

Aldridge, Boone. 2021. *Kenneth L. Pike: An Evangelical Mind*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers. 240 pages. ISBN 978-1-7252-9375-5. \$31.

– Reviewed by Karl Franklin (SIL)

Boone Aldridge, who holds a PhD in history from the University of Stirling in Scotland, is an historian for the Wycliffe Bible Translators and SIL International. He has previously published a book on the founder of Wycliffe, Cameron Townsend.¹

Aldridge's research is unique and comprehensive, in that he had access to the archives of Pike (located in Dallas) and Townsend (located in Waxhaw, North Carolina). In addition, he conducted interviews with Pike's family, with SIL members and had correspondences with several scholars who knew Pike. The bibliography of references to Pike's letters and publications alone covers some four pages.

The subtitle of the book ("*an evangelical mind*") is significant because Boone uses it to counter a claim by Mark Noll who, in his book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, claimed that evangelicals were poor scholars.² Boone shows conclusively how wrong Noll is in his lack of perspective about Christian scholarship, with Pike as a prime example.

Pike grew up in East Woodstock, Connecticut, in a home with 7 siblings, a home that was solidly Christian, perhaps even fundamentalistic, before the term and concept became popular and pejorative. He was committed to missionary work early in his life and completed his undergraduate degree at Gordon College in Massachusetts.

Although Pike was brilliant, he was no saint and often described himself as lazy and introspective. He had applied to the China Inland Mission, was rejected, but fortunately for the Wycliffe Bible Translators and SIL, he was introduced to Cameron Townsend, whose summer school had just started in Arkansas. Pike soon became a regular teacher at the school and based on his Mixtec fieldwork in Mexico, was soon acquainted with linguistic and educational scholars. Townsend was impressed with Pike and asked him to attend summer sessions of the Linguistic Society of America. There Pike met two men who were to be highly influential in his life: Edward Sapir and Charles Fries. Fries was a professor at the University of Michigan who, having interacted with Pike on his phonetic work, invited Pike to attend additional summer sessions and write up his phonetic work as a PhD dissertation. Sapir read Pike's materials and gave him advice on tonal analysis and additional encouragement.

Although Townsend had been a missionary in Guatemala and was highly committed to evangelical work, he knew that scholarly work would be necessary if his organization was to succeed in Mexico. Townsend saw the potential in Pike, and then Eugene Nida, and encouraged both to pursue PhD studies at the University of Michigan. Pike concentrated initially on

¹ Aldridge, Boone. *For the Gospel's Sake: The Rise of the Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Summer Institute of Linguistics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018.

² Noll, Mark. *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994.

phonology and Nida on grammar, but Pike soon expanded his interest to language and culture and began his theoretical explication of tagmemics, culminating in his *Language in Relation to a Theory of Human Behavior*³.

By 1953 Nida had left SIL to work with the American Bible Society, but Pike continued to provide the academic leadership for SIL, even as he taught at the University of Michigan. He became a full Professor of Linguistics in 1955 and, with a university arrangement, spent time each year lecturing and holding workshops for SIL around the world.

Aldridge describes in detail the difficulties Pike had with both his superior (Townsend) and his own colleagues to promote linguistic scholarship in an organization where most of the members were interested solely in Bible translation. The linguistic descriptions of the languages they described were useful, but often seen by them as the means to an end (translation). Aldridge notes that some of this focus was because a large percentage of SIL member are involved in support tasks, like education, aviation, administration, and other fields and had no direct interest in language or cultural analysis.

In his career Pike achieved superior status as a linguist: President of both the Linguistic Society of America and its counterpart in Canada; a host of honorary doctorates; appointments to The American Academy of Sciences and The National Academy of Scientists; lectures in 42 countries; and the publication of a dozen books and almost 200 articles. As Aldridge notes, “For a man who counted himself lazy, it was quite a record.”

Aldridge also points out that Pike was ahead of his time in other ways: for example, he promoted women into positions in SIL that far surpassed that of the current missionary practice. Of course, he had the examples of his wife and sister for scholarly examples but women as equals was part of his Christian perspective.

The question implicit in Aldridge’s book is one that often concerned Pike: What would happen to the academic nature of SIL International in the future? As he noted, “Loss of the linguistic goal, of science for science’s sake AS WELL AS linguistics as a tool for translation could kill, in the long run, our drive toward translation. Translation is not easy, but the drive toward it is helped if we have the enthusiasm which comes from interest in a task.” (Stevens 1989:141)

Pike had not only “an evangelical mind,” but also a pragmatic approach and a philosophy to live by. Aldridge has given us a personal account of Pike and his outstanding scholarly record reveals a most remarkable man. It is hopeful that his book will be inspirational reading for future SIL and Wycliffe members, as well as potential scholars in other agencies. In addition, it should show clearly—contra Noll—that Christian evangelicals can be counted as scholars in their own right.

³ Kenneth L. Pike, 1962, published by Mouton.

A Personal Note

My wife Joice and I first met Pike in 1956 and 1957 when we attended summer sessions that SIL held at the University of Oklahoma. We began work in PNG in early 1958 and when Pike came to hold a semester-long workshop at Ukarumpa in 1962 we were again students, but this time working on the East Kewa language. Pike conferred with SIL members who were working in 20 language groups and also trained several of us as junior consultants. I was assigned to work on Kewa syntax and Joice on Kewa tone and phonology. We would meet each week with Pike, who would review our analysis and make suggestions.

Pike often ate lunch with us, usually outside in the fresh air. He would tell us stories of fieldwork in Mexico and his teaching role at the University of Michigan. During the workshop Pike suggested that several of us do advanced studies and through his recommendation I began graduate studies at Cornell University in 1963. During the summer of 1964 Joice and I taught at the SIL summer course in Oklahoma, when Pike asked me to initiate the first SIL in New Zealand. Although Joice had our second child the end of October 1964, by December we were in Auckland and both teaching linguistics. Joice carried our daughter from one classroom to the next in a large woven Buka basket. We often joked that it was how she got started in linguistics—she is now a Professor of Hispanic Linguistics at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

During our furlough in 1980-81, Pike invited Joice and me to give a lecture on Kewa tone at one of his classes at the University of Michigan. He and his wife Evelyn then entertained at his house.

After we left PNG and were in charge of the Australian SIL for 3 years, we then moved to Dallas, Texas, where we taught at the SIL, then associated with the University of Texas, Arlington. SIL had ceased operations in Oklahoma and Pike was both a Professor at Arlington and a lecturer at the new year-round SIL school in Texas.

I was teaching grammar and was following the tagmemic model of Pike. My interest was also in the etic-emic dimensions of his model, so I asked if I could interview him. He agreed and I spent over 4 hours with him, subsequently publishing my results on the SIL website⁴. At that time, and as Aldridge notes, the theory of tagmemics was in decline, and when I asked Pike what he thought his lasting contributions might be. “Probably not much,” he replied, “although the concept of etic vs. emic has become common.” This is true, although Pike is hardly ever acknowledged as the instigator of the view, despite Headland’s arranging a debate by Pike about its application with a noted anthropologist, Marvin Harris.⁵

During the years 1997-2002, I was the Vice President of Academics for SIL and Pike would often drop by my office to visit, usually to discuss something he was working on or present me with materials.

⁴ See my article, *Etic and emic stories*, 2009. *GIALens* 3(2):1-11.

⁵ Headland, Thomas N., et al. eds. 1990. *Emics and Etics: The Insider/Outsider Debate*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Once SIL no longer had an affiliation with UTA, the Principal of the Dallas SIL school (Dr David Ross) and I proposed to the SIL Board a plan to start a new and independent school, which at the time we called the Graduate School of Applied Linguistics.

Pike was not enamored by the idea of a school separate from SIL, but he did not oppose it. If he had contested it, the Board would undoubtedly not have allowed the process to proceed. He was cautious in his relationship with GIAL, and not alive when it was fully accredited. There is no doubt, however, of his influence upon the development of many of the faculty at GIAL, which has now morphed into the Dallas International University, with Applied Linguistics as one component of its structure.

As an older member of SIL, I represent a set of linguists who knew Pike personally and were stimulated by his writing and example. He was able to form a bond between his academic structure and achievements with his personal devotion and calling as a Christian. Although his legacy lives on, it is unlikely that SIL will ever see someone of Pike's caliber again.

Karl Franklin
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