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Spirit and Method
*Pentecostal Theology and
the Pneumatological Imagination*

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If method guides the discoverable, and theologising is about relating God to the discovered, then, for Pentecostals especially, the Spirit ought to be “poured out” over the whole process. Edwin Rodriguez-Gungor’s *Spirit and Method: Pentecostal Theology and the Pneumatological Imagination* is an ambitious undertaking that develops a heuristic scaffold at this intersection.

Fundamentally, Gungor develops a pneumatological theological method (PTM), which is simultaneously enacted by a distinctly Pentecostal performativity. The result is a rigorous openness to the Spirit enflamed with radical and supernatural wonder. Nevertheless, Gungor goes beyond the isolated exceptional, offering a method that interrogates spirit-filled pentecostals as being “everyday people too” (6). In doing so, the intrigue and curiosity toward the world (and its multiplicity of scholarly and artistic disciplines) naturally becomes a site for Pentecostal inquiry.

Based upon his doctoral work, *Spirit and Method* has eight chapters. Beginning with what makes pentecostalism pentecostal, Gungor, contrary to common Pentecostal scholarship, asserts

that the global movement has three shared distinctives and essentials: revivalism, mysticism, and the pneumatological imagination. Cautiously, he affirms that “a grave danger exists of being too specific” and, therefore, he is “searching for the soaring butterfly that is pentecostalism—to enjoy and to remain in amazement of it—not to capture and immobilize it” (13). He is seeking to identify the intonation of the Spirit without necessarily articulating its annunciation.

Guiding the butterfly’s search is his connection between these three shared distinctives and pentecostalism’s emphasis on orthopathos. To discern if something is genuinely Pentecostal these must be present: affection, a priority of love, theological openness, being Jesus-centred and missional.

Building on the prerational dimensions of Pentecostalism, Gungor examines the religious and philosophical influences in chapters three and four. At its core, he contends that any interrogation of Pentecostalism within a particular cultural context will use that community’s expressions, concepts, and priorities. Nonetheless, there is a ‘foundational pneumatology [that] may have the same numinous experiences, primal essences, and initial evidences’ (p.69). In doing so, Gungor parses out the prerational encounters with the Spirit as, inevitably, being communicated ‘by rational thought that is not only of the Spirit’ (81). He demonstrates this through an analysis of how American pentecostals were unconsciously beholden to foundationalism. The result, he suggests: Pentecostal theologising was blunted of “their unique Spirit-centeredness” and closer cooperation “with conservative-fundamentalist tendencies that radicalized reason over revelation” (95).

Stepping back to view the whole, Gungor argues in chapter five that theologians ought to discern which rational forces cause the pentecostal movement to stray or return to its heart (of revivalism, mysticism, and the pneumatological imagination). He explores three zeitgeists:

premodernism, modernism, and postmodernism. Ultimately, he concludes that whilst particular pentecostals have fallen prey to modernist rationalism, it is, nevertheless, “an alternative version of all modernities and seeks a kind of via media between them” (120). Pentecostals are metamoderns. This aversion to a specific zeitgeist loyalty is, he supposes, due to “the pneumatic impulse” (119) which keeps pentecostals moving through epochs. Pentecostals are pneumatic pilgrims hesitant to stay in one philosophical/religious limitation for too long.

Gungor’s project takes a constructive turn in chapter six. Advancing a foundation for a subsequent PTM hermeneutic. He privileges the non-rational and pretheological over the rational, funded by the pneumatological imagination. Undergirding his methodology is the insistence that pentecostal theologising be done prayerfully, prioritise orthopathy, and “foster spiritual ‘affection’ while pursuing truth” (132). Then, expanding on the Spirit, he identifies four key descriptors: life, truth, love, and wind.

At its core, “theology always needs to catch up with testimony” (174). Meaning the theological task, like Pentecost itself, is predicated on the miracle of hearing the diversity of tongues. Or, when one’s practices no longer satisfy the historical or intellectual situation, an epistemological crisis emerges whereby the theologians’ community becomes essential. Thus, *Spirit and Method*, we might say, is Gungor’s performed attempt to annunciate his own testimony under the guise of a pneumatological method.

Before the epilogue, Gungor expands on how the theologian using PTM ought to inhabit four varying worlds in chapter seven. That is, the world is enchanted: arguing for a panentheism; the world is unfinished: we must “always be scanning the world for places where the Spirit is not being fully expressed” (183); the world is relational: there is “a unitive impulse” that maintains mystery (185–6); and, the world has a dialectical tension; saying, “In this world, theologues are

joint heirs of how the Spirit is leading all into a greater apprehension of God” (188). Then, moving from a descriptive PTM, Gungor prescribes eight “be’s” for how the theologian embracing this methodology should operate: be converted, prayerful, scriptural, historical, philosophical, ecumenical, discerning, and provisional.

In short, these eight be’s situate the PTM as necessitating a religious conversion that requires explicit bias: “the theologian is situated within this Christian story and is convinced of its veracity” (190). And its result should be that the theologian bears the fruit of humility: their prayer is done with Scripture in hand, searching for the Spirit that passes through its passages. But also, by listening to how those saints, past and present, in the Tradition have identified the Spirit, too. Nonetheless, the PTM theologian should be open and humble enough to discern where the Spirit may be present across traditions, faiths, cultures, and philosophical systems. This is not to surmount the world to being purely good, for “the influence of God is not the only influence at work” (202).

Yet, this need to humbly discern the evil amidst the good is, citing Yong, the need to search for the concreteness of evil. It is Gungor’s overarching emphasis on the particular that continuously emerges throughout *Spirit and Method*. Precisely because the Spirit is universal does the specific become so important.

Notably, Gungor’s work has two unique strengths. First, he compellingly performs the methodology. The argument is not just about the logic communicated, but also its literary aesthetic. In this light, he harkens to a way forward for pentecostal theologising that comes equipped with a distinct literary and aesthetic style. Second, *Spirit and Method* is rife with ecumenical potential. Gungor casts a capacious vision that prioritises the Spirit of Unity.

Nevertheless, I found the method never quite fully “hit the road”. For all of its emphasis on the particular and testimony, Gungor sweeps through significant historical epochs and philosophical systems as an attempted “performance” offering “an overarching heuristic theological methodology that can embody a pentecostal spirituality” (5). Thus, the traditional academic inquirer might be found frustrated at this performed testimonial pneumatological methodology.

Which leads to my final observation. This work has resonance beyond Pentecostal scholarship, particularly among British Anglican theologians who engage with and are inspired by the Theo-Dramatics of Donald McKinnon and Hans Urs von Balthasar. Such as Samuel Wells and Ben Quash at the turn of the century. By emphasising the performative nature of theologising, *Spirit and Method* would find interesting dialogue partners here and continue to develop Pentecostal theology in new ecumenical and interdisciplinary directions. The question then becomes: to what extent is *Spirit and Method* distinctly pentecostal and not merely pneumatological? To leave this provisional (Gungor’s final be) is, arguably, to follow Gungor’s pneumatological theological method.