

Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies



Volume 7, Number 2 (July 2004)

BOOK REVIEWS

Anselm Kyongsuk Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology after Postmodernism* (New York: T & T Clark, 2004). vii + 245 pp., ISBN: 0567025705, US\$ 27.00.

Anselm Min is a Korean-American Roman Catholic, and has taught theology, philosophy and religion at the Claremont School of Theology and Graduate School since 1992. While he is, in all probability, a stranger to readers of *AJPS*, his new book is important for *AJPS* readers for at least three reasons: its taking seriously but not uncritically our postmodern situation; its presenting and defending a robust pneumatological theology; and its broaching global issues through the particularity of Min's Korean-American liberation theology perspective. Let me very briefly elaborate on these.

Part one of this volume includes four chapters wherein Min provides one model for doing theology in critical and constructive dialogue with postmodernism. While applauding how the postmodern emphasis on difference destabilizes the modern emphasis on totality, yet difference itself cannot be absolutized without undermining the possibility of ethical action. So even if Levinas rightly calls attention to the transcendence and infinity of the other, his denial that such is historically mediated results on our inability to engage the concrete factuality of others as particular historical beings. Similarly, Derrida's deconstruction and *différance* leads him to posit a messianism that is only ideal; thus Derridean "religion" is an ahistorical abstraction, irrelevant at best and legitimating of the status quo at worst. Both champions of the postmodern deconstruction of totality leave them incapable of engaging the actualities of the social, political, and economic realms within which all humans live, move and have their being. The modern totality and the postmodern difference therefore need to be sublated into "the solidarity of the different," and this precisely because of the demands of justice and liberation. Classical insights into human nature as referring to basic needs, capacities and structures common to all human beings allow for the possibility of justice, while postmodern perspectives on human nature as historically located insist that the concrete establishment of justice involves social, political and economic life. What emerges is a trinitarian dialectic between totality (concrete historicity), infinity (the immeasurable dignity of the other), and solidarity (the interdependence of others), each understood as permanent "existentials" of the human condition. Engaging this dialectic seriously requires a praxis that seeks to create liberating totalities.

In general terms, Pentecostalism both extends and rejects modernity, albeit in different ways. On the one hand, Pentecostal movements have been precipitated in part by the social changes accompanying modernization and globalization. On the other hand, the Pentecostal experience has also been seen as a counter discourse to the homogenizing forces of modernity: arguably, glossolalia not only resists the rationalizations of the western paradigm, but also legitimizes the pluralism of indigenous languages, cultures and ethnicities. Certainly Min's constructive yet critical engagement with postmodernity can help Pentecostals who are wrestling with their own questions about whether or not to get on the "postmodern bandwagon." But even more specifically, might Min's "solidarity of the different" serve as a sophisticated philosophical explication of the many tongues of Pentecost declaring the wonders of God?

Part two begins to answer this question by moving from philosophical to theological analysis and reflection. (Min is eminently qualified to move between and betwixt these disciplines given his PhDs in philosophy and theology from Fordham and Vanderbilt Universities, respectively.) The constructive pneumatological and postmodern theology after postmodernism of this book proceeds from two related moves: that of developing a theological anthropology of concrete totality, and that of renewing the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The former calls attention to the concreteness of human economic and social interdependence in our global context. If human beings are defined both by their personal and social aspects, and by their transcendental and historical—minimally: the economic, political, and cultural—dimensions (whereby each side mediates and is thereby dialectically constitutive of the other side), then theological anthropology needs to pay attention to both other-worldly and this-worldly salvation, the latter being the explicit domain of liberation theology. The latter renewal of pneumatology involves the retrieval of the patristic model of the Spirit as the mutual love of the Father and the Son in order to suggest that the Spirit is the power of relating, reconciling and creating communal solidarity in the life of the immanent and the economic Trinity. At the level of the immanent Trinity, Min insightfully sees a kind of "solidarity of others" since each of the trinitarian persons are persons in different ways, yet unified together. At the level of the economic life of the Trinity, Min's pneumatology emphasizes the Spirit's power to create, inspire and liberate finite creatures for relationship with God and for communal (historical) solidarity with other creatures. The body of Christ instantiates the solidarity of the Spirit, since it transcends fragmentation

and regionalism but not by mandating any kind of uniformity. This is why Min talks not about a “solidarity with others”—which still puts “us” in a privileged position—but about a “solidarity of others” where each is related to and dependent upon everyone else. Otherness is transcended in terms of difference with “us” even as it is preserved in the solidarity of “us all.” As such, solidarity resists both the hegemony of the individual and the totalitarianism of the whole.

Min’s creative re-reading of pneumatological themes in scripture recaptures familiar texts and passages and results in a cosmic and liberative anthropological pneumatology that goes far beyond traditional individualistic or ecclesial articulations of the doctrine of the Spirit. Here, Min elaborates further on the constructive liberation theology he has been working on for decades. Whereas his earlier *Dialectic of Salvation: Issues in Theology of Liberation* (State University of New York Press, 1989) advanced the thesis that human nature is not only personal but social and that salvation and conversion therefore have to be understood in both personal and social terms, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World* extends this basic anthropological and soteriological thesis through more in-depth pneumatological and trinitarian theological reflection. The much stronger theological axiom that emerges is that liberation dialectically conceived emphasizes social agency as part and parcel of the Christian life, neither accidental nor extrinsic to it, precisely because the incarnational and pentecostal movements of the trinitarian life have entered into history and been poured out upon the people of God who are thereby empowered to accomplish together what individuals on their own cannot: the concrete social and historical transformation of the human condition.

As important, however, is the attention Min gives to how to discern and respond to the presence and activity of the Spirit in our world. Two examples will have to suffice about how Min’s perspective is illuminating for spiritual discernment. The first concerns his bold but important claim that the economic dimension of human life is arguably the most important. If otherness is signaled by historical, social, ethnic, political, religious, cultural, linguistic, economic, etc., differences, the last is nevertheless the most crucial because economic discrimination allows for and realizes the kind of oppression that other forms of discrimination do not. Hence, otherness is defined ethically, in terms of economic justice and of our obligatedness to and solidarity with those with whom we live in interdependence. Because economic injustices demand social, political and structural action, the Spirit’s liberative presence needs to be measured not only by what individuals do, but by

collective human activities. Here, Min's personal and sustained engagement with the Korean situation over the decades has undoubtedly sensitized him to the concrete (even if complex) demands of theological praxis in global context.

The second example of how Min's analysis yields insight into spiritual discernment concerns the subject of religious pluralism. While the challenge of religious pluralism recurs throughout the volume, two essays address specifically the question, what about the other religious traditions? Min's liberationist approach to religious pluralism is to raise it precisely as a problem for praxis rather than just for cognition. The clash of religions today signals the challenges of different communities struggling for physical, economic, political and social survival. Hence, against both the exclusivism of traditional approaches which presumes a supra-historical position that judges other religious traditions "from above" and the relativism of pluralist approaches which abandons the uniqueness and normativity of Christ, Min proposes an inclusivist and "confessionalist pluralism of praxis." This recognizes that religious claims are inevitably confessions of faith continually negotiating the tensions between conviction and revisability, particularity and universality, the standpoint of faith and the pluralism of horizons. The integrity of religious differences therefore needs to be engaged not only theoretically and dialogically in terms of the interreligious encounter but practically in terms of interreligious initiatives directed toward peace and justice in our global village. Because religious beliefs and practices cannot be disentangled from the social, political and economic aspects of human life, the Spirit's liberative presence needs to be measured not only by what individuals claim to believe, but by what religiously inspired human action accomplishes.

Good books raise important questions. Perhaps in future work, Min will further elaborate on his christological and soteriological theology of religious pluralism. Also, how Min's affirmation of Jesus Christ as the "final, universal, normative Savior of humanity" (p. 187) relates to his pneumatology and to Western/Latin doctrine of the *filioque*? There also remains the question of what kind of eschatology follows—or ought to follow—from the thoroughly dialectical philosophy of history which Min deploys: can Min tell us anything more about how both history and the eschaton retain their full integrity in our theological reflection given their dialectical relationship?

In the meanwhile, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World* will help Pentecostals think through prolegomena issues related to epistemological, hermeneutical, and methodological issues for a

postmodern and Pentecostal theology. Further, Pentecostals rethinking their understanding of the Holy Spirit will benefit from Min's dialectical approach to pneumatological theology. But most importantly, Min's emphasis on the necessity of concrete social, political and economic praxis to sound pneumatological thinking cannot but help challenge Pentecostal theological reflection. This is just as Min would have it; he is thus to be thanked for this book.

Amos Yong

French L. Arrington, *Encountering the Holy Spirit: Paths of Christian Growth and Service* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2003). 546 pp., Paper, ISBN: 0-8714-8226-6, US\$19.95.

Pastors, students in Bible colleges, and Christians who want a practical and reliable account of how the Holy Spirit is currently operating in fulfillment of New Testament prophecy might consider professor Arrington's new guide a "must read." Although the book is aimed for the educated layperson and Bible college student, scholars also will not at all find the work unprofitable, given that the domain of the Holy Spirit, especially the gift of the Holy Spirit to disciple-believer-witnesses who pray earnestly for this empowering gift, is in need of further clarification. Given several centuries of confusion following the Lukan cessationism of the Reformers, further embellished in the Evangelical traditions, fresh approaches are in order. Building on the past century of scholarship and experience in the Pentecostal tradition, together with that in the various Charismatic Renewal Movements among the Orthodox, Roman Catholics, and increasing blocks of Protestantism, Arrington sweeps away a good bit of the ecclesiastical fog surrounding a vital and timely topic. Here we have a realistic guide for practicing Christians who want to use their Bible in an understandable and accurate manner, becoming cognizant of a budding scholarly tradition within the Pentecostal Reformation, now the fastest growing sector of world Christendom.

It is a pleasure to welcome this well written and persuasive presentation of what the Bible actually says about leading a Spirit-filled life. Arrington engages the biblical witness with great care and clarity. Aside from his lucid explanations of biblical passages and their connections, we find many helpful summaries of main points, along with lists of penetrating questions causing us to think afresh about ourselves. I