

A Paradigmatic Analysis of Authority Within Pentecostalism - 1995 by Randall Holm

In resuscitating the charismatic experience of the primitive Christian community the Pentecostal church has experienced a remarkable growth over the last one hundred years, despite being the object of much suspicion. As a popular expression of Christianity, Pentecostalism defies the traditional modes of regulating the Christian faith by proposing a new equilibrium between the authority of Scripture (Written Word), the authority of the Christian community (Spoken Word) and the authority of the official discourse (Institutional Word).

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse, the operation of authority within the contemporary Pentecostal movement, in particular the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC). The study is in part theological, historical and sociological. The corpus studied will essentially be comprised of Pentecostal writings characteristic of each of the time periods considered and the results of a survey distributed to 200 Pentecostal pastors across Canada.

Our hypothesis will be that the regulation of faith has evolved successively through three different paradigms (an apocalyptic/intuitive model nourished by orthanopathy, an accommodational model guided by a preoccupation with orthodoxy, and a techno-efficacious model expressed through a voluntary orthopraxy) and that pragmatism has played a determining role which becomes more explicit with the evolving of each paradigm.

Our study consists of two parts. The first part is interested in the theoretical foundation for the regulation of the faith. First and foremost we will seek to indentify the understanding and the weight Pentecostals accord the Bible (Written Word), the testimony of the local church community (Spoken Word) and the official discourse (Institutional Word). The second part will examine the same question from a factual standpoint. It consists of verifying how authority within the contemporary Pentecostal movement synthesizes this triple "Word" within a doctrinal (Baptism in the Holy Spirit) ethical (divorce and remarriage) and juridical (ordination of women) issue.

We conclude that Pentecostalism is committed to the primacy of a dynamic Scripture. Directed by the Spirit, Pentecostals believe that the World must be proclaimed. As for any official discourse, always suspect, it is unable to impose itself except through the voice of pragmatism.