

BOOK REVIEW

VONDEY, Wolfgang, *Beyond Pentecostalism: The Crisis of Global Christianity and the Renewal of the Theological Agenda*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans. 2010. 288pp. Pbk. ISBN: 9780802864017. £22.94.

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Wolfgang Vondey in his book analyses the crisis of the late modern world and its subsequent effect on today's theological task. He claims that Classical Pentecostalism is both a result of this crisis and response to it. However, as the Pentecostal movement spread globally, it developed beyond its roots and therefore beyond the late modern crisis. Through his analysis, he demonstrates that this crisis of theology is best resolved through the utilization of resources from within the global Pentecostal movement.

In the introduction, Vondey describes the theological crisis and how he views Pentecostalism in relation to it. He does this by describing in each chapter a dynamic of the crisis, how Classical Pentecostalism responds to the dynamic, and how the resources of global Pentecostalism can help the theological agenda go beyond the dynamic. In chapter 1, he examines the role of imagination within theology. Whereas the postmodern world has rejected imagination, Classical Pentecostalism uses the imagination in its engagement with and transformation by the Spirit. Global Pentecostalism has shown through the use of play that the imagination, rather than rejecting theological structures, changes them. In chapter 2, he discusses divine revelation in order to show how modern society has reached an impasse within the dichotomy of scripture's form and content. Pentecostalism uses its imagination to enter into and be transformed by scripture, thus bypassing this dichotomy. Globally, Pentecostalism's "prophetic actualization of scripture" (p. 73) goes beyond the dichotomy through the interaction of Word, Spirit, and community.

In chapter 3, Vondey examines creedal confessions. Creeds have become divorced from confessing communities within modern society. Within Classical Pentecostalism, the rejection of creedal statements shifted the focus from the structure of doctrine to its effect on the community. Global Pentecostalism has shown that orthopathy bridges the gap between doctrine and practice that goes beyond a dependency upon creeds. In chapter 4, the liturgy and drama of the modern church become divorced, resulting in clericalization and sacramentalization. The development of the Pentecostal liturgy reveals the nature of play within the liturgy, thus allowing for a diversity of liturgical forms within global Pentecostal movements.

In chapter 5, Vondey discusses the interplay of the church and culture, where churches are placed on an ecclesiastical scheme in the modern era. Classical Pentecostalism initially opposed this model by resisting institutionalization, whereas global Pentecostalism goes beyond the divide of church and culture by understanding the church as the “playground” of cultures and of the Spirit. Vondey concludes his work with the assertion that the church can go beyond the late modern crisis by conceiving of theology as play. This will allow the global church and its theological task to be renewed through the utilization of the resources of global Pentecostalism.

Where Vondey’s work excels is in its presentation of Classical and global Pentecostalism to a largely non-Pentecostal audience. He takes seriously the history and resources of Pentecostalism in its multiform expressions within his application of the same to global Christianity. Admittedly, this can at times result in descriptions of Pentecostal practices with which many Pentecostals may take issue, such as his reference to glossolalia as “stammering sounds” (p. 30) and his mentioning of some contextualized practices in Africa and Asia as near-syncretistic. Nevertheless, his presentation is clearly devoted to bringing the full weight of the Pentecostal movement into the discussion of global theology even in his discussions of more controversial aspects of the movement, such as Oneness Pentecostalism, and their potential for global theology.

The greatest issue I take with the book is the scope with which it attempts to concern itself. Vondey, in drawing on the resources of global Pentecostalism, attempts to address the theological crisis facing the global church. Nevertheless, he repeatedly refers to this crisis as the “late modern crisis” and describes its rise as a result of Western history and influences. In his analyses of the crisis, he discusses historical backgrounds such as Platonic philosophy, medieval liturgical reform, and the Enlightenment as predecessors to late modernism. The question could be asked as to what extent this “theological crisis” is then a crisis of the global church if its historical roots appear to only stem from the West. He holds numerous expressions of Pentecostalism globally in high regard in their potential to go “beyond” this crisis but discusses little why these expressions should be applied to a sociohistorical context foreign to themselves. Vondey’s work serves as an excellent example of applying global resources to a late modern society, but it is another matter entirely to apply these global resources in a global fashion.

This book is intended for a graduate-level readership. It is written towards and highly recommended for two audiences: for scholars of Pentecostalism interested in analysing their field within a global and ecumenical arena, and for scholars of global Christianity interested in studying the impact of Pentecostalism on the contemporary agenda of theology.

