Giovanni Maltese


Despite increasing interest, comparative works and systematic studies on the religious experience of the Spirit are still a novelty, even among Pentecostals. Maltese focuses on the philosophical foundations and conceptual frameworks of two Pentecostal theologians: Terry L. Cross and Amos Yong. His study reveals that these two proposals offer two very different approaches to religious experience on a level of transparency that allows for their integration in established theological conversations. The book is structured along three parts. The first two introduce the concept of experience in the writings of Cross (part 1) and Yong (part 2). Each part opens with a brief overview of the concerns of each theologian, followed by a description of method and sources, an analysis of the dimensions and definition of experience, and completed by the integration of this reconstruction in the overall work of each thinker. A third part concludes the study with a comparison of the two approaches along logical, theological, epistemological, and pneumatological dimensions of experience.

Maltese views the work of Cross as an attempt to bring divine transcendence and immanence into an operative relationship through a focus on the experience of the Spirit. In Cross’s theology, transcendence is suspended in immanence: the finite human being can experience the infinite God because God enables humanity to do so through the Holy Spirit. In Cross’ articulation, Maltese finds a theological realism that is oriented along three moments: the reality of the Trinity, human participation in the Trinity, and a dialectic of the encounter between transcendence and immanence. Cross constructs an \textit{analogia experientiae} in Barth’s sense of the \textit{analogia fidei}, in which the human experience of God is constructed analogous to the Trinity as an experienced reality that has the Holy Spirit as its primary subject.

In contrast, Yong’s concept of experience is rooted in the reality of God (not humanity), and God is not accessible in God’s true (immediate) form. Truth demands experience, and experience proceeds on what has \textit{a priori} been accepted as truth. Yong’s conceptual fallibilism is embedded in a theological hermeneutic, in which experience occurs within the trialectic of Spirit, Word, and Community. Experience functions appropriate to reality, interpreting reality and transforming the human person in an encounter with ultimate reality.
Divine presence and agency can be experienced potentially everywhere, also outside of the Christian contexts, although subject to fallible interpretation. For Yong, all experience of God is experience of the Spirit, but religious experience may be of any number of spiritual realities and therefore requires a discernment of spirits.

Both Cross and Yong operate with an anteriority of experience and reject rationalist and subjectivist theology. Yong, however, can only speak of a mediated immediacy, while Cross accepts the possibility of the human experience of the divine immediacy. Cross operates on the basis of the human elevation to participate in the divine, while Yong’s work begins always with the mediated event of the outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh, in which all of creation can experience the infinite. Experience for Cross is theosis, sanctification, and transformation of the human being, while Yong emphasizes the contrite fallibilism of all human symbols. Maltese faults Yong's shifting hermeneutical trialectic for failing to provide a consistent methodological grounding in personal existential experience. Cross, on the other hand, fails to make transparent the philosophical foundations for a Pentecostal theology of experience that remains compatible with the methodological dialectic of Barth’s theology and avoids triumphalism.

Despite sharing a central emphasis on the Spirit, the Pentecostal interpretations of religious experience differ fundamentally in their emphasis on the immediacy of God. This difference between unmediated immediacy and mediated immediacy is significant if it can be shown that the two methodological approaches responsible for the different conclusions are indeed representative of two larger streams within Pentecostalism. However, the choice of the two theologians is somewhat unusual. Yong’s pioneering efforts have been received critically not only among Pentecostals. The veracity of Maltese’s observations on Cross’s work, on the other hand, cannot be verified, since large portions of his study are based on several unpublished manuscripts. All the more surprising is that Maltese dedicates 104 pages to Cross, and only 44 pages to Yong, with few selections from Yong’s prolific corpus. Maltese tends to overanalyze the work of both thinkers in comparison with platonic methexis-theory, Kantian transcendental philosophy, and Hegelian dialectic. Although this conversation elevates the discourse and serves the theological conversation with and integration of Pentecostalism, it is unlikely that the Pentecostal notion of the experience of the Spirit will be formulated in the future within these parameters.

Set within the context of the experience of the Spirit, arguably the experience *par excellence* among Pentecostals, the prominence of immediacy in Cross’s work reflects more directly the classical Pentecostal account of the