In *Spreading Fires, The Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism*, author Allan Anderson sets out on the ambitious task of writing a history of early Pentecostalism that is global in scope. In doing so, he focuses on early Pentecostal missionary efforts in order to "make more visible the 'non-western' nature of Pentecostalism in the early twentieth century and to do this without minimizing the international importance of the movement emanating from North America" (p. 13). His work, while containing some flaws, mostly succeeds in this goal.

Anderson’s book is divided into three parts. Part 1 focuses on the roots of Pentecostalism, and centers on the time period before and up to the Azusa street revival. Part 2 surveys Pentecostalism’s worldwide spread, and takes the reader through its beginnings in India, China and East Asia, Africa and the Middle East, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Part 3 closes by exploring early Pentecostal thought and theology.

The core, and the main strength of the book, is part 2. In this section, Anderson does an admirable job of mapping a network of the early leaders in global Pentecostalism. In doing so, he establishes a history that challenges the long-held idea that Americans exported Pentecostalism to the world. In reality, Anderson’s work proves that a complicated web of known native Pentecostal leaders, unknown native workers, and white missionaries from both the United States and Britain aided the worldwide spread of early Pentecostalism. Anderson points out that local leaders enjoyed more success in rooting Pentecostalism within their communities, and that white missionaries often displayed a profound ignorance of the native cultures that they encountered. Anderson does a good job in touching on some of the more problematic aspects of missionary history—he acknowledges that some missionaries were racist, that paternalism ran rampant, and that some missionaries were “pig-headed” in their inability to trust local peoples to run their own churches. He could have done a bit more to deconstruct missionary paternalism and racism, but he does explain why early Pentecostals heavily demonized native religions in their writings, and what this reveals about their view of the world, and their place in it. By turning ethnocentrism on its head and using it as a vehicle to examine Pentecostal culture, Anderson pushes Pentecostal scholarship to begin addressing some of the difficult issues within the history of Pentecostal missions.

The main flaw of this book (and it is by no means a fatal flaw) is that it is dense, and so packed with information that it would be difficult to use in the classroom. Parts of the book could have been cut in order to highlight the book’s main argument in part 2. Although part 1 and part 3 were clearly put in to give part 2 context, they could have easily been shortened, or taken out of the book altogether. Solid scholarship already exists on pre-Pentecostal roots, such as Vinson Synon’s classic *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition* (1971, 1997 2nd ed.), so part 1 could have been significantly shortened. While part 3 offers an interesting take on the Pentecostal mindset, Grant Wacker has already covered similar topics in
Heaven Below (2003), and many of the original observations that Anderson makes in this section could be seamlessly integrated into part 2. By integrating part 3 into part 2, and by eliminating or largely cutting part 1, the book would be tighter and more readable for a college audience. As the book stands now, it is a useful, highly detailed, and dense source for scholars of Pentecostalism and graduate students in the field.

Anderson acknowledges in his introduction one of the main problems that plagues all Pentecostal scholars who try to capture the history of nonwhite believers—the lack of native voices in the sources. Since the first generation of Pentecostal believers is now gone, historians cannot make up for the deficiencies in the sources by using ethnographic material, and because Pentecostal primary documents are often relentlessly stylized (as Anderson rightly notes) it is very hard to find native peoples in the roles of actors rather than as those who were acted upon. Anderson’s work is a step in the right direction in the broadening of early Pentecostal history—he points out many of the problems that scholars in the field face, and urges future scholars to continue innovating in order to make all Pentecostal voices heard. If scholars of Pentecostalism take Anderson’s call to heart and follow his lead, the history of the movement will change dramatically—and it will become a history that reflects the true face of global Pentecostalism, both in the past and in the present.

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