

DAVID A. ROOZEN & JAMES R. NIEMAN, EDITORS

# CHURCH, IDENTITY, AND CHANGE

THEOLOGY AND DENOMINATIONAL  
STRUCTURES IN UNSETTLED TIMES

## **The Challenges of Organization and Spirit in the Implementation of Theology in the Assemblies of God**

**William W. Menzies**

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# CHURCH, IDENTITY, and CHANGE

*Theology and Denominational Structures  
in Unsettled Times*

Edited by

David A. Roozen and James R. Nieman

Hartford Institute for Religion Research  
Hartford Seminary  
hrr@hartsem.edu

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# The Challenges of Organization and Spirit in the Implementation of Theology in the Assemblies of God

*William W. Menzies*

The modern Pentecostal movement began in 1901 in Charles F. Parham's informal Bible school in Topeka, Kansas (cf. the Gary B. McGee historical introduction, pp. 35-44). This is the point from which a connected historical narrative can be traced. It was here that the identifying characteristic of the movement was formed, a self-understanding that identified the phenomenon of speaking in other tongues as the accompanying biblical witness of Spirit baptism. This religious experience had been reported in a variety of settings over a period of some years, but it was not until the events in Topeka transpired that the meaning of these experiences was articulated, giving an ideological framework for the movement that soon developed.

The modern Pentecostal revival was propelled onto the stage of world events through the remarkable meetings that took place in Los Angeles from 1906 to 1909. This is generally known as the Azusa Street Revival. A black Holiness preacher, William J. Seymour, was the leader of the Azusa Street Meeting. Parham's attempt to control events in Los Angeles was rebuffed by Seymour and his followers, and with his repudiation in Los Angeles, his influence quickly waned. By 1910 Seymour had also been displaced by other charismatic figures, both in Los Angeles and elsewhere around the world. In effect, the revival had outgrown these early leaders. A worldwide network emerged almost at once. It should be noted that there was really no single "father" of the modern Pentecostal movement. What gave a sense of identity was the belief that believers should seek for and expect to receive a baptism in the Holy Spirit, and that they would know they had the full biblical experience when they spoke in other tongues. The common expectation was that God was pouring out his Spirit once again, just as he did in the book of Acts.

This revival, although so startling in some of its implications that it was

often referred to as the “Latter Rain,” was in reality an extension of common strands evident in American evangelicalism at the turn of the century. Some assert that the Pentecostal revival is a form of Restorationism.<sup>1</sup> To be sure, many of the earliest Pentecostals thought what they were experiencing was so remarkable that it was in truth a recovery of the purity of the apostolic church. Many of the early Pentecostal assemblies adopted the name “Apostolic Faith” as a witness to this conviction. In fact, however, virtually everything was already in place for the birth of the Pentecostal revival. Pentecostal groups that formed denominations, such as the Assemblies of God (AG), borrowed nearly everything from other Christian bodies, such as church polity and the full panoply of fundamentalist theology, including the Scofieldian dispensational system of hermeneutics. That fundamentalist dispensationalism was inherently anti-Pentecostal was no problem for AG scholars like Frank M. Boyd and Ralph M. Riggs. They gave Scofieldian premillennialism a “Pentecostal baptism.” For them, the hiatus of the church age — the parenthesis between dispensations — instead of being shorn of the possibility of gifts of the Spirit (as the fundamentalists taught), became the age of the Spirit!<sup>2</sup>

American evangelicalism had promoted the concept of a crisis experience of the Spirit subsequent to new birth as available to all believers. The concept “baptism in the Holy Spirit” had been popularized in American Christianity from the time of Phoebe Palmer in the 1830s. By 1875, revivalist Charles G. Finney was promoting this teaching. Wesleyan Holiness advocates were inclined to see baptism in the Spirit as a useful way of expressing the “second blessing” of entire sanctification. Many evangelicals from non-Wesleyan groups, however, employed this term to identify a crisis experience of empowerment for Christian witness, for evangelism and missions. Comparing the Baptist A. J. Gordon’s *The Ministry of the Holy Spirit*,<sup>3</sup> published in 1895, with the Statement of Fundamental Truths adopted as the theological platform of the AG in 1916, one notices a striking parallel in virtually every respect but one. The only clearly different understanding lies in the attachment of speaking in other tongues to the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Gordon did not make this connection, but the early Pentecostals did. It is precisely here that the identity of the modern Pentecostal movement is to be distinguished.

The Pentecostal movement has grown at an astonishing rate. Although

1. Edith Blumhofer, *The Assemblies of God: A Chapter in the Story of American Pentecostalism* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1989), 1:18-22.

2. William W. Menzies, *Anointed to Serve: The Story of the Assemblies of God* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1971), pp. 328-29, which describes the Pentecostal revision of fundamentalist dispensationalism.

3. A. J. Gordon, *The Ministry of the Holy Spirit* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1894; reprint, 1950).

at the beginning of the second century of the Pentecostal revival there is no longer total agreement on the doctrine of the normative sign of tongues as the biblical criterion for Spirit baptism (“initial physical evidence”), nonetheless this is still the most widely held view among Pentecostals worldwide. Certainly this is true among the thirty million adherents to the many autonomous national AG bodies.

It is important to note a major difference between the modern charismatic movement and the Pentecostal movement. The Pentecostal movement highlights the experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit, understood to be an enduing of power for evangelism and missions. The charismatic movement, appearing on the scene from about 1955 onward, is best understood as openness to the charisms of the Spirit, specifically the manifestations enumerated in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. Although Pentecostals make abundant room for the manifestations or gifts of the Spirit, a higher priority is given to the experience of baptism in the Spirit with the expectation that the participants will be deeply involved in ministry of one kind or another. Charismatics may or may not speak of a baptism in the Spirit, and not many of those who do make a necessary connection between that experience and speaking in tongues. Most charismatics would say that speaking in tongues is “normal” but not “normative.”<sup>4</sup>

### **The Ethos of the Assemblies of God**

Because the AG is strongly experientially oriented, its membership and leadership have not generally been overly concerned about the niceties of theological distinctions. Instead, the worldview of Pentecostals is best appreciated by examining its common practices. These practices reveal much about deeply felt values, values that do not readily translate into a set of doctrinal statements. An important means for capturing this worldview is to construct at least a brief description of typical worship patterns and other practices that are of central concern to this body of believers. Hopefully, such an introduction may promote an understanding of the belief structure of this denomination’s adherents.

Over the years the AG has gone through considerable change. It is not worthwhile to stereotype a group as diverse as the AG particularly because of the high value placed on the autonomy of the local church. In a given city with

4. William W. Menzies, “A Taxonomy of Contemporary Pentecostal-Charismatic Theologies” (lecture delivered at the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Valley Forge, Pa., December 1978), which provides a chart identifying theological views of a variety of charismatic and evangelical scholars.

several AG churches, each will have its own identity marked by differing socio-economic profiles, ethnic origins, or tastes in music and worship style. Nonetheless, there are common values that are deeply shared and to some degree will be recognized in nearly all local AG churches. I have identified here some of the prominent characteristics that mark local churches. To a large degree, these characteristics are the practical implementation of the belief structure of these people. Later I will address those points that appear to be evidence of ambiguity and dissonance.

The local church is the primary arena for experiencing the manifestations of the Spirit. It is not surprising that the AG features a fairly strong sense of congregational church polity. Nevertheless, such localism is constrained by credentialing and disciplining of ordained ministers at the regional and national levels, reflecting a unique adaptation of presbyterial polity. In truth, then, the AG is really a hybrid of congregational and presbyterial structures. The focus, however, is clearly on the local church. The denomination is seen at its best in facilitating the work of the local church.

Pentecostals expect the Holy Spirit to break into any public gathering, be it an annual district council session, the biennial General Council, or a local assembly. It is the local church, however, that nurtures encounters with the Holy Spirit. It is here that parishioners are most likely to experience the activity of the Holy Spirit. In fact, a great attraction to AG churches is an environment conducive to the "flow of the Spirit." Few churches provide a printed order of service. This does not mean there is not a generally accepted pattern in the church service, but rather that the familiar routine is held tentatively, with the expectation that God might interrupt the meeting with an utterance in the Spirit, an interpretation of a "message in tongues," a prophecy, a word of wisdom, or a word of knowledge. Every service is expected to be marked by a degree of spontaneity. The generally recognized pattern that provides a sense of order is usually understood to be an opening prayer, group singing, special music, an offering and an offertory, a time of special intercessory prayer, and then a sermon. At the conclusion of the sermon, the pastor issues an altar call followed by a benediction. Following evening meetings, there is usually a time of prayer available for those seeking something from God, conducted around the altar at the front of the church or in an adjacent prayer room. This "after service" is usually confined to Sunday evening or Wednesday evening sessions since the Sunday morning service usually does not permit time for such protracted meetings in view of the impending dinner hour.

The style of worship varies considerably depending on geographical location and the level of sophistication of the congregation. The music and the form of worship, albeit attuned to the needs and tastes of the group, are de-



signed to elevate individuals into an exalted state of praise and worship. This is often reflected by the raising of hands and, in some cases, individuals rising to sing while others sit quietly by. The content of the music in more recent years has moved away from the classic hymnal, with its mixture of traditional hymns and gospel songs, and toward the popular worship choruses generated by groups like Calvary Chapel or Hillsong from Australia. It is here that influences from the charismatic movement are clearly evident. Most churches have a means of projecting on a screen the music to be sung (choruses or hymns) for the convenience of the congregation. Conspicuous is the exuberant participation of the congregation in singing. One will observe some people singing (perhaps with eyes closed, as in prayer), some raising their hands, and most standing during at least part of the worship time. Intensity, enthusiasm, and participation characterize the worship.

In most AG churches prayer is a significant part of the church service. The services are punctuated by occasions when special prayer is offered, often with laypersons leading the prayer and the rest of the congregation audibly participating. During these times of "concert prayer," some may be praying in tongues. This time of corporate prayer is in reality a chorus of many private prayers being offered simultaneously. It is evident that the people are comfortable praying aloud and spontaneously. They are talking to God and they know it. Although it does not occur in all services, the pastor also fulfills the injunction to pray for the sick (James 5:14-15). The pastor will have a bottle of olive oil with which he anoints those who come forward at the designated time for such prayer, and elders of the church along with pastoral associates join him in laying hands on those seeking healing. The weekly periodical of the AG, the *Pentecostal Evangel*, regularly reports testimonies of divine intervention, often citing remarkable healings that have been authenticated by medical personnel. (Changing views on the theology of divine healing are addressed later in this paper.)

The content of AG preaching is clearly christocentric. It is widely understood that the work of the Holy Spirit is best seen as pointing to Christ (John 15:26). There is no prescribed liturgical calendar to govern the preaching in the local churches, but encouragement is provided for pastors to highlight the person and work of the Holy Spirit during the annual Pentecost season. That such encouragement is felt to be needed signifies that preaching on the Pentecostal experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit certainly is not the preoccupation of the ministers in the fellowship. AG ministers regularly subscribe in their annual credentials-renewal papers to the full list of doctrines cited in the *Statement of Fundamental Truths*, which is a thoroughly trinitarian document. The preaching of AG ministers is centered in Christ, followed by attention to the varied

ministries of the Holy Spirit. It might be noted that although primary attention is given to preaching about Christ with substantial attention given to the person and work of the Holy Spirit, there does not seem to be commensurate attention devoted to the doctrine of God the Father.<sup>5</sup>

Church architecture is significant. The design of buildings, whether rural, small-church structures or urban, large-church facilities, expresses the theology of the immanence of God. The message is clear: God can be experienced in this place. The small-town church has bright lighting, large windows, simple platform layout with a pulpit in the center, and a bench across the front of the church below the platform. This is called the altar, understood as the place where people meet God in vital ways. These structural forms suggest that in this place God is accessible. Larger cities are likely to have grand structures, but the auditorium is arranged so that everyone seems to be near the pulpit. The balcony is likely to have steps descending to the main sanctuary near the platform area so that respondents to the altar calls can readily come forward. A generous area is provided below and in front of the platform so that many people can crowd forward for group prayer at the conclusion of a service. The platform area is usually quite large, giving space not only for a substantial choir but for musical instruments as well. Space for full drum sets, a piano, an organ, and various other instruments is typical. Many churches have a baptistry artfully placed at the rear of the platform. Such facilities enable the practice of baptism by immersion, a view universally held within AG churches.

Participation is a key word for understanding Pentecostal life and worship. The new birth brings converts into a spiritual fellowship. New believers are encouraged to seek God for the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is understood to be an empowering experience available to all: young and old, male and female, clergy and laity. Participation is visible in the shared and meaningful congregational worship but goes far beyond this. Programs for mobilizing the energies of the people of God allow them to serve God in concrete ways. In earlier times the Sunday school proved to be an ideal mechanism for harnessing the energies of Spirit-filled laypersons. It was from such elementary leadership experiences that the pastor could observe emerging candidates for more conspicuous leadership. It was common practice for the pastor to select promising young leaders to join him in establishing a "home prayer meeting" in an area the local church wanted to evangelize. Eventually, one of the emerging leaders from the parent church might be asked to take over the responsibility for shepherding the fledgling home prayer meeting. Many of

5. C. M. Ward, *Sermon Classics*, ed. Gwen Jones (Springfield, Mo.: Revivaltime Media Ministries, 1991-93), contains typical examples of AG preaching.

these tiny beginnings eventually flowered into self-supporting churches. Observed leadership skills in the local environment were considered sufficient qualification for effective ministry, while attendance at one of the AG Bible schools remained a matter of debate. Some felt that academic endeavor at a Bible school might diminish the ardent spiritual vitality of the individual. In time, much of this anti-intellectual feeling dissipated (as noted in the McGee introduction), but the tension lingers for some. Historically, it was assumed that receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit would lead to involvement in some form of ministry, with the individual selecting specifically what that calling might be. Although the patterns of church growth and lay ministry have changed over the years, it is significant that there remains a large pool of candidates for full-time Christian service both for ministry in domestic churches and for overseas missionary service. That AG churches still attract a large number of young people is an indicator of continuing vitality today and a hopeful sign for the church of tomorrow.<sup>6</sup>

A significant difference between groups like the AG and mainline denominations is that the people in AG churches have little interest in remote national entities passing resolutions on major issues such as poverty and injustice. AG people are more inclined to respond to concrete needs at the local level or to needs presented by the constant parade of missionaries who punctuate the church calendar, making vivid the specific needs at specific locations. Each year more than \$100 million is given to missionary appeals, indicating a vigorous interest in reaching beyond the needs of one's own congregation. Most AG members and pastors are content to let the national office make official pronouncements on matters of national ethical concern. It would be a mistake, however, to confuse this relative indifference about national level resolutions with a lack of compassion for the needs of a hurting world.<sup>7</sup>

As previously noted, understanding an experience-oriented fellowship like the AG requires us to recognize how its group practices are particularly revealing, providing a useful means for getting at the real values held by participants. Experiencing God, participating in the "flow of the Spirit," is as impor-

6. Sherri Doty, Assemblies of God statistician, conversation with author, April 25, 2000. According to Doty, in 1978 there were 160,891 members of AG youth groups. By 1998 this figure had nearly doubled to 317,478.

7. David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990), an interesting study by a British sociologist who assessed which religious forces were most effective in bringing about social change among the poor of Latin America. He concluded that the Pentecostals were making a genuine difference in the lives of people, far beyond what other groups were doing. Although a similar study has not been undertaken for the American AG, it is possible that a comparable result would be observed.

tant as the theology that packages these experiences. Although the membership is strongly committed to the authority of the Bible, few seem to be greatly concerned about revamping the traditional doctrinal statements of the fellowship. Most seem content to study the Bible regularly within the framework of denominational teaching, whether in a Sunday school class or in the midweek Bible study, believing that the basic denominational truths are an adequate vehicle for experiencing God.

Many laypersons are content with traditional doctrinal statements. For a growing number of young pastors and many college and seminary students, however, there is a growing uneasiness about theological issues facing the Pentecostal movement. The tremendous current interest in the person and work of the Holy Spirit both within and beyond the Pentecostal movement has raised questions that were not considered in earlier days. In previous generations, one was either Pentecostal or anti-Pentecostal. There was little middle ground. There is, however, a great interest today in virtually all quarters of the Christian church in the Holy Spirit and how one may experience the Spirit. This fascination has produced a great volume of literature, much of it critical of the way Pentecostals have articulated their theology. Younger Pentecostals perceive a growing need for more persuasive responses to questions surfaced by astute theologians. Some of these theologians are genuinely interested in what is valid in the Pentecostal revival, yet they question the way these values have been supported by Pentecostal theologians. Sympathetic but unconvinced critics of Pentecostalism pose a continuing challenge for a new generation of Pentecostal scholars.

Analysis of surveys reported in Poloma's sociological case study (pp. 45-96) demonstrates a fairly high degree of satisfaction among AG pastors with the service provided to the local church by district judicatories and the national organization. As this dynamic and growing denomination has evolved over time, however, one would expect certain points of tension to arise. I will next examine some of the issues that have surfaced and attempt to trace how change has been addressed.

### **Structural Changes in the Assemblies of God**

The AG did not begin with the intention of forming a denomination. Circumstances forced this. Rejection by fundamentalism, by virtually the entire Holiness cluster of churches, and by the mainline churches of American Protestantism forced Pentecostals to seek fellowship among their own. The AG came into being as a "cooperative fellowship" of autonomous Pentecostal local churches

for the purposes of credentialing and disciplining ministers, regularizing acceptable teaching, providing for publications, arranging for the development of ministerial training schools, and facilitating the cause of missions. At the outset, strong sentiment prevailed against organizing as a denomination. There was an intuitive awareness of the tension between charisma and organization, as Margaret Poloma has elsewhere so eloquently articulated.<sup>8</sup>

Amorphous revival movements inevitably require some form of structure for survival, however. Within two years the infant AG found that it had to respond to theological issues that threatened to destroy the fellowship altogether. Occasioned by the "Jesus Only" crisis (as noted in the McGee introduction), a *Statement of Fundamental Truths* was adopted in 1916. This statement of faith was not intended to be a comprehensive creedal articulation. Nevertheless, it was only slightly edited over the years and has in truth become tantamount to a full-blown creed. How is one to evaluate this structuring of beliefs? Is this attempt to state core beliefs in propositional form simply a step toward routinization of charismata? I contend that the ability to articulate biblical boundaries for key concepts, including definitions of religious experience, has been an important means for preserving the integrity and continuity of the Pentecostal revival. A unique feature of the modern Pentecostal revival is its *survival*. Previous charismatic eruptions in history failed to survive, succumbing to fanaticism and/or heresy. Why did this transpire? Is it because they were not successful in expressing a coherent set of values having sufficient objectivity and biblical reference so that they had to be taken seriously? Certainly the history of charismatic movements is complex and each episode demands independent analysis, but I would argue that the modern Pentecostal revival survived long enough to gain a hearing in the larger church world precisely because it affirmed and enforced commitment to orthodox theology and to biblical foundations for all doctrine, experience, and practice. It is generally accepted that the AG has provided an important stabilizing influence on the modern Pentecostal movement.<sup>9</sup> Is it possible that a brief formulation of the understood and accepted basic doctrines actually set the people of the denomination free, within these parameters, to maintain the charismatic dimension of their religious experience?

By reorganizing the various resolutions that had been made in the General Council sessions since the founding of the AG in 1914, a constitution was adopted in 1927. In this move, this association of churches and ministers effec-

8. Margaret Poloma, *The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads: Charisma and Institutional Dilemmas* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), pp. 90-92.

9. William W. Menzies, *Anointed to Serve*, p. 10.

tively passed from the category of an amorphous “movement” into the structured confines of a denomination. Leaders such as Thomas F. Zimmerman and Thomas Trask have been reluctant to surrender the term “movement,” likely because it seems to convey the idea of vitality and growth more than does the term “denomination.” The truth, however, is that the AG became a denomination within fifteen years of its birth.

Until the Second World War, the AG functioned at the national level with an extremely spare bureaucracy. A handful of people processed all the records and accounts of the denomination, in addition to operating a substantial printing plant at the Springfield, Missouri, headquarters. From 1941 to 1953, however, a dozen major service agencies were developed, creating a vastly increased bureaucracy at the national level. Gradually through the years, new programs have been called into being by action of the General Councils in session, necessitating a relentless upward thrust in the complexity of the national offices and a generally increasing number of personnel required to service them. Periodically there have been major attempts at restructuring the operations of the national headquarters with a view to effecting greater efficiency and, more importantly, insuring as much as possible that the energies expended there were indeed crucial for carrying out the primary objectives of the denomination. I have selected the Study Committee on Advance as a window into the process of such internal structural reform.

A long period of sustained, dramatic growth in the denomination came to an end in the middle 1950s. For the next decade, these growing patterns for opening new churches, credentialing new ministers, and adding new members essentially reached a plateau. Sociologists like David O. Moberg warned that the AG might mimic the rise and decline of Methodism, a concern that seemed to be a real and immediate possibility.<sup>10</sup> Driven by genuine anxiety, the Executive Presbytery of the AG called into being a Study Committee on Advance in 1967. The stated purpose of this special fifteen-member committee was to define the purpose of the church as gleaned from Scripture, and using this biblical model, to examine the present structures in the AG. The objective was to ascertain as accurately as possible which functions contributed directly to the denomination’s central reasons for being, which supportive functions legitimately facilitated those primary functions, and which functions fit neither of these categories. Functions in this latter category were regarded as barnacles that should be scraped off. The importance of this committee lies primarily in being formed at a moment of truth for the AG, when the revival movement had reached a level

10. David O. Moberg, *The Church as a Social Institution: The Sociology of American Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), a study that features the AG.

of maturity and was called upon to reflect theologically on its reason for being. It was a time for self-conscious awareness, a pause in the midst of activity for reflecting on self-identity.

Based on the picture of the church at Antioch provided by Luke in Acts 13:1-3, the functions of the church were defined as threefold: to minister to believers inside the church (edification), to minister to the Lord (worship), and to minister to the world (missions). As an observer engaged in research at the time, I witnessed a singular event one Friday morning several months into the meetings of this committee. Bugged down for months in the initial definitional stage of the enterprise over such basic concerns as the meaning of "church," the members of the committee were clearly discouraged. These sessions were bathed in earnest prayer. On the Friday in question, there was a pause following a time of prayer and discussion during which one of the participants began to speak. He spoke for no more than three or four minutes. It was as if a dam had broken. Around the table, there was a great sense that the committee had heard from God! At the coffee break that followed, I asked this person how he had arrived at such a wise and fruitful proclamation, an utterance that was received so joyfully by those present. His response was simply that he had been impressed by the Holy Spirit to speak those words. In the months and years that followed, every subsequent decision flowed out of that single event. The results of this meeting were far-reaching. The bylaws of the denomination were overhauled to reflect this fresh rearticulation of the meaning of the church. Great national conferences were developed to focus attention on these three great, basic themes. Here, indeed, was a critical point where theology and praxis came together.

In writing the history of the AG, I was unsure what the next years would hold for the denomination. It was entirely uncertain whether the dire predictions of a downturn in the fortunes of this revival movement would be borne out or whether there would be a period of increased growth. At the time, in 1971, I looked at the AG as positioned for either decline or growth, considering the denomination to be at an optimum level of balance between charisma and organization. No one, however, could be certain what would transpire.<sup>11</sup>

The next twenty-five years were in fact marked by a surge of growth both at home and abroad. It appears that at least part of this growth in the 1970s and 1980s was a result of redefined identity and objectives, although the dramatic impact of the charismatic renewal certainly must be factored into the equation. Since the ministers surveyed in the Poloma case study seem relatively content with the services provided by regional and national judicatories, it may be rea-

11. William W. Menzies, *Anointed to Serve*, pp. 374-83.

sonable to claim that this optimal balance between charisma and structure still exists.

Additional reorganization followed during more recent years. There has been some fine-tuning of the highest echelons of the national bureaucracy, chiefly by enlarging the membership in the Executive Presbytery and the General Presbytery, the representative bodies that govern the affairs of the denomination in the intervals between the sessions of the General Council. More important have been changes effected around the "We Build People" program introduced in 1995. This program redefined the primary objectives of the denomination around four principles: fellowship (the principle of *inclusion*), discipleship (the principle of *instruction*), ministry (the principle of *involvement*), and evangelism/missions (the principle of *investment*). To these has recently been added a fifth: worship (the principle of *inspiration*). Of major significance is the decision to cut across traditional bureaucratic boundaries at AG headquarters to gather key people in various departments in order to network and achieve greater creativity for improving leadership in the discipleship process. This appears significantly to refine the previous three major biblical priorities gleaned by the Study Committee on Advance, which relied upon Acts 13:1-3 as a model for church life. Just as important was the decision to implement a process of networking among the various departments and divisions at the national headquarters.<sup>12</sup> Leroy Bartel was selected to head the new Commission on Discipleship in March 2000 by action of the Executive Presbytery. This new commission was charged with addressing a refined theological understanding of the functions of the local church.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, a parallel commission to accommodate networking with respect to evangelism issues was also instituted. Randy Hurst has been appointed to serve as chairman of this new Commission on Evangelism.<sup>14</sup>

The 1990s were to be a "Decade of Harvest," a time when concentrated effort at home and abroad was to be marshaled to open new churches and accelerate evangelism. This slogan was adopted by the newly formed World Assemblies of God Fellowship, a federation of autonomous national sister fellowships and largely the product of the American AG mission activity. Reported success proved to be uneven. Some nations such as the Philippines exceeded expectations in each of the years of the Decade of Harvest, reporting a doubling of the

12. Minutes of the General Council of the Assemblies of God (1999), pp. 146-48, which contain the articles detailing the function and composition of these two new commissions.

13. Sylvia Lee, "Assembly of God Leaders Meet to Discuss Discipleship," *Pentecostal Evangel*, April 30, 2000, p. 24.

14. Leroy Bartel, national director of the Division of Christian Education, interview with author, April 19, 2000.



number of churches.<sup>15</sup> In the United States, however, the American AG had little about which to cheer. Another plateau of growth had been reached, thus ending the dramatic growth of the 1970s and 1980s. Slogans and promotion were clearly inadequate. In fact, if the domestic growth among the Hispanic churches were discounted, the American AG in the Decade of Harvest experienced relatively little growth. In spite of a reduced rate of growth in recent years compared to previous ones, church membership had increased to more than 1.4 million by 1998 and the number of adherents passed the 2.5 million mark. The overseas constituency of sister national AG fellowships has grown to more than 30 million.<sup>16</sup>

The fairly steady pattern in Sunday school attendance nationwide over the past thirty years has been of considerable concern. Although actual attendance has held reasonably steady, the numbers are disappointing because they fail to keep pace with growing church attendance and membership. It appears that Sunday school attendance is no longer as useful a measure of actual Bible study activity as it once may have been. Bible study patterns in the AG are now much more diverse than participation in the traditional Sunday school program. Although statistics are not readily available to verify this, a burgeoning of new Bible study delivery systems providing services equivalent to the traditional Sunday school seems partly to compensate for the relative decline in Sunday school participation. Through the years the Sunday school was a key instrument for identifying emerging leadership in the local church, effectively mobilizing the energies of Spirit-baptized workers. With a multiplication of new, local church ministries presently available, however, lay leadership is now directed into a wide array of functions in addition to the traditional Sunday school.<sup>17</sup>

Bible institutes and Bible colleges have been the backbone of furnishing trained leadership for the AG. District-sponsored, regional-sponsored, and national colleges served the basic ministerial educational needs of the denomination for many years. Liberal arts programs and graduate education were eventually added to the academic services provided. There has been strong resistance to requiring a specific level of academic achievement as a criterion for credentials, but most of the districts stipulate that those considered for min-

15. Russell Turney, "A Decade of Harvest," *Pentecostal Evangel*, May 7, 2000, p. 15.

16. Doty, conversation with author, April 19, 2000. Based on information gleaned from the Annual Church Ministries Reports, statistics disclose that the number of net new churches from 1990 through 1998 averaged 83 per year, compared to 163 per year in the previous decade. Church membership between 1980 and 1990 grew at the rate of 22 percent, while in the first eight years of the Decade of Harvest growth had slowed to 12 percent. The number of ministers grew in the 1980s by 20 percent, but from 1990 to 1998 the number had grown only 5 percent.

17. Bartel, interview with author, April 19, 2000.

isterial credentials show evidence of fulfilling a slate of required readings or completing a required list of distance-education courses offered by Berean University. These nominal requirements are intended to insure theological harmony in the fellowship.

Historically, the three-year Bible institutes that served the earlier needs of the AG evolved upward into four-year degree-granting colleges. Several are now offering graduate programs and are classified as universities. A theological seminary has emerged. To meet a continuing need for entry-level Bible instruction, a whole new slate of schools is emerging. These are called "church-based Bible institutes." These local church Bible schools have tended to seek denominational endorsement as appropriate tracks for qualifying students for credentials. Application is made to the office of the General Secretary for such endorsement. It appears that courses offered through Berean University are important for certifying these local church Bible schools.<sup>18</sup> What is significant is that many laypeople, in addition to aspiring clergy, are enrolled in the multiplying range of serious Bible study opportunities now available, even though the traditional Sunday school seems to be in decline.<sup>19</sup>

## The Assemblies of God Confronting Theological Challenges

To capture how the evolving structure of the national AG organization has related to the cascade of theological challenges over the years, I will review selected doctrinal issues with the intention of showing how a variety of organizational mechanisms have been employed to address perceived needs. Each of the following issues has a story of its own. From this tapestry, I will then draw several conclusions.

### *Pacifism*

The AG in its beginnings featured a strong commitment to the imminent, premillennial return of Jesus Christ. Margaret Poloma has seen the pacifist pos-

18. Katy Attanasi, "New Global University Facility Nears Completion," *Pentecostal Evangel*, May 7, 2000, p. 28, reports that 400,000 students are participating in the distance-education delivery systems of Berean University and ICI University, combined. These two entities, one serving domestic United States needs and the other international needs, are being combined into a single enterprise called Global University.

19. Dayton Kingsriter, director of the Commission on Higher Education, interview with author, April 18, 2000.

ture of the emerging church as an authentic reflection of an otherworldly outlook. Preoccupied with reaching the lost before the cataclysmic end of the age, Pentecostals were little concerned with secular endeavors to reform a doomed world. Participation in war, even for a noble cause (as some portrayed the contours of the First World War), was not an option. Officially, the AG adopted a conscientious objection position.

When the United States was plunged into war in 1941, the situation was totally different. Pearl Harbor impacted the constituency of the AG very much like the rest of the nation. During the Second World War, fifty thousand AG young men served in the United States military. Only thirty-five served in camps for those asking for exemption as conscientious objectors.<sup>20</sup> This was a glaring cognitive dissonance for a denomination officially classified as pacifist!

During the Vietnam War, action was taken to address this problem. It was quite evident that the AG had acculturated to the point that its earlier pacifist position was no longer held by more than a handful of constituents. At the 1965 General Council held in Des Moines, Iowa, a decision was made to appoint a committee to study the matter with a view to making a recommendation for action at the next General Council convening two years later in Long Beach, California. What is significant about this issue is that never before had a major ideological issue been reexamined on the basis of a yearlong assessment by a theological committee. At the 1967 meeting of the General Council, the committee's recommendation was that the AG withdraw from its previous pacifist posture to the more realistic posture of honoring the right of individual members to adopt a position of conscientious objection to military service, of non-combatant military service, or of serving as a combatant. The committee's recommendation was adopted by the General Council, the first time such a decision was reached through the advice of a theological study commission.<sup>21</sup>

### *Divorce and Remarriage*

No issue has resurfaced as frequently as the AG position on divorce and remarriage. From the beginning of the AG, the official position was essentially the same as that of the Roman Catholic Church: a virtual denial of the legitimacy of divorce. Under no circumstances other than by recognition of the annulment of a marriage could a married person with a living companion be remarried by an AG minister. An AG minister performing an unauthorized marriage

20. William W. Menzies, *Anointed to Serve*, pp. 327-28.

21. Minutes of the General Council (1967), p. 35.

did so at the risk of losing his credentials. In the years following World War II, more and more members of AG churches encountered the problem of divorce. In fact, the AG came increasingly to reflect the culture of which it was a part. By the 1960s, serious tension existed at this point, with larger urban churches more clearly reflecting the pressures of prevailing culture while rural and small-town churches appealed to sustaining traditional positions on the issue of divorce and remarriage. A standing committee of the General Council, "Doctrines and Practices Disapproved," was charged by the 1971 General Council with the responsibility of making a thorough study of this issue.

This committee, comprised of pastors, schoolmen, and church executives, spent more than a year studying the biblical foundations for marriage, divorce, and the conditions for possible remarriage. At the 1973 General Council in Miami, the recommendation of the committee was adopted with only slight revision. That decision effectively ratified the typical Protestant evangelical position on marriage and divorce, acknowledging that although divorce is not encouraged, it may be permitted for biblical reasons: adultery (Matt. 5:31-32 and 19:9) and abandonment (1 Cor. 7:15). Although affirming that divorce is therefore more than legal separation, the church recognized that when the conditions fell within biblical parameters, divorced persons could be allowed to remarry. Pastors of local churches were given the authority to perform such marriages, contingent on their being satisfied that the parties met the necessary qualifications. The committee recommended, however, that the denomination retain its previous standard for ministers and lay leaders in the local church. No minister could be ordained if he or she had been divorced and then remarried with the previous companion still living. One standard was therefore adopted for ordinary laypersons and another for clergy and local lay leadership. Not all have been satisfied with this position, even though it is a substantial change from the earlier position. The matter resurfaced in 1999 at the Orlando General Council, this time in the issue of same-sex marriages. A resolution was presented that added to the previous language on the divorce-remarriage issue by explicitly forbidding ministers to perform same-sex marriages. The motion was adopted.<sup>22</sup> At the General Council in 2001, a resolution was adopted permitting the credentialing of ministers if the divorce in question transpired prior to conversion.

Another means by which theological controversies have been addressed by the AG since 1970 has been the publication of occasional position papers. These documents do not have formal denominational sanction, being the product of a committee of scholars and churchmen. At the 1991 General Council meeting in Portland, the authority of such documents was clarified to insure

22. Minutes of the General Council (1999), p. 80.

that only those position papers recommended by the Executive Presbytery and approved by the General Council could be understood to have authority for credentialing purposes.<sup>23</sup> The publication of such documents tends to carry with it a kind of implicit influence, however, being perceived by the general public as the “official” position of the AG. In the years since the writing of the first position paper in 1970, only one has gained the approval of the General Council, thus becoming truly an official representation of AG belief. This was the “Divorce and Remarriage” paper, which was debated and adopted at the 1973 General Council.<sup>24</sup> From 1970 to 1997, twenty-two position papers have been promulgated.<sup>25</sup> All these have been approved by the General Presbytery, a broadly representative body. Most are the product of the standing General Council commission called Doctrines and Practices Disapproved, brought into being in 1971. As the title suggests, this commission reviews a variety of issues referred to it by the Executive Presbytery that are perceived to be of sufficient magnitude to warrant response. This commission was reconstituted in 1979 as the Doctrinal Purity Commission.<sup>26</sup>

### *Sanctification*

From the beginning of the denomination, the doctrine of sanctification has been a matter of some ambiguity. The intention of the language employed on this point in the 1916 *Statement of Fundamental Truths* was purposely somewhat vague. This was done so that exponents of the Wesleyan Holiness crisis experience theology would not be overly offended, since the majority in the infant AG preferred the Keswickian, or Reformed, model of progressive sanctification. The terminology of “entire sanctification” was used, although it was generally defined to mean something less than the “second blessing” teaching of the Wesleyans. Over the years the term “entire sanctification” created sufficient ambiguity that a decision was made to drop it from the *Statement of Fundamental Truths*. Consequently, by action of the General Council in 1961, a clarification was supplied by amending the article in the *Statement of Fundamental Truths* accordingly.<sup>27</sup> It is a matter of curiosity that the annual ministerial ques-

23. Minutes of the General Council (1991), p. 60.

24. Minutes of the General Council (1973), p. 58.

25. Assemblies of God, General Council, *Where We Stand: The Official Position Papers of the Assemblies of God* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 2001).

26. Bylaws of the General Council of the Assemblies of God (revised August 7, 2001), art. IX, sec. A.

27. Minutes of the General Council (1961), p. 92.

tionnaire continues to ask the minister to verify that he or she conforms to the teaching of the denomination on entire sanctification, even though that terminology was abandoned nearly forty years ago.

### *Divine Healing*

From the earliest days of the Pentecostal revival, it was a nearly universal belief that God's intervention occurred in concrete, physical ways. This included a belief in God's willingness to heal people. Borrowing from the slogan expressing core beliefs of evangelicals like A. J. Gordon and A. B. Simpson, AG people heralded confidence in the "fourfold gospel" (what Pentecostals tended to call the "full gospel"), which meant: "Jesus Christ the Savior, the Healer, the Baptizer in the Holy Spirit, and the Coming King." Of course, these themes were derived from their evangelical predecessors. Praying for the sick was a fairly common practice among a wide range of evangelicals in the late nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup> Implicit in the full gospel was the belief that Jesus, "the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8), heals those who ask in faith. It was not uncommon for zealous advocates of this dimension of Pentecostalism to scorn those who employed the services of physicians. Over the years it became apparent that, although many did testify to remarkable healings, not all for whom prayer was offered were in fact healed. A strain appeared in the fabric of healing theology. How was one to report that healing is for all when common experience discloses that many are not healed?

The cognitive dissonance evident in the teaching on healing led to the promulgation of a position paper in 1974. This document is a clear retreat from the simplistic expectation of earlier years, with a clear acknowledgment that there remains a mystery in healing and that we must frankly report that all are not healed. In spite of this frank recognition of limitations, the reader is enjoined to "preach the Word and expect the signs to follow."<sup>29</sup> AG ministers cooperate fully with professional medical people today, accepting that healing is from God whether it comes in the form of special divine interventions or scientific medical skill.

Reaching a peak in the 1950s, the "Salvation-Healing" crusades often featured tent evangelism and citywide interdenominational support, but quickly waned in popularity when many of the traveling evangelists came under severe

28. Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1987), pp. 115-42.

29. Assemblies of God, *Where We Stand*, p. 54.

criticism for moral or financial shortcomings. The General Presbytery considered the problem of the lack of accountability of these marginal ministers, many of whom were independent. Eventually in 1965, the General Council adopted a resolution entitled "Criteria for Independent Corporations," which was aimed principally at AG ministers who had set up their own organizations in an effort to avoid the scrutiny of the denominational leadership.<sup>30</sup> The abuses of the Salvation-Healing evangelists quickly led to the virtual demise of this kind of ministry in the United States. The failure of these largely independent Pentecostal preachers, often making extravagant and unsubstantiated claims, led to considerable disillusionment among AG people regarding the ministry of divine healing, so that prayer for the sick diminished in local churches for a time. Gradually, however, a sustained level of local church healing practice was recovered and continues. A significant number of individuals report to have made commitments to Christ as a result of a physical healing of either themselves or a family member.

It does appear that remarkable healings are a significant factor in reaching people at the frontiers of Christianity. Evidently, supernatural interventions are more common in such situations. In the mission fields of Asia, Latin America, and Africa, as well as those of Europe, AG missionaries find a good response to the message that God delivers from sin, sickness, and the demonic. This seems to be particularly true among animist tribal peoples.<sup>31</sup>

### *Initial Physical Evidence*

Close to the heart of Pentecostal ideology is the belief that there is, separable from the experience of new birth, the possibility for all believers to experience a baptism in the Holy Spirit. This belief was held by a significant array of evangelicals in the late nineteenth century, but for the first half of the twentieth century was largely shelved to avoid the possibility of being associated with Pentecostalism. Most Pentecostals adopted the evangelical "Higher Life" concept of Spirit baptism, identifying strongly with the view that this experience is to be understood principally as empowerment for Christian witness. To capture this intention, Pentecostals sometimes speak of the "expressive domain" of the Spirit. This language intends to include enrichment in private prayer and pub-

30. Minutes of the General Council (1965), pp. 54-58.

31. Julie C. Ma, *When the Spirit Meets the Spirits: Pentecostal Ministry among the Kankana-ey Tribe in the Philippines* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), which contains an excellent case study of healing among tribal animists in the mountains of Luzon, Philippines.

lic worship in addition to divine help in evangelism and missions. Sometimes the term “overflow of the Spirit” is employed as well. Nearly all Pentecostals, including AG people, claim that the biblical model for Spirit baptism includes speaking in other tongues (Acts 2:4) as the accompanying sign or “initial physical evidence” of Spirit baptism.<sup>32</sup>

This belief has not gone without challenge, however. In 1918 the first challenge to the commonly held “initial physical evidence” doctrine was mounted by F. F. Bosworth, a prominent leader in the AG. In a tract titled *Do All Speak with Tongues?* he minimized the role of tongues as evidence, placing the manifestation among other gifts of the Spirit. Bosworth felt that *any* of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:8-10) would suffice as evidence of Spirit baptism. He refused to make a distinction between evidential tongues associated with Spirit baptism and the gift of tongues employed in public worship, as did mainstream Pentecostals. He sought to distribute his tract at various conferences and camp meetings where AG ministers gathered, expecting to gain a following. Few of his colleagues joined his cause. It became apparent that Bosworth’s view was not going to prevail and, if permitted to continue, would prove disruptive to the embryonic AG fellowship. Bosworth, a Christian gentleman, made a gracious, uncontentious exit, resigning from the AG at the General Council of 1918. He joined the Christian and Missionary Alliance, a denomination he served effectively for the rest of his life.<sup>33</sup> As a result of the issue raised by Bosworth, a resolution adopted at the 1918 General Council made the teaching of anything contrary to the initial physical evidence doctrine a matter of “serious disagreement.”<sup>34</sup>

Only the matter of divorce and remarriage has surfaced more frequently at the national level than this question. In a 1959 quarterly letter sent to AG ministers, the general secretary noted that in one district, “a few of its preachers have confessed doubt in their attitude toward our doctrine of tongues as the initial physical evidence of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>35</sup> Although the issue continued to recur, it did not seem to gain much momentum for many years.<sup>36</sup> In 1963 the general superintendent wrote a position paper that reported that “Time has brought changes, but no modification in the emphasis, teaching, and experi-

32. Minutes of the General Council (1999), p. 92.

33. Carl Brumback, *Suddenly . . . from Heaven: A History of the Assemblies of God* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1961), pp. 217-19.

34. Minutes of the General Council (1918), p. 8.

35. Ralph Riggs, *Ministers Quarterly Letter* (Springfield, Mo.: General Council of the Assemblies of God), June 12, 1959, p. 3.

36. Bartlett Peterson, former general secretary of the Assemblies of God, interview with author, April 6, 1970.



ence of the baptism of the Spirit.”<sup>37</sup> Later, the general secretary reaffirmed this understanding: “Our position is unchanged with regard to the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in other tongues.”<sup>38</sup>

More recently, the Executive Presbytery in 1998 appointed a special committee to study the issue with a view to making recommendations for strengthening the teaching on the doctrine in local churches. That committee met over a period of many months, submitting a final report to the Executive Presbytery in January 2000. Concurrently the Doctrinal Purity Commission was at work on a revised position paper that was submitted to the General Presbytery in 1999 but was returned to the commission for further study. A revised report was adopted by the Executive Presbytery in March 2000 with the recommendation that this be submitted to the General Presbytery for its consideration at their August 2000 meeting.<sup>39</sup> This document is an updating of the previous position paper on the baptism in the Holy Spirit published in 1981, addressing important issues that have surfaced in the intervening years. The earlier position paper did not have the benefit of recent Pentecostal scholarship, so it was deemed necessary to update that publication. The newer document addresses hermeneutical questions, such as the availability of narrative materials in Acts for developing biblical theology. This is a new avenue of approach that Pentecostal scholars have pursued effectively in recent years.

Fifteen commonly asked questions are addressed in the document. Among these is, “What about the person who is convinced he or she was baptized in the Holy Spirit in a definite encounter with God, but did not speak in tongues until some time later?”

Since the Bible teaches and demonstrates that tongues are the initial evidence of receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit, the church cannot confirm the opinion of the individual until he or she actually speaks in tongues. But neither can we depreciate a special experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit of God. One might describe such an in-between time as involvement in a process that culminates when the person speaks in tongues. To take any other position on the question would open the door to individuals claiming to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, without having received the biblical evidence of speaking in tongues as the Spirit

37. T. F. Zimmerman, “The Pentecostal Position,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, February 10, 1963, pp. 2-3, 7.

38. Bartlett Peterson, *Ministers Quarterly Letter* (Springfield, Mo.: General Council of the Assemblies of God), September 23, 1966, p. 4.

39. Minutes of the Executive Presbytery of the Assemblies of God (March 21-22, 2000), pp. 1-2.

gives utterance, and feeling content with what they already have experienced spiritually.<sup>40</sup>

Causing concern are data disclosing a significant number of church members claiming to believe the doctrine but also reporting never to have spoken in tongues. It is evident that there is enough uneasiness over the uncertainty with which some pastors hold this doctrine that the national leadership is struggling for better ways to support the traditional position.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, although in general the people of the AG are content with the basic doctrines described in the *Statement of Fundamental Truths*, the teaching about the initial physical evidence of baptism in the Spirit is a point of continuing uncertainty among some ministers.

### *Ecumenism*

Prior to the Second World War, the AG participated on an unofficial basis in several agencies that in 1950 gathered into what became known as the National Council of Churches of Christ in America (NCC). As early as 1919, for example, Missionary Secretary J. Roswell Flower attended conventions of the Foreign Missions Conference of North America. Such interaction by the young and relatively unknown AG with such a missions organization proved helpful in getting visas and other necessary documents important for foreign missionaries. Through the years the AG participated constructively in such organizations as the Department of Church World Service, the Missionary Research Library, and the Associated Missions Medical Office. During the 1950s the AG also participated in the stewardship seminars offered by the NCC.<sup>42</sup>

In 1951 David du Plessis, a South African Pentecostal leader who had recently moved to the United States, became acquainted with John A. Mackay, president of Princeton Theological Seminary. Mackay had become interested in the Pentecostal movement from his travel in Latin America. Mackay introduced

40. Assemblies of God, General Council, "The Baptism in the Holy Spirit: The Initial Experience and the Continuing Evidences of the Spirit-Filled Life." Final revision to this position paper was made by the Commission on Doctrinal Purity, February 21, 2000, approved by the Executive Presbytery, March 21-22, 2000, and approved by the General Presbytery, August 11, 2000.

41. Statistics provided by Sherri Doty disclosed that in the latest year available, 94,721 people were reported having experienced baptism in the Holy Spirit, while 505,017 conversions were reported. Evidently fewer than 20 percent of the new converts moved on to the baptism in the Spirit, at least in that year.

42. William W. Menzies, *Anointed to Serve*, p. 220.

du Plessis to leaders of the World Council of Churches (WCC). Receiving a warm response, du Plessis was soon engaged in a wide range of activities within the WCC. He was responsible for leading dozens of World Council participants into the Pentecostal experience. All of this seemed to be a remarkable fulfillment of a prophecy given to him in 1936 by a British Pentecostal, Smith Wigglesworth. His well-publicized involvement with the WCC proved to be an embarrassment to the leadership of the AG, however. The AG had only recently been accepted as a collegial body within the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and was bent on proving that it was loyal to the core values of that group. Right-wing dissidents such as Carl McIntire had spurned membership in the NAE in 1943 at its founding. He chose instead to help form a separate fundamentalist coalition of churches, largely because the NAE had decided to include Pentecostal bodies such as the AG. Fundamentalists complained to the NAE that the AG was sojourning with the World Council. Stung by such accusations, the AG cut off all ties to World Council enterprises, including the very useful missions-oriented services, in order to appease critics. In 1962 the AG terminated the credentials of David du Plessis because of his World Council activities. Eighteen years later, his papers were restored.<sup>43</sup> The wry twist in this is that during these years many within the mainline National Council and World Council churches were experiencing the Pentecostal baptism, but very few were within evangelical churches.

By 1963 all of these associations had been terminated. On August 31, 1962, the General Presbytery unanimously adopted a resolution, subsequently ratified at the General Council of 1963, condemning the ecumenical movement. The reasons cited were:

1. We believe said movement to be a sign of the times and contrary to the real biblical doctrine of spiritual unity in the church of Jesus Christ, and
2. We are opposed to ecumenicity based on organic and organizational unity, and
3. We believe that the combination of many denominations into a World Super Church will probably culminate in the Scarlet Woman or Religious Babylon of Revelation. . . .<sup>44</sup>

The resolution did however seek to safeguard participation by ministers on a local level in such interdenominational activities as ministerial alliances. In the intervening years, many AG ministers participated in a variety of interdenominational activities, principally occasioned by the advent of the charismatic

43. Poloma, *Crossroads*, pp. 131-33, which has an excellent review of the du Plessis episode.

44. Minutes of the General Council (1963), p. 41.

movement. The current General Council bylaw article permits such activity provided it does not “promote the ecumenical movement.”<sup>45</sup>

It has been difficult for Pentecostals to comprehend that the charismatic movement erupted within the more liberal mainline church bodies before it reached the evangelical cluster of churches. The problem of understanding the appropriate relation of the AG to various strands of the charismatic movement, especially those charismatics within the ecumenical movement and within the Roman Catholic Church, continues to be largely unresolved.<sup>46</sup> Most AG ministers are opposed to the ecumenical movement and feel that their loyalties lie with evangelical Christianity (see the Poloma case study). Yet many seek to find ways to nourish fellowship with charismatic Christians, particularly at the local level.<sup>47</sup> There is widespread recognition that true ecumenism is a spiritual fellowship across denominational boundaries generated by the Holy Spirit (John 17), but even stronger rejection of the kind of organizational union expressed by bodies such as the National Council and the World Council.

### *Revival*

For some Christians the term “revival” evokes the image of unwelcome disturbance to the status quo, an intrusion into comfortable routines. The pejorative term “enthusiasm” has been used by some historians to cover this kind of religious phenomenon. In the context of the AG, however, this frequently employed term expresses the yearning of the people of God for “fresh wind and fresh fire.” When the heightened sense of God’s manifest presence diminishes in a church or a cluster of churches, prayer meetings may be organized to call upon God for a fresh outpouring of his Spirit. A significant proportion of AG preaching contains a sense of concern if not urgency to rekindle the fire of God among his people.

Revival, to be sure, does not mean the same thing to all. It appears that each major revival episode has unique characteristics. Historically, one can argue that some of the movements that have impacted the AG contained genuine elements of renewal but were not sustained because of abuses that threatened

45. Minutes of the General Council (1999), p. 134.

46. Cecil M. Robeck, “Pentecostals and the Apostolic Faith: Implications for Ecumenism,” *Pneuma* 9 (spring 1987): 61-84. Robeck, professor of church history and ecumenics at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, is the leading authority in the AG on ecumenical relationships.

47. George Wood, general secretary of the Assemblies of God, interview with author, Springfield, Mo., April 17, 2000.

the stability of the denomination. The AG was particularly affected by some of these awakening movements.

In 1948 a movement that became known as "The New Order of the Latter Rain" first erupted in Saskatchewan and then moved into the United States, especially in Oregon, Michigan, and other Midwestern states. Features of this movement were the identification of latter-day apostles and prophets and the belief that spiritual gifts and ministries could be bestowed by the laying on of hands. Personal predictive prophecy was widespread, sometimes accompanied by disastrous consequences. Entire congregations were swept up in the enthusiasm, since the apparent fresh vitality being experienced suggested a higher level of spirituality than the traditional AG churches exhibited. At a 1949 annual district ministers' institute in Dearborn, Michigan, District Superintendent Charles Scott outlined the extravagances of the new movement and reported that these were not really new, but a reappearance of fringe phenomena from earlier times. This was for information only; no actions were taken. A year later, however, at the district council of May 1950, decisive action was taken. Out of two hundred ministers confronted with a decision regarding the Latter Rain movement, only two chose to leave. This effectively ended the flurry of events in that state.<sup>48</sup>

On the national level, the first evidence of concern came in February 1949 with the publication of the *Quarterly Letter* sent to all AG ministers. General Superintendent E. S. Williams provided a brief, general statement on the bestowal of spiritual gifts, pointing out acceptable biblical guidelines but not mentioning the Latter Rain phenomenon. The next *Quarterly Letter*, issued in April 1949, addressed the matter quite directly. At the General Council meeting later that year, a resolution was adopted denouncing Latter Rain practices deemed to be unbiblical extravagances. At the next General Council, the general secretary reported that very few churches had defected to the Latter Rain movement. Remnants of the Latter Rain movement persisted but had little further impact on the AG.<sup>49</sup>

How is one to assess the significance of this flurry of enthusiasm? Perhaps the Pentecostal movement had indeed slumped into a state of complacency. Phenomenal growth was being experienced. Perhaps some pastors had developed a routinized approach to ministry. They had learned how to "put it over." Was God shaking up a church, newly successful and grown complacent? Certainly the Latter Rain episode provoked many church leaders to a sober re-assessment of spiritual priorities and to a healthy self-examination.

48. William W. Menzies, *Anointed to Serve*, pp. 323-24.

49. William W. Menzies, *Anointed to Serve*, p. 325.

More recently, what has become known as the "Brownsville Revival" has had a similar impact on the AG. At the Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola, Florida, in June 1995, a revival began that quickly reached international prominence. Ministers and laypersons from all over the world have flocked by the thousands to this revival center. Remarkable testimonies of physical healings, emotional healings, and transformed ministries have flowed from the Brownsville revival. Theologically, it is difficult to identify any particular teaching that is in conflict with standard AG belief and practice. As of this date, there appears to be good harmony between the Brownsville Assembly and the West Florida District in which it lies. It appears to serve as an instrument for deepening spiritual life and raising the horizons of expectation for local ministries without moving beyond acceptable AG understanding.

Some ministers and laypersons have returned to their local churches following a visit to Brownsville and have attempted to kindle a similar revival by instituting changes in schedule and practice they observed at Brownsville. Not all local churches have been ready to climb aboard the Brownsville bandwagon, however, sometimes resulting in church splits. Certainly the Brownsville revival and the widespread impact it has had, particularly within the AG, is an expression of a continued hungering for the presence of God. In spite of resistance to the threat it poses to some, it appears that a majority within the AG has looked favorably upon the revival.

As Poloma has so ably pointed out in her case study, revival movements are not readily contained and can introduce tension with existing structures. An appendage to the current wave of revival centered in northern California is known as "the River of God." This movement is clearly distinguishable from the Brownsville revival but has very likely drawn inspiration from it. The River of God has exhibited some of the same manifestations common to the New Order of the Latter Rain and has resulted in the splitting of churches. It has become such a serious issue that the 1999 General Council debated a strong resolution condemning what are deemed unbiblical practices in this new enthusiasm. A decision was reached that returned the matter to the Executive Presbytery for further consideration, with a recommendation that the Committee on Doctrinal Purity prepare a position paper for possible publication. The resolution reinforces the determination of the AG to circumscribe beliefs, experiences, and practices within the plain teaching of the Scriptures.<sup>50</sup> Traditional Pentecostal groups such as the AG draw theological lines somewhat differently from some charismatics. At the heart of the matter ultimately lies the issue of biblical hermeneutics.

50. Minutes of the General Council (1999), pp. 80-81.

### *Ethnic Diversity*

The original Pentecost described in Acts 2 transcended significant sociological divisions occasioned by the fall. Pentecost seemed to be a statement about the divine intention to restore the harmony lost by the sinfulness of humanity. In an episode that seemed to reaffirm this Acts 2 principle, the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles (1906-9) was marked by ethnic diversity and bore a multicultural character. In fact, William Seymour, the first major leader in the revival, was an African American. This was especially remarkable during the Jim Crow era in the United States. It is sad to say, however, that the early Pentecostals acculturated to the segregation practiced in the larger society, so that by 1910 the Azusa Street Revival was reduced to a black congregation while the whites moved on to other venues.

By the time the AG was formed in 1914, a de facto segregation had already taken place. The largely black Church of God in Christ was looked upon as an appropriate counterpart to the white AG, so that black visitors coming to AG churches were routinely directed to the nearest Church of God in Christ congregation. The record of the AG in race relations up to the time of the Civil Rights era is unremarkable. The AG was neither better nor worse than other Pentecostal and evangelical bodies. Segregation, although not institutionalized and formalized, was the standard practice of all but a handful of congregations in the fellowship.

In more recent years, vigorous and proactive leadership has addressed the changing demography of the United States. By action of the General Council in 1997, the Executive Presbytery was enlarged to include representation from ethnic and linguistic minorities. At the same time, the General Presbytery was also enlarged to insure broader ethnic representation. Provision was made to establish a Commission on Ethnic Relations.<sup>51</sup> The report given to the General Presbytery by Ethnic Relations Commissioner Dr. David Moore discloses that during the "Decade of Harvest" (1990-2000), enormous changes took place in American society that deeply affected the AG. While there was a net growth in numbers of AG congregations and membership, there would be an actual loss were it not for the ethnic minority groups in the fellowship. White majority congregations declined by 205 while ethnic minority churches grew by 936!<sup>52</sup>

Moore observes that much of the ethnic church growth must be attributed to immigrant leaders harvesting the Christians from their native lands

51. Minutes of the General Council (1997), pp. 22-24, 70-71.

52. David Moore, Report to the Annual Meeting of the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God, Springfield, Mo., August 7, 2001, p. 62.

who had immigrated to the United States. The patterns of this immigration have been changing for the AG. No longer are Hispanics the fastest-growing component of the ethnic churches. The fastest-growing segments in the Decade of Harvest were from the Asia Pacific region, led by Koreans and Filipinos. Moore observes that the growth is not primarily because of proactive Anglo ministry but instead due to aggressive ministry undertaken by immigrants themselves.

Although Moore acknowledges that a few Anglo congregations have achieved a genuine multiracial character, he does not see this happening across socioeconomic lines. Those occasional churches that are multiethnic are inevitably monocultural in economic status. Moore does acknowledge that a variety of successful cooperative ventures have been undertaken by numerous AG congregations to reach out to ethnic groups. The most common expression of openness is the creative use of available space, so that several ethnic congregations share the same facilities on a scheduled basis. Some of these gather together periodically to celebrate their unity, but primarily these are separate congregations under a single roof. Not much blending is evident.

Moore sees a deeper problem in the AG. The denomination developed principally as a white organization, fitting well into the American pattern of western and northern European culture that characterized the broad development of the United States. In the 1990s, however, a dramatic cultural shift occurred. Until recently, immigrants were apparently well served by casting aside their ethnic and language identities and becoming absorbed in the great melting pot. This is no longer true. We have become an open society in which ethnic minorities are retaining their cultural identities but within the larger unity of American society. We are a cluster of many cultures, no longer a single culture.

The implications of this are significant for the AG. To encourage ethnic minority groups to give up their identity and meld into the dominant white culture of the congregation is no longer received well. The underlying assumption is that the dominant culture is superior. Moore sees that the challenge for the AG is to take seriously the need to respect immigrant populations for their diverse values. Proactive ethnic ministry must precede the attempt to gather minorities into the dominant white ethos. A sea change in attitude is required, not a structural change. Moore sees, for the well-being of the fellowship, an urgent need to face the monocultural ethos of the denomination.<sup>53</sup>

53. David Moore, Ethnic Relations Commissioner, interview with author, Springfield, Mo., August 14, 2001.



## Evangelical Association: Theological Tensions

Born in isolation, the AG seems to have become fascinated by the approval and respect accorded the denomination by various evangelical parachurch organizations. Evangelicals have accepted groups like the AG as valid orthodox Christian bodies in spite of disagreement about the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Herein lies a major point of ambiguity. The perplexity has been that believers belonging to liberal church bodies were more ready to seek Pentecostal-like experiences than the evangelicals with whom Pentecostals were more eager to identify. Some Pentecostals, recognizing the significance of this tension, have surfaced the notion that Pentecostals are better served by identifying themselves as a true “third force” in Christianity without being locked into either evangelicalism or liberal Christianity. Nevertheless, strong ties bind the AG to evangelicalism.

One way of demonstrating the dependence of the AG on evangelicalism is to consider the intellectual resources from which AG people draw. Without evangelical textbooks to line the shelves of AG college libraries, there would be little upon which students could draw. Apart from Sunday school materials and the reprinting of older books designed for lay readership, the Gospel Publishing House has over the years provided only limited help in support of Pentecostal theology. The books of E. S. Williams, Ralph M. Riggs, and Myer Pearlman — the old “classics” — are all nearly fifty years old or more. More recently, Stanley Horton has carried the theological freight for the AG. His popular book, *What the Bible Says about the Holy Spirit*, is widely read as an authentic representation of mainstream AG teaching.<sup>54</sup> The Gospel Publishing House has recently instituted a Pentecostal Textbooks Project with the objective of providing Pentecostal textbooks for use in AG colleges. These books are being published under the Logion banner. This enterprise was undertaken to fill a perceived need, since relatively little substantial Pentecostal theological material had been introduced for many years. Although AG leadership has not been conspicuous in encouraging theological scholarship, when scholars have produced useful materials these have been received with appreciation.

Until the advent of the charismatic movement in the late 1950s, simple

54. Stanley M. Horton, *What the Bible Says about the Holy Spirit* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1976); and Myer Pearlman, *Knowing the Doctrines of the Bible* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1937). E. S. Williams, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1953), is an authentic representation of Pentecostal belief but is not really a systematic theology, being instead the collected notes from classes he taught at Central Bible Institute. See also Ralph M. Riggs, *We Believe: A Comprehensive Statement of Christian Faith* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1954).

statements articulating basic Pentecostal beliefs seemed to serve the needs of the AG. With the sudden development of interest in the person and work of the Holy Spirit among Christians in virtually every sector of the church, new ways of expressing life in the Spirit appeared. Questions confronted Pentecostals from an avalanche of published materials. Most of the new charismatics had indeed invited the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, but generally expressed their new understanding in ways puzzling to Pentecostals. Many talked about Spirit baptism but few expressed belief in speaking in other tongues as the normative biblical evidence of it. When evangelicals entered the arena, advocates of dramatic interventions of the Holy Spirit for healing and deliverance from demonic power (such as Peter Wagner and John Wimber) distanced themselves conspicuously from Pentecostalism.<sup>55</sup> For many evangelicals, what some call baptism in the Spirit is not separable from new birth but is merely an actualization of that which is incipient from the moment of regeneration.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps the most difficult theological challenge confronting Pentecostals today comes from evangelicals who have eagerly entered into the domain that Pentecostals once held virtually alone but who understand these values in a significantly different way. Today the lines are considerably blurred, principally because of evangelical actualization theology.<sup>57</sup>

AG officialdom has responded to the theological challenges to Pentecostal doctrine by attempting to reinforce the statements of faith ministers are regularly required to sign. It is not a new practice in the AG to use annual questionnaires for maintaining credentials. These reach back at least to 1922. Questions respecting conformity to AG doctrine were instituted for the first time in 1960. Two basic questions were asked of each ordained minister, the one about subscription "without reservation" to the *Statement of Fundamental Truths* spelled out in the General Council constitution, and the other about publicly proclaiming these from the pulpit. The next year a third question was introduced, asking the minister to affirm his or her commitment to AG doctrine on six specific issues. If the minister differed in some respect on any of these six points, he

55. John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Healing* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987); and C. Peter Wagner, *Territorial Spirits: Insights on Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare from Nineteen Christian Leaders* (Chichester, U.K.: Sovereign World Limited, 1991), both of which are examples of typical "Third Wave" theology.

56. Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 123-47.

57. James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (London: SCM, 1970). Dunn, an English Methodist who is sympathetic to Pentecostals but critical of their theology, has mounted the most serious challenge to that theology. Pentecostal scholars have labored to counter the theses presented by Dunn in his monumental work.

or she was asked to state the differing opinion. The six issues were: (1) belief in speaking in other tongues as the initial physical evidence of Spirit baptism, (2) water baptism by immersion, (3) the premillennial return of Christ, (4) divine healing, (5) the rejection of eternal security teaching, and (6) entire sanctification.<sup>58</sup> This attempt by leadership to shore up the language of traditional doctrine appears to be a defensive measure adopted out of fear of losing traditional theological distinctiveness.

Traditional Pentecostal theology affirms the experience of baptism in the Spirit as an experience separable from new birth and accompanied by speaking in other tongues. It supports this belief by recourse to the narrative material of Luke recorded in Acts, particularly the episodes described in Acts 2, 8, 9, 10, and 19. On the basis of these five episodes, Pentecostals have taught that a pattern emerges that is a model for the church of today. Early Pentecostals concluded that what was described in Luke's accounts of early church events in Acts were experiences of people who were already Christian believers. Whatever they were experiencing, it was not new birth because they were already Christians. The language of Luke, employing terms like "falling upon" or "filling," was clearly intended to describe what Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:5 called being "baptized in the Holy Spirit." Pentecostals understood that the purpose of this experience was for empowering believers to extend the church initiated by Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8). They saw this verse capturing the outline for the book of Acts, the expansion of the church.

Besides arguing for a Pentecostal experience distinct from new birth, Pentecostals have sought biblical support for answering how a person can know that he or she has been baptized in the Spirit. Pentecostals saw sufficient pattern in the Acts episodes to conclude that Luke was teaching that speaking in tongues is the normative accompanying sign of Spirit baptism. Although tongues is not specifically mentioned in the Samaritan Pentecost episode of Acts 8, it is understood to be very strongly implied. Again, in the Damascus experience of Saul in Acts 9, tongues is not specifically mentioned. Pentecostals respond, however, by turning to 1 Corinthians 14:18, pointing to Paul's affirmation that he spoke in tongues more than any of the Corinthians! If that is so, then the assumption is that this began in Damascus when Ananias prayed for him. Pentecostal advocates infer this since it fits the other initiation episodes of Acts.

The problem with this "pattern methodology" is that even if it satisfies most Pentecostals, it is not persuasive to many non-Pentecostals, let alone to an

58. Doty, conversation with author, April 19, 2000. The data compiled by the statistician is distilled into official annual reports on a timely basis.

increasing number of Pentecostal pastors. AG scholars in recent years have undertaken fresh ways of developing a Pentecostal theology. The core of the problem in earlier years lay in hermeneutics. To deflect criticism from evangelical counterparts, Pentecostals argued for a distinct Pentecostal hermeneutics.<sup>59</sup> An example of the challenge Pentecostals faced is the influence of highly respected British evangelical John R. W. Stott, who rejected the propriety of employing biblical narrative materials for the development of theology unless these were repeated in overtly didactic passages.<sup>60</sup> This effectively diminishes Luke-Acts as suitable for constructing a biblical theology. Since all the initiation episodes of Spirit baptism are located in Acts, this obviously has serious implications for Pentecostal theology. In effect, the hermeneutics of people like Stott undercut the possibility of a valid Pentecostal theology.

A sea change occurred in evangelical hermeneutics in 1970 with the publication of I. Howard Marshall's *Luke: Historian and Theologian*.<sup>61</sup> Marshall, considered the foremost evangelical Lukan scholar of our time, rejected the traditional evangelical limitation on the use of narrative materials for theology, insisting instead that denying narrative for theological purposes seriously diminishes a theological opportunity. Since then, a growing number of evangelical scholars have joined Marshall's bandwagon. This has opened new possibilities for Pentecostals to present their faith in ways more persuasive to evangelicals, since a major hermeneutical chasm has been crossed.<sup>62</sup> Roger Stronstad, Robert Menzies, and Frank Macchia are among a growing number of younger, creative, and articulate spokespersons who are now gaining respectability among evangelical scholars for their fresh approaches.<sup>63</sup> In the

59. William W. Menzies, "The Methodology of Pentecostal Theology: An Essay on Hermeneutics," in *Essays on Apostolic Themes: Studies in Honor of Howard M. Ervin, Presented to Him by Colleagues and Friends on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Paul Elbert (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1985), pp. 1-14.

60. John R. W. Stott, *The Baptism and Fullness of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1964), p. 7.

61. I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

62. William W. Menzies and Robert P. Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundation of Pentecostal Experience, a Call to Evangelical Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000). This volume presents a Pentecostal apologetic on the basis of Marshall's insights.

63. Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1984); Robert P. Menzies, *The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology: with Special Reference to Luke-Acts* (Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991); and Frank D. Macchia, "The Struggle for Global Witness: Shifting Paradigms in Pentecostal Theology," in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel*, ed. Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen (Irvine, Calif.: Regnum Books, 1999), pp. 8-29.

next years, we should expect to see a new level of discussion between evangelical and Pentecostal theologians.

## Conclusion

The modern Pentecostal movement celebrated its centennial in 2001. For eighty-five of these years, the AG has been perhaps the most influential denomination within the larger Pentecostal revival movement. At the prospect of embarking upon a new century and a new millennium, it is appropriate to ponder the prospects for the AG in the coming years. Certainly, the challenges for the AG are for the most part quite different from those of the mainline Protestant denominations. Mainline churches are endeavoring to find ways to stem their losses, while conservative churches such as the AG generally appear to be more vital. Miller has remarked that observers of the American religious scene have been surprised that groups like the AG have attracted a growing number of middle-class citizens, evidently filling a vacuum created by attrition among mainline churches. The denomination has appealed to a sizable number of disenchanted Roman Catholics as well.<sup>64</sup>

One of the factors that may help to explain the well-being of the AG is the continued evidence of a reasonable balance between charisma and organization. There appears to be sufficient elasticity in the denomination to sustain the inevitable ideological challenges it confronts. A variety of structural mechanisms are available to address the theological tensions provided by the rapidly changing religious environment. The bureaucracy, amenable to the will of the people at biennial General Council sessions, is trusted to carry out clearly defined responsibilities. The institutional apparatus seems to be reasonably effective in facilitating the work of the local churches, which is the heartbeat of the denomination. For the most part, pastors seem to feel encouraged and supported in their desire to fulfill their sense of calling. On at least two occasions in the last forty years the AG leadership has thoughtfully reassessed its reason for being and has sought to clarify goals and objectives in terms that are perceived to be biblical mandates. These values have resonated well with the constituency, providing a sense of common mission. The sense of the immanence of God, that God is accessible, is a major attraction in the local churches. The lively, experience-oriented worship and expansive fellowship fit well in the postmodern age. Revival, the seeking of spiritual renewal, is a fairly common

64. Donald Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 8.

thread in the tapestry of AG churches. That the denomination has from its beginnings been a strong missions-oriented body likely has been a major cohesive force through its history. Even if there may be differences of opinion on some matters, these tend to be submerged in the greater, common passion to reach the world for Christ. Confidence in the Division of Foreign Missions provides a rallying center for a wide variety of churches within the fellowship.

To be sure, there are areas of continuing concern and unresolved dilemma. Some of the challenges are certainly more significant than others. Ambiguity about the relationship with the charismatic movement is among the more significant issues to be faced. It is a perplexing question for the evangelical-oriented AG that many in the last generation reporting Pentecostal-type experiences are identified with liberal Christian bodies. Even more difficult to resolve is the mystery that Roman Catholics in large numbers claim a Pentecostal experience, whereas AG people have been taught that the Roman Church may be the harlot of Revelation.

Long-cherished doctrines are under assault within the denomination. Core values such as the initial physical evidence of Spirit baptism (speaking in other tongues) are facing fresh challenges. The very success of the modern Pentecostal/charismatic movement has produced an immense array of books on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Many in the charismatic world have written interpretations of religious experience that conflict in various ways with Pentecostal teaching. A bewildering array of diverse teachings has bombarded a younger generation of Pentecostals. For many years AG leadership seemed to be content with traditional articulations of Pentecostal belief, not giving serious thought to the fresh challenges affecting young pastors and students. In spite of some recent encouraging signs, the denomination continues to be marked by a degree of anti-intellectualism. This should not be a great surprise, since the denomination has featured the work of the Holy Spirit empowering people to *do*. Religious activism has therefore marked the denomination. Pragmatism in the fellowship tends to be impatient with theological reflection. More recently, however, the work of younger AG theologians is being respected as a useful service to the needs of the fellowship in a rapidly changing world. Fresh developments in evangelical hermeneutics have opened new dialogue opportunities for Pentecostal theologians.

Historically, most Pentecostal people have not been greatly concerned with theological matters. Most are quite content with a simple list of core beliefs. Herein lies a problem, however. Data disclose considerable cognitive dissonance within the AG with respect to Pentecostal experience. A significant number of adherents in local churches accept the doctrine of Spirit baptism but have not made the effort earnestly to seek the experience. The leadership of the

denomination is addressing this matter as a sobering challenge for the future of the fellowship.

In spite of a slate of continuing challenges, it appears on balance that the AG is poised for continued growth in the near term. Ministers and laypeople seem to be satisfied with the service provided by the national structure for facilitating their local church ministries. The appeal to young people who evidently are attracted to the values of the fellowship is encouraging for the future. As the AG enters the twenty-first century, the present balance between charisma and structure, as long as it can be sustained, bodes well for the near term.