

BOOK REVIEW

Not by Might Nor by Power by Douglas Petersen. Oxford: Regnum Books International, 1996. Pp. 260. Paper.

Not by Might Nor by Power provides a significant contribution to the increasing task of articulating Pentecostal theology. In this work, Petersen argues for a Pentecostal theology of social concern which is focused on Latin America. This book is basically centered on a specific situation and project in Central America: the Latin America ChildCare (LACC) program of the Assemblies of God. The structure of the book is organized around some important issues for the whole Pentecostal movement in Latin America. Discussion includes the nature of the Pentecostal experience, the process of indigenization, and theological thinking with the “rationale” for (existing and future) Pentecostal social concern. The footnotes are quite extensive reflecting the original intention of the manuscript as a doctoral thesis.

Chapter one, which accounts for the nature of Pentecostal experience, is an excellent and concise historical background of the Pentecostal movement, tracing its beginnings to the Azusa Street experience. Understanding the emergence and development of the movement is indispensable if one is to understand the Pentecostals better. Petersen cites Luther Gerlach (pp. 36-40), a highly regarded sociologist, to substantiate his point that Pentecostalism is a legitimate movement for change.

In chapter two the author argues for the social relevance of Pentecostalism, which blends well with current social circumstances in Latin America. Petersen posits that Pentecostalism was not just an imported movement from the U.S. but a movement that eventually became autonomous and indigenous. He makes it clear in this chapter that the role of the North American missionaries was key in the indigenizing process. Petersen strongly believes that what was conveyed from North America was *not* the missionaries’ institutions – “which were not in any event transferred intact.” Quite a number of authors on Latin American Pentecostalism agree with this observation including Paul Freston who said, “Pentecostal salvation came indeed from America, but from its underside. Born among the blacks and women, it was exported at virtually no cost, often by non-Americans, by-passing the usual channels (religious and otherwise) of American wealth and power.”¹ However Petersen does not fully explore the socio-religious consciousness of Latin

¹ Paul Freston, “Latin American Dimensions,” in *A Global Faith*, eds. M. Hutchinson and O. Kalu (Sydney: CSAC, 1998), p. 74.

Americans. The section on “The Compatibility of Latin American Culture and Pentecostalism” in chapter three would have been a good place to do this. The author’s cursory treatment on the subject leaves the readers with a major point underdeveloped. A much better approach might have been to build on the intrinsic characteristics of Latin Americans without first alluding to a Pentecostal ethos.

The social relevance of Pentecostals in Latin America is further discussed in chapter four. Petersen does this by citing various social programs carried out in Central America. He reiterates the fact that it is the socio-economic context of Latin America, which provides the horizon that enables the Pentecostals to be involved in transforming their society.

Chapter five highlights a case study in Pentecostal praxis featuring Petersen’s organization, the Latin America Childcare (LACC). This chapter is well documented and reflects an insider’s perspective, which lends much credibility to the central argument of this book. Inarguably, the author does a great service to the Pentecostal movement worldwide by providing an excellent model in LACC.

Having demonstrated that Latin American Pentecostals developed independently (from missionaries) a social ethic as part of their faith, Petersen challenges the Pentecostals to undergird their action with a comprehensive and coherent theological statement. Thus he entitles chapter six, “Toward A Social Doctrine for Latin American Pentecostals.” From a sociological analysis, the author now turns to a theological discussion. To articulate his Pentecostal (LACC, etc.) ethic he uses a hermeneutical circle based on biblical themes (Kingdom of God, justice in O.T, etc.) that particularly interact with the concrete social reality of Latin America. Petersen’s sources in this chapter are impeccable, however, a Pentecostal theology of social concern in Latin America (as the subtitle of the book suggests) cannot be constructed based on an LACC case study alone. Other forms of social expressions must be factored in extensively, not just alluded to.

Finally, in chapter seven Petersen briefly presents the challenges of the future of Pentecostal theology of social concern. There are two important areas, which the author believes, Latin American Pentecostals must give serious consideration. One is “triumphalism” and the other is the political dimension and implications of Pentecostal activity. For Pentecostals to participate in the structural transformation of their society, they must expand their horizons by placing themselves in the larger tradition of the Christian Church. While Petersen recognizes that involvement in politics can no longer be avoided (p. 232) he remains

consistent throughout the book stating that “Pentecostals can offer not only a kind of spiritual refuge, therefore, but authentic social action alternatives” (p. 233).

Petersen has managed to compile from his experiences as a missionary with LACC, a vast quantity of historical literature concerning the Pentecostal movement, its ideas and viewpoints. There has never been such a clear and strong articulation of Pentecostalism with a specific view toward social concern. Petersen’s book contributes immensely to the ongoing discussion concerning the social relevance of Pentecostalism. His message to critics is clear enough to understand. Pentecostals deserve to be taken seriously because of what they are doing and will continue to do in the future. The book as a whole is a significant work in relation to the issues of Pentecostal scholarship. Being originally intended as a dissertation, the book contains several technical terms that may sound foreign to many Pentecostals except those “educated persons in the pew.” Petersen has accurately located the work of Pentecostal churches in Latin America. Although a bit triumphalistic in presentation, *Not by Might Nor by Power* is a meaningful contribution to the area of academic historiography of Latin American Pentecostalism. For Pentecostal scholarship this is highly recommended reading.

Joseph R. Suico

Ad ultimum terrae: Evangelization, Proselytism and Common Witness in the Roman Catholic Pentecostal Dialogue (1990/1997) by Veli-Matti Karkkainen, Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity, No. 117. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999. Pp. 281. Paper.

This volume (no. 117 in the Peter Lang’s Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity series) is an important contribution to Pentecostal scholarship. It is presented as a sequel to the author’s doctoral dissertation on the earlier phases of the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue, which has been ongoing since 1972. The author did his dissertation at the University of Helsinki, on the pneumatology in the dialogues in the period from 1972-1989. The present volume, dealing with the dialogues from 1990 to 1997, brings his study forward to the present era. Dr. Karkkainen wrote his dissertation at the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research in Collegeville, Minnesota, under the mentorship of Killian McDonnell, OSB, the co-founder and co-chair of the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue.

The author, a Finnish Pentecostal scholar, is Principal of Iso Kirja College (Keuruu, Finland). He has served as a participant in the Dialogue and has served as a professor of theology in Thailand from 1991-1994. He has participated, additionally, in the International Dialogue between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and Pentecostals. His personal experience clearly gives him a high degree of credibility as he engages sensitive missiological issues that form the core of the dialogues about which he writes.

Useful to the reader is the introductory chapter, which is a review of the history of the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue. This furnishes the context in which the Dialogues have functioned, including a brief history of the dramatic rise of the Pentecostal movement. He acknowledges, as well, the significant studies that have already been produced on earlier phases of the Dialogue. Dr. Karkkainen observes that the Second Vatican Council was an important point of departure within the Roman Catholic Church that propelled such initiatives as the Roman Catholic/Pentecostal Dialogue. He observes, as well, that it is significant that the Roman Catholic Church and the modern Pentecostal movement are the two largest Christian families, neither of which is part of the World Council of Churches. The Dialogue, therefore, furnishes a mechanism for conversation between two significant components of Christianity that otherwise would not exist.

The first major chapter is devoted to reviewing the topics discussed in the first three five-year phases of the Dialogue, with summaries of the findings of these discussions. The author provides an analysis of the commonalities and the distinctive differences in point of view of Roman Catholics and Pentecostals on the key topics of mission, evangelization, and social concern. He calls the first quinquennium (1972-1976) the Stage of Mutual Introduction. The second quinquennium (1977-1982) the Phase of Contra-Positions, and the Third Stage (1985-1989) the Search for a Common Identity. The fourth quinquennium (1990-1997), which is the featured study of the author, he titles, the Potential of Mutual Cooperation in the Christ-given Mission. The fourth quinquennium actually lasted for eight years.

The chapters that form the body of the book are organized successively around the annual topics of the Dialogue in the fourth quinquennium. In 1990, the Dialogue convened in Emmetten, Switzerland, featuring the Meaning of Mission and Evangelization. The next year, the Dialogue met in Venice, Italy, discussing the Biblical and Systematic Foundation of Evangelization. In 1992, the venue was Rocca di Papa, Italy, where Evangelization and Culture was the featured topic.

The Dialogue convened in Paris in 1993, dealing with the topic of Evangelization and Social Justice. In 1994, at Kappel am Albis, Switzerland, discussion centered around Evangelization/Evangelism, Common Witness, and Proselytism. The next year the Dialogue dealt with Evangelization and Common Witness at Brixen/Bressanone, Italy. In 1996, the Dialogue convened again at Brixen/Bressanone, and later in Rome, to prepare a final report.

The author reports faithfully, not only the content of the major papers presented by each side in the Dialogue, but traces the significant discussions which the papers evoked. He is careful to state the positions of both sides, highlighting not only the points of agreement, but also pointing out areas of significant differences. He notes that as the Dialogue has matured over the years, the participants seem to be more ready to articulate points of continued disagreement over the “hard questions.” Valuable summaries of these different perspectives give considerable credibility to the work. For example, in chapter four (the 1991 Dialogue) it is evident that Roman Catholics are inclined to be more positive about the elements of grace that may be seen in non-Christian religions, whereas Pentecostals are more inclined to see demonic elements in non-Christian systems. Again, in chapter seven, dealing with the 1994 Dialogue, the “hard question” of proselytism is opened up. It is evident that Roman Catholics are put off by enthusiastic Pentecostals who tend to see inactive Catholics as “fair game” for evangelism. This continues to be a point of tension.

The conclusion of the report is a frank assessment of continued areas of disagreement, which is a healthy and honest approach to genuine dialogue. Also, against the face of common enemies in prevailing culture of these two groups, such as widespread secularism, Dr. Karkainen identifies a number of areas in which there is, indeed, ground for common witness.

This volume is helpful to serious students of modern Pentecostalism, not only for the clear and faithful recording of the interchange between Pentecostals and the largest Christian body in the world, but also for the thorough documentation conspicuous throughout. This is not only a good piece of scholarship, but it is highly readable. The frequent summaries and the detailed outlining make it easy to follow.

Finally, this is not just a chronicle of events past, but the identification of yet-unresolved issues of the present that offers useful pointers for honest engagement in the future. As Pentecostals face the future, here is an agenda for serious reflection.

William W. Menzies