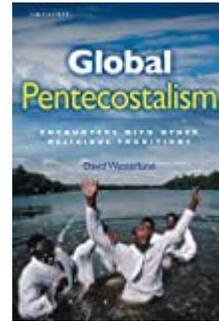




David Westerlund, ed. *Global Pentecostalism: Encounters with Other Religious Traditions*. Library of Modern Religion Series. London: I. B. Tauris, 2009. 288 pp. \$89.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84511-877-8.



Reviewed by Amos Yong (Regent University School of Divinity)

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Commissioned by Gene Mills (Florida State University)

W(h)ither the Pentecostal Encounter with Other Religions?

The major problem with this book is the title: readers expecting to learn about Pentecostal encounters with other religious traditions will probably be disappointed as only a few of the chapters focus on this topic. Four out of the fifteen chapters (excluding the editor's introduction) do explicitly describe Pentecostal encounters with other religions: the born-again polemic against witchcraft in Nigeria (coauthored by Asonzeh Ukah and Magnus Echtler); the public space contested by Christianity and Islam in Nigeria (by Ukah again); the public rhetoric against Islam in Sweden (by David Westerlund); and the practices of spiritual warfare conducted against Mayan religiosity in Guatemala (by Virginia Garrard-Burnett). But the rest explore other facets of Pentecostalism that would have fit better under the subtitle "Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations." Such a subtitle would have more accurately reflected both the fact that many of these essays discuss intra-Christian developments and dynamics (e.g., chapters by Cephas Omenyo on the proliferation of various forms of Christian churches and movements in Ghana; by Torsten

LÅ¶fstedt on the growth of the Russian Church of Evangelical Christians vis-À-vis the Russian Orthodox Church in the former USSR; and by Elizabeth Brusco and Hans Geir Aasmundsen—separately—on the often heated relations between Pentecostalism and Roman Catholicism in Colombia and Argentina). More often than not, the topics are not about Pentecostals encountering people in other faiths so much as they are about Pentecostal attitudes toward other religions (e.g., the chapter by Allan Anderson on early Indian and Chinese Pentecostal attitudes toward Hinduism, Buddhism, and other East Asian traditions) or Pentecostals' appropriations of other traditions for their own purposes (e.g., chapters by Kristina Helgesson Kjellin on South African Assemblies of God understandings of contemporary Israel; by David Thurffjell on Romani Pentecostal adjustments to late modernity across eastern, central, and southern Europe; and by Tabona Shoko, Sung-Gun Kim, and Jan-Ç°ke Alvarsson—respectively—on adaptations of indigenous traditions among Pentecostals in Zimbabwe, South Korea, and Bolivia). There is also one essay (by Daniel

P. MÃguez) providing a functional comparison of how Pentecostalism and Umbanda in Argentina have enabled their adherents to make social transitions.

But once the reader adjusts to the actual contents of the book—the adjustment will be helped along if one does not skip over the editor’s introductory chapter—then what emerges is a set of case studies that reveal the global permutations of a religion “made to travel.” The fifteen chapters are equally divided into three parts: on Africa, Asia/Europe, and Latin America respectively. The fifteen authors—five anthropologists, eight historians of religion or religious studies scholars, and two sociologists—are for the most part established scholars of Pentecostalism (although a handful can also be considered participant “insiders” to the movement), with each bringing the full panoply of his or her social scientific tool kit to bear on the topic. Having been presented originally at a session devoted to Pentecostalism at an April 2007 conference on the study of religion at SÃ¶dertÃ¶rn University in Stockholm, the chapters are remarkably even for this type of volume, with end-of-chapter reference lists that are suggestive of many avenues for further exploration.

Overall, this reader has three general impressions in response to *Global Pentecostalism*. First, the book shows that for Pentecostals, there is but a short step between inter-Christian ecumenical relations and issues and extra-Christian or interfaith relations and issues. The ecumenical challenges are no less complicated than the interreligious ones, precisely because of the vigorous exclusivism that tends to characterize most Pentecostals around the world. Thus “encounters with other religious traditions” continue to include those who remain in the “dead churches,” even if such are populated by mainline or traditional Protestant denominations, and certainly include Orthodox and Roman Catholic parishes and adherents, nominal or not. In other words, the “religious” other for Pentecostals represents all those not necessarily “outside” of Pentecostalism (which is difficult to define since its institutional boundaries are blurry), but all who have had neither the born-again experience nor that of the baptism and infilling of the Spirit.

Second, Pentecostals have not, in general, given much thought to formal articulation of their theology of

religions. Pentecostal views of other faiths must be inferred from their practices vis-Ã -vis those in other traditions. There are, of course, exceptions, such as Swedish Pentecostal pastor Stanley SjÃ¶berg, who has not only written two books on Islam, but has also been engaged in a sustained manner with the perceived “Muslim threat” to Scandinavia. But by and large, Pentecostal theological views about religious others remain dominated by exclusivism as featured in their spiritual warfare practices; their hostility to witchcraft and other forms of indigenous religions; and their commitments to resist the advance of Islam, particularly in social contexts where Christians are not in the minority against a Muslim majority (there is no chapter, for example, on Pentecostalism in Malaysia).

Last but certainly not least, the contents of this book should motivate Pentecostal theologians to take up the task of developing more informed theological views regarding religious pluralism. If “Nigerian Pentecostals have increasingly come to believe that Islam’s Allah is not the same as Yahweh, the loving father of Jesus Christ,” and such views are what drive the ongoing Christian-Muslim hostilities on the ground in such countries as Nigeria, whither the Pentecostal encounter with other religion in general and with Islam in particular (p. 109)? Deeper reflection of this specific theological question, for example, will inevitably lead to the observation that both Christians and Muslims believe in one God who is the creator of the world, and understand by their references to Yahweh and Allah precisely this creator. The theological question that Pentecostals need to consider, then, is when Muslim pray to this creator, even when naming such Allah, is Yahweh the creator God listening? Such theological questions, if allowed to emerge, will force Pentecostals to think through their beliefs and even practices—although it may be unpredictable what the long-term outcome of such reconsiderations might be: revitalization of genuine Pentecostal encounters with other religions or the withering away of authentic relations and interactions.

Global Pentecostalism will otherwise appeal to missiologists, students of globalization, and scholars of Pentecostalism, among others. It may be profitably used as a supplementary text in courses on Pentecostalism, ecumenism, and interreligious relations.

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