

The FTL, Pentecostal Theology, and the Academy in Brazil

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Introduction

We prefer to use the term *Pentecostalism*s, in plural, to emphasize the diversity of Pentecostal expressions observable in the Brazilian context. There are Arminian Pentecostals (such as the Assemblies of God, with more than ten million members in Brazil), Calvinist Pentecostals (like the Christian Congregation of Brazil, with over two million members); there are Trinitarian as well as Oneness Pentecostals (“Jesus Only”).¹ Pentecostal modes of

1. Walter Hollenweger states that half of the worldwide Pentecostal population does not believe in the Trinity (and are therefore Oneness Pentecostals). Walter Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals: The Charismatic Movement in the Churches* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972).

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government vary from democratic forms of congregational participation to more concentrated structures with strict hierarchy and even a sort of “privatization” by certain individuals or families. The Pentecostal movement is not restricted to denominations that use such nomenclature in their official names. Therefore, the Pentecostalisms present in Brazil today cannot be identified merely through denominations. They are part of a religious phenomenon that, in broad strokes, is not new. The search for a direct connection with God through mystic means, for reliving the early days of the church, and for engaging all the senses in living out the Christian faith has been a mark of different groups throughout the history of Christianity.

Some characteristics of modern Pentecostalisms show up at the very beginning of church history and have been present ever since. Characteristics can be traced, for example, through the church

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during biblical times, radical second-century Montanist spirituality, desert spirituality (Eastern), medieval Catholic mysticism, Ignatian spiritual exercises, spiritualists (“enthusiasts”) of the radical Reformation, the British and North American awakenings, and the Holiness movement. The indigenous imagination and African, Muslim, and other religious practices also reflect some of the same characteristics. In other words, there has been no quantum leap from New Testament times to the current day as if the events of Azusa Street in Los Angeles, California at the beginning of the twentieth century were something completely new. On the contrary, the diverse spiritual or “enthusiastic” manifestations throughout church history demonstrate that the search for direct experience with

the divine has been a catalyst of new expressions and modes of Christian faith.

As the Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana (FTL, Latin American Theological Fellowship), as a fellowship that seeks to reflect