

BOOK REVIEW

ATTANASI, Katherine and Amos YONG (eds), *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socio-economics of the Global Charismatic Movements*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 278pp. Hbk. ISBN: 9780230338289. \$100.

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Bringing together contributors from a wide range of disciplines, this timely collection of essays addresses intersections between theology and economy in contemporary Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity, focusing particular attention on the socio-economic influences of the prosperity gospel in the lives of adherents. These are themes that have already received a good deal of attention from scholars but the book is, at least in this reviewer's knowledge, the first edited volume that systematically and in a quite nuanced way explores the diversity of Pentecostal/charismatic prosperity theologies, while at the same time providing in-depth case studies of their appeal, and social and cultural impact in a context of a global neo-liberal capitalist hegemony.

An introduction written by Katherine Attanasi does little more than introduce the chapters that follow. The remaining chapters are divided into three main sections. Part I, "Taxonomies of Prosperity", includes two very helpful chapters, written by Amos Yong and Nimi Wariboko, on different Pentecostal theological approaches to prosperity and development. Part II consists of seven case studies of the impact and particular appropriations of the prosperity gospel around the globe, whereas Part III, "Responses", includes three chapters that reflect upon the preceding contributions and bring together important themes from the book. The last two chapters in this final section offer theological assessments of the prosperity gospel.

A theme that runs through the chapters is the relation between Pentecostalism, and in particular the prosperity gospel, and a neoliberal capitalist world order where labour markets are uncertain and where privatized rather than communal and associative notions of progress and development prevail. As Katharine Wiegele notes (chapter 8), the prosperity gospel does not contribute to the cultivation of a critical awareness of structural causes of poverty. But in one way or the other, most of the chapters demonstrate how prosperity communities and teachings enable adherents to come to terms with life conditions that are affected by neoliberal capitalist policies. Chapter 3, on South Africa, authored by numerous unnamed scholars affiliated with the Centre for Development and Enterprise, South Africa, and chapter 4, by Eloy H. Nolivos, on Latin America, show how Pentecostalism facilitates the adaption to neo-liberal labour markets,

for instance by encouraging entrepreneurship and hard work, by fostering self-confidence, self-worth and flexibility, and by facilitating the creation of social capital. In chapter 5, on the North American Word of Faith Movement, Jonathan L. Walton demonstrates how prosperity teachings not only prove convincing in periods of plenty but may also serve to allay the anxieties in times of economic uncertainty. Gerardo Marti (chapter 6) writes on a church in Hollywood that attracts persons whose work life is generally unstable. He describes how congregants learn to reconceptualize their careers. Nanlai Cao (chapter 7) demonstrates how a prosperity denomination in coastal China becomes a vehicle by which local elites vie for status and power. Wiegele's chapter (8) on Catholic Charismatics in the Philippines shows how the prosperity gospel gives adherents a sense a renewal, self-reliance and optimism as they learn to identify with a triumphant image of Christ rather than with the suffering Christ. The final case study by Daniela C. Augustine (chapter 9) draws a contrast between eastern European communitarian values and neoliberal ideology that emphasizes individualist consumerism. Augustine argues the prosperity gospel functions as a spiritual platform for the latter.

The volume is impressive for its conceptual coherence, its consistency in focus and not least for its careful avoidance of crude generalizations and simplistic interpretations. The authors are generally perceptive regarding theological diversities and/or to the complex processes of contextualization and negotiated adoption through which the prosperity takes hold in different parts of the world. Some authors offer semi-critical assessments of the prosperity gospel (see especially chapter 11 by Frank D. Macchia, who calls for a theology that also emphasizes Jesus' poverty on the cross, and chapter 12 by Douglas A. Hicks, who provides a normative outline for a theology that acknowledges the reality of evil and suffering and avoids too simple interpretations of divine agency). Yet the dominant perspective in the volume is a neo-Weberian one, with most authors (including the ones who are semi-critical) emphasizing how prosperity communities can function as helpful platforms for individual empowerment and enable adherents to adapt to difficult circumstances and move forward in life. A quick glance at the index reveals that, apart from Weber himself, the scholars whose names appears most frequently throughout the volume are Peter Berger and David and Bernice Martin, all whom are known for their optimistic assessments of the capability of Pentecostalism to bring about social and cultural change. In the view of this reviewer, the fine line between optimism and naïve wishful thinking is crossed with Frank Macchia's speculations about the potentiality of prosperity theology to challenge larger society as radically as liberation theology once did by contributing to the emergence of a widespread social vision of capitalism as profoundly spiritual and as including human giftedness and potential that should be released, not in order to be exploited but for the benefit of all (pp. 231–2). However, most of the authors maintain a moderately optimistic and empirically informed perspective on the prosperity gospel as a potential agent of social change, with Andrew Chesnut reminding the reader that hard evidence for large societal benefits of Pentecostal theological renewals has yet be produced and that difficult structural circumstances continue to pose serious

obstacles to development even when people have been empowered by their faith (see chapter 10). With this important note in mind I conclude by highly recommending what I consider to be an important and well-edited volume to scholars and students with an interest in global Pentecostalism and more generally in intersections between religion, development and economic life.