

Book Review

*Mediation of the Spirit: Interventions
in Practical Theology*

Mark J. Cartledge

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Reviewed by Yisrael Vincent, M. Div. Student
Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri

The Mediation of the Spirit, by Mark J. Cartledge, proffers a distinctly Pentecostal perspective to the broader discipline of practical theology. The monograph is part of the Pentecostal Manifestos series that seeks to unite the maturing Pentecostal/Charismatic movements with the larger academic community of theological discourse. Cartledge is uniquely equipped for this task on account of his experience in both the secular and religious university settings. As an ordained priest in the Church of England, he interacts with other traditions, both at the academic level and the spiritual—the latter helping to anchor the former.

The first two chapters of the book clearly reveal his interaction with other traditions and serves as primer for his thesis. Cartledge takes time to develop the broad concept of practical theology as one of many disciplines in the broader academic community. His approach employs a working knowledge of several different academic and spiritual traditions, and how they approach the subject of practical theology. This overview helps the reader better see the terrain of theological discourse in this area. He also takes the time to outline methodologies that shape the scope, agendas, and conclusions of the respective groups. Specifically, presuppositions in accordance with how groups view Scripture,

experience, and the Holy Spirit are shown to vastly affect the practical theology of the different traditions. This allows Cartledge to adduce the merits of a distinctly Pentecostal/Charismatic lens to contemporary dialogue and scholarship. At times, the wealth of contrasting paradigms and sources is difficult to follow clearly. However, Cartledge devotes adequate time to announcing his own views.

Cartledge's pneumatological approach to practical theology rests on the concept of mediation, which he develops over the course of the work. Cartledge defines mediation on several levels for clarity. Chiefly, he argues that the intermediary model preserves both the divine transcendence and immanence of the triune God. His proposed nature of mediation deals with both the divine agent, the Holy Spirit, and the divine medium, primarily the Church (p. 161). His interaction with the Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition observes the distinct experiential nature of the mediation of the Holy Spirit to the Church. Subsequently, the mediation of the Church as an active ameliorating spiritual agent in the world confirms this experience. To fully express this, he elucidates key passages in Acts that deal with the mediation of the Holy Spirit to the church.

The concept of community reception in the mediation of the Holy Spirit, as opposed to individual, is paramount in his handling of the Acts narrative (p. 92). His conclusion regarding a lack of absolute uniformity in physical experiences associated with the interactions with the Holy Spirit is debatable. Especially in his dealings with *glossolalia* whereas a lack of explicit mention appears to equate to a firm assumption of lack of presence (c.f. Acts 8:17, 9:17-18). However, this view does not undermine his proposition of the mediation of the Holy Spirit upon and then through the Church. One of the most poignant aspects of Cartledge's pneumatology is its coupling with soteriology. In this dynamic, the author shows the mediation of the Holy Spirit as more holistic than simply offering freedom from physical and political bondage—as frequently adopted by other schools of thought such as Liberation theology. The work of the Holy Spirit is adequately shown to be explicitly Christ-centered, something that pluralism and post-modernism have neglected (p. 118).

Cartledge maps these mediations through a second hand case study of a small congregation. Through this study, he presents a framework for his broader observations. Furthermore, his Pneumatological and Christological assertions expose some of the prevalent weaknesses in modern practical theology. Most alarming is the functional deism that pervades some practical theological discussions. This perspective either avoids talk of the divine entirely or marginalizes Trinitarian distinctions through encompassing language. Cartledge aptly points out that this approach effectively becomes anthropological discourse in the guise of theology (p. 131). Cartledge, however, admits some of his own limitations in using a second hand account, and is

honest about questions that may be left unanswered based on unavailable information.

What is gained for Cartledge in this study is evidence that the mediation of the Spirit is nuanced by the *Sitz im Leben* of the congregation. For Cartledge, this does not pose a lapse towards relativity because of the soteriological nature of the Holy Spirit. Instead, these premises have a legitimizing effect for different expressions of ecclesiology and the interaction with the Holy Spirit. They also overlap theological inquiry with anthropological and sociological methodology. Cartledge is sensitive to the danger of compromise in these areas, especially where topics such as the real and universal issue of sin are considered taboo. His foundational approach to Scripture helps prevent capitulation to such trends. In this way, he effectively initiates a dialogue that gives serious consideration to Scripture, experience, and the growing discipline of practical theology.

A unique conclusion to Cartledge's work is the inclusion of a Pentecostal Manifesto for Practical Theology that solidifies some of his main propositions and invites further discussion. The challenge for practical theology to more deeply engage with the disciplines of biblical and systematic theology is especially refreshing. Overall, *The Mediation of the Spirit* tenders a candid look into the current condition of practical theology, as a whole, and shows how a deliberate Pentecostal perspective may help address real deficiencies in the discipline. Although the book's technical approach is tailored more towards the academy, it merits attention to issues that directly translate to the local church. I would recommend it for seminarians and lay-theologians alike.