



# MORE THAN NOSTALGIA: A Pentecostal Inheritance

by George O. Wood and George P. Wood



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I recently came across an article by Dean Merrill titled “Five Faces of Pentecost.” He noted that approximately one out of every nine persons living today is Pentecostal, Charismatic or Neo-Charismatic.

However, this large movement has many faces, including retro, prosperity, hyper and nominal.

Merrill identifies Retro Pentecost as a church that still has the feel of 1962. Nothing much has changed. The people are blessed, but the outside world is largely untouched.

Prosperity Pentecost is what we too often see on Christian television—the flashing jewelry, “God wants you to be rich” message and out-sized personalities. The problem with that brand is it doesn’t work for most people despite their best wishes—and it certainly doesn’t work in the third world.

HyperPentecost involves keeping people jazzed up (my words, not his). It’s the proverbial church with the Jumbotron that says repeatedly, “Get louder, get louder!” This type of Pentecost is always looking for something new and keeps jumping



off the rails of scriptural doctrine and experience.

Nominal Pentecost is all too frequent. Pentecostal doctrine is still written into the church constitution, but basically the Acts 2:4 experience and focus on gifts of the Spirit are non-existent in practice.

These four faces of Pentecost could be considered our *heritage*, that is, the whole bag of what comes from our past. Our heritage includes many things I don’t want to repeat, and also many good things. But

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I’d rather reach back to the first Pentecostal church to find our *inheritance*.

The first Pentecostal church was embodied by what Merrill calls Authentic Pentecost. Merrill says that this fifth face of our movement is the kind of Pentecostal experience where the Spirit is clearly at work. An example given is that of a church Merrill attended in Amsterdam,



a church vibrant with a sense of the Spirit’s presence. He noticed on the wall behind the platform a large inscription, “Geef de Heilige Geest ruimte.” He inquired for the meaning and was told, “Give the Holy Spirit Room.”

My heart’s desire is for the Assemblies of God to be authentically Pentecostal.

During the Palin run for the vice-presidency, I received a number of calls from news reporters inquiring about the Assemblies of God. I tried to explain to them what Pentecostal means.

I used the analogy of the Sistine Chapel. About 30 years ago I was in Rome and went to see Michelangelo’s great fresco on the ceiling of the chapel. I came away disappointed, wondering why it was considered such a great work of art. The ceiling was dark, the result of centuries of burning candles that produced a thin layer of blackness.

Recently I revisited the Sistine Chapel. In the intervening years it had been cleaned, and now Michelangelo’s riot of color and detail blazed forth in all its glory. The ceiling must now look like the day he painted it.



That's what Pentecost is meant to do. Over the centuries, layers of church tradition, even coldness and apostasy have obscured the pure vitality, the living doctrine and experience of first-century believers. The idea of Pentecost is to remove the accretive smudge of theological and experiential smoke and junk that has obscured what the church was at its beginning.

At its very heart and soul, the modern-day Pentecostal outpouring was designed as a restoration movement—"Let's restore the church to what it was at the beginning in terms of its doctrine, mission and experience."

In the Old West, before fire stations and fire trucks, they had something called the bucket brigade. When a building caught fire, volunteers lined up from a source of water, such as a river, all the way to the fire. At the water source, a bucket was lowered, filled and passed to the next person until the last person threw it on the fire.

However, in transmission, sometimes water would slop out. What happens if the bucket reaches the last person and there is little or no water left? The fire takes over.

The Pentecostal Movement, in its ideal and authentic form,

is meant to throw a full bucket of apostolic doctrine, mission and experience into a world that is perishing. Sadly, a lot of water slopped out of the bucket over time.

The solution is not to throw away the bucket but to get back to the water source and keep the generational handoff going with full buckets all the way.

We can do that if we will continue to be a people of the Spirit.

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I recently became a father. George Reese Wood was born on Sunday, October 26, 2008. Before his birth we referred to him as G4 because he is the fourth "George Wood" in a row.

G1—George Roy Wood,  
born February 26, 1908

G2—George Oliver Wood,  
born September 1, 1941

G3—George Paul Wood,  
born May 8, 1969

G4—George Reese Wood,  
born October 26, 2008

As you can see, the four Georges have something in common—their first names. But their middle

names are different, giving them some individuality. Unlike G1–3, however, G4 doesn't go by the name George. He goes by Reese. His first name is his heritage. It doesn't exhaust who he is or how he is perceived by others.

I think about Pentecostalism in the same way. I am a third-generation AG minister. G1 was a pioneering missionary and small-church pastor. G2 was a large-church pastor and is a denominational leader. I am the pastor of a small turnaround church. The three of us share some things in common, including what my dad refers to above as "doctrine, mission and experience." But we also do things very differently from one another.

Some of our differences are methodological: suits versus Hawaiian shirts in the pulpit, organs versus drums in the song service, long altar calls versus response cards, etc.

Some of our differences are generational. In G1's generation the leadership model was command-and-control. Authority flowed from the top down. In my generation anyone with a blog can challenge authority, so authority has to be earned and then shared.



But some of our differences are substantial. G1 was trained in a fly-by-night Pentecostal Bible college. My dad attended an AG liberal arts college and then a non-Pentecostal seminary. I have never attended an AG school. These educational experiences shaped our outlooks on life. I am far more open to non-Pentecostal and non-evangelical forms of Christianity than would be my father or grandfather. I have more questions about Pentecostal doctrines than they did or do. And I get the feeling that many younger ministers have the same openness to other Christian traditions and questions about our own.

I like what my dad wrote about Pentecostalism as a restorationist movement. The question is, what are we restoring? I get the feeling

that some in the AG want to restore early 20th century Pentecostalism rather than first century Pentecostalism. In other words, they have confused biblical Pentecost with historical Pentecostalism. “The idea of Pentecost,” my dad writes, “is to remove the accretive smudge of theological and experiential smoke and junk that has obscured what the church was at its beginning.” AG Pentecostals should never think that we are guiltless of adding smudge, smoke and junk of our own. Unless we are constantly reforming ourselves according to the biblical pattern of faith and works, we’re not restoring anything but our own spiritual misconceptions.

But by the same token, we should be mindful that we can’t

just leap across the centuries from 21st century Pentecostalism to first century Pentecost. There are twenty centuries of Christians preceding us. We can learn from their example too. A greater commitment to doing what the Bible says doesn’t contradict a greater openness to learning from other Christian traditions.

Pentecostalism is my heritage, just like the name George. There are now four generations of George Woods in the AG. Without ever letting go of George, we should always make sure there’s still room for Reese.

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