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A Subject Analysis of Pentecostalism in the Dewey Decimal Classification System

Abstract. Suggestions for classifying works on the subject of Pentecostalism in the most recent edition of the Dewey Decimal Classification System reveal a number of existing definitional and historical errors that could cause confusion for cataloguers as well as diminish access to works on Pentecostalism for users of libraries that rely on the Dewey Decimal Classification System. In the following article, I identify the sources of these errors, offer suggestions to remedy them, and argue for the importance of regular consultation between librarians and subject specialists in order to maintain both the accuracy and social responsibility of a classification scheme.

Keywords: Dewey Decimal Classification, classification, subject headings, Pentecostalism, religious studies.

Introduction

The most recent edition of the Dewey Decimal Classification System (hereafter, DDC 23) provides five suggestions for classifying works on the subject of Pentecostalism. Biographies of Pentecostal individuals should be classified in 289.940 92, those works specifically addressing Pentecostalism as a branch of the larger Protestant tradition in 280.4, and works regarding what DDC 23 describes as “Pentecostal churches” in 289.94. Finally, what are described as “comprehensive works on evangelicalism, fundamentalism, pentecostalism, [and the] charismatic movement” concerning the historical period 1900–1999 should be classified in 270.82, and works on the same subjects concerning the historical period 2000 and later, in 270.83¹.

¹ Melvil Dewey, *Dewey Decimal Classification and Relative Index*, ed. Joan S. Mitchell et al. (Dublin, OH: OCLC, 2011), 2:248; 4:643.

For a religious studies scholar – and particularly a sociologist of religion who specializes in the study of Pentecostalism – these suggestions raise a number of concerns including: (1) the precision of the vocabulary used to refer to religious organizations in 289.94 and 270.82, (2) the implications of restricting the origins of Pentecostalism to the twentieth century reflected in 270.82, and (3) the sweeping decision to group the certainly related, although historically and phenomenologically distinct, religious traditions of Evangelicalism, Pentecostalism, Fundamentalism, and the Charismatic movement together as primarily twentieth century phenomena represented in 270.82.

Below, I elucidate in greater detail the problems that DDC 23's use of vocabulary from the discipline of religious studies and the historical parameters that it places on certain religious traditions might cause for both cataloguing and accessing works on Pentecostalism, as well as offer possible solutions to these problems that will allow DDC 23 to remain an effective tool for organizing and discovering works on what is the world's fastest growing religious tradition².

Treatment of Religious Organizations in 289.94 and 270.82

How DDC 23 understands the terms “churches” and “independent denominations” is not entirely clear. Generally, scholars of religion use the term “church” to refer to a locally situated group of religious adherents, or, sometimes more specifically, the physical building that this group worships in. They also use the term “denomination” to refer to a formal association made between two or more churches³. More precise are sociologists of religion who use the term “congregation” instead of church in order to make clear when they are referring to a locally situated group of religious adherents rather than to either a denomination or a sociological category of religious organization used by sociologists, both of which might possibly be erroneously inferred by the use of the term “church”⁴.

² Douglas Jacobsen, *The World's Christians: Who they are, Where they are, and How they got there* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 354.

³ Nancy T. Ammerman, “Congregations: Local, Social, and Religious,” in *The Oxford Handbook of The Sociology of Religion*, ed. Peter B. Clarke (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 562.

⁴ Lorne L. Dawson, “Church-Sect-Cult: Constructing Typologies of Religious Groups,” in *The Oxford Handbook of The Sociology of Religion*, ed. Peter B. Clarke (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 526–30.

In a note under 289.94, DDC 23 uses two large American Pentecostal denominations – the Assemblies of God and the United Pentecostal Church – as examples of what they call, “pentecostal churches”⁵. As the definitions given above make clear, to a student or scholar of religion, the phrase “pentecostal churches” describes more than one locally situated group of religious adherents, that is, a plurality of individual Pentecostal congregations that may or may not in themselves comprise a denomination. DDC 23, however, instead uses this phrase to refer to Pentecostal denominations, which can be clearly inferred from the use of the Assemblies of God and the United Pentecostal Church as examples of what they mean by “pentecostal churches.” This usage not only represents a conflation of the terms “church” and “denomination” that belies an unfamiliarity with basic religious studies terminology that would be expected of a second-year undergraduate student within the discipline, but also the poor decision to use an ambiguous term (church) when a much more precise term (congregation) was available. The editors of the next edition of DDC 23 should incorporate this use of the term congregation in favor of church in order to avoid confusion for cataloguers and improve the organization of works on Pentecostalism for users.

Another note under 270.82 explains: “class pentecostal churches that are independent denominations in 289.94”⁶. This note is confusing on multiple levels. Is it referring to individual Pentecostal congregations that are formally constituted as their own denominations (that is, a single congregation that is simultaneously organized as a denomination), or groups of Pentecostal churches (in other words, denominations) that are independent from one another? If DDC 23 intends the first meaning, this is problematic since, by definition, a denomination requires more than one congregation in order to exist. If it intends the second meaning, it is equally as problematic since the term “independent denomination” carries no meaning; all denominations are, by definition, independent of one another. Learning from the inherent logic of the vocabulary used throughout DDC 23 in reference to Pentecostalism, it seems likely that what is meant here is simply, Pentecostal denominations.

A note under 270.82, for instance, reveals that works regarding the existence of Pentecostal-like phenomena within congregations affiliated with non-Pentecostal denominations (referred to within religious studies as Charismatic congregations) should be classified under the heading of

⁵ Dewey, *Dewey Decimal Classification and Relative Index*, 2:272.

⁶ *Ibidem*, 2:248.

that particular denomination, and not Pentecostalism⁷. This means that the phrase “class pentecostal churches that are independent denominations in 289.94” must refer to works specifically regarding Pentecostal denominations – and, presumably, to congregations within these denominations – but not works regarding, for instance, Roman Catholic congregations that manifest Pentecost-like phenomena. This confusion could be largely resolved by modifying the note to read: “class Pentecostal denominations and their congregations in 289.94; for Charismatic congregations in non-Pentecostal denominations, class under a specific denomination, e.g., Roman Catholicism 282.”

Pentecostal Origins in 270.82

DDC 23 also suggests classifying what it calls “comprehensive works on evangelicalism, fundamentalism, pentecostalism, [and the] charismatic movement” concerning the historical period 1900–1999 in 270.82, and works on the same subjects concerning the historical period 2000 and later, in 270.83⁸. What is immediately alarming here is the restriction of Pentecostal origins to no earlier than 1900. Although many scholars and adherents of Pentecostalism, particularly in the United States, purport that Pentecostalism originated in the United States usually somewhere between 1900 and 1906⁹, this view is strongly contested by both scholars and adherents of Pentecostalism outside of the United States who recognize multiple points of origination – or at least foundational antecedents – both within and without the United States, several of which predate 1900¹⁰.

Forcing works on Pentecostalism to be classified according to this historical scheme is not only ahistorical, but also serves to perpetuate an Americentric bias within the field sharing close associations with early twentieth century American racism and imperialism that serves to marginalize the experiences of the vast majority of Pentecostals that reside outside of the United States. This ideological remnant could be easily eliminated by simply broadening the historical period covered by 270.82.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ Cecil M. Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006).

¹⁰ Adam Stewart, “From Monogenesis to Polygenesis in Pentecostal Origins: A Survey of the Evidence from the Azusa Street, Hebden, and Mukti Missions,” *PentecoStudies* 13, no. 2 (2014): 151–72.

Evangelicalism, Fundamentalism, Pentecostalism, and the Charismatic movement in 270.82

The classification of Evangelicalism, Fundamentalism, Pentecostalism, and the Charismatic movement under a common heading in 270.82 is extremely historically problematic. Pentecostalism and Fundamentalism are frequently considered to be narrower segments of the much broader Evangelical movement, however, the Charismatic movement is not, given that it is a religious movement with roots in various Protestant as well as non-Protestant Christian denominations. Considering the Charismatic movement's close association with Pentecostalism, however, seems to be sufficient reason for maintaining the affiliation of these four religious movements in 270.82 and 270.83.

A more substantive justification for challenging the grouping of these four traditions under the same heading in 270.82 can be based on the particular historical parameters given to the heading, especially considering that the organizing principle used in 270 is historical and not phenomenological, and so one would expect it to be at least approximately historically accurate. Scholars of religion generally agree that Christian Fundamentalism did not emerge as a distinct tradition until sometime between 1910 and 1920¹¹ and that the Charismatic movement did not begin in earnest until the 1960s¹², maintaining the integrity of the 1900–1999 time period imposed here. As already discussed, however, the precise origins of Pentecostalism are strongly contested, and, more importantly, it is nearly universally agreed that Evangelicalism originated in the 1730s with the beginning of the Methodist tradition in England and the Connecticut River Valley Revival in New England¹³. This would require not only classifying works relating to Pentecostalism originating in the late nineteenth century, but also those regarding Evangelicalism as early as the 1730s such as Jonathan Edwards's famous, *Faithful Narrative*, published in 1737 under a heading that DDC 23 claims is relevant to subjects no earlier than 1900¹⁴. It is somewhat ironic that a later version of

¹¹ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹² Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 157.

¹³ Mark Hutchinson and John Wolffe, *A Short History of Global Evangelicalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 25.

¹⁴ Jonathan Edwards, *A Faith Narrative of the surprising work of God in the conversion of many hundred souls in Northampton* (London: Oswald, 1737).

Melvil Dewey's classification scheme would do such an historical disservice to Evangelicalism given that Dewey was himself an Evangelical well acquainted with the tradition's early history who, very likely, would not have committed such fundamental oversights¹⁵.

Conclusion

The precision of the vocabulary used to refer to religious organizations in 289.94 and 270.82 and the decision to group Evangelicalism, Pentecostalism, Fundamentalism, and the Charismatic movement together under a single heading restricted to events occurring no earlier than 1900, demonstrate a lack of rudimentary definitional and historical knowledge in the field of religious studies on the part of DDC 23 editors. Furthermore, the decision to restrict the origins of Pentecostalism to the twentieth century shows a lack of awareness of contemporary scholarly developments regarding an increasingly significant global religious tradition, which, albeit unintentionally, promotes an ahistorical perspective that is rooted in early twentieth century American racism and imperialism. By slightly modifying the vocabulary used to describe Pentecostalism and expanding the historical range in 270.82, however, these errors could be entirely resolved.

Despite the problems regarding how DDC 23 classifies and describes Pentecostalism, an examination of the OPAC at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library – the largest library in the United States using DDC 23 – revealed that the library's holdings on Pentecostalism were relatively easy to find and browse¹⁶. DDC 23 is largely successful at providing a scheme in which works on Pentecostalism can be reliably found and accessed, however, both the cataloguing of and access to these works could be significantly improved by implementing the changes noted above.

Dewey himself was acutely aware that the headings in his classification scheme would not always precisely represent all of the works contained therein. He wrote in the first edition of his *Classification and Subject Index*: "In the naming of headings, brevity has been secured in many cases at the sacrifice of exactness. It was thought more important to have short, familiar titles for the headings than that the names should express with

¹⁵ Wayne A. Wiegand, *Irrepressible Reformer: A Biography of Melvil Dewey* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1996), 3–13.

¹⁶ "University Library," University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, accessed October 6, 2016, <http://www.library.illinois.edu/>.

fullness and exactness the character of all books catalogued under them"¹⁷. It is entirely reasonable to expect that there will exist some degree of discontinuity between headings and the works classified under these headings in a scheme attempting to classify all of human knowledge. This, however, is hardly reason to abandon the use DDC 23. Furthermore, the most egregious errors – particularly those that serve to perpetuate a discriminatory or ethnocentric ideology as in the case of the origins of Pentecostalism – can largely, if not entirely, be ameliorated with more frequent consultation between librarians and subject specialists prior to the regular revision of the classification scheme.

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¹⁷ Melvil Dewey, *A Classification and Subject Index for Cataloguing and Arranging the Books and Pamphlets of a Library* (Amherst: n.p., 1876), 5.

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Analiza tematyczna ruchu zielonoświątkowego w ujęciu klasyfikacji dziesiętnej Deweya (KDD)

Streszczenie. Propozycje klasyfikacji dzieł dotyczących zagadnień ruchu zielonoświątkowego w najnowszym wydaniu klasyfikacji dziesiętnej Deweya (KDD) ujawniają wiele błędów w definicjach i historycznych pomyłek, które mogą wprowadzić spore zamieszanie przy ich katalogowaniu, jak również zmniejszyć możliwości dotarcia do odpowiednich dzieł poświęconych pentekostalizmowi tym użytkownikom bibliotek, którzy w swoich poszukiwaniach posługują się układem KDD. Artykuł identyfikuje źródła tych błędów, proponuje sposoby naprawcze i uzasadnia znaczenie regularnej współpracy między bibliotekarzami a specjalistami dziedzinowymi w celu zachowania maksymalnej precyzyjności systemu klasyfikacji zbiorów bibliotecznych i towarzyszącej mu odpowiedzialności społecznej.

Słowa kluczowe: klasyfikacja dziesiętna Deweya (KDD), klasyfikacja, hasła przedmiotowe, ruch zielonoświątkowy, studia religioznawcze.