

Robert P. Menzies, *Christ-Centered: The Evangelical Nature of Pentecostal Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020). xxi + 166 pp. \$24.00 paperback.

Christ Centered “is, above all, a call to remember,” Robert Menzies remarks in the Introduction (xv). This review will summarize the content and impetus for this remembering and offer some brief comments on the work.

In the first two parts of the book, the author embarks on a pilgrim’s journey through the Evangelical origins and foundations of Pentecostal theology, offering snapshots that when viewed in tandem, support an unmistakable conclusion: Pentecostals, who affirm the authority of the Bible, cherish a personal relationship with Jesus and are committed to sharing the good news with all peoples, are firmly situated inside the Evangelical family (xv). Menzies seeks to strengthen the bonds of family unity by challenging generalizations, affirming shared commitments and history and highlighting ways in which the Pentecostal Movement and broader Evangelicalism have enriched each other’s theology and practice. In Part I (chapter 1), Menzies accomplishes this by examining the life and teachings of R. A. Torrey, who might be called the “Father of Fundamentalism”—or could he rightly be seen as the progenitor of the Pentecostal Movement, which Menzies calls “his most faithful and significant theological heir,” (3)? Torrey’s family background, scholarly community and negative personal experiences led him to distance himself from Pentecostals (24-33). However, much of Torrey’s work exerted formative influence on the movement: his understanding of Spirit baptism as a definite experience, which is separate from regeneration and that empowers witness; his penchant to elevate Lukan pneumatology and emphasize the normative link between the early church and believers today; and his “treasure trove of promises” approach to the Bible, especially Acts (31-33). Furthermore, Torrey’s example shows that just as not all Pentecostals are “wild-eyed enthusiasts,” other Evangelicals are not all “sterile rationalists” (139). Rather, our theology and praxis are remarkably similar.

Part II (chaps. 2–4) focuses on the Evangelical foundations of Pentecostal theology. Menzies surveys the three most distinctive doctrines of the Pentecostal Movement in order to demonstrate that they

are firmly grounded in Scripture. This, he asserts, is the wellspring of the movement's longevity and the essence of its uniqueness among many charismatic movements in history that have failed to impact mainstream, global Christianity (37). In chapter 2, Menzies pleads for Luke's pneumatology to have a seat at the table along with Paul's. He interprets the baptism in the Holy Spirit as a prophetic empowering against the backdrop of Numbers 11:24-30 and other Old Testament (OT) texts that anticipate a corporate refining and a mobilization of God's people to fulfill Israel's calling to be a light to the nations (44-49). Chapter 3, on the other hand, invites the reader to examine glossolalia from Paul's perspective and with contextual sensitivity (1 Cor. 12-14 vis-à-vis other salient New Testament (NT) texts), particularly as doxological prayer, intercession, and a corporate expression of worship (56-70). Menzies concludes that Paul had a positive outlook on tongues, although Paul sought to correct abuse of this spiritual gift (71). Signs and wonders as the visible manifestations of God's kingdom are the focus of chapter 4. Menzies demonstrates through careful textual analysis that Luke "nowhere describes the kingdom of God as something that is simply internal and spiritual" (81). Rather, it is the "realm where God's authority is exercised and acknowledged" (81). As believers enter through faith, it is right for us to continue to pray for and expect miracles (Luke 11:2; Acts 4:21); this is part of our holistic, present-tense experience of salvation. Here, the author argues that the translation "the kingdom of God is *among* you" in Luke 17:20-21 better indicates the kind of kingdom Jesus had in mind (73-83). Menzies offers an Evangelical corrective to potential triumphalism by reminding Pentecostals that this "theology of glory" must walk hand-in-hand with the "theology of the cross" that is likewise anchored in the Bible (85).

In Parts III and IV, we see that the book's *remembering* has a future orientation and a very pressing relevance. First, Menzies examines the Evangelical trajectory of Pentecostal theology. He illustrates some of the Pentecostal Movement's contributions to the global Church through conscientious readings of Paul and Luke. Chapter 5 fleshes out how Jesus' *Abba* prayer encapsulates the Evangelical distinctives of "the gospel, personal relationship with God in Christ, and involvement in missions" (102). Pentecostals faithfully extend this intimacy through their experience, worship, and evangelism. In chapter 6, Menzies exegetes

Acts 2:17-21 in order to illuminate Luke's overall theological purpose—for believers to continue emulating the ministries of Jesus and the apostles. The author notes how Pentecostals' "their stories are our stories" hermeneutic (105) and commitment to worldwide evangelism align with and honor Luke's intentions.

Finally, Part IV (chapter 7) offers a nuanced rejoinder to Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's "Pentecostal Pneumatology of Religions" essay (in Kärkkäinen, ed., *The Spirit in the World*, 2009), and by extension, the work of Amos Yong. These prolific Fuller professors call for reflection on the Spirit's empowering activity and presence outside the realm of the Church. Their vision includes what they believe is a robustly Pentecostal theology of religions—but is this an accurate description? Menzies offers a brief synopsis of Kärkkäinen's essay then moves to address the issues of Pentecostal identity, biblical authority/theological method and inclusivism. First, Menzies pushes back against Kärkkäinen's conclusion that the diversity of the Pentecostal Movement precludes speaking of it as a whole, positing instead that Pentecostal identity is remarkably congruent in light of the movement's clear theological message and unwavering commitment to the biblical narrative and worldview (125-26). Second, he addresses the need for the primacy of the Bible in a truly Pentecostal theological method. While Pentecostals do indeed value social engagement and political action, this flows naturally from our grounding good news story. Menzies concludes that it is to Pentecostals' advantage to continue featuring "a message that clearly centers on the word of God" (130) rather than to place one foot in the political or social arena then stretch the other foot toward Scripture. Third, Menzies turns to Kärkkäinen's and Yong's inclusivist theology of religions. This is not compatible, he argues, either with the beliefs of most Pentecostals or with the New Testament apostolic witness (132-36; see 136-37 for analysis of the particular vs. universal work of the Spirit). Many of Kärkkäinen's and Yong's theological constructs consist of familiar words (e.g., *empowerment*, *baptism in the Spirit*, *Pentecostal*) divested of familiar meanings. As a community, Pentecostals are not seeking to lay another foundation or to move the ancient boundary markers (to borrow analogies). Menzies queries whether their vaguely Spirit-oriented, phenomenologically-based, "expansive" theology that is informed by but not tethered to the Bible is at home in the Pentecostal Movement, and

the answer is a resounding “no!” This is precisely why the Pentecostal Movement must remain tethered to our Evangelical heritage and the commitments we hold in common.

I found this work to be fresh but not faddish; generous yet forthright; and well-documented but not inaccessibly academic. Menzies presents poignant, precise, and well-reasoned arguments. *Christ-Centered* is peppered with stories from his missionary work in Asia that impart humanness and heart, strengthen the credibility of his proposals, and temper the density of the work. This timely book succeeds in its mission to house the Pentecostal Movement inside the structure of Evangelicalism, built upon the foundation of Christ, the apostles, and the Scriptures, and to identify points of contact that can foster familial empathy and appreciation. Since it is mostly a compilation of essays written at different times and for various purposes, it is more like a stained-glass window than a panorama. However, the picture it presents is largely cohesive, except perhaps for chapter 5, which I thought wove together too many themes to constitute a focused contribution to the book’s development. In addition, I wondered whether R. A. Torrey might object to this “arranged marriage” with a Pentecostal bride. Finally, the author could enhance the book by using more gender-inclusive language (e.g., “every scholar worth his salt,” 111).

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