ARTICLES

Theological Dialogue on the “Full Gospel”: Trinitarian Contributions from Pope John Paul II and Thomas A. Smail

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Pentecostal testimony often employs the term “Full Gospel” as witness to the restoration of God’s salvific purposes in Jesus Christ. Spirit baptism is part of the pattern of Christ’s work, represented in either a fivefold or fourfold account. Jesus is acclaimed as Savior, Sanctifier, Spirit Baptizer, Healer, and Coming King. The non-Wesleyan or “finished work” side of the movement favors the fourfold account by dropping Sanctifier, consistent with its rejection of Wesleyan entire sanctification as a second work of grace. Despite this difference Pentecostals agree that something is lacking in the gospel if Spirit baptism is not proclaimed and experienced. In more formal theological language Pentecostal faith intends to confess the full pneumatological dimensions of God’s christological work of redemption and grace.

Interestingly enough, one of the marks of the contemporary theological scene for at least the last quarter century has been a renewed interest in Christology, trinitarian theology, and the theology of the Holy Spirit. The relationship among them is in many instances quite explicit. For example, thinking about the Holy Spirit raises the question of the Spirit’s relation to the Father and the Son. Also, considering that pneumatology has been somewhat neglected in the western church the renewed vitality of the experience of the Holy Spirit in Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Renewal has provoked interest in these Christian doctrines and underscored their relationship to each other.

Clearly not all those in this genre have been influenced by the various waves of the Pentecostal/charismatic movement. This lack of explicit connection does not diminish their contribution to this renewal and in the area of Christian thought I would argue that further insight

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1 The title of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel is perhaps the most explicit witness to this.
can be gained as a consequence of fruitful dialogue between charismatic and non-charismatic theologians. With this in mind I propose to articulate the trinitarian and pneumatological concerns of two different voices, one non-charismatic and one charismatic, with whom Pentecostals and charismatics may cultivate an invigorating dialogue. One is that of Pope John Paul II as articulated in the exercise of his Petrine teaching office. The other is the charismatic, once Church of Scotland, now Anglican theologian Thomas Smail.

Each in his own way since the 1970s has taken a trinitarian journey in theological reflection. The Pope in his capacity as universal teacher respectively devoted a papal encyclical to each person of the Trinity: Redemptor Hominis (Redeemer of Man, 1979); Dives in Misericordia (On the Mercy of God, 1980); Dominum et Vivificantem (On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World, 1986). Initially, I will seek to establish the Pope as an interlocutor with classical Pentecostalism by utilizing the “Full Gospel” as a paradigm for Pentecostal faith and experience.

I will then employ the work of Thomas Smail whose three books—Reflected Glory: The Spirit in Christ and Christians (1975), The Forgotten Father (1980), and The Giving Gift: The Holy Spirit in Person (1988)—reflect the same trinitarian sequence: Son, Father, and Holy Spirit. They specifically attempt to provide mature theological direction for the Spirit-renewed in the life of the church. As former director of the British charismatic institute, Fountain Trust, and editor of Theological Renewal, Smail has been a long-time advocate of bringing theological reflection to bear on Pentecostal/charismatic experience.

The Full Gospel and the Persons of the Trinity

Pope John Paul II, in his 1994 apostolic letter Tertio Millenio Adveniente, exercised an ecclesial discernment of the upcoming Great Jubilee of the year 2000. At the turn of the millennium he anticipates a “new springtime of Christian life ... if Christians are docile to the action of the Holy Spirit” (§18), an emphasis not that far removed from the Full Gospel of Pentecostal witness and testimony permeated as the latter is by eschatological hope and the experience of the outpouring of

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3 Thomas A. Smail, The Forgotten Father (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980).