

TH 502 Theology in global context

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Spring 2021

Pentecostalism in all of its different manifestations can have an impact on the many problems facing our world.

The thesis of this book is that Pentecostals became more and more involved in social ministries. In the history there are examples of compassionate social service in Pentecostalism. At the meanwhile, within Pentecostal churches there is a movement emerging which leads to a holistic understanding of Christian faith. This movement seeks a balanced approach to both evangelism and social actions, it follows the model after Jesus's example of both preaching/teaching and ministering the physical needs of the people he encountered. This movement represents the fact that the growth of Pentecostalism from an otherworldly sect to a main force in developing global Christianity. This movement is called Progressive Pentecostalism, at one hand, it's because the authors defined it as movement of Christians who claim to be moved by the Holy Spirit and the life of Jesus who balanced the needs of people in spiritual, physical and social areas. Secondly, the authors think the adjective Progress more appropriate to describe those worship music, organizational expression and engagement with the communities, comparing to earlier generations of Pentecostals. There are different types of social involvement by Progressive Pentecostals, some are humanitarian responses to human need, others are projects on community development. The leading edge among these are projects involve issues at a systematic level

from the perspective of the authors. The authors kept repeating that many churches have been focusing on fixing problems of the community not think structurally about them. one of the reason is that many Pentecostals were still in a stage of waiting for the return of Christ, so they would spend time and energy on long-term development of the community. In contrast, Progressive Pentecostal are changing the direction of traditional Pentecostal from a perspective on future reality to present moment following the example of Jesus to be agent of love and compassion.

The authors view global Pentecostalism as emergent force within world Christianity. Since first century, Christianity has been reshaped and transformed, and behind this is Pentecostalism. Regarding Pentecostalism, there are couple of stereotypes. First, not all Pentecostal churches live out the spirit of Pentecostalism which could tell from their worship services. Second, Pentecostals are people from lower-class who take religion as opiate. Third, Pentecostals are not for this world, they are for heaven. So there are many social scientists would view Pentecostalism or religions are based on human needs. And there are many arguments have been made on the reasons of growth of Pentecostalism, some saying that the attraction of Pentecostalism is obvious because it brings order, stability and hope to people who are living in unstable lives.; some saying that for people from traditional culture background, they are easy to fit into Pentecostalism because they also believe in spirit world; some saying that Pentecostalism is a direct response to modernity. There are different types of Pentecostalism, one is classical Pentecostalism which is the major one; another one is called indigenous Pentecostalism which has no connection with North America; one is called independent Neo-Pentecostal church which not in the state of organizational denomination; one more is called charismatic renewal

movement; last one is called proto-charismatic Christians who don't belong to any church but embrace some tradition of charismatic. And there are three ways which Pentecostalism to be a potential agent of social transformation. First, as Karl Marx's argument that religion could numb pain of live and bring people hope for a better life after. Second, the impact of Pentecostalism has increase on people's social welfare. Third, Pentecostalism has another impact on human rights. As the author indicate "the emergence of Progressive Pentecostals is simply one more nail in the coffin of secularization theory."

For Progressive Pentecostalism, they are aware of the substantial criticism towards Mother Teresa's program. It's the same when Pentecostal programs focus on individualistic forms of charity. So they should be careful that during the intervention in the lives of people in poverty and sick, every effort made should avoid to create a long-term dependency. And they realize that helping people with their social needs was not enough. Material development is important but not sufficient. People need internal change to realign them morally. This is the foundation for people to gain upward social mobility. But programs only focus on conversion are not enough neither. But only a holistic view of both social and internal transformation is on demand.

As the authors indicate "The hallmark of Progressive Pentecostals, however, is precisely their attempt to maintain a holistic view of the people served in their various social ministries."

For the new generation, according to the model Venezuela, there are some conclusions drew out. First, those young adults desperately need a mother figure in their lives. Second, the small worship group works like an extended family for the young adults. Third, most of the young adult have encountered Jesus at certain level. Fourth, the community is effective in directing the young adults to worship. Fifth, those young adults in this worship community experience upward

social mobility comparing to the rest of them not in this community. Finally, they have a model in the church as agent of Jesus.

During their serving in the community, in the very act of giving their lives to others, they found new purpose in their lives. While individualism is so prominent in today's contemporary society, a communitarian ethic is taking the place of it and becoming the symbol of Jesus to server others.

Regarding AIDS crisis, Pentecostals normally see it as the result of sinful behavior, and people contracted this was being punished by God. But how about infant and spouses infected by their partners? Right now some Pentecostal pastors are changing their view on this.

Regarding healing service, in some rural counties where medical suppliers are lack, people are tempered to attending healing service because supernatural healings are promised. But this is very dangerous, because when people are not healed, they tend to blame God and fall into disbelieve. To avoid this, just focus on the disease, as to confront the issues without judgement, minister the sick, educate people to protect themselves. Bottomline when people are sick, the responsibility for the church is to love them unconditionally.

There are couple of places mention Progressive Pentecostalism with Liberation Theology. The differences of them are : first, Pentecostals emphasizing harmony and purity while Liberation theology involves in opposition, conflict, and struggle. Second, Jesus in Progressive Pentecostalism, represents a king ruling over a well ordered and harmonious kingdom, violence and revolutionary are not suggested in this kingdom. Jesus is a revolutionary prophet in Liberation theology, and violence and revolutionary are needed. Third, for Pentecostals, the kingdom of God will come in true when people are aware of their holiness and following the

teaching of God, becoming obedience to God, and for Liberation theology, the utopian kingdom will come in true only after a revolutionary struggle. Last, Pentecostals prefer to create new structures other than tear down the old ones. They focus on long term life changing of leaders in those structures. And Liberation Theology focuses more on confronting politic institutions, and easily cause internal civil struggles.

People tend to mix fundamentalism with Pentecostalism, although they are different. First, fundamentalism and Pentecostalism have nothing in common historically. Second, fundamentalism focuses on theological doctrines and principles and addresses them as timeless and absolute. Third, fundamentalism preferred a prior Golden Age when things were ordered, less corrupt and God centered. Pentecostalism is experience-oriented, it prefers direct encounter with God, is future oriented and easy to adapt new technologies. Last, fundamentalism are dualists, they separate body and mind, heaven and hell, good and evil. Pentecostalism is associated with the Enlightenment without the dualism.

At the end, the authors identify Pentecostalism as a renewal movement. Without renewal movement, religion will become routine and die. But the renewal groups eager to connect with the origins of the movement, they are trying to restore the initial elements in the movement before it becomes institutionalized. The hallmarks of renewal movements are they treasure first-hand experience of the holy, they break with authority, they devalue the structures and encourage everyone's participation, they address experience over theology. And they are very easily get attacked by those hierarchical institutions.

Towards the end the authors indicate “For Pentecostals, worship provides the opportunity to experience an alternative reality. It is a moment when mind and body can potentially connect: it is a space in which worshippers imagine impossible possibilities; it is a time when they are filled with new hope and desire for a better world. The challenge is to channel these motions, these feelings, these desires.....”, “when visiting many Neo-Pentecostal churches, the outsider observer is often first struck by how youthful the congregation is. Rather than a multitude of gray and balding heads, which populate most mainline congregations.....”

In this book, it’s obvious that the authors put lots of emphasis on the topic of worship. Whenever they got to a church, the first thing they looked at was their worship service. I personally total agree with them that worship could bring life-changing, life-affirming, and future-oriented. But I disagree them for their emphasis on this area alone, and they were lack of emphasis on the doctrine teaching and for my understanding, they prefer more personal experience than theological dogmas. One person used to tell me a story about the experience he had in a very famous evangelical church in NYC. He said he went to that church which locates in the heart of Manhattan, expecting a modernized ritual in their worship service. But unfortunately, all the songs they played are very classical old ones. Their worship instruments are out of date too. He didn’t see people dancing or shouting during the worship, everything was in a good order. And after that was the sermon from that famous pastor, very academic and deep. It’s that church that attracted lots of people from wall street, and it’s that church stand in the community as a pillar of truth and lamp for the darkness. This church made me disagree with the authors emphasis on the worship service.

After reading this book, I wish I picked the other one recommended, because the whole book is lack of structure, most arguments are not connected, all I read were tons of interviews. Although

I appreciate the authors for their 4 years' hard work traveling many countries, visiting different churches.

One thing I learnt from this book is that as a Christian, we're not only focus on the soul of people, but also minister people's needs in this world as Jesus had done.