Chris E.W. Green

Towards a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord’s Supper: Foretasting the Kingdom

Chris Green’s monograph offers a Pentecostal theology of the Lord’s Supper with a view to promoting theological conversation about the sacraments and a renewal of Pentecostal Eucharistic practice. The book is composed of six chapters, with an introduction and a concluding chapter that outlines the book’s contributions and some helpful suggestions for further research. Chapter’s 2–5 unfold the book’s argument for a fresh and revised Pentecostal theology of the Lord’s Supper; it remains authentically Pentecostal as defined especially by the early years of the movement.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed bibliographic review of scholarly literature by Pentecostals related to the sacraments from 1932 to the present. Green shows both the diversity of Pentecostal treatments of the sacraments and the recent burgeoning of interest in the sacraments, which he believes involves a recovery of a lost vision. This review also shows the absence of full-orbed theological treatments of the Lord’s Supper by Pentecostals—implying the need for his study. Green observes that “differences in theological method seem to determine differences of opinion among Pentecostals on the meaning and purpose of the sacraments” (72–73), which later prompts his contribution of a theological model that is “biblical, Pentecostal, and catholic all-at-once” (328).

In chapter 3, “(Re)Discovering the Sacramentality of Early Pentecostalism,” Green offers a careful, inductive exploration of the early periodical literature of Pentecostalism. He structures his analysis of relevant articles in each periodical according to a fitting three-fold rubric: (1) “explicit treatments of the sacraments,” including not only baptism and the Lord’s Supper, but also footwashing and laying on of hands/anointing—all understood as sacraments by Green because these practices were believed to “occasion or mediate God’s effective presence” (77); (2) “testimonies of sacramental experience”; and (3) “embedded sacramentality,” which includes use of language and motifs (for example, feasting or feeding on Christ) that imply sacramental thinking and living. Green finds that early Pentecostals, whether from the Wesleyan-Holiness or Finished Work sub-traditions, by-and-large affirmed baptism and the Lord Supper—and sometimes foot-washing—as critical aspects of Pentecostal worship, as ways both to obey or imitate Christ and to experience his grace. Evident especially in testimonies, baptism and communion were often “moments in which ... believers found themselves overwhelmed by God’s real, active presence” (178) expressed in sanctification, healing and spiritual gifts. Green concludes boldly that, despite some later perceptions, for early Pentecostals “the Lord’s Sup-
per was never merely a memorial feast” (179). Yet Green also recognizes that early Pentecostals uniformly rejected and avoided formalism, notions that the sacraments conveyed grace automatically, and metaphysical explanations of the Lord’s presence in the Supper.

In chapter 4, Green examines “the Lord’s Supper in the Church’s Scripture,” based on the belief that Pentecostals have always been a people devoted to Scripture. Green first develops a Pentecostal hermeneutical model, building on the work of other Pentecostals. He then treats three texts, following the pattern he employed for early Pentecostal literature: an explicit treatment of the Lord’s Supper (1Cor 10:14–22), a testimony of the Supper (Acts 2:42), and a text manifesting embedded sacramentality (John 6:52–59). Some attention was given to these texts’ “effective history” in various “ideal” Christian and Pentecostal communities. The result is a balanced biblical theology that allows Green to critique Eucharistic views that have eclipsed some voices of the canon in favor of others.

Chapter 5 provides the theological heart of the book towards which the previous chapters lead. Green develops a distinctly Pentecostal theology of the Lord’s Supper, moving from prescription (what the Lord requires) to promise (what the Lord promises to do) to presence (how the Lord is present and active). He draws widely and judiciously from past and present Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal theologians, demonstrating an admirable, irenic, “both/and” approach to theology. The author offers a compelling argument for Pentecostal churches to restore the Eucharist to a place of centrality in their theology and practice. The Lord’s Supper is above all a “foretasting of the kingdom” (the book’s subtitle) in which the realities of the age to come proleptically become present to today’s church. In an insightful sacramental recasting of the Pentecostal five-fold gospel, Green proposes that through work of the Spirit in the Lord’s Supper Christ saves, sanctifies, baptizes, heals and (proleptically) comes as King. Christians thus undergo comprehensive “Christification” in a unique-but-not-exclusive way through the Lord’s Supper. The Chapter concludes with implications of Green’s Eucharistic theology for the wider field of Pentecostal theology and praxis under three headings. First, hermeneutics and theological method should be shaped and ordered by the Lord’s Supper, which like Scripture should act as a norming norm for theological reflection. Second, Pentecostal mission should be strengthened and marked by the Eucharist, rightly understood as a missionary meal that serves the world and not only the church. Third, and most basically, the Lord’s Supper needs to be restored to a place of frequency and formative centrality in Pentecostal public worship.

Minor weaknesses marked this study that detracted slightly from its overwhelmingly positive contributions. The book lacks a clear rationale for some