

Albert Hernández. *Subversive Fire: The Untold Story of Pentecost*. Lexington: Emeth, 2010. 304 pages. \$28.

Since the last century, especially from the last quarter of the century, there has been increasing interest in the practice of Christian spirituality. In response to the intellectual and pastoral desire to learn about Christian spirituality, many scholarly and ministerial resources for the understanding and practice of Christian spirituality have been published. This book is a unique resource on this topic in some aspects.

As a historian, the author critically reviews a variety of spiritual movements that occurred in Western Europe by the impact of the story of Pentecost in Acts 2 from the 1100s to the late 1600s. Rather than tracing scholastic debates on the abstract metaphysical concept of the Holy Spirit and its doctrinal development, he examines a number of historical figures of theologians, visionaries, prophets, and esoteric spiritual practitioners who are not so familiar to the mainstream of Christian believers. Through the constructive assessment of these historical sources, the author provides readers with practical theological insight into critical reflection on the relevance of personal and corporate practices of the Christian spiritual life.

In six chapters, the author ambitiously deals with the complexity of movements of the Holy Spirit in human history with the conviction that “the past creatively appropriated, imaginatively reconstructed, is the material out of which the future is effectively made” (20).<sup>1</sup> His interdisciplinary approach to the topic by means of literary critics, socio-political and cultural criticisms, liturgical studies, as well as historical and theological analyses, makes this volume a comprehensively informative resource to study spiritual movements during that time period.

Chapter One introduces the volume with an overview of the history of pneumatological movements within the Western church and presents “constructive historicism” as the appropriate method of the project for the study of “the Pentecostal legacy” (20). Chapter Two explores how the commemoration of Pentecost was formed by and practiced in popular culture in association with pre-Christian cosmological worldviews and indigenous cultural practices. As examples, the author presents three medieval stories—the Arthurian and Holy Grail traditions; Wolfram’s epic story, *Parzival*; and Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur*. Chapter Three explores prophetic leadership in relation to the lives of Abbot Joachim of Fiore, Francis of Assisi and the Franciscans, female lay minister Guglielma of Milan, and Cola di Renzo, empowered by the Holy Spirit to struggle for ecclesiastical reform. Chapter Four reviews spiritual movements during the Protestant and Roman Catholic Reformation era, focusing on Martin Luther and John Calvin, along with their counterparts, Thomas Müntzer and Michael Servetus, and three Spanish Jesuits—Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and Ignatius of Loyola. Chapter Five surveys activities of such Christian magicians, alchemists, and scientists as Abbott Trithemius of Sponheim, Agrippa von Nettesheim, Francis Bacon, and Johann Valentin Andreae, who tried to interpret the work of the Holy Spirit through the integration of religious knowledge and pre-modern scientific learning, from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. Chapter Six concludes the volume with the theological practical concern about “the pneumatological deficit” (265) in the Euro-Western world since the Modern era.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Delwin Brown, *Boundaries of Our Habitations: Tradition and Theological Construction* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 118.

This book is valuable for those who are interested in learning about how pneumatology and the story of Pentecost have played a role in the history of the Western church and its wider society. This book is also a good resource for those who want to think theologically about the way of the Christian spiritual life since it provides a critical theological reflection on its history. As the author indicates in the conclusion, the pneumatological deficit or the *amnesia* (forgetfulness) of “the seven-times-seven days of Pentecost” is a trend of the contemporary church (265). Yet, it is notable that, since the Second Vatican Council, mainline Protestant churches in North America have reevaluated the significance of the Christian calendar and have begun to use it as their liturgical and homiletical tool. For them, this book can be a practical resource to think about how their worship service and preaching, based on the liturgical calendar, can be an event of communication acted upon by the “subversive fire” of the Holy Spirit. It should, however, be warned that because the focal point of the book is on the story of Pentecost, readers might be misled to understanding that the experience of the power of the Holy Spirit is confined to the historical event of Pentecost and its liturgical season.

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