

Keith Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology: A Theology of Encounter* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), paper, xii + 336pp., ISBN: 978-0-567-04452-5, US\$32.

Pentecostal theology, being both experiential and self-analytical, is very difficult to define. Keith Warrington, the Welch Pentecostal scholar, is conscious of the difficulty in defining this multidenominational, multidimensional, global movement. One's first thought upon picking up this book is, "How can this medium-sized book cover such a broad topic?" He clarifies, however, in his preface that his intention is not to provide a systematic or comprehensive study of all that Pentecostals believe. Rather, his intention is to highlight those aspects which are unique to Pentecostals. His intention is to provide a book that will assist Pentecostal theology as it develops beyond its adolescence into maturity. Each chapter ends with "some ways forward" toward this goal.

The subtitle, "A Theology of Encounter" reflects the idea that, while non-Pentecostal theologies often deal primarily with a set of beliefs, Pentecostal theology explores its beliefs within the context of praxis. Pentecostals are not simply those who adhere to a list of beliefs, they are those who have encountered those beliefs experientially. Warrington is well aware of the dangers inherent in a theology based on experience (emotionalism, triumphalism, subjectivism, etc.). Nevertheless, he asserts that Pentecostal theology will only be understood along these lines.

After dealing with the difficulties of defining Pentecostal theology, Warrington goes on to do so. He begins, appropriately, with God. Pentecostals are mainly Trinitarian (the significant exception being the Oneness Pentecostals), though they tend to be more personal as they "practically relate to the individual members of the God head as if they were three different persons" (30). It is perhaps in the area of God's relationship with people that Pentecostalism has most to contribute to theology. It is the real, personal, life-changing relationship that Pentecostals have with God, through Christ, empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit that often distinguishes them from the rest of Christianity.

Predictably, Warrington focuses his "God" chapter on the Holy Spirit. He has already established that, despite being called "Spirit centered" by others, Pentecostalism is actually Christocentric, or perhaps "pneumatologically Christocentric" (34). Having done so, he spends about fifty pages describing Pentecostalism's perspective on the

Holy Spirit, the believer's relationship with the Holy Spirit, and the charismata. The rest of the chapter deals with Baptism in the Spirit, a central facet of Pentecostal theology. He deals with subsequent and initial evidence, making an effort to explain various perspectives within Pentecostalism.

Warrington next discusses the church. Ecclesiology, he points out, is a weak point in Pentecostal theology, which is generally more interested in soteriology (132), though this weakness is being corrected by such authors as Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, Simon Chan, and Frank Macchia, among others. Pentecostals have an expectation that the church will experience the immediate, transforming, and empowering presence of God. As he describes various aspects of the church, he focuses on the differences in Pentecostal praxis, such as the role of women in church leadership (143). He also spends considerable time in this chapter describing "some ways forward" in areas such as higher education, ordinances, and ecumenism.

In "The Bible" (ch. 5), after an overview of orthodox Christian theology, Warrington steps into the Pentecostal world to discuss the importance of application, the use of narrative, and the value of personal experience in interpreting Scripture. Of particular concern to him is that Pentecostals must continue to grow in their value of using their intellect in interpreting the Bible, using established rules of hermeneutics to do so.

Chapter 6, "Spirituality and Ethics" appears to be a place for Warrington to put topics that did not readily fit anywhere else. He briefly mentions the importance of sanctification and the desire for holiness, which he sees as decreasing within Pentecostalism (211). One reason for the deep spirituality that often characterizes Pentecostals is the emphasis on prayer, which is seen as relational and corporate (as well as individual). Worship, expectant and spontaneous, is also an important part of a Pentecostal's spirituality as a regular means of encountering God. This chapter also addresses the accusation that Pentecostals neglect social and political concerns. While this may have been somewhat true in the past, Warrington shows that Pentecostals are now significantly engaged in political and social issues all over the world.

Next, in the chapter about "Mission," the passionate Pentecostal commitment to spreading the gospel throughout the world is seen as central to understanding the movement. Pentecostals have inherent advantages as missionaries. Their firm commitment to the Great Commission, their empowering Spirit baptism, the signs and wonders

that have accompanied them, their spiritual worldview, their pragmatism, and their belief in the imminent return of Christ have given them an enthusiasm and efficacy in missions that has changed the world.

“Healing, Exorcism and Suffering” are specialties of Warrington, who has extensively researched and written on these topics. He briefly deals with many issues within the doctrine of healing, such as the role of faith, prayer, sin, the name of Jesus, the use of oil, and the laying on of hands. He also addresses the question of whether healing is guaranteed by the atonement. As he examines Matthew 8:14-17, Isaiah 53:4-5, and 1 Peter 2:24, Warrington reveals his own belief that this doctrine is erroneous and has led Pentecostals to neglect the reality and importance of suffering.

The final chapter, which discusses eschatology, is mainly a description of different perspectives on the millennium, the parousia, and eternal life (heaven or hell). Warrington shows the variety (and uncertainty) that exists within Pentecostalism in these matters and encourages openness to different perspectives in the interest of fellowship and unity (323).

Warrington is successful in achieving his goal to set forth a basic Pentecostal theology as a starting point for further discussion. He does very well at presenting a global view of Pentecostalism, which is refreshing in a world dominated by American publishing. The brevity of his descriptions and explanations is both a strength and a weakness. On one hand, the book is easy to read and easy to understand, but on the other hand it is at best introductory on all these topics.

Another strength of this book is the largely unbiased manner in which he presents Pentecostalism and the various views within the movement. He is realistic about the faults of existing Pentecostal theologies. By candidly exposing the weaknesses of Pentecostal theology, he provides a motivation and means to encourage its improvement.

The footnotes are extensive and show that Warrington’s aim is not to simply assert his own opinion of what constitutes Pentecostal theology, but to describe the position of the entire global movement. He does this ably, by quoting not only Western scholars, but Asians, Africans, Latin Americans, and many missionaries also.

One significant weakness of this book is the lack of a bibliography. The introductory nature of the book begs further study. The natural place to begin such a study is with the authors mentioned by Warrington, but the only bibliographic information is found in the

footnotes. Also, the index, hardly more than one page, would be much more useful if it were expanded to include more subtopics.

In the “some ways forward” sections, the ideas are presented rather roughly. They are simply stated and few of them are argued in any way. Perhaps he intends this simple format to encourage discussion on the topics, but the impression is more that these are sketchy thoughts that he didn’t have the time to develop more fully within each chapter.

This book will be very useful as a textbook in either an undergraduate or graduate “Introduction to Pentecostalism” course. Additionally, it would be useful for non-Pentecostals who desire to understand the Pentecostal movement. Pentecostals who want to understand their own beliefs more fully might find this book useful as a starting point, but will quickly find that it is inadequate for any kind of in-depth study.

Anyone would surely be intimidated by the thought of writing a book called “Pentecostal Theology.” Who would dare to put his name on such a work? Yet Warrington has not only written such a book, but written it in such a way that it represents the multifaceted Pentecostal movement simply and modestly. His intention is to help move Pentecostal theology along toward maturity and he does so by defining where it *is* at this time. Therefore, this book will serve well as part of a foundation from which Pentecostalism can put out branches as it explores, clarifies, establishes, and defines its theology.

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