Where Do We Go From Here?

It has been suggested many times in recent years that classic Pentecostalism and its sister in the Historic churches, charismatic renewal, are at a crossroad. Pentecostalism has arrived at this point some eight or more decades after it first erupted in the US, having made some movement from a religion of the storefront, tent meeting, and brush arbor, to a position of reasonable respectability, glamorous Christian Centers, and ever increasing institutional power. Charismatic renewal, in the assessment of Richard Quebedeaux as described in his book *The New Charismatics II* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983), p. 239 “had ‘run out of steam’ by the late 1970s - but not out of abiding significance.”

To be at a crossroad is not necessarily bad. It, in fact, offers ample opportunity for one to assess past experience, to take stock of present strengths, weaknesses, and resources, and to plot future direction. To be at a crossroad and not to take the opportunity for reflection and self evaluation is to miss a precious moment for continued growth and a chance to make informed decisions.

This past year three articles which tend to underscore the reality of the present crossroad have made their way into print in different theological journals. Carl-Erik Sahlberg has published an abstract of his dissertation completed at the University of Uppsala in Sweden. It is a look back, in which he assesses the transition “From Ecstacy [sic.] to Enthusiasm: Some Trends in the Scientific Attitude to the Pentecostal Movement,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 9:1 (January, 1985), 70-77. Prior to 1970, the secular scientific community had treated Pentecostalism in a negative light, but he notes, since 1970 the scientific attitude toward Pentecostalism has changed significantly in its portrayal of Pentecostals and their practices. He attributes this to Pentecostalism’s (1) rapid growth, (2) changing sociology, (3) self-awareness, and (4) the rise of charismatic renewal. While we may find Sahlberg’s observations to be of interest in a variety of ways, it is significant to note that he does raise some substantial issues not the least of which is related to the roots of Pentecostalism. Are Pentecostals changing so rapidly from who they were that they are in danger of forgetting their raison d’être? How much change is good? How fast should it occur? And, what kinds of changes are right for the present?

A second article, this one by John Ponter, looks at “The Charismatic Movement,” *The Expository Times* 96:8 (May,
1985), 228-233, and assesses both past history and contemporary needs. Its place as the fourteenth article in a regular series titled *First Aid in Pastoral Care* demonstrates that there are weaknesses in addition to the many strengths of the movement which remain with it. Among those weaknesses which the author has chosen to highlight are (1) questions of exclusivism, elitism, and triumphalism over the expression of what constitutes a legitimate experience of the Holy Spirit, (2) questions of appropriate Biblical models of authority and excesses of certain kinds of authoritarianism, (3) questions of spiritual maturity and personal identity, and (4) questions of world view.

Ponter has made some modest suggestions, but it is clear that many of these problems confront Pentecostalism in much the same way that they exist in charismatic renewal. These issues need continued attention by everyone concerned if the crossroad is to become a valuable nexus for these movements and the larger church, for history and posterity.

Walter Hollenweger, known foremost for his work *The Pentecostals* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972) as well as for his flair at painting the broad sweep, has contributed a reflective piece titled "After Twenty Years' Research on Pentecostalism," *Theology* 87 (1984), 403-412. While he is interested in the past as well as the present of the movement, he is also concerned with its future. Where will it go, indeed, where should it go in the decades ahead? He projects that by AD 2000 there should be nearly as many Pentecostals on earth as there are in all other Protestant denominations combined, and the vast majority will be, in fact already are, Third World Christians. In what way(s) will their participation in the movement affect both faith and practice?

Hollenweger raises questions regarding the integration of doctrine and praxis and notes the growing distance between the two in some cases. Similarly he raises questions of authority; the age old struggle between charismatic leadership and institutional, ecclesial structures is still alive. But, he raises hopes, too. Is there, for instance, a creative and dynamic ecumenism available in charismatic renewal? And, is there a role for the Third World? Do typical Western and Two/thirds World mission policies need further refinement or rethinking altogether? And where do the many indigenous movements fit in all of this? There is, indeed, hope as Pentecostalism and charismatic renewal ponder the future at the crossroad, but it is a hope which needs to take seriously the contribution of all Pentecostals and charismatic Christians. As Hollenweger puts it, either "...