

Book Review

Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Restoration: Multidisciplinary Studies from a Pentecostal Perspective

Martin W. Mittelstadt & Geoffrey W. Sutton (Eds.)
(Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010) 243 pages

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I know He said, “My grace is sufficient for you,” ... but is *my* grace sufficient for *you*? I realize this is twisting 2 Corinthians 12:9 from its context, but this wording gets at the core essence of this fascinating book. Foundational to the Pentecostal perspective is the truth that God can and will forgive each person through the blood of Christ and fill him or her with His Holy Spirit if the person genuinely asks. Humans, however, continue to struggle with forgiveness of individuals or social classes who have implicated pain, some quite deeply.

Martin Mittelstadt and Geoffrey Sutton bring the reader on a journey that is both historically fascinating as well as deeply poignant at a personal level. This richness comes from incorporating a focus of forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration through the lens of Pentecostal tradition but from diverse perspectives. Drawing authors who write from the various disciplines of recent church history, literature, research and applied psychological science, sociology, and education, the work is a tapestry of perspective. At the root of it all, however, is the glorious grace of God.

The work is divided into six sections: theological, literary, historical, psychological, sociological, and educational. Each section contains chapters that walk the reader through how others have either

individually or as a society attempted to work through the process of forgiveness, reconciliation, and at times, even restoration.

In the opening chapter, Mittelstadt focuses on the emphasis that Luke places on the Spirit of God speaking to His people. It sets the stage for the ultimate forgiveness and reconciliation between God and humankind as well as forgiveness and reconciliation between people groups. While not the lightest read, it rewards the reader with a perfect setting and understanding for the remaining chapters.

Robert Berg moves the reader into the literary section with chapter two: Pentecostals, Postmodernism, and *The Shack*. Berg describes the popular book by William Young well enough that a person who had not yet read the *Shack* can still understand the issues at hand from a Pentecostal perspective. Berg makes the point that Pentecostals are used to people providing testimonials and recommends the book be viewed not as a theological tome, but as a testimonial of how one very pained human being works through a basic understanding of God’s sovereignty and the need to forgive. Keeping this perspective allows the reader to appreciate the book for what it is and even learn about his or her personal struggles in continuing “to work

out [one's] own salvation in fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12).

Next, Marilyn Quigley and Diane Awbrey discuss the *Jilting of Granny Weatherall* by Katherine Anne Porter. This short story, first published in 1930, brings the reader into the mind of an ostensibly religious woman on her death bed who had not learned to forgive another and yet graciously receives the greatest forgiveness of all. Quigley provides the counter point to this sad state of affairs by providing her own experience of needing to walk the road of forgiveness for a painful event in her own life.

Renea Brathwaite and Lois Olena move the reader to the historical section of the book in the next two chapters that deal with racial prejudice in the historical Pentecostal movement with Brathwaite's review of the Azusa Street revival and Olena's account of the life of Reverend Robert Harrison. Only by remembering one's past can a person hope to improve race relations in the future. Although not exactly historical, Tony Richie focuses on the related, but more difficult, issue of forgiveness and reconciliation between different faith-related groups. He highlights the need for each faith group to find common themes, but ultimately has difficulty facing the fact that some belief systems make a mockery of Christ. We must indeed seek justice and peace, but not at the expense of proclaiming Christ alone as "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6).

Geoffrey Sutton, Johan Mostert, and Melvin van der Spuy focus on the psychological perspective. Sutton does an excellent job of covering psychological research related to the Pentecostal view of forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration. Mostert and van der Spuy open the window to events that occurred in South Africa as the apartheid-based government moved through its now

famous metamorphosis with the research based analysis of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's effectiveness in resolving conflict, clearly moving a society out of further bloodshed, and even promoting healing to some extent.

Under the sociological perspective, Michael Wilkinson addresses public acts of apology and forgiveness with a focus on the history of how Eurocentric expansion to North America affected the indigenous peoples, particularly in Canada. Many mainstream Christian churches played a part in this disrespect and abuse of native people and culture and also participated in the government's official acts of apology.

The last section deals with educational perspectives with Jeff Hittenberger and Patrick Mureithi reviewing a model of education for peace in Rwanda. The model uses workshops derived from the historical roots of Quaker conflict resolution to educate indigenous peoples of the African Great Lakes Region to understand each other and seek peace. Preliminary results for the program are positive, and the authors challenge the Pentecostal church to potentially adopt the model and see its benefits expand exponentially.

The book closes with an epilogue by the well-respected forgiveness and reconciliation researcher/author, Everett Worthington, Jr. The epilogue is a treat because Worthington helps place the work of the preceding authors in a larger context.

The very clear strength of *Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Restoration* is the incorporation of multiple disciplines. By integrating these differing perspectives, the light shines on this key theological/human issue as if through different facets of the same beautiful diamond. Although the reader journeys through time and space to

different parts of the world, the same core truth remains—a truth as personal as faith itself—that a person can receive forgiveness and forgive others. As Worthington writes, “Almost all the current volume’s writers have taken a prophetic perspective, calling the church into needed repentance and commitment to ‘let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!’ (Amos 5:24) and to balance the things that God requires of people—‘to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God’ (Micah 6:8).”¹

¹Worthington, E. L. “Epilogue,” in *Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Restoration: Multidisciplinary Studies from a Pentecostal Perspective*, ed. M. W. Mittlestadt and G. W. Sutton, 215-229 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 222.