

BOOK REVIEW

RICHIE, Tony, *Speaking by the Spirit: A Pentecostal Model for Interreligious Dialogue*. Asbury Theological Seminar Series in World Christian Revitalization Movements in Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies, no. 6. Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2011. Pbk. ISBN: 97816094701442. \$35.75.

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Tony Richie endeavours to develop a theology of religions and a model for interreligious dialogue from a classical Pentecostal point of view. In the contemporary context of religious pluralism and in view of violence related to religions, interreligious dialogue is necessary, “not only for religious people but for the rest of the world” (p. 245). Richie’s book wants to help Pentecostals to respond adequately to the challenges of religious pluralism. By emphasizing the Pentecostal perspective, Richie does not intend to isolate Pentecostalism; rather, he demands a “combination of familiarity and specificity” (p. 105). His specific Pentecostal contribution to the theology of religions and interreligious dialogue is based on fundamental convictions Pentecostalism shares with the general Christian tradition and the Evangelical and Wesleyan movements.

Richie’s theology of religion is *inclusivistic*. According to him, inclusivism avoids the extremes of fundamentalism and exclusivism on the one hand, and of “ideological” pluralism (*viz.* the pluralistic philosophies or theologies) on the other hand. His inclusivism resembles the position of Lesslie Newbigin, Norman Anderson and the Roman Catholic magisterium: he accepts that non-Christians can be saved, but he does not regard the non-Christian religions as ways to salvation. The ideological pluralism is unacceptable for him because it contradicts fundamental Christian doctrines (mainly the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, the trinity and the atonement).

It is not surprising that a Pentecostal theologian rejects “ideological” pluralism. In the context of Pentecostalism it is harder to criticize exclusivism. Therefore Richie painstakingly argues against Pentecostal and evangelical exclusivism. By drawing on historical, biblical and systematic arguments he tries to prove that inclusivism is in line with the origin and the convictions of classical Pentecostalism. For instance, he affirms that knowing Christ in this life is not conditional for salvation by Christ and that therefore inclusivism does not contradict the uniqueness of Christ. Further, he endeavours to show that inclusivism does not undercut the Pentecostal ethos of evangelism. Rather, recognizing that God is already at work in people of other faiths can motivate evangelism.

Richie's inclusivism is based on *pneumatology*: The Spirit is not at work in the church alone but in the whole world. "Once Pentecostals ... acknowledge the Spirit in the wider world, implications for understanding and dialoguing with world religions reasonably occur as well" (p. 252). By integrating his pneumatological inclusivism into a *trinitarian* framework Richie avoids the pneumatologically justified openness becoming pluralistic or arbitrary. The Spirit is "always the Spirit of Christ" (p. 58).

However, pneumatological and trinitarian inclusivism is neither new nor specifically Pentecostal. The original Pentecostal contribution of Richie's approach is his interesting proposal to use "testimony as a resource for inter-religious dialogue" (p. 283). A personal testimony connects one's personal story with the biblical story of Christ. It tells what God has done in the life of the testifier. Using testimony in interreligious dialogue helps to transcend the merely doctrinal and cognitive character of interfaith dialogue. As the personal experience of Christ's Spirit is essential for Pentecostals, testimony permits them to authentically participate in interreligious dialogue. However, a testimony not only tells a story about the acting of the Spirit, but according to Richie the testimony itself can be inspired and inspiring, a "speaking by the Spirit". The giving and receiving of testimony are envisioned to be mutual, but Richie's statements about the benefits Pentecostals gain from the testimonies that the dialogue partners bring are quite vague. This might be a consequence of his inclusivism, which excludes that the central beliefs of non-Christian religions concerning their aims and efficacy can be true.

Here we face the limits of Richie's approach. Let me illustrate these limits by two points:

- 1 Richie relativizes the threefold classification of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, and criticizes "*a priori* views about the religions" (p. 58; cf. p. 63). He states that "The key here is to be able to comprehend other religions according to their own self-understanding without prejudging or defining them according to our own Christian (or Pentecostal) theological categories" (p. 59). Excellent! But this legitimate principle is violated by Richie himself when he dogmatically (*a priori*!) disregards the possibility of any kind of "ideological" pluralism and of inclusivistic theologies which regard other religions as ways to salvation.
- 2 At the end of the book, Richie gives a personal testimony concerning his theology of religion: after he had read *Adversus Heresies* of Irenaeus, he prayed for God to help him "to stand against any contemporary heresies ... As I did so, the clear voice of the Spirit spoke to my own spirit in a commanding fashion. I heard simply, 'Pluralism is the Gnosticism of your day'" (p. 288). This testimony does a disservice to Richie's interesting approach. Though he does not "claim to an infallible divine inspiration" (*ibid.*), the testimony stops the dialogue with "liberal" theologians and philosophers and undercuts intersubjective argumentation. The dogmatic *a priori* receives a divine legitimation. If the testimonies Richie wants to give in the context of interreligious

dialogue are similar to his testimony concerning pluralism, they will not promote but impede the interfaith dialogue.

Nevertheless, Richie's book is a remarkable contribution because it intentionally demonstrates the possibilities, and unintentionally the limits, of a Pentecostal theology of religion and model for interreligious dialogue.