Editorial

Roger Stronstad – A Personal Reminiscence

It is funny, the way one can feel so close to someone with whom one spends so little time. This is true of Roger Stronstad for me.

It was my privilege to meet Roger for the first time at a Society for Pentecostal Studies meeting at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in the fall of 1984. The occasion of the meeting was after a presentation where I tried to gain some leverage on the topic of the disciples and the Spirit before Pentecostal. My fledgling steps on this theme was met by a robust pushback from Gordon Fee, whom I also met for the first time and who would become a friend over the years. Roger made his way to me to let me know that he himself had been exploring themes relevant to this topic and then encouraged me to continue this exploration, as he was in agreement with much that I had said. Though I did not know Roger or his work at that point, his affirmation meant much to a young scholar who had just made his second paper presentation at SPS.

Little did I know that Roger’s terrain-changing little monograph, The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke, was appearing that very year. It is amazing how often a small seminal work winds up changing the course of a subject or discipline. But such would be the case with Roger’s volume. It was simply the most important work written in biblical studies by a Pentecostal scholar to appear to that point, and in some ways continues to hold that distinction. When I read Charismatic Theology, I was literally bowled over, for here in this modest effort, Roger challenged the dominate view of Luke-Acts asserted initially by Hans Conzelmann, a student of Rudolf Bultmann, and built upon with reference to the role of the Spirit by none other than James D.G. Dunn. Roger, informed by a form of redaction criticism, challenged this basic paradigm, focusing on the role of the Spirit in Luke-Acts, coming to conclusions radically different than those of Professor Dunn, from whom those of us in the tradition have learned so much. It would be my privilege, less than a decade later, to accompany Jimmy around the book stalls at Society of Biblical Literature to retrieve various volumes written by Pentecostals in response to his Baptism in the Holy Spirit. When coming upon Roger’s work, I could see Dunn’s reaction whilst reading Clark Pinnock’s blurb on the back cover, that apparently there was more diversity in New Testament thought than even Professor Dunn
was willing to admit! I knew in that moment that Jimmy was hooked. His later response to these volumes would appear in the third volume of JPT in 1993.

Roger taught many of us that Pentecostals may have something to say and that we were not necessarily beholden to the paradigms of others or to the ‘assured results of scholarship’. For in his Charismatic Theology, Roger offered an analysis of the broader narrative that testified to the wholistic nature of Luke’s theology in a way that neither Dunn nor Conzelmann before him had fully recognized. In many ways, Roger’s work is one of the lines of demarcation that marks the beginnings of Pentecostal scholarship as a theological discipline. Charismatic Theology would become for several years to come Hendrickson’s best seller.

Though not widely known, after the successful completion of his Masters thesis at Regent College, Roger gained admission to pursue the PhD with renowned New Testament scholar F.F. Bruce at the University of Manchester. Alas, such a chapter would have to be postponed and eventually declined, owing to situations and obligations beyond his control. Nonetheless, this acceptance by such a widely respected scholar speaks volumes about Roger’s scholarly work and abilities.

Significantly, Roger and his work would figure into the conception and inception of the Journal of Pentecostal Theology and its Supplement Series of monographs. The 1990 Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies at Christ for the Nations Institute, led by Murray Dempster, would prove to be an incredible gathering of a number of individuals that would figure prominently in the nascent movement to explore numerous aspects of constructive Pentecostal theology. During our times of conversation, we discovered that Roger had a monograph length manuscript that had been held up by a publisher over a minor editorial matter. This discovery, along with the convergence of a large number of budding Pentecostal scholars, led my Old Testament colleague, Rick Moore, and I to conceive the idea for the proposal to Sheffield Academic Press to undertake the publication of an academic series of monographs on Pentecostal Theology. Several years later Roger’s book, The Prophethood of All Believers would appear in this very series as volume 16, a monograph that would have an important impact of my own later thought and work on Acts.

The 1992 Society for Pentecostal Studies Meeting hosted by the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary would witness an historic dialogue between Roger Stronstad and Gordon Fee on issues related to Spirit Baptism. The session, which was sponsored by the Biblical Studies Special Interest Group, was so popular with conference attendees that it emptied out a number of other sessions.
Roger was always very modest about his extraordinary contributions and seemed quite happy, after having had his say, to leave the discussion with nothing else to say. He seemed not to mind if people disagreed and he didn’t need to have the last word – a rarity in scholarly circles! I would learn this lesson not only in Roger’s dialogue with Gordon, but also at a session where I served as a respondent anxious to hear Roger’s though on this or that question, only to have Roger content to let others carry on the conversation. Even the reissue of Charismatic Theology by Baker, which would see Roger win a Book of the Year Award, would illustrate this attribute as he modestly apologized to the author of the runner-up volume for the fact that Roger’s volume was a republication. Such was Roger’s humility and modesty. On still another occasion at a meeting of the European Pentecostal Charismatic Research Association at Mattersey Hall in the UK, a young post grad confided in me his hesitation to meet Roger because he had been a bit harsh in his assessment of Roger’s work under the influence of his supervisor. I assured him he had nothing to worry about and, after making the necessary introduction, proceeded to witness Roger’s gracious and loving engagement with this young scholar, whose view of Roger and his work became more wholistic and affirming.

As the year’s would go by, and other publishing ventures developed, it would be my privilege to undertake the re-publication of Roger’s Prophethood of All Believers, reset and corrected, with CPT Press. This volume would be followed by two additional works, A Pentecostal Biblical Theology: Turning Points in the Story of Redemption (2016) and Mark: A Commentary (2018). Both of these books came to me via two separate phone calls Roger placed to me saying, in what by now was a very soft and faint voice, ‘I think I have something for you to consider’. As far as I was concerned, anything Roger wrote I was happy to publish, he had earned that right and had proven himself to be a seminal and creative thinker for the tradition and beyond.

It was for many of these reasons that it was one of the honors of my life to nominate Roger for the bestowal of the Doctor of Divinity degree upon him by the Pentecostal Theological Seminary in 2012. After a rigorous vetting of his published work, the unanimous, enthusiastic recommendation of the full faculty to the administration and Board of Directors of the Seminary was to grant this honor to Roger Stronstad as one who embodied so much of what the Seminary had come to represent and hold dear.

Occasionally, I would get a phone call out of the blue as Roger’s circumstances would change. In these last calls between friends, I would often remind him of his faithfulness to the Lord and the significance of his work – work that came from a significant person. It was my honor to know you, Roger. My life
and work would be all the poorer without you. May your works follow you, my brother.

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