

REVIEW: ANDREW GABRIEL'S BOOK  
*THE LORD IS THE SPIRIT*

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One of the most valuable contributions of Andrew Gabriel in *The Lord is the Spirit* is to reveal the limitation of classical theism, which is heavily Christo-centric. He thoroughly examines ancient theologians including Thomas Aquinas to contemporary theologians including Karl Barth and Jürgen Moltmann in order to demonstrate the lack of or insufficient reference to the presence of the Spirit in the discourse of the doctrine of God.

I appreciate Gabriel's critiques of classical theism's attributes, namely divine immutability, divine impassibility, and divine omnipotence by lifting up the role, the nature and the work of the Spirit which has not been sufficiently recognized. By carefully and broadly reviewing the work of classical theism and that of the responses, he successfully demonstrates that the classical understanding of divine attributes needs to be revised.

The notion of the suffering of the Holy Spirit, though it is not the same suffering as humans, is helpful in that the Spirit has passions that are affected by humans and other creatures. Such passion of the Spirit or ability to feel pain enhances our understanding of the incarnational nature of God as enfleshment, as bodily being and that of the world as the body of God.

The understanding of the Spirit as movement, drawing the biblical meanings of *pneuma* and *ruach*, and other symbolic images of the Spirit as water, wind and air challenges the notion of the triune God as immutable (p. 156). I find this thought of the Spirit as in motion by unsettling the classical theistic notion quite settling and amusing. Such a view is helpful not only in our own Christian dialogues with each other in different denominations but also important to bring forth in inter-faith dialogues with other religious traditions. In *Three Ways of Grace* (United Church Publishing House, 2011), a United Church of Canada's study on the Trinity, I argued for a mutual dialogue between Trinity and Taoism when the Trinity is viewed as in motion and the Yin and Yang in Taoism are also in motion, once a dualistic thinking is denounced. I think Gabriel would agree with my treatment of the Trinity,

illuminated by non-Western Taoistic wisdom, which is beyond androcentrism by encompassing cosmic creation, as he notes the Pentecostals in the Majority world, those who are less influenced by Western theology have recognized the presence of the Spirit in the world of nature in non-dualistic ways (p. 173). I like his articulation of the Spirit entailing a contradicting nature, which involves omnipresent and ever changing as well as being in different places in different times, fully present yet not fully active (pp. 176-177).

My most uneasy and troublesome thought, however, comes from Gabriel's focus on the Spirit as entirely masculine. I have never read a book that is completely oblivious to the view of the Spirit as feminine. The absence of introducing ancient and recent scholarship on the feminine imagery of the Spirit, mostly coming from feminist theology but not limited to it, makes this work seem somehow uneven and outdated. The God spoken of in the Hebrew Bible, generally regarded as God the Father, is spoken of also as a mother giving birth to her people in Deuteronomy 32:18, as one of many examples in the Hebrew Bible. In Luke 13:34 and in the parallel passages of the other Synoptic Gospels, Jesus compares his care for Jerusalem to that of a mother hen for her chickens. Furthermore, Jesus has been seen as the incarnation of Divine Wisdom (*sophia*, grammatically feminine in Greek). So it can be easily demonstrated that the Holy Spirit has been associated not only with a masculine divinity but also a feminine attribute of divinity.

I can see Gabriel's work as innovative and original and it offers much potential to future readership and scholarship. Given the fact that his very motivation for writing this book comes from his own recognition of the neglect of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit proves a worthwhile approach to our scholarship which discloses a limitation of the conventional and dominant attributes of God from christological perspectives in the discipline of doctrinal theology.

However, at the same time, I wonder if his work results in a neglect of the feminine attribute of God as the Holy Spirit by focusing on the conventional and dominant attributes of God as masculine. I wonder if his reason for "following the historic practice of using masculine pronouns in reference to God and the Spirit" (p. 3) sits right or well with any readers when he ignores the historic practice of using inclusive and gender neutral language in academic institutions and in church communities in liturgy.

Feminine images of God have emerged out of a long struggle for recognition in church and society and are supported by the historic evidence rooted in the Bible since the beginning of Christianity and throughout the centuries. It is a well-known fact that the images and attributes of God have always been ambiguous and fluid, and never been fixed and unilateral. However, we are also aware that the use of masculine images of God have been dominant and this has served to legitimate patriarchal power and oppression. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza makes this point, “if language determines the limits of our world, then sacred androcentric, that is, grammatically masculine, language symbolizes and determines our perception of ultimate human and divine reality” (*Bread not Stone*, xii). That is precisely why we should not unilaterally speak of God as masculine but instead open ourselves to the mystery of God beyond gender, and certainly beyond a male God.

Quite frankly, I am startled by his oblivious treatment in regards to this issue. For example, the various times, 19 times to be exact, when he cites the work of Elisabeth Johnson who intentionally and theologically names God as “She who Is” he never bothers positioning her in this light, thus, failing to point to the important development of feminist theology and feminist scholarship. To be fair to Johnson, I wonder if it is even possible to understand her theology fully apart from and in opposition to the mystery of God in feminist theological discourse. Therefore, I would like to hear Gabriel’s view on this matter! That is my first question.

On one hand, Gabriel develops an argument quite successfully to make a point regarding the doctrine of the divine attributes from the perspective of pneumatology, drawing from biblical insights. For example, on page 157, the divine attribute of immutability, he argues, “is based on a preconceived notion of the absolute immutability of God rather than any biblical or doctrinal argument.” On the other hand, however, I would argue that he falls into this preconceived notion of the dominant understanding of God as masculine without attending to sufficient feminist biblical scholarship and liturgical movements of reforming and resisting this understanding, advanced and supported by various groups around the world.

I can see Gabriel’s work being more appreciated and relevant in the pastoral and worshipping contexts. His interpretation of the anointing of Jesus by the Spirit can be lifted up and enacted as a visible and

symbolic sign of the presence of the Spirit at work through the pouring out of water during baptism, through the sacrament of anointing of the sick and that of anointing the priests and bishops during ordination. I appreciated his insight on the epiclesis as a part of Eucharistic prayer in order to deepen the roles of the Spirit that invoke and work among the people and the community (p. 166).

This leads me to the next point I would like to make. As a pastoral and practical theologian, I was looking for applications and implications of his doctrinal theology from pneumatological perspectives for our church in ministry and people in communities. He does touch on this in part from page 162 and on when he discusses how the Spirit is present in the church. Drawing on both Roman Catholic and Protestant ecclesiology, Gabriel claims that the church is a sacrament of the Spirit, a manifestation of the Spirit, a kind of incarnation of the Spirit, while the church is the place where God is revealed and that people can receive this revelation through the work of the Spirit.

My final point is about the relevance of this work in light of engagement in the world. The fact that he begins his discussion by calling our attention to the growing presence of the Pentecostal churches on a global scale, especially in the global south where Christianity is still on the rise, I anticipated his contextual analysis and reading of the world in relation to the engagement of the Spirit in the world. On a local level in Canada, places where Pentecostal influence are on the rise includes Aboriginal and newer immigrant communities. If the key to Pentecostal and pneumatological theology is about recognizing the ability to change a believer's life, attention to the particular and historical contexts from which this believer is situated and awareness of the social conditions to which this person is bound should be raised sufficiently, in my view. Yet, I find Gabriel's work falls short in this respect. He could have, as I see it, explored this issue when he connected the faithfulness of the Spirit that has the prophetic task in terms of the connection between the Spirit and the coming of the kingdom of God. How can the Spirit as gifts be the sign of the kingdom? What does it mean to present the Spirit as the present realization of the kingdom of God to those whose present reality is haunted by the history of the past?

For example, it would be an interesting and important study to examine how colonialism and the colonial legacy in the name of the civilizing mission is related to and challenged by the Pentecostal move-

ments in the global south, in the countries that have been colonized, and in the global north in the communities (e.g., Aboriginal) that continue to be affected by it in the post-colonial era of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What is the role of the Spirit that empowers, moves, and transforms the life of believers in this particular yet almost universal context, given that we are all affected by colonialism, though differently? What and how has the Spirit, indeed, been “present throughout the whole world making humanity better than it would otherwise be?” as he asked on page 172. Citing Hendrikus Berkhof, he rightly contends not only once but twice that “the liberating and transforming power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ is at work everywhere where men [please note using exclusive language] are freed from the tyranny of nature, state, color, caste, class, sex, poverty, disease, and ignorance” (on pages 172 and 196). A contextual analysis of the phenomenon of the Pentecostal churches, using critical approaches including postcolonial and feminist insights would benefit and strengthen this valuable work which may have a danger of only serving theoretical abstract and purely academic discourses, otherwise.

The editors of *Empire and the Christian Traditions: New Readings of Classical Theologians* (Fortress, 2007) Kwok Pui-lan, Don Compier, and Joerg Rieger, open up their work by saying that “religious beliefs and practices are always inescapably intertwined with the discourses and institutions of empires, capable of reinforcing and legitimizing domination, but also possessing the potential to raise and sustain counterhegemonic challenges” (xiii). In this regard, my second question to Andrew is: how are Pentecostal movements related to colonialism and, at the same time, how can these Spirit-filled and Spirit-led movements provide counterhegemonic alternatives in Canada and beyond Canada?

I can already sense where his answer may be when he distinguishes the power of the Spirit as forced, constraint, and the unilateral all-determining power from the power that never forces but is sympathizing and inviting in mutual relationships. The latter power of the Spirit throws out the power of a king on a throne by paradoxically speaking, emptying and self-restraining its own power in order to “combat demonic and other evil forces in the world, and resist the power of exclusion in the power of embrace” (192, 194). Perhaps, we can be more faithful and courageous when we are not afraid of disclosing our colonial and imperial Christian past and present as we are also encouraged to unveil “the dark side of the Spirit,” its violent complicity as he

puts it, on page 202. In short, the mystery and the beauty of the Spirit can be touched in the balanced dances between divine and human agency, between speech and solidarity and between discerning and determining the work of the Spirit.