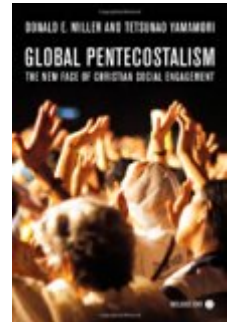


Donald E. Miller, Tetsunao Yamamori. *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. x + 261 pp. \$25.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-520-25194-6.



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“Knowing the Pentecostals has enriched and changed my life. Whatever your religious views, or lack of them, seeing people live their faith in a spirit of love toward all people, not just their own, is beautiful to behold. If you ever get a chance to go to a Pentecostal service, don’t miss it,” writes President Bill Clinton in his memoirs.[1] Those who have never had an opportunity to attend such a service can read *Global Pentecostalism* and watch the DVD accompanying the book instead, to learn about what is one of the most intriguing and fastest growing religious movements of our time. Donald E. Miller, professor of religion and executive director of the Center for Religion and Civic Culture at the University of Southern California, and Tetsunao Yamamori, president emeritus of Food for the Hungry International, visited dozens of carefully selected Pentecostal congregations in twenty different countries on four different continents during a four-year period to research various forms of Pentecostalism, focusing especially on churches engaged in effective social ministry. The result of this arduous un-

dertaking is this insightful and elegantly written book, which will undoubtedly be of interest to social scientists, theologians, and religious practitioners.

During the last one hundred years, Pentecostals have been effectively confronting the long enduring problem of *Geistvergesenheit* (forgetfulness of the Holy Spirit). Today, they are recognized largely for their evangelistic fervor, dynamic worship, and emphasis on building a potent Christian community, but to a significantly lesser degree for their engagement in holistic social ministry. For instance, the *raison d’être* of the Assemblies of God, the largest Pentecostal denomination in the world, is “evangelizing the lost,” “worshiping God,” and “disciplining believers.” These three basic missiological categories, found in article 10 (The Church and Its Mission) and article 11 (The Ministry) of the sixteen “non-negotiable” tenets of their faith, have guided the praxis of the Assemblies of God and also a great number of other Pentecostal churches. But theologically and historical-

ly speaking, one may argue, there is one important missiological category absent, social ministry (*diakonia*), which has been historically understood by Christians as one of the most essential aspects of the church's mission. Unsurprisingly, this omission in Pentecostal orthodoxy has resulted in a somewhat truncated orthopraxy. *Global Pentecostalism* demonstrates, inter alia, that there has been an increasingly growing number of Pentecostals who have made a note about this serious disregard in their own faith tradition, and now embrace social engagement as an indispensable part of their Christian calling and holistic mission of the Christian church.

Miller and Yamamori name this new movement the "Progressive Pentecostals," whom they define as "Christians who claim to be inspired by the Holy Spirit and the life of Jesus and seek to holistically address the spiritual, physical, and social needs of the people in their community" (pp. 2, 212). These progressive churches have not abandoned their accent on evangelism, but embracing holistic theology, they believe that proclaiming the "good news" and performing the "good deeds" are both an integral part of the mission of the church. This is, the writers believe, one of the signs of the movement's maturation process.

In the introduction, Miller and Yamamori present the basic thesis of the book, arguing that "some of the most innovative social programs in the world are being initiated by fast-growing Pentecostal churches" (p. 6). They attempt to understand the Pentecostal movement through a phenomenological lens and are, in the process, guided by Jamesian pragmatism, which is, in my judgment, a particularly useful methodology for studying this religious movement from a social scientific perspective. Their semi-journalistic style of writing freely intermingled in the text and riveting storytelling with rigorous scholarship is engaging and refreshing.

The first chapter, "Global Pentecostalism," briefly discusses the emergence and subsequent growth of Pentecostalism, which is now estimated between 250 million and 500 million adherents, the majority of whom are located in the developing countries, which Miller and Yamamori traversed (e.g., Argentina, Brazil, China, Kenya, and the Philippines). The authors cogently challenge some basic misconceptions about Pentecostalism, suggest the reasons for its rapid growth, and adumbrate different types and strains of Pentecostalism, correctly recognizing that Pentecostalism is not a monolithic movement. They are especially interested in the aforementioned Progressive Pentecostalism, a movement emerging in the 1990s, which consists of socially conscious Pentecostal believers, engaged in the work of social transformation.

The second chapter, "Progressive Pentecostals," is dedicated to this particular strain of Pentecostalism. On my reading, this is the heart of the book. The authors first describe manifold social ministries in which Progressive Pentecostals have been engaged, categorizing them as follows: mercy ministries (providing food, clothing, and shelter), emergency services (responding to floods, famine, and earthquakes), education (providing day care, schools, and tuition assistance), counseling services (helping with addiction, divorce, and depression), medical assistance (establishing health clinics, dental clinics, and psychological services), economic development (providing microenterprise loans, job training, and affordable housing), the arts (offering training in music, dance, and drama), and policy change (opposing corruption, monitoring elections, and advocating a living wage) (pp. 42-43). The authors observed that although Pentecostals often focus their efforts primarily on the relief aspect of social ministry, an increasingly greater number of them are coming to a realization that social *diakonia* must go beyond providing social services, which can often have unintended negative conse-

quences for indigent people. They now focus their efforts on individual and even community development as well, sometimes in cooperation with both government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Nevertheless, this is a minority report, and the question still remains: whether or not Progressive Pentecostals will be able to move beyond providing primarily social services and social education and fully embrace the importance of social development and social justice.

Although Pentecostalism is a complex religious movement, it is safe to say that historically speaking, the majority of Pentecostals have held that social ministries should be done with a purpose of proselytizing.[2] But Miller and Yamamori report that to a great number of Progressive Pentecostals, “offering services with an ulterior motive: namely, providing food or shelter only after recipients listen to a sermon or some other presentation encouraging conversion,” seemed contrary to their convictions (p. 43). One example is their visit to the Resurrection 2000 church in Santiago, Chile, where the authors observed that during a lunch program there were no strings attached to providing social services. Readers are told that Progressive Pentecostals are primarily motivated to engage in social ministry by religious factors, namely, Christ’s own example of compassionately serving the needy and his command “to *love one’s neighbor* as oneself.”

The following two chapters, written with a journalistic flavor, describe a plethora of Pentecostal churches that are involved in various social programs. Chapter 3, “Building a New Generation,” focuses on congregations that serve the needs of those most vulnerable, children and youth, in Uganda, Kenya, India, South Africa, Egypt, Venezuela, Argentina, Singapore, and the Philippines. The churches visited were involved in providing homes for orphans, running drug rehabilitation programs, operating schools, providing vocational training, and even founding a hospital and child advocacy efforts. In chapter 4,

“Practicing the Faith,” one can read some more compelling stories from Hong Kong, Poland, Argentina, Thailand, Kenya, Brazil, etc., where the authors encountered Christian organizations involved in offering drug rehabilitation programs and prison ministry, serving the mentally ill, caring for abandoned HIV-positive babies and people with AIDS, operating medical clinics, and engaging in other social ministries.

Miller and Yamamori observed that “the emerging rhetoric heard in Progressive Pentecostal churches is that it is better to teach someone how to fish rather than simply give them a fish to eat” (p. 123). As a result, some churches had decided to partner with NGOs to bring a positive long-term change into their community through various forms of economic development. In other words, they not only “give out the fish” (social services), but also “teach how to fish” (social education), and assist in helping those in need “to make a fishing rod” (social development) (pp.123-124). In general, due to complex theological reasons, which the authors do not discuss in detail, Pentecostals in the developing world have been quite reluctant in getting involved in the realm of politics and thus bringing structural change resulting in societal transformation. Expanding on the fish metaphor, indigent people often remain hungry not because they do not know how to fish or they do not have a fishing rod, but because they do not have “access to the lake” or can only access the parts of the lake where there is not a sufficient number of fish. Nevertheless, Progressive Pentecostals had directly confronted social injustices, though only in a few isolated instances.

The following, “Encounters with the Holy,” could be viewed, according to the authors, as “the lead chapter of the book, since we believe that the root of Pentecostal social engagement is the experience of collective worship” (p. 132). Through communal worship and earnest prayer, Pentecostals claim to be personally transformed and

empowered by the Holy Spirit for the work of service. After carefully studying the structure and content of Pentecostal worship, Miller (“a liberal Episcopalian of long standing”) and Yamamori (“a noncharismatic evangelical”) express some doubt that the Pentecostal resurgence and energetic service can be explained exclusively in rationalistic terms. However, they are careful not to make any theological claims, operating in the field of social science, while at the same time acknowledging the limits of human capacity to fully comprehend a religious phenomenon. They write: “while some Pentecostal experiences lend themselves quite nicely to functional explanations, it often seems like one is running up against a wall in trying to understand people’s deeper motivations by simply appealing to rational choice models, deprivation theories, and the like. Perhaps some of the time, and for some people, there is “something more” at play in their experience” (pp. 158-159). The authors revisit this theme in the final chapter, in which they identify “something more” with the “S” (“Spirit”) factor.

In chapter six, “Born in the Image of God,” the authors, by critically engaging Max Weber’s argument presented in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2002; German, 1905; English, 1930), contemplate the relationship between Pentecostal conversion and upward social mobility they witnessed in various places they visited. They discuss seven different factors, which in their view contribute to the individual economic progress of Pentecostals, all of which are in one way or the other related to a transformed life subsequent to the conversion experience the vast majority of Pentecostals claim to have. However, far from being triumphalistic about the virtues of Pentecostalism, they also make a note of some of its anomalous expressions, such as the Prosperity Gospel. Furthermore, they correctly discern that “an important element of the Judeo-Christian tradition—namely, the biblical emphasis on social jus-

tice,” is rarely taken into consideration by Pentecostals (p. 183).

The following chapter, “Organizing the Saints,” describes the organizational dynamics that lie underneath the explosive growth of Pentecostalism. The organizational structure of a successful Pentecostal congregation includes such features as charismatic pastoral leadership, who deem their primary responsibility to empower believers for Christian service; cell groups intended to nurture Christian fellowship and maintain church growth; a strategy of church planting; and an emphasis on self-sufficiency.

In their eighth and final chapter, “The Future of Progressive Pentecostalism,” the authors sum up the argument of the book and cautiously prognosticate the future of Progressive Pentecostalism. Especially interesting is their comparison and contrast between Pentecostals and Liberation Theology, inquiring whether Progressive Pentecostals will adopt some positive elements of Liberation Theology, especially its emphasis on structural change in the process of social transformation. It remains to be seen whether Progressive Pentecostals will embrace a vigorous pursuit of justice on behalf of those oppressed by unjust social, political, economic, and even religious structures as an integral part of their Christian mission. In this section, I think it would have been helpful if the authors briefly discussed some positive developments in the Western world and the work of those Pentecostal scholars who clearly see the connection between authentic life in the Spirit and the quest for social justice.[3] Furthermore, theologically inclined readers might want to read a deeper biblical-theological analysis of Pentecostalism than the authors were able to provide in their book.

At the outset, the authors note that “excluded from our research were churches in Europe,” but, in fact, Poland and Armenia also figured among their research sites, so there should have been a

qualifier (p. 7). Nevertheless, this is an insignificant oversight especially considering that earlier the authors clearly state that their research took them "to twenty different countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and *eastern* Europe" [emphasis mine] (p. 6). This trivial point aside, as someone who was born and raised in the former Eastern Europe, I was anxious to learn more about Pentecostal ministry in the part of the world where Christian societal involvement was suppressed by the totalitarian regime for over forty years. It would certainly have enriched the book if some other countries of the former "Eastern Block," such as Romania, where Pentecostalism is a significant force, were included among research sites—it is, after all, a book about *global* Pentecostalism. Having said that, this reviewer is acutely aware that no writer can do everything in a single volume, and, with this caveat in mind, one should also read the above remarks.

In sum, Ernest Hemingway once wrote that "the world is a fine place and worth fighting for." Pentecostals have generally not been convinced about the veracity of this statement and their response to the world was flight rather than fight. This book demonstrates that in recent years, the situation has been changing. Even though a great number of Pentecostals would probably still disagree with the first part of Hemingway's statement, an increasing number of them are now embracing the second. *Global Pentecostalism* is a window into the soul of Progressive Pentecostals in the developing world, describing them in a sympathetic yet not uncritical way. The book is an impressive scholarly accomplishment and an indispensable contribution to the study of Pentecostalism.

Notes

[1]. Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 252.

[2]. For instance, in the spring 2004 issue of *Enrichment* magazine, which was dedicated to

"Compassion Ministries," the general superintendent of the Assemblies of God, Thomas Trask, stated in an interview: "Everything we do as a church, including feeding and clothing the poor must be done with a purpose for evangelization.... One of the integral parts of the Convoy of Hope is an evangelism presentation. This compassion ministry will not give food, haircuts, or any other service until they have heard the gospel." "Ask the Superintendent: A Revival of Compassion," *Enrichment: The Journal of Pentecostal Ministry* 9, no. 2 (2004): 14-15, quotation on 15.

[3]. See, for example, Murray A. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen, eds., *Called and Empowered: Global Mission of Pentecostal Perspective* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991); Eldin Villafañe, "The Politics of the Spirit: Reflections on a Theology of Social Transformation for the Twenty-First Century," 1996 Presidential Address, *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, vol. 18 (fall 1996): 161-170; Cecil M. Robeck Jr., "Pentecostals and Social Ethics," *Pneuma*, vol. 9 (fall 1987): 103-107; Richard J. Mouw, "Life in the Spirit in an Unjust World," *Pneuma*, vol. 9 (fall 1987): 109-128; and Murray W. Dempster, "Pentecostal Social Concern and the Biblical Mandate of Social Justice," *Pneuma*, vol. 9 (fall 1987): 129-153.

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