

BOOK REVIEW

ANDERSON, Allan Heaton, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Second Edition). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. xii + 331pp. Pbk. ISBN: 9781107660946.

Reviewed by: Joel Cabrita, University of Cambridge, UK. Email: jmc67@cam.ac.uk

Ten years ago Allan Anderson published the first edition of *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, an ambitious survey of the global Pentecostal movement. Now, Anderson has written its second edition, the title updated with the inclusion of “Global Charismatic Christianity” to reflect the ever-increasing prominence of the newer Spirit-inspired movements across the world that may not strictly define themselves as “Pentecostal” in the classic sense. As is by now well known, Pentecostal and Charismatic forms of Christianity are today flourishing in many areas of the world, and in particular in the regions Anderson dubs the majority world – the continents of Africa, Asia and Latin America. An introduction to worldwide Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity is an important and worthwhile undertaking.

Anderson’s approach follows the template of the book’s first edition. The first half of the book is divided into a number of historical chapters that trace the background and context of Pentecostal Christianity, and its emergence and development in the Americas and the Caribbean, Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Australia and the Pacific. The final chapter of this section surveys the mid-twentieth-century Charismatic renewal, particularly underscoring the saliency of this movement to the Catholic Church. The second half of the volume is theological in approach, surveying topics such as mission and evangelism, gender and society, and academy and ecumenism.

There is much merit to Anderson’s two-fold approach, particularly in its potential to combine both overview and analysis of worldwide Pentecostalism. A further strength of Anderson’s volume is its provision of a robustly global account of the emergence of Pentecostalism, resolutely decentering North America from a pivotal role in the story (an intent that seems shaped as much by ideological as historical motivations). I particularly appreciated the chapter entitled “Politics and Economics”, in which Anderson analyses the multi-faced contributions Pentecostals around the world have made to political movements and social reform impulses. Some accounts have dismissed Pentecostals’ stance as apolitical and disengaged, or willing to lend support to right-wing governments on account of the “moral” stances these administrations adopt on issues such as abortion and homosexuality. Through a careful detailing of case-studies from the

Philippines, Korea, Brazil and South Africa – among other locations – Anderson shows the complex, multi-layered propensity of Pentecostals to view political matters through a spiritual lens, and their resulting “active social conscience” (p. 284). Pentecostal “politics” are seldom reducible to, nor contained within, secular agendas, but given the demographic preponderance of these Christians in large parts of the world, Anderson is surely right to argue that their contributions to public life deserve to be taken seriously.

However, in addition to these strengths, there are also a number of weaknesses to this second edition. As with the first edition, the text is in need of further editing in order to avoid the frequent repetition that characterizes it (for example, in the chapter on “Gender and Society” several passages about female evangelists are replicated on successive pages, and in the chapter “Academy and Ecumenism” material on David du Plessis is also reiterated at several points). Furthermore, this is a largely synthetic or synoptic account, and so Anderson mainly relies upon secondary rather than primary material. In particular, he restricts himself to a fairly small number of scholars, leaning heavily, for example, upon the work of Walter Hollenweger as well as drawing upon classic studies by Harvey Cox, Simon Coleman and William Faupel, among others. This all means that Anderson neglects the large number of new and influential studies of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity, most notably produced by the large Anthropology of Christianity school, including important ethnographies by Joel Robbins and Webb Keane. Attention to these newer studies would have enriched Anderson’s coverage, and is important for the kind of synthetic overview of contemporary scholarship on Pentecostalism he is attempting to provide.

Furthermore, in my opinion Anderson’s scholarship is marred by a number of questionable historical assumptions about the origins and nature of Pentecostalism. For example, he strongly emphasizes the early egalitarianism of the North American Azusa Street community, and in particular the prominent role played by African-American spirituality. While this view presents a somewhat essentialized notion of supposedly “African” spirituality (primarily invested in orality and experience, rather than literate dogma), it also glosses over the significant ruptures and fractures within the original Azusa street community, including, for example the contested role that Latinos played in this group. One suspects that Anderson’s grounds for emphasizing the “African” nature of Azusa Street is more grounded in his programmatic decision to decentre white American participation in favour of a more cosmopolitan, global perspective. This laudable intent, however, is not necessarily backed up by the historical record.

Another problematic aspect of Anderson’s analysis is his incorporation of groups and individuals who might only consider themselves very loosely Pentecostal or Charismatic, if at all, into his overall demographic count of Christians belonging to this movement. This inflationary tendency is evident in his approach to both Christians in China and southern Africa; in the case of the latter’s Zionist and Apostolic Christians, Anderson dubs these “Pentecostal-like independent churches”, acknowledging their inclusion vastly swells the total number of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians worldwide. I have myself argued

for the importance of acknowledging the influence of evangelical Christianity upon southern African Zionist and Apostolic communities usually dismissed as “syncretistic” indigenous appropriations of Christianity. However, the tracing of two-way institutional influences and of overlapping religious identities and affiliations needs to be carried out with great caution, attentive to the high degree of variability and internal heterogeneity Zionist and Apostolic groups display, and their varying degrees of proximity – and distance – to doctrines and practices identifiable as Pentecostal or Charismatic. A blanket identification of these groups as “Pentecostal” obscures precisely these nuanced complexities.

These reservations aside, this is a valuable volume that will be read primarily by theologians and religious studies scholars with interest.