

Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, *A Guide to Pentecostal Movements for Lutherans* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016). xiii + 150 pp. \$21 paper.

Sarah Hinlicky Wilson may well have written this book for me. My grandparents were Pentecostals, and Germans from Eastern Europe who settled just outside of Edmonton. They were Lutherans until a Pentecostal revival swept through their community and the family then became members of the local German Pentecostal church. After marriage, my father and mother decided to make Lutheranism their home, but I was raised with some awareness of this family history. Moreover, I have had some interaction with charismatic movements within Lutheranism, and so, I am intrigued by “Pentecostal movements” and what Lutherans might learn from them in which Wilson here provides a fine guide.

Wilson does a stellar job of interweaving history and doctrinal themes, allowing the reader to identify points of similarity and difference while appreciating the complexity of Pentecostalism, defined as “a movement to reclaim the experience of the Holy Spirit and such spiritual gifts as tongues, prophecy, and healing as a normal part of every Christian’s life” (13). The further distinctions she makes between Classical Trinitarian Pentecostals, Classical Oneness Pentecostals, Charismatics, and Neo-Charismatics (13–20) help the reader understand that attention to nuance assists the reader to better understand these religious movements.

I especially appreciated her characterization of the distinction between Pentecostal and Lutheran movements as experiential versus confessional (31). Many Lutherans would happily use this as a kind of trump card in an ecclesial parlour game. But Wilson unsettles Lutheran doctrinal pride by informing readers that in the days of Azusa, blacks laid hands on whites (1), and women were as active as men (7). Moreover, in the pre-Azusa Pentecostal movements among Pietist missions in India, “caste lines were eliminated among participants” (10) and forms of worship and leadership attentive to indigenous forms prevailed (10). Wilson is able to discern in this broader religious movement—and perhaps most demonstrably in the charisma of tongues—that voice is given to the voiceless (52, 130).

Lutherans who read this book will be familiar with stock-in-trade critiques of Pentecostal movements as subjective. Wilson, however, points us to the underlying impetus of mission rather than personal holiness at the core of the “Spirit baptism” (5)—the latter a term “in circuit” that was used by the early North American recipients of the movement to name a common experience (49). Indeed, she undoes a common mistake of identifying adherents of Pentecostal movements as “fundamentalists,” noting that the latter were among the most severe persecutors of the former in the movement’s earliest days (14). Moreover, such critiques as “fanaticism,” in light of appeals to the miraculous, is deemed inconsistent in light of Lutheran confessional documents, which presume healing, etc. (51).

A *leitmotif* of the book identifies the manner in which the Pentecostal movement is about practical Christianity. Wilson quotes one of the first pieces in print from the Azusa Street Mission which notes that the movement is not “fighting men or churches, but seeking to displace dead forms and creeds of wild fanaticisms with living, practical Christianity. ‘Love, Faith, Unity’ is our watchword” (98). Of course, many are aware that this movement has sometimes moved in directions deemed problematic and so, for instance, Wilson deals with the prosperity gospel with a deft hand. She notes that its “name it and claim it” message is not a piece of the original Pentecostal movement, and runs in direct conflict with the experience of the faithful, a key marker of Pentecostal theology (102–104). And yet, she also notes that the prosperity gospel “has a different texture when it is preached by and to people who are destitute and starving, and denied access to any medical care at all” (105). Pentecostalism holds hard to hope in unimaginable contexts and appears differently when seen as an expectation that the God of Jesus Christ comes to make all things new for all people—including the destitute, the poor, the undereducated, and the powerless.

I recall, many years ago in my first parish, being invited by a local businessman to a Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship meeting. I went with serious emotional reserve and all of my doctrinal daggers in place. But what I most remember was that there weren’t many “businessmen” there, and the testimonies were more about the Spirit than the converts. I was also disarmed by the manner in which it was assumed that God is in the “business” of raising up those downtrodden,

broken, marginalized, and voiceless. I have no illusions about the misuse of power in this movement because I have seen power misused in Lutheranism. But as I witness Lutheranism in North America slipping from mainline to sideline, I am hopeful that our institutions can again become *movements* in which those who have no voice are given a place from which to speak. In this liminal time, Lutherans need to attend to those who know something of being on the margins, and I am thankful to Wilson for introducing us to important pedagogues in Pentecostal movements.

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