

TXR-2082: History of Pentecostalism written assignment (3000 words)

Select a major character within the development of the Pentecostal or charismatic movements and write a critical assessment of his or her life and ministry

Introduction

This essay will examine and critique the life and ministry of John G Lake.

John G Lake was born in Ontario, Canada to a Scots' immigrant family on

March 18, 1870 but is chiefly remembered as an American missionary to

Africa and as an important figure in the American 'Healing Rooms' movement.

He lived until Sept 16, 1935 and died at the age of 65.

A Brief Description of His Life and Ministry

As a historical figure of Pentecost, he is particularly interesting as his life

spans the period that is generally considered to be the "heart"¹ of the

movement where its basic theology and uniquely Pentecostal practices and

distinctives were formulated. Lake was in some senses a missionary

representative of his time with a call and experience similar to George Mueller

and Hudson Taylor. He disposed of his fortune to be "absolutely dependent

on the Lord"² and ministered in a foreign country under the most extreme of

conditions experiencing hardship, persecution and the death of his wife from

¹ Land, Steven J., *Pentecostal Spirituality – A Passion for the Kingdom*, p26, Sheffield:2001.

² Liardon, Roberts, *John G Lake – The Complete Collection of His Life Teachings*, pxxii,

Tulsa:1999.

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malnutrition. He established two Pentecostal denominations in South Africa amongst both the native and Afrikaans settlers.

However, he was also very different in that he returned home after just five years to build a work that in many ways surpassed his work on the field. He was also very different in that he was actively involved in the political sphere, debated philosophically with some of the greatest minds of his time and was happy to attend séances and other religious gatherings to be examined both in beliefs and the practice of healing and deliverance. In vivid contrast to many Christians today, he saw the presence of foreign religions and alternative world views as an opportunity to prove that Christ was the real power of God evidenced by the manifestation of deliverance and healing.

Critiquing His Life, Ministry and Theology

Land's description of this period as the "heart" of Pentecostalism as opposed to "infancy" is important to Pentecostal scholars and for the purposes of critiquing Lake's life and ministry. Traditional or "orthodox" Pentecostal scholarship has a distinctively fundamentalist feel to it. A Christian fundamentalist will assert that the Church is to look towards the Early Church as a model and replicate its practises. Similarly, orthodox Pentecostal scholars see the lives, ministries, Churches and practices of early Pentecostal "fathers" as the standard against which Pentecostalism should be judged, their ministries emulated. In essence, the Church is not slowly evolving in practice and doctrine towards its eschatological end but is there already. The Pentecostal experience was the 'End Times' spirituality after the restoration of

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missing and forgotten foundations in the preceding centuries³. Later Pentecostal scholarship has tended to be more reflective and revisionist of its historical doctrines inherited from this period as the doctrine of an imminent *parousia* of Christ had proved increasingly difficult to sustain as the years rolled by and the intensity of their Pentecostal experience has waned.

One of the titles given to Lake by historians and scholars of the movement is 'A Man of Healing'⁴ and his theology of healing had a dramatic impact on the practice of early Pentecostals. His theology is revealed briefly in the following record of one of his sermons:

"Men received Jesus Christ...His love and power in them redeems them from sin *and* sickness...we are promised in His Word. Redemption from sin, sickness and death constitutes man's deliverance from bondage to Satan and his kingdom, and establishes the kingdom of heaven."⁵ (Italics mine)

His radical and uncompromising theology of healing as 'part of the atonement' has, in particular, come under close scrutiny by Pentecostal scholars and many now prefer the "Charismatic" model of healing as resident in the Spirit. Atonement deals with sin alone, healing is always a 'gift' of the Spirit and operates apart from the Atonement or, as proposed by Petts as a modern Pentecostal scholar, 'ultimately in the Atonement'⁶. The arguments proposed

³ Ibid., pp58-119.

⁴ Liardon, R., *God's Generals – Why They Succeeded and Why Some Failed*, pp169-193, 6th Edition, Tulsa: 1996.

⁵ Lake, John G., 'The Ministry of Healing and Miracles – Divine Healing is Scientific', p286, *John G Lake – His Life, His Sermons, His Boldness of Faith*, Kenneth Copeland Ministries, Fourth Edition, Fort Worth: 1995.

⁶ Petts, D., "Healing and the Atonement", pp34ff, EPTA Bulletin 12, 1993.

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by Petts are of particular interest when assessing Lake for one of the motivations of Petts, according to Kimberley was to “divest Pentecostal theology of aberrant theologies, such as those proposed by Hagin and Copeland...the Health and Wealth Gospel”⁷. Copeland and Liardon as “Health and Wealth” preachers, have been two of the ministries responsible for preserving and re-packaging the legacy of John G Lake⁸. In the ministry of Copeland in particular, there are very strong echoes, sometimes direct quotation, of principles and doctrine derived directly from Lake.

It must be said though that Petts’ view remains controversial, particularly beyond and even within, British Pentecostalism of whom he is an influential figure. However, the author would like to propose that the technical language of the arguments of today hides the obvious association of Lake that divine healing was associated with the release of the power of God⁹. It was an operation of the Spirit. Lake was a remarkably effective healer by any measure and it is his understanding of what he called the “science of divine healing” that should be of interest to both Pentecostals and Charismatics. Lake established personally trained “healing technicians” that ministered to

⁷ Kimberley, Ervin Alexander, *Pentecostal Healing- Models in Theory and Practice*, pp234-237, 1990.

⁸ See the bibliography. Both ministries had unprecedented access to the primary source material by direct arrangement with the family. Previously unpublished material was made available that more than quadrupled the published literature regarding the teaching of Lake.

⁹ Lake, John G., ‘The Ministry of Healing and Miracles – Divine Healing is Scientific’, pp285-289, *John G Lake – His Life, His Sermons, His Boldness of Faith*, Kenneth Copeland Ministries, Fourth Edition, Fort Worth: 1995.

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the sick within the Spokane Healing Rooms with a remarkable success rate with the most severest of conditions that were deemed medically untreatable. The city of Spokane in Washington where the Healing Rooms were situated was recognised by the United States government as the healthiest city in the nation. Lake himself seemed to consider a theological argument about healing unnecessary preferring rather the healing as a self-attesting witness to his theological standpoint:

“We do not preach divine healing. It is not worth while. We say to the sick people, ‘Come up on the platform and come and get it.’ Brother, one man healed in the sight of your audience beats all the sermons...in convincing proof in power of the Son of God and the reality of the power of the blood of Jesus.”¹⁰

The author would assert that much of the driver behind the debate within British Pentecostalism and Charismata about divine healing is a polemical dislike for all things American televangelist¹¹, rather than substantial theological differences. Any doctrine associated with a “blab-it and grab-it, name-it and claim-it, health and wealth” personality is dismissed out of hand rather than critically evaluated and adjusted according to the local context.

This is in direct contrast to the non-European Pentecostalism that has been much more ready to adapt and modify these “extreme” theologies. The current re-birth of the “Healing Rooms” movement in the United States in the

¹⁰ Alexander, Kimberley Ervin, *Pentecostal Healing – models in theory and practice*, p94, Norwich:2006.

¹¹ The so-called “Holy Wars” of the late 1980s that saw American televangelists jailed for fraud and discredited for sexual immorality did nothing to endear them to the already strained relationship with Pentecostalism this side of the Atlantic. However, ties of the ‘Prosperity Preachers’ with the American Pentecostals have remained much stronger.

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last decade is described by Poloma and clearly considers Lake as the 'grandfather of the healing rooms movement'¹² and that the current leader wears the "mantle"¹³ of Lake. However, the new movement 'does not share the disdain thatLake had for the medical profession'¹⁴.

This most unpalatable aspect of Lake's practice is clearly traced to his early training with Dowie in Zion where medical practitioners were banned from the city and those seeking divine healing were required to renounce their medication. The new Healing Rooms movement is much more appreciative and complimentary of medicine¹⁵ but nevertheless emphasises the superiority of divine healing over the practice of medicine¹⁶.

Dowie, Lake and a host of other Pentecostal fathers are open to the contemporary criticism of being heartless, insensitive and of having nothing to say to those whom are not healed. Lake is even quoted as referring to the "Pentecostal heathen" whom revert to medicine when they did not immediately receive their healing. However, Lake can only be fairly judged in

¹² Poloma, Margaret M., 'Old wine, New Wineskins: The Rise of Healing Rooms in Revival Pentecostalism', p61, *Pneuma*, Volume 28, No.1, Spring 2006.

¹³ Ibid, p63.

¹⁴ Ibid, p66.

¹⁵ Orall Roberts, a televangelist highly influential in the post war healing revivals in the United States and founder of a University and hospital, is credited with rehabilitating the medical profession with this simple view that divine healing and medicine can be complimentary according to the individual's faith.

¹⁶ Poloma, op.cit., p66.

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this regard when he is considered in the context of his time. Lake describes his experience with medicine:

“In my youth I took a course [a medical degree] in medicine. I never practiced medicine for I abandoned the whole subject a few months before the time of my graduation, when it came to the place where diagnosis became the general subject for examination. It was then that I discovered that the whole subject of diagnosis was very largely a matter of guesswork, and so it remains..”¹⁷

Medicine was far less advanced today than it was then. Lake was an extremely intellectually aggressive man with considerable skills in the scientific disciplines of Chemistry and Electricity. Examples of his recorded sermons show a description in the empirical tradition of the process of healing. He considered divine healing as “spiritual science” that was far superior to “natural science”.

On occasions he encouraged scientists to attach instruments to legs before he prayed for them so that the tangible effects of the operation of God’s power could be seen. One of the most dramatic examples was when he was ministering during the plague epidemic in South Africa where the victims would die with a bloody froth at the mouth. A team of British scientists had been sent to investigate why Lake and his fellow workers had not fallen ill.

Lake took a microscope slide and scooped some of the froth from a victim and asked the doctor to observe it until a microscope. It was teeming with the live bacteria. He then put the foam on his hands and asked the doctor to look at

¹⁷ Lake, John G., ‘Science of Healing’, pp303-315, *John G Lake – His Life, His Sermons, His Boldness of Faith*, Kenneth Copeland Ministries, Fourth Edition, Fort Worth: 1995.

the slide a second time. To his astonishment, the bacteria had died¹⁸. Lake describes this event in the following way making an explicit theological connection between the continuing work of Christ through the Holy Spirit:

“Brother, it is the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus. I believe that as long as I keep my soul in contact with the living God so that His Spirit is flowing into my soul and body...no germ will attach itself to me, for the Spirit of God will kill it.”¹⁹

However, it is an injustice to consider Lake simply as a “healing evangelist”.

The breadth of subjects addressed by Lake in his writings and his legacy of two Pentecostal denominations in South Africa, lends credence to Lindsay’s description of him as ‘apostle’²⁰. Lake was not like some of the latter post 2nd World war “healing evangelists” that had a very narrow focus on the miraculous and healing which later led to doctrinal errors and apostate ministries. Land describes five distinctives of Pentecostal spirituality:

1. Justification by faith in Christ;
2. Sanctification by faith as a second definite work of grace;
3. Healing of the body as provided for all in the atonement;
4. The pre-millennial return of Christ;
5. The baptism of the Holy Spirit evidenced by speaking in tongues.²¹

With the exception of 4, a review of Lake’s teachings such as conducted by Liardon²² shows extensive attention to each of these areas. Lake clearly had

¹⁸ Liardon, *God’s Generals*, p182-183.

¹⁹ Lindsay, Gordon (Ed), ‘John G Lake Sermons on Dominion Over Demons, Disease and Death’, p108, Dallas:1988.

²⁰ Lindsay, Gordon, *John G Lake – Apostle to Africa*, pp16-34, Dallas: 2004.

²¹ Land, op.cit, p18.

²² Liardon, Roberts, *John G Lake – The Complete Collection of His Life Teachings*, Tulsa:1999.

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a developed theological perspective that was rooted in the Wesleyan-Holiness antecedents but encompassed a radical new pneumatological dimension.

The previous treatment of Lake's life and ministry is essentially a spiritual one and is common in the treatment by Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic historians or commentators. Lake is undoubtedly a major inspiration or irritation to be dismissed as extreme. However, there is a more controversial aspect to Lake's ministry and that was particularly connected with his ministry in Africa. It is also an issue with which Pentecostalism has and still is struggling with.

The issue is race and white supremacy. Although an issue within the United States context it was a far more serious problem in South Africa. Lake's ministry predated the apartheid era but race was already a major issue both politically and practically within the society and the Church. Lake is cited both as the proclaimer of a 'non-racial historical Pentecostal gospel'²³ and as the father of segregation policy in South Africa²⁴. A fair treatment of the evidence, such as undertaken by Horn within the South African context, reports that 'Lake did not conduct segregated meetings. He started his ministry in a black Zionist church...At the second meeting, the first whites attended.'²⁵ Lindsay

²³ Burton, W., *When God Makes a Pastor*, p30, London:1934.

²⁴ Burger, I., *Geloofsgeskiedenis van die apostoliese geloofsending van Suid-Afrika 1908-1958*, p173, Johannesburg:1987.

²⁵ Horn, Dr Nico, 'Crossing Racial Borders in Southern Africa: A Lesson From History', p4, *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research*, June 1991.

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describes a native pastor and evangelist called Elias Letwaba as ‘the man who carried on the work’²⁶. Lake is reported as putting his arm round Letwaba and calling him ‘my brother’ as white men within the audience were screaming abuse and announcing:

‘My friends, God has made of one blood all nations of men! If you don’t want to acknowledge them as your brothers, then you’ll have the mortification of going away into eternal woe, while you see many of these black folk going to eternal bliss...’²⁷

As the intensity of the opposition increased Lake announced with his hand still on Letwaba’s shoulder, ‘I will stand with my black brethren.’²⁸ This made a radical impression on Letwaba whom became a member of Lake’s team and pioneered the Patmos Bible School to train men and women. Letwaba added a deep understanding of the African psyche and understood that teaching was necessary to counter the tendency for extreme and unscriptural religious practices. It is perhaps with this last point that Lake was most vulnerable to criticism.

In common with many white people of the era he is accused of being paternalistic towards non-Whites. He clearly had influence and contact with the Boer party and was instrumental in framing a racial policy. Horn concludes:

“Lake was paternalistic, and possibly even a proponent of political segregation, but he was not a racist...Lake complained that the Afrikaner has, like the Southerner, a strong prejudice against blacks, but...that God was changing the hearts of many white workers.”²⁹

²⁶ Lindsay, G, op.cit, p41.

²⁷ Ibid, p43.

²⁸ Ibid, p44.

²⁹ Horn, op.cit, p4.

Lake was dealing with a particularly difficult situation as a foreigner and some South African analysts consider he adopted a 'practical'³⁰ position of creating separate white and native Pentecostal denominations to facilitate the wider goal of evangelisation. In the following decades after Lake's return to the United States in 1913 up to April 1943 the Apostolic Faith Mission remained committed to an aggressive anti-racist stance under the tutelage of Lake's fellow-worker and successor Pierre Le Roux. However, this opposition was distinctly theological in character and was not supported by political action³¹. However, this again may have been a reflection of Lake's respect for the internal politics of the nation rather than his indifference to the race issue. Lake is commended for being aware that he was an American in a foreign country and was much more vocal in his comments about American politics and policy³².

Conclusion

This essay has sought to present a realistic portrayal of a man that may be said to have iconic standing within certain sections of Pentecostalism and consequently a rather skewed interpretation of his life and ministry. They

³⁰ De Wet, C. , *The Apostolic Faith Mission in South Africa*, p158, University of Cape Town:1989.

³¹ Horn, op.cit, p7.

³² Clark, M., 'God's Showman: A Historical Study of John G Lake and South African/American Pentecostalism', p181, *Pneuma*, Volume 27, No.1, Spring 2005.

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have emphasised his spirituality at the expense of his remarkable intellectual stature and organisational abilities.

Many studies of Lake have failed to consider his wider engagement with the African political context, particularly when considered against his high profile involvement with the leaders of both his native and mission governments.

With this additional dimension, it has been shown there was a man whom was able to leave behind a legacy of 125 white congregations and 500 native ones and established two Pentecostal denominations. Although there were particular problems with racism in the apartheid era, the denominations are still active today, standing as a testimony to the foundation he lay in those he taught and appointed as his successors.

Lake has been shown to have been able to work within a variety of contexts and was as equally as successful in his native country as he was as a missionary. Lake remains an outstanding example of a man of Christian dominion whom had a thoroughly Lutheran view of the work of Christ, a Wesleyan background of holiness teaching and the classical Pentecostal theological framework. If the proof of pudding is in the eating, rather than in the theological ingredients or lack thereof, he is a commendable example of a man that maintained his integrity amidst great personal success.

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