

# Pentecostal Missions to Brazil: The Case of the Norwegian G. L. Pettersen

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The recent appearance of a major autobiography by G. Leonard Pettersen,<sup>1</sup> longtime Norwegian Pentecostal missionary to South America, provides an opportunity to reflect on the significance of the work of Scandinavian Pentecostal missionaries to that continent at a time when the startling growth of the religious tradition which they planted in that context is amazing and/or frightening the rest of the Christian world.<sup>2</sup> Although it is usually overlooked in the current discussion, the heritage of much of Latin American Pentecostalism is generally to be traced to Sweden and Norway. Pettersen was intimately involved with the Pentecostal churches of Brazil and Bolivia during the formative period of 1936–1965 when these groups evolved from small sects to popular religious movements. Pettersen's autobiography, placed in the context of Norwegian and Swedish Pentecostal mission efforts, provides documentation for the role of the European Pentecostal churches in the development of that tradition in Latin America. His personal religious pilgrimage is also illustrative of the issues surrounding the origins of Pentecostalism.<sup>3</sup>

## **The Making of a Missionary**

It was at age 19 (1926) that Pettersen became a Pentecostal.<sup>4</sup> However the searching for a more intense spirituality had begun long before. Pettersen's parents were members of the Salvation Army in Norway and were living in Sarpsborg when he was born 17 May 1907.<sup>5</sup> There they first heard T. B. Barratt speak at the local Sarpsborg Methodist Episcopal Church, one of the few Norwegian Methodist churches to quickly embrace Barratt's Pentecostal message after his return from New York,

Dec. 1906.<sup>6</sup> In 1912 they moved to Oslo where the family continued to work in the Salvation Army. It was in Oslo, as a boy of eight or nine (*circa* 1915), that Pettersen recalls having a vision in which he was called to minister in South America.<sup>7</sup> We are told nothing of the circumstances of this vision, other than that it occurred during a prayer meeting following a Salvation Army worship service, and it is difficult to determine, in Pettersen's own narrative, the significance for his later activities.

Pettersen continued to develop within the Salvation Army milieu, but was obviously aware of the revolutionary spirituality promulgated by T. B. Barratt from his Oslo center. Relations between Barratt and the Salvation Army had been strained since the early days of the Pentecostal revivals. During 1907, Salvation Army leader, Samuel Logan Brengel arrived in Norway and fought furiously to stop the defections among Salvation Army adherents to Pentecostalism.<sup>8</sup> However, *pace* Brengel, it was within the Salvation Army that Pettersen received the theological instruction and life examples which facilitated his conversion to Pentecostalism. In 1925, his fellow Salvationist musician friend, Ansgar Ånonsen became a Pentecostal. The summer 1926 annual conference of the Salvation Army celebrated the ministry of pietist revivalist Albert Lunde. General Bramwell Booth as conference leader discussed in detail the Wesleyan Holiness heritage of England and its incarnation in the Salvation Army, urging all to take on the life of holiness in a personal religious experience. This intensified the dissatisfaction with his spirituality, provoking a crisis which would be resolved by his conversion to Pentecostalism. It was at the Salvation Army meeting house in Arendal, after personal spiritual searching of two or three years, that Pettersen experienced «baptism in the Holy Spirit» as taught by the Pentecostal churches.<sup>9</sup>

After this experience, the nineteen year old Pettersen left the Salvation Army and joined Barratt's Filadelfia Church in Oslo.<sup>10</sup> Under the tutelage of Barratt, other leaders of the Filadelfia churches and the peripatetic English evangelist Smith Wigglesworth, Pettersen's experiences in the Salvation Army were crafted into the accessories of a Pentecostal evangelist. He traveled throughout Norway as a «home missionary» aiding in the development of the new Pentecostal centers.<sup>11</sup> Through the influence of his friend Mentz Østby he was invited to preach in Sweden where he was soon invited to be pastor of the Pentecostal Church on Arvika, Sweden, at age «22 1/2» in 1930.<sup>12</sup>

Pettersen arrived in Sweden at a time when the fledgling missionary program, albeit very successful, had fallen into disfavor with the charis-

matic insecure sometimes tyrannical leader, Lewi Pethrus, the self proclaimed leader of the Swedish Pentecostal Movements and the one who had asked A. P. Franklin to organize the Swedish Free Mission. Its success and Franklin's consequent stature in the movement threatened Pethrus who promptly defrocked Franklin and forced him and the mission from the Filadelfia Churches.<sup>13</sup> The result was to slow the growth of the mission program and of the churches. However, Pettersen as a foreigner pastoring a small church was unaffected by the struggles for power in Stockholm. His reflection about mission, one of the *sine qua non* of Pentecostal self-understanding, continued. His consciousness was raised through reading the volume, *Apostolisk väckelse i Brasilien* which celebrated the 25th anniversary of the beginnings of Pentecostalism in Brazil and through the articles of Lewi Pethrus in the Pentecostal periodical, *Evangelii Härold*.<sup>14</sup>

Earlier, certainly to demonstrate his concern for mission after the controversy regarding the Swedish Free Mission, Lewi Pethrus had journeyed to Brazil to preside at the Annual Conference of the Assembleias de Deus held in Natal, Brazil, 5–10 September 1930. From there he had written glowing reports and, importantly, had confirmed the practice of the Swedish Pentecostal missionaries who had encouraged comparatively quick development and empowerment of ministry by native Brazilians. Significantly this coincided with Pethrus' modified congregationalist ecclesiology and also prevented any missionary from establishing a power base there from which to threaten Stockholm.<sup>15</sup> This pattern of promoting indigenous leadership in foreign churches resulting from missionary efforts provided the base from which Pentecostalism could flourish in Brazil, and the modified congregationalism (strong central national or regional church with many related quasi dependent churches) explains much about the development of Pentecostal ecclesiological structures in Brazil.<sup>16</sup> It was also effective in attracting missionaries into service with limited expectations of personal authority.

### **Missionary to Brazil**

Petrus' approbation of indigenous ministry in Brazil, as well as the amazing narratives recounted in *Apostolisk väckelse i Brasilien* and *Evangelii Härold* were sufficient to stimulate a sense of «calling» to missionary service. Months of negotiation led to Pettersen's appointment to Brazil under the aegis of the Filadelfia Church Mission. He departed in late 1936 for South America on the steamer «General San Martin.» His financial support came both from the church in Arvika,

funneled through the Stockholm Filadelfia Church, and the Norwegian Pentecostal Church «Salen» in Ski.<sup>17</sup>

When Pettersen arrived at Rio de Janerio on 12 January 1936,<sup>18</sup> he was joining a mission to which Swedish Pentecostal resources had been committed since 1910 with the arrival of Daniel Berg in Belem who was soon joined by Gunnar Vingren. By 1914, they could report baptisms in particular towns ranging into the hundreds of converts.<sup>19</sup> By 1930, there were more than 16.000 Brazilians in 150 congregations founded by the Swedish missionaries and their Brazilian co-workers.<sup>20</sup> These were organized into a fellowship of churches on the Swedish pattern but using the Portugese version of the name chosen by some of both North American and British Pentecostals, Assembleias de Deus, a decision which has led to significant confusion among demographers and by the U. S. Assemblies of God which wishes to take credit for and control of this church, including them in their world-wide denominational totals. By 1940, there were about 400.000 members organized into 1609 churches.<sup>21</sup>

After an initial orientation and some language study, Pettersen became an evangelist in the state of Rio Grande del Sol. He traveled widely before settling at Uruguaiiana, where beginning with an initial group of 19, he founded a church in 1938. From this city he continued to evangelize in the border regions between Argentina and Brazil as well as Uruguay. This church has continued to flourish and by the late 1960's had more than 10.000 members.<sup>22</sup>

Pettersen did not have the pleasure of watching all of this growth. With the outbreak of World War II in Europe in 1939, tensions in Brazil between immigrant populations forced some relocations. Pettersen went first to Porto Alegre and then to the Santa Maria whose central location facilitated access to the entire state of Rio Grande del Sol. With the church strengthened in Santa Maria, he went on to nearby Casequi. Then came a more severe dislocation. He was drafted (1943) into the Norwegian military and told to report to New York. He remained in the military until 1945 when he was able to return to Brazil.<sup>23</sup>

The time away from church and family was not wasted however. While in New York, he established contact with the «Salen» Church, a Norwegian immigrant church in Brooklyn with close ties to Norway, then pastored by Harry Ring.<sup>24</sup> He studied in detail, for the first time, the history and roots of the Pentecostal tradition, with particular attention to the Welsh revival. This research and study continued when he was taken by the Norwegian navy to England. There he renewed contact with Smith Wigglesworth and met other English Pentecostal leaders. March

1945 found him on the way back to Brazil, after a two year hiatus, where he rejoined his wife Ragna who had continued the evangelistic and parrotal work in his absence.<sup>25</sup>

The rapidly changing situation of Pentecostalism in Brazil made it impossible to reappear and assume a previously held position. Pettersens returned briefly to Norway to visit family and consider missional options. Back in Brazil, while still searching for direction, a letter came inviting him to co-pastor a church in Rio de Janeiro with Brazilian pastor, Jose Pimentel de Carvalho. At the beginning of 1946, the church had about 1500 members. At the end of five years (1951) there were 4500 members and a network of about 100 preaching/ministry centers in the city.<sup>26</sup> It was during this period that he wrote his first book, an important description of the developments taking place within Pentecostalism in South America.<sup>27</sup>

By 1953, the Assembleias de Deus of Brazil were approaching 750.000 members, and had developed thoroughly indigenous leadership structures. The Pettersens felt they could be more useful moving to an area less evangelized by the Pentecostals. Bolivia was chosen and in late 1953, Leonard and Ragna Pettersen moved to La Paz, but because of deteriorating health, they were soon forced to return to Norway, but continued to have contact with Bolivia.<sup>28</sup>

Pettersen also continued to write about missions in South America. He co-authored a chapter to the volume celebrating fifty years of Norwegian Pentecostal missions describing the developments in Brazil. The essay is revealing also regarding the missionaries themselves and their motivations, one of which was a determined distrust and fear of Roman Catholicism, and strategies of mission.<sup>29</sup> An updated account of the advances of Pentecostalism in South America was published in 1966 which provides an important analysis of trends and factors in the numerical growth there, especially in Brazil and Central America.<sup>30</sup>

Pettersen pastored for a few years at the «Betania» Church in Tønsberg. There have been various trips to Brazil which have allowed him to maintain friendships established earlier and to minister in sites where he worked previously.<sup>31</sup> And, fortunately, he has provided the volume *Pinse over grensene* which records details and reflects upon a life of missionary service in the context of the Norwegian/Swedish/Brazilian/Bolivian Pentecostal churches.

## Conclusion

The Pettersens mission work in Brazil is but one small chapter in Scandinavian mission in general and to Brazil in particular. The narrative of his involvement there calls to awareness the need to establish more completely the contributions of Swedish and Norwegian, as well as Finnish and Danish, Pentecostal missionaries to the development of the third largest (21.4% of the total) ecclesial unit in Christianity, Pentecostalism. This is especially necessary for Latin America, where according to David Barratt, more than 78.000.000 (23.57%) of more than 330.000.000 Pentecostals world wide live. Pentecostals comprise 19% of all Christians in Latin America.<sup>32</sup> Understanding this missional heritage is essential to understanding the phenomenon as it currently presents itself. More work is needed like that of Jan-Endy Johannesson on Swedish Pentecostal missions in China which establishes the prosopography, geographical extension and missional structures for the entire post-1907 Pentecostal era.<sup>33</sup>

The individual trajectory of religious affiliation exemplified by Pettersen that is his movement from Salvation Army (with contacts with Methodists) to Pentecostal, is typical of what the research of Dayton, *inter alia*, would lead one to expect for early Pentecostal leaders.<sup>34</sup> However as a convert into the second generation of Pentecostalism, Pettersen's experience indicates the need to continue the analysis of conversion processes into that generation. Was his movement from a Wesleyan/Holiness context into Pentecostalism and leadership within that new arena typical or atypical? Only precise prosopographical analysis of conversion structures will enable us to know for certain.

The Pettersen narrative is one of many which await the attention of historians of Christianity and missiologists. It is to be hoped that additional research will be forthcoming which examines the larger contribution of Pettersen's Norwegian colleagues as well as those from the other Scandinavian countries.

## NOTES

1. G. Leonard Pettersen, *Pinse over grensene* (Oslo: Filadelfiaforlaget, 1989).
2. See, for example, David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990). This phenomenon is producing a vast quantity of literature, see the extensive bibliographies in *Algo más que opio: Una lectura antropológica del pentecostalismo latinoamericano y caribeño* (ed. Bárbara Boundewijnse, André Droogers and Frans Kamsteeg, Colección Sociología de la religión; San José: Departamento Ecueménico de Invest-

- igaciones, 1991), 137–176, and Cecil M. Robeck, «Select Bibliography on Latin American Pentecostalism,» *Pneuma* 13,2 (1991), 193–197.
3. There is a debate among American scholars of Pentecostalism regarding the roots of Pentecostalism. Donald Dayton, *The Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Studies in Evangelicalism, 5; Meteuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1985), following Paul Fleisch, *Die moderne Gemeinschaftsbewegung in Deutschland* (Leipzig: H. G. Wallman, 1912), argues for the Wesleyan/Holiness roots, while Edith Waldvogel (now Blumhofer), *The 'Overcoming Life': A Study of the Reformed Evangelical Origins of Pentecostalism* (Unpublished Ph. D. Diss. Harvard University, 1977) argues that its roots are to be found in American reformed evangelicalism.
  4. Pettersen, *Pinse over grensene*, 18.
  5. Oddvar Nilsen, *Ut i all verden; Pinsevevnenes ytre misjon i 75 år* (Oslo: Filadelfiaforlaget, 1984), 237.
  6. Pettersen, *Pinse over grensene*, 21. See the comments made in August 1908 by Barratt's former ecclesiastical superior, Methodist Episcopal Bishop, William Burt, «My Notes of European Conferences, June 1908–July 1909,» Burt Papers, Methodist Archives and Historical Center, Drew University, Madison, NJ: UB-BGM: OMC F1152: «The Barratt movement seems not to have caused much disturbance except at Sarpsborg. . .» For Barratt's perspective on this period, see T. B. Barratt, *In the Days of the Latter Rain* (London: Elim Publishing Co. 1928) and the more expansive, *idem*, *Erindringer* edited with Etterskrift by Solveig Barratt Lange (Oslo: Filadelfiaforlaget, 1941). On the events leading up to Barratt's conversion to Pentecostalism, see my «T. B. Barratt: From Methodist to Pentecostal,» to appear in *EPTA Bulletin* as well as my essay «T. B. Barratt: The Methodist Years.» *Pentecostalism in the Context of the Holiness Revival* (Wilmore: n. p., 1988), 62–75.
  7. Pettersen, *Pinse over grensene*, 23.
  8. Clarence W. Hall, *Samuel Logan Brengle: Portrait of a Prophet* (New York: The National Headquarters, The Salvation Army, n. d.), 232–238 *et passim*.
  9. Pettersen, *Pinse over grensene*, 24–25; see also the discussion of the events leading up to this experience, pp. 28–42.
  10. Pettersen, *Pinse over grensene*, 44.
  11. Pettersen, *Pinse over grensene*, 47–57.
  12. Pettersen, *Pinse over grensene*, 58.
  13. On the controversy, see Bertil Carlsson, *Organizations and Decision Procedures within the Swedish Pentecostal Movements* (Mariefred: n. p., 1974); Arthur Sundstedt, *Pingstväckelsen och dess utbredning* (Pingstväckelsen, 4; Stockholm: Normans Förlag, 1972), 55–82 (with full texts of crucial documents); and, Rakel Fris, *Insyn i mina minnens värld* (Jakobsberg: Rakel och Rikard Fris fond for yttre mission och fängelsemission, 1973).
  14. *Apostolisk väckelse i Brasilien* (Stockholm: Filadelfia Förlaget, 1934). The

- standard history of the Assembleias de Deus in Brazil is *Historia das Assembleias de Deus no Brasil* ed. Abraao de Almeida, et al. (Rio de Janeiro: Casa Publicadora das Assembleias de Deus, 1982) [Hereafter, *Historia*].
15. Sundstedt, *Pingstväckelsen och dess utbredning*, 287–294. The visit is mentioned but not celebrated in *Historia*, 214.
  16. Walter Hollenweger, *El Pentecostalismo: Historia y doctrinas* (Buenos Aires: La Aurora, 1976), 119–162. On early Pentecostalism in Brazil, see the memoirs of one of the early Swedish Pentecostal missionaries, Daniel Berg, *Enviado por Deus: Memorias de Daniel Berg* (Sao Paulo: Assembleias de Deus, 1959).
  17. Pettersen, *Pinse over grensene*, 74–77.
  18. Pettersen, *Pinse over grensene*, 78.
  19. Arthur Sundstedt, *Pingstväckelsen och dess genombrott* (Pingstväckelsen, 3; Stockholm: Normans Förlag, 1971), 54–93, et passim; G. E. Söderholm, *Den Svenska Pinstväckelsens spridning utom och inom Sverige* (Supplement till den Svenska Pingstväckelsens Historia; Stockholm: Förlaget Filadelfia, 1933), 56–97. For the Brazilian perspective, see *Historia*.
  20. Arthur Sundstedt, *Pingstväckelsen och dess genombrott*, 83; G. E. Söderholm, *Tjugo år under Guds trofasthet* (Stockholm: Filadelfia Förlaget, 1939), 63.
  21. Hollenweger, *El Pentecostalismo*, 122. On the U. S. Assemblies of God efforts to include Brazil in its statistics and claim it as a dependent mission field, see Hollenweger, *idem*, 126. As Hollenweger suggested in 1976, «. . . los pentecostales brasilenos se consideran independientes [the Brazilian Pentecostals consider themselves independent].» This is imminently clear in the narrative of *Historia*.
  22. Pettersen, *Pinse over grensene*, 80–87. See *Historia*, 332.
  23. Pettersen, *Pinse over grensene*, 86–88. See *Historia*, 327 (Porto Algre) and 330 (Santa Maria).
  24. Pettersen, *Pinse over grensene*, 89–99. Regarding the «Salen» Church in Brooklyn, see, Stanley Johannesen, «The Holy Ghost in Sunset Park,» *Historical Reflections/Reflexions Historiques* 15,3 (1988), 543–577, which unfortunately does not discuss the War years.
  25. Pettersen, *Pinse over grensene*, 100–101. I have found little information about Ragna Pettersen (1903–1983) who accompanied her husband to Brazil in 1936 and to Bolivia in 1953. See, Nilsen, *Ut i all verden*, 238.
  26. Pettersen, *Pinse over grensene*, 105–110; Nilsen, *Ut i all verden*, 85–86. See *Historia*, 217 regarding Pettersen in Rio de Janerio.
  27. G. Leonard Pettersen, *Blant folkeslag i Sør-Amerika* (Oslo: Filadelfiaforlaget, 1947).
  28. Hollenweger, *El Pentecostalismo*, 122 et passim; Pettersen, *Pinse over grensene*, 113–114 et passim; Nilsen *Ut i all verden*, 102–103.
  29. G. Leonard Pettersen and Leif F. Andersen, «Brasil,» *Til jordens ender: Norsk pinsemisjon gjennom 50 år* (Oslo: Filadelfiaforlaget, 1960), 245–264.



30. G. Leonard Pettersen, *Sør-Amerika, framtidens kontinent* (Oslo: Filadelfiaforlaget, 1966).
31. Pettersen, *Pinse over grensene*, 116–142.
32. David B. Barratt, «Statistics, Global,» *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 816–817. These figures are for 1988, and would now appear to be significantly higher.
33. Jan-Endy Johannesson, *Dokumentation av Svensk Pingstmission i Kina 1907–1951* (Forskningsrapporter i missionsvetenskap, missionshistoria och missionsatropologi/Research Reports in Missiology, Mission History and Missionary Anthropology; Stockholm: MissionsInstitutet-PMU, 1988) and the more populær and much abbreviated presentation in *idem*, *Sådd i mittens rike Dokumentation av Svensk Pingstmission i Kina 1907–1951* (Stockholm: MissionsInstitutet-PMU, 1988). A new edition of the former volume is in preparation.
34. Dayton, *Theological Roots*.

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### **Pentecostal Mission to Brazil: The Case of the Norwegian G. L. Pettersen**

The mission programs of the Scandinavian Pentecostal Churches have since the beginnings of those traditions been active throughtout the world. Unfortunately, documentation for much of that activity is generally unavailable to scholars and therefore the historiography of Pentecostalism, with few exceptions, describes Pentecostalism outside North America as an American export. The publication of the autobiography of G. L. Pettersen provides the basis for demonstrating the development of Pentecostalism in Brazil cannot be understood without recourse to Scandinavian sources. The trajectory of Petterson's religious affiliations (Methodist, Salvation Army, Pentecostal) is of significance for the discussion of Pentecostal origins.