

REVIEW ESSAY

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

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Introduction

My aim is to summarize the central argument in Frank Macchia's *Baptized in the Holy Spirit* and describe how it fits within its Pentecostal context. I will then highlight some key issues that I think will be primary for Pentecostals as well as for ecumenical discussion. Due to the brief length of this paper, my comments are very selective.

Macchia begins his book in a typical Pentecostal fashion. He shares his testimony. Shortly after graduating from high school, and after having resisted his Christian heritage, Macchia decided to leave home to find himself. However, after spending a night sharing with his Father, who was a minister in the Assemblies of God, Macchia, as he puts it, "gave his heart to Christ." Macchia proceeded to go to an Assemblies of God Bible College. On his second day there he was invited to a student prayer meeting. Let me share his description with you:

No sooner had I entered the room that 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 schoolmates 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 thing to do.¹

Classical (North American) Pentecostals would say that this is when Macchia was baptized in the Holy Spirit. The experience, they would say, was a one-time experience that occurred subsequent to his conversion and, according to the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada's (PAOC) statement faith, that the "initial evidence" of this experience was his "speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance."² Most classical Pentecostals would say that those who have not had this so-called "initial evidence" have not been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

In contrast to the above and just about every traditional interpretation of Spirit Baptism, Macchia presents Baptism in the Holy Spirit not as a one-time experience (or even a repeatable experience) but rather as a process identified with the coming of the kingdom of God. That is, the process of Spirit Baptism began at Pentecost, continues still, and will continue until the full consummation of the kingdom of God. This also means that Spirit Baptism is not just about people receiving the Spirit, but also about the presence of God indwelling the whole of creation.³

¹ Frank Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 13.

² PAOC, *Statement of Fundamental and Essential Truths*, article 5.5.2 "Baptism in the Holy Spirit." Available at <http://www.paoc.org/about/what-we-believe>.

³ Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 103.

Macchia views himself as attempting to integrate the diverse canonical voices that utilize the metaphor of Spirit baptism. He agrees with classical Pentecostals that Luke and Paul use this metaphor with different emphases.⁴ That is, he agrees that Luke, when writing Luke and Acts, uses the metaphor to refer to an experience of the Spirit that is primarily characterized (though not exclusively, Macchia suggests) by charismatic empowerment for witness, whereas Paul's use of the metaphor is primarily soteriological.⁵ However, he thinks that he is justified to utilize the idea of the kingdom of God to integrate the diverse canonical voices based upon Matt 3:1-12 and Acts 1:2-8, both of which place this metaphor in the context of preaching about the kingdom of God. For example, in Acts 1:3 Luke reports that Jesus appeared to the apostles and "spoke about the *kingdom of God*." Then, in verse 5 Jesus tells them that "in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

I had originally planned on providing a summary of the whole of Macchia's book, but this ended up being impossible. Since his understanding of Spirit Baptism is so expansive, his theology of Spirit Baptism essentially ends up covering every area of pneumatology and every area that pneumatology touches. He discusses just about every doctrine from a pneumatological perspective, including

⁴ Although some English Bible translations translate 1 Cor 12:13 as "by one Spirit" it could also be translated as "in one Spirit." The Greek preposition *en* which is translated 'in' or 'by' in this verse is the same word that is found in Acts and the Gospels when we read about being baptized 'in' the Spirit.

⁵ Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 15.

justification, sanctification, the doctrine of the Trinity, Christology and pluralism, anthropology, eschatology, and, with the greatest amount of focus, ecclesiology. Though he certainly has many fresh insights in his pneumatological reflections,⁶ one sometimes gets the feeling that he is simply re-describing much that is already discussed in pneumatology only now under the banner of Spirit-baptism.

Challenges in the Pentecostal Context

I will now describing some challenges to the classical Pentecostal view of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This is the Pentecostal context into which Macchia writes.

One of the more recent challenges to the classical Pentecostal position on Spirit Baptism comes from within Pentecostal circles themselves. There is a growing awareness of the diversity of global Pentecostalism.⁷ Especially through the writings of Walter Hollenweger⁸ and Allan Anderson, Pentecostals are realizing that much of the global Pentecostal community does not hold to the under-

⁶ Let me note just one novel insight found in this book. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 210, claims that since Christ is the one who baptizes us in the Spirit, one must affirm that Jesus is fully God. This is based on the observation that the Old Testament signified that it would be the Lord himself who would pour out the Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:28).

⁷ Macchia reflects on this in *Baptized in the Spirit*, 35. See also Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 10.

⁸ Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Development Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997) and Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (London: SCM Press, 1972).

standing that Spirit Baptism is an experience subsequent to salvation for which the initial evidence is speaking in tongues. This has led to the recognition that that which has traditionally been understood within North America as *the* classical Pentecostal doctrine of Spirit Baptism is really only *the North American* classical Pentecostal doctrine of Spirit Baptism (or perhaps even only one of a few North American Pentecostal views). The challenge, then, for Pentecostals is whether or not there can be a single Pentecostal theology of Spirit Baptism. Along with this recognition of the diversity of beliefs within Pentecostalism some question exactly what it means to be Pentecostal.⁹ Perhaps we can speak only of the existence of a number of Pentecostalisms (plural). On the other hand, many today would follow Allan Anderson who lumps the whole of the Charismatic movement together into ‘Pentecostalism,’ defining ‘Pentecostals’ broadly as those who place emphasis on the experience of the Spirit and the place of spiritual gifts in the practice of Christian life.¹⁰ To summarize, the global diversity of Pentecostalism challenges

⁹ Allan Anderson, “When Is a Pentecostal Not a Pentecostal? When She’s a Charismatic! Responding to Irvin, López Rodríguez and Waldrop.” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 16.1 (2007) 58-63.

¹⁰ Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 13. Anderson writes, “I think the term ‘Pentecostal’ is appropriate for describing globally all churches and movements that emphasize the workings of the gifts of the Spirit, both on phenomenological and on theological grounds.” Further, he writes, “Pentecostalism is more correctly seen in a much broader context as a movement concerned primarily with the *experience* of the working of the Holy Spirit and the *practice* of spiritual gifts” (p. 14). Certainly when all of the triumphalistic statistics are read regarding the rapid growth of Pentecostalism, they include this broader definition of what it means to be a Pentecostal.

both what it means to be a Pentecostal and also the possibility of having a single Pentecostal doctrine of Spirit Baptism.

A second challenge to the classical Pentecostal position on Spirit Baptism coming from within Pentecostal circles themselves is a recognition of the theological diversity within the early development of North American Pentecostal denominations. For example, the official “party line” within the PAOC and the American Assemblies of God today is that one has not been baptized in the Holy Spirit if they have not spoken in tongues. The idea is that without the “evidence,” that is, without speaking in tongues, there has been no experience of Spirit Baptism. The challenge from early Pentecostalism comes in that the diversity then was acceptable and was found even among key denominational leaders. Cecil Roebeck documents how this is the case in the Assemblies of God. One example of the diverse interpretations of the ‘initial evidence’ doctrine comes from the first general secretary of the Assemblies of God (elected in 1914), Joseph Roswell Flower. He wrote in his published testimony that he was baptized in the Holy Spirit several months before he finally spoke in tongues.¹¹ Evidently, Flower, and others

¹¹ Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., “An Emerging Magisterium? The Case of the Assemblies of God,” *Pneuma* 25.2 (fall 2003): 187-190. It is significant that Flower’s testimony, which many classical Pentecostals today would think contradicts the Assemblies of God statement of faith, was published (and considered acceptable!) in 1933, many years after the denomination had penned their statement of faith in 1916.

like him, interpreted the initial evidence doctrine to mean that, although there may be other signs that would come first, tongues was the initial sign which was decisive (the “initial evidence”) to convince other Christians that this experience had happened in one’s life.¹² In contrast to the early diversity of how to interpret the initial evidence doctrine, Robeck argues that, similar to the Roman Catholic church, the Assemblies of God “executive officers, the General Presbytery, and the Doctrinal Purity Commission have become the magisterium, and together they have essentially removed the discussion of certain doctrines from the general fellowship.”¹³ Given the present strict interpretation promoted by leadership of classical Pentecostal denominations, the renewed awareness of the diversity in the early stages of these denominations causes some to question that which is understood to be the classical Pentecostal position.

Furthermore, there continues to be diversity among classical Pentecostals today regarding this doctrine. Carl Verge’s 1987 research on the beliefs of PAOC ministers illustrates that there does remain diversity within the PAOC on this issue. When asked if “no person has received the baptism of the Holy Spirit who has not spoken

¹² Flower also seems to view the experience of being baptized in the Holy Spirit as somewhat of a process because he suggests that it is only when believers have spoken in tongues that they have the “full manifestation” of Spirit Baptism as found in the “biblical pattern.” As quoted in Frank D. Macchia, “Groans too Deep for Words: Towards a Theology of Tongues as Initial Evidence” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 1.2 (1998): 16. Available at www.aps.edu/index.cfm?menuid=94&parentid=54.

¹³ Robeck, “An Emerging Magisterium?,” 170.

in tongues” one group of PAOC ministers responded only 65% in agreement, the other responded with 86% agreement.¹⁴ Given the present diversity of beliefs among these Pentecostals, the above realization that the formative years of North American Pentecostal denominations also included diversity proves as a further challenge to the classical Pentecostal view.

Another challenge to the classical Pentecostal view of Spirit Baptism has been consistent. There has always been the challenge of the alternative non-Pentecostal interpretations of Spirit Baptism (Macchia describes these in chapter 3). That is, Spirit Baptism has also been interpreted as occurring at the point of conversion or regeneration (especially among Protestants) or as occurring at the same time as water baptism (especially among Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox). This is certainly a key challenge for Macchia when it comes to any attempt to reach an ecumenical agreement concerning baptism in the Spirit.

To summarize, Macchia writes within a Pentecostal context where the classical Pentecostal understanding of baptism in the Spirit is facing challenges both from within the movement itself along with the ever-present challenges from outside of the movement. Macchia responds to these challenges with an attempt to integrate the con-

¹⁴ Carl Verge, “A Comparison of the Beliefs and Practices of Two Groups of Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada Ministers: Those With a Master’s Degree and Those with Only Three Years of Bible College Training,” (Unpublished Dissertation, New York University, 1987), 88, cf. 111.

cerns of those listed above. Before discussing the ecumenical potential of Macchia's proposal, it is necessary for both Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals to understand the implications this proposal has for Pentecostal thought.

Key Issues for Pentecostals

There is no doubt that Macchia's proposal for such an expansive understanding of the metaphor of Spirit Baptism will be received both positively and negatively. I expect that many in the PAOC, given the already strong influence of Canadian Pentecostal theologian Roger Stronstad, will follow Stronstad who feels that Macchia is trying to have his "cake and eat it too." Stronstad concludes that, "Macchia's exposition of Spirit Baptism is a 'feel good' approach to a divisive subject. Every tradition is accommodated and affirmed."¹⁵

Macchia is free to expand the metaphor of Spirit Baptism. It is after all just a word. There is nothing inherently wrong with using this term to refer to every experience of the Holy Spirit. However, Pentecostals, like myself, will likely wonder if he is accurately representing what the biblical authors meant to convey. After all, if the biblical authors use the metaphor in different ways are we not justified (even required) to do so as well? By contrast, Macchia appears to take an almost modern mindset in which each of the canonical voices have to be subsumed under

¹⁵ Roger Stronstad, "The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke Revisited (Special Emphasis upon Being Baptized in the Holy Spirit)," in *Defining Issues in Pentecostalism: Classical and Emergent*, ed. Steven M. Studebaker (McMaster Theological Studies Series; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2008), 119, 120.

an overarching concept of what it means to be baptized in the Spirit.

Pentecostals, especially those who accept his proposal, will also need to reflect further on the issue of “initial evidence.” If Spirit Baptism is, as Macchia proposes, a lengthy process of the coming of the kingdom of God, then what link is there between this experience and speaking in tongues? Raising this issue will be enough to scare many away from Macchia’s proposal, however, it should not. Macchia still affirms the initial evidence doctrine and is still ordained with the Assemblies of God and teaching at one of their universities. But more importantly, he does indeed affirm the doctrine of initial evidence (although he does not reflect on this much within this book¹⁶) in the sense that he views tongues as the “characteristic sign of Spirit baptism...because they symbolize God’s people giving themselves abundantly in a way that transcends limitations and creaturely expectations.”¹⁷ That is, tongues is the decisive sign that confirms the experience of being baptized in the Holy Spirit. One should not be dismayed by his lack of the use of the word ‘evidence’ because even classical Pentecostal scholars, such as Stronstad, prefer to speak of tongues as the ‘sign’ of Spirit Baptism since this

¹⁶ To see his reflections on this issue elsewhere, see Macchia, “Groans too Deep for Words,” 1-20, and Frank D. Macchia, “Tongues as a Sign: Towards a Sacramental Understanding of Pentecostal Experience,” *Pneuma* 15.1 (Spring 2003): 61-76.

¹⁷ Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 281.

is a term used in the Bible, whereas the word ‘evidence’ is not.¹⁸

Another issue for Pentecostals that arises throughout Macchia’s book is that we cannot divide and fragment the work of the Spirit as though the Holy Spirit only does one thing at a time.¹⁹ Based on this recognition, it would be incorrect for Pentecostal to claim that non-Pentecostals (in as much as they too have experienced the Holy Spirit) have not been empowered by the Holy Spirit to any extent, as though this only occurs when one speaks in tongues. This is too often suggested by Pentecostals, though it certainly is not official doctrine. In fact, Gordon Anderson (who is by all means a classical Pentecostal), while reflecting upon the Assemblies of God statement of faith, clarifies that the classical Pentecostal position is not that the Holy Spirit empowers no one before they are baptized by the Holy Spirit (and speak in tongues) but rather that this experience, as properly understood by classical Pentecostals, adds additional power. Classical Pentecostalism does not, and should not claim that “*all* fullness, *all* reverence, *all* consecration, and *all* love come from the baptism in the Holy Spirit, but that *something more is added* to what God has already done.”²⁰

¹⁸ E.g., Stronstad, “*The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke Revisited*,” 121, writes, “the sign of Spirit-baptism is speaking in other tongues.”

¹⁹ Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, esp. 18.

²⁰ Gordon L. Anderson, “Baptism In The Holy Spirit, Initial Evidence, And A New Model,” *Enrichment Journal* (Winter 2005) (original emphases). Available online at: http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200501/200501_071_BaptismHS.cfm

Related to the above point that we can not fragment the work of the Spirit, Macchia also provides a service to Pentecostals by reminding them that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is about more than just receiving ‘power’ for witness, in the sense of charismatic empowerment for inspired speech (as emphasized by Stronstad and Menzies). Rather, this “power for witness also involves... a certain quality of communal life that is reconciling and rich in praise and acts of self-giving.”²¹ That is, Spirit baptism empowers us not only for sharing the gospel with our preaching and testimonies, but also as we are shaped and enabled to live in a manner of love in the church community and the world at large, which is another way that we can be witnesses. From this perspective, Macchia is correct to suggest that Spirit Baptism (even from a Lukan perspective) does include an aspect of sanctification, both morally and vocationally.²² This insight is not totally new for Pentecostals, however, though too often neglected. For example, the PAOC statement of faith claims that through Spirit baptism, a believer comes “to know Christ in a more intimate way, and receives power to witness and grow spiritually.”²³ I turn now to consider some reflections on the ecumenical significance of Macchia’s proposal.

²¹ Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 16, cf. 14.

²² Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 80-84. He writes that sanctification and charismatic gifting/empowerment “are distinct but inseparable dimensions of Spirit Baptism” (Macchia, *Baptized*, 260).

²³ PAOC, *Statement of Fundamental Beliefs and Truths*, article 5.5.2 “Baptism in the Holy Spirit.”

Ecumenical Significance

Throughout the book Macchia reveals his ecumenical hopes for his writing.²⁴ Constance Price's article (in particular) in this present volume illustrates his success. I, however, wish to focus on his ecumenical hopes specifically for his proposal to expand the metaphor of Spirit Baptism. Instead of viewing Spirit Baptism as a one-time experience that happens either at or subsequent to conversion or at one's water baptism, Macchia suggests that *all of these* experiences are indeed aspects of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Clearly, if Spirit baptism can be said to encompass the whole of the economy of salvation, as Macchia proposes, then *every tradition's* view of Spirit baptism can be affirmed, only expanded. This would of course help lead to a unity in theological understanding across denominational boundaries.

It remains to be seen how well Macchia's proposal will be received by Pentecostals. Regardless of its reception however, his proposal would only change the words that Pentecostals use to describe their experience of the Spirit. Hence, there would still remain an issue of diversity to overcome. Regardless of if Pentecostals accept Macchia's proposal or if they maintain the classical Pentecostal view, the fact remains that Pentecostals, including Macchia,²⁵ claim to have had an experience of the Spirit that other Christians have not had. To be more explicit, from the classical Pentecostal perspective, Pentecostals have

²⁴ See especially, Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 22 and 25.

²⁵ Consider Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 152.

been baptized in the Spirit, while many others have not. Similarly, although Macchia would affirm that all Christians are experiencing (in some way) the baptism in the Holy Spirit, he too (with the classical Pentecostals) would affirm that most Pentecostals have had an experience of the Spirit that many non-Pentecostals have not had, namely the additional charismatic empowerment of the Spirit and, along with this, the experience of praying or speaking in tongues.

This issue should not be a cause for division in the church, however. Each denomination has experienced the leading of the Spirit in a different way. For example, the United Church of Canada has tended to be led by the Spirit to engage in issues of social justice more than PAOC churches have (cf. Matt 12:18). The fact of the matter is, even beyond just the denominational level, on the individual level, all Christians have experienced the Holy Spirit in different ways and at different times in their lives. Instead of viewing this as a stumbling block to unity, just as Paul in 1 Corinthians celebrates the diverse gifts of the one Holy Spirit, we too should celebrate the diverse experiences of the Spirit and call one another to follow the Spirit's leading in our lives. Whether we refer to all of these experiences of the Holy Spirit as Spirit Baptism (as Macchia does) or only refer to one of them as Spirit Baptism (as has historically been the case in most Christians traditions), it does not remove this reality of the diversity of our experience. This is okay though because ecumenical unity need not mean uniformity (neither in

experience nor theology). Macchia would agree with this and talks much about church unity including diversity,²⁶ even though it sometimes seems as though he requires a single doctrine of Spirit Baptism for ecumenical unity. Regardless, with Macchia I affirm that “divisions between churches that exclude each other [wrongly] imply [that there is] more than one Spirit or one Christ or one Father, which is absurd.”²⁷

²⁶ Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 211-222, esp. 212-213.

²⁷ Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 211.