

Robert P. Menzies, *Pentecost: This Story is Our Story* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2013). 165 pages. ISBN 978-1-60731-341-0.

In this highly readable volume aimed at a general readership both within and outside Pentecostalism, American Assemblies of God missionary and Lukan scholar Robert Menzies delineates a compelling apologetic for Classical Pentecostal readings of Scripture, experience, and spiritual and missional practice. The book's title directly states Menzies' consistently argued descriptive of Pentecostal theological identity, which he moreover argues, is foremost accountable for Pentecostal church growth worldwide. Menzies thus argues that Pentecostal identity and church growth primarily emerges from the Pentecostal hermeneutical practice of reading the Luke-Acts narrative (e.g., "stories"), specifically via the Acts chapter two Pentecost story, as their primary paradigmatic "model" for shaping their "identity, ideas, and actions" (p. 23). Hence, Pentecostals read the story of Pentecost as "*our* story" (pp. 21, 23, 35, 67, 98, 117-118, 138, 144, 147).

The first four chapters closely delineate methodological approaches and theological themes that Menzies has extensively argued throughout most of his past and more scholarly-toned writings. Menzies begins with a brief introduction that clarifies key terminology and addressed issues. Then in chapter 1 ("Why We Read Differently") Menzies reiterates his past arguments for the traditional Pentecostal Lukan-prioritized hermeneutic, stressing theological, paradigmatic and historically enduring methodological purposes to the Lukan corpus. Menzies thus also shows how this hermeneutic contrasts with common Evangelical hermeneutical premises that restrict Luke's writings to purely historiographical aims.

In chapter 2 ("Baptism in the Holy Spirit"), Menzies similarly reiterates his past thesis that Lukan pneumatology doctrinally posits an experience of Spirit baptism that lacks soteriological dimensions, being strictly missiological in purpose for the sake of empowering believers for Spirit-inspired witness. Menzies thus again argues how these themes account for how Luke consistently likens this experience to Old Testament ideas of vocational, charismatic, and prophetic empowering. In chapter 3 ("Role of Tongue in Luke-Acts") Menzies offers some fresh developments to his past discussions on tongues-speech. He also suggests that the Pentecostal practice of tongues speech emerges from the distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic delineated in chapter 1.

Building on this premise, Menzies suggests that in Pentecostalism, the practice of tongues speech symbolically illustrates the true prophetic calling of the Christian church, which he substantiates by building a theology of tongues speech from the prophetic speech motifs running throughout Luke-Acts.

Chapter 4 (“Signs and Wonders”) also illustrates some ongoing development in Menzies’ thinking. While he still contrasts distinctives between Pentecostals and Charismatics in their differing stress on charismatic gifts and phenomena, here he stresses an integral role to “signs and wonders” within Pentecostal experience and ministry praxis. Yet he argues that the Luke-Acts narrative subsumes charismatic experience and phenomena within its intended, ongoing model of prophetic-empowerment for Spirit-inspired witness.

In chapter 5 (“Why Pentecostal Churches are Growing”) Menzies suggests “five theological-oriented reasons” accountable for Pentecostal church growth worldwide. These are: 1. Their “missional DNA” that emerges from their paradigmatic reading of Acts; 2. Their “clear message” again emerging from their reading of Bible stories as “our stories;” 3. Their expectation that the “signs and wonders” evident in the early church should characterize our contemporary experience and ministry practice; 4. “Limited church structure,” meaning a “strong egalitarian” ethos in Pentecostal community; and 5. An “emphasis on experience,” again referring to how Pentecostals believe that believers should share in the kinds of experiences recorded in Luke’s record of the early church. In his “Conclusion,” Menzies reiterates his broader thesis that the Pentecostal movement ultimately demonstrates the theological distinctiveness of Luke-Acts. Menzies thus concludes by suggesting that a major contribution the Pentecostal movement should continually make to the broader Christian church worldwide is Luke’s theological distinctiveness and the Lukan portrayal of the early church as a paradigmatic template for ongoing Christian experience and missiological practice.

I shall now point out what I see as Menzies’ most salient and sustainable apologetic towards a theological understanding of Pentecostal identity. Here I refer to Menzies’ sustained stress on the paradigmatic role that Luke-Acts has and should serve towards Pentecostal identity formation, experience, and missiological practice. I say this, however, for the following rebuttal to some of Menzies’ argued themes. Broader theological and interdisciplinary perspectives would substantiate this presumed hermeneutical relation, even if we do not wholly concur with Menzies’ long-sustained reading of Luke’s

pneumatology as strictly void of soteriological dimensions and hence also, Pentecostal experiences of Spirit baptism. I applaud Menzies' insistence, as a biblical theologian, on the formative role of Lukan theology on Pentecostal identity. Yet I feel that his ambivalence towards broader theological disciplines and varied interdisciplinary methodologies that have become well integrated in broader Pentecostal theological scholarship unfortunately hampers his own contribution towards this apologetic. His ambivalence thereby also undermines the logical coherency of his concluding chapter. For while he claims to offer "theological" reasons for the growth of Pentecostalism worldwide, his identified reasons, (which essentially focus on matters of praxis) can easily be deemed as broad generalizations albeit lacking adequately appropriated empirical research.

Another weakness to Menzies' theological portrayal of global Pentecostalism emerges from his argued stress on its Reformed heritage and perceived affinities between the two traditions. In chapter 2 Menzies specifically grounds this trajectory on his concurrent stress that the Pentecostal doctrine of Spirit baptism is best developed on an understanding of Luke's theology of spirit-empowerment as wholly consisting of charismatic power for mission ("prophetic enabling") without soteriological implications (pp. 48-52). Granted, the original context of chapter 2 was a paper delivered in Amsterdam for probably an audience of Reformed background. Yet because Menzies does not acknowledge other major traditions that Pentecostalism shares historical and current affinity to, such as particularly Wesleyanism, and because of the chapter's importance within an introductory text, what results is a singularly Reformed construal of Pentecostalism. Perhaps it would actually better serve Menzies' intent if, in his introduction, he clarifies that his perspective is in fact a Reformed Pentecostal perspective and that he privileges this perspective's interests.

On the other hand, throughout his book I notice some commendable developments in Menzies' thinking. First to note is that he more clearly affirms that as a biblical theme, the Spirit baptism metaphor is polyvalent in meaning (Menzies states that the "New Testament speaks of two baptisms in the Spirit—one that is soteriological . . . and one that is missiological" [p. 63]). Second, in explaining the relation of tongues speech to Spirit baptism (chapter 3) Menzies seems to consistently define tongues speech as a "sign" of Spirit baptism, while avoiding evidentialist terminology (pp. 68, 93-94, 97-99). I say this while noting that Menzies clarifies the chapter as an edited version of a paper (originally in Mandarin Chinese) on "initial

evidence” presented in Taiwan (p. 68). Related to this is perhaps an emerging willingness to describe tongues speech in sacramental terms. As earlier mentioned, in chapter 3 Menzies infers a sacramental nuance in describing tongues speech as a “sign” of “prophetic power” (p. 94). Then in his “Conclusion,” he explicitly suggests that tongues speech functions “as a sacrament,” in the sense of “an outward sign of a spiritual reality” (p. 144). Finally, Menzies provides some helpful perspectives towards observed missiological power in the lives of non-Pentecostals, and the sometimes missing phenomena of tongues speech amongst believers open to or seeking Pentecostal experiences of Spirit baptism. Menzies thus suggests that some experiences, or the lack thereof, are beyond our human judgements, and what matters most is that we encourage believers to stay open to miraculous expressions of God’s presence and blessings (pp. 98-101).

To conclude, given its merits while bearing in mind its critical limitations, Menzies’ book can function well as a Bible college text, and for general readers wanting an introduction on how Pentecostals derive their identify from their unique reading of Scripture.

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