

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, ed.. *The Spirit in the World: Emerging Pentecostal Theologies in Global Contexts*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2009. 272 pp. \$20.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-8028-6281-5.



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Conservatively numbered at over six hundred million, the worldwide explosion of Pentecostalism(s) during the last century makes it the fast-growing religious contingent on the planet. But the significance of the movement is not simply about numbers. In the introduction to this volume, no less a figure than Jürgen Moltmann boldly declares that Pentecostalism heralds a “new formation” in Christianity (p. viii). Using a trope familiar to “Renewal” theologians (the umbrella term for those across the denominational spectrum invested in the movement) Moltmann generalizes the patriarchal phase of Christianity as that of “the Father,” while the Reformation focus is “the Son.” Pentecostalism, he says, represents a third epoch of “the Spirit”—the “divine wind” that blows everywhere: in the natural world; across all cultures; even in all religions.

The sheer force of the eschatological implications of this pneumatological emphasis outstrips the dogmatic and denominational constructs of much of western Christianity (including Pentecostalism). Nevertheless, Moltmann issues what

amounts to a mandate to emerging Pentecostal theology: that it should give birth to a cosmic pneumatology. This challenge hovers above the ebb and flow of the diverse essays in Kärkkäinen’s book, creating a curious sense of expectancy that carries the reader forward.

As an ecumenical and widely published Renewal academic, Pentecostal Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen is the right person to assemble these articles. He has brought together the voices of a veritable “who’s who” of international Pentecostal scholars, with expertise in the areas of sociology, cultural studies, history, missiology, and theology. Each of the briskly edited and well-sequenced pieces essays adds variety and perspective to the book.

The essays are grouped into three sections. The first is “The Spirit Among the People: Pentecostal Theology and Spiritual (em)Power(ment).” Kärkkäinen opens here with a contemporary overview of Pentecostalism. Echoing Harvey Cox, he suggests that experiential religion is the chief emergent alternative to fundamentalism in late

modernity. Pentecostalism is characterized by openness to newness and to divine intervention, valuing of charismatic community, affirmation of embodiment and physical healing, and a narrative approach to hermeneutics. In the next essay, Frank D. Macchia details the varied constellations of Pentecostal theology historically and asks: is there a Pentecostal distinctive? He finds his answer in the experience of Spirit Baptism, which he schematizes in imaginative ways to encompass the fullness of the *ordo salutis* of the Spirit as she justifies, heals, and perfects creation. Following Macchia, sociologist Margaret M. Poloma draws upon her field research to show how Pentecostalism's double emphasis on holiness and somatic wholeness has implications for thinking about and the nature of wellness in postmodernity. Turning to social issues, Korean missiologist Won-suk Ma considers various ways that Pentecostalism has served globally to empower the poor and disinherited from many inhomogeneous backgrounds. Missiologist and community organizer Doug Peterson then focuses on how Latin American Pentecostalism's openness to the empowerment of the Spirit has fostered social action and institutional change, as evidenced by *Fundación Piedad*—an educational network serving a hundred thousand children in twenty-two nations.

Section 2 of the book is entitled “The Spirit Among Cultures: Pentecostal Theology and Cultural Diversity.” Indian theologian Paulson Pulikottil's lead essay describes how an indigenous Syrian Pentecostal community in Kerala resisted assimilation by post-Azusa St. western Pentecostalism. This refusal demonstrates the postcolonial parameters of global Pentecostalism. Confirming Pulikottil's premise, Korean theologian Koo Dong Yun gives us an Asian reading of Pentecostalism as a charismatic liberation movement for *minjung* (common people who are exploited or oppressed). According to him, Azusa St. (1906) was an American black *minjung* movement. The Mukti Revival in India (1905) was but one of many Pentecostal *minjung* movements addressing the issues of de-

serted women and children, colonialization, and caste. The 1907 Pyongyang Revival liberated Korean *minjung* oppressed by the Japanese. Interestingly, it involved not only religious conversion but also wide-scale *affective* conversion—a cathartic release of shame and guilt. But African American ethnographer and theologian Deidre Helen Crumley's essay would suggest that there are *minjung* yet to be liberated. Her comparison of sociocultural data from African Pentecostal churches and from inner-city African American churches argues that—despite similar theological doctrines—the former disempower women. Closing this section, the eminent expert on African Pentecostalism, Ogbu U. Kalu (d. 2009), roots Pentecostalism's growth in Africa in its capacity to resonate with and restructure the symbolism and worldview of indigenous religion. It is “a new form of possession replacing the old,” (p. 138) in which the Spirit fills the practitioner with a form of health that makes one “fully human” (p. 139). Pentecostalism understands the living contours of the African spiritual world, and offers a praxis by which persons can reshape the covenants of power that delimit reality.

Section 3 is entitled “The Spirit Among Religions: Pentecostal Theology and Religious Plurality.” In his lead article, Kärkkäinen writes passionately and persuasively about the pneumatological renaissance, declaring that with the new advent of discourse about the Holy Spirit, “the Cinderella of theology” has come to the ball (p. 155). Pneumatology addresses unanswered lacunae such as nature versus grace that have plagued theology since the impasse demarcated by Karl Barth and Friedrich Schleiermacher. It also sets the stage for a Pentecostal sense of the Spirit as healer, liberator, and earth-keeper. Kärkkäinen lays particular weight on pneumatology's importance in constructing a “theology of religions.”[1] Acknowledging that the Pentecostal perspective is overwhelmingly exclusivist, he nevertheless points to the work of a new wave of highly trained Pentecostal and Renewal theologians who are exploring the

constructive potential of pneumatology for inclusivism and even for science-religion dialogue.

Rather than pursuing such constructivist claims dogmatically, Kärkkäinen wisely offers the reader three essays that focus on field and case studies. In the first, Ghanaian missiologist Opoku Onyinah evaluates modern genetic theories of witchcraft as a phenomena rooted in superstition and economic instability. His two years of interviews with pastors, exorcists, traditional priests, witches, and ex-witches suggests to Onyinah that rationalistic missions approaches failed to address the deeply held African sense that the powers of the spirit world are real and need to be taken into account. Neo-Pentecostal “deliverance” practices found more purchase in this arena, but were themselves problematic. Onyinah’s take-away is that African Pentecostals need to be about the task of parsing out the spirit world theologically in a way that is postmodern and perhaps post-western. Implicitly, this is a house call for “theologians of religions” to be about their business. In this regard, Chinese-Malaysian-American theologian Amos Yong is already on the job. In his essay, Yong attempts a thought experiment, setting Pentecostalism in dialogue with what would seem to be a most unlikely dialogue partner: Buddhism. While educating the reader about both traditions theoretically and historically, Yong evinces a clear and pragmatic sensitivity towards his Pentecostal readership. He deftly navigates the mine-field of exclusivist objections to any “theology of religions” and disarmingly sketches possible soteriological, anthropological, and cosmological corollaries between the two traditions (e.g., *pneuma* and *anatma*; *pneuma* and *sambhogakaya*). Yong argues that the willingness to entertain the “strange tongues” (testimonies) (pp. 218, 226) of interreligious dialogue is an expression of Christian hospitality; and that the openness to hearing a common word in such discourse is a mark of the proper Pentecostal anticipation of the visitation of the Spirit. Tony Richie’s closing essay highlights the paradox and the promise of Pentecostalism

with regard to the theology of religions. In his examination of the theology of John Hillary King (1869-1946), the founder of the Pentecostal Holiness Church, Richie finds reasons to be optimistic. King was well traveled, and incontestably uncompromising about the centrality and superiority of Christ in the economy of salvation. Nevertheless, in a way reminiscent of the early church Fathers and Vatican II, King saw Christ as both “the Son in eternity” and “the Messiah in time” (p. 234) and believed that the Spirit mediates Christ’s saving presence in general revelation, making repentance and salvation possible for all. Richie recommends that this unapologetic optimism become the ecumenical gold standard for Pentecostalism.

In conclusion, *The Spirit in the World* should engage a wide readership for a number of different reasons. It is an important and timely collection of essays reflecting the pulse of global Pentecostalism. Moltmann is undoubtedly correct that a pneumatological renaissance is underway in theology—and for this reason alone, Kärkkäinen’s book is significant. The unanswered question is whether Pentecostalism itself will overcome its unrequited love affair with fundamentalism and “come to the ball.” Kärkkäinen is frank in stating that Pentecostalism’s grasp of a global theology of the Spirit lags drastically behind its aggressive global missionary effort.

Cecil M. Robeck, a leading Pentecostal ecumenist, famously stated in a speech that “Pentecostals are ecumenical, they just don’t know it.”[2] One of the virtues of *The Spirit in the World* is to press the question of whether “Pentecostal ecumenism” is oxymoronic or not up for a vote. The quality and trajectory of the essays in this volume suggest not only that some Pentecostal stragglers are showing up to the dance, but also that some have come to call the tune.

Notes

[1]. See his *An Introduction to the Theology of World Religions: Biblical, Historical and Contem-*

porary perspectives (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

[2]. "Taking Stock of Pentecostalism: Reflections of a Retiring Editor," *Pneuma* 15, no. 1 (1993): 39.

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