



A Decade of Pentecost
Resource from the
Acts in Africa Initiative



Training Pentecostal Ministers

**Towards an Authentic Pentecostal Training
Model During the Africa Assemblies of God
“Decade of Pentecost”**

Denzil R. Miller

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CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Introduction | 4 |
| The Necessity of Building Our Training on a Deliberate Pentecostal Foundation | 7 |
| The Power of Theology | 8 |
| A Time for Bold Examination..... | 9 |
| A Pentecostal Approach to Scripture and Ministerial Training..... | 13 |
| Direct Relevance | 14 |
| Practical Immediacy | 15 |
| Supernatural Expectancy | 16 |
| A Pentecostal Approach to the Ministry of Jesus..... | 17 |
| A Pentecostal Approach to Interpreting Acts | 18 |
| The Importance of These Issues | 18 |
| Towards an Authentic Pentecostal Training Model..... | 19 |
| Reaffirmation..... | 19 |
| Review..... | 19 |
| Implementation..... | 20 |
| Conclusion..... | 22 |
| Other Works by the Author | 23 |

INTRODUCTION

A few years ago, if you were to drive into the front gate of the Assemblies of God School of Theology in Lilongwe, Malawi, along with the name of the school, you would have read on the main signboard this motto: “Dedicated to quality theological education.” The time came, however, when the administration and teachers of the school decided that this was not a satisfactory mission statement for their school. They felt that quality theological education could not, in itself, be considered a sufficient reason for the existence of a truly Pentecostal Bible school. Quality theological education was merely one means to fulfilling a greater mission.

Therefore, in accordance with the bold Decade of Harvest¹ commitments made by the school’s parent organization, the Malawi Assemblies of God, the leadership of the school wanted a mission statement that would reflect the church’s enlarged missionary vision. The statement would further need to convey

¹The Decade of Harvest was a ten-year evangelistic and church-planting emphasis of the Africa AG, along with sister AG churches worldwide, beginning in 1990 and leading up to the turn of the millennium in 2000. During the DOH the African church experienced unprecedented growth both in the number of adherents and in the number of local congregations. At the beginning of the decade about 2.1 million believers worshiped in 11,800 AG churches in 31 sub-Saharan countries. By its end, the number of adherents had nearly tripled to 6.3 million, and the number of churches had more than doubled to 24,019. Additionally, the AG had entered into 8 new countries, bringing the total to 39 countries in which AAGA-related [AAGA is the acronym for Africa Assemblies of God Alliance] national churches were active. It was, however, during the decade following the DOH, that is, the first decade of the twenty-first century, that true exponential growth began to occur.

the school's strong biblical and Pentecostal orientation. After much prayer and discussion a new mission statement was crafted. Today, as you enter the school, you will read, "Assemblies of God School of Theology: *Biblical training to touch the nations in the power of the Holy Spirit.*"

The adoption and internalizing of this mission statement helped to revolutionize the school. Since that time, everything done or taught in the school is evaluated in the light of that statement. If an activity or course helps the school to fulfill its mission, it is embraced; if it does not, it is discarded. Later, when the Malawian church decided to establish a graduate training program, it adopted a similar mission statement, again reflecting the church's strong commitment to Pentecostal missions: "*Mobilizing the church for global mission in Pentecostal power.*" The new school's name, All Nations Theological Seminary, was also carefully chosen to reflect its missional orientation. Both institutions have become powerful forces in the training and mobilizing of Pentecostal ministers and missionaries in Malawi and throughout southern Africa.

The leadership of the Malawi Assemblies of God understood this basic truth: if our model for training Pentecostal ministers is to be of any lasting value, it must be about more than academics; it must be about mission, that is, about fulfilling the *missio Dei*. And it must be about forming thoroughly Pentecostal ministers who are able to advance God's kingdom in the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit. Only as our ministerial training institutions stay focused on these two key kingdom issues will they be able to develop effective training models for Pentecostal ministers in Africa and beyond.

From its genesis the God-ordained mission of the Africa Assemblies of God has been to evangelize the nations of Africa and the world in the power of the Holy Spirit. The 232 Assemblies of God seminaries, Bible schools, and extension

schools across Africa exist to help mobilize the church in fulfilling that great mission.² The primary mission of our ministerial training institutions is to equip and help to mobilize a mighty army of last-days, Spirit-empowered harvesters. This goal can only be achieved if our understanding of our unique mission as Pentecostal trainers of Pentecostal ministers is crystal clear. As we contemplate this mission, we must be guided by two clear principles: Our ministerial training must be *boldly missional* in its focus, and it must be *forthrightly Pentecostal* in its orientation.

In this book I will focus my thoughts primarily on the second guiding principle, the absolute necessity for our ministerial training schools to have a strong Pentecostal ethos. In doing this, I will discuss three crucial issues that Pentecostal educators face in developing a truly Pentecostal training model. In Chapter 1, I will discuss the necessity of building all of our theological training on a deliberate Pentecostal foundation. In Chapter 2 I will talk about how we as Pentecostals uniquely approach the Bible, and how that approach must be reflected in our ministerial training. And finally, in Chapter 3 I will briefly suggest ways in which we may begin to build a truly Pentecostal model for training Africa's Pentecostal ministers for the twenty-first century and beyond.

² Africa's Hope, Springfield, MO

CHAPTER 1

THE NECESSITY OF BUILDING OUR TRAINING ON A DELIBERATE PENTECOSTAL FOUNDATION

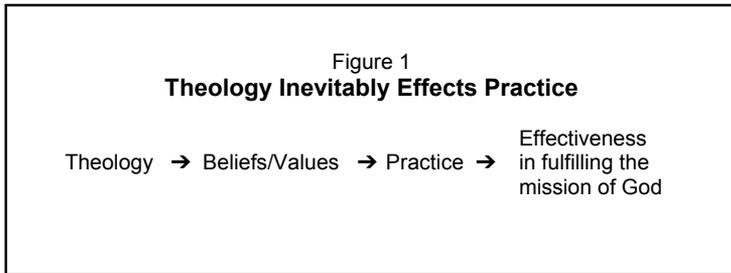
In March of 2009 at its quadrennial General Assembly held in Johannesburg, South Africa, the Africa Assemblies of God Alliance (AAGA) unanimously committed itself to a “Decade of Pentecost” (DOP) from 2010 to 2020. The emphasis was officially launched on Pentecost Sunday, 2010, and will continue until Pentecost Sunday, 2020. The DOP is a ten-year, unified missionary emphasis of the 50 national Assemblies of God churches in sub-Sahara Africa and the Indian Ocean Basin. The cornerstone of the emphasis is the corporate goal of seeing 10 million new believers baptized in the Holy Spirit and then mobilized as Spirit-empowered witnesses, church planters, and cross-cultural missionaries. It is believed that, properly harnessed and directed, this powerful spiritual emphasis will inevitably result in thousands of new churches being planted, millions of people coming to Christ, hundreds of new indigenous African missionaries being deployed, and the yet-to-be-reached tribes of Africa being engaged with the gospel. To date, all indicators point to the fact that the movement is poised for the greatest evangelistic and missionary success in its 100-year history.

Spirit-empowered missional ministerial training lies at the heart of the vision of the DOP. Therefore, as we of the Africa AG progress through the decade, we and our ministerial training

institutions must maintain a laser-like focus on the twin tasks of evangelism and church planting. In doing this we must ensure that the ministers we train and the churches we plant are infused with the missional and spiritual DNA needed to quickly reproduce themselves and plant other Spirit-empowered, self-multiplying missionary churches.

The Power of Theology

With these things in mind, we as Pentecostal educators must be ever conscious of how our theological approach impacts the ministers we train, and ultimately the churches they will plant. This is because one’s theology directly impacts his or her beliefs and values; and one’s beliefs and values in turn directly affect their ministerial practice; and ultimately, their ministerial



practice will directly contribute to their effectiveness in fulfilling the mission of God, as I have charted in Figure 1. Powerful implications flow from these truths. If we as Pentecostal educators are uncertain about who we are, and why we exist as a movement, we are bound to pass on what I call a *reticent Pentecostal theology*. Such a theology is often more concerned about being accepted by the larger evangelical community than it is about fulfilling the mission of God. It is an accommodating theology, one which is almost apologetic about being Pentecostal. Such a theology inevitably results in trepid, that is to

say, timid Pentecostal practice, and ultimately in diminished effectiveness in fulfilling God’s mission.

If, however, we as Pentecostal trainers clearly understand our God-given mission, and our Spirit-given means of accomplishing that mission (cf., Acts 1:8), we will boldly strive for what I call a *forthright Pentecostal theology*. Such is a theology whose main aim is not to accommodate, but to fulfill mission. It is resolute and unbending in its beliefs and values. Such a theology will inevitably result in powerful Pentecostal practice and in biblical results in our churches (see Figure 2).

| Type of Theology | Beliefs/Values Produced | Resulting Practice | Effectiveness in Mission |
|--|--------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| An “Reticent” Pentecostal Theology | Diluted Beliefs and Values | Trepid Practice | Mediocre |
| A “Forthright” Pentecostal Theology | Resolute Beliefs and Values | Powerful Practice | Biblical Results |

Figure 2

A Time for Bold Examination

These insights help us to understand the importance of the issue. We as Pentecostal educator-practitioners must not fail in our endeavor to train thoroughly Pentecostal pastors and leaders. We must courageously reexamine—and, when necessary, replace—our sometimes inadequate training models of the past and present. We must ask the hard questions: Has our curriculum and training methods at times been too generic—to accommodating? Have we ourselves been overly influenced by our own (or by our teachers’) training in non-Pentecostal

institutions, and have we thus at times lost sight of our unique challenges and goals as Pentecostal educators? In our well-intentioned attempts to create a broad-based theological curriculum to present to our churches and ministerial training institutions, have we at times pushed aside, or at least downplayed, our unique Pentecostal emphases? I fear that such tendencies, often done unconsciously, can only serve to dramatically weaken the very Spirit-empowered, mission-oriented church we are trying to establish in Africa and the world.

Add to this the fact that in the Africa AG we are undergoing a crisis of experience.³ While we rejoice in the tremendous growth of the Africa AG, for the past two decades another not-so-encouraging trend has been taking place in the movement. As the church has been growing ever larger, it has, at the same time, been steadily becoming less Pentecostal—at least statistically. Annual field reports consistently reveal that the vast majority of our AG constituents in Africa have not been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Add to this the fact that the “Pentecostalism” embraced by many of our African AG churches is a specious pseudo-Pentecostalism very unlike the kind we find portrayed in the book of Acts and other New Testament books.

In 1992 the annual survey conducted by the Assemblies of God World Missions, Africa Office, revealed that only 19% of our Africa AG constituents had been baptized in the Holy Spirit. In the following two years this percentage fell to 17%, then 12%. This report was received with varying degrees of alarm in the African church and in the American mission. In the 19 years

³ This crisis of experience in Pentecostal experience is a worldwide phenomenon. Across the world Pentecostal churches are reporting sharp declines in the percentages of their membership having been baptized in the Holy Spirit evidenced by speaking in tongues (Acts 2:4) and bold witness (1:8).

since 1994 the percentage of constituents baptized in the Holy Spirit has fluctuated from 16 to 19%. Since 2008 it has hovered around 19%. The message is clear; this unacceptable condition in the church must be addressed and remedied. Unless something dramatic occurs, the movement will, perforce, lose its Pentecostal identity. If the Africa AG is to maintain its spiritual dynamic and fulfill its God-ordained missionary destiny, a continent-wide outpouring of the Holy Spirit is needed, with millions of our members being baptized in the Holy Spirit and empowered as Christ's witnesses. In my travels and ministry in 30 countries in all parts of Africa, I have observed the need firsthand.

There are, however, encouraging signs. Recognizing the need for a new outpouring of the Spirit on the church, African AG leaders have committed themselves to doing something about it. In my visits with several African AG church leaders across the continent, I have sat and listened to them as they passionately spoke of their desire for an outpouring of the Spirit on their churches. This thirst for authentic Pentecostal experience is mirrored in the zeal of AG believers to personally experience God's power. Wherever we have presented the message of Pentecost and given people an opportunity to receive the Spirit, they have enthusiastically responded, and many have been filled with the Spirit evidenced by speaking in tongues and greater commitment to reaching the lost with the gospel. Truly, the Africa AG is ripe for a powerful new Pentecostal awakening.

Clearly, a portion of the blame for this decline in Pentecostal experience and practice must be laid at the feet of us Pentecostal educators. The sad fact is our African pastors have not been adequately trained in the importance and methods of getting their people filled with the Spirit and then mobilizing them to reach the lost and plant Spirit-empowered, self-duplicating missionary churches. Nor have we adequately trained them in how to

minister effectively in the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit with signs following. This unacceptable situation must be immediately addressed and aggressively remedied. It is my prayer that this booklet will help to spark such a movement among Pentecostal educators in Africa.

CHAPTER 2

A PENTECOSTAL APPROACH TO SCRIPTURE AND MINISTERIAL TRAINING

As we move forward through the Decade of Pentecost, we as Pentecostal trainers must allow our experience with the Spirit to more significantly inform our training methodologies. In our reading of Scripture, our development of curriculum, our mentoring of leaders, or whatever else we do, we must learn to think and act more “Pentecostally.”

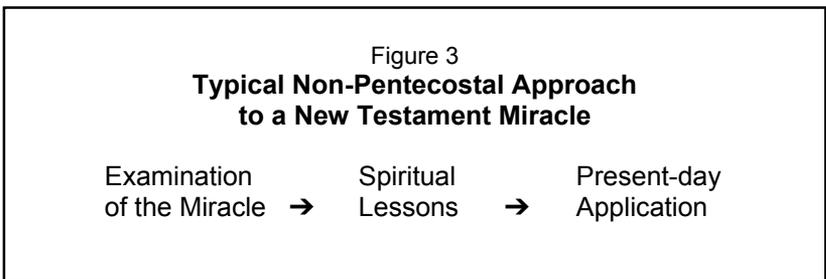
It is axiomatic that one’s Christian experience (or, for that matter, one’s non-experience) influences the way he or she approaches Scripture. While we unequivocally share certain basic presuppositions with fellow evangelical believers concerning Scripture, we as Pentecostals nevertheless embrace certain distinctive interpretative presuppositions. Along with other evangelicals, Pentecostals approach the Scripture with the assumption that the Bible is the divinely revealed Word of God. We believe, as they do, that the Scriptures are without error, and we share with them the belief that the Bible is our authoritative and final rule of faith and practice.

And yet, as Pentecostals, we almost instinctively embrace certain distinctive presuppositions in our approach to Scripture. This is especially true in our approach to NT texts dealing with miracles and the work of the Holy Spirit. By way of example, allow me to suggest three ways that we Pentecostals uniquely approach Scripture:

Direct Relevance

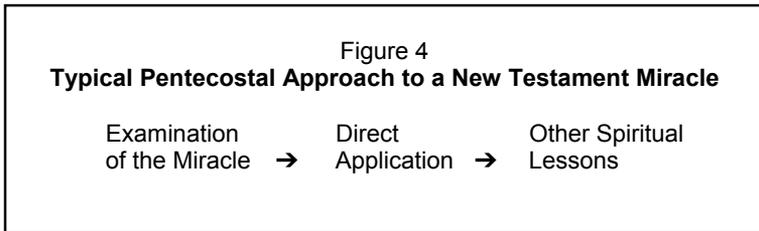
An oft-cited verse in Pentecostal circles is Hebrews 13:8: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” This fact highlights the experiential predisposition in most Pentecostals, and is reflected in the way we approach the historical portions of the NT, meaning specifically the gospels and Acts. Typically, when a Pentecostal reads an account of one of Jesus’ miracles, he or she is more likely than is the non-Pentecostal to assume a direct relevance between the biblical miracle and his or her own life and ministry today.

Consider with me for a moment how non-Pentecostals and Pentecostals differ in their approach to a biblical miracle. A non-Pentecostal, when reading about a miracle of Jesus in the gospels, or an apostolic miracle in Acts, will typically approach the story using the following thought sequence. He will first examine the miracle; he will then, almost immediately, look for spiritual truth contained in the miracle; and finally, he will make present application of those spiritual truths he discovered. I have charted this sequence in Figure 3 below.



To the non-Pentecostal, therefore, there is little or no direct relevance between the biblical miracle and his present situation. He typically sees only an secondary relevance, through spiritual application, to his current life and practice.

However, in his interpretative approach to the same miracle the Pentecostal sees a more direct relevance. The Pentecostal often sees a direct correlation between the text and his own personal life and ministry. His thought processes will proceed something like this: Like the non-Pentecostal, he will examine the miracle; however, unlike the non-Pentecostal, he will not immediately look for spiritual truth. He will, rather, make a direct application to his present situation. He will reason, if Jesus healed the sick man, then He will heal me. Or, he may reason, if God used Peter and John to heal the sick, then He will also use me to heal the sick. He may then look for other spiritual lessons found in the text (see Figure 4). The Pentecostal thus sees a more direct relevance between the text and his present belief and practice.



Thus, either consciously or unconsciously, Pentecostals interpret such miracle texts based on certain interpretative (and experiential) presuppositions they hold concerning the theological and practical value of the historical portions of NT Scripture, and of the author's (or as some would say, the Holy Spirit's) intent in writing.

Practical Immediacy

Closely akin to direct relevance is practical immediacy. Along with seeing a direct relevance to his or her present situation, the typical Pentecostal sees a practical immediacy between a miracle of Jesus or the apostles and his or her own

present situation. Since they reason that the same Spirit who was at work in the lives of Jesus and the apostles is at work in their own lives and ministry, Pentecostal believers anticipate the same practical and immediate results. Typically, the non-Pentecostal interpreter will not make the same direct association.

Supernatural Expectancy

As a result of the previous two Pentecostal presuppositions, they elicit from the miracles of Jesus and the early church a certain present-tense supernatural expectancy. They expect that God can and will act supernaturally on their behalf now, just as He did for the early believers then. They think, if God did it for them, He will do it for us. Did Jesus heal the blind man? Then, He will heal you too. Did Jesus rebuke the fever of Peter's mother-in-law? Then, I also rebuke your fever in the name of Jesus. Did the disciples speak in tongues when they were filled with the Spirit? Then, we too should speak in tongues when we are filled with the Spirit. Pentecostals expect God to act supernaturally today just as He did in NT times.

My reason for describing these historical Pentecostal approaches to Scripture is to encourage Pentecostal educators to cultivate, rather than discourage, such an approach to interpreting Scripture in their students. Far too often in our western-oriented, uncritical insistence on non-Pentecostal interpretative approaches to Scripture, especially to the NT historical narratives, we inadvertently mitigate supernatural expectancy in the hearts of our students. In doing this we diminish the supernatural impact of Scripture on their personal lives and ministries. I personally believe that the NT writers of the gospels and Acts intended their readers to read their writings with the same direct relevance, practical immediacy, and supernatural expectancy typically employed by Pentecostals today. Therefore, how we, as Pentecostal educators, read and

interpret Scripture, and how we teach our students to do the same, will profoundly affect the way we, and they, carry out the missionary task.

A Pentecostal Approach to the Ministry of Jesus

Further, Pentecostals approach the ministry of Jesus somewhat differently than do our non-Pentecostal friends. While both Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals see Jesus as their example for life and ministry, Pentecostals take it a step further. They see the ministry of Jesus as their model for Spirit-anointed, Spirit-empowered ministry. Let me explain what I mean.

Pentecostals believe that just as the Spirit of the Lord was upon Jesus anointing Him for ministry (Luke 4:18; Act 10:38), so He is upon them, anointing them for ministry (Acts 1:8). They, therefore, expect to do the same works as Jesus, in the same way (John 14:12). They see Jesus not only as their example for Spirit-filled living, He is also their example and pattern for Spirit-empowered, charismatic ministry (see Figure 5 below). As we embrace these unique Pentecostal approaches to Scripture, they will inevitably influence the way we teach, among other things, such courses as Christology, Missions, Evangelism, Leadership, and a host of other subjects in our Pentecostal training institutions.

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Figure 5</p> <p>A Comparison: Pentecostal and Evangelical Approaches to the Ministry of Jesus</p> | |
| The Evangelical approach: | Jesus is our example of life. |
| The Pentecostal approach: | Jesus is our example for life and Spirit-empowered, charismatic ministry. |

A Pentecostal Approach to Interpreting Acts

In addition, as I have already mentioned, Pentecostals approach the book of Acts with certain hermeneutical presuppositions. While many non-Pentecostals contend that normative doctrine and practice cannot be derived from the “purely historical” portions of Scripture (meaning specifically, the book of Acts), Pentecostals contend with Paul that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God” and that it is “profitable for [normative] doctrine” (2 Tim. 3:16, KJV). Pentecostals further contend that Luke was more than a sacred *historian*, he was also a Spirit-inspired *theologian* (and I would add, *missiologist*). They believe that he had clear theological and missional intent in writing Luke-Acts, and that this intent can be seen, among other things, in his careful selectivity in his choice of materials, as well as in his precise use of language.

The Importance of These Issues

Why are these things important? They are important because, as we develop our authentically Pentecostal model for training African pastors, missionaries, and other church leaders, it is essential that we understand that we, as Pentecostals, have a unique approach to Scripture. When writing and examining our curriculum, we must see Scripture through Pentecostal eyes. We must ensure that those who write our texts and develop our curriculum are themselves thoroughgoing Pentecostal scholars in personal experience, in theological orientation, and in charismatic practice. We must also ensure that those who review and approve our curriculum are able to discern whether any given teaching serves to promote—or mitigate—our Pentecostal testimony and missionary effectiveness in the world. If we are to train Pentecostal leaders for the Decade of Pentecost and beyond, we must intentionally develop curriculum and training models from a clear Pentecostal perspective.

CHAPTER 3

TOWARDS AN AUTHENTIC PENTECOSTAL TRAINING MODEL

The question naturally arises, how must we go about developing our authentic Pentecostal model of training in Africa and beyond? If we are to ensure such a training model in our schools, we must be both very dedicated and very deliberate in our efforts. For starters, the development of such a training model will involve at least three elements:

Reaffirmation

We must begin our quest by frankly reaffirming our “Pentecostal-ness.” We must come to terms with who we are as a movement, why God has called us, and how we are to fulfill that unique calling. While rejoicing in our past successes, we must, nevertheless, humbly reflect on the reason for past and present failures. In doing these things, we must constantly reaffirm our Pentecostal orientation toward life, toward Scripture, toward ministry, and toward ministerial training. All the while, we must fully recommit ourselves to the training of thoroughgoing Spirit-anointed, missions-oriented Pentecostal leadership.

Review

Beyond reaffirmation, we must boldly review our present training models, asking certain probing questions, such as,

- Is our present model of training suitable for producing authentic Spirit-anointed leaders, church planters, pastors, missionaries, and evangelists?
- Is it capable of developing Pentecostal preachers who are thoroughly equipped and able to lead their people into dynamic Spirit-filled kingdom service?
- Can it produce ministers who are able to confront and defeat the spiritual powers that they encounter daily in Africa and other parts of the world?

In doing this we must review each course in our curriculum asking,

- Does this course clearly reflect our unique Pentecostal orientation to Scripture and leadership training?
- Is it clearly aimed at training truly Pentecostal leadership during this Decade of Pentecost?

As we do the above, we must also take a fresh look at each of our school's *raison d'être* (reason for being), asking ourselves if it unambiguously reflects the unique Pentecostal orientation and missionary vision of our institution and movement.

Implementation

Finally, we must begin today taking bold and deliberate steps to consciously implement the needed Pentecostal emphasis into all of our curricula. This task must include implementation of our Pentecostal emphasis in the following essential areas:

- The selection of courses and textbooks
- The delineation of desired outcomes for each course
- The choice of those who write, edit, and review our courses
- The process of individual lesson building.

It is only as we boldly address these critical issues that we will begin to develop a curriculum that will adequately prepare Pentecostal ministers for this momentous decade and beyond. We must not fail in our task.

CONCLUSION

The Decade of Pentecost is upon us. Jesus is coming soon. There is a great harvest yet to be reaped. We, as Pentecostal educators, must therefore with courage address the task at hand, that is, the task of shaping and delivering to our constituents a truly Pentecostal model of ministerial training.

In a meeting of some of the leading Assemblies of God educators in Africa, the principal of one of our premier Bible schools gave us all a startling wake up call. Reflecting on what he believed to be the growing separation between what his students needed, and the curricula provided by some of our AG training institutions, he asked, “Are our AG ministerial training institutions prepared to reinvent themselves, or will Africa be forced to look for another means of training its pastors?”

How shall we answer this Bible School principal? And how shall we respond to our Bible schools and ministerial students around the world, crying out for a truly Pentecostal curriculum? Our answer can only be, “We will not abandon you. We are indeed ready to reinvent ourselves. We are ready to provide Africa and the world the most focused, the most dynamic, the most missionary-oriented Pentecostal curriculum the world has ever seen—so help us God.”

OTHER WORKS BY THE AUTHOR

Power Ministry: How to Minister in the Spirit's Power (2004)
(also available in French, Portuguese, Malagasy,
Kinyarwanda, and Chichewa)

*Empowered for Global Mission: A Missionary Look at
the Book of Acts* (2005)

From Azusa to Africa to the Nations (2005)
(also available in French, Spanish, and Portuguese)

Acts: The Spirit of God in Mission (2007)

In Step with the Spirit: Studies in the Spirit-filled Walk (2008)

*The Kingdom and the Power: The Kingdom of God:
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*Experiencing the Spirit: A Study of the Work of the Spirit
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Teaching in the Spirit (2009)

*Power Encounter: Ministering in the Power and
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(also available in Kiswahili)

*You Can Minister in God's Power: A Guide for
Spirit-filled Disciples* (2009)

*The Spirit of God in Mission: A Vocational Commentary
on the Book of Acts* (2011)

OTHER WORKS BY THE AUTHOR

*Proclaiming Pentecost: 100 Sermon Outlines
on the Power of the Holy Spirit*
(2011) (Soon to be available in French, Spanish, Portuguese, and
Swahili) (Associate editor with Mark Turney, editor)

Globalizing Pentecostal Missions in Africa (2011)
(Editor, with Enson Lwesya)

*The 1:8 Promise of Jesus: The Key to World
Harvest* (2012)

*Power for Mission: The Africa Assemblies of God Mobilizing
to Reach the Unreached* (Editor, 2013)

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