FEEDBACK:
PENTECOSTAL MISSIOLOGY

Pentecostal Missiology: Moving Beyond Triumphalism to Face the Issues

Gary B. McGee

Reading through the articles of the Spring 1994 issue of PNEUMA, I was struck by the advances that have been made in the study of Pentecostal missions in the last few years. Guest editor Byron D. Klaus, along with each contributor, has provided a valuable opportunity to assess the current state of Pentecostal missiology from the perspectives of well-qualified practitioners, all of whom are committed to evangelism and the heritage of Pentecostal spirituality. Their work reveals the emerging maturation of Pentecostal missiology with each one having either completed a doctorate in missiology or working toward one. In terms of academic training, most of the contributors, including the editor, demonstrate the influence that Fuller Theological Seminary and its School of World Mission is having in shaping the theoretical and analytical elements of Pentecostal missiology (Klaus, McClung, Cavaness, Amstutz, and Pousson).

The scope and complexity of contemporary Pentecostal and Charismatic missions seem far removed from the days when missionaries traveled on “faith” (without pledged support) from places like Azusa Street, the Hebdon Mission, and the Holmes Bible and Missionary Institute to the far ends of the earth with no cross-cultural preparation and little if any formal ministerial training. As the centenary of the Pentecostal movement approaches, missiological reflection is more necessary than ever for guiding and safeguarding the integrity of the mission enterprise.

All the writers offer valuable insights into their respective areas of research. Thus, I hope the following observations will contribute in some way to these ongoing studies. First, Pentecostal missiologists must realize that “triumphalism” unintentionally impedes the kind of sober and accurate analysis that the task requires. McClung rightly warns of the “twin perils of triumphalism and elitism.”

1L. Grant McClung, Jr., “Pentecostal/Charismatic Perspectives on a Missiology
the widespread and uncritical use of statistical speculations for drawing conclusions about the advance of Pentecostalism reinforces triumphalism, and thereby easily sidelines crucial issues and factors that must be examined.

McClung cites the five “umbrella categories” used by David Barrett in his World Christian Encyclopedia (1982) for classifying Pentecostals and Charismatics, a list Barrett subsequently enlarged by adding, among many others, “Non-white indigenous quasipentecostals,” “Crypto-charismatics,” “Postpentecostals,” and “Isolated radio pentecostal house groups.” Consequently, this classification garners together a bewildering array of indigenous churches reflecting varying degrees of syncretism along with classical Pentecostal and Charismatic constituencies. Not surprisingly then, and assisted by a debatable research methodology (How does one count isolated radio Pentecostals?), the statistical totals of “Pentecostals” and “charismatics” run into hundreds of millions. In January, he calculated that by mid-year, there would be nearly one-half billion worldwide. Noah could only envy the diversity that Barrett packs on board Peter’s bark.

With little hesitation, Pentecostal and Charismatic leaders uncritically trumpet his totals, and those of other statisticians with similar presuppositions, as factual evidence of astounding gains in evangelism. Generating a heart-pounding excitement among the faithful at home, leaders herald the surge as “explosive,” “fastest-growing,” “infinitely reproducible,” and sponsored by the “most missionary-minded segment of world Christianity today.” How could the ethos of any

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