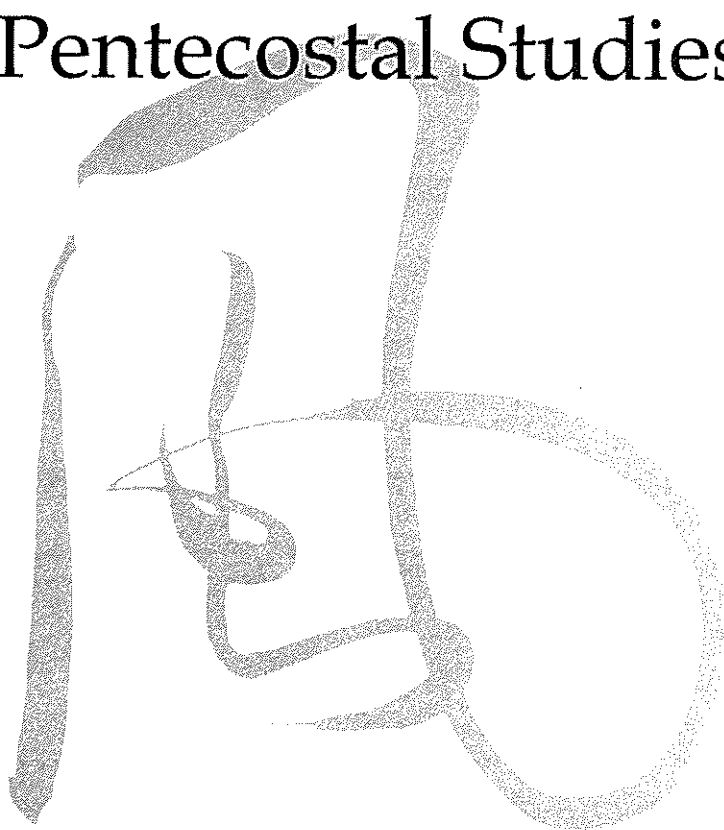


# Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies



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## BOOK REVIEWS

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Toward a Pneumatological Theology: Pentecostal and Ecumenical Perspectives on Ecclesiology, Soteriology and Theology of Mission* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2002). 294 pp., paper, ISBN: 0-7618-2389-1, US\$47.00.

This collection of seventeen essays all written by Kärkkäinen is a significant contribution to the ongoing theological discussion regarding the possibility of a genuine pneumatological theology. While many of them were written during his theological formative years and have been published in the past as journal articles, they are relevant and are an important step in acquiring a deeper understanding of the challenges in the life and mission of the church.

In speaking of a pneumatological theology, Kärkkäinen clarifies at outset that it is not a theology that is primarily centered on the Spirit but rather that He is the key to understanding the Godhead. He writes: "A true spirited theology is fully trinitarian, a theology in which all the persons of the Trinity are honored in their own specific, yet unified personhoods and ministries" (p. viii).

In affirming his belief that any discussion about the Spirit must be both contextual and ecumenical, Kärkkäinen adds that these essays provide such a perspective on the soteriological, ecclesiological and missiological issues discussed.

The book is clearly divided into four divisions. Part One consists of five essays on Pentecostal hermeneutics in relation to the Pentecostal identity which is defined to be the characteristics that the denominational community regards as indispensable for its self-understanding. The basis for this approach is that the hermeneutical questions, that are discussed in chapters 1 and 2, cannot be isolated from the identity questions discussed in chapters 3 and 4. It is because the answers and decisions made in each area determines and informs the other. Kärkkäinen's survey and assessment of the development of Pentecostal hermeneutics in the first chapter is noteworthy and challenging in its conclusion where he writes: "Much philosophical, historical, theological and exegetical work waits the new generation of Pentecostals who want to preserve their identity and at the same time relate to other Christians and to the world around them" (p. 21).

The following five essays in Part Two constitute the heart of Kärkkäinen's theological agenda. The first two essays (chapters 6 and 7) assess the ecclesiological implications in considering the Trinity as communion in the Spirit from a pneumatological perspective. Kärkkäinen's choice of John Zizioulas, Wolfhart Pannenberg and Karl

Rahner who, from their respective tradition, represent a major ecumenical approach from this perspective is valid and relevant. In emphasizing the importance of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers (in chapter 9), Kärkkäinen argues for a charismatic structure of the church as opposed to one that is unduly dependent on the clergy. The concluding essay (chapter 10) explores the relationship between the Spirit and the Lord's Supper and of the Spirit's role in the mediation of Christ's presence.

Part Three consists of three essays that attempt to re-conceptualize soteriology from a pneumatological perspective. The first essay (chapter 11) suggests that the doctrine of deification (our transformation in the image of God and being made partakers of the divine nature) in Eastern Orthodoxy offers much pneumatological potential besides contributing to our understanding of salvation. The following essay (chapter 12) explores how a pneumatological spirituality perceives the sufferings and tragedies in life. The final essay on social justice reminds Pentecostals of the need to re-conceive soteriology in social rather than in only salvific and individualistic terms.

The last four essays in Part Four respond to missiological questions from a pneumatological and eschatological perspective. Of special interest is the first essay (chapter 14) on proselytism which has become as one of the most debated topics in evangelism and mission. Mindful of the challenges from other religions, it is fitting that Kärkkäinen devotes the final essay of his book with a reflection on the theology of religions from a pneumatological perspective.

Kärkkäinen's book is provocative and challenging—a stirring wake-up call to Pentecostals. In his concluding exhortation in the Preface, he writes: "I believe the time has come for Pentecostals to engage in mutual learning and exchange with other traditions, not only in sharing their charismatic, dynamic spirituality, but also their emerging theology" (p. viii).

One of the virtues of the book is its clarity. The purpose of each chapter is clearly declared in its introduction and the book is written at an accessible level that should allow even the laity to read it with profit. In summation, Kärkkäinen has done the church and the academy a valuable service in producing this book that enlightens and enrich not only the Pentecostal tradition, but also the church at large.

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