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**The Holy Spirit in Christian Dogma, Pentecostalism, and Philosophy**

This collection, edited by Michael Welker, contains contributions to a consultation entitled “Pneumatology: Exploring the Work of the Spirit from Contemporary Perspectives” held in New York City in November 2004. It aims at providing an interdisciplinary approach to the topic, and includes essays under three separate sections: “Re-conceiving the Spirit, Its Personhood and Workings”; “The Spirit in Pentecostal Theology”; and “The Spirit: Connecting Theological, Scientific and Philosophical Insights.” Contributors include non-Pentecostal theologians, such as James Dunn and Bernd Oberdorfer; Pentecostals, such as Velli-Matti Karkkainen, Frank Macchia, Grant Wacker, and Amos Yong; and social scientists and philosophers, such as Margaret Poloma, Donald and Anna York, and Welker. The consultation was supported by the John Templeton Foundation, which has an interest in promoting research on “spiritual realities,” a concept that is complicated and difficult to wrestle with in an academic setting. Each contributor offers an approach and perspective that thrusts the notion of spirit and spirituality (if not always Spirit and Christianity) into the foreground in a manner in which it may not be simply dismissed as vague or nonscientific.

In this collection, one encounters the expected questions, most of them dealt with competently and sympathetically—sympathetic to traditional views as well as to more creative or universalist views. The title of the collection entitles the reader to believe that the perspective of Pentecostalism forms a major source and concern in the work, and by and large this is the case. The contributions address the following major questions: the relationship and role of the Spirit in the Christian notion of the Trinity; the challenge of doing science, while recognizing the existence of spirit; the particularistic and universalistic understandings of the Spirit’s work; the relationship between the immediate and spectacular work of the Spirit, and his more mundane ongoing work and role in church and life; and the diminishing role of pneumatic and charismatic phenomena in mainline Pentecostal denominations.

Unusually, it is a non-Pentecostal theologian and a sociologist who direct the most challenging questions to Western Pentecostalism. Dunn argues for a notion of Spirit in Christianity that cannot be institutionally restricted as too dangerous or too unpredictable, a Spirit that shakes the church and individual to the core. This is a view of the Spirit that is true to the representation in both Testaments of the Christian Scriptures. Poloma’s critique of the Assemblies of God from a sociological perspective implies that this vast Pentecostal institution may be applying just such a restriction: while asserting its own Pentecostal identity, it actually operates much like its Evangelical peers in terms of worldview and style. This implies that the future of pneumatic and dynamic Pentecostalism might lie with “immigrant” churches, or with Pentecostalism in the non-Western and non-modern South, and not with the older denominations of the West.

Kathryn Tanner discusses the tension between an understanding of the Spirit that sees his work as immediate and spectacular versus that which sees him "work
gradually, and without final resolution, in and through the usual fully human and fully fallible, often messy and conflict-ridden public processes of give-and-take in ordinary life” such as learning, discussing, and dialogue (p. 87). The point is the tension between authority of pneumatically powerful personalities as opposed to authority of institutions, councils, and theologies. This is, in essence, the Anabaptist-classical Protestant divide that has not been resolved since the Reformation. Tanner’s discussion may be of relevance to older Pentecostal denominations (such as the Apostolic Faith Mission in South Africa and Elim Pentecostal Church in the United Kingdom), which have recently adopted a strange mixture of “the New Apostolic paradigm” and their original presbyterian church-government systems. It will be interesting to observe how the inherent tension between the authority of “apostolic” personalities and of the wider charismatic community (as represented by councils) plays out in these sorts of scenarios.

The question of the nature of the Spirit obviously raises questions of personhood and Trinity. Karkkainen, while arguing for a healthy Trinitarian framework to prevent disconnection between the Spirit and Christ, and the Spirit and the Creator, takes full cognizance of the reality that a Trinitarian approach limits dialogue possibilities with other religions, especially Muslims. However, in his critique of a pneumatology that considers the Spirit to represent universality while the Son represents particularity, he sees the Spirit as closely tied to Christ and the cross. Oberdorfer, while portraying a strongly Christian-Trinitarian commitment, argues for a notion of the Spirit that does not overemphasize his personhood, claiming that visioning the Spirit as not just a public person but also a “field of power” of the divine activity is a better representation than pure “personality” (pp. 36-40).

Macchia and Wacker address the important issues (to Pentecostals) of personal spiritual empowerment, the former in arguing for the centrality of the experience of the baptism in the Spirit as a central Pentecostal identifier, and the latter in terms of the relationship between such personal empowerment and this-worldly practicality in the ministry of the empowered. In these two contributions, one encounters something of an idealized picture of Pentecostalism, a sort of Pentecostalism that one encounters much less frequently in the West than many would hope.

Other contributions are more abstract, discussing the notion of “spirit” in philosophy, creation, and humanity rather than the particularly Christian notion of Spirit. These essays provide valuable insights for Pentecostal scholars interested in entering into the science-religion and philosophy-theology debates and dialogues. It will be interesting to see whether Pentecostal scholarship, if it does engage in those areas of science, will manage to present a significantly distinctive contribution to Evangelicalism.

The contributions in this collection, and the consultation from which they stem, reveal a bold new interest for Pentecostal scholarship in the West, drawing it from the incessant search for distinctions and from musings on their relationship to the dominant Evangelicalism of the North American context. It is also exciting to encounter contributions in Pentecostal theology from the discipline of systematic theology (Karkkainen, Macchia, and Yong), since sometimes it appears that so much Pentecostal theologizing involves Biblical and historical disciplines more than any others. Having said that, what is missing in the collection, with the exception of Dunn’s essay, is a serious Biblical approach to the notion of Spirit. Church history records far too many instances of “spirit” movements that marginalized themselves by departing from the foundations and boundaries of the commonly recognized text. I am sure Pentecostals can be scholars of Spirit and of Word without becoming Evangelicals.

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