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within the broader context of the Christian tradition so that it is both continuous with it in some respects (i.e., the order of theological loci) and novel in others (i.e., an all-encompassing third article approach).

IV Epilogue—a Gift

All things considered, *Renewing Christian Theology* is a gift to both renewalists and non-renewalists alike. In the Epilogue, Yong summarizes his work by saying that it is, 'no more than a modest and even preliminary contribution, one designed to introduce theology students to the richness of the biblical and Christian traditions and also to showcase the capacity of a Spirit-inspired Christian faith to empower life amid the complexities of our twenty-first-century global village' (Yong, 358). As such, it has accomplished precisely these objectives and done so admirably.

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The Big Picture, with Questions!

Chris E.W. Green

I Introduction

Reading this systematics, which is as Yong says a 'culmination' of his thought to this point in time (xix), graced me with the same gifts I always receive from his works: first, a clear 'big picture' vision of what is at stake in particular theological conversations; and second, a storm of questions—some delightful, some terrifying—to struggle with and be troubled by. In this case, some of the questions are new to me, directing my thought down lines of reflection I would never have known to take otherwise. Other questions, which I had believed were already answered, have been given new life with which to afflict me. Thanks to these gifts, my already significant debt to Amos Yong has only deepened and widened.

On its own terms, this work is preliminary and introductory (358), a summary of central Christian doctrines that have particular relevance for the

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twenty-first century renewal movement, providing a 'showcase' (358) for the promise of renewal spirituality and theology. The questions I have to raise about the work, then, are not so much criticisms as prompts for myself and my students. I hope that as we engage the theological vision Yong has given us, these questions will goad our theological reflection and construction toward greater faithfulness.

With that in mind, I will reflect first on the book as a whole, raising questions about its aims and major themes, as well as its basic structure. Then, I will turn attention to the chapter on the ordinances/sacraments, assessing its central claims and arguments, as well as its key presuppositions and conclusions. In conclusion, I will explore the interrelatedness of this theology of the ordinances/sacraments with what is said in other chapters about the doctrines of the church and salvation.

II The (Im)Possibility of a Global Renewalist Systematics

To begin with an obvious, but perhaps not a worthless question: is there in fact any such thing as '*the* renewal movement' (14)? Or would it be better to talk about an extended (and in many ways, broken) 'renewal family' (300) that across the many lines of genuine difference nonetheless shares a few resemblances? To ask the same question another way, is it helpful to essentialise renewalist spirituality and theology, to suggest that it has a singular 'heart' or 'taproot'? I, for one, would argue that renewalism is rhizomatic, not arborescent, so that it would be better, as a rule, to speak of it in non-essentialist terms.

But assuming for the moment that we *can* speak of renewal spirituality and theology in essentialist terms, it is still not clear how we might construct a truly *global systematics*. Arguably, no one theological/spiritual tradition can provide a theology adequate for all the churches in the various traditions. And given that renewalist theologians and practitioners operate mainly in responsive, corrective (that is, 'prophetic') modes, it would seem impossible to craft a renewal systematic theology. Would not such a work necessarily call its own claims and arguments into question, and in the end deconstruct itself? This seems particularly true of classical Pentecostals, at least in North America, who as a rule are now, or at least have been in the past, not so much *renewalist* as *restorationist* and *sectarian*.

This is why I am not sure what to make of the use of the World Assemblies of God Fellowship Statement of Faith (WAGF SF) in this work. For one thing, this Statement—like the Statements of other classical Pentecostal denominations and many pentecostal/charismatic communities as well—enfolds sectarian doctrines into the same creedal space as catholic doctrines, with declarations on the inerrancy of Scripture, entire sanctification, Spirit baptism and initial evidence set alongside affirmations of the doctrine of the Trinity and the divinity and humanity of Christ—as if they all belonged to the same order and carried the same weight.[1]

1 Yong is aware of these concerns, obviously. As he says, 'the choice of adopting the WAGF SF as the basic structure for theological reflection brings with it the SF's fundamentally

I do not mean that such Statements are invalid or worthless, of course. But it does mean that such Statements need to justify their relationship to the faith of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Robert Jenson insists that he is writing theology for the not-yet seen but nonetheless hoped-for visibly unified church.[2] Is that what Yong is doing? If so, do these Statements serve that purpose? If they do not serve that purpose, then why use them?

The reversal of the order of the SF is provocative, as Yong's thought typically is. But I am not quite satisfied or fully convinced by it. Certainly, I see the (Pentecostal) sense of beginning with eschatology, but why simply reverse the order of the statements? Why not create an alternative order and make a case for that reordering? For example, Yong holds that 'a fully trinitarian theology has to be pneumatological, christological, and eschatological'. Why not, then, move from this opening chapter on eschatology to one on Christology and then to one the Trinity? Why not at least begin and end each chapter with some explanation of how it relates to what immediately precedes and succeeds it?

Again, this is not a critique of the work *per se*. By inciting these questions, the reordering obviously has served Yong's stated purpose. That said, I remain convinced that Christian dogmatics should begin with the doctrine of God (whether moving from Christology to Trinity or vice versa). Because Yong has reversed the order of the SF, his treatment of the doctrine of God comes as the penultimate chapter in the book, and much of it is devoted to conversation with Oneness Pentecostalism and inter-religious dialogue in a pluralistic world. We should be grateful for his attention to these concerns, and we do well to take his judgments and directions seriously. But I cannot help but wonder how this work would be different if this chapter had come first and had worked out a strong doctrine of God as the unity and ground of the systematics.

III Manifestation as Transfiguration: The Theology of Ordinances/Sacraments

This chapter, like all of the rest, begins with one of the articles of the WAGF SF. It assumes, and perhaps *demands*, belief in 'believer's baptism', a position that has always been dominant in the Pentecostal tradition, but is not representative of the renewal movement globally and ecumenically.[3] The

evangelical theology-plus pattern—common to most conservative Protestant statements of faith, actually—and raises critical questions for this book" (12). But for good or ill he stops short of providing answers to these critical questions.

2 Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology Vol. 1* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), viii: 'it is a great blessing specifically to theology that we need not wait for the church to be undivided to do theology for and even of the undivided church. For theology is itself a form of the waiting we must practice. The present work is deliberately done in such anticipation of the one church, and this will be throughout apparent, in its use of authorities and its modes of argument.'

3 However, as Dan Tomberlin ('Believer's Baptism in the Pentecostal Tradition', *The Ecumenical Review* 67.3 [Oct 2015], 423-435) contends, 'it is impossible to speak of the Pen-

description of the Eucharist is sheerly memorialist, and so is false not only to the catholic tradition and to many of the contemporary renewal movements, but also to classic Pentecostalism (as I have tried to show in my own work).[4] It leaves out altogether any reference to footwashing or the laying on of hands for ordination.[5]

1. History and/or theology

Yong acknowledges that Article 7 'already signals alignment on one side of an extremely contentious debate launched during the Reformation' (135), but insists that he wants to reaffirm the 'basic thrust of ordinance language' even while he seeks a way to 'preserve what is biblical about both discourses' (136) in an idiom better suited to the contemporary global conversation. To that end, he offers a brief sketch of a few highlights in the history of Christian sacramental practice and theology, intending to set the philosophical, theological, and biblical issues in a historical profile.

Reading this sketch, I found myself asking if such a truncated description can really be helpful. Does it in effect only re-inscribe already-familiar (mis) understandings? Does framing the issue in such cursory historical terms in effect obscure the theological issues at stake? I wonder, too, what would be different about this chapter if it began not with the *history* of *John's* baptismal practice but with a properly *theological* account of *Jesus'* experience of baptism. For example, what if it had explored at length the relationship of Christ's baptism to the church's rite of washing and our experience of Spirit baptism?

2. Flesh and spirit, sign and reality

Yong believes that talk about sacraments/ordinances emerges from and returns to a central question: 'if, how, or to what degree spiritual realities can be manifest through material ones' (147). But perhaps the language of 'manifestation' implies a kind of spiritual/material dualism? Peter Leithart argues against 'means of grace' language for just this reason.

> To the extent that the idea of 'means of grace' emphasizes that believers receive real benefit from baptism and the Supper, it is a helpful corrective to feeble theologies that are widespread in the modern church. And, to the extent that the phrase is used to emphasize that God bestows life through water, bread, and wine, it is a useful reminder not to make idols of the elements. In several respects, however, describing sacraments as 'means of grace' can be misleading and adds unnecessary complication.[6]

tecostal perspective on water baptism'. He goes on to suggests that because 'God's act of knowing is efficacious' and the 'capacity for faith is intuitive and essential to human ontology (Rom. 1:19; 2:14-15),' Pentecostals can and should practise infant baptism as a form of 'prevenient grace.'

4 Chris E.W. Green, *Foretasting the Kingdom: Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord's Supper* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012).

5 The former is sure to trouble some 'classical Pentecostals, and the latter is sure to trouble pentecostals/charismatics in the so-called 'liturgical' traditions.

6 Peter J. Leithart, *The Baptized Body* (Moscow, ID: 2007), 14-15.

This language suggests that the sacraments are 'machines that deliver grace',[7] a kind of religious technology required for delivering spiritual benefits. In this way, 'means' language 'obscures the personal dimension of the sacraments'—especially 'when it is allied with a depersonalized misunderstanding of grace'.[8] Insofar as Leithart is right, then we would not want to say that 'divine grace' is 'given and received sacramentally', through 'official' (or unofficial) 'channels' (147). Instead, we would insist, as Yong would want us to do, that 'sacraments are moments of personal encounter with the living God, "trysting places" between God and His people'.[9]

So, to return to the original question, what comes of describing sacraments as material means 'manifesting' spiritual realities? Only if we understand that 'grace' is shorthand for the Spirit of God, who shares with us the divine nature and character, and that 'manifesting' means the sacramental elements—the water, the bread, the wine, the oil—actually participate in the divine life they bring to bear.[10]

Sacraments, like icons, do not 'facilitate access to [spiritual reality that] lies behind or beyond' (155), but gracefully enfold us into personal communion with the Triune God whose presence transfigures these things for us and us with these things. As Leithart avows:

> Sacraments are not 'signs of an invisible relationship with Christ' as if a relationship with Christ might occur without them. Rather, the intricate fabric of exchanged language, gesture, symbol, and action is our personal relationship with God.[11]

It follows, then, that baptism and the Supper are not merely 'windows into the solidarity of ecclesial life' (152), but forms of embodied and spirited solidarity with Christ and his divinely human life.

No doubt Amos disagrees with Leithart and with me at least in part. But if, as he says, 'the ordinances or sacraments are signs of the presence of the Spirit and of the coming reign of God' (159), then we have to ask how a *divine* sign can be *merely* a sign. As Kilian McDonnell explains, Calvin (following Augustine) insists that 'because the eucharistic act is an act of the Holy Spirit in regard to the humanity of Christ, the eucharistic elements cannot be an empty sign, but must have realization and reality'.[12] It seems to me that if we assert the personal, eschatological, and trinitarian character of baptism, the Lord's Supper—and perhaps footwashing and ordination as well—we are unavoidably affirming that they are truly *sacraments*, and not merely ordinances.

In spite of his avowal of ordinance language and his disavowal of any 'magical' or 'automatic' sacramentality, there are signs scattered here and there in this chapter that Yong wants

7 Leithart, *The Baptized Body*, 15.

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10 Think, for example, of Jesus' clothes, which mysteriously mediate his 'virtue' (Mt 9.20) and participate in the transfiguration of his body (Mt 17.2).

11 Leithart, *Baptized Body*, 21.

12 Kilian McDonnell, *John Calvin, the Church and the Eucharist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 269.

to reaffirm the 'fully sacramental' view he has articulated elsewhere, rather than distance himself from it.[13] For example, Yong avows that 'the sign quality of these enactments is eschatological', and therefore affords us 'present glimpses of or portals into the reign of God that is yet to fully arrive' (159). He understands this description as a way of getting beyond the sacrament-versus-ordinance debate and the conventional philosophical and metaphysical frameworks in which that debate has traditionally been carried out. But what he affirms is wholly consistent with the ecumenical consensus about the sacraments.

3. Participation and theosis

How does this theology of the ordinances/sacraments relate to the theologies of church and salvation considered elsewhere in the book (primarily in chapters 5 and 7-10)?[14] There is a strong theology of exorcism and healing at play in this work—in fact, those may be the work's most important constructive contributions. But there is not a clear description of how, if at all, the saving of diseased bodies and oppressed spirits relates to the church's practice of baptism, footwashing, eucharist, and ordination. Salvation, as this work describes it, is 'eschatological', but there is not much exploration of how the ordinances/sacraments participate in and 'manifest' the 'powers of the age to come' (Heb 6.5).

All that to say, I am convinced that Yong's treatment of the ordinances/sacraments—both what he says and what he does not say—calls for a robust theology of participation, one that stresses our personal share in the eschatological blessings gifted to us through the Word and the sacraments in the lively, enlivening presence of the Triune God. In his own words, 'the how of salvation … calls attention to human participation in Christ's life and resurrection by the power of the Spirit' (250). But what is the character, the dynamic of this participation? And what, if anything, does it have to do with the ordinances/sacraments?

Often, when Yong refers to participation, his emphasis falls on *human* agency and action, which means that his account of obedience is shot through with ambiguities. He holds that 'what is redemptive is human participation in the creational work of God in Christ by the power of the Spirit' (291), but it is not clear *how* that participation is redemptive. Consider this pair of statements: 'practices of exorcism and renunciation of the devil thereby achieve the healing work of the Holy Spirit *as people turn away* from the conventions of the world' (156), and 'salvific grace emerges as people confess their sins,

13 See especially Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out On All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 160-162.

14 At least some of the statements of Article 6 of the WAGF SF, the Article that describes the doctrine of the church, fit awkwardly with the other Articles, and with much of what Yong says in his chapter devoted to the church and its mission (Chapter 7). For example, the Article refers to the church as 'the body of Christ and the habitation of God through the Spirit', which 'witnesses to the presence of the kingdom of God in the present world'. But Yong's ecclesiology tends to emphasize the 'fallible and finite character' of the church's witness (184), and the radical freedom of the Spirit over against the church's institutions and orders.

repent of their ways, seek cleansing (through exorcism) from their distorted values and commitments, renounce the father of lies and all that he represents, and embrace their membership among the people of God' (157). I am not quite sure how to make sense of that 'as,' but it is obviously crucial to his account of our salvation. In fact, I suspect that discovering what that 'as' means would be to put a finger on the pulse of this entire work.

Alan Rathe, drawing on a medieval schema, has proposed an evangelical theology of participation that attends to three horizons: participation in *human action*, participation in *divine-through-human action*, and participation in *the life of God*.[15] His reading of Pentecostal scholars (including Amos Yong) has convinced him that there is an emerging sacramentality in the Pentecostal tradition, which has always believed in '*divine-through-human* action'. Rathe believes Pentecostals are finally coming to realize how their experience of being 'between two worlds' leads inevitably toward sacramental practice and theology. We also note that leading Pentecostal scholars are discovering how to appreciate mediation—and in particular sacramental mediation—without losing a sense of 'God's intimate, immediate presence'.[16]

In this way, Pentecostal theology, long regarded as non-sacramental, promises to serve the larger ecumenical community, helping it to 're-envision its way to a richer and more vital grasp of sacrament'.[17] So, in the final analysis, we are given in Yong's systematics at least the broken fragments of a full-bodied sacramentality, and we do well to gather them up.

15 Alan Rathe, *Evangelicals, Worship and Participation: Taking a Twenty-First Century* Reading (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 57.

16 Rathe, *Evangelicals, Worship and Participation,* 265.

17 Rathe, *Evangelicals, Worship and Participation,* 266.