

Christ Centered: The Evangelical Nature of Pentecostal Theology. By Robert Menzies. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020. 190 pp..

It is unanimously accepted that Christology is an indispensable theological tenet of Pentecostal theology. Thus, the title of Robert Menzies book, *Christ Centered*, has historical ties to origins of early Pentecostal theological expressions rooted in the Full Gospel. Yet it is the decidedly more divisive subtitle of the text, *The Evangelical Nature of Pentecostal Theology*, that provides the scaffolding for the text. Menzies' objective is to tether Pentecostal theology to a narrow subsection of religious expression commonly labeled Evangelicalism. In the opening pages of the text, he laments that the strong Evangelical convictions of Pentecostalism are being forgotten (xv). Further into the Introduction he presses the issues further claiming those who do not affirm the Evangelical origins of Pentecostal theology “. . . do not understand the Pentecostal movement or seek to transform it into an image of their creation” (xvii). Menzies' strong assertions provide the reader with a clear understanding of his stance regarding his views on the relationship between Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism.

Given the strong assertions in the Introduction, Menzies' appeal to R. A. Torrey as historical evidence for the Evangelical origins of Pentecostal theology should not come as a surprise to those familiar with early Pentecostal history. Unlike Charles Parham, whose reputation has been called into question under historical scrutiny, the historical record regarding Torrey is favorable. Further, Torrey provides a direct connection to the Keswick Movement, which played a larger role in shaping Evangelical sensibilities than the Wesleyan roots of William Seymour. Torrey, whom Menzies suggests is the “father of Fundamentalism” (3), provides the historical ties necessary for Menzies to assert the Evangelical origins of Pentecostalism. While he does not explicitly make the claim, those familiar with the historical underpinnings of Pentecostalism will note that Menzies is essentially shifting the primary influence of Pentecostalism from Azusa Street to the Keswick Movement in his appeal to Torrey as the father of Pentecostalism (4), despite Parham and Seymour having the strongest historical consensus. Considerably more historical scrutiny must be conducted prior to validating Menzies' assertions regarding Torrey as the “father of Pentecostalism.” While the influences of the Keswick and Higher Life movements upon Pentecostalism have been historically documented, the attempt to position the Keswick Movement as the primary influence of early Pentecostalism requires more than the condensed biographical sketch provided by Menzies.

Part II transitions towards a theological argument in favor of the Evangelical origins of Pentecostalism. The opening pages anticipate the absence of Azusa Street from the previous historical defense by devaluing the role of Azusa Street. Citing his

father, a renowned historian, Menzies insinuates that the Evangelical origins of Pentecostalism protected the Pentecostal Movement from being cast to the periphery, which he claims has been the fate of over twenty charismatic movements documented in the history of the church. Conveniently, the discussion of Azusa Street and its most influential characters, Parham and Seymour, is only mentioned in passing as evidence for the Evangelical nature of Pentecostal theology. The remaining portion of Part II addresses the three key theological themes of baptism in the Spirit, glossolalia, and signs/wonders in three separate chapters. Menzies' choice of these three specific theological themes is anticipated as they are historically the most commonly rejected among Evangelical/fundamentalist theological systems. The argument that Pentecostal theology has its Evangelical root hinges upon being able to justify these three theological themes within the theological systems of Evangelicalism. Menzies leans heavily on the works of James Dunn and Max Turner, whose influence is evident in the numerous citations to their works within the chapters. Notably absent are works from influential Evangelical theologians such as John Frame, Wayne Grudem, Louis Berkhof, or Millard Erickson, who have produced works of systematic theology. The fact that Menzies is unable to make direct connections between prominent Evangelical theologians and these key doctrinal issues suggests the relationship between Evangelicals and Pentecostals may be more tremulous than he is willing to admit.

In the next section of the text, Menzies shifts the dialogue from theology to spirituality. The section contains chapters on the necessity of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and missions. Ignoring the pietist influences of the Reformation, Menzies advances his argument for the Evangelical origins of Pentecostalism by appealing to the Reformer Martin Luther. Bypassing the pietist influences Menzies is relieved of addressing the theological differences between the magisterial reformers and pietist movements regarding religious experience. As a renowned historian Menzies is no doubt aware of the abundant historical documentation concerning the influence of Wesleyan/Holiness religious expression upon Pentecostalism, which suggests the omission was intentional. The omission raises questions concerning the strength of Menzies' argumentative ability to withstand alternative historical and theological proposals.

The fourth and final section enters into dialogue with two of the premier contemporary Pentecostal theologians: Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen and Amos Yong. Menzies specifically addresses an article written by Kärkkäinen for the book titled *The Spirit in the World*. He rebuffs the idea that the diversity of Pentecostalism makes it difficult to construct a set of unifying theological principles. Menzies attempts to parlay what is a valid critique of Kärkkäinen to promote the Evangelical origins of Pentecostal theology. This attempt is only viable if the origins of early Pentecostal theology are shifted away from Azusa Street and relocated to the Keswick Movement. Such an attempt runs

upstream against the consensus of Azusa Street as the defining event of modern Pentecostalism. Menzies continues his critique of Kärkkäinen, questioning the primacy of spirituality over theology within the Pentecostal tradition. This positions Menzies to argue that Kärkkäinen is “dissatisfied with the simple focus on the Bible as the source of our theology” (124). Menzies’ argument is one that has been leveled by fundamentalists since the days of Azusa Street. Having registered his critique of Kärkkäinen, Menzies now turns his attention to Yong. He takes issue with Yong’s assertion that other religions may be “instruments of the Holy Spirit working out the Divine purposes in the world” (131). Menzies argues that Yong has elevated pneumatology at the expense of Christology, lamenting that Yong’s exhortations “sound more like a product of contemporary Western and liberal culture than the apostolic mandate” (132). Again, Menzies raises valid concerns about the views of Yong that must be critically examined. Yet, Menzies forgoes such critical examination in favor of casting Yong as outside the Pentecostal Movement. The attempts by Menzies to position two prominent Pentecostal scholars outside acceptable parameters of Pentecostalism weakens his argument for the Evangelical origins of Pentecostalism.

Since the acceptance of the Assembly of God into the National Association of Evangelicals in 1942, the origins of Pentecostalism have been disputed. Menzies is among the minority of Pentecostal scholars in the academy who advocate for the Evangelical origins of Pentecostal theology. He should be commended for reminding Pentecostals of the deep influences that Evangelicalism has asserted upon Pentecostal theology. The tendency of Pentecostal scholarship to downplay these influences needed to be corrected. Menzies’ work attempts to provide such a correction. The challenge for Menzies is his assumption that such influences are grounds for locating the origins of Pentecostal theology in Evangelicalism. The latter is much more difficult to justify historically and theologically. It requires repositioning the historical origins of Pentecostalism from Azusa Street to the Keswick Movement, ignoring the pietistic influence of the Wesleyan/Holiness Movement and reworking key theological themes within Pentecostalism to fit within fundamentalist theological systems. Despite the difficulty in claiming the Evangelical origins of Pentecostalism, Pentecostals should not dismiss the claims of Menzies. Rather, Pentecostals should see Menzies’ book as an opportunity to engage in critical dialogue around the areas of continuity and discontinuity with Evangelical theology. Such ecumenical dialogue will allow for Pentecostals to come out of the shadows of Evangelicalism and begin to establish and articulate itself as a unique theological tradition.

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