

Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel*. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017. ISBN: HB: 978-0-5672-7539-4. Page numbers: 302 pages + xiv. Cost: US\$114.

This is a beautifully written, literary masterpiece, presenting a visionary method and example for constructing Pentecostal systematic theology. More specifically, as Wolfgang Vondey suggests, a Pentecostal rendering of systematic theology that is deeply informed by its core symbol, narrative, experiences, and practices that can be historically and globally observed in Pentecostalism worldwide.

For this reason, I must stress the crucial role of the book's Introduction and first chapter titled, "Prolegomena." These together delineate Vondey's key arguments and theological method. Let us recall that systematic theologies often begin with a "prolegomena"; hence, a discussion of methodological issues or premises, "before" presenting a theology or doctrine. These may also include references to a given Christian tradition's commonly recognized theological or doctrinal confessions. Yet here we surprisingly encounter Vondey's bold proposal: that what should be recognised as coming "*before*" a Pentecostal exposition of doctrine or theology is: "Pentecost" (11). Hence, "Pentecost *is* the very prolegomenon of Pentecostal theology" (12).

Vondey then suggests several correlating motifs that should appropriately express the language or "logic" underlying construction of a Pentecostal systematic theology: "play," "spirituality," "experience," the "full gospel," "affections," "praxis," and "embodiment" (12-24). It should be evident that through these terms, Vondey is thereby articulating a methodology directly informed not just by commonly identified Pentecostal beliefs, but by their commonly identified experiences and practices (3, 5-6, 9, 30-34). Hence, Vondey has striven to articulate a systematic theology not primarily "harvested" from formally existing confessions, but rather on the biblical imagery of Pentecost, as historically experienced, practiced, and lived by Pentecostals (4-5). For Vondey, this endeavour moreover requires recognizing Pentecostalism as a "theological tradition" deeply premised on "encounter with God through the Spirit of Christ manifested in discernible signs and wonders as evidence of God's transforming and redeeming presence directing all of life towards the kingdom of God" (4).

Emerging from these themes, Vondey thus forwards the following main arguments, which he consistently reiterates throughout the book. First: "Pentecost is the core theological symbol of Pentecost theology, and its theological narrative is the full gospel" (2, 281). By "full gospel,"

Vondey refers to the historic Pentecostal fivefold Christological motifs of Jesus as Saviour, Sanctifier, Spirit baptiser, Healer, and Coming king. While the fivefold pattern more specifically characterizes the explicit doctrinal confession of Wesleyan-Pentecostals, Vondey follows the lead of recent pentecostal scholarship (representing both “Finished-work” [e.g., Assemblies of God, Foursquare] and Wesleyan-Pentecostal efforts) towards appreciating the fivefold pattern as an “inclusive framework” (6), heuristically identifying core theological motifs found throughout world Pentecostalism. In fact, Vondey ecumenically structures his chapter on sanctification (Ch. 3, “Sanctified: Participating in the Life of God”), as a survey on how the sanctification theme is commonly demonstrated within both theological streams.

Yet more important to note is how Vondey insightfully articulates the “full gospel” motifs as a narrative structure that describes a plot commonly identified within Pentecostal spirituality (21-24, 288-289). Let me explain how this works. First, Vondey consistently argues that what is narrated through this “full gospel narrative” is the Pentecostal liturgical practice of encountering God at the “altar.” Throughout Vondey’s book, the term “altar” functions as a “theological symbol” (5) signifying the Pentecostal stress on ongoing or periodic transforming encounters with God, which generally occur within the liturgical context of worship (8-9, 25-26, 31-32, 282-283, 289). Then Vondey pulls these themes together to suggest that the very notion of “Pentecostal theology,” calls us to the “altar” (5, 10, 255-256, 291, 294). Therefore, the five “full gospel” Christological themes narrate our movement toward and at the altar, then from it in mission with God to the world, and finally back again to the altar that signifies encountering God in worship (8-9, 55, 83-84, 90, 289).

With each chapter themed according to one of the five Pentecostal Christological motifs, the next five chapters (“Part 1: Full Gospel Story”) further delineate the Full Gospel as a “theological narrative.” The inviting power of each chapter title warrants their listing:

- Ch. 2, “Saved: Meeting Jesus at the Altar”
- Ch. 3, “Sanctified: Participating in the Life of God”
- Ch. 4, “Baptized: Transformed by the Holy Spirit”
- Ch. 5, “Healed: Manifesting Signs and Wonders”
- Ch. 6, “Commissioned: Enacting the Coming Kingdom.”

Each chapter comprises three sections. In each, *vis-à-vis* the prime Pentecostal metaphor of the “altar,” the first section explores how the respective motif emerges from commonly observed Pentecostal “ritual” experiences and practices. The second section consistently articulates a

moral doctrinal-themed exposition, followed thirdly, by further theological implications. Then in Part 2 (“Full Gospel Theology”) Vondey appropriates the five motifs to construct a theology on the following five selected foci: “Creation” (Ch. 7); “Humanity” (Ch. 8); “Society” (Ch. 9); “Church” (Ch. 10); and “God” (Ch. 11). Hence, each of these five chapters comprises five sections, with each section thus examining the respective foci, from the prism of one of the five Christological motifs.

Vondey’s Conclusion is beautiful. Its first two sections (“The symbol of Pentecost” and “The narrative of Pentecostal theology”) climatically transitions to the third section: “The Pentecostal Liturgy.” Here Vondey states the book’s “chief conclusion”: “Pentecostal theology represents a liturgical tradition oriented around the altar.” It does because, “The full gospel forms the narrative of a Pentecostal liturgy that makes possible the participation in Pentecost as symbol of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit” (291). More specifically: “The surprising conclusion we can draw from this exercise [the book’s broad thrust] is that Pentecostal theology is at heart a liturgical theology” (281, cf. 291-294). By “liturgy,” Vondey refers to the unique worship practices commonly descriptive of Pentecostal community life. These practices are particularly evident through the historical Pentecostal practice of “altar call and response” (31-32) or simply, calling people into encountering God within the “ritual environment” that characterises the Pentecostal communal gathering for worship (43).

I shall now elaborate on two outstanding qualities I find so descriptive of this watershed contribution to Pentecostal theology: *pentecostally synthetic*, and *structurally symphonic*. If I was to name a third feature, it would be: theologically, *aesthetically beautiful*. Let me elaborate what I mean by *pentecostally synthetic*. After halfway reading through Vondey’s book, one of the unique things that caught my attention pertains to his “theological methodology.” Yet by this I am not foremost referring to anything primarily stated in his “Prolegomena” chapter. Nor am I referring to his main arguments, which I have earlier discussed. Rather, by “pentecostally synthetic,” what I mean is this. I noticed that while this work reads as a clear ecumenically-aimed project (7), most of the scholarship that Vondey draws from is that body of historically accumulated Pentecostal formal/academic scholarship that has come to be known within Pentecostal studies as the Pentecostal theological tradition. This is what Walter Hollenweger earlier referred to as, the “Pentecostal critical tradition.” It is as if Vondey had “synthetically” taken up this whole critical tradition as it presently exists, and squarely constructed on it, this exemplar of Pentecostal systematic theology.

In much Pentecostal scholarship, a common and needful approach is to explore a given topic “in conversation” with someone, a given school/tradition, or discipline, within or outside of Pentecostal scholarship. Yet in this work, Vondey refrained from doing so, rather specifically focusing on the existing Pentecostal theological tradition. So while the book clearly demonstrates ecumenical cognizance and aims, Vondey intentionally retrieved most of his sources from within Pentecostal scholarship, in order to demonstrate the theological maturation of contemporary Pentecostal scholarship.

Yet I also find it important to stress that Vondey more explicitly explains how he methodically funded this example of Pentecostal systematic theology. Namely, with the lived “spirituality” of Pentecostals, exemplified by their congregational liturgical practices and experiences affectively evident in worship before God (18-20, 24-26, 28-34) which for Vondey, are broadly signified through the Pentecostal “theological symbol” of “Pentecost” and “altar” as the tradition’s core “theological metaphor” (5, 7, 281-288). By doing so, Vondey effectively integrates these two fields of Pentecostal theological formation: on one hand, the tradition’s formal theological/critical tradition, and on the other, its grassroots liturgical experience. Incidentally, in liturgical theological studies, the former is often referred to as secondary theology, while the latter is understood as primary theology. Vondey thus infers the integral role that grassroots Pentecostal should play within the formation of Pentecostal theology, at the secondary level of formal academic scholarship.

Moreover, through integrating the primary and secondary sources of Pentecostal theology, Vondey successfully achieves another stated aim. Namely, to suggest that such an approach accurately characterises Pentecostal theology as a form of “mystical theology” (17-18). This is a term which historically refers to Christian practices that promote steady movement into the moral likeness and mission of God. This trajectory thus reinforces Vondey’s conception of the Full Gospel as an ongoing narrated movement from the world to the altar where Pentecostals receive empowerment, which thus sends them back into the world with God in His mission to save, sanctify, Spirit baptise, heal, and reign over creation (255-256, 289, 292).

Second, I would characterise both Vondey’s book with its projected portrayal of Pentecostal systematic theology, as *structurally symphonic*. I cannot recall all the details on what qualifies a set of musical instruments or a music piece as a symphony. Yet I enjoy classical music symphonies, where the conductor beautifully integrates all those separate instruments and melodies towards one increasingly symphonic work, often with several crescendos on the way to a fitting climax. As earlier

demonstrated, Vondey's master themes are Pentecost, the altar, and the Fivefold Full Gospel. I am amazed by how he has translated the Fivefold Full Gospel into a narrative movement where God draws us to Himself at a sacred place and time metaphorically called the "altar," then from there sends us out in mission through the transforming power that "Pentecost" signifies.

The basic narrative movement I just described characterizes a recurrent melody through each of the five chapters comprising Part I ("Full Gospel Story"). As earlier noted, another example is how Vondey appropriated the Fivefold Gospel to the five selected theological foci examined in chapters 7-11. In fact, a chiasmic structure can be observed to both parts, which further illustrates the book's structural beauty. Vondey's "Full Gospel Story" (chapters 2-6) thus goes like this: 1a. Saviour; 2a. Sanctifier; 3. Spirit baptiser; 2b. Healer; 1b. Coming King. Then chapters 7-11 can be chiasmically observed as: 1a. "Creation"; 2a. "Humanity"; 3. "Society"; 2b. "Church"; 1b. "God." I suggest this infers that Vondey's chapter on "Society" thereby signifies that God's mission towards "creation" is its flourishing, which is achieved as God's kingdom becomes eschatologically realized in all things (221-24).

Another example of the books' symphonic beauty comes from how Chapter 11 ("God") and the Conclusion, both function as climatic conclusions, one crescendo after another. Chapter 11's sub-title marvellously displays the first crescendo: "Pentecost, Altar, and Doxology." The rest of the chapter reads sermonically, via its translation of the five Christological motifs as verbal descriptions of the triune God. Functioning like an "afterglow," the Conclusion is again, beautiful. Its beauty comes foremost through its climatic suggestion that Pentecostal theology is really—"liturgical theology," calling us to the "altar" in, "worship," which "is the beginning and end of Pentecost" (294). Finally, the symphonic beauty of Vondey's book emerges from its imagery rich yet simple vocabulary, and its highly readable and profoundly edifying prose. For these reasons, another great quality of this work is here we have a systematic theology that can richly fund Pentecostal preaching and congregational liturgical leadership with formatively-powerful imageries, symbols and themes that evocatively call people to God at the altar of Pentecost.

Let me point out however that while this volume is indeed a "systematic theology," it is not one in an exhaustive or traditional manner. In this work, Vondey has not attempted to address all normally identified areas that usually characterize single volume systematic theological works. Rather, what this work aims and succeeds in doing is to suggest a theological method for constructing systematic theology; namely, a method retrieved from the historic repository of Pentecostal

spirituality and its theological tradition. With that, Vondey has explicitly demonstrated through each chapter in Part 2 how the Pentecostal Full Gospel can be used for exploring and addressing on any given doctrine or theological issue, or constructing a theology, in manners robustly characteristic of Pentecostal spirituality (292).

To conclude, I strongly recommend this volume as requisite reading in Pentecostal theology. Its highly readable style makes it assessable for both academic and non-academic settings, such as for a church or ministry resource, particularly for those having an interest or concern in Pentecostal theological scholarship. I have earlier, for instance, noted its applicability for preaching and teaching. However, for the moment its present cost (USD 114) may well limit its accessibility for personal purchase, or as a student textbook. Yet this seminal work deserves purchase for academic and even church libraries. Within the theological school setting, both undergraduate and graduate level students can also benefit from this fine work via selected readings.

Reviewed by Monte Lee Rice