

# ***Review of Macchia, Justified in the Spirit: Creation, Redemption, and the Triune God.***

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Macchia F D 2010. *Justified in the Spirit: creation, redemption, and the triune God.* Pentecostal Manifestos. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans.

## **1. Introduction**

In Frank Macchia's work, the author attempts to 'develop a pneumatological theology of justification inspired by a Pentecostal metaphor, the baptism in the Spirit' (p. 14). He proposes that divine koinonia, or the mutual indwelling of the Trinity, is the most fruitful context for bridging the gap between the usually isolated doctrines of creation, justification and sanctification. This noted Pentecostal-ecumenical theologian takes a deep look at both the Protestant and Catholic doctrines of justification, moving past both in order to reconcile them within the Spirit's embrace. Therefore, Macchia highlights the role of pneumatology in order to lead 'toward a Trinitarian integration of justification' (p. 293).

Pneumatological reflections, and as a result, Trinitarian theology are the means by which Macchia develops his vision of justification. This vision is both metamorphic and forensic by developing justification from within the indwelling Spirit's eschatological mission of bringing all of creation into the embrace of the divine koinonia. For Macchia,

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

this Trinitarian embrace finds its ultimate fulfilment in the resurrection of the dead and the new creation. Consequently, justification is essentially eschatological, as justification must have its beginning and ending in the extensiveness of the life of the Spirit.

## 2. Summary

Throughout the chapters of his book, Macchia sets out to develop a Trinitarian theology of justification with an emphasis on Spirit baptism. Justification then is pneumatological in substance, ‘consisting of pardon, the victory of life over death, divine witness and vindication, and participation in the divine koinonia’ (p. 13). In the first part of the book, which consists of chapters 2, 3, and 4, the author explores three models of justification and how these connect with the Spirit: Catholic, Protestant and Pentecostal.

Macchia first shows how the Catholic doctrine of justification moved in the direction of a moral view of the justified relationship and an anthropological emphasis on acquired virtues (p. 36). However, the modern Catholic reach for the Spirit has the potential to help view justification within the wide-open spaces of the Trinitarian self-vindication as the Creator, who makes the creation the divine dwelling place (pp. 30–35). Further, Macchia moves on to look at the Protestant doctrine of justification and shows how it both neglected and reached for the Spirit at the same time. Macchia suggests that in fixing the legal overtones of Protestant soteriology what is needed is a fresh emphasis on the Spirit instead of faith as the very substance of justifying righteousness. This move serves to maintain the God-centric theology of the Reformation (p. 74). On the flip side, the Protestant view of justification has always reached for the Spirit in that it reached for a Trinitarian soteriology, but the great insight into justification as a

divine judgment requires a strong pneumatology in order to help the robustness of the Trinitarian structure (p. 73).

Therefore, both the Catholic and Protestant doctrines of justification miss the Spirit's activity on their emphases: habitual grace and imputed righteousness. In chapters 2 and 3 he shows how both of these ultimately are the Spirit's activity, and thus argues that both can become more effective by adopting Pentecostalism's distinctive emphasis on Spirit Baptism. Thus, in chapter 4, Macchia shows how the 'justified relationship is not primarily legal or moral but rather involves mutual indwelling and embrace, which is its ecumenical significance' (p. 99). He expands Pentecostalism's typical theology of Spirit baptism and the typical theologies of justification found in the Christian West in order to discover the enormity of their eschatological scope. However, this not only serves to bridge the gap between Protestantism and Catholicism in relation to justification, but this dialogue serves to also help Pentecostal theologians rethink some of the ambiguities and difficulties of their own varied tradition (p. 75).

In the second part of the book that includes chapters 5, 6, and 7, the author moves to look at the justification-Spirit connection found in the Old Testament, in Christ's life found in the gospels and Acts, and then in the rest of the New Testament following Pentecost. This promise of the Spirit is then fulfilled in Christ's life, especially in the atonement when corresponding to Jesus' later role as Spirit Baptizer.

First, in the Old Testament, the author finds that God will fulfill the promise to Israel and, ultimately, to the world and the creation through the gift of the Holy Spirit (p. 128). The prophesied Messiah will have God's favour and will rule in justice as the man of the Spirit. He will proclaim the year of the Lord's favour as empowered by the Spirit (p. 118). However, he notes that what is unclear in the Old Testament

witness is the exact link between the Messiah and outpouring of the Spirit of life on flesh (p. 129). The idea of Jesus as the dispenser of the Spirit, or the Spirit Baptiser is the breakthrough notion of the New Testament, especially found in the gospels and Acts. According to Macchia, ‘Spirit baptism will link the righteous Messiah with the rightwised creation’ (p. 129).

In Christ as the man of the Spirit, God spreads himself through the chasm in order to open all of creation to the gift of the Spirit. This is the angle that Macchia takes in order to overcome the gap between justification in the cross and subsequent events involving Christ that are generally more widely recognised events of the Spirit—resurrection, exaltation, and Spirit-impartment (pp. 132–133). Therefore, there is no way to exclude the Spirit from justification by way of using the cross. God has decided to open the Spirit to creation, through the meditation of the crucified Jesus (p. 184).

Macchia proceeds to again talk about the basis of justification in the metaphor of Spirit baptism with a renewed focus on Spirit outpouring after the resurrection. He sets out this time to show how justification is more deeply connected to the indwelling and new life of the Spirit in the New Testament witness than is commonly assumed. The scriptural witness concentrates all soteriological categories not only on Christ but also on the Spirit, both of whom are sent by the Father to accomplish His will and to bring creation into the embrace of the divine koinonia (p. 215). Thus, ‘Spirit baptism provides the link between the Spirit-indwelt Christ and the Spirit-indwelt church, or between Christ’s justification and ours’ (p. 215).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In relation to ‘Christ’s justification’ see 1 Timothy 3:16 and Romans 4:25. According to Macchia, the sin that is overcome in Jesus’ justification in the Spirit at his resurrection is our sin and not his, but it is still the sin that he bore for us on the

Chapters 8, 9, and 10 make up the third part of the book. As a whole, these chapters focus on the biblical treatment of justification in connection to how it is worked out eschatologically in the life of the faith, the communion of the church and the life of the Trinity. First, the author discusses possession of the Spirit. In the context of Spirit baptism, faith is the means by which we possess God, as God has possessed us in Christ and in the embrace of the Spirit (p. 221). Therefore, although faith involves belief it cannot be reduced to it as faith more deeply involves mutual indwelling and participating. For Macchia, we are justified ‘by grace through faith’ or more specifically ‘by the Spirit in Christ through participation in his faithful witness’ (p. 257).

The author then moves to discuss how justification in Christ and by the Spirit means justification through communion. Just as Christ rose from the dead through the fullness of life in the Spirit, so the church rises with the same fullness. Humanity is, as a result, rectified in reconciliation and communion with the ‘other’ (p. 292). Without the other, there can be no communal renewal, as we were created to live out the Spirit-filled life with one another.

Finally, in the concluding chapter, attention is turned to the Trinitarian structure necessary to the author’s task. This final chapter highlights the role of pneumatology in leading one towards a Trinitarian integration of justification. He began by moving beyond ‘a mere knitting together of Protestant and Catholic understandings of justification’ (p. 293). He then asserts that the Spirit brings about justification through Christ in

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cross. Jesus’ justification is an expression of God’s own self-justification as faithful creator and redeemer, whereas our justification is a gift received in faith and lived out (imperfectly) in faithfulness.

the mutual love and koinonia of Father, Son and Spirit and then uses the mutual indwelling of Trinitarian koinonia as a context for understanding the overlapping and integrated nature of justification and sanctification and the theological categories of creation and redemption. Lastly, a concluding reflection is offered in chapter 11 using Ezekiel 37 as a metaphor for justification in the Spirit.

In sum, Macchia concludes that to be justified is to participate in the fullness of the Trinitarian embrace. This means that the risen and glorified Christ as well as the communion of love enjoyed between each member of the Trinity is now available to be enjoyed by the believer. Without the Spirit's embrace and witness, both traditional Catholic and Protestant understanding of justification will continue to be put in opposition to each other. Therefore, the Spirit serves to be the central link and the eschatological fulfilment of both the divine legal declaration and the infused virtues. What is left is a pneumatological theology of justification using Spirit baptism as the central metaphor that propels readers towards a more Trinitarian soteriology.

### 3. Critique

This brilliantly written and argued book sets forth a robust pneumatology of justification. Finally a theologian has been able to effectively join both Protestant and Catholic views of righteousness by placing the Spirit's indwelling at the very centre of justification, all outlined within a Trinitarian framework. One of the most noteworthy aspects of this remarkable project is that Macchia effectively moves beyond the anthropocentric tendencies of Western Christianity, especially in relation to theologies of justification. For Macchia, the Spirit brings about justification through Christ in the mutual love and koinonia of the Trinity. This mutual indwelling of Trinitarian koinonia

is the context for understanding the overlapping nature of justification, sanctification and creation.

This focus on God's redemptive purposes for all of God's creation is an important element in this project that deserves due attention. Macchia's theology of justification as it relates to creation is especially relevant to doing theological science pneumatologically and done from a distinctly Pentecostal perspective. Although Macchia does not explicitly mention the term 'science', his theology of creation in relation to pneumatological justification resembles many other 'scientific' theologies of nature. Here Macchia advocates for a redemptive eschatological and pneumatological theology of creation:

We should also bear in mind that the forsaken creation entered by the forsaken Christ and the blasphemed Spirit at the cross was already a reality sustained by the Spirit in its implicit witness to God (Rom 1:20) and also precisely in its implicit yearning for the liberty of redemption. 'We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time' (Rom 8:22). There is no such thing as a Spiritless creation: 'If I make my bed in the depths, you are there' (Psa 139.8). In the cross God reaches down into a forsaken creation that is crying out for liberty with the aid of divine pathos, the Spirit of creation. The Spirit who descended with Christ into suffering and alienation at the cross brought to fulfilment the Spirit's longstanding intercession for creation in the midst of its groaning for liberty. In the cross, the Spirit now wilfully opens up to be assailed by the dark forces that keep creation in bondage in order to remain true to this intercession ... God achieves justice for creation, not only as judge, but also as intercessor and advocate in solidarity with the guilty and shamed defendants. (pp. 179-180)

Ecological theology and theologies of nature/creation fall within the scope of scientific theology, which Macchia touches on here. Further, Macchia also is implicitly scientific in his approach, that is, his theology is criticizable, shareable, and expandable. However, Macchia distinctively uses the eschatological Spirit to develop a Pentecostal theology of justification that includes all of God's creation, even non-human life. As he said above, 'There is no such thing as a Spiritless creation' (p. 179).

Scientific theology needs a robust pneumatology in order to effectively engage other sciences. Macchia has indeed provided this. However, it is important to note that doing theological science pneumatologically also demands prudence. When done from a Pentecostal perspective, scientific theology must reject panentheism as well as any theology that separates the Holy Spirit's work from Christ. This is especially important, as Pentecostalism emphasises Jesus as the Spirit Baptiser. Nonetheless, despite these two concerns, theological science done pneumatologically and from a distinctly Pentecostal ethos, I believe provides an immense opportunity for theology into the twenty-first century.

Although Macchia's work is brilliantly written and articulated, I find certain aspects of it wanting. For instance, as noted before, although Macchia's work surpasses many glaring weaknesses of Western theologies of justification, I found myself wanting more dialogue with Eastern Christianity. Although justification is typically a Western doctrine historically speaking, that is not to say that Eastern Christianity has nothing to add to the conversation. I find this especially relevant as Macchia's 'mutual indwelling' has a clear similarity to the Eastern notion of theosis. Along the same line, his engagement with Pentecostalism is clearly written from a Western theological context. Normally I would not penalise a theologian for his own context, yet



since Pentecostalism especially is now primarily in non-Western nations, I believe it would have been beneficial to engage these emerging voices.

Further, another weakness to consider is the apparent lack of dialogue on practising our theology. One of Macchia's overall achievements is how ecumenically useful his theology is for the church at large. However, readers are left with the question, 'now what?' The reader is left with little dialogue on how to begin to use this ecumenical pneumatology of justification in ecumenical conversation and in the church at large. To solve this, a suggestion for further consideration would be for Macchia to have written the last chapter, chapter 11, with some final thoughts on how to practise this theology. The preceding critical comments, though, should not divert anyone from the paramount importance of this project for Pentecostal theologians in particular and the church as a whole.

#### 4. Conclusion

Consequently, Macchia's project as a whole is of vital importance for ecumenical theology, pneumatology, theologies of justification and Pentecostal theology as a whole. In relation to theological science, there are a few things to be cautious about when doing it pneumatologically, but Macchia's balanced approach shows that a robust pneumatology is most full-bodied when it is situated within a Trinitarian framework. Despite a few minor weaknesses, Macchia's project as a whole is a brilliant theology that deserves much attention and admiration. His pneumatology and Trinitarian framework is useful for more than only justification, and could be used as an engagement tool for many other theological disciplines, such as theological science.

## Reference List

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