Pentecostal Spirituality as Theory and Praxis of Theology

The lived experience of Pentecostals is constantly running forth and back between theory and practice. Pentecostal spirituality is a social practice that draws from theology, both experiential and rational, and from daily experiences, habits, and conduct. It creates a subjectivity that serves as the basis for intellectual reflection and social actions. It is situated between the rigidity of theology and the freedom of subjective actions. In this way, pentecostal spirituality is continually produced by the faithful believers, and it serves as the basis of their labor, work, and action.

In this issue of Pneuma, we have curated a set of six articles that reflect these two distinguishable but intertwined dimensions of pentecostal spirituality. The opening set of three essays first deepens our understanding of when ancient Christians began to pray directly to the Holy Spirit, then explores what happens to believers’ memory when they are ecstatically grasped by God’s Spirit, and subsequently offers fresh insight into the age-old debate concerning the baptism of the Holy Spirit as subsequent to conversion. This first set of essays is theological, faith seeking understanding. It also provides glimpses into how pentecostal spirituality is produced.

Pentecostal spirituality is not only produced, but it is also productive. Pentecostal spirituality is deployed as a key to interpreting the political, economic, social, and scholarly actions of three major leaders in the religious market, politics, and scholarship. These three essays thus seek to comprehend how the Spirit has manifested Godself in the life and work of a religious leader in the United States, a political leader in Australia, and a leading scholar in Ghana. Together, they accent the pragmatic orientation to life or leadership that is characteristic of global Pentecostalism.

It is germane to add quickly that none of the essays in this second set seeks to present the figures the authors studied as having a direct link to God or that each directly knows what God wants. None of the studies sees the success of its key figure as a direct, unmediated result of God’s blessings or anointing. Nonetheless, the studies demonstrate that we cannot adequately understand the practices, behavior, actions, scholarship, products, or services of the three figures apart from their pentecostal spirituality. Pentecostal spirituality is a source of empowerment for creativity and innovation.
Before we proceed to give the title and theme of each of the six essays, let us locate this issue in *Pneuma*'s context that encompasses it and the one before it. The last double issue (43.3–4), “The Spirit throughout the Canon: A Survey of Biblical Authors’ Approaches to the Divine Spirit,” focused on understanding the presence and work of the Holy Spirit throughout the Bible. This current single issue continues the journal’s recent focus on providing constructive interpretations of the presence of the divine Spirit not only in the biblical canon but also in the life of the world, life-in-spirit, and in the labor, work, and action of Pentecostals. In the current edition, the presence and work of the Holy Spirit are interpretatively extended beyond the confines of the Bible without transcending or escaping it.

The matter of early Christian prayer to the Holy Spirit is the heart of the first essay in this edition, providing crucial insights into the history of early Christian worship. By examining extant records of the first three centuries of the Christian era, Boris Paschke, in “Four Early Christian Documents from Egypt with regard to Prayer to the Holy Spirit,” portrays the historical origins of the practice of praying to the Holy Spirit. From Paschke’s work we learn the probable first dates of addressing the Holy Spirit in prayers, including liturgical prayers of thanksgiving, prayers of praise, and hymns.

Clint Tibbs’s “Possession Amnesia: Patterns of Experience, Evidence for Spirits” takes readers into a different dimension of life in the spirit. He writes about occurrences of possession amnesia; this is a case of believers not remembering what transpired when they were thickly, ecstatically in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Tibbs has marshalled biblical, historical, and comparative religious data to support his thesis. As he puts it,

In the history of early Christian prophecy, possession amnesia played a pivotal role in the discernment of prophecy among members of the early church. By the end of the second century, assessments of Montanist prophecy ruled that speaking in ecstasy and possession amnesia were signs of false prophecy only, and opponents of Montanus charged him with demonic possession. Taxonomy for ecstasy determined the ethics of prophecy. Vision ecstasy guaranteed God’s presence, and unconscious ecstasy meant that God was absent.

We bring the theoretical-theological dimension of the twofold presentation of pentecostal spirituality to a close with the essay, “‘Two-Stage’ Spirit Reception in the Writings of Paul” by Daniel J. Baker. Working from Robert Menzies’ 2017 article that argues that the pentecostal doctrine of subsequence is compatible
with Pauline pneumatology, Baker examines multiple texts to strengthen the conclusion that Paul bears witness to a “two-stage model” of Spirit reception. Baker goes further to offer insights into how pentecostal theologians should rethink the definition of post-conversion Spirit reception. He argues that if his “reading of the Pauline epistles is correct, then it inspires new ways of seeing the organic unity of the NT’s pneumatology. With Paul and Luke as advocates of the same ‘two-stage’ model of Spirit reception, fresh avenues open to us of reading Paul informed by Luke and Luke informed by Paul ... Their respective emphases remain, but their essential unity becomes even greater” (p. 59).


Robert McBain’s essay, “Oral Roberts: A Religious Innovator,” uses the religious economic paradigm to examine the runaway success of Reverend Oral Roberts. McBain offers fresh insights into Roberts’s pentecostal spirituality by placing him in a religious marketplace framework. The essay focuses on four areas of Roberts’s ministry: (a) Roberts’s innovative use of television to reach his intended audience; (b) his bold address of the ills of America’s racially and socially divided society; (c) the way Roberts provided the consumers of his services and products with the kind of experience that brought them back over and over; and (d) the global scope of Roberts’s religious enterprise.

What Roberts did in the religious market in the United States, Prime Minister Scott Morrison of Australia is attempting to replicate in his country’s political space. Denise Austin, David Perry, and Steven Fogarty’s essay, “Politics and Pentecostalism in Australia: Prime Minister Scott Morrison as the ‘Miracle Man’,” provides a timely account of how the Prime Minister leveraged his pentecostal spirituality in attaining the highest political office in Australia. Austin et al. show that Prime Minister Morrison deployed not only his pentecostal experience but also “strong leadership, practical pragmatism, marketing acumen, and a narrative of hope” (insert page number here based on proofs).

Indeed, the six essays in this edition of Pneuma offer a lens into pentecostal spirituality that reveals it in its salient pragmatic orientation and subtle the-
ological reasoning. In all six cases, we observe a constant movement between theory and praxis, theology and experience, intellectual reflection and freedom of subjective actions, and tradition and innovation.

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