

Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostalism: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London, UK: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013. 205 pages. ISBN 978-0-567-15460-6.

In this tightly written introduction to global Pentecostalism, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Regent University (Virginia Beach, Virginia, USA) Wolfgang Vondey argues for a poly-tension themed descriptive of Pentecostalism as a global Christian “movement” that significantly shapes and mirrors meta-transitional dynamics more broadly characteristic of 20th-21st century world Christianity and more broadly still— global human life. Vondey, who is also Director of Regent’s Center for Renewal Studies, frames this thesis against the backdrop of an important methodological dilemma impinging on current studies on Pentecostalism. This dilemma Vondey posits as the many conflicting and “perplexing” juxtapositions that observers may identify towards a variety of theological and phenomenological dynamics equally descriptive of global Pentecostalism (1-4, 8).

Therefore, with the goal of setting forth an introductory guide to “Pentecostalism as a whole” (2), Vondey structures this seven-chapter survey of world Pentecostalism via seven motifs. Vondey articulates each motif as a “tension” between two polarities, albeit together comprising a key descriptive that narrates the ongoing evolution of Pentecostalism as a global movement that mirrors transitions currently characterizing the evolving global landscape of Christianity altogether (2, 22, 157). Vondey’s chapter titles, therefore, aptly define the seven descriptives.

Chapter 1 (“Local roots and global pluralism”) examines the “tension between the local roots and global pluralism of Pentecostalism” (3, 10). Hence, Vondey argues that through the dialectic of “glocalization,” both realities (local and global) inform the inherent “mobility” that characterizes Pentecostalism ethos in both its local and global expressions (25-26). Chapter 2 (“Holistic spirituality and charismatic extremism”) examines the “tension between the Pentecostal emphasis on holistic spirituality and the excess display of charismatic manifestations” (3, 29-30, 46). Here, Vondey argues that the phenomena of charismatic excess unavoidably arises from Pentecostal holistic spirituality, given its worldview which precognitively perceives all aspects of life as experientially interfaced with spiritual presences, powers, and forces (43-47). Chapter 3 (“Ecumenical ethos and denominationalism”) examines the “tension between a divisive denominationalism and the ecumenical ethos of Pentecostalism” (3). Vondey thus delineates the diverse practices and

beliefs comprising Pentecostalism (66-68). He then examines the divisively sectarian character of local Pentecostalisms (57-59), which contrasts however with the early and ongoing Pentecostal visions towards ecumenical engagement and church unity (50).

Chapter 4 (“Orthodox doctrine and sectarianism”) examines tensions that arise from divisions within global Pentecostalism over matters of doctrine, which is particularly illustrated via the tension between orthodox trinitarian and Oneness Pentecostals (69-70). Vondey also examines the unique role of spiritual experience in Pentecostal theologizing and doctrinal confession (82-83), and argues this as an evitable factor towards increasing theological and doctrinal diversity in the future (86). Chapter 5 (“Social engagement and triumphalism”) examines tensions between two contrasting ways of fostering a commonly observed dynamic of Pentecostal experience, namely, “Pentecostal upward social mobility in socio-economic terms” (90). On one hand, he surveys a diversity of social activist expressions and approaches, along with diverse forms of political and socio-cultural engagement and consciousness (90, 93-96). Vondey compares and contrasts these manners of Pentecostal upward mobility, with varied kinds of triumphalistic teaching coupled with social passivism, such as illustrated in prosperity preaching (93, 97-103).

Chapter 6 (“Egalitarian practices and institutionalism”) examines the “tension between democratic egalitarian ideals and the divisive effects of institutionalism” (3). Hence, Vondey contrasts Pentecostal understandings of Pentecost as signifying the prophethood of all believers and empowerment of all believers as equals in the fellowship of Christ (115-119), with the historical realities of intuitionism, racial segregation, biased scholarship, and gender inequality within Pentecostalism (119-124). Finally, Chapter 7 (“Scholarship and anti-intellectualism”) examines the “tension between Pentecostalism scholarship and the prevalent anti intellectualism of the movement” (3). More specifically, Vondey examines the early and ongoing anti-intellectualism that still shapes much of Pentecostal pedagogy and negative grass-root perceptions towards formal theological reflection (134-141). Vondey then contrasts this variable with the recent emergence of genuine Pentecostal scholarship that is reflecting unique theological and disciplinary methods emerging from Pentecostal spirituality (143-148). Vondey moreover argues that arising from this development, Pentecostal scholarship is now set not only to significantly inform 21st century Christian theology, but also via its unique epistemological and hermeneutical premises—a vast array of scholarly explorations within the human and natural sciences (145-146, 148, 151-153).

I shall now review several integrative themes Vondey develops, which reflect agendas characteristic of his broader theological projects that are serving to popularize Regent's "renewal" scholarship perspective. Given my familiarity with some of Vondey's other published works, I find these themes coded in his concluding sentence, "To understand Pentecostalism, one has to look *beyond Pentecostalism*" (italics mine; 158). Vondey's conclusion signals a direct reference to his earlier and more comprehensive volume, *Beyond Pentecostalism: The Crisis of Global Christianity and the Renewal of the Theological Agenda* (Eerdmans, 2010). I recommend a reading of both works, because the structural methodology and themes Vondey utilizes and pursues in this briefer work, are clearly appropriated from themes and arguments first developed in his *Beyond Pentecostalism* book.

One such theme is Vondey's thesis that the tensions of Pentecostalism are "symptomatic" of diverse "transitions" underway in 20th and 21st century Christianity that Pentecostalism significantly illustrates, given its existence and role as a global renewal "movement" within the Church Catholic and world Christianity (3, 8, 157). Hence, a correlating theme I must also note is Vondey's stress that we primarily classify Pentecostalism as a "movement" rather than as a church tradition within the Church Catholic (25, 50, 59-60, 65, 68, 155-157). Vondey premises this suggestion on early and ongoing Pentecostal self-referencing as a "movement" ecumenically aimed towards all church traditions (50-51). However, I feel Vondey would do better by more fully juxtaposing this observation to emerging understandings of Pentecostalism as a maturing theological *tradition*, comprising unique modes of theologizing and theological methodologies, which demark Pentecostal groups from other church traditions and even other renewal streams or "movements."

I feel that failure to recognize this development hinders Vondey's ecumenical intent, because it limits adequate appreciation towards diverse communal giftings and encounters with God, which the Spirit may mediate via the cultural-linguistic settings of other diverse church and theological traditions. In saying this, I would surmise that the spiritual renewing of the Church Catholic, even in the Pentecostal sense of "latter day outpourings," does not infer that the Spirit is transforming and leading all Christian traditions into "pentecostal type" experiences, worldview, hermeneutical paradigms, and theological perspectives. I believe that emerging Pentecostal pneumatologies that explicate comprehensive theologies of Spirit baptism beyond, yet comprising, the classical Pentecostal nuance on empowerment for service, substantiate this ecumenical approach to spiritual renewal, while conversely

stressing Pentecostalism as an emerging theological tradition. For these reasons, I think Vondey could strengthen his ecumenical aims by also articulating as another tension of Pentecostalism—the tension between Pentecostalism as a renewal movement within the Church Catholic and as a maturing Christian tradition in its own right.

As I earlier inferred, another broader agenda that Vondey pursues through this guide is to frame Pentecostalism from the perspective of Regent University's ongoing development and popularizing of "renewal studies" (151) and "renewal theology" (152). This agenda characterizes Vondey's concluding chapter, where he outlines an innovative scheme that classifies the "history of Pentecostal scholarship . . . into five periods of development, each focusing on the formation of a particular vocation" (141). Hence, focusing on the formation of "Pentecostal missionaries," missionary training schools characterized the first phase (141-142). The second phase can be associated with desires to root contemporary Pentecostalism in its early heritage, thus focusing on formation of "Pentecostal historians" (142-143). To respond to and engage non-Pentecostal scholarship, the third phase led to formation of "Pentecostal biblical scholarship" (143). Beginning in the early 1990's, the fourth phase led to formation of genuine "Pentecostal theologians," as Pentecostal scholars began approaching diverse theological loci from the basis of uniquely identified Pentecostal theological methods (143-144). Vondey then describes the current era as an expanding thrust of Pentecostal scholarship into the "human and natural sciences," now leading to formation of "Pentecostal scientists" (141-142, 144).

Vondey next distinguishes "Pentecostal studies" from "Renewal studies," which he theologically anchors not to "Pentecostalism but Pentecost," meaning the "renewing work of the Holy Spirit" (152). Reflecting themes that consistently characterize the theological works of other Regent voices (most notably Amos Yong), Vondey defines renewal studies as the task of bringing pneumatological reflection into multidisciplinary conversation with a vast spectrum of fields, such as science, technology, politics, economics, and religion (152). Hence, "renewal theology" explores "the renewing work of the Holy Spirit in all phenomena of life" (152).

I will now close with two observations concerning the relevancy of Vondey's guide, albeit primarily tied to his concluding chapter. First, I think Vondey's guide provides a helpful resource on Pentecostalism for three audiences. Besides readers of a non-Pentecostal background, grass-root Pentecostals will find Vondey's work highly stimulating, which for many will provide a concisely worded, fresh and perhaps evocative perspective on current trends and challenges that characterize

global Pentecostalism as a historically significant shaper of 21st century Christianity, and human life as well. Meanwhile, Pentecostal scholars would appreciate Vondey's work as a handy pedagogical resource that coherently schematises the poly-fold tensions characterizing global Pentecostalism.

A second observation concerns Vondey's thesis that Pentecostalism is shifting from its deeply entrenched anti-intellectualism and anti-theological scholarship into a major shaper of not only 21st century Christian theological scholarship, but of diverse disciplinary fields as well. On one hand, this thesis will certainly evoke affirming responses from many who are already familiar with current directions in Pentecostal scholarship. On the other hand, Vondey's work may evoke bewildered and perhaps negative reactions from many Classical Pentecostal readers who cannot imagine Pentecostalism as anything other than a eschatologically-propelled end-time, missionary movement for world evangelization. Perhaps in future works, Vondey may want to substantiate this thesis by framing it as another emerging tension within Pentecostalism. This is a tension we should historically frame within the formidable 21st century challenges that threaten our world. Namely, it is a tension between the eschatologically fostered passion that awakens historical consciousness within Pentecostals, and Pentecostalism's coming of age as a global epistemological resource for renewing human life *and* human civilization, and moreover—the flourishing of all creation.

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