

BOOK REVIEWS

Gary B. McGee, *People of the Spirit: The Assemblies of God* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2003) with CD, hard, 661 pp., ISBN: 0-88243-099-8.

Gary McGee, long-time Professor of Church History and Pentecostalism at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri, has written the latest official history of this American Pentecostal denomination. *People of the Spirit* is unlike most denominational histories. The institutional and structural issues are muted, and it is certainly not a detailed analysis of statistics and the changing shape of the denomination. Although important events are cited, it appears that such data are brought in as inconspicuously as possible. Rather, McGee has sought to capture the ethos of this revival movement.

Immediately obvious to the reader is the large number of thumbnail sketches of individuals who represent the kind of persons who are the heartbeat of the movement. After all, most of the 12,000 churches in the Assemblies of God USA are small, averaging less than 100 members. Striking is McGee's reaching into the lives of lesser-known, ordinary people that he has selected, to express the inner reality of the movement. He has interviewed many people, and has allowed them to tell their own stories through a large number of direct quotations. He states in the introduction: "The founders of the Assemblies of God came from the working class. They were hardworking Americans who caught the vision of evangelizing the world in the last days before the second coming of Christ" (p. 11). This departure from the usual church history format gives an unusual personal charm to the book. To be sure, the prominent leaders of the denomination are given a proper place, but all the attention is not focused on these headliners.

The twenty-six chapters in the book are divided into six units. These units are arranged chronologically from the founding of the Pentecostal movement through the various epochs the author identifies as key markers. The serious reader is aided by a bibliography and recommended list of readings at the end of each chapter, so that topics, surfaced in the chapter that arrest the attention of the reader, may be pursued further. This, coupled with down-to-earth language and a strong narrative emphasis, makes this an attractive option, not only as a classroom textbook, but as a good choice for a teaching series in the local church.

McGee's special professional expertise lies in the study of the history of missions. The missionary passion that has dominated the Assemblies of God from its inception does not escape the author's

attention. The vibrancy of local church life is shown to be tightly coupled with a persistent sense of responsibility for world-wide missions. The first chapter, titled "Power from on High," demonstrates this by focusing considerable attention to the missionary impact of the Pentecostal revival (pp. 16-32).

In any religious organization, it is inevitable that problems and challenges will confront the church from time to time. To fail to acknowledge, at least the significant issues, would propel a denominational history into the category of hagiographa. McGee has not written a propaganda piece; rather, he has addressed some important controversies that have transpired within the fellowship without being distracted by these matters. A good example of this is discovered in Chapter 16, titled "Testing and Growth." The author provides the reader with an objective evaluation of how the denomination struggled with such issues as "The New Order of the Latter Rain," the "Healing Movement," and the fallout of this, and the fascination with "Prosperity" teaching (pp. 332-54). To be sure, McGee does not dwell on controversies that have burdened the denomination periodically, but he has done a reasonable job of keeping such matters in perspective. This gives the book a mark of authenticity.

A warm, personal, and highly readable book, this latest history of the American Assemblies of God will certainly have a large and appreciative following.

William W. Menzies

Aldwin Ragoonath, *Preach the Word: A Pentecostal Approach* (Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada: Agape Teaching Ministry, 2004), paper, 239 pp., bibliography, ISBN: 097344680-3.

Preaching has always been central to the life of the church, and especially following the Reformation of Luther and Calvin. However, preaching takes on a different hue in the Pentecostal revival that has, and continues to bring about change to the entire church world-wide.

In his book *Preach the Word: A Pentecostal Approach*, Aldwin Ragoonath makes the assertion, "Pentecostal and Charismatic preaching is a type of preaching that is different from all other forms of preaching" (p. 1). He links this form of preaching back to Jesus and his apostles and in this book seeks to convince the reader of the uniqueness of the kind of preaching instinctive to the Pentecostal world.

His definition of Pentecostal is a classic view: those who have what he calls “a Spirit world-view” that includes “dreams, visions, revelations, curses demons roaming the world, spiritual guidance, angels guiding us, people speaking in tongues, miracles, exorcisms and things we cannot explain” (pp. 11, 31). For him, it is important that Pentecostals understand the difference this form of preaching is from other forms, for it is “through preaching that their doctrines and emphases are communicated” (p. 13).

The book covers a rather wide selection of topics meant to encourage those of Pentecostal persuasion. He begins with what is called Theology of Pentecostal Preaching in which he moves from the preacher and message to the traditional feature—especially of older Pentecostal churches—the altar service.

In his chapter on the History of Pentecostal Preaching, the author takes us back into the lives and sermons of those who were instrumental in the early beginnings of the Pentecostal movement, at the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles in the early 1900s. He provides an analysis of the way Parham and Seymour preached and how they handled the biblical text in their preaching. He also provides suggestions on how to go about building a sermon from a text.

In preparation for preaching at healing and deliverance services, he offers his logic as to the value of such services, along with organization of the services. From there he provides counsel on outlining sermons and their delivery.

Aldwin Ragoonath has obviously spent much time considering the importance of preaching to those who serve within the Pentecostal and Charismatic community. Throughout his writing, the author asserts that Pentecostals are not traditionally from educated classes: “Pentecostalism was born from working class people and reflects a simple view of the Word of God” (p. 89). With this in mind, his material may best refer to those Pentecostals who preach to people with a limited education.

I am grateful for the opportunity of reading and reviewing *Preach the Word*.

Brian C. Stiller