Louis Dallière: Apologist for Pentecostalism in France and Belgium, 1932-1939

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Louis Dallière (1897-1976) was one of the most remarkable leaders of the Pentecostal Movement before World War II. When Pentecostalism came to France and Belgium, Dallière was a young intellectual in the Reformed Church of France working for spiritual renewal within that communion. A competitive, much published academician in his church, the fact that his training was in philosophy as well as theology makes him all the more unique among those early participants in the Pentecostal "revivals." In this his only peers were, to my knowledge, Jonathan A. B. Paul (Germany) and C. L. Parker (Britain). Dallière has become an historiographical enigma. Although he was actively involved in the beginnings of the Pentecostal movement in two countries and wrote an analysis of British Pentecostalism, because he did not "come out" of the Reformed Church, he was removed from Pentecostal historiography (both written and oral) and his participation minimalized. Because he remained convinced of many Pentecostal theological positions, he was never at ease in the Protestant Church of France.

Dallière first came into direct contact with the Pentecostal movement in 1932, and it was not until 1939 that he, and others, were forced, by a variety of factors, to choose to remain in the Protestant Church or withdraw to form a new communion. This essay will examine Dallière's life and ministry during those intermediate years, 1932-1939, with special attention to his apologetic efforts on behalf of the Pentecostal movement.

Status Quaestionis

The role of Dallière in the development of French and Belgian Pentecostalism has just begun to be investigated. The status quaestionis can be quite brief. Henri Schaerer and René de Richmond discussed the foundation of the Union de Prière (Prayer Union) centered at Charmes. Hollenweger then developed briefly the ecumenical and ecclesial commitments of Dallière after 1940 while describing in some detail the regulations of the Union de Prière. Dallière is described by Hollenweger, correctly in my opinion as a charismatic pastor within the

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1Henri Schaerer and René de Richmond, Retour historique sur les origines de l'Union de Prière, exposé le 24 août 1969, Charmes sur Rhône, polycopie.
Reformed Church. Much of this research was incorporated into the Spanish version of Enthusiastisches Christentum. Dallière was mentioned briefly by George Stotts who chose to focus on the life and ministry of Douglas Scott. A major development in the study of French Protestantism (and Pentecostalism) was the presentation of Dallière in Thooren's mémoire on the Union de Prière presented at the Institut Catholique de Paris. It is particularly valuable for our discussion because the biographical data is gleaned from interviews with Dallière and his contemporaries. Without it our knowledge of the biographical details of his life would be minimal.

F. Lovsky has contributed an analysis of Dallière's theological thought. This is a reflection on the significance of ecclesiological considerations and commitments in Dallière's theology. Lovsky argues that Dallière cannot be understood as a Pentecostal, but as a "churchman." This is certainly true of Dallière in his later period (after 1939). However, as Lovsky frequently indicates, Dallière was heavily influenced by Pentecostal concerns and theological Tendenzen throughout his life. As shall be demonstrated below, by whatever definition of "Pentecostal" one would choose, Dallière functioned as a Pentecostal theologian and apologist from 1932 to 1939. Even after 1939, he was never completely reintegrated into the French Protestant Church. As Lovsky unwittingly shows, he remained, "charismatic," a Pastor and Prayer Union leader working for renewal of the Protestant Church from the fringes of that Church.

Building on the work of these scholars, I have attempted to indicate his role and access his significance for the early Pentecostal movement in Belgium. Like Hollenweger, I have used the term "charismatic" to describe Dallière. There has been some negative response to this "anachronism" but it appears accurately to hold in tension both the revivalist and ecclesial aspects of Dallière's agenda. A summary analysis


4Jean Thoorens, L'Union de Prière de Charmes si Rhône, mémoire (Institut Catholique de Paris, n.d.[after 1976]).

