David's Sling: The Promise and the Problem of Pentecostal Theology Today:
A Response to D. Lyle Dabney

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Seldom, if ever, have I read a review essay of such an elaborate and insightful caliber as the one provided by the Marquette University pneumatologist D. Lyle Dabney. Indeed, Dabney's contribution goes far beyond any review in offering a constructive proposal for the future direction of Pentecostal theology. He not only detects the main pitfalls, as he sees them, but also the promising prospects for an ambitious program of crafting a Pentecostal theology of the Holy Spirit. My minor disagreements with and emphases differing from his approach are not meant so much to criticize Dabney's suggestion as to offer some further thought for our common enterprise.

Dabney's essay contains a competent, insightful analysis of the current state of Pentecostal theology. His biographical silhouette in the beginning of the article accounts for the fact that he not only knows—from an inside perspective, so to speak—the ethos of Pentecostal spirituality, but also is competent to assess the quality of Pentecostal theological attempts so far.

I have understood my task as a respondent to Dabney's review to my two published dissertations (the doctoral dissertation and postdoctoral Habilitationsschrift) to be the submission of a few comments on the overall approach of Dabney's review of my dissertations, rather than as giving any kind of apology for weaknesses of my writings that he points out (of which I am the most cognizant person of all). Therefore, I will first comment on the nature of these two books to give the context for my remarks. Then I will comment on the promise and problematic of Pentecostal theology and, finally, will reflect on the feasibility of constructing a viable Pentecostal theology in light of Dabney's proposal.

The Task and the Limitations

Had I had the chance to write a book (or two, in this case) specif-
ically on the method and topics of Pentecostal theology in light of the Catholic/Pentecostal dialogue, the contents and the directions of my work would have looked much different. I would have had the freedom needed not only to analyze the dialogue outcomes but also to move toward a constructive proposal. That was not my task. My assignment was to write an ecumenical analysis (my major in both the doctorate and the postdoctoral degree is ecumenics). The method used was systematic analysis, which means a careful sorting out of the main themes and topics of the material under scrutiny and a presentation of those outcomes— and those only. Therefore, to do justice to my sources (and this was the main concern of my theological tutelage) I could not help but approach, for example, the question of hermeneutics and revelation exactly in terms of those concepts and categories that the dialogue offered in the sources. Had I diverted from this, I would have been charged for mispresenting my ecumenical data. For better or for worse, my mentors continually kept me on the methodological narrow road to such an extent that where I offered more constructive attempts those had to be developed as separately published articles.¹

Consequently, when I looked at how Pentecostals defined their identity for the purposes of the dialogue, I had no other way to define it than with the one created by the Pentecostal team. I don’t say it is the “best” one, but that it was the one placed on the ecumenical table. I agree with Dabney that indeed the question of identity is a determining issue for ecumenics; but unfortunately, it was a topic that I could only introduce in the light of previous treatments, without even