

REVIEW ESSAY

Frank Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

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The Pentecostal movement that began early in the 1900s, and the Charismatic movement that has members in older denominations, have together grown to approximately 500,000,000 members worldwide.¹ For many a distinguishing characteristic of both has been the experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit, which frequently gives rise to glossolalia or speaking in tongues. Theologians affiliated with older churches at first tended to dismiss such experiences as a modern form of the enthusiasm that Paul denounced in the early church in Corinth. Charismatic communities and Pentecostal churches often criticized older denominations as lacking or stifling the invigorating presence of the Holy Spirit. Since the 1960s though, a dialogue has begun between theologians on both sides.² The Pentecostal movement has also diversified, and a lively dialogue about Spirit baptism has grown within it.

¹ Michael Welker, "Introduction," in *The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism* edited by Michael Welker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), x.

² Alasdair Heron, *The Holy Spirit* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), 130-136.

Frank Macchia comes out of the Pentecostal tradition and has been involved in both of these dialogues for many years. His book, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology*,³ seeks to understand Spirit baptism within the Trinitarian framework of the divine economy. In doing so he presents Spirit baptism as “an organizing principle of Pentecostal theology” (17), and relates it to a broader ecumenical discussion of pneumatology (22). What follows will note an aspect of this broader discussion that is missing from Macchia’s account, and a counter question that Macchia’s understanding of speaking in tongues raises for theologies having a strong ethical orientation.

Macchia understands Spirit baptism as an experience in which the Holy Spirit overwhelms and empowers a person, kindling within them loving devotion to God revealed in Jesus Christ and gratitude for the salvation they have received. Spirit baptism is a good that every Christian deserves and should desire, and a means by which God revives and inspires the church (79). Macchia describes his own experience of Spirit baptism as follows:

I fell to my knees and began to pray. I began to cry and to search for words that I could not find. Meanwhile my schoolmate began to pray for me. I felt a fountain well up within me. It grew stronger and stronger until it burst forth with great strength. I began to pray in tongues. It was not forced, neither from me nor from God. In fact, it seemed at the moment to be the most natural

³ Frank Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006). Page references to this will be given directly in the text.

thing to do. By now I lay there on the floor with my eyes fixed on that cross. I felt God's powerful presence embrace me, and while accepting my calling to the ministry, I made promises to God that have accompanied me throughout me life (13).

Machia argues that this phenomenon of Spirit baptism must be understood as part of the Trinitarian work of creation and redemption. The Holy Spirit is an eschatological gift (48) by which people participate in God's new creation. The experience of life in all its fullness is a distinguishing characteristic of this new creation. The Holy Spirit and Spirit baptism are a foretaste of this fullness that is yet to come, and an inspiration and empowerment to seek it. Jesus is the Spirit Baptizer, who was both filled with the Spirit, and through whose life, death and resurrection, life in the Spirit is made possible for others. Conversely, the Holy Spirit binds people to Christ.

Macchia disapproves of infant baptism, but acknowledges that people receive the Holy Spirit through water baptism whether they are baptized as infants or as believing adults (251). Spirit baptism cannot be separated from water baptism (84). It is a "release" in the life of a Christian and a church of the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit that has already been present from the time of conversion or water baptism (153). The Holy Spirit is not limited to those who experience Spirit baptism. For Macchia, Spirit baptism is an intensification or revival of the presence of the Holy Spirit that is already there in all who believe in Jesus Christ, and even in others who do not (127-128).

Macchia gives a strong ethical orientation to the work of the Holy Spirit. When Spirit baptism is an authentic experience of the Holy Spirit, it gives rise to a participation in the love of God that seeks fullness of life for all creation.

In coming into solidarity with us, the Spirit furthers the witness of Jesus who came into solidarity with us by grace for our redemption. Jesus as the man for others is present in the Spirit as the Spirit for others, sanctifying and empowering a church as the church for others. This 'presence of the other' is at the heart of a Spirit-baptized ecclesiology (167).

This strong ethical orientation makes Macchia's understanding of the Holy Spirit congruent with many theologies of liberation. Macchia's theology looks beyond history to the coming reign of God. But here faith in divine transcendence is oriented towards faithfulness to the earth and its inhabitants. This is not a world-denying theology. It understands the Holy Spirit as God's empowering love that is working to heal and redeem creation.

In keeping with this, Macchia rejects any ecclesiastical triumphalism. He distinguishes between the church and the reign of God. The church is a special community on earth, a sign of the coming reign of God (192). But it continues to be one with creation in awaiting its final redemption, and remains in need of continued repentance and re-vivification. There is a critical dialectic between Jesus and the church, as the church is both the body of Christ, a sign of his living presence, and yet subject to sin and in need of judgment and correction in light of Christ. However,

according to Macchia, there is no critical dialectic between Christ and the Holy Spirit (192). The Spirit empowers people to live and seek what Christ reveals. Christ is the means for distinguishing its presence.

A Revelatory Role of the Holy Spirit.

Macchia's assertion that there is no critical dialectic between Christ and the Holy Spirit is correct on one level. As God is one, Christ and the Spirit are one. Their unity is as great as their individuality. Together they work to bring redemption to fulfillment. However, while there is no critical dialectic between Christ and the Holy Spirit, the histories of older denominations show that there can be a critical dialectic between the Holy Spirit and the churches' understanding of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is "the keystone in the arch of Spiritual manifestations in history,"⁴ the concrete revelation in terms of which the presence of the Holy Spirit can be discerned. But the Holy Spirit can also work to lead the church to a truer or more efficacious understanding of Jesus Christ. This understanding is present in the farewell discourses of the Gospel of John. Here Jesus Christ, who sends the Holy Spirit, is the revelation by which one can distinguish the Spirit's presence.⁵ Yet conversely, the Holy Spirit is also described as having a revelatory function for the church in relation to Jesus Christ (John 14:25-26; 16:12-15). The Holy Spirit not only opens people to faith in Christ, it also

⁴ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Vol. III (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 147.

⁵ C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to John*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978), 90.

brings those who have faith to a deeper understanding of Jesus Christ.

This revelatory work of the Holy Spirit means that revelation has a history.⁶ Jesus is not always understood as the Christ in the same way. Over time, as the church enters into new contexts, faces new questions, acquires new forms of knowledge and experience, and as the face of evil changes,⁷ the church's former understanding of Jesus Christ may prove inadequate, and even contribute to sin and suffering. When this happens, the Holy Spirit is able, through a dialectical process of doctrinal development, to lead the church to a new understanding of Jesus Christ that can more adequately address its new context.⁸ The Spirit delivers the church from captivity to inadequate understandings of Jesus Christ through its revelatory function. When the face of evil changes, the Holy Spirit works to lead the church into a new or possibly fuller understanding of Jesus Christ, often by negating aspects of the church's previous understanding. *Macchia* does not discuss this revelatory role of the Holy Spirit.

An example of this revelatory work of the Holy Spirit can be seen in the doctrinal development that took place

⁶ Gary Burge, *The Anointed Community: The Holy Spirit in the Johannine Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 211-217.

⁷ Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), 188-190.

⁸ For an account of this process, see Gregory Baum, *The Credibility of the Church Today* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 157-174.

in the Roman Catholic Church in the twentieth century. This culminated in the changes in church teaching that were affirmed at Vatican II. Previously the Roman Catholic Church had taught that outside the church there is no salvation. But at Vatican II, this teaching was re-interpreted, so as to affirm that God is graciously present in other Christian denominations, in Judaism, and in other religions. In doing this, aspects of the church's previous teaching were effectively negated.⁹ In the course of the twentieth century, many older denominations have experienced a similar doctrinal development, issuing in a new understandings of Jesus Christ.

This particular doctrinal development should not be simply equated with the teaching of liberal theologies that interpret the gospel in terms of modern forms of knowledge and experience, seeking an abiding reality of God that is always the same lying behind the particularity of Jesus Christ and the revelations at the heart of other religions. Theologians like Paul Tillich, Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, and Elizabeth Johnson continue to affirm the absoluteness of Jesus Christ, and yet they interpret this, with varying success, in critical yet genuine openness to other religions and movements for social justice. Traces of this doctrinal development are present in Macchia's own thought (127-128, 221). Thus while there is no critical dialectic between Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, there is one between the Holy Spirit and the churches' understanding of Jesus Christ. This has a Biblical warrant in the

⁹ Avery Dulles, *The Survival of Dogma* (Garden city, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 145.

Johannine tradition and can be seen in recent church history. By means of this dialectic, the church remains open to God's leading and is able to move beyond the shortcomings of its past.

This aspect of contemporary pneumatology is missing from Macchia's discussion. But his treatment of speaking in tongues raises an issue not always adequately discussed in liberation theologies.

Speaking in Tongues

Some theologians from older denominations have been critically open to speaking in tongues. This can represent the Holy Spirit engaging the whole person, in ways that extend beyond people's conscious rational faculties.¹⁰ Taking this further, speaking in tongues can be interpreted as a protest against the reductive effects of modern Western secular culture on Christian experience and worship.¹¹ Over against the emphasis in Western modernity on people as autonomous and self-transparent individuals, speaking in tongues can be seen as an experience of people being caught up in the force-field of the Spirit, a power and community greater than themselves, embedded in relations and belonging to something that transcends and yet grounds and empowers their individuality. However, as Machia's account of his own Spirit baptism suggests, speaking in tongues is not done in order to protest

¹⁰ See for instance, Heron, *The Holy Spirit*, 134-136.

¹¹ Michael Welker, *God the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 269-270.

or struggle against something, but to affirm and celebrate something.

Speaking in tongues can also be given a functional or symbolic meaning, as in the account of Pentecost in Acts 2. Here it is portrayed as a divinely inspired means of communication by which the divisions between different cultures and languages are overcome without these differences being abolished.¹² Acts 2 does present a powerful representation of how the new reality that Christ and the Spirit bring is a diverse unity in which otherness is preserved and differences are respected (218). It provides an important mandate for recognizing cultural differences within church and society.

But speaking in tongues cannot be fully understood in terms of its use value or symbolic significance. It is not usually done for the sake of what it achieves or might represent. Rather, it is done for its own sake. It is, typically, an un-coerced expression of praise to God. It has ethical dimensions, as Paul noted in I Corinthians 14. But it also shows that there are dimensions of Christian life that cannot be fully understood in ethical terms. Just as everything is political but politics is not everything, so everything has ethical dimensions, but ethics is not everything. Speaking in tongues, done out of joy and thanksgiving for the goodness of God, is an example of the aesthetic dimension of Christian life.

Macchia accepts that speaking in tongues is not the central gift of the Holy Spirit. For him, that central gift is God's love (259). This love expresses itself in ethical ac-

¹² Ibid., 232-234; Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 212-218.

tion, in openness to and care for the other. Speaking in tongues does not play a major part in this, as it does not have a significant ethical function, and so it is not a major topic in Macchia's pneumatology. But Macchia notes that speaking in tongues is an example of the gift of the Holy Spirit finding expression in a way that transcends ethical categories. The gift of God's love gives rise to ecstasy, or self-transcendence (281). This self-transcendence finds expression in ethical action, in which people pour themselves out for others. But it also finds expression in speaking in tongues, speech that expresses praise for the gift received and joy experienced, and yearning for its coming fullness (282). As such speaking in tongues symbolizes self-transcendence, the way the self in receiving God's Spirit enters into the force field of God's love and transcends its narrow self-centredness, for the sake of a centeredness in God and God's coming new creation. But it is not done for the sake of what it demonstrates to others. For Macchia, it is done to celebrate the self-transcendence one experiences. It seeks to express what normal languages labour to articulate. Speaking in tongues has ethical dimensions. It can serve self-transcendence, or it can work against it. But its reason for being lies beyond this, in joyful celebration of God's love for its own sake. The self-transcendence that the Holy Spirit gives needs to find expression in aesthetic as well as ethical action. The two are related yet differentiated. They cannot be collapsed into one another.

The rise of the Enlightenment and the secularizing of most Western societies have led to the meaning of religions in Western cultures being primarily located in ethical terms. In this perspective, religions become important or detrimental because of what they do. As a central emphasis of the Enlightenment was on the liberation of human life from various forms of suffering and oppression through responsible human action,¹³ religions are judged as to whether they bring one peace, move one to moral action, or create fear and cause violence. In Western cultures, religions, in many forms of discourse, are understood, evaluated, and used according to how they function in ethical terms. This continues as religions become appropriated as identity markers by which to mobilize people in violent nationalistic struggles, as in the Hindutva movement in India.¹⁴ Liberation theologies also stress the ethical or liberating meaning of the gospel, without limiting its meaning to this.

But the holy cannot be confined to ethical categories, and the “festive,” the celebration of life and of values and goods that give life meaning, continues to be present in Western societies.¹⁵ In response to the utilitarianism of the Enlightenment, which has sometimes been experienced as stifling the festive, there has arisen a counter-

¹³ Gregory Baum, *Theology and Society* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 129-131.

¹⁴ Sathianathan Clarke, “Hindutva, Religious and Ethnocultural Minorities, and Indian-Christian Theology,” *Harvard Theological Review* 95:2 (2002), 197-226.

¹⁵ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 715.

Enlightenment that makes celebration, often of death, a central value.¹⁶ A partial explanation for this can be found in the Biblical traditions. A study of the Psalms teaches that celebration, the exaltation of some good, is an intrinsic aspect of human life. "There is no real, full existence that does not in some way honor, admire, look up to something."¹⁷ If praise is not directed to the God of life, it will inevitably be offered to something else. Similarly, in the thought of Paul, a person's fundamental understanding of life and its meaning is seen to come to expression in boasting and celebration.¹⁸ Life remains incomplete without worship of what gives it meaning.

Conclusion

The aesthetic thus has a place within the divine economy. Latin American liberation theologians also acknowledge the need for celebration as well struggle for liberation.¹⁹ The two are distinct, and yet inseparable and mutually empowering. Liberation gives rise to celebration, even when only experienced in anticipation. Conversely celebration is needed to empower and illuminate struggles for

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 723-726.

¹⁷ Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 160.

¹⁸ Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 133.

¹⁹ Jon Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 36. See also Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology and Joy* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1973).

liberation.²⁰ Speaking in tongues can be one form of such celebration, although like others, it is easily distorted, and can become divisive. As Macchia's understanding of speaking in tongues indicates, a Christian aesthetic must be Christologically focused and oriented towards the coming reign of God (282). It should be a celebration of God's love, exemplified in Christ, and a celebration of self-transcendence oriented towards fullness of life for all. Christian aesthetics should celebrate both the gift of salvation that has been given, and express a yearning to see it fully actual in all of creation. Theologies with a strong ethical emphasis can learn from Macchia here.

²⁰ Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Executed God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 116-117.