

A RESPONSE TO ‘IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT: THE HOLY SPIRIT’

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Reception of a Minority Voice

In his paper, Luis Felipe Nunes Borduam offers a framework from which one may carefully engage the topic of pneumatology in the context of South America. Because of its emphasis on the person and work of the Holy Spirit and its size and influence in his context, Borduam critically engages Pentecostal theology and practice from a Wesleyan perspective. The paper highlights three ways in which various ‘Pentecostals’ have emphasised one aspect of pneumatology to the neglect of others: 1) the power of the Spirit to receive and exercise spiritual gifts, 2) the power of the Spirit to prosper, and 3) the power of the Spirit to achieve social justice. In all three examples, Borduam suggests a common theme: none of these examples offer a nuanced doctrine of sanctification as represented by the Wesleyan-holiness tradition. Borduam concludes, Pentecostalism, in its various forms, ‘ignores the Holiness movement’.¹

Borduam’s contribution to this global theology conference is to be welcomed, as it offers contextual clarity for a significant place in which the Church of the Nazarene serves, and it provokes further discussion on a critical issue we each face throughout the world: preaching, teaching, and embodying a Wesleyan-Holiness doctrine of sanctification. What follows is a response to Borduam’s paper, in which I nuance Borduam’s view of sanctification, highlight several Pentecostal theologians who are re-engaging our shared Wesleyan-Holiness roots, and suggest a possible means of dialogue between these Pentecostal churches and the Church of the Nazarene called ‘reception theology’.

A Wesleyan-Holiness Doctrine of Sanctification: Holy Love

In each of the three examples of Pentecostal pneumatology (power is gifts, power is prosperity, power is social justice), Borduam notes a glaring absence: power is holy living. He defines holy living as ‘purification of the heart’, ‘transformation of the moral and spiritual character’, and ‘power to mortify the flesh, as well as to express positively the Christlike character.’² While I agree that emphasising gifts, prosperity, and social justice could lead one to neglect personal transformation of the heart and life, I believe a further aspect of holiness is left unexplored. Only once, in the whole paper, is the word ‘love’ used. In the final sentence of the paper Borduam says, ‘The apostle Paul even highlights that the power of love, granted by the Holy Spirit, is what must be mostly desired and is more spectacular than any gift we may have (1 Cor. 13).’³ As a Wesleyan-Holiness critique of these forms of Pentecostal pneumatology, the dynamic of love should not be a final thought, but at the centre of framing the way one speaks of holy living.

In one of his final publications, John Wesley summarised sanctification/holiness/Christian perfection in the following way: ‘By perfection I mean the

¹ Luis Felipe Nunes Borduam, ‘In the Power of the Spirit: The Holy Spirit’, *Didache: Faithful Teaching* 22.1 (Spring 2022), p. 10.

² Borduam, ‘In the Power of the Spirit’, p. 9.

³ Borduam, ‘In the Power of the Spirit’, p. 10.

humble, gentle, patient love of God and our neighbour, ruling our tempers, words, and actions.⁴ Loving God and loving others is how Jesus summarised the command of God (Matt. 22.37-40). It is how he summarised what it means to live in relationship with Him and other humans as we were created and designed to live. Holy living is best understood as holy love. Wesley's theology was received and nuanced in the 19th century holiness movement, out of which the Church of the Nazarene was born. There is not enough space in this paper to address the ways in which Wesley's theology was misrepresented in that century, but suffice it to say, love was not emphasised. The 20th century saw further developments of Wesley's theology, most importantly, a return to the doctrine of holiness as holy love.

In 2022, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of Mildred Bangs Wynkoop's book, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism*. Of this book, Diane Leclerc said, 'Wynkoop's *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism*, published in 1972, revolutionized the way the doctrine of Holiness was articulated in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition. This work presents her interpretation of John Wesley's theology of perfect love.'⁵ Wynkoop sought to bring love back to the centre of the doctrine of holiness, emphasising: 1) love as the defining characteristic of God, 2) love as a relational term, and 3) sin as a relational term. The aim of Wynkoop's book was to articulate holy living as defined by Wesley. Holy living is not moral perfection or the absence of sin. These are merely fruits of a life defined and empowered by the love of God poured into our hearts (Romans 5.5). Her work continues to inspire Wesleyan theologians today.

Pentecostals Re-engaging Wesleyan Roots

When holiness is defined as holy love, one may understand the power of the Holy Spirit in a different way. Interestingly, this is a growing emphasis in Pentecostal theology today. Amos Yong developed a pneumatology centred on love in his book, *Spirit of Love: A Trinitarian Theology of Grace*. He highlighted that 'the language of love has played a minimal role in more recent Pentecostal theological reflection', for, among other reasons, the word 'love' does not appear at all in the book of Acts.⁶ He continued, 'We know, however, the book of Acts is about the Holy Spirit, and that the gift of the Holy Spirit has been associated with the gift of love in the Christian tradition. Might we be able to reframe the narrative of the Day of Pentecost outpouring of the Holy Spirit as an expression of what the Christian tradition calls the gift of love and what many early modern Pentecostals called the baptism of love?'⁷ Yong's theological project in this book was the construction of a Pentecostal pneumatology, which emphasises the power of the Spirit as the gift of love.

⁴ John Wesley, *Brief Thoughts on Christian Perfection* (1783) in *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial Edition, 13:199.

⁵ Diane Leclerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness: The Heart of Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2010), p. 127.

⁶ Amos Yong, *Spirit of Love: A Trinitarian Theology of Grace* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012), p. 94. Other than the use of the word 'beloved' (Acts 15.25), there is no mention of love in the book of Acts. See also Amos Yong, *An Amos Yong Reader: The Pentecostal Spirit* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2020).

⁷ Yong, *Spirit of Love*, pp. 94-95.

Frank Macchia's recent work on Christology is another example of the renewal of love as the centre of the doctrine of sanctification in Pentecostal theology. The book, *Holiness and Pentecostal Movements: Intertwined Pasts, Presents, and Futures*, recognises what Borduam said was missing in Pentecostal theology: any awareness of its Wesleyan-Holiness roots. Macchia's chapter developed a Spirit-Christology in which, 'Christ's act of atonement is shown to be like a new exodus through the fire to the promised land of the sanctifying Spirit and the new creation... Those who participate in God by faith... offer themselves in self-giving love to God's cause in the world as empowered witnesses'.⁸ A third example of this renewal of love at the centre of Pentecostal theology is found in the many stories and testimonies collected by Donald Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori in their book, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement*. This book is a collection of stories of the ways in which the power of the Spirit as love is being made evident across the globe. They conclude that in the many expressions of Pentecostalism, 'there are surely self-interested manipulators', as Borduam has noted, however, 'there is another side to Pentecostalism that marches to a different drummer, and it is this dimension of the movement – those who are leading self-sacrificial lives – that has intrigued us throughout this study.'⁹

Reception Theology

The final part of my response to Borduam's paper draws from the ecumenical theology of Paul Avis. In his book, *Reshaping Ecumenical Theology*, Avis proposes a method of discussing topics amongst persons of differing theological traditions called 'reception'. Using this method, persons of differing theological perspectives are given equal opportunity to share their views. This ensures all views, particularly those in the minority, are heard. The process of reception, therefore, is not simply receiving someone's theological position as one's own (as in the minority view being forced to receive the majority view). According to Avis, 'An authentic understanding of reception presupposes a corporate, organic understanding of the Church. It points to the idea of a Church listening to itself, listening to the Spirit within it and listening and responding to minority voices within it, before making the portentous judgment that the *consensus fidelium* on a contentious issue has been attained.'¹⁰ Avis' method of reception may be a positive step forward for those in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition to dialogue with our brothers and sisters in the various Pentecostals around the world. In this way, we approach theological discourse not by saying, 'What can we teach them about our theology, but rather, what can we learn from them about our shared identity as the Body of Christ?'

⁸ Frank Macchia, 'Baptized in the Spirit and Fire' in David Bundy, Geordan Hammond and David Sang-Ehil Han, eds., *Holiness and Pentecostal Movements: Intertwined Pasts, Presents, and Futures* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2022), p. 203. See also, Frank Macchia, *Jesus the Spirit Baptizer: Christology in Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018).

⁹ Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), p. 224.

¹⁰ Paul Avis, *Reshaping Ecumenical Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), p. 96.

Conclusion

We have learned much from Borduam's paper. It has raised significant contextual and global issues in pneumatology. My hope is that we may receive what we have learned from this paper and continue the process of reception with others as we reflect on the place of Wesleyan-Holiness theology in the Body of Christ. However, I would caution us to remember and acknowledge in this process that we are the minority view.