time. And when the Pentecostal revival came, the first pioneers cared not a whit for slanders and accusations thrown against them, whether they came from secular scoffers or from the outraged church world.

As the movement spread to the continent of Africa the same disdain for tags and epithets—indeed, even for overt persecution—was displayed. First, the Afrikaner (Dutch) converts in South Africa for decades suffered the slander of their peers of being co-opted into hated Britishness by accepting believers' baptism by immersion. By so doing they had implicitly rejected the "covenant seal" baptism of the Reformed

² I have reservations about too casually referring to confrontational religion as "prophetic," since prophecy is normally a charismatic event initiated by the Holy Spirit. However, the term has become so established in this broader sense that I am employing it thus in this paper.

³ E.g., F. D. Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 35.

⁴ E.g., D. W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1987).

churches, thereby alienating themselves from a nation which saw itself as the covenant people of God bringing civilization to darkest Africa. The African converts to Pentecostalism were equally courageous, rejecting the trappings of ancestor veneration while at the same time drawing the scorn of the “mission” churches for their acceptance of the emotional and spiritual phenomena of Pentecostalism.⁵

The flood of converts that has taken place in Latin America and Asia since the Second World War contains further evidence of the potency of this radical difference. In societies that are dominated by entrenched literary religions such as Catholicism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, the courage that it takes to opt for the Pentecostal Christian alternative should not be underestimated. For the oldest son in a Buddhist family to convert to Christianity demands a level of fortitude with which many of us in western churches have never been challenged. To witness to Jesus in a Hindu village on a sub-continent where religious strife has always been endemic is to live dangerously every day. To be a Christian (normally a Pentecostal Christian) in an Indonesian nation, where the Muslim majority is seeking scapegoats for political and economic setbacks, takes courage indeed. To consistently flout the wishes of the Communist Party in China, by witnessing to Christ, attending prayer meetings and holding Bible studies, is to “not count the cost” in a most remarkably courageous way.

The basis for this lack of concern for, and obeisance to, the consensus of their cultures and societies is the personal experience by the Pentecostal convert of the power of God in Jesus Christ. The shattering effect of the Holy Spirit on the individual led to an apocalyptic re-evaluation of everything that till then had been taken for granted. The convert found that what had been established—perhaps even precious—in their pre-Pentecostal life no longer exerted the same influence. A new goal, a new set of values, a new community, had replaced that which existed before. The impact of the experience of the saving, healing, baptising, returning Christ was such that the old mould was shattered totally and a new entity came into being. And this new person challenged every “given” of their culture and religion by modelling a radical

⁵ A. Anderson, *Bazalwane: African Pentecostals in South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1992), p. 76.

alternative—Pentecostal discipleship.⁶ Without necessarily always becoming dissenters, they certainly became questioners.

3. Which Consensus Should Be Questioned?

If Pentecostal theology accepts the premise that Pentecostal discipleship implies a criticism of prevailing consensus, it may not do so purely on the basis of its own historical antecedents. While such antecedents are valuable in indicating just how Pentecostal discipleship comes to expression in a number of secular and religious contexts, they cannot be normative in themselves. For a normative indication of how to relate to social and religious consensus Pentecostal theology must search the scriptures. The Pentecostal notion that we are living in the ongoing history of God is a fitting indicator in this regard. Obviously the example of Jesus himself, as well as of the apostles and the first church community, provides relevant data here. In the interests of an holistic approach to the scriptures, the examples of the Old Testament charismatic personalities can also be used to provide a key to understanding the nature of the difference that marks those who are called and empowered by God.

Most evident in all of these lives is the undoubted sense of commitment and surrender to a personal God whom they had encountered. The stories of these encounters are offered as simple narrative, and generally lack the mystical elements that might otherwise somehow have elevated the subject to divinity, or to the rank of “holy man/woman.” The encounters took place in history, in a social and cultural context, and their results were lived out in a non-mythical world, in an everyday existence where normal, everyday men and women lived everyday lives. And yet the encounters left the individual somehow changed, seeing their environment through totally different eyes to their peers. This change of perception led to a change of attitude, which came to expression in a change of conduct. And a most significant element in this change was that their contemporaries could not easily categorize it. It was not that they became rebellious citizens, or religious apostates, or subversive activists, or anti-social elements. Whenever these tags were

⁶ I find the term “discipleship” attractive in describing the Pentecostal way of living, since it denotes a greater similarity with revival and discipleship movements than with classical Protestantism or even Evangelicalism.

attributed to them, they were almost immediately proved to be either inadequate or inaccurate.⁷

The Old Testament prophets, while remaining Israelites indeed, and while not overtly attempting the overthrow of monarchs or priests (unless specifically so commanded by God), nor the destruction of the temple, nevertheless related to both monarchy and cultus in a radically different way. They themselves would claim that they now saw these things from the same viewpoint as God. At the same time their own personal destiny and sense of self-worth was no longer linked to the trappings of daily life in Israel or Judah. They were therefore radically free to express the values and plans of God in and to their contemporary culture. Their fellow Israelites perceived immediately that these people, while perhaps not overtly fomenting revolution or rebellion, were making pronouncements and expressing values and perspectives that were inherently subversive. Eichrodt notes:

The whole prophetic movement, which on principle subjected all political and national considerations to the sovereign will of the nation's God, inevitably acted as a vociferous protest against any subordination of religion to the programme of the civil power.⁸

The ambivalence of such a situation is best expressed in the ministry of Jeremiah, who wept for the very nation over which he proclaimed the doom of God's judgement. In the New Testament there is a powerful parallel to this as Jesus weeps over the city of Jerusalem in Matt 23.

Eichrodt's comments on the nature of the classical prophet in Old Testament Israel clearly describes the basis of their alternative perception, values and message as their personal encounter with the power of God:

In their own personal life the prophets experienced this power terrifyingly as the radical overthrow of everything that had held good for them hitherto, an experience to which the accounts of their calling bear eloquent testimony. There is not one of them who did not receive

⁷ This attributing of tags to Bible characters on the basis of one's own ideology or convictions was not limited to their contemporaries. In the last half-century we have encountered Jesus the AK47-wielding revolutionary, Jesus the pot-smoking Hippie, Jesus the liberal do-gooder, and Jesus the Black Messiah, to mention just a few.

⁸ W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (London: SCM, 1961), vol. 1, p. 331.

this new certainty of God in such a way that the whole previous pattern of his life, the thoughts and plans by which he had till now regulated his relationship with the world, was not smashed, and replaced by a mighty divine imperative obliging him to undertake something which hitherto he had not even considered as a possibility. And the same revolutionary forces which they saw in their own lives they saw realized also in the life of the nation by this terrible divine fact, driving with irresistible impetus against the totally differently constituted reality of the empirical world, and hurling it out of its path.... For these men all descriptive phrases which sought to imprison God in the Here and Now, or to portray his sovereignty over the world as a static and inherently stable situation, were bound to appear palpably inadequate.⁹

The life of Jesus reveals this radical difference and “un-tag-ability” most forcefully. While on the face of it he appeared anti-imperial, antinomian, antireligious and indeed even antisocial, he was all and none of these things. This does not imply that his life needs to be dialectically understood, as though in himself he reconciled opposite and contradictory attributes. It simply indicates that the life and utterances of Jesus turned the searchlight of enquiry and criticism back upon the presuppositions and consensus that questioned him. When his contemporaries wanted to show him as either a subversive against the empire, or as a collaborator against his own nation, his answer to their question about paying tax to Rome left his interrogators with the uncomfortable suspicion that it was their attitude toward God, emperor and nation which was under question. Here walked and spoke a man whose presence and mode of life could not be classed according to the categories that the prevailing social and religious consensus presupposed. In effect he forced his contemporaries to contemplate an alternative category, a category that had not occurred to them, a category which judged every category they had previously adopted or spurned—the category of the Spirit-filled son of God.

Hengel’s comments on the tax-question and the Jewish struggle for freedom show a remarkable parallel to Eichrodt’s quote above:

The nearness of the reign of God relativizes even the power of Rome. The political religion of the all-powerful empire is—in total contrast to the Zealot protest—pushed aside as devoid of power; indeed, it is not even taken into account. By the power of His word Jesus battles to have his people really acknowledge God’s will.¹⁰

⁹ Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, p. 345.

¹⁰ M. Hengel, *Christ and Power* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), pp. 19-20.

Hengel can thus comment elsewhere, “one can quite correctly call Jesus a revolutionary, and this could be underscored with superlatives.”¹¹ What was revolutionary about the man from Galilee was not his fervor for the liberation of Israel, nor for the prosperity of the people, not even of the law: it was his personal commitment to the God who had sent him, who had anointed him with the power of his Spirit. Says Hengel:

People have wanted to see him as a political revolutionary as well as an apolitical fanatic, indeed even as an agent of the occupation forces. Those kind of tendentious interpretations refute themselves. One could put as a heading over his entire work the passage from Zechariah... “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.” The Spirit of God manifested itself [*sic*] in Jesus’ outwardly simple style of preaching, whose effectiveness lay solely in the content of his message, and in his deeds of kindness.¹²

The apostles showed that their revolutionary approach to the social and religious consensus of the day, based as it was on the intervention of God’s power in their lives by the Holy Spirit, was both extremely popular and intensely hated. Its very difference from the fossilized sterility of Jewish religion, and from the superficiality and confusion of pagan rites, lent it an appeal and satisfaction particularly to the disinherited. However, though they themselves could not always put their finger on just where the threat lay, those whose personal integration lay in the religious, social and political establishment of the day tended to respond with hostility to its challenge. That not all Christians, or even Christian leaders, could always totally resist the force of this hostility is evident in Paul’s confrontation with Peter at Antioch (Gal 2:11-14). This being the Peter who had been radically challenged by God to break the mould of his own prejudices and take the gospel to a gentile household—the same Peter who courageously defended his compliance before the Jewish believers with the powerful words: The Spirit commanded me to go (Acts 11:12)!

While obviously militarily, politically and economically harmless, the first Christians soon drew the wrath of the established powers and consensus upon themselves. For their new sense of identity and purpose led them to treat casually (if not with contempt) the many literal and figurative altars at which the contemporary consensus demanded all

¹¹ M. Hengel, *Was Jesus a Revolutionist?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), p. 34.

¹² Hengel, *Christ and Power*, pp. 15-16.

should bow. When one of these altars was the altar of Caesar, these radical disciples were faced with the sternest challenge the church has ever faced—and the passive and accepting way in which they went to their deaths indicated just how deeply they had been co-opted into an alternative way of thinking and living. The scope of that unrelenting persecution was repeated again in the days of the Anabaptists, where Protestant and Roman Catholic both attempted to totally exterminate a group of Christians who would not bow at the altars of their respective state-church syntheses. In more recent times many Pentecostals have similarly been treated, particularly in Marxist, Islamic or recently “liberated” countries where the ruling elite claim to represent the source and content of the nation’s destiny and self-image.

It is clear that the issues most subverted by the Christian witness were the issues of power. The threats and promises of military, social and religious power were peripheralized in the Christian context, since the new perception of the disciple was based upon an encounter with an all-surpassing power—the power of the one true God as revealed to them and in them by the Spirit of his Son. Fear and veneration of those powers which everyone else believed to be ultimate in the contemporary context, were replaced by love for (and also fear of—referring to Acts 5 and 9 which reveal the terrible power of God) the living God. Mass or majority opinion or consensus was relegated to a minor position, the most pressing demand upon their time, resources and energy being how to walk and witness as worthy disciples of the Master.

In answer to the question “Which consensus should be questioned or opposed?” the Pentecostal answer must be “Whichever consensus exalts itself and demands allegiance above the Master himself.” Perhaps in reviewing the perils of failing to question a prevailing consensus one can identify specific contemporary presuppositions and consensus that challenge Pentecostal theology by demanding allegiance.

4. Failing to Question—Seduced by Conformity

What perils lie in wait for a Pentecostal theology that fails to question the surrounding consensus at the beginning of the twenty-first century? While it would be an oversimplification to claim that there is such a thing as a single emerging social consensus today, it is not paranoid to imagine that there are significant and intensively propagated opinions that demand that all “relevant” schools or philosophies acknowledge their tenets. Most have both protagonists and antagonists,

but this is not the issue for Pentecostal theology. For us it is not a question of taking sides (another form of conformity) but of representing the position of our Master in every issue.

This is made clear in the conflict between the ideologies of the right and the left that took place from the 1960s until the 1990s. (Some would maintain that this conflict is still not resolved, that it merely continues under the guise of the many forms of “correctness” that prevail in our societies.) At the time it soon became clear that a “relevant” theologian could not hope to opt out of this ideological struggle. Either one bore the labels “progressive” or “radical” or “sensitive,” and basked in the approval of the proponents of the left; or one was tagged “conservative,” and found approval from the churchly right. There was nowhere to lay the head for the one who cared for neither option, who opted out, or who took a radically alternative stance. No invitations to ecumenical conferences, no heralding as a champion of the Christian fundamentals. To arrive, to be accepted, to be heard demanded partisanship in the cause of one side or the other. For the Pentecostal theologian seduced into this conformity lay the small satisfaction of acceptance into a wider circle—and the peril of total irrelevance in and to a community of radical disciples.

This period presented a number of severe disappointments for Christianity as an alternative perspective, as many theologians threw their weight into the political and ideological struggles of the day. Perhaps the most depressing was the co-option of Moltmann into a single camp, the camp of socialism and the left. This is depressing because his early theology offered real hope of an alternative way—particularly since he sought meaningfully historical antecedents for a relevant theology among the Anabaptists. Despite his extremely cogent pleas for the “critical freedom of the gospel,” based on an exciting, free-church-type approach to the stories of the Jesus and the prophets, Moltmann eventually capitulated by insisting that the Messianic task of Christians could only be carried out in partnership with other “messianic” movements—every one of them from the left!¹³

In the twenty-first century the lines are perhaps no longer as clear-cut as they were in the old east-west, left-right days. Now the divide seems to be between the advocates of a globalized consumer culture (the

¹³ My own evaluation of the significance of Moltmann’s theology for Pentecostals facing political issues can be found in M. S. Clark, “The Relationship Christianity-Society: A Study in Jürgen Moltmann from a Pentecostal Perspective” (D.Th. thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 1989).

old right?) and those who advocate anything from its overthrow to its radical amendment (the old left?). In a truly postmodern way the burning issues include such matters as cultural imperialism, or ecological correctness, or economical domination—the extent and variety of the various battlefields almost evokes nostalgia for the simplification of the old left-right struggle. However, the temptation to conformity is no less than it was, since the issues that by often unspoken consensus come to dominate the agenda may not be the issues that are encountered in powerful Pentecostal witness to Christ. Indeed, so many of them come to express the interest of very specific or local agendas—feminist concerns, anti-racist issues, pro-life versus pro-choice campaigns, etc. At the end of the day, the choice for the Pentecostal theologian is to be leader or a follower—either to set the agenda or to submit to another's. However, one can be sure that if he or she refuses to conform to the agenda dictated by the contemporary consensus, there will be a penalty in it for the non-conformist.

In the context of Pentecostal theology, particularly in the context of the so-called two-thirds world, the great debate at present is about contextualization of the gospel as opposed to syncretism. This is not a debate that can be dealt with simplistically, since there are no clear guidelines in Christian history or in the scripture that make it easy to decide what, for example, a Buddhist should retain of his or her culture when converting to Christianity, nor what they should abandon. However, once again this area offers seductive choices to the Pentecostal theologian. Should one join the more culturally sensitive group who would diminish the boundaries between the Christian religion and other religions? Or should one make a home for oneself with those who draw such absolute distinctions between Christianity and non-western cultures that the convert is expected to westernize completely or else lose their salvation? Make no mistake, both sides would love to have the support of Pentecostal voices and scholarship, since it is the Pentecostal movement that is at the cutting edge of Christian witness in these regions. And the consensus implies that, unless one takes sides on these issues, one's theology will be done in the wilderness, irrelevant and unheard. If the Pentecostal theologian succumbs to this temptation, can he or she retain enough credibility in the Pentecostal environment to deal with the issues that are burning in the movement, and not those that the surrounding consensus insists are the burning issues?

However, the challenges of contextualization and of a radical alternative Pentecostal approach to it, are not limited to the world of missions. The recent secularization of the West, to the extent that some

would claim it is now a pagan culture, makes demands of the Pentecostal movement that are as challenging as any other transcultural interface. Many seem to feel that to become relevant to the new post-modern generation the movement must adopt post-modern categories in the entire spectrum of its existence and ministry. To do so may deprive the Pentecostal movement, which has the greatest chance of successfully reaching Generations X/Y/Z, of its strongest weapon—its radical difference and its alternative approach and value system.

Another area that demands attention by Pentecostal theology is the siren voice of “correctness.” This is an all-pervading notion that affects almost every area of academic pursuit in the human and social sciences. The very term “correct” implies a consensus—somewhere, somehow, someone’s point of view and sense of values has taken on the nature of a canon. It is presupposed that this canon cannot be questioned. The most savage labels that can be applied to those who fail to heed this stricture include terms such as “insensitive,” “cultural imperialist,” “chauvinist,” “supremacist”—and the even more damning “racist” and “sexist.” Once applied to an academic, those epithets spell his or her intellectual doom. Such a one is then consigned to the ranks of the untouchables, in some instances even considered to defile and pollute those they would debate or instruct.

It is obvious that such a powerful consensus bears with it all the marks of a religion or spirituality. There is an all-accepting relativism underlying it that refuses to accept anything that is labelled by the consensus as “incorrect.” This contradiction demands allegiance, and sanguine is the Pentecostal scholar who believes it will never demand his or her obeisance.¹⁴

Since most of the tenets that are held to be “correct” by this establishment are the tenets of the left and of the liberals of the 1950s and 1960s, there is a well-established anti-correctness consensus among conservatives of every stripe. The temptation for the Pentecostal scholar is therefore not just to submit to the demands of the “correctness” brigade, but also to perhaps follow the opposite course. Neither destination offers particularly attractive bed-fellows to the person who has encountered the calling and power of God in their lives.

¹⁴ W. D. Watkins, *The New Absolutes: How They Are Being Imposed on Us, and How They Are Eroding the Moral Landscape* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1996) offers a cogent description and Christian refutation of contemporary “correctness” as encountered in North America.

Those who have followed this argument up to this point are entitled to now ask the question: where does this fellow want to go? Is he holding out the option of being different purely for the sake of being different? (That of course was the old Hippie ideal—don't tag me, man!) Perhaps he is suffering from an extensive ego, believing that he alone has the right or insight to set a Pentecostal agenda? The aim of this paper is not to specify any particular agenda for Pentecostal theology, but rather to prevent it bleeding to death as it plays with the notions of adopting the agendas of other interest groups for the sake of a spurious relevance or recognition. However, if the point of view set out above is not totally specious, then it hints at an implication for Pentecostal theology. Namely, that Christian discipleship, and Pentecostal discipleship in particular, demands the convictions and courage of an inner-directed individual.

5. Individuality as a Key Foundation Stone for Pentecostal Scholarship

I have chosen the term individuality as opposed to individualism to specify what I intend in this paragraph. This is due to the influence of my Philosophy 1 lecturer, who informed me that “-ism” means “disease”! Ramphela admonishes the graduates of Cape Town University in 1999 not to fear the aloneness that comes from holding alternative and unpopular positions to the prevailing consensus. This does not mean that the collective nature of African relationships and processes must be usurped by a selfish individualism. Individuality *per se* is not automatically subversive to tradition, nor to respect for one's elders. It merely implies having the courage to find within yourself your values and directions, and not to simply inherit them from your milieu.

If ever there is a theologian who needs this courage, it is the Pentecostal theologian. In the halls of Academe we are newcomers, not always welcome, not always liked. Our movement has often been brashly anti-intellectual, our spokesmen rarely renowned for their diplomacy. Simply because the movement is burgeoning, we are in danger of sounding triumphalist or arrogant. At the same time we may exhibit signs of an intellectual inferiority complex as we are confronted with the sophistication of the theological and philosophical edifices that preceded our own call to academic pursuits.

However, even our own Pentecostal milieu may be as unwelcoming of Pentecostal theology. Sometimes when we recognize that we are truly alien in the wider circles of Christian theology we may be tempted to

seek affirmation from the more vocal (and often less thoughtful) circle of the Pentecostal community. To acquiesce in this would be a tragedy, since it would imply losing our critical freedom to confront our own peers with the challenges of God, his Spirit and his word. A Pentecostal theology that seeks solely to mediate Pentecostalism to non-Pentecostals will be fruitless in addressing the many challenges and seductions to which the movement itself is continuously exposed. Therefore one may at times need to be as lonely within the movement as without.

At the same time a large portion of Pentecostal theology has been developed in the western milieu, where the movement is at best moribund and the challenges completely different to those found in what was known as the "mission field." Both north and south are producing young Pentecostal theologians in large quantities, and unless both produce individuals of outstanding courage and conviction, the process of developing a viable Pentecostal theology that will be a spur to the dynamic of the movement may become irrevocably divided, perhaps even lost. To provide a viable framework of understanding within which Pentecostal ministry can be promoted, Pentecostal disciples trained, and Pentecostal research meaningfully and adequately carried out, calls for men and women who have the courage to be different. They may often have to operate alone and unheard, while those who succumb to the seductions of partisanship for one of the many "causes" in the realm of theology may be seen to flourish. Such loneliness often came upon the prophets and the apostles, indeed upon the Carpenter himself. Eichrodt sums up this challenge in terms of the classical prophets of Israel:

...the prophets had no strong organizational backing, nor were they armed with solid political power to give emphasis to their words. If they were to make themselves heard in this situation they needed a spiritual power and inner conviction which would raise the individual above the mass, and give him complete independence. Here among the prophets we meet men who...are capable of moving through life in majestic solitude.... It is their strongly marked individuality, indeed, which makes them for us the most clearly defined personalities of ancient Israel, and gives all their preaching the stamp of genuineness and inimitable originality. Even where traditional patterns and systems of concepts are employed, everything is molten in the fire of a personal experience of God, and emerges freshly minted.... It is in their own submission to the existential demands of God that they are made free from all human ties.¹⁵

¹⁵ Eichrodt, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, pp. 342-43.

If Pentecostal theology is to achieve a truly prophetic impact, then Pentecostal theologians will have to be as involved in Pentecostal ministry as they are in scholarship. I find numerous examples of such scholars in Asia and Africa—men and women who have felt the call to Academe, but have not forsaken their commitment to powerful and radical Pentecostal ministry. In keeping current in both worlds perhaps we may avoid the pitfalls of tailoring our theological viewpoints and findings so as to gain recognition among the theological establishment. We may keep our hearts and minds singly devoted to pleasing the Master who radically confronted and changed us, so that we might serve his people, promote his witness and do everything we can to promote and maintain the powerful dynamic of the Pentecostal movement.

5. Conclusion

A cloud of witnesses who were prepared to challenge the prevailing consensus of their own age surrounds us. Our Master reminds us that the way to which he called is narrow “and few there are that find it.” The apostle to the gentiles challenges us to be transformed rather than be conformed to this age. None of this biblical witness is intended to drive us to anti-social isolationism, or to the life of an intellectual world-avoiding hermit. The corresponding demands of Christian agape love do not allow us such a self-centred, perhaps self-pitying, luxury.

However, as Pentecostal theologians we are more likely to make a difference if we are different, to be relevant if we operate critically of every consensus rather than be co-opted in the consensus itself. However, our relevance will lie, as it did for Stephen, in the power and the wisdom of the Spirit in which we speak, research and minister.