

Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Social Concern

Part I

For the next two editions, we will embark on an interesting journey down a road that, from where I sit, far too few Pentecostal scholars in the Asia Pacific have been willing to go: the development of a Pentecostal theology of social concern. With the continued growth of the church in the majority world, I believe that this issue will substantially impact the future of global Pentecostalism. Pentecostal social concern was the theme of the 21st Annual APTS William W. Menzies Lectureship Series, which we hosted on the Baguio campus from February 4-8, 2013, under the title “The Gospel of Good News: Word, Deed and Power.” Dr. Doug Petersen from Vanguard University (Assemblies of God), in Southern California was the keynote speaker. Dr. Joel Tejedo and Dr. V.J. D-Davidson were among those that also presented papers. Dr. Petersen’s lectures and these papers constitute this edition of the Journal.

Joel Tejedo’s article is an excellent example of the Pentecostal praxis of social concern. He opens with the case study of Jun Somera, a Filipino born into poverty who became a successful businessman through faith in God and a strong, disciplined work ethic. Tejedo then goes on to profile other Filipino businesspeople, who are passionate followers of Jesus and who integrate their faith into their chosen profession.

The first of Doug Petersen’s lectures, co-authored by his friend and former colleague, Dr. Murray Dempster, deals with personal redemption and transformation that is solidly rooted in Paul’s theology of the cross (Colossians 2:13-15). In the second and third lectures, which are combined here under the title “Kingdom Rules: Upside Down Discipleship,” Petersen contends that social concern impacts and informs virtually every major doctrine in the Bible. Here, he deals with God’s righteous reign and argues his case from within the Jewish culture of Palestine. In first century Israel, like civilizations the world over throughout history, the rich and politically powerful oppressed the poor. Using Mark’s narrative, Petersen compares this situation with the ethical demands of the Kingdom of God that are, to say the least,

countercultural both then and now. Petersen holds that, according to Mark, success in the Kingdom would be defined by service to the poor and disinherited, not by grasping for wealth or power.

In Petersen's final article, he lays out three challenges for Pentecostals regarding social concern: "the emergence of a Pentecostal hermeneutic, further development of an essential connectedness between social action and the biblical text, and the importance of establishing and maintaining healthy, fair, and equal relationships within the community of faith." A Pentecostal hermeneutic, which Petersen draws from his extensive involvement in Latin America, is drawn from the grassroots of how the poor read the Bible and apply it to their daily lives. In his second challenge, he articulates that God is at the center of both the biblical text and Pentecostal social action. The truth that people were created in the image of God calls for us to treat all men and women with dignity and respect—living out the ethics of the Kingdom of God daily. The third challenge relates to being the Body of Christ on earth. This command, according to Petersen, transcends social norms, especially social status, which is often determined by race, social position and the level of one's wealth or poverty. To Petersen, the ground at the foot of the cross is level, reflecting God's love for all men equally. When Pentecostal churches and believers function as God intended, the heart of biblical social concern is achieved.

V. J. D-Davidson's article focuses on intimacy with God and its impact on daily life as an expression of the gospel in word, deed and power. The author contends that intimacy with God is an aspect of Pentecostal spirituality that is often overlooked and overshadowed by the ongoing debate among Pentecostal and Charismatic scholars on *glossalalia*. But for Davidson, nurturing and maintaining intimacy with God is a focal point in our relationship with God. Enhanced intimacy with God leads to increased sensitivity to others with the result that we will express the Good News to others in word, deed and power—Pentecostal social concern.

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Thanks for reading,

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