

BOOK REVIEW

ALDRED, Joe (ed.). *Pentecostals and Charismatics in Britain: An Anthology*. London: SCM, 2019. 221pp. Pbk. ISBN 9780334057116. £30.

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Pentecostals and Charismatics in Britain avowedly deals with the historical origins of the various forms of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in Britain. It also highlights, in part, their growing ecumenical and socio-political engagements. This collection, edited by Joe Aldred, brings together academics and practitioners from different ethnic backgrounds. With a Foreword written by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, the book includes chapters from some seasoned British Pentecostal academics and writers. From the outset, Aldred invites readers to expect to deepen their understanding of British Pentecostals and Charismatics beyond the stereotypical generalization of British Pentecostalism being labelled “an African/Caribbean” expression of Christianity (p. xvi). Against this background, the cultural and gender diversity of the contributors takes readers on a journey through African, British and European Pentecostal history. The book is divided into four sections, with each section focusing on a theme within British Pentecostal and Charismatic history and practices.

Andrew Davies opens Part I of the book, entitled “Pentecostal and Charismatic History”, with a chapter on the history of the multifaceted origins of British Pentecostalism and highlights their global connectedness. Davies writes “that we can even talk about so many variant denominational perspectives as being part of one movement shows how much this tradition has learned to be flexible and responsive to changing contexts” (p. 5). Babatunde Adedibu continues in Chapter 2 with a focus on the rise and contributions of African Pentecostalism in Britain before Roger Forster concludes the first part with a rich and mostly anecdotal history of the various branches of British Pentecostals and Neocharismatics.

Part II of the book includes three chapters under the heading “Pentecostal and Charismatic Diversity”. William Kay gives us a vivid account of the transition from the classical Pentecostal to Charismatic scene in Britain by detailing the unique characteristics and contributions of the different strands of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. He traces the history of British Pentecostal movements to as far back as the First World War and follows the three main classical Pentecostal denominations in Britain before giving an overview of the subsequent African and Caribbean Pentecostal and Charismatic movements as well as the megachurch phenomenon in Britain today. Daniel Akhazemea follows with yet another historical reflection of British Pentecostalism before briefly

discussing their doctrinal and liturgical differences and mission activities and how this contributes to a positive montage of Christian expression in Britain. In a true reflection of diversity, Dionne Lamont closes this section of the book with a practical and pastoral approach to the place and prominence of women in the Pentecostal churches today. Lamont suggests that “the inferiorization of women to men in the Pentecostal churches echoes the wider Church down the centuries” (p. 87). She argues that it is “when God is understood as gender neutral Spirit” that “women can feel a stronger association with the church as well as loved, cared for and protected within the religious environment” (p. 87). Lamont concludes her chapter by highlighting nine contemporary women leaders in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Britain.

Part III of the book deals with Pentecostal and Charismatic movements and their ecumenical actions or in some cases lack of it. Ann Dyer begins this section by presenting a history of the slow and cautious approach Pentecostals have taken to ecumenism. Dyer however highlights the great strides that several Pentecostal movements including the African and Caribbean Pentecostal churches have made to be a part of Churches Together and other ecumenical alliances and concludes by suggesting a Pentecostal pneumatological contribution to ecumenism (p. 107). David Hilborn follows this with an examination of the significant dialogue between Pentecostals and Anglicans that has taken place over the past decade. Allan Anderson brings a unique perspective to the conversation by widening the scope of discussion to include the Protestant Reformation and its wider impact on Christianity including the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. Anderson argues that “the Protestant Reformation has set off a spiral of events and ideas that have had a profound, if indirect, influence on global Pentecostalism” (p. 148). Emmanuel Kapofu closes this part with a brief history of Pentecostalism in Britain before dealing with the influence of neo-Charismatic movements on the British scene.

The final part of this engaging book discusses the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements and their involvement in social and political issues. It begins with Mark Sturge’s astute chapter on “Pentecostalism and prosperity theology”. Sturge argues from both social and political angles and asserts that “it is not sufficient to decry prosperity theology unless we have an answer to a creation that once ‘groaned’ but now is ‘hollering’ and brawling for justice (Rom. 8:19-22)” (p. 194). Either side of Sturge’s chapter are David Muir’s insightful contributions. The first deals with theological education while the second and the last chapter of the book deals with political engagement among British Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. Muir celebrates the rising numbers of theological training centres for Pentecostal movements while raising concerns about the need for quality assurance. In the final chapter, Muir concludes that for the church to be relevant in local communities and provide solutions to their communities, there needs to be a “radical and prophetic” engagement in the political processes of the communities (p. 210).

One of this book’s strong points is the attention to diversity and culture, both in authorship and content. The book is careful to address British Pentecostal and Charismatic studies within black and white Pentecostal history. Perhaps it is in

this strength that also highlights a weakness in the book in the little attention it pays to the rise of Asian Pentecostalism in Britain as well as the emerging impact of next generation African/Asian diaspora Pentecostals and Pentecostal scholars. Although the chapters by Lamont and Foster lack serious academic rigour in methodology and approach, they both compensate for this by giving readers a passionate, pastoral appeal in the case of Lamont and a personal reflection in the case of Forster. The historical emphasis of the book outweighs issues such as theology and changing doctrine of Pentecostals and Charismatics in Britain today. Nonetheless, the book must be commended for the work done in bridging and building a unified, yet varied discussion on a movement that is both diverse and still evolving. It is recommended for its historical richness and passionate discussions on British Pentecostal and Charismatic origins and movements.