

Title: “Discerning the Future: A Brief SWOT Analysis of the Potentiality and Challenges within Pentecostal Higher Education”

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Synopsis: As Pentecostalism(s) move into another century of expansive world-wide impact, higher education is likely to play a more and more significant role in the training of future leaders in the home, church, marketplace, and academies across the globe. By using the strategic planning model of assessing internal Strengths and Weaknesses and external Opportunities and Threats this presentation will attempt to address what is unique about the pursuit of a “Holy-Spirit baptized intellect” and what that means for our future.¹ It will recap some of the hard lessons we need to learn from past challenges using some research data specific to the Assemblies of God. Hopefully, this critique will help us to discern a number of positive principles for dealing with potential external threats and to realize the true potentiality of the Spirit’s work within a uniquely Pentecostal higher education. A guided and dynamic interactive discussion with the audience will culminate the session.

SWOT analyses are often used in strategic planning methodologies as the initiating catalyst for change to help clarify the present situation but also to anticipate the future in some respect, which is the goal of all strategic planning.² Some would say, the nature of the ongoing sea-changes in our culture have cast us adrift in a tsunami of cultural fluctuations.³ No one can predict what is around the next cultural corner. In this scenario our future is so unpredictable that any attempt to predict or plan for the future is futile, irresponsible, and a waste of time.

Others are convinced the issue is one of getting used to “surfing the edge of chaos” and trusting that the Lord will help us muddle through in some capacity.⁴ I personally trust in what one of the wise sages of my Bible College days said, “If the Holy Ghost can use us when we are unprepared, then how much more can he use us when we are prepared?”⁵ The reality is if we are going to be wise-stewards of what God has given us - a divine appointment to “bear fruit that will last,” then we really don’t have a choice.⁶ We must do what we can to analyze our present predicament in the hopes that through an eclectic process of observations and discussions, we might hear more clearly from the Spirit of God. So as to be somewhat prepared to move with serendipity, innovation, and spontaneity in sensitivity to the Spirit’s leading as we negotiate the many and intense storms that Pentecostal higher education will face over the next decades. Toward that end, I offer my measured, albeit anecdotal, assessment of the potentialities and

¹ I am indebted to Dr. Russ Spittler who used this phrase frequently when I was at Fuller Seminary.

² John C. Bryson calls these SWOC analyses; cf. *Strategic Planning for Public and Non-Profit Organizations*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2004), 138-149.

³ Leonard Sweet, *Soul Tsunami* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1999).

⁴ Alan Hirsch – *The Forgotten Ways* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2006), 260-262.

⁵ Rev. David Jones, Trinity Bible College, Ellendale, ND.

⁶ John 15:16.

challenges that we can anticipate in our endeavor to fulfill our call as educators in the Pentecostal tradition.

Strengths

1. A Spirit-led ethos permeates the movement at least as an “aspirational” value.
2. A constituency that embraces the importance of higher education commensurate with the population at large.⁷
3. Entrepreneurship is a value among movement leaders – charismatic pastors and church leaders.
4. There is a wide-spread burden for reaching beyond themselves and impacting the world for Christ.⁸
5. We have 17 nationally or regionally accredited institutions of higher learning with educated and committed faculty, administrations, and staff willing to serve the constituency sacrificially.⁹
6. There is vibrant denominational support of higher education through the Alliance for AG Higher Education and other General Council resources to develop common standards, national promotion, and provide educational and financial resources to their institutions of higher learning.¹⁰
7. Various push-pull factors out of so-called “secular” institutions into academic communities where Christian community can be cultivated; i.e., student/parent interest in higher moral standards and intense desire to be a part of genuine Christian community.

⁷ Specifically, 15.2% of AG adherents had some college, 11.5% were college graduates, and 2.2% had completed some graduate work compared to 15.3% of the general U.S. population that had completed a college degree (2006), see Brian M. Kelly, “The Christian University as Messianic Community in Missional Engagement” in *Transformational Leadership* (Lakeland, FL: Small Dogma Publishing, 2008), 185-187.

⁸ Acts 1:8 is a pivotal Scripture in the institutional memory of the movement and evangelism is codified as first among the Four-fold Mission of the of the AG: 1) Evangelize the lost, 2) Worship God, 3) Disciple believers, 4) Show Compassion, taken from <http://ag.org/top/About/mission.cfm>, (accessed June 14, 2014).

⁹ Listed on the AG website for Colleges & Universities, under “Schools” tab, see: <http://colleges.ag.org/schools>, (accessed June 14, 2014).

¹⁰ Purpose statement of the Alliance for AG Higher Education; see <http://colleges.ag.org/about/mission.cfm>, (accessed June 14, 2014).

8. A growing geographic, ethnic, gender, economic, and doctrinal diversity among the Pentecostal movement – the AG in particular.¹¹
9. A ubiquitous missional incarnational impulse among the believing student population embracing the “priesthood of all believers” and “ministry of the laity” desiring to serve missionally in diverse capacities within the culture at large.
10. An increase in degree expectation among employers for a baccalaureate education as a minimum standard for employment.

Challenges We Face

1. Lack of ethnic and gender diversity in the leadership personnel of the movement. A quick glance at the General Executive Presbytery of the AG reveals it is nearly all white and all male which does not represent a growing diversity within its constituency.¹²
2. Moribund ecclesiastical structures that perpetuate status quo instead of cultivating innovation, spontaneity, and flexibility in their approaches to serving constituencies.
3. Movement-wide anti-intellectual animus within Pentecostalism as a whole, suspicious of anything too cerebral or academic – thus the value of shutting off your mind to commune with the Spirit is widespread in the movement.¹³
4. A hermeneutics of suspicion within the youth culture we serve that “doesn’t trust anyone over 30.”
5. The idolatry of youth (incipient Ageism) that permeates American culture and universities as a whole – that disrespects the aged, the infirm, differently-abled individuals, and glorifies athleticism, sensuality, and competitive values.
6. An overall plateauing of U.S. Pentecostal church attendance /growth, etc. which serve as the primary “feeders” into our academies. While Pentecostal church growth is exponential in the Global South – this constituency does not have the resources to attend

¹¹ By far the largest increases in decadal growth by district in the AG from 2002-2012 has occurred in the Latin American/Hispanic districts. All U.S. Districts average 10.9% increase in Major Worship Attendance for that decade, Latin Districts averaged 65.7% growth for the same period, see *AG 2012 Full Statistical Report*, see: <http://agchurches.org/Sitefiles/Default/RSS/AG.org%20TOP/AG%20Statistical%20Reports/2012/2012%20Full%20Statistical%20Report.pdf>, (accessed June 14, 2014), 1-3.

¹² The number of female licensed ministers has grown from a low of 14% in 1982 to 22% ($n = 7,815$) in 2012, *Ibid.*, 88. But what percentage are senior pastors? The Southeastern student body in 2012 was 33% ethnic minority and 56% female, but the administrative leadership team remains all white and all male.

¹³ Kärkkäinen noted “there is a dearth of academically trained leadership among Pentecostals, not only in the Global South . . . but also in Europe and the U.S.A.” He notes in the AG in the U.S. that 55.6% had attended Bible College but only 41.3% had obtained a degree, see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “Epistemology, Ethos, and Environment”: In Search of a Theology of Pentecostal Theological Education” in *Pneuma*, no. 34(2012), 247. See also Rick M. Nañez, *Full Gospel: Fractured Minds* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) for a full scale critique of Pentecostalism’s pervasive anti-intellectual worldview.

U.S. academies who are struggling to develop the “extended” capacities to meet this tremendous need.¹⁴

7. The increased percentage of mega-churches who are more likely to develop their own competing academies rather than refer students to our existing institutions of higher learning.¹⁵
8. Resilience of the overarching “clerical paradigm” in our governmental structures for higher education (board and administrative structures that give undo primacy of place to “church” issues), neglecting the other significant domains of home, marketplace, and academy – are we “hybrid” Bible Colleges or true universities with genuine shared faculty governance.¹⁶
9. “Peter-principled” over-promotions within administrative and academic structures that result in a measure of “sanctified incompetence,” calcified systems permeated with nepotistic relationships, and stultifying inertia highly resistant to the kinds of exponential change that culture demands in order to remain viable in a tuition-driven marketplace.
10. Noticeable dumbing down of academic rigor in graduate degree expectations that ultimately lead to a depletion of academic capital in our institutions and a further denigration of academic outcomes among our student populations.¹⁷
11. Along with the previous is the potential abusive use of “contingent faculty” or adjuncts to cover classes so institutions can ‘save’ on hiring competent faculty: “overuse of adjuncts and their lowly status and compensation institutionalize disincentives to quality education, threaten academic freedom and shared governance, and disqualify the campus as an exemplar of democratic values.” Many of these instructors come from within the graduates of often dumbered-down programs in a sort of academically incestuous relationship that further depletes critical and diverse thinking within these academies.¹⁸
12. While technology allows for the delivery of educational information in many new and innovative formats, the temptation is to see that as a financially expedient replacement for

¹⁴ Data reveals that by 2012 the A.G. claimed over 66,400,000 adherents in some 362,800 churches worldwide, cf. *AG 2012 Full Statistical Report*, General Council Office of the Statistician, *op. cit.*, 26.

¹⁵ The most recent data shows 37.1% of AG churches are less than 50 in major worship service attendance, 65.4% are less than 100, and 84% are less than 200. Yet, fully 33.2% of all 1,880,269 U.S. adherents attend the 3% of churches that are 700+ in attendance, see *AG 2012 Full Statistical Report*, General Council Office of the Statistician, *op. cit.*, 18.

¹⁶ Robert Banks. *Reenvisioning Theological Education* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans), 61-64.

¹⁷ All one need do is a quick comparison across the board of what’s involved to obtain a Ph.D. in Theology in many of our institutions today with what was expected even 15 years ago for a seminary Ph.D.: Completion of 9 seminars with significant critical *mss.* submissions, proficiency in 5 languages, passing 5 comprehensive exams, and critical review by 3 renowned scholars in the field of a 90,000 word dissertation.

¹⁸ Richard Moser, “Overuse and Abuse of Adjunct Faculty Members Threaten Core Academic Values” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (January 13, 2014), <http://chronicle.com/article/OveruseAbuse-of-Adjuncts/143951/>, (accessed June 18, 2014).

the “important but difficult to measure impact of being in an actual classroom,” where human interacting, processing, and sharing of wisdom and insight is irreplaceable.¹⁹

13. The unwillingness of many of the leaders in Pentecostal education to encourage open dialogue about the potential dilemmas they face – as evidenced by all the tension in the room right now concerning my even noticing publicly the “elephant in the living room” so to speak. This unwillingness to openly engage in Spirit-led dialogue about our shortcomings may be the biggest single challenge we face in genuinely addressing them.

Potential External Threats

1. Economic realities that hinder student/parent involvement in higher education.²⁰
2. Persecution of Christians in non-Christian countries.
3. Government regulations that could impinge on non-profit status of educational institutions due to perceived bias in hiring and enrollment practices.²¹
4. The steady decline in actual academic rigor in curriculum content and venues to meet challenging financial hardship by making degree completion consistently easier in order to attract and retain student enrollment.²²
5. At the same time there is burgeoning demand for more and more collegiate education in the marketplace - there is a corresponding lessening of rigor in advanced degrees conferred.²³
6. Inadequate or declining enrollments for the majority of our institutions, because they are funded by tuition rather than endowment, place most of them at risk as they do not have adequate budgets to maintain sustainable institutional capacity and remain economically

¹⁹ Email from Dr. Steve Fettke, Southeastern University, June 14, 2014.

²⁰ Economists chart a 75% decline in home values in the U.S. between the 2nd Quarter of 2006 and the 1st Quarter of 2012, see “Reality Check: Our Interactive Guide to the U.S. Housing Market” at *The Economist*; <http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2014/02/us-house-prices>, (Accessed June 14th, 2014).

²¹ Pressure will continue on tax-exempt religious organizations as liability increases in the Employment Law area, where more and more of our institutions will be challenged of the “basis of several grounds, including race, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, **sexual orientation**, and the off-duty **use of lawful products** such as tobacco and alcohol,” see Richard R. Hammar, “Ten Legal Risks Facing Churches and Church Leaders” (emphasis mine) http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200401/200401_78_legalrisks.cfm, (Accessed Jun 14, 2015). This will become more of an issue in regard to not hiring avowed homosexuals and pot-users because the institution may not agree with their lifestyle, but the government condones it.

²² Witness the advent and popularity of so-called extended education learning models – online, blended, and hybrid deliveries. Also pressure from D.O.E. to reduce or limit baccalaureate concentrations to 120 credits or less.

²³ Witness the academic requirements of traditional Ph.D. vs. “professional” doctorates across the board.

viable.²⁴

7. Deteriorating facilities at some of our institutions demand more and more of operating budget for maintenance but enrollment numbers by and large are not on the increase because of many of the previous threats mentioned.
8. Potential local/national/global economic turmoil that impairs supporters/lenders from fulfilling lending commitments/support to our institutions when needed.²⁵

External Opportunities

1. Post-modern/emerging culture and the collapse of modernity's limited focus on all things empirical, denying the spiritual dimension altogether means more people are open to a move of the Spirit than ever before.
2. The mainstreaming of Pentecostalism – which is no longer considered strictly a “poor man's religion” or even cultic in nature, opens the door to the culture at large for the Pentecostal message and therefore a Pentecostal education.
3. Global Growth of Pentecostalism world-wide, especially in the A.G.,²⁶ provides tremendous opportunities for those institutions able to transition to reach the “global village” through digital learning and other extended education venues for training leaders. Growth opportunities for Pentecostal higher education within the non-Western world are expanding exponentially and yet are falling way short of fulfilling this tremendous need.
4. Building missional capacity in students by identifying and nurturing their missional-incarnational impulses will resonate with parents and students, enabling our institutions to fulfill their God-given role to extend the kingdom of God
5. Along with the previous is the opportunity for us to come alongside the work of the Holy Spirit in our young people whom is stirring up a desire in them to work in the area of compassion ministries and social justice concerns to help further the advancement of the

²⁴ Institutional researchers Martin and Samels note that conventional wisdom is that institutions that are primarily tuition-supported cannot maintain viability with enrollment of less than 1,000. They now claim that number is 2,500 due to harsh economic realities, see James Martin, James E Samels, and Associates, *Turnaround: Leading Stressed Colleges and Universities to Excellence* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 14. Of the 17 institutions named on the AG website, cf., note 10 above, only two can claim an FTE above their parameter, three more exceed 2,000 and another three exceed 1,000. If one accepts their premise for viability on enrollment alone, fully 11 of the 13 of AG schools (85%) are “fragile” and meet this “driver” for “a campus under stress,” Ibid., 4.

²⁵ Too many of our institutions are “fragile” in this respect - the at-risk driver of “short-term bridge financing required in the final quarter of each fiscal year,” see. Martin, Samels, & Associates, *op. cit.*, 13.

²⁶ Cf., note 13 above.

kingdom of God through our various academies.²⁷ This is part of our unique call as Pentecostals educators.

6. The use of collaborative campus-wide Spirit-led strategic decisioning could renew the vision and purpose of Pentecostal education across the globe.
7. A growing interest in the cultivation of Spirit-baptized intellectual capacities could invigorate scholarship support from churches and individual donors to encourage life-long learning in the Pentecostal tradition.
8. Hiring and supporting faculty that are credibly committed to the church, home & marketplace – beyond their academic pursuits, would bring a renewed dynamic to these domains as well as the academy.
9. The development of centers for life-long learning could bring a value-added (not only donor-related) capacity to our institutions providing partnership venue that would only invigorate donor and alumni relations.
10. Others that you can think of?

²⁷ Thanks to Dr. Robert Houlihan at Southeastern for this observation.