

Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Social Concern

Part II

This is the final installment of a two part series regarding a theology of Pentecostal social concern. Pentecostal social concern goes well beyond feeding programs and disaster relief and must include dealing with long term issues such as unjust social structures, health care and environmental concerns. To even scratch the surface of these issues is well beyond our ability here. The articles that follow, however, deal broadly with the issue of unjust social structures, which are particularly relevant to the poor—a category that includes most Pentecostals in the Majority World.

In this issue, Monte Rice calls for global Pentecostalism to engage the biblical concept of justice and draws on the history of racial equality that prevailed at the Azusa Street Revival where the line between the races was “washed away by the blood of Jesus.” He argues that imbuing Pentecostal tradition with a strengthened emphasis on social orientation will enhance the Pentecostal “vision and witness of the justified people of God.” For Rice, this implies “uniting social-economic, generational, and ethnically stratified peoples” into diverse missional communities based on loving one another as equals in Christ.

In a two part article, Denise Austin tells the incredible story of Mary (Wong Yen) Yeung, a Chinese Australian woman who, by her own confession, was poor and not well educated, who became filled with the Holy Spirit. Empowered by the same Spirit, she rose above her circumstances and transcended a number of racial and social barriers to become a Pentecostal pioneer both in Australia and China, outliving no less than three husbands in the process. Yeung’s story is indicative of the reality that the Baptism in the Holy Spirit is a socially democratizing factor that can lift those with lower social status above their situations. Furthermore, throughout her life Yeung planted churches and did social work, seeing no difference between the two and even engaged in business when necessary to support her various ministries.

APTS MTh student Daniel Qin has written an excellent article giving an emic perspective on the Confucian concept of filial piety and compares it to the fifth commandment to honor one's parents (Exo 20:12). Basing his reflections on H. Reinhold Niebuhr's concept of Christ above Culture, he provides some excellent examples of correlation between the Chinese concept of filial piety and the biblical concept of it as well as presenting some striking differences. For example, according to Qin, the primary relationship in the family in to Confucian filial piety is that of the Father and eldest son, not the husband and wife, which Qin says degrades the woman. The biblical ethic, then, lifts the woman's relationship to equality with her husband. The point for a Pentecostal theology of social concern is both to elevate the status of women and to follow the biblical command to honor one's parents deal with the issues of the family, the building block of human civilization.

Finally, Robin Steen writes an insightful article giving an etic perspective of the impact of the Pentecostal message among the animistic Kankana-ey tribe of Northern Luzon in the Philippines. He contends that the gospel has been "reasonably" well contextualized, but also expresses some concern about syncretism. Here, the development of a Pentecostal theology of social concern is not immediately obvious, although it does begin to come into focus when one considers both the spiritual and economic impact of the Kankana-ey's animistic practices.

As always, I welcome your comments. You can drop me a line at www.aps.edu.

In Christ,

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