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Book Review: Together in One Mission: Pentecostal Cooperation in World Evangelization by Arto Hämäläinen and Grant McClung, eds.

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Hämäläinen, Arto, and Grant McClung, eds. *Together in One Mission: Pentecostal Cooperation in World Evangelization*. Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2012. 337 pp.

A review by David Rogers, Senior Editor of the Adrian Rogers Pastor Training Institute. He received a B.A. in Business Administration and Radio-TV-Film from Baylor University and a M.Div. from Southwestern Baptist Seminary. David is a Ph.D. candidate at Southeastern Baptist Seminary in Applied Theology: International Missions.

As I sit down to write this review, the evangelical blogosphere and other social media are abuzz with responses, both positive and negative, to the recently completed “Strange Fire” conference sponsored by John MacArthur’s Grace to You ministry. Just as a response to that conference may be predicted accurately based on personal perspective with respect to the Pentecostal and charismatic movement(s), those with different perspectives on these issues will almost certainly have different reactions to the book I am now reviewing. With that in mind, it will be somewhat helpful, before we jump into the content of the book, to identify briefly my own perspective. As a Southern Baptist with over twenty years of international missionary experience in both denominational and interdenominational settings, a *continuationist* understanding of Scripture, and

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recollections of having observed both excesses and positive contributions on the part of a mixed assortment of Pentecostal and charismatic friends and ministry colleagues down through the years, I write with what might be called a “friendly outsider” perspective on the global Pentecostal and charismatic movement(s). I also write from the perspective of a particular interest in gospel-centered unity of the body of Christ, or what some have called *evangelical ecumenism*.

This book is a collection of essays presenting various perspectives on in-house cooperation among Pentecostals (and, to some degree, the parallel charismatic movement), as well as to how this all relates the unity of the broader body of Christ and the task of world evangelization. As co-editors Arto Hämäläinen and Grant McClung write in the preface, “This book was written to *celebrate a movement* and *counter a misconception*. The *movement* is the growing international reality of Pentecostal cooperation in world evangelization. The *misconception* is that Pentecostals are prone toward divisiveness and isolation” (23). They indicate further: “This collection of essays is intended not only for description—telling the story of ‘what is’—but is intentionally didactic and prescriptive in nature, urging cooperation and collaboration as ‘what should be’ for those committed to world evangelization” (25). The authors of the various essays (26 altogether) come from a variety of cultural contexts, most of them holding leadership positions in global, regional, and national networks of Pentecostal churches and missionary ministries.

The fact that Pentecostal and charismatic movements comprise a substantial force in world Christianity today is undeniable. The statistics vary according to different criteria used to define exactly who qualifies, but they reach as high as David Barrett’s 2008 figure of 601 million Pentecostals and charismatics worldwide. This leads Hämäläinen to affirm that it is “logical to divide Christendom into four main branches: Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Reformed, and Charismatic” (223), although there is some overlap of these categories with the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, as well as an increasing number who would describe themselves as both Reformed and charismatic. This, in turn, raises two key questions: 1) Who exactly are Pentecostals? 2) What is the relationship of Pentecostals (and charismatics) to evangelicals?

Peter Kuzmic, in his introductory essay entitled, “Pentecostals in the Evangelical Family: A Historical and Theological Reflection,” provides some helpful answers. First, he reminds us that Pentecostals share roots with other Christians in their belief in the core doctrines expressed in the classical creeds of the early church, the Protestant Reformation, and the revivals of the eighteen and nineteenth centuries in the United States. As an exception, Oneness Pentecostals,

Rogers: Book Review: Together in One Mission: Pentecostal Cooperation in who do not accept the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, comprise a small minority of the broader Pentecostal movement. Additionally, Pentecostals have more specific roots in the Wesleyan and Holiness movements. They generally trace their birth as a separate movement to the Azusa Street Revival that began in Los Angeles in 1906. They place an emphasis on a post-conversion experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit, accompanied by the practice of speaking in tongues, as well as other miraculous phenomena, such as supernatural healing and the practice of the spiritual gift of prophecy. Today, Pentecostals are spread out among 11,000 denominations. Fifty-six denominations and pan-denominational organizations—including some of the largest Pentecostal groups, such as the Assemblies of God, Foursquare, the International Pentecostal Holiness Church, the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), the Church of God in Christ, the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, and the Pentecostal European Fellowship—are grouped together in the Pentecostal World Fellowship (PWF), which according to contributor Prince Guneratnam is “now the largest forum for Pentecostal collaboration” (27).

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Though the subject of the book is specifically Pentecostal cooperation, it is difficult in many respects to separate the Pentecostal movement from the charismatic movement, which has permeated previously established denominations as well as an additional 3,000 independent charismatic denominations. Vinson Synan’s essay on the “Memphis Miracle” of 1994 narrates how black and white leaders from both Pentecostal and charismatic churches and denominations gathered for a time of mutual repentance and reconciliation culminating in the founding of the new umbrella organization, Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches of North America (PCCNA).

Even though, as former international Lausanne director Tetsunao Yamamori remarks, “Global Pentecostalism has emerged as the largest and fastest-growing expression of the worldwide Christian movement” (21), the overall vision articulated in *Together in One Mission* is not that of Pentecostal triumphalism. As contributor Billy Wilson observes, “This harvest is so large and so vast it demands the Christian church to work together. No one ministry or denomination could possibly harvest 7 billion people, although some would like to act as though they can” (108). Instead of opting for a self-sufficient isolationism, Wilson suggests that “Spirit-filled believers should lead Christianity in bringing people together in united purpose and effort” (110).

Kuzmic’s essay (in my opinion, the best and most interesting of the book) narrates the historical development of Pentecostalism and its sometimes rocky relationship with evangelicals who, under the guise of early twentieth century

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fundamentalism, defined themselves in opposition to the twin dangers of
theological liberalism and Pentecostalism. However, with the emergence of New
Evangelicalism in the 1940s, they came to eventually embrace Pentecostals and
charismatics as fellow evangelicals and partners in the Great Commission. In
recent years, one of the prime examples of this new mindset is the Lausanne
Committee for World Evangelization, which links together traditional evangelicals,
Pentecostals, and charismatics on a global level.

For the most part, although basic biblical arguments in favor of Christian
unity and cooperation in mission are presented in several essays, complex issues of
ecumenical cooperation are not treated in an in-depth fashion. One idea that
comes through clearly and repeatedly throughout the book, however, is that unity
and solidarity with the broader body of Christ does not preclude Pentecostals and
charismatics from cooperating in a special way with each other by means of
individual denominations and such initiatives as the PWF and PCCNA. The final
two sections of the book are comprised of a series of essays on regional issues, case
studies, and personal reflections from representatives of various cultural contexts
that illustrate how these principles are being put into practice around the world.

One issue that I would have liked to have seen treated more extensively
(especially in light of the proposals offered at the “Strange Fire” conference) is the
relationship of more biblically balanced Pentecostals to prosperity gospel and
Word of Faith proponents, as well as to modalist Oneness Pentecostals, and the
call for accountability and “policing” of unhealthy excesses. On a personal side
note, though, I can attest to having heard a powerful and passionate message given
by now deceased Pentecostal evangelist David Wilkerson at a 2004 Pentecostal
conference in Madrid in which he called fellow Pentecostals to personal holiness
and integrity and warned against superficial sensationalism and prosperity
teaching.

Whatever one’s personal opinion with regard to the biblical validity and
spiritual value of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements, what is indisputable
is that anyone hoping to gain a better understanding and appreciation of the
global Christian movement cannot afford to bypass the dynamic and impactful
contribution of Pentecostals and charismatics and the various denominations,
movements, and networks that join them together. With this in mind, *Together in
One Mission* is a helpful and informative compendium of observations from key
leaders within these movements with regard to how they approach the issues of
Christian unity and missionary cooperation in the body of Christ.