Book Reviews

Samuel López Torres

*Historia de la Quinta Iglesia Apostólica de la Fe en Cristo Jesús de Tijuana B.C.*

Catarina Londino, ed.


These two books make similar contributions. Both illumine persons and traditions generally ignored in research on Pentecostalism; both are published outside the mainstream academy; both have implications for the study of immigration and its role in the development of Pentecostalism. The first has to do with Mexico and the USA; the second has implications for Italian Pentecostal history in the USA, Canada, Argentina, Brazil and Italy; I will discuss them in that order.

In the first volume, López Torres has provided a Pentecostal local history written to illuminate larger issues of the church and its cultural context. This volume, with the insightful prologue by Jaimes Martínez, Professor at the Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, is an important scholarly contribution to the study of Pentecostalism and culture in Mexico and the U.S.A. It and its predecessor, a 154 page work by Dr. López Torres, *Historia de la Iglesia Apostólica de la fé en Cristo Jesús* (Tijuana: n.p., 1999) are carefully documented, drawing on printed and oral sources. Both volumes are enhanced by well-chosen photographs.

They are case studies of the way the macro issues of urbanization, immigration, emigration, the changing conditions along the Mexico-U.S.A. border, educational opportunities and structures, and the economic capacities of the laity effect the local Pentecostal congregations in a city that suffers and prospers from its proximity to the border.

López Torres acknowledges his deep family roots in the congregation and in
Tijuana; his family has been crucial to the evolution of the congregation. But he writes as a participant observer. He assiduously conducted interviews and identified documentary evidence for the historical narrative.

The Iglesia Apostólica de la Fe en Cristo Jesús of Tijuana was founded 1927. By 1953, the original congregation counted 307 members. That year Isidro Avolas Virgen, originally from Jalisco, who had ministered in Whittier, CA, where he taught himself to read using the Bible, was commissioned to evangelize in the developing areas east of downtown Tijuana. The population expansion of Tijuana was due both to internal migration in Mexico and the expulsion of thousands of Mexican agricultural workers from the U.S.A. following WWII. The evangelism and new congregation were supported by Daniel Torres Rodríguez and his wife Maximiliana, landowners who had moved to Tijuana from Jalisco and were baptized as Pentecostals.

Subsequent leadership had connections to the churches in Tijuana (28 congregations by 1999). In careful well-crafted detail, the volume relates the development of the congregation. The two volumes provide a nuanced narrative of social and ecclesiastical change. Not included is evidence of the conflicts and struggles within the congregation and the larger denomination in Tijuana as they adapted to the changes forced on them by the macro issues for which their lives and ministries are evidence. It is hoped that López Torres and perhaps Professor Jaimes Martínez will undertake such an analysis as a case study of urban Pentecostalism. The two volumes of López Torres are models of what can be achieved by careful study of regional expressions of faith.

In the second volume, the second edition, Londino provides a biographical sketch of Guiseppe Petrelli (1876–1957), someone rarely mentioned in Pentecostal historiography and whose influence is still felt on three continents. The first edition, by Antonio Bernabie Chauvie (Torino: Ago-Set, 1997) did not receive much attention.

Petrelli was born into a Catholic family. He studied law, and began a legal career. He attended a Baptist church in Naples and was baptized (1905). Two weeks later the family left for New York. They affiliated with Second Avenue Baptist Church; Petrelli became (1909) pastor to the Italian congregation. Three books were published during this period: Simone Pietro (n.p.: n.p.: 1911), Cristo per fede (n.p.: n.p., 1912) and Davide peccatore e penitente (n.p.: n.p., 1915?).

In October 1915, he experienced Pentecostal “baptism of the Holy Spirit,” prayed over by a Swedish Pentecostal evangelist. He undertook a mission trip to Argentina and Brazil (1920–1921) which led to life-long support of the Italian Pentecostal churches there. He resumed publishing, now as a Pentecostal theologian. The periodical, Il re ed il regno (1929–1947), became Il Regno di Dio (1948–1959), achieved significant circulation as did, La Differenza (1945–1948).