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Castelo's "Pentecostalism as a Christian mystical tradition" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Castelo, D. (2017). *Pentecostalism as a Christian mystical tradition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 214 pp. \$30.00 ISBN 9780802869562

Pentecostalism has often been described as a charismatic religious movement that emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit and the experience of God in the believer. Though commonly framed as “evangelicalism with tongues,” or even an aberrant form of Christian orthodoxy, Daniel Castelo proposes that Pentecostalism is best understood as a “mystical tradition of the church catholic” (pp. xv-xvi). In *Pentecostalism as a Christian mystical tradition*, he argues that Pentecostalism does not fit squarely within the Protestant tradition or evangelical orientation, but is rather a reflection of the voices of historical Christian mystics. This connection is pursued by exploring the relationship between spirituality and theology, specifically the theological methodology and theological epistemology within American evangelicalism.

In chapters 1 and 2, Castelo establishes changes within the theological landscape that have influenced American evangelicalism. Acknowledging comparative studies on theological method and epistemology, he chooses to highlight the approach that focuses on Pentecostalism as a *spirituality*. Noting that outsiders to the movement and insiders are not in agreement as to how Pentecostalism fits within a broader theological framework, he demonstrates that a spirituality-theology interface is very much alive within the methodological framework of Pentecostalism. Christian theologians are urged to consider God as a revelational mystery that needs to be made manifest or known in a genuine way, and Castelo offers the term “encounter” as a useful way to describe this intellectual and relational activity (p. 55). He continues to build his case by highlighting the widespread emphasis on encounter, which is central to the Pentecostal identity, and argues it is primarily what makes Pentecostalism a mystical tradition. He later concludes that these experience-based encounters, with the potential to transform believers, help us identify Pentecostals as “modern-day mystics” (p. 82).

A third dimension of Castelo’s overall argument is how Pentecostalism relates to American evangelicalism. By giving an account of several theological positions from the last three centuries, he shows how the rationalism at work in American evangelicalism can prohibit a full understanding of the Pentecostal identity and

its mystical orientation. These mystical features prominent in church history are often dismissed as representative of the gospel. Castelo creates further links between Pentecostalism and Christian mysticism by expanding the Pentecostal understanding of Spirit-baptism. In his final chapter, he develops the thoughts of contemporary Pentecostal scholars and argues that Pentecostalism must rely on its character as a mystical tradition in order to further perpetuate its identity.

Overall, this “working proposal” is a helpful way to reframe and understand the Pentecostal movement. Professor of dogmatic and constructive theology at Seattle Pacific University and Seminary and author of *Pneumatology: A guide for the perplexed*, Castelo offers a well-researched and articulate contribution to the understanding of Pentecostalism throughout history and in modern times. Engaging and thought-provoking in its presentation, Castelo’s work is highly recommended for all academic audiences, but would be of particular interest to graduate students and faculty in theological programs.

Reviewer

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