CHAPTER FOUR

TOWARD A PNEUMATOLOGICAL TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY:
AMOS YONG, THE SPIRIT, AND THE TRINITY

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The Trinity plays an important role in Amos Yong's constructive theological projects. In *Spirit-Word-Community*, Yong uses the Trinity to develop a Pentecostal approach to theological hermeneutics. In *Hospitality and the Other*, he gains inspiration from the Trinity for his proposal for a theology of religious hospitality. On the doctrine itself, his most significant contribution consists in what might be called a pneumatological trinitarian theology—an approach that starts with the Spirit. This essay outlines and evaluates his engagement with this doctrine in respect to biblical pneumatology, pneumatology and the Trinity, Oneness and trinitarian Pentecostalism, and theological hermeneutics. The essay also critically and constructively engages Yong's work on the Trinity with the goal of building on his effort to develop a Pentecostal and pneumatological trinitarian theology.

1. Yong's Biblical Pneumatology

*Spirit-Word-Community* is the fullest presentation of Yong's trinitarian theology. It is a vision of the Trinity shaped by a theology of the Holy Spirit. Yong's goal: to present a "trinitarian metaphysics that is relational, realistic, and communal" on the basis of a "foundational pneumatology."\(^1\) Reflecting his Pentecostal sensitivities, Yong's trinitarian theology begins with biblical pneumatology and then moves to a "pneumatological and foundational theology."\(^2\) Three characteristics of the Spirit form the basis of his pneumatological trinitarian theology: the relationality, rationality, and *dunamis* of the Holy Spirit.

First, for Yong, relationality refers to the Spirit’s role in mediating Jesus' incarnate life and ministry, a believer’s relationship with God, and finally

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1 SWC, p. 25.
2 Ibid., p. 25.
the community of the church. The Spirit's relational work has vertical and horizontal dimensions. The Spirit both establishes the relations between humanity and God and between the human community and the world. In respect to Jesus, the relationality of the Spirit emerges in two ways. First, the Spirit plays a mediatorial role in the Incarnation. Yong describes the Spirit as the “relational medium that makes possible the incarnational and paschal mysteries.” The relational role of the Spirit in the Incarnation is to unite the divine and human natures in Jesus Christ. Second, the Spirit anoints and empowers Jesus’ public life and ministry. The cross and resurrection most fully reveal the relational nature of the Spirit in the life of Jesus. On the cross, the Spirit is the medium for Jesus’ faithfulness to the Father. Afterward, the Spirit raises Jesus to new life. In Jesus’ life, the Spirit enables his life of devotion to the Father (vertical) and his ministry of salvation for the world (horizontal).

Yong insists that the relational role of the Spirit in Jesus parallels the Spirit’s work in grace. Experiencing the union of the Incarnation, anointing, and resurrection through the Spirit, Christ offers universal participation in this grace through baptism in the Spirit. As the Spirit of Pentecost, the Spirit becomes the foundation for the creation of the body of Christ, the church; the Spirit baptizes “believers into the body of Christ.” The Spirit’s work here corresponds to the union of the divine and human in Jesus Christ. The Spirit reconciles human beings to God and to each other. The mediation of the Spirit produces Christian communities where people experience the renewal of life and overcome the alienation and exploitation that characterize human social relations.

Second, the rationality of the Spirit refers to the Spirit’s role in making the world and the purpose of human life intelligible. The rationality of the Spirit derives from the Spirit’s agency in creating the world. The Old Testament creation and wisdom texts along with Jewish inter-testamental wisdom literature linked biblical wisdom with the Spirit and the Word of God. The New Testament carries on this association, though as Yong notes with Christology playing a crucial role. Yong refers to the Spirit as the “mind of God” and the “intelligibility of divinity.” But what exactly does

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3 Ibid., p. 30.
4 Ibid., p. 32.
5 Ibid., pp. 28–30 and 32.
6 Ibid., p. 30.
7 Ibid., pp. 30–32.
8 Ibid., pp. 31–34.
9 Ibid., p. 37.
10 Ibid., p. 42.