

**Paul S. Baker, *Pentecostal Imagination and the Retrieval of Identity: Towards a Pneumatology of History* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publication, 2023). 256pp. RRP: \$55.00 Paperback.**

Pentecostal identity and Pentecostal history are closely intertwined, though many Pentecostals are unaware of their history, or indeed of history generally. Modern Pentecostalism began at the outset of the twentieth century, seemingly as a completely new phenomenon. This immediately raised questions. Was this an authentic Christian movement or not? If it was genuinely Christian, why were its distinctive features not heard of before, at least not since the New Testament (at best)? How did it relate to the broader church? What were the roots of the modern Pentecostal movement? And what of the Pentecostals' claim that theirs was/is the "apostolic faith"? Was there any evidence that this was so?

These sorts of questions have been answered all sorts of ways by Pentecostals. They have sought to identify their practices and beliefs with those of the NT church, especially as described in Acts. Some have searched through church history to find a measure of continuity, such as sporadic outbursts of speaking in tongues. Some have used the "former and latter rain" imagery to explain why such spiritual gifts as tongues have been rare between the times of the early church and Pentecostalism. In a similar way, others have used the concept of restoration to construct a narrative of post-Reformation church history: justification (Luther), then sanctification (Wesley), then healing (A.B. Simpson), then premillennialism and finally Spirit baptism (Pentecostals). Some scholarly histories have examined the theological and social roots of the Pentecostal movement, especially in the USA. Pentecostal history itself has been analysed in terms of its three "waves." Most of these attempts have grossly oversimplified the history of the church and left the question of modern Pentecostal identity unresolved, at least to outsiders.

Paul Baker, an independent scholar living in England, attempts in this book to address these issues in a much more philosophical and systematic way. Drawing on the Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong and the work of European and British philosophers, especially Paul Ricoeur, he explores some key underlying issues (philosophical, historical and theological) that might help us make sense of Pentecostalism in historical context. The five main chapters explore the identity of Pentecostalism and its relation to church history, the philosophical theology of Amos Yong and its roots (as seen especially in his book *Spirit-Word-Community*), concepts and issues related to Experience and Interpretation, Ricoeur's "theological philosophy" and finally "Towards a Pneumatology of History."

The title and sub-title helpfully identify the goals of this book. A key issue is the identity of Pentecostalism and its relationship with the primitive church of the New Testament. Can this be retrieved from historical data? Another issue is how can we trace the work of the Holy Spirit through the history of the Christian church; indeed can we do this (a pneumatology of

history)? Baker is particularly critical of Mark Cartledge's *Encountering the Spirit*, an attempt to discover a charismatic thread through church history, for its failure to define key concepts such as "experience," "encounter," "tradition," its lack of critical discernment, and its too-easy identification of past events with "recent phenomena" (pp.13-19).

Can Yong's concept of the "pneumatological imagination," a central term for this book, help us discern the presence of the Holy Spirit, not just now but in the past? As Baker comments, "my development of Yong's pneumatological imagination directs us toward an understanding of how the Holy Spirit can be seen to direct human history, namely, through the empowerment of God's people to live out their faith in an authentic reflection of the Kingdom of God" (p.187).

This is not easy reading. Baker takes us on a long and challenging journey through Locke, Hume, Kant, Luther, Hegel, Marx, Peirce, Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur, Gelpi, David Carr, Thiselton, and many other thinkers, not to mention Pentecostals, especially Yong. He examines issues about history, memory, interpretation, ideology, experience, language, imagination, utopias, even forgiveness. You leave this book having had a philosophical education. His goal is to bring particularly Yong and Ricoeur together. In the Conclusion, he writes,

In dialogue with Ricoeur.... Yong's pneumatological imagination can be extended to include pneumatological memory. It is this which ultimately funds the pneumatology of history, as it proffers the symbol, which constitutes the interpretive key to reading history in terms of the foundational pneumatology (ideology) and the pneumatological imagination (utopia) (p.226).

I found some aspects of this book frustrating. The author's argument was not always easy to follow. He assumed a lot of prior knowledge of various philosophical schools on the part of readers. The footnotes often took you to secondary sources rather than to the work of the author being discussed. There was no index to help you go back and re-read a section that was unclear or to search for a particular theme. At the end I still wasn't entirely clear how to go about constructing a "pneumatology of history," though at least I knew what it was.

And yet I came away with a fresh appreciation for the complexity of the issues about Pentecostal identity which I had previously overlooked. I saw more clearly some of the problems with ideas I had embraced even if I didn't find solutions to those problems. If readers are prepared to "do the hard yards," they will definitely be enriched by this book.

**Jon Newton**

*Alphacrucis University College, Melbourne, VIC, Australia*