Book Reviews

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Global Pentecostal Movements: Migration, Mission, and Public Religion

This edited volume addresses an important topic within the study of religion: the continuing growth and aspirations for further expansion of that branch of Christianity that has come to dominate the public face of this religious tradition in many parts of the world. The volume is subdivided into three parts: negotiation, expansion and contextualization. It is introduced by the editor Michael Wilkinson with a good and nuanced introduction that does not take the units of study for granted but highlights how these are continuously negotiated: what is Pentecostal and what is not, what is religion and what is not, pointing out how Pentecostalism is part of a system of religions, but has to situate itself contextually every time.

Richard Burgess gives a well informed and well researched overview of the impact of Pentecostalism on politics in three African countries, Nigeria, Zambia and Kenya, as well as some useful categories for distinguishing the ways Pentecostals attempt to influence politics: via prophetic pronouncements, intercessory prayer, electoral politics and the political aspirations of pastors themselves. Van Gorder similarly provides an interesting and well-informed overview of the impact of Pentecostalism on Muslim-Christian relations in Nigeria. He presents both Islam and Christianity in Nigeria as “models of social change which are fundamentally closed to, and intolerant of, ‘the other’” (p. 63). Girish Daswani develops two interesting arguments with regard to globalization and the role of culture in transnational Pentecostalism. While discussing Pentecostalism, invoking the term ‘global’ is almost obligatory, but Daswani develops an original approach to this well-worn topic. He examines the role of ‘globalization’ as a concept metaphor representing an actual state of affairs but also exceeding representation, showing how Pentecostals in Ghana view globalization as a causal force, but also use the term to imagine themselves. Furthermore, he shows how ‘culture’ is objectified and debated to distinguish it from true Pentecostalism and assess its potentially harmful effects. He ends with the insightful conclusion that “the constant attempt to distinguish between what is Christianity and what is culture then becomes an inescapable
reality for Pentecostal Christians who negotiate identity in a global society” (p. 88). Indeed, this is exactly the sort of process that I also observed while researching Nigerian Pentecostalism in Europe.

The section ‘expansion’ contains chapters by David A. Reed, Connie Au and Seth N. Zieliecke. These chapters have a much more historiographical aim, examining the particular histories of Pentecostalism in Indonesia, China and Argentina respectively. Each of these chapters takes one particular church or evangelist as their main case study. Although in themselves quite interesting and meticulously documented histories, the reader who does not happen to be interested in the particularities of these case studies is left to draw his or her own conclusions with regard to the insights that can be gained from them. One wonders whether they would not have been better placed in a volume focusing on Pentecostalism or Christianity in a particular region. Nevertheless, each of these chapters tells a part of the global story of Pentecostalism, showing how Pentecostalism is inserted differently in each context, creating new ways of relating to local culture and political configurations but also serving as a representative of the demons of globalization or westernization to its enemies.

The title “Contextualization” of the last section seems to imply a certain theological perspective on the relationship between Christianity and culture that I am not sure is intentional on the part of the editor, and that is not necessarily reflected in the individual contributions in this chapter. What they seem to have in common is that they focus on non-US or non-Western driven forms of Pentecostalism. Joseph Bosco Bangura discusses developments in Africa. He promotes the addition of a new category of churches to the already existing categories of African Indigenous Churches and mission churches: New Indigenous Churches or nics. Following the missiologist Wallis, he defines nics as those churches whose leadership and ministry is African and are not directed by (Western) missionaries. These nics have a quite hostile stance towards the older, more syncretistic aics and are charismatic/Pentecostal in character, promoting prosperity teachings and demonizing local cosmologies. While describing and recognizing their relevance in the post-colonial context, the author states that their theology needs more thorough reflection. Thomas Aechtner presents a very interesting model of how membership of a Pentecostal church in the Canadian context affects identity formation among migrants. According to Aechtner, membership of a Pentecostal church leads to a decrease in the importance of ethnic and nationalistic markers, longing for home and antagonistic responses to racism and an increase in Christian pan-Africanism, missional objectives and passive responses to racism.

The final two chapters focus on Latino/a Pentecostalism in the US and Canada. Otto Maduro presents the fascinating life stories of five female Latina