

PNEUMATOLOGICAL RELATIONS AND CHRISTIAN DISUNITY IN THEOLOGY-SCIENCE DIALOGUE

by Telford Work

Abstract. Ecclesial divisions shape and distort the developing interdisciplinary dialogue between Christian theology and the natural and social sciences in ways that can be better understood by focusing on pneumatology, specifically on the variety of ways in which we relate to the Holy Spirit—as giver of life, as Lord, as powerful anointing, as God’s gift of wisdom, and as wellspring from Jesus Christ. Each denominational camp of Christians has centered its appreciation of the Holy Spirit on one of these relationships, sometimes to the neglect or marginalization of others. This appreciation drives the favoring of some scientific disciplines and suspicion of others. For instance, Pentecostals and charismatics emphasize the Spirit *upon* us, speaking through the prophets. This tends to privilege personal narrative and testimony. The closest cognate science is cultural anthropology. Issues of social construction of reality, cultural imperialism and relativism, and narrative history dominate consideration of science’s theological possibilities and pitfalls in ways distinctive to that pneumatological camp. Engagement and disengagement with other disciplines of learning are driven in part by our theological loyalties and antipathies to unreconciled bodies. Hence a fuller engagement with the sciences becomes an ecumenical task, not just a generically Christian or specifically Pentecostal or Wesleyan one.

Keywords: charismatic; Christianity; ecumenism; Holy Spirit; Pentecostalism; pneumatology; sciences; theology; theology-science dialogue

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CHRISTIAN DIVISION AND THE SCIENCE DIVISION

Theological and denominational fault lines that divide Christians also shape and distort the developing interdisciplinary dialogue between Christian theology and the natural and social sciences. Ecclesial division, formed in part by various Christian traditions' distinct pneumatologies (doctrines of the Holy Spirit), drives Christian affinities with certain scientific disciplines and rivalries with others. Denominational partisanship thus encourages or constricts support for the various sciences in our various traditions.

Drawing a pneumatological map of the theology-science dialogue reveals two significant features: first, an irreducible abundance of ways in which pneumatology informs Christian life and doctrine, and, second, blurry but real boundary lines we have drawn between these ways that have balkanized not only our confessional territories but also our commitments to the sciences. We relate to the Holy Spirit in a variety of ways, each of which has relevance to specific aspects of life and specific scientific disciplines that pertain most directly to them. Our traditions' uneven engagement with the various scientific disciplines, driven in part by theological convictions distorted by our unreconciled loyalties and antipathies, makes a fuller engagement with the sciences not just a "Christian" task, let alone merely a Pentecostal or charismatic one, but an intentionally ecumenical one. Truly embracing the sciences calls us to offer and receive each other's pneumatologies in order to arrive at a fuller appreciation of the Spirit's relationships with creation.

A frustrating teaching episode introduced me to this aspect of the theology-science dialogue. In spring 2007 I held a seminar on Pneumatology and Nature, dealing with the intersection of the sciences and Christian theology with special attention to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.¹ At my evangelical liberal arts college there is a lot of demand for interdisciplinary engagement between theology and other disciplines. Students constantly hear from us that "it all fits together," and they want to see how. So hopes were high among my religious studies majors, social scientists, and natural scientists as we began. Yet our hopes were frustrated. We learned a lot about the history of the sciences' engagements with theology, learned some traditional and charismatic pneumatology, and became familiar with some of the leading voices in the theology-and-science dialogue. The course was my least successful in my whole teaching career. I concluded midway through that we were not discovering how everything fit together but starting from our disciplinary locations down into a chasm that none of us knew how to bridge, let alone fill. The cosmic Holy Spirit in John Polkinghorne's account of divine action (Polkinghorne 2005) has little to do with the biblical and patristic Holy Spirit Kilian McDonnell describes in *The Other Hand of God* (2003). The many contributions in Michael Welker's *The Work of the Spirit* (2006), spawned by a Templeton Founda-

tion consultation, are broadly satisfying individually, but rarely do theology and science *intersect* in any one analysis, let alone the collection as a whole, in a mutually informing way.

My students and I certainly sensed the familiar gravity that pulled topics into orbits around individual disciplines. But another force, disorder within the discipline of Christian theology itself, was at work making it difficult to reconcile all the details into a big picture. The concerns that have driven the formation of discrete traditions—Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Lutheran, Reformed, Anabaptist, Anglican, Wesleyan, Holiness, Adventist, Pentecostal, and so on—drive distinct affinities and rivalries with particular scientific disciplines.

For instance, the strong natural theology of Roman Catholicism—itsself largely a legacy of its Thomistic engagement with Aristotelian science eight hundred years ago—engages physics and biology with greater vigor and critical appreciation than it does the newer social sciences. By comparison, the experiential thrust of Wesleyan traditions, including Pentecostal and Holiness traditions, tends to engage social and behavioral sciences much more vigorously, appropriating resources for interpreting human experience and resisting where social-scientific claims threaten the personal confessional claims that the tradition prizes and privileges methodologically.

Why is this? Certainly historical contingencies are responsible for much of what is familiar and unfamiliar to our traditions. Why are so many nail salons in California run by Vietnamese? Probably not because of some feature of the depth grammar of Vietnamese-American culture; it probably just happened that way. Likewise, many reasons for our denominations' different affinities for certain scientific fields are not directly theological. Yet, even if no theological paradigm explains all the frictions haunting the theology-science dialogue, there are significant theological dimensions of its complex landscape. Among them is the one developed here: The pneumatological variety among Roman Catholic, Wesleyan, and other approaches to science.

ECUMENICAL DIFFERENCES OVER PNEUMATOLOGICAL RELATIONS

Pneumatology rarely plays a central role in the development of Christian self-reflection, but it regularly plays a significant secondary one. From Paul's appeal to the Galatians receiving the Holy Spirit by believing, to the development of the doctrine of the Spirit's full divinity and personhood between the councils of Nicea and Constantinople, to Athanasius and the Cappadocians and Augustine and John Calvin and John Wesley, to the rise of charismatic Christianities from the west throughout the southern hemisphere, pneumatology has held an integral if somewhat marginal place in Christian theology.

Elsewhere I have argued that by the grace of God the church enjoys a series of distinct relationships with the Spirit (Work 2006). Various church practices embody those relationships. Each of our fellowships seems to honor them all, though in varying degrees. Yet our churches have tended to favor one relationship over the others in our lives and our theological imaginations. Sometimes we have let one relationship dominate and even control the others. When that happens, the tradition's pneumatology is narrowed and its "Spirit" is weakened. Theological inadequacy and sectarian defensiveness result as each of our churches sets itself against the others' own weak "Spirits."²

Five of the Holy Spirit's relationships with us are, roughly, *before* (Greek: *pro*) the church, as breath of God and "giver of life"; *over* (*hyper*) the church, as "the Lord," the finger of God; *upon* (*epi*) the church, as the mouth of God and its tongue who "spoke through the prophets"; *in* (*en*) the church, proceeding "from the Father" as the eyes of God and mind of Christ; and *into* (*eis*) the church, proceeding "also from the Son" as living water. Biblical narratives and developments in theological tradition describe each relationship. Each is associated with particular ecclesial practices and traditions. Abuses result when any one vision dominates the others.³ Each distortion and consequent abuse comes when our theological camps reduce our relationships with the Spirit to one dominating and overbearing aspect, or subordinate the other aspects to our favorite. In exalting any one relationship with the Holy Spirit over others, our partisan ecclesologies turn prepositions into favorites and favorites into protectorates.

In creation and baptism the Spirit is *before* us; in covenanting and justifying the Spirit is *over* us; in empowering the Spirit is *upon* us; in illumination the Spirit is *in* us; in cosmic renewal the Spirit flows *into* and from us. Ecclesial traditions prefer some of these relationships over others. The creative Spirit *before* us, the breath of God, tends to overshadow the others in the Anglican and baptist⁴ traditions. The sovereign Spirit *over* us, the finger of God, dominates the magisterial Protestant Augustinian traditions. The revolutionary Spirit *upon* us, the mouth of God, drives Pentecostal traditions. The perceiving Spirit *in* us, the eyes of God, directs Orthodoxy with its iconography and spirituality of ascent, as well as third-wave charismatics with emphases on words of knowledge and visions. The Spirit flowing *into* us, the living water of God, governs the sanctificationist renewal traditions from monasticism to Pietism and Wesleyanism.

Now, the reality is more complex than these general tendencies suggest. For instance, Pentecostal respect for healing echoes the Spirit before us while its renewal theology prizes the Spirit into us. These are natural legacies of its Anglican and Wesleyan inheritances. Yet from Pentecostalism's original insistence on tongues as the initial evidence of Spirit-baptism to the prominence of words of knowledge and spiritual warfare in third-wave Pentecostalism, the tradition (particularly as a set of denominations) has

made this relationship with the Spirit a defining one over against its rivals. This commitment has deepened and enriched world Christianity's appreciation of the Holy Spirit over the last century. However, privileging this relationship within Pentecostal circles also has narrowed Pentecostals' appreciation of God's relationship with the world accordingly.

FROM DISTINCT PNEUMATOLOGIES TO SECTARIAN SCIENCES

Our narrowed pneumatologies, focused as they are on specific relationships we have with the Holy Spirit, naturally privilege the disciplines that pertain most directly to those relationships. As a result, Christian disciplinary favoritisms correlate with distinct Christian pneumatologies.

In the Newtonian era, an overly narrow emphasis on the Spirit *before* us as original Creator led to a Deism that could not accept subsequent acts of divine intervention. This respect for the Spirit as originator manifests itself in the contemporary theology-and-science dialogue in the "fine-tuned universe" of the Anthropic principle and in noninterventionist accounts of divine action. Says physicist and Anglican clergyman John Polkinghorne,

If the Spirit is operating in the universe, part of his activity will certainly be through the scientific law which reflects his faithfulness, and we do not have to picture him working against its grain. The God who is the ground of physical process is inescapably a *deus absconditus*, a hidden God. This is the area where Christian theism is "necessarily tinged with deism." (Polkinghorne 2005, 45)

Polkinghorne is not a Deist. Yet his strongest contributions to the theology-science dialogue involve the created capacity for structural openness of a quantum universe over the closed systems it allegedly has displaced, as significant for special divine action from response to prayer to miracles including the resurrection. In holding out for Non-Interventionist Objective Special Divine Action (NIOSDA), many scientist-theologians are out both to honor the consistency of the physical sciences and to protect the original integrity of a free universe. The Spirit's work is front-loaded at the beginning of our cosmic order. The double focus on the consistency and origin of the universe in physics and chemistry make them favorite scientific disciplines for dialogue among traditions such as Anglicanism whose scientific sensibilities were forged in early modernity and who champion the Creator-Spirit before us.

For all its similarities, emphasis on the Spirit *over* us, "the Lord," is distinct. It has tended to focus on the juridical ordering and rule of nature and society. Here the formative scientific questions concerned not how the universe came to be but which heavenly bodies revolved around which center, and what that implied about conventional hierarchies of being. Here philosophy comes to the fore; the problems of divine foreknowledge and determinism rise to prominence. The question of contingency dominates scientific discussion, from the relative merits of strong versus weak

Anthropic principles to the inevitability or contingency of humanity's emergence and global dominance through evolution, intelligent design, special divine action, or sinful exploitation of God's cosmos. It troubles magisterial and evangelical Protestants with our well-developed doctrines of divine providence that ours would be just an incredibly lucky universe in the vast, unprovable, and nonfalsifiable multiverse or, as Stephen Jay Gould famously argued, that "playing the tape over again" in biological history would produce a very different ecosystem without human beings. Astronomy and biology are thus favorite conversation (or sparring) partners in the evangelical Protestant dialogue with science.

In one of these visions, God is mainly in the front. In the other, God is mainly on top. Communities shaped by pneumatologies in which the Spirit's fundamental relationship is over us as Lord will conceive of both God and creation somewhat differently than communities preoccupied with the Spirit before us as Creator. The study of both God and creation will adjust accordingly. A universe in which God is more Creator than Lord has a different ethics and a different politics than one in which God is Lord first and Creator second. There will be different fundamental insights, different dogmas and sacred cows, different negotiables and acceptable sacrifices, and different utilities for specific scientific disciplines in ecclesial and theological endeavors. For instance, creation care emerges as a Christian concern for a variety of reasons. Stress on the Spirit above us funds an environmentalism out of fidelity to the Lord we serve as custodians—a prominent theme in Reformed theology—whereas stress on the Spirit before us informs a more anxious environmentalism where human beings must be ever mindful of the fragile ecosystems in which we are coparticipants.

Emphasis on the Spirit *upon* us, speaking through the prophets, privileges personal narrative and testimony. The closest cognate sciences are history (if one classifies it as a social science) and cultural anthropology. Pentecostals are legendary for undertaking investigations of the Spirit's outpouring at, say, Azusa Street, then discovering signs of the kingdom of God in other eras and becoming historians of the church or of Christianity.

Pentecostals are not invested in NIOSDA as some other church traditions are. We easily shrug off its concerns, out of respect as much for the contemporary miracles we witness and chronicle as for the resurrection of Jesus. The Spirit seems too obvious a presence to be relegated even most of the time to quiet, ordinary natural processes as a ruler or originator. In Jack Deere's *Surprised by the Voice of God* (1998), the Holy Spirit is a divine voice constantly speaking even if rarely heard (see Psalm 19)—not necessarily intervening, but certainly voicing wisdom and purpose we are foolish to ignore. As Arminians we are less invested in magisterial Protestantism's Augustinian doctrines of determination and foreknowledge and more open—pun intended—to contingency in history and the sciences. This young-

est of major ecclesial traditions, born of an age that birthed the field of sociology, shares many of its concerns. When we consider science's theological possibilities and pitfalls, Pentecostals dismiss Newtonian Deism; but issues such as the social construction of reality, cultural imperialism and relativism, and narrative history loom larger and more troubling for us. They strike closer to the heart of our pneumatology.

Where emphasis falls on the Spirit *in* us, we appreciate God especially as our faculty of vision, the creator of the light by which we see, and the uncreated light that reveals creation's true christomorphic character. This pneumatology has affinity with semiotics and metaphysics. Healthy science consults God. Despite its Aristotelian heritage, Eastern Orthodoxy historically has had less interest in theology-and-science dialogue than Western Christian traditions. Only when science can coexist with contemplation of divine mystery does Orthodoxy begin to celebrate the sciences as enthusiastically as the West. In that vein, Alexei Nesteruk calls "for the *reciprocal* application of science (using the rational, cataphatic intellect) and theology (using the spiritual or noetic, apophatic intellect) to the discovery and contemplation of the created order, which is available for investigation and is a link to God's truth" (Demopoulos 2004, 124; emphasis added). Tradition is our way of seeing and knowing, and cultivating it with a sufficiently respectful theological vision is a key to unlocking the mysterious shape of God's universe.

Emphasis on the Spirit *into* and through us favors the sciences of physical and psychological healing. John Wesley was a health nut who recommended a bewildering variety of cures to his friends and associates. "*An Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases* was Wesley's main tome on health," writes John Spalding; "By its 24th edition, in 1792 the book included thousands of therapies, many of which Wesley tried himself, noting 'tried' after each one he had used on himself. For example, his cure for an earache: 'Put in a hot roasted fig, or onion: tried. Or, blow the smoke of tobacco strongly into it.' And his cure for a toothache: 'Be electrified through the teeth: Tried'" (Spalding 2003, 150). Wesley's followers regard their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit and resist alcohol and other pollutants. As the sciences of the mind later flourished, Pietists put them to use in countering vice, freeing from addiction, and restoring relationships. Thomas Oden (1972) notes the Pietistic flavor of "encounter groups" and other therapeutic practices. Pietists regard for personal experience is not just a product of Cartesian or Kantian dualism or an invasion of liberal theology; it also powerfully respects the presence of the Holy Spirit who reveals to us all we have ever done (John 4:29). Pietists imitate Christ through his provision of "living water within, springing up to eternal life [John 4:14 NRSV]. . . . Jesus came that we might have life . . . being filled with the Spirit" (Pinnock 1996, 162–63).

PNEUMATOLOGY'S ECUMENICAL CHALLENGE

Now, this typology is admittedly caricaturish and too briefly drawn. Each of these rich traditions respects all five and more of these relationships. They all read the same Bible and draw on our common Christian theological heritage. Moreover, the Spirit is a divine person whose multiple relationships are necessarily coherent internally.

Nevertheless, any student of theology notices before long that in each one of our ecclesial traditions some claims function more fundamentally and centrally than others. In the Foursquare Pentecostal denomination I have embraced as my own, we confess Christ as Savior, baptizer with the Holy Spirit, healer, and soon-coming King. American fundamentalists insist on the inspiration and inerrancy of authoritative Holy Scripture as foundational to all theology, mediating the divine decrees by which the sovereign God authors and perfects. Neither denies the other's claim, at least not necessarily; but clearly the one is more fascinated by the Spirit upon us, the other by the Spirit over us. In the Roman Catholic tradition, meanwhile, the Holy Spirit accomplishes sacramental new creation at the moment of descent or *epiclesis* in the Eucharist and births a hierarchy whose human structures extend the incarnation's new beginning. God and creation dominate the First Part of Thomas' *Summa Theologica*, and the sacramental new order of Jesus Christ dominates the Third Part. For all the common ground among these visions, there are distinctive visions in which distinctive pneumatologies play critical roles. We play dogmatic favorites.

It is tempting, and not entirely false, to assert the richness of Christian variety here. The Nicene Creed obliquely acknowledges each of these relationships in the phrases of its third article, and there may be times and seasons for each to come to the fore while others recede. Yet this favoritism also reflects a balkanization within our tradition, a balkanization that also haunts the dialogues between Christian theologies and sciences.⁵ Ecclesial partisanship encourages or constricts support for the various sciences in our various traditions. For instance, as a natural-science tradition Roman Catholicism has so made its peace with astronomy that the nineteenth-century Vatican maintained an observatory and still maintains an astronomical institute. This is a big change in a sense from the days of Galileo; however, it is still one in line with classic Catholic concerns.

By comparison, Wesleyan and Holiness traditions that have concentrated their theological resources on sanctification feel a more natural affinity for psychology than either physics or biology. Adventist soteriology inspires hospitals more enthusiastically than Pentecostal soteriology does (though Oral Roberts University did eventually catch the vision and opened a medical school). Magisterial Protestant fundamentalism with its lordly Spirit over us is inclined toward modernistic hermeneutics to defend its literal readings of the Bible, joined as they are to literal readings of Paul's

soteriological claims and the events of Jesus' life, while Orthodox semiotics embrace multiple senses of scripture that the Father's Spirit brings to light as the full truth about the Son; and these two hermeneutics lead to very different appropriations of the primordial human narratives in Genesis 2–3 and very different (if still suspicious) stances toward contemporary neo-Darwinian anthropology. And so on.

This should come as no surprise. The theological project is “faith seeking understanding,” and as observation is theory-laden we seek the understanding we believe to be most important. Traditions constructed to develop and defend overly narrow views of God, the gospel, or the world have naturally tended to serve their agendas by exploring promising disciplines and resisting threatening or apparently irrelevant ones. An instructive example is the modern Lutheran embrace of historical-critical method to isolate the kerygma (the apostles' confession of faith) allegedly at the earliest stratum of a biblical witness compromised by “early Catholicism,” an embrace that seems inimical to Christian faith among Reformed conservatives. Theological and secular disciplines cluster according to our particular ecclesial convictions and worldviews.

Similarly, Christian divisions place added stress on many of the fault lines that set theological traditions against scientific ones. Disengagement with other disciplines of learning and divergence with their hypotheses are driven in part by theological convictions shaped and distorted by our loyalties and antipathies to unreconciled church communities. For instance, evolution has become a battleground between progressive modernists, whose Spirit is immanent living water, and fundamentalist cessationists, whose Spirit is more of a transcendent interventionist. Whole generations of Americans are being raised to shun contemporary biology and reject its assumptions even as they fund an enormous medical establishment that follows those assumptions in developing new medical techniques to lengthen American lives. A richer appreciation of the Holy Spirit's interactions *in* us, perhaps mediated through a tradition such as Eastern Orthodoxy, can help dispel the pessimistic tone of so much neo-Darwinian biology (noted in Murphy 2000) and restore Christian confidence that the God whose eyes perceive the light that shines on the creation also works natural miracles through the ordinary processes that give rise to life. What we already know to be true of the babies “God gives us” we may also find in the species the Holy Spirit gives the skies, the seas, and the earth in Genesis 1.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE FUTURE OF THEOLOGY'S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SCIENCES

The very traditions that constrict, disengage, and distort our vision also have the resources to widen, engage, and correct the vision of fellow traditions.⁶ We will learn a deeper appreciation of the significance of the *whole*

third article of the Nicene Creed, and the rich pneumatology of the Great Tradition that it guards, if we work together. If charismatic and Pentecostal Christians bear some of the blame for overly narrow theologies and interdisciplinary engagements, we also have our parts to play in recovering Christian appreciation for the Spirit's full involvement in the life of God, the church, and the world. This is especially true where our brothers and sisters have neglected the Spirit *upon* us. Not only can we reassert the indispensability of that relationship for an adequate understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, but we also can assert the prominent role that, say, history and cultural anthropology will likely play in any truly adequate Christian engagement with the sciences. Their relevance will not be as clear to champions of other pneumatological relationships.

Yet Pentecostals and charismatics are only one party in what must be a whole multilateral exchange. For all our rhetoric about the "full gospel," we have not fully honored our apostolic inheritance any more than the brothers and sisters God raised us to help. Like one family at a potluck supper, charismatics and Pentecostals have much to contribute but much more to learn about the Spirit's many other relations with the church in God's complex embrace of the world in Jesus Christ.

This added stress that Christian division places on fault lines between theological and scientific traditions makes a fuller engagement with the sciences an ecumenical task, not just a generically Christian or specifically Pentecostal or Wesleyan one. This project has led me, a teacher at an evangelical Protestant liberal arts college, to the sobering realization that our faithful efforts to perceive the unity of interdisciplinary knowledge in God's kingdom are being impeded by our own evangelical tradition's theological blinders. Now as a convinced charismatic, Protestant evangelical, I believe our issues with the claims of theological liberals, Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and others are legitimate and deserve careful attention. Yet where division distorts and narrows my school's Christian vision, it will distort and narrow our ability to engage the full range of academic disciplines, because it will have distorted and narrowed our understanding of the full implications of the good news.

The logic of this frustration offers hope as well. A school in such intentional participation with a wide range of academic disciplines inevitably grapples with a wide range of human inquiries into God's beloved creation. That ought to drive us to an ever fuller appreciation of the God who has engaged it in so many ways, and ought to help us sense and resist the theological reductionism that has helped us rationalize our separation.

Fuller engagements with the range of natural and behavioral sciences thus hold ecumenical as well as educational promise, since together these involve a more complex set of original and eschatological relationships between God and the world than our divided theological traditions and heritages have often been able to appreciate themselves. The full range of

our relations with the Spirit inevitably appears in our lives of personal relationship, whether we appreciate them or not. As cross-cultural mission became a driving force for the early twentieth-century ecumenical movement, our generation could yet find that the interdisciplinary challenges of the sciences and other traditions of learning drive an intellectual ecumenical convergence, along with an impetus to reconciliation among Christian theological traditions, as we perceive our own interdisciplinary weaknesses and one another's strengths in the Spirit we know in part (1 Corinthians 13:9–14:2).

Few schools seem to have envisioned the integration of faith and learning across the disciplines as an ecumenical task. Until we do, I suspect that Christian institutions like mine will only revisit the frustrations my students and I felt during our seminar.

NOTES

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1. The syllabus for this class is at <http://www.westmont.edu/-work/classes/rs131/spr2007/index.html>.

2. Amos Yong (2005) offers a helpful glossary of the different uses of *spirit* in contemporary science-religion dialogue. This list of five relationships describes not the range of contemporary meanings of spirit but five distinct relationships manifested in Israel, displayed definitively in Jesus' ministry, and shared in the life of the church. The whole list presupposes and develops an orthodox Trinitarian pneumatology that is broadly covered by Yong's fourth and seventh types.

3. Such abuses are Deism, legalism, enthusiasm, spiritualism, and arrogance, respectively.

4. The term, with a lowercase *b* to emphasize a style rather than a particular institutional identity, is James McClendon's (1986, 19).

5. Because the complexity of our relationships with the Spirit is a manifestation of the Spirit's coherent personhood, balkanizing them also effectively depersonifies the third person of the Trinity.

6. For a similar point with a different ecumenical implication, see Newbigin 1959.

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