

Introduction

What do we understand by the word “God”? What comes spontaneously to mind when we hear this term? Most likely the answer will be: *Father*. Or perhaps even more emphatically: the *Super Father*, who transcends the world and to whom we pray. What is sure, however, is that the word “God” does not lead us *in the first place to think of the Holy Spirit*. This discloses a quite fundamental deficiency of our conscious faith and of our piety.

—Heribert Mühlen¹

HISTORICALLY, PNEUMATOLOGY HAS HAD little influence on the Christian doctrine of God. In particular, although Christians throughout the ages have defended the deity of the Spirit, most have not adequately taken the economic activity of the Spirit into consideration when formulating the doctrine of the divine attributes. Few theologians have realized, as Jürgen Moltmann has, that “an understanding of the unique personhood of the Spirit is . . . decisive for the understanding of God in general.”² Those who have realized this have begun to develop the implications of this notion. In many cases however, pneumatology has been treated as an appendage to or separate from the doctrine of God and separate from the doctrine of the divine attributes in particular. In an effort to correct the historical lack of influence that pneumatology has had on the doctrine of the divine attributes, this book advocates and explores the potential for considering the doctrine of the divine attributes in light of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, that is, in light of a pneumatological approach to the doctrine of God. In advocating for this approach, I seek to extend and develop the revisions to classical theism that many

1. Mühlen, “Holy Spirit,” 11 (original emphasis).

2. Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 286.

contemporary theologians are already proposing. The overall argument of this book is that a pneumatological approach to the doctrine of God recovers an emphasis on divine immanence, which has been marginalized by classical theism's privileging of divine transcendence. This is of great significance because a person's concept of God shapes not only how they live and worship, but also their whole worldview.

TRANSCENDENCE AND IMMANENCE

Some might question why I frame my argument in terms of transcendence and immanence. Pointing to a possible concern, Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson speak of "the now discredited spatial metaphor of transcendence and immanence."³ These theologians are rightly concerned that the metaphors should not be taken as referring to *space*. However, the metaphors do not have to be taken this way; hence, immanence and transcendence can still serve to express the difference between classical theism and the results of pneumatological perspectives on the divine attributes. Even Grenz and Olson continue to use the metaphors of transcendence and immanence (although not spatially) in their descriptions of contemporary theologians throughout their *Twentieth-Century Theology*. Beyond their book, discussions regarding the transcendence of God and the immanence of God are prevalent in contemporary doctrines of God. Some theologians who write on the doctrine of God even include a specific chapter devoted to this issue.⁴ So, what is meant by "immanence" and "transcendence"?

Immanence must be defined together with its counterpart, transcendence. As noted above, these ideas can present spatial images, depicting God as being either above and beyond the world, or close to the world. However, in theological terms transcendence does not refer simply to space, but primarily to the Creator/creation distinction. That is, God is "beyond" the world in as much as God is other than it. God's transcendence is especially seen as one contrasts the attributes of God with those of creation. Many theologians speak of God's infinity, eternity, immensity, omnipresence, aseity, simplicity, immutability, and impassibility. These are all generally considered expressions of God's transcendence.

3. Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology*, 309.

4. For example, Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, 79–102; Erickson, *God the Father Almighty*, 256–77; Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 103–17; and Henry, *God, Revelation, Authority*, 6:35–51.

Immanence may, to a very limited extent, be considered the opposite of transcendence; however, it is important to realize that God is able to be immanent to creation precisely because God is transcendent from it.⁵

Immanence also pertains to God's interaction with the world, often with respect to the providence of God. Those who discuss God's immanence are sometimes responding to deism, which sees God as the Creator but nothing more. In this manner, Borden Bowne defines immanence with respect to providence: "We mean that God is the omnipresent ground of all finite existence and activity. The world . . . continually depends upon and is ever upheld by the ever-living, ever-present, ever-working God."⁶ This again is a reminder that transcendence and immanence are not opposites. Rather, they should be thought of as correlates. If God did not transcend creation, God could not be immanent to creation.

DIVINE IMMANENCE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

Pneumatology naturally serves as a corrective to classical theism's privileging of divine transcendence over divine immanence. Theologians frequently emphasize the immanence of God through the Holy Spirit. Without consideration of the Spirit, God can seem distant or in the past. In contrast, although the Spirit is often thought of as elusive, the Spirit is "God with us" today. As Clark Pinnock expresses it, "Most wonderfully, the Spirit is God's face turned toward us and God's presence abiding with us, the agency by which God reaches out and draws near, the power that creates and heals."⁷ In the Spirit, God draws close to the world in mutual relation with it. Following this line of thought Michael Welker writes, "The Holy Spirit brings about intimacy with God. Indeed the Spirit of God is this intimacy."⁸

5. Although God does not have a gender, I follow the historic practice of using masculine pronouns in reference to "God" and the "Spirit." This poses numerous difficulties; however, using impersonal or feminine pronouns is also problematic (Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 15–17, cf. 251 n. 20). Unfortunately, it is not always possible to avoid using personal pronouns in reference to God. For example, there is some precedence for using the cumbersome term "Godself" in reference to God (in place of "himself"), but none that I am aware of for speaking of the Spirit "Spiritself."

6. Bowne, *Immanence of God*, 3; cf. v. Similarly, Callen, *Discerning the Divine*, 207; and Owen, *Concepts of Deity*, 41.

7. Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 14.

8. Welker, *God the Spirit*, 331.

The immanence of God in the Spirit is apparent when one considers the Spirit's contact function and the image of the Spirit as the touch of God—one of the two hands of God (as Irenaeus would say) reaching out to creation. In the Christ event, the Spirit touches Jesus as the Spirit affects the incarnation, anoints Jesus at his baptism, and empowers him for ministry. Beyond this, Christ sends the Spirit from the Father and the Spirit comes and empowers the church. The Spirit also leads people to the Son and to return praise to the Father. The Spirit is the touch of God upon Christ, and similarly, upon the church. Kilian McDonnell clarifies, "Without the Spirit God remains a private self, an isolated glory, an island apart. In this sense the Spirit is sovereign and all inclusive, the universal horizon, the exclusive point where we touch God and God touches us from within."⁹ Molly Marshall extends this notion beyond ecclesial life to the cosmological level as well: "The Spirit is the point of contact between the life of God and the world that is yet coming to be. Described as 'divine nearness,' the Spirit makes possible the universal contact between God and history, between God and all creation."¹⁰ The Spirit is clearly immanent to humanity and creation at large. Given this, Hendrikus Berkhof remarks, "So intimate is the Spirit to man's life that we sometimes feel ourselves on the brink of pantheism."¹¹ As described in pneumatologies, God looks somewhat different (i.e., more immanent) than the God of classical theism.

By suggesting that a consideration of the Spirit highlights the immanence of God, I do not mean to suggest that the Spirit is not transcendent. As affirmed above, God's immanence presupposes God's transcendence. This is true of the Spirit as well, given that the Spirit is a divine person. One must affirm both the immanent transcendence of the Spirit as well as the transcendent immanence of the Spirit.¹² Accordingly, balancing his affirmation of the immanence of the Spirit, Pinnock correctly states, "Most essentially Spirit is transcendent and divine, not mere flesh; it is the energy of life itself."¹³ Too often though, transcendence is taken to refer to much more than the Creator/creation distinction. Further, God

9. McDonnell, *Other Hand of God*, 119 (see further, McDonnell's ch. 10, "God Beyond the Self of God"; and ch. 12, "The Spirit is the Touch of God").

10. Marshall, *Joining the Dance*, 13.

11. Berkhof, *Holy Spirit*, 95.

12. Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 31, 47; Johnson, *She Who Is*, 147.

13. Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 14.

is seen to be unaffected by the material world and that which happens in it. A renewed emphasis on the Spirit in the doctrine of God overcomes this misunderstanding of divine transcendence.

A PENTECOSTAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

As far as my ecclesial aims and context are concerned, this book aims to be a work in ecumenical theology in the sense that I draw on theologians from across the Christian traditions. At the same time, it is a work in evangelical theology, in as much as I am an evangelical writing from within an evangelical context and in as much as my proposals are consistent with and build upon the revisions to classical theism that many evangelicals are already making. More specifically, while much of contemporary pneumatology ignores Pentecostal theology, this book is, at least in part, a contribution to Pentecostal theology.¹⁴ This complements my intention to do ecumenical theology because, although some denominations bear the label “Pentecostal” today, Pentecostalism has always been an ecumenical movement that spans across denominational boundaries, even those of East and West.

Thus far, Pentecostals have done little to develop the doctrine of God, and have primarily borrowed from the wider evangelical community. The lack of development in this area of theology is not surprising. Historically, Pentecostals have tended to distrust academic theology with the result that, as Néstor Medina observes, “Pentecostalism’s theological content remains in the faith *experience* of the people manifest in their oral traditions, and from which theological discourse is yet to emerge.”¹⁵ When Pentecostals write systematic theologies—and some would question if one may properly use the designation “Pentecostal” here—they have generally been written for an audience of lay people or as introductory text books for students in theology and they are often written exclusively for Pentecostals. As a result, most theologians would agree with David Bundy who observes, “It is clear that the genre

14. Consider Coakley’s review of Rogers where she critiques him for neglecting Pentecostal theology (Review of *After the Spirit*, 432). Pentecostals consistently voice this same concern in book reviews published in the journal *Pneuma*. As a recent example see Studebaker’s review of Cole (Review of *He Who Gives Life*, 147).

15. Medina, “Pentecostalism(s),” 103 (original emphasis).

of [Pentecostal] systematic theology is still in its earliest phase.”¹⁶ Terry Cross affirms this specifically with respect to the doctrine of God, suggesting that “Pentecostals have been deficient in crafting a doctrine of God.”¹⁷ Outside of the doctrine of God, however, contemporary Pentecostals (such as Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, Amos Yong, and Frank Macchia) have taken great strides to develop theological loci from a pneumatological perspective. This book takes a cue from these theologians by extending the pneumatological approach to theology into the doctrine of God and it thereby takes steps toward correcting the deficiency that Cross identifies in Pentecostal theology.

Pentecostals are currently struggling to define just what it means to do Pentecostal theology. However, given the growing awareness of the diversity of global Pentecostalism (including theological diversity), there will probably never be just one way of doing Pentecostal theology and there may never be one clear Pentecostal theology.¹⁸ Nevertheless, this book is a work in Pentecostal theology in the sense that it is ecumenical (as Pentecostalism is ecumenical) and in the sense that it draws on Pentecostal theology and arises from my Pentecostal experience. Throughout the book I do consider the typical theological issues that Pentecostals have a particular interest in—Spirit Baptism, speaking in tongues, and spiritual gifts—and I draw on insights from Pentecostal theologians. Even though these theologies and theologians are not my primary focus, this book is also a Pentecostal contribution to the doctrine of God in as much as I find myself within, and have been raised in, a Pentecostal tradition and my Pentecostal experience shapes all of my thinking and worldview. More than any doctrine or theological metaphor (e.g., Spirit Baptism) that might be distinctive of Pentecostalism, the experience of the Spirit holds Pentecostalism together.¹⁹ There is no

16. Bundy, “Systematic Theology,” 101. Cf. Pinnock who writes, “There is not at present a full-blown Pentecostal systematic theology, although work is underway on it” (Pinnock, “Divine Relationality,” 3).

17. Cross, “Rich Feast of Theology,” 46.

18. On the diversity of global Pentecostalism see Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 10. On the struggle to define “Pentecostal” see Anderson, “When Is a Pentecostal Not a Pentecostal?” 58–63.

19. Yong, *Spirit Poured Out*, 145. Macchia chronicles the attempts that theologians have made to express what makes Pentecostalism distinct. Macchia himself proposes that the metaphor of Spirit baptism is the central distinctive of Pentecostal theology (Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 19–60).

doubt that my Pentecostal experience has lead to the general thrust of this book. If it had not been for the influence of Pentecostalism, I probably would not have even pursued this particular topic. Colin Gunton notes that Western theology “has notoriously neglected the work of the Spirit in our life and thinking, and that is why there have been outbreaks of Pentecostal church life and belief which serve as a just reproach to the one-sidedness of the Western tradition.”²⁰ This is the case with this project in as much as this work arises from within Pentecostalism. In this sense (as well as those mentioned above) it is a contribution to Pentecostal theology.

OVERVIEW

As noted above, the overall argument of this book is that integrating pneumatology into the doctrine of the divine attributes facilitates a retrieval of divine immanence from the margins it occupied in classical theism. To begin moving toward this conclusion, the next chapter further describes classical theism and shows that it neglects pneumatology in its doctrine of God and privileges divine transcendence. Classical theism has expressed many important truths about the reality of God. Nevertheless, even classical theists should realize, with Eric Johnson and Douglas Huffman (who are classical theists), that “any discussion” of the attributes of God “is open to improvement.”²¹ Hence, chapter 3 places the contribution of this book within the context of contemporary attempts to revise classical theism. More specifically, the chapter provides a review of how process theologians, evangelical theologians, and trinitarian theologians critique and revise classical theism and displays how few contemporary theologians have begun developing a pneumatological approach to the doctrine of the divine attributes. Chapter 4 continues by recommending a pneumatological approach to the divine attributes. The remainder of the book illustrates how a consideration of the passion, presence, and power of the Holy Spirit provide a way to revise the classical accounts of divine impassibility, immutability (and omnipresence), and omnipotence. I limit myself to discussing these attributes primarily because they are key attributes in classical theism as well as in contemporary discussions concerning the doctrine of the divine attributes.

20. Gunton, “Holy Spirit,” 79.

21. Johnson and Huffman, “God of Historic Christianity,” 36.

My proposed revisions to classical theism are consistent with classical theism's affirmation of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. They are also consistent with contemporary trinitarian theology in that they are based on the fact that the identity of God is Father, Son, *and Holy Spirit*. In contrast to the frequent neglect of pneumatology in the doctrine of the divine attributes throughout history, as you progress through this book I hope that it will become apparent, as Elizabeth Johnson observes, that "so comprehensive are the operations of the Spirit and so vast the corresponding human experiences by which the Spirit's presence is known that one might think that speaking of God had exhausted its material once the Spirit had been considered."²²

SAMPLE

22. Johnson, *She Who Is*, 149.