

## **Review Essay: Spirit of Love: A Trinitarian Theology of Grace**

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Amos Yong's 2012 work titled, *Spirit of Love: A Trinitarian Theology of Grace*, provides, from a Pentecostal perspective, a highly readable yet interdisciplinary, pneumatological and Trinitarian approach to the theology of love. Dubbed as his "personal *apologia pro vita sua*" ("a defense of one's life"), Yong stresses that this "missionary and evangelistic manifesto" captures his "Pentecostal passion" unlike anything he has previously written. Firmly guiding this theological reflection is Yong's thesis that "Pentecostal understandings of the Spirit of God can shed new light on God as love and loving, and on what it means for creation as a whole and for human beings, in particular, to receive the love of God who gives graciously." (p. x)

Yong also characterizes this theological reflection as a "Pentecostal and pneumatological soteriology" or "soteriology of love." Appreciating soteriology as God gracing human life and creation through the Spirit of love, thus clarifies the subtitle, a "Theology of Grace." Integral to this soteriology is his definition of love as an "affective disposition toward and intentional activity that benefits others." (p. xi) Yong thus argues that altruistic behavior significantly points to the biblical narrative of God's salvation. He, therefore, consistently accentuates the fostering of altruism throughout creation, as central to the meaning of Christian soteriology and, hence, the aim of God's mission and how it shapes the mission of the Church.

Yong has well-structured his treatise into three parts. Part 1 proposes a broad theology of love informed by scientific and sociological studies on love. Building on this, Part 2 proposes how the phenomenological, performative, and theological resources implicit to Pentecostal experience, spirituality, and theology significantly enriches a Christian theology of love. Part 3 finally integrates these trajectories with a biblical theology of love, integrating the themes of love within the Lukan, Pauline, and Johannine perspectives, resulting in a twenty-first century integrative, pneumatological, and Trinitarian theology of love and grace. Having surveyed the broad structural themes that shape Yong's book, I will now shift to a more detailed review, focusing on a few themes I find especially noteworthy, pointing out some strengths and limitations and along the way, suggesting implications towards Pentecostal tradition, church *ethos*, ministry, and lived spirituality.

Reflecting his "foundational pneumatology" that consistently informs his broader theological project, Yong structures Part 1 (chapters 1 to 3) as foundational to Parts 1 and 2.<sup>1</sup> Chapter 1, therefore, comprises a critical retrieval of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Paul Tillich's respective theological projects, each of whom have drawn strong links between love and the Holy Spirit, while stressing moreover the centrality of love in a Christian doctrine of God. Oddly absent from Yong's survey of

his three selected “love theologians” is engagement with John Wesley, whom many familiar with his theology, generally appreciate him as a perennial “theologian of love.” Yet on the other hand, one could argue that throughout chapters 4 and 5 Yong implicitly retrieves as prescriptive to the tragic subsuming of love to the theme of power (chapters 3 and 4) within much of contemporary Pentecostalism, particularly within Keswickian streams, Wesley’s theology of love, and, hence, how holiness leads to altruistic behavior.<sup>2</sup>

Especially helpful is Yong’s discussion on how emerging from Augustine’s pneumatology of love is his hermeneutic of love, wherein Augustine stresses the aim of Scripture reading as the formation of charity in human life and behavior. This, I believe, can help shift Pentecostal readings of Scripture from postmodern pragmatic-aimed utilitarianism on one hand and theological monism on the other, which when wedded to Pentecostal orthopathy, easily leads to congregational/ecclesial boundaries premised upon impermeable established readings of Scripture. I suspect that here we are touching upon the Evangelical problem of defining fellowship as doctrinal like-mindedness. This, in turn, hamstring space for gifted diversity and opposes the Spirit’s aim through the event of Pentecost. Furthermore, it fosters a plurality of giftings and indelibly creates a plurality of interpretive giftings, which impacts one’s reading of Scripture. Further explication of these themes goes far beyond the scope of this review. I will, therefore, close this reflection by simply stressing that Yong’s retrieval of Augustine’s hermeneutic of love carries tremendous promise towards identifying hermeneutical paradigms that foster a mutual embrace of diversely gifted people—held together not on impermeable boundary-marking theological confessions, but rather through the fellowship of the

Spirit who graces a healthy measure of theological latitude.

Having critically synthesized trajectories evident in historical pneumatological-enriched theologies of love (chapter 1), in chapter 2 Yong brings these reflections in dialogue with contemporary studies on biological and social variables that are informing a scientific understanding of altruistic love. Otherwise known as the “science of love” or the “sociology of love,” these studies seminally emerged at the end of World War II via the work of Russian sociologist, Pitirim Aleksandrovich Sorokin (1889-1968). Sorokin, whose research was expanded beginning in the 1950s through the Harvard Research Center for Creative Altruism, hypothesized that altruistic behavior, especially in extraordinary altruistic actions, necessitates an “inflow of love” from outside one’s self, such as through family, friends, and other meaningful relations. Sorokin further concluded that people who manifest high levels of altruistic behavior without proportionate resources from their community may illustrate existence and access to transcendental (e.g., God) inflows of love (pp. 23-26). Yong then discusses how in the 1980s researchers shifted the conversation from sociology to biology, noting how research in the cognitive/neuro-psychological sciences suggests that human genes program human beings towards altruistic behavior. Hence, humans are genetically and neurologically wired to love. Hence, people are most human when they express altruistic behavior, which, in turn, empowers recipients towards the same behavior (pp. 23-37).

Yong’s survey into the science of love grants us a window into how the “neurophysiology of emotional empathy” may confirm Aquinas’ doctrine of habitual grace (grace perfecting human nature). In

doing so, this survey helps a person to appreciate how loving actions within Christian community may indeed be generative towards a congregational *ethos* of overflowing “godly love.” Moreover, Yong’s introduction to many readers previously unacquainted with these ongoing interdisciplinary studies can help them appreciate, as Yong consistently demonstrates elsewhere in his writings, the unique epistemological, theological, and methodological resources that Pentecostal spirituality comprises for positively funding a broad range of contemporary sciences and research disciplines.

In Part 2, Yong appropriates the preceding integrative theology of love towards a sociological and phenomenological analysis of Pentecostalism, to argue that at its best, Pentecostal spirituality comprises unique phenomenological, sociological, and theological resources for fostering altruistic love, which can enrich a Christian theology of love. Yet in doing so beginning with chapter 3 (“What’s Love Got to Do with It? Pentecostalism, the Holy Spirit, and Love”), Yong also delineates a running *exposé* on how Pentecostals have too often, to their own detriment, subsumed the imagery of love under the imagery of “power” as foremost characteristic of Pentecostal spirituality, while simultaneously outlining Yong’s prescriptive trajectories.

Yong, therefore, stresses how many people first associate Pentecostalism not with love but with power, and the resultant bifurcation of spiritual power from the ethical and behavioral contours of biblical love and holiness. Yong notes that to some extent the challenge arises from a core Pentecostal text, Acts 1:8: “You shall receive power.” Yet Yong laments how Pentecostal history comprises far too many histories of “power manifestations gone wrong” (pp. 40-43). Through his prescriptive trajectories, Yong

urges that believers more closely associate the “power” of Pentecostal as the empowering love of God.

Highly integral to Yong’s argument is Margaret M. Poloma’s studies on how experiences of love within the context of loving Charismatic and Pentecostal congregations, result in a recipient’s desire to behave altruistically.<sup>3</sup> Yong draws special attention to Poloma and John C. Green’s 2010 work, *The Assemblies of God: Godly Love and the Revitalization of American Pentecostalism*. They argue that their research on American Assemblies of God (AG) churches demonstrates a “positive correlation between congregational renewal or revitalization, religious/mystical experience, and social benevolence.”<sup>4</sup> This whole study, which Yong, Poloma, Green and others have embarked on, belongs to a broader interdisciplinary research project (beginning in 2007) involving social scientists and theologians titled, “The Flame of Love: Scientific Research on the Experience and Expression of Godly Love in the Pentecostal Tradition.”

Early on in the “Flame of Love” project, participants coined the term “Godly love” as a conceptual premise to guide the project’s research, defining this as “the dynamic interaction between divine and human love that enlivens and expands benevolence,” primarily focusing on how this interaction fosters altruistic behaviour in people.<sup>5</sup> One of the “Flame of Love” project’s key agendas was to discover why, in much of Pentecostal tradition, “love language” has not been strongly expressed. Yet Yong discovered that notwithstanding critical concerns evident within Pentecostalism, there are “untapped resources” within Pentecostal spirituality, theology, and experience, pointing to the reality of love (e.g., “godly love”) as an intrinsic aspect of Pentecostal spirituality, congregational *ethos*

and ministry— at least in forms most filial to Pentecostal tradition. Through this research, Yong concluded that these Pentecostal resources can contribute towards the “wider discussion about godly love, its effects, and its redemptive and transformative power” both in Christian ecumenical discussions as well as towards the science or sociology of love (p. x).

In Part 2 (chapters 4 to 6) Yong unpacks these arguments through retrieving resources from the Azusa Street Mission and appropriating these to the “phenomenological and performative resources” explored in chapter 3. By doing so, Yong aims to sharpen a Pentecostal hermeneutic that better discerns the themes of empowering love implicit, though oftentimes untapped, in Pentecostal spirituality. Yong begins by retrieving the Azusa Mission’s understanding of Spirit baptism as a “baptism of love,” noting how this premise was fostered through salient themes characteristic of the nineteenth century Holiness tradition (chapter 4). Then in chapter 5, Yong demonstrates how contemporary Pentecostal theological scholarship strongly substantiates the early Azusa Mission understanding of Spirit baptism, again warranting a fresh “retrieval” of these historical resources for a “reconstruction and revitalization” of contemporary Pentecostal spirituality.

Yong argues that crucial to remedying the historical bifurcation of power and love within Pentecostalism is the early Azusa Street Mission’s understanding and William J. Seymour’s seminal doctrine of Spirit baptism as a “baptism of love.” In doing so, he explores how this Wesleyan rooted yet early Pentecostal understanding of Spirit baptism was eventually lost amongst Keswickian Pentecostal movements, such as the Assemblies of God (AG), via the influence of William H. Durham’s “Finished

Work” doctrine. Yong laments how these early Pentecostal movements failed to retain the conjoining links between spiritual power, holiness, and love (pp. 64, 67).

Yong observes that early predominately white Pentecostal groups like the AG, “in following various aspects of Durhams’ Finished Work theology in distinguishing the doctrine of Spirit baptism from a more robust theology of sanctification, are the ones who have not retained the close connections between the baptism of power and of love” (pp. 67). He further notes how more Wesleyan-Pentecostal groups who have better recognized these connections, had historically managed to “maintain interracial relations much longer” (p. 67). To be fair, Yong affirms positive developments over the past two decades, such as the 1994 “Memphis Miracle,” which resulted in the “disbanding of the all-white Pentecostal Fellowship of North America,” and its replacement by the racially integrated “Pentecostal Charismatic Churches of North America” (pp. 67-68). Yong stresses that “the reality of racism and its institutional, structural, and ecclesial effects” continues, which should enjoin us in tarrying for “ongoing baptisms of love” (p. 68). Yong pleads that Keswickian Pentecostals restore this important association (inferring that Wesleyan-Pentecostals meanwhile continue to foster the association), that it may again theologially ground and shape contemporary Pentecostal congregational ethos, ministry, and missional praxis.

In chapter 5, Yong further remedies the Pentecostal love/power bifurcation by demonstrating how three contemporary and prominent Pentecostal theologians are forging a closer link between love and power for service in Pentecostal theology and spirituality. First to note is Yong’s engagement with Wesleyan Pentecostal theologian Steven J. Land’s seminal

monograph, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*.<sup>6</sup> Land's aim was pastorally oriented towards overcoming the unhealthy dichotomies between holiness, love, and power, which he described as the "unfinished theological task of Pentecostalism." Building on this purpose from a Wesleyan-Pentecostal perspective, Land argued that through the three soteriological crisis-event experiences (redemption, sanctification, Spirit baptism), God infuses believers with "apocalyptic affections" that comprise the "core of Pentecostal spirituality."<sup>7</sup> As Yong points out, he coalesces these affections of *gratitude, compassion, courage* to the Thomistic theological virtues of *faith, hope* and *love*, signifying the transformative coming of God's Kingdom (regeneration: righteousness → *faith* → "gratitude;" sanctification: peace → *love* → "compassion;" Spirit baptism: joy → *hope* → "courage").<sup>8</sup> Land argued that Pentecostal spirituality creates in believers this triad of "apocalyptic affections," chief of which is love for God, comprising an eschatological longing for the coming of His kingdom, which issues in love for one's neighbor.<sup>9</sup>

Next, Yong introduces Pentecostal theologian Samuel Solivan's thesis that through the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit, God creates an "orthopathos" (right affection) that joins us to God's willingness to enter into the "pathos" of human experiences with suffering, victimization, and marginalization.<sup>10</sup> Finally, Yong draws on the ongoing projects of Frank D. Macchia who has been constructing a comprehensive Pentecostal theology of Spirit baptism as a baptism in God's love.<sup>11</sup> I suggest that Yong's survey of the works of Land, Solivan, and Macchia might encourage individuals who have identified with the Keswickian oriented Pentecostal streams to better appreciate early holiness Pentecostal

assumptions that sanctifying experiences should precede tarrying for Spirit baptism. It calls believers to reflect on how they might appropriate this premise in their current settings in manners that reinvigorate the respective streams as missiologically aimed, love-producing, Pentecostal spiritualities (pp. 61-62, 65, 72).

Finally (chapter 6), Yong delineates a fresh reading of Luke-Acts in order to demonstrate that the traditional Pentecostal Lukan prioritized hermeneutic can also reinforce an understanding of Spirit baptism as a baptism of love rather than simply power. He does this by drawing attention to Luke's witness on how receiving God's Spirit generates gifted and gracious lifestyles of altruistic loving, proto-typically illustrated in Jesus' ministry and early Christian communities. Yong's reading points to what he identifies as an "apostolic spirituality of love." He then explicates this concept via Land's notion of the Pentecostal "apocalyptic affections" (gratitude, compassion, and courage). This discussion loops the expansive argument of Spirit baptism as a baptism into God's love, back to Yong's pneumatologically informed definition of "love" as an affective disposition towards disinterested, altruistic behavior.

I find it helpful to recall the seminally important exegetical projects of Roger Stronstad and Robert Menzies towards arguing for the Classical Pentecostal understanding of Spirit baptism as a missiological empowerment for service and witness. These have indelibly contributed to a more sophisticated biblical grounding of Pentecostal experience, theology, and ministry over the past several decades.<sup>12</sup> Yet while affirming their exegetical fruit, quite a few other Classical Pentecostal theologians have faulted their strict refusal to acknowledge any soteriological dimensions

to Luke's pneumatology, thus inadvertently contributing to the power/holiness/love bifurcation in Pentecostal spirituality.<sup>13</sup> Yong, therefore, demonstrates for many Pentecostals highly aligned to more "power for service" nuanced readings of Luke-Acts that other thoroughly Pentecostal reading approaches exist. These are readings that connect a person to embedded Lukan pneumatological themes that deeply confirm early Pentecostal understandings of Spirit baptism as an infilling of God's love, with profound soteriological and ethical ramifications towards the shape of Pentecostal life, ministry, and mission (pp. 110-111).

Part 3 comprises two main discussions. First, Yong constructs a biblical pneumatological theology of love, thereby providing a solid biblical grounding to the concluding final chapter in which he articulates a "constructive charismatic theology of love for the twenty-first century." Utilizing his earlier established hermeneutical link between love and the Holy Spirit, Yong achieves this by drawing out the Pauline (chapter 7) and Johannine (chapter 8) pneumatologies of love, which he integrates with the Lukan witness to the Spirit as God's gift of empowering love. Second, Yong climaxes his work via his final chapter's delineation of "A Manifesto in Nine Theses." Each thesis articulates core characteristics of love that conclude the book on concrete implications for appropriating this theology of love from a Pentecostal perspective, to Christian witness and ministry.

Given its tight yet brilliantly structured coherence as a visionary manifesto for twenty-first century missional witness and ministry, I find it relevant to focus more on this final chapter, and how Yong masterfully demonstrates its grounding on all preceding chapters. To begin, Yong outlines his nine

manifesto theses along three trajectories: the anthropology, theology, and missiology of love, each reflecting his broad pneumatological concerns. The first three theses delineate the biological, affective, and the spiritual levels of a theological anthropology of love, from which Yong argues that embodied, affective, and spiritual aspirations exist as God's "gratuitous endowments" to human life.

The next three theses delineate the creational, incarnational, and Pentecostal levels of a pneumatology of love, through which Yong again projects a biblical yet explicitly Trinitarian theology of love. Yong hermeneutically grounds this biblical-Trinitarian theology of love on the Father's generational love portrayed through the Genesis creation accounts, the New Testament stress on the Spirit-empowered *kenosis* of the Son, and an understanding of Pentecost as signifying the outpouring of God's love to empower humanity in behalf of the eschatological renewing of creation.

Through the final three theses, Yong demonstrates how the preceding theological anthropology of love and biblical-Trinitarian theology of love points toward a missiology of love, comprising the modalities of evangelism, witness via altruistic love towards one's enemies, and engaging the powers in manners that signify God's eventual redemptive healing of all creation

Finally, keeping in mind the formative power of a tradition's "cultural-linguistic" *ethos*, Yong's book may, if Pentecostals so desire, help shape their theological, liturgical, and congregational language and core imageries in manners congruent to the early Pentecostal genius of perceiving and encountering the power of the Spirit as nothing less than the power of God's redeeming, sanctifying and empowering love. With this in mind, I prayerfully close

with some “nonacademic Pentecostal theologising.”

Not just people of power,  
But make us through the Spirit of  
Fellowship—  
Apostles of Love.  
For like John the Beloved  
You call us the Beloved community;  
So increase our faith, and make us thankful;  
Increase our hope, and make us courageous;  
Increase our love, and make us  
compassionate.

Let not the world note the greatness of our  
deeds,  
But let them note the kindness of our  
presence.  
For to us, you are kind;  
Calling us by name,  
Making us partakers of your nature,  
Sending us forth as preachers of Love.  
Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> See Amos Yong’s *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2002. Yong surveys his theological project in his article, “Poured Out on All Flesh: The Spirit, World Pentecostalism, and the Renewal of Theology and Praxis in the 21st Century,” *PentecoStudies* 6, no. 1 (2007): 16-46. Three helpful analysis of Yong’s theology are: Wolfgang Vondey and Martin William Mittelstadt, eds., *The Theology of Amos Yong and the New Face of Pentecostal Scholarship: Passion for the Spirit* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Publishers, June 2013); Peter D. Neumann, *Pentecostal Experience: An Ecumenical Encounter*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 187 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications; Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2012); Christopher A. Stephenson, *Types of Pentecostal Theology: Method, System, Spirit* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> I am following Amos Yong’s designation of the term “Keswickian,” to Pentecostals historically representative of William H. Durham’s “finished work” two-stage scheme and “Keswick ‘higher Christian life’ revivalism;” *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2010), 28, 168-171.

<sup>3</sup> See also Yong’s article, which closely parallels this book’s arguments, “What’s Love Got to Do with It? The Sociology of Godly Love and the Renewal of Modern Pentecostalism,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 21 (2012): 113-134.

<sup>4</sup> Margaret M. Poloma and John C. Green, *The Assemblies of God: Godly Love and the Revitalization of American Pentecostalism* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2010), 14; quoted in Yong, *Spirit of Love: A Trinitarian Theology of Grace* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 50.

<sup>5</sup> Margaret M. Poloma and Ralph W. Hood, *Blood and Fire: Godly Love in a Pentecostal Emerging Church* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2008), 4; quoted in Matthew T. Lee and Margaret M. Poloma, “Editorial: Special Issue on Godly Love,” *PentecoStudies* 11, no. 1 (2012): 5-8.

<sup>6</sup> Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 1 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993; Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 11-12.

<sup>8</sup> Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 67, 74-75, 120-121, 133-135f.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 143-147, 150.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Solivan, *The Spirit, Pathos, and Liberation: Towards an Hispanic Pentecostal Theology*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplemental Series 14 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 63, 258, 271; Frank D. Macchia, *Justified in the Spirit: Creation, Redemption, and the Triune God* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2010), 80, 89-90.

<sup>12</sup> Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984); Robert P. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); Robert P. Menzies, *The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology with Spiritual Reference to Luke-Acts* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991).

<sup>13</sup> Martin William Mittelstadt, *Reading Luke-Acts in the Pentecostal Tradition* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010), 68-80; Simon Chan, "Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 21* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 42, 85-86; Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 15-18, 24-30, 57-60.