

# Reviews

**Kirsteen Kim**

*The Holy Spirit in the World: A Global Conversation.*

Maryknoll:Orbis, 2007. London: SPCK, 2008. 210 pages.

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When ancestor spirits were invoked at WCC's Canberra Assembly in 1991, attendees were split between applause and condemnation. Over a decade later, debates over the role of the Spirit and the spirits have not abated. They opened up 'a wide range of applications for pneumatology, and also gave spirit-language a pluralistic character' (p. xiii). Thus, Kim's book aims to 'highlight the issues involved in any theology of the Spirit in the world and to sketch emerging perceptions that are challenging the shape of traditional European theology.'

Against this backdrop, she surveys the theologies, history and contexts of how the Spirit is understood worldwide. Theologically, Catholics emphasize the Spirit in the church, Protestants emphasize the Spirit as unity in God and Pentecostals/charismatics as the power of God (pp. 3-4). These differences are historically rooted between Augustine, who viewed the 'Spirit' as in the church and Luther who saw the Spirit in the Bible and a person's faith. Yet none of them examined ancestor spirits or the Spirit in creation (pp. 6-7).

Kim sees three possible starting points for a biblical pneumatology: Pentecost, Christ or creation (pp. 9-10). For Pentecostals/charismatics, it begins in Acts 2; for the 'catholic' it begins in Christ's life and ministry; and for the 'orthodox' in Genesis 1. Chapter 2 should not be missed as many biblical descriptions and symbols of the Spirit are expertly detailed, preparing us to examine global pneumatologies (chapters 5-6).

She comments on the strengths and weaknesses of theologians like Stanley Samartha, Vandana and Samuel Rayan (all Indians), Suh Nam-Dong, Yonggi Cho and Ryu Tong-Shik (all Koreans). Of Samartha, Kim writes that his Spirit is 'the one who brings about the unity of Father and Son and the oneness of believers in Christ' (p.76), whose 'mission [is not of] the proclamation of a message about Jesus Christ but a continuation of the work of Jesus of Nazareth by the leading

of the Spirit... and... [the] spirit that inspired Jesus Christ is the spirit of dialogue' (p. 77). While Samartha's pneumatology charitably calls Christians to experience mission as the spirit of dialogue amidst religious pluralism (ibid.), Kim believes Samartha dichotomizes Eastern and Western thoughts, disconnecting 'the Spirit from human reason' (p. 78).

Kim not only critically examines these writers' pneumatologies but also surveys pneumatologies across history and cultures, studying how these constructs have delimited each doctrinal formulation. She analyzes each model using a trinitarian approach, a framework I find excellent in showing their contributions and shortcomings.

Two important threads evident throughout the book are that of pluralism and the discernment of the spirits (pp. 16, 57, 77-79, 154-155, 173-174). While most Christian engagements on pluralism have centred on Christology, Kim highlights the potential in examining it pneumatologically. Doing so prioritizes the need for the discernment of spirits – affirming its importance for twenty-first century missions.

As an Asian charismatic evangelical, I gained a deeper understanding of global pneumatologies from Kim. This book deserves a wide reading among all Christians. If Christianity is truly global, we cannot neglect other theologies of the Spirit in mission today.

However, the book title is misleading as the book omits Latin American and African pneumatologies. A forthcoming contribution from these areas would be in order. However it is hard to fault Kim for her insights and writings that coincide with the places where she had lived and ministered in – one can only live in so many spots. With the Spirit acting in the world, one could hope the Spirit leads her elsewhere so we can further glean from her insights.

*Reviewed by John Cheong, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, USA.*

David Maxwell

*African Gifts of the Spirit: Pentecostalism  
and the rise of a Zimbabwean transna-  
tional religious movement*

Oxford: James Currey, 2006) 250pp.

ISBN 0-85255-966-6

There are several reasons why *African Gifts of the Spirit* is a welcome contribution to the study of the church in Africa. It unashamedly takes as its topic the history of one African-instituted denomination as a worthwhile project in its own right for what it says about people and change. It is called the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA), but may appear under different names in several Africa countries, the USA, the UK, Germany and Australia. Pentecostalism and Christian faith are by no means irrelevant to wider considerations of culture and history; indeed, in Africa as many other places, no history is complete without appreciating the religious aspect of culture. Maxwell also attempts a 'black history', which is to say that his sources are predominantly those of this African instituted church itself, its records, and its Zimbabwean leaders. Full credit is given to their activity and agency in changing lives, while the opinions and responses of mainstream and Western Pentecostal churches are not considered relevant to the analysis. The thoroughness of the research and the attention given it, are evidently exceptional. Maxwell has been to see, or had scripts read by, the pertinent scholars of both African and Pentecostal studies. He has mined information in South Africa, USA, and UK as well as Zimbabwe above all. From this he has presented papers in no less than 22 cities in 12 different countries. Surely this must be a record for preparing any single volume!

Maxwell sets out ZAOGA as a bridge of various social formations, between global Pentecostalism and African independency, rural and urban, poverty and prosperity, social lift and capitalism, transnational networks, African nationalism (anachronistic or not), and between freedom from ancestral tradition and total dedication to the saved society. If ZAOGA provided a successful bridge between these, it would indeed change the world, yet the longer the salvation-history of this church goes on, the more it appears to show the decrepit face of the all-consuming mouth of the élites *en route* to the politics of the belly. Sometime cosyng to the ruling party in the 1990s has been replaced by

withdrawal from offering and receiving political legitimation as the government impoverished the people, but still the church leaders want to be seen associating with the rich élite as the sign of the height of this gospel's social lift.

Sadly the exclusive boundaries patrolled by authoritarian, monarchical leadership reappear here. Despite the author's stated intentions to the contrary (p. 138), the fantastic prominence given in the movement to its founder and leader, Ezekiel Guti, threaten to focus as much attention on Pentecostal leadership as Paul Gifford's *Ghana's New Christianity* (London : Hurst & Co., 2004). Though Maxwell's sources are much wider, the voices of the ordinary member do not come through strongly. What is missing in both accounts is any assessment of the turnover of membership. Is the African agency of these churches mainly to be identified in the rule of their big men, who cannot help, it seems, from rendering their ecclesial subjects relatively passive, there for the time of tongues, the Amens, and the ever revolving collection bowls? What happens to the majority who are passed by the sermonic visions of cars, lorries, houses, and bank accounts? Three years is a long time for the membership to be enchanted with such a message, however eye-opening and possibility-widening.

Thus the voices of followers rehearsed here are in praise of, or supplication to, their 'Baba', 'Daddy', 'Dad', and the God to whom he has exclusive access: 'Please Father, I know you are a true prophet of God. May your God help me.' ... 'We consider it a marvellous privilege to be your children' (pp. 142f., 208). The big man arrives in a chauffeur-driven, silver Mercedes to 'oversers and pastors bowing and scraping before him' whistling shouts of acclamation and a stocky bodyguard (p. 141), but keeps his external funding secret and his patronage system to maintain an image of 'tenacious African self-reliance' worthy of cultic devotion to the God of Ezekiel (p. 116). In this he has far more in common with 'the Pentecostalist big man' than with 'a traditional leader' or prophet (p. 217f).

'New converts also become smart in appearance, hard-working and literate, hence employable' (p. 201). However Maxwell does not sufficiently acknowledge that lives 're-modelled on the life of the church' require huge and continuing investments of time, energy, money for tithes and offerings, often in the hope that this is the key to miraculous prosperity, which in practice is likely to come the neo-patrimonial way.

Pentecostalism has done far too little to cleanse the state., whose corrupt oppression has rid Zimbabwe of most of the benefits of neo-liberal modernity. Thus the Pentecotalist's investment in faith has proved to have a much longer payback period than was bargained for, and much more like that offered by the more crucicentric mainstream denominations. ZAOGA ministry differs from them if one woman founder's complaint is correct: 'The blessing has become the gospel of money' (p. 152). The collapse of the economy in this millennium has undermined 'the possibility of a respectable family life and the gospel of prosperity' (p. 150), so the hope of modernity had to be transferred to the MDC opposition party in 2000, and 'mission work from an urban base' (p. 204) became more problematical. If 'modernity is always an aspiration rather than a condition' (p. 210) for ZAOGA, then what is left to it when the aspiration fails at last?

Though Maxwell is able to cross sociology and history in this exceptionally well-grounded study of a Pentecostalist church, the greatest lacuna lies in a theological analysis. Thus the main counterpoise is that between the socio-economic and the religious, for instance, 'pragmatic and primitive impulses merged seamlessly in a pervasive sense of God's providence' (p. 209). Does the church not have a theology, however implicit, to sustain it? Do the sacraments not show how spirit and matter, creation and salvation come together? Maxwell does not answer such questions and consequently limits our understanding of ZAOGA as a church and its place on the wide spectrum of Christian confession. Thus despite his thoughtful attempt to appreciate the contribution of spiritual manifestation, Maxwell delivers on historical analysis mainly in terms of qualitative socio-economic causes and consequences, but not so much in terms of the prom-

ised irreducible deposit of religion. Whether therapeutic or dictatorial, ZAOGA as presented here, appears not to have any alternative to political leadership for Zimbabweans.

One of the author's many worthy aims is to demonstrate that Africans can exercise their own agency and spawn global Pentecostalism themselves, so that it should not be seen merely as North American cultural imperialism. He does this incontrovertibly, though it is interesting to note that ZAOGA members go to the UK with much the same materialist motives as other Zimbabweans, and Shona worship an exalted Harare as their Jerusalem, eventually alienating the marginal whites who had joined them (p. 177). Though the rejection, suppression, or demonization of African traditions compose a common theme in its preaching (p. 166), ZAOGA is no more free of ethnocentrism than any other missionary movement.

There is many a phrase replete with explanation in this book, which is packed with interest. Introduction and conclusion are rich indeed. Terms like auto-hagiography need wider currency. On the other hand I would prefer to see 'radical Evangelicals' reserved for the meaning given by Two-Thirds World theologians in the Lausanne movement at Pattaya in 1980, who insisted on socio-political engagement. Pentecostalists might create nuclear families rather than revolutions (p. 221), but Evangelicals themselves understand 'radical Evangelicals' this way, and not as Evangelicals who so emphasize the Spirit and Holiness that they become proto-Pentecostals. The length of this review and the quality of insight given by the quotations in it are themselves testimony to this valuable work of scholarship. If you need to know about African Pentecostalism, read it!

*Review by Ben Knighton, Research Tutor, OCMS*

## Christianity and Cultures: Shaping Christian Thinking in Context

David Emmanuel Singh and Bernard C Farr (Eds)

This volume on Christianity and Cultures is a way of marking an important milestone in the relatively short story of the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (OCMS). The papers here have been exclusively sourced from Transformation, a quarterly journal of OCMS and seek to provide a tripartite view of Christianity's engagement with cultures by focusing on the question: how is Christian thinking forming or reforming through its interaction with the varied contexts it encounters? As Christianity has taken and still takes shape in multiple contexts, it naturally results in a variety of expressions and emphases. One can gain an appreciation of these by studying different strands of theological-missiological thinking, socio-political engagements and forms of family relationships in interaction with the host cultures.

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