

## “The Untrammelled Development of Our Life”: Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Common Grace

Geoffrey Butler  
Wycliffe College, University of Toronto

### Abstract

While a force for evangelism and missions that has had an enormous impact on global Christianity, the Pentecostal movement has not historically prized cultural engagement. However, this has begun to change somewhat over the past several decades, with many younger Pentecostals in particular exhibiting a more positive view of culture. At is on this point that the doctrine of common grace, as articulated in the Reformed tradition, has strong potential to inform a Pentecostal theology of cultural engagement. This is particularly true if the doctrine is placed in conversation with Pentecostal pneumatology, which highly prizes the activity of the Holy Spirit in the individual life of the believer. Indeed, adopting some form of the doctrine of common grace may expand the Pentecostal vision of the Spirit’s work in society much more than at present, leading to a more robust theology both of the Spirit and of cultural engagement.

As a restorationist movement that believed in the imminent return of Christ from its infancy,<sup>1</sup> Pentecostalism has not historically held an especially positive view of culture or, consequently, placed significant emphasis on cultural engagement. Early denominational literature, often interpreting global events with an eye to the Second Coming, demonstrates little optimism concerning the larger society.<sup>2</sup> And, in his analysis of Richard Niebuhr’s renowned *Christ and Culture*, Andrew Walker, a scholar of Pentecostal theology, observes that “it is quite clear that all things Pentecostal would fit his rubric of ‘Christ against Culture,’” noting that

1 Harvey G. Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1995), 47.

2 For a prime example from World War I, see “The Great and Speedy Return of the Lord.” *The Weekly Evangel* 184a (April 10, 1917), 1–3. Blasting those nations that battled one another, the author declares: “The nations, in God’s sight, are regarded as great antagonistic world powers, who act at the instigation of Satan, and by whose authority will be terminated by the sure and certain coming of Christ.”

there “have been few sociologists who have not viewed Pentecostalism and its many charismatic mutations as ‘culturally denying’ in some sense.”<sup>3</sup> However, Pentecostalism’s emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit has proven a remarkable driving force in its evangelistic efforts, with a zeal matched by few other Christian traditions.<sup>4</sup> There is good reason to believe that this vibrant pneumatology is the prime reason for the movement’s rapid spread, particularly in the Global South where, as Philip Jenkins observes, “Pentecostals retain a strong supernatural orientation and are by and large far more interested in personal salvation than in radical politics.”<sup>5</sup> Yet, Jenkins also notes that part of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement’s appeal, especially among the poor and oppressed, is the deeply held conviction that the living God is active among his people. In Pentecostal churches, he observes, “There is a firm belief in God’s intervention in everyday life.”<sup>6</sup> Adherents have a faith that can be described as “otherworldly”—in the vein of the historic Pentecostal tradition, which has always heralded the soon return of Christ—yet not “escapist, since faith is expected to lead to real and observable results in the world.” Though there is, within the Pentecostal ethos, a clear sense that this Spirit empowered faith ought to have an impact on one’s life here and now, it seems that the movement has yet to come to a full understanding of how this same faith ought to affect social engagement “in the world” as well.<sup>7</sup>

The Reformed tradition, on the other hand, has often excelled in the area of cultural engagement, grounding its public theology in what has frequently been called the “cultural mandate” given to Adam and Eve Genesis 1.<sup>8</sup> This was a distinctive that marked out the early Protestants from the ecclesiastical establishment of their era. Unlike their Catholic counterparts, Luther, Zwingli, Bucer, and Calvin all spent the bulk of their ministries in urban contexts, and were forced to

---

3 Andrew Walker, *Notes from a Wayward Son: A Miscellany*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2020), 33.

4 Cox, *Fire*, 195.

5 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Future of Christianity Trilogy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 9. Jenkins goes on to note that “Christianity grows and spreads in highly charismatic and Pentecostal forms, ecstatic religious styles that are by no means confined to classical Pentecostal denominations, but which span churches with very different origins and traditions. Pentecostal expansion across the Southern continents has been so astonishing as to justify claims of a new Reformation.”

6 Jenkins, *Christendom*, 84.

7 Some within the broader Charismatic Renewal who claim the label “Pentecostal” may challenge this assertion. However, those in view here are not primarily those from more established Christian denominations whose congregations have adopted a charismatic pneumatology via the renewal movement, but the classical Pentecostal movement. For a brief discussion concerning this distinction, see Andrew Walker, “The Charismatic Movement,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, eds. Ian McFarland et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 94–95.

8 James K.A. Smith, *Letters to a Young Calvinist: An Invitation to the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010), 110.

grapple extensively with the issues that faced the laity.<sup>9</sup> In contrast to medieval clergy and monastics, who frequently frowned on those who pursued “secular” careers, Reformation theology affirmed with enthusiasm the notion of calling, or vocation, encouraging laypersons to serve God in such spheres as business and politics, previously regarded as unspiritual.<sup>10</sup> This view of culture, remarkably positive considering their strong view of human sin, was upheld by a firm commitment to the ideas encapsulated by the doctrine of common grace, defined by Wayne Grudem as “the grace of God by which he gives people innumerable blessings that are not part of salvation.”<sup>11</sup> Common grace, he explains, “is different from saving grace in its *results* (it does not bring about salvation), in its *recipients* (it is given to believers and unbelievers alike), and in its *source*. This grace, according to Abraham Kuyper, manifests itself in the ways in “which God . . . relaxes the curse which rests upon (his creation), arrests its process of corruption, and thus allows the untrammelled development of our life in which to glorify himself as creator.”<sup>12</sup> Common grace is not in any sense salvific for the individual soul; its purpose, rather, is for the general blessings of the human race, its cultures, and its institutions, to the glory of God the creator. This article will argue that Pentecostalism’s emphasis on the work of the Spirit uniquely positions the movement to view this ancient doctrine from a fresh perspective. Though on the surface Pentecostalism may not seem like fertile ground for the appropriation of a Reformed distinctive, its pneumatology, which prizes the Spirit’s activity in the world, makes the movement a natural home for the doctrine of common grace.

### Whose Reformed Theology?: Dutch Calvinism as a Key Pentecostal Conversation Partner

Before proceeding further, it will be helpful to clarify exactly which wing of the “Reformed” tradition is in view here. In its broadest sense, the word could be taken to denote a Baptist church that holds to the five points of Calvinism, a liberal mainline congregation in the Presbyterian tradition, or the relatively novel New Calvinism popular among millennials of various evangelical backgrounds.<sup>13</sup> While the Reformers themselves planted the seeds for the full development of the doctrine of common grace, it was the Dutch strand of Calvinism in particular

9 Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 254.

10 McGrath, *Reformation*, 254.

11 Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity, 1994), 657.

12 Smith, *Letters*, 98.

13 See Jamin Hubner, “The Diversity of Contemporary Reformed Theology: A New Encyclopedic Introduction with a Case Study,” *Canadian-American Theological Review* 8, no. 2 (2019): 44–45. The author notes, “Clearly, the term ‘reformed’ is not as meaningful and/or precise as many imagine,” pointing to the vast theological diversity of those who all lay claim to the label.

that articulated it most clearly and concisely, applying its relevance to the various spheres of human society.<sup>14</sup> Jamin Hubner, in a 2019 piece on the various strands of Reformed theology, refers to this wing of the Reformed tradition as “Neocalvinism,” explaining that:

Generally speaking, Neocalvinism is (a) Dutch Reformed theology tempered by modernism, and (b) the more direct theological and intellectual descendant of John Calvin, having sidestepped both the entrenched scholasticism of Turretin and the fundamentalism of American evangelicalism. . . . While the eschatological emphasis in Confessional Reformed theology points towards converting more people to reformed confessionalism, Neocalvinism focuses more directly on the creative development of God’s kingdom and the restoration of all of creation under Christ’s Lordship.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, Hubner highlights several distinctives of Neocalvinism relevant to a discussion of common grace, noting it “insists on a comprehensive and integrated understanding of creation, fall and redemption,” and “emphasizes God’s good and dynamic order for creation.”<sup>16</sup> Unlike some strands of Reformed theology such as, say, Calvinistic Baptists who are more combative in their approach to cultural engagement,<sup>17</sup> the Neocalvinist approach tends to be much more culture affirming. Thus, while the idea is not exclusive to Dutch Calvinism, when speaking of the “Reformed” doctrine of common grace, it is this tradition that will prove especially pertinent.<sup>18</sup>

Considering Jenkins’s observation about their awareness of God’s activity in every area of one’s life, Pentecostals would do well to further engage with the idea of common grace through the lens of its pneumatology in order to develop a uniquely Pentecostal theology of common grace. As Pentecostalism matures and broadens, it would do well to further probe questions of engaging culture

14 This is not to say the Dutch tradition alone owns this doctrine. As will be demonstrated, both Calvin and Edwards made lengthy statements concerning the idea of common grace. However, it was the Dutch Neocalvinist strand of Reformed theology in particular that developed the doctrine the most fully, thus making it the most important branch of the Reformed tradition for the purposes of this conversation.

15 Hubner, “Diversity,” 64–65.

16 Hubner, “Diversity,” 64.

17 See Hubner, “Diversity,” 59. He notes here that “Calvinist Baptists seem to have a louder voice in public ‘culture wars’” than many other strands of Reformed thought. Interestingly, some within this strand of Reformed thought also share some commonality with the Pentecostal movement in their dispensational eschatology—anything but a catalyst for a robust concept of common grace.

18 This will be especially true in engaging with the work of James K. A. Smith, a self-professed Pentecostal Calvinist. In the introduction to James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy*, Pentecostal Manifestos (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), Smith recounts the shock expressed by some acquaintances during his graduate work that a Pentecostal like him would be studying philosophy in the Dutch Reformed tradition.

and exerting influence in such spheres as science, politics, medicine, business, and other dimensions of the so-called secular realm with a view to where God may already be at work. Speaking to the church's need for a renewed approach to civic engagement, Walker makes the argument that "Christians do need to recapture a sense of civic responsibility, but by being the church again, not by attempting to become model citizens of a secular society."<sup>19</sup> While he clarifies that he does not wish for a "theocratic" or "Constantinian" society, neither is retreat from societal involvement—which he terms "Anabaptist retrenchment"—a proper way forward either.<sup>20</sup> Pentecostalism's pneumatology, the hallmark for which the movement is known, may allow it to approach these matters of civic engagement in a fresh light. While Pentecostals do have an eschatologically driven approach to faith that, in Jenkins' words, could be termed "other-worldly," their appreciation for the Spirit's activity in the here and now could enable the movement to strike this delicate balance between withdrawal from the public sphere and the inappropriate pursuit of power which has often seriously damaged the church in the past.

Moreover, it has been observed by some within the Pentecostal tradition that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has long been treated as relatively peripheral in Western theology compared to the attention afforded the Father and the Son.<sup>21</sup> Yet, this is hardly true of Pentecostal theological method, wherein the Spirit often serves as the starting point for reflection. In a 2011 essay exploring Pentecostal theological method and intercultural theology, Mark Cartledge observes that some within the tradition "have argued for a method of doing theology that works with a triad of sources: the text of Scripture, the community of the Church and the person of the Holy Spirit. All three sources are expected to work together in order to generate theological reflection and inform ecclesial decisions in relation to missiological praxis."<sup>22</sup> Pointing to the work of scholars within the Church of God (Cleveland) such as Kenneth Archer and John Christopher Thomas in particular, he explains how these three sources are understood to complement one another, noting at one point that, "The voice of the Holy Spirit is heard through the community and Scripture, and permeates the hermeneutical process." Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong, in a similar vein, argues that "Christian theological

19 Andrew Walker, *Telling the Story: Gospel, Mission and Culture* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 189.

20 Walker, *Telling*, 189.

21 See Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), chapter 4, as he argues that in "Western theological heritage . . . the Spirit is implicitly expected to play a subordinate role."

22 Mark J. Cartledge, "Pentecostal Theological Method and Intercultural Theology," in *Intercultural Theology: Approaches and Themes*, eds. Mark J. Cartledge and David Cheetham (London: SCM, 2011), chapter 4.

reflection in a postmodern world starts with the experience of the Holy Spirit,”<sup>23</sup> and that, “it is time for the West to consciously resist the subordination of the (Spirit to the Word)” in this task.<sup>24</sup> A prime example of this approach in Yong’s own work is his call for a “pneumatological theology of religions,”<sup>25</sup> which “allows us to ask the soteriological question within a different, and perhaps broader, framework,” that is, by considering where the Spirit may be at work in religious communities outside Christianity.<sup>26</sup>

Through this very method that Yong employs with a theology of religions, Pentecostals are well positioned to develop their own distinct conception of common grace. If Pentecostals frequently approach the theological task itself from the vantage point of the Spirit’s person and work, then it stands to reason they would do likewise with this doctrine. While Kuyper speaks of common grace as the way in which God “relaxes the curse” upon creation with the redemption of each sphere in view, Pentecostals may emphasize how the Spirit specifically accomplishes this work. A pneumatologically grounded doctrine of common grace could provide an excellent framework for conversations surrounding God’s activity not just in the church, but the culture, potentially serving as a fruitful contribution to the wider Christian tradition. Questions of cultural engagement are even more crucial considering Pentecostalism’s rapid global spread, as believers across diverse contexts grapple with how to engage their particular locale.

This work will focus particularly on how the doctrine of common grace could help Pentecostals better engage in the political realm, the sciences, and, in true Pentecostal form, more effective evangelism. The work of Amos Yong and James K.A. Smith, in particular, will be highlighted, the former in order to understand a

23 Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002). It is worth noting that Yong’s work in this volume is focused not on theological method but theological hermeneutics. Nevertheless, the core idea—that theological reflection can, and should, begin with an experience of the Holy Spirit—is still pertinent to the discussion here.

24 Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 16. See also Stephenson, Christopher Adam. “Pentecostal Theology According to the Theologians: An Introduction to the Theological Methods of Pentecostal Systematic Theologians” (Ph.D. Diss, Marquette University, 2009). The author provides an overview of Yong’s theological method in the fifth chapter of this work, asserting that it is “is formed by pneumatology from first to last, a characteristic due in part to the fact that he is a member of a younger generation of Pentecostal scholars” (157).

25 Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2003), 21. Yong’s theology of grace in general, also approached from a pneumatological angle, will be discussed at a later point in this article. For now, Yong’s approach to developing a pneumatological theology of religions will serve as a model for the development of a pneumatological theology of common grace. It should be noted that the concept of a theology of religions in general is not a Pentecostal distinctive. Drawing on the work of Paul Tillich, it is “the attempt to understand the human ultimate concern within a theistic framework” (Yong, *Impasse*, 18).

26 See Yong, *Impasse*, 22. He argues that, since the Holy Spirit “blows where it chooses,” as per John 3:8, “why would the Spirit ‘blow’ outside the church but not in all the religions, especially if the religions themselves are never only (or purely) the religions but are already culturally, socially, and politically informed in some way?”

classical Pentecostal response to this challenge, as well as the latter on account of his deep roots in both classical Pentecostalism and the Dutch Reformed tradition. Both have written at length on matters of science and culture, and Smith has, at times, referred to himself as a “Reformed Charismatic” or a “Pentecostal Calvinist.”<sup>27</sup> His work reveals a deep appreciation both for Pentecostalism’s dynamic pneumatology as well as the Reformed zeal for cultural influence and transformation, making him a capable conversation partner in the development of a Pentecostal theology of common grace.

### **An Historic Doctrine, A Contemporary Imbalance**

Before bringing common grace into conversation with Pentecostal pneumatology, it will be helpful to probe more deeply into how the former has been understood in the Reformed tradition historically. Bearing in mind Kuyper’s comments, God’s common grace operates in every sphere of life; while not sufficient for personal salvation, it restrains evil in the human heart, endowing them with gifts and abilities for the betterment of their society, working toward the redemption of each cultural sphere for the glory of God. Perhaps the quip for which the Dutch statesman is best known, and that which encapsulates his understanding of common grace, is that “[t]here is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: Mine!”<sup>28</sup> James Smith expands on Kuyper’s theology of creation in his 2010 work *Letters to a Young Calvinist* by explaining that

[e]very life-system, according to Kuyper, not only spells out how “I” can be saved but spells out an entire vision of and for the totality of human life, ultimately articulating an understanding of three “fundamental relations of all human life”: our relation to God, our relation to other persons (and human flourishing in general), and humanity’s relation to the natural world . . . he later emphasizes in his fourth Stone lecture, while “the Christian religion is substantially soteriological”—that is, concerned with salvation—“the object of the work of redemption is not limited to the salvation of individual sinners, but extends itself to the redemption *of the world*” (119, emphasis added), the renewal and restoration of this groaning creation (Rom. 8:18–23).<sup>29</sup>

27 See, for example, “Teaching a Calvinist to Dance.” *Christianity Today*, May 16, 2008. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/may/25.42.html>.

28 James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 488.

29 Smith, *Letters*, 97–98. In the same volume, he chides fellow Calvinists, especially young newcomers to the Reformed tradition, who admire preachers that “spend more time bashing other Christians than they do denouncing the idolatries of our age. In fact, if these sermons and lectures are any indication, you’d think these folks see Pentecostalism as more of a danger to our souls than capitalism—or Willow Creek as more of a threat than the temptations of nationalism” (See Smith, *Letters*, 91).



Keeping in mind Kuyper's worldview, God's purposes are not constrained to individual salvation, but the broader redemption of society. The Pentecostal tradition has historically been strong on the individual, yet often neglecting societal, transformation. The goal in engaging Reformed theologians like Kuyper, then, is to consider how it may retain its emphasis on the former while developing a robust conception of the latter.

It is worth noting that, for all his contribution to the doctrine's development, the actual substance of common grace was not an invention of Kuyper's. The real roots of the concept lie in the Reformation and the rather culture affirming stance its leaders adopted.<sup>30</sup> John Calvin, in his landmark *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, points to Paul's Acts 17 appeal to the Athenians to argue, in essence, for the doctrine of common grace;<sup>31</sup> the apostle asserts to his audience that God "is not far from any one of us" and that humanity "might feel after God to find him." For Calvin, this nearness to each member of the human race, believer and unbeliever alike, pointed to the fact that every individual has "within himself undoubted evidence of the heavenly grace by which he lives, moves, and has his being."<sup>32</sup> This evidence is not given exclusively to followers of Christ, but even the pagan philosophers to whom Paul made his address. Calvin further points to the restraint of sin in society<sup>33</sup> and the gifts of intellect and artistic ability,<sup>34</sup> as evidences of common grace, which both prevents what is evil and actively promotes what is good. He spells this out even more clearly in a later section, addressing how a sinful individual may perform virtuous acts by explaining that such actions

[a]re not common endowments of nature, but special gifts of God, which He distributes in diverse forms, and, in a definite measure, to men otherwise profane. For which reason, we hesitate not, in common language, to say, that one is of a good, another of a vicious nature; though we cease not to hold that both are placed under the universal

30 Recall Hubner, "Diversity," 64, and his claim that Dutch Neocalvinism is "the more direct theological and intellectual descendant of John Calvin," than Reformed fundamentalism or scholasticism. Thus, the commonality between Dutch Neocalvinism and Calvin himself on this point is not surprising.

31 For a detailed account of Calvin's doctrine of common grace, see Herman Bavinck, "Calvin and Common Grace," trans. Geerhardus Vos, *The Princeton Theological Review* 7, no. 3 (1909): 437–65.

32 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2017), 1.5.3.

33 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.3.

34 See Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.17. Here he claims common grace expresses itself in that "some excel in acuteness, and some in judgment, while others have greater readiness in learning some peculiar art, God, by this variety commends his favour toward us. . . . For whence is it that one is more excellent than another, but that in a common nature the grace of God is specially displayed in passing by many and thus proclaiming that it is under obligation to none." Under such circumstances, he is clearly not speaking of the Lord "passing by" or electing an individual for salvation, but in granting them a particular ability during their earthly life.



condition of human depravity. All we mean is that God has conferred on the one a special grace which He has not seen it meet to confer on the other.<sup>35</sup>

Calvin points to the example of King Saul over Israel as an object of this grace. This clearly implies Calvin understands one operation of this common grace is when God grants a political leader the necessary competence to fulfill their duties. Indeed, he goes on to state that “[t]he virtues which deceive us by an empty show may have their praise in civil society and the common intercourse of life, but before the judgement seat of God they will be of no value to establish a claim of righteousness.”<sup>36</sup> So, while repudiating the idea that an individual may attain salvation through any work, they may accomplish what is praiseworthy as it concerns civic duty.

Jonathan Edwards, writing two centuries after Calvin, likewise made a distinction between God’s saving grace—effectual for salvation, and granted only to the elect—and common grace, which referred to “that kind of action or influence of the Spirit of God to which are owing those religious or moral attainments that are common to both saints and sinners, and so signifies as much as common assistance.”<sup>37</sup> While Edwards’s description of common grace as “assistance” to “both saints and sinners” highlights once again how this grace is indiscriminate, note here the emphasis on the Spirit. Even the upright actions of sinners are due to the “influence of the Spirit of God.” This may sound surprising to those who hold the Spirit works only through believers; not only would this position affirm that the Spirit thus blesses all of humanity for a common good, but Edwards’s comment about the “religious attainments” of sinners would imply the Spirit can be at work in non-Christian faith communities, albeit non-salvifically. Indeed, his statements sounds not so different from Yong’s proposal for a pneumatological theology of religions on this point. Edwards’s explicit focus on the Spirit not only aligns with the essence of that which Calvin, Kuyper, and the Reformed tradition broadly understood of this doctrine, it also highlights why, and how, it may be well suited to the Pentecostal worldview as well.

### The Pentecostal Connection

If one holds to common grace, it follows that they ought to look for ways in which the Spirit of God is at work in every area of life. This is a natural fit for a tradition in which theological reflection is approached from the vantage point of

---

35 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.4.

36 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.4.

37 Jonathan Edwards, *Treatise on Grace and Other Posthumously Published Writings*, ed. Paul Helm (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1971), 25.

one's experience of the Holy Spirit as Yong proposes.<sup>38</sup> While some within the movement may be slow to look to the Reformed tradition on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, it is worth highlighting that all three theologians from that tradition surveyed thus far give sustained attention to the Spirit's person and work. Calvin has, in the past, been labelled "The Theologian of the Holy Spirit" given how he intertwines his work within virtually every aspect of his larger system.<sup>39</sup> A hallmark of Edwards's theology was the place of religious experience, and as noted above, his pneumatologically grounded conception of common grace would appear to be very conducive to a development of a Pentecostal theology of the doctrine. And Kuyper himself, in his volume on pneumatology published in 1900, commends Calvin especially for how his doctrine of common grace emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit.<sup>40</sup>

Yong interacts with Kuyper's theology of common grace in his work *In the Days of Caesar*, quoting him favourably in regards to his political theology, ordered around the concept of multiple interacting spheres.<sup>41</sup> He notes that such a concept is quite compatible with the Pentecostal tradition if viewed through a distinct pneumatological lens; while Reformed theology views the triune God as active in such fields of Economics, Politics, and Culture, a distinctly Pentecostal position would emphasize particularly the work of the Holy Spirit in these realms. Reflecting on Yong's analysis, it seems that his emphasis on the Spirit's activity is just one application of Jenkins's observation that, for Pentecostals, "There is a firm belief in God's intervention in everyday life." If the Spirit of God is active in the life of the individual, does it not follow that he would be unceasingly active in a society composed of individuals? And if God himself is at work to redeem his entire creation, not just the individual soul, should not his people be concerned with this mission as well? The drive that has characterized Pentecostal evangelism would be instrumental if applied to cultural engagement and redemption as well.

Smith has likewise written extensively on public theology and common grace

---

38 And, again, as Cartledge has noted is characteristic of the movement (See Cartledge, "Pentecostal Theological Method," chapter 4).

39 The individual first credited with coining this phrase was conservative Reformed theologian B.B. Warfield. See Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism*, ed. Ethelbert Dudley Warfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), 374. Victor Shepherd concurs with this assessment, arguing in his discussion of Calvin and the Christian experience that "Calvin, it must always be remembered, has long had the reputation of being *the* theologian of the Holy Spirit." See Victor A. Shepherd, *A Ministry Dearer Than Life: The Pastoral Legacy of John Calvin* (Toronto: Clements, 2009), 10.

40 Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. John Hendrik De Vries (Funk & Wagnalls: New York & London, 1900), xxxiv.

41 Amos Yong, *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology*, The Cadbury Lectures, 2009 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 82–83.

in his 2017 work, *Awaiting the King*.<sup>42</sup> Common grace, he writes, not only restrains sin but also sustains societal instructions, not the least of which is the state.<sup>43</sup> In light of the reign of Jesus Christ, which has already been inaugurated, believers ought to conduct themselves with confidence as they engage their society, recognizing the presence of God as active in his world. Thus, while the church must not neglect the salvation of individuals, he argues, Christians are also called to work toward the flourishing of the culture itself.<sup>44</sup> Granted, some Pentecostals may be skeptical of Smith's approach; given their apocalyptic eschatology, many might conclude that the culture itself is simply not salvageable, and that in light of Christ's soon return it would be best to focus on the salvation of individuals. Yet, it would not only be short-sighted to reject Smith's approach outright, but it would not even be consistent with the entirety of historic Pentecostalism. Despite the heavy influence of dispensationalism—which typically relegated the reign of Christ to a future millennial age—within the movement, some early Pentecostal leaders identified the church itself with the Kingdom of God. Myer Pearlman, for example, claims that “the church age is a phase of the kingdom,”<sup>45</sup> in contrast to the pessimistic outlook concerning church and culture typical of old school dispensational thought. He describes Colossians 4 as “Paul’s description of Christian work as being in the sphere of God’s kingdom”—terminology one could mistake for that of Kuyper and his Dutch Reformed understanding of the world. Perhaps, then, the potential to develop a Pentecostal theology of common grace has existed from the movement’s very beginning.

### **Beyond Christendom: Pentecostalism and the Political Sphere**

Given the bloodshed and division that has characterized much Christian involvement with the state over the past 2,000 years, many believers may be hesitant to support the Church’s involvement with politics. Non-Christians, all too aware of the Church’s frequent abuse of political and cultural power in the past, may well be hesitant to trust professing Christians with such power in the present and future. Yet, the Bible itself refers to the brutal Roman authorities as “God’s servant,” demonstrating his ability to work through even the most depraved of humanity on occasion (Rom 13:4).<sup>46</sup> Smith argues that, while Christians may be conditioned to see “secular” spheres such as government in a negative light—and sometimes with good reason given the corruption that frequently characterizes them—believers

42 James K.A. Smith, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology*. Cultural Liturgies, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017).

43 Smith, *Awaiting*, 97.

44 Smith, *Awaiting*, 22.

45 Myer Pearlman, *Knowing the Doctrines of the Bible* (Springfield: Gospel, 1937), 351.

46 Recall John Calvin’s previously mentioned comments concerning the common grace afforded unregenerate political officials; see Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.4.

ought to see them as a gift, a structure ordained and upheld by God.<sup>47</sup> In his work on Pentecostalism and philosophy, creatively entitled *Thinking in Tongues*, Smith notes that much fruit has been borne out of the church's influence in Western politics, not the least of which is the concept of liberal democracy itself. The Pentecostal view of the Spirit's involvement in the world should naturally produce a robust theology of culture, he argues, including in the political arena. "Pentecostal spirituality, we've noted, is bound up with an expectation that the Spirit operates *within* the created order," Smith claims, and that beyond ecclesiology, "implicit in Pentecostal theology is also a unique theology of creation and culture."<sup>48</sup> Aware of its skepticism of culture, yet optimistic concerning the potential the Pentecostal worldview holds, Smith explains:

Even though Pentecostals have often accepted such dualistic rejections of "the world," a core element of the Pentecostal worldview—the affirmation of bodily healing—actually deconstructs such dualism. One of the concomitant effects of this should be a broader affirmation of the goodness of embodiment and materiality, and therefore an affirmation of the fundamental goodness of spheres of culture related to embodiment.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, in Smith's view, on account of this "affirmation of the goodness of embodiment"—inherent in one of its core distinctives—Pentecostals are well positioned to develop a more robust theology of the Spirit's work in culture. "including," he charges, "the spheres of politics, commerce and the arts."<sup>50</sup> Smith's language, in discussing the Pentecostal worldview, is quite similar to the manner in which Calvin speaks of common grace, or how Kuyper outlines his doctrine of "sphere sovereignty." Recall once again how Edwards defines common grace as "influence of the Spirit of God to which are owing those religious or moral attainments that are common to both saints and sinners, and so signifies as much as common assistance."<sup>51</sup> Surely political involvement would fall under this definition as much as any sphere. Moreover, if Smith's observation that Pentecostalism understands human culture to be "charged with the presence of the Spirit,"<sup>52</sup> a more fully developed Pentecostal theology of common grace would be well positioned to inform Christian political engagement.

This application may be timely given the increasing influence secularism

---

47 Smith, *Awaiting*, 96.

48 James K.A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy*, Pentecostal Manifestos (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 38–39.

49 Smith, *Thinking*, 41.

50 Smith, *Thinking*, 39.

51 Edwards, *Treatise*, 25.

52 Smith, *Thinking*, 39.

enjoys in the West. Certainly, some conceptions of “Christendom” must be emphatically rejected, those that would suppress the religious freedom of others or endorse coercion in spreading the faith. Yet, Smith’s vision of Christendom as articulated in his work on public theology, *Awaiting the King*, is rather “a *missional* endeavor that labors in the hope that our political institutions can be bent, if ever so slightly, towards the coming kingdom of love.”<sup>53</sup> This involves not just the redemption of individuals involved in the institution, but the institution itself. Recall his earlier charge that the Pentecostal worldview is “charged with the presence of the Spirit.” If the biblical assertion that government is a divinely ordained institution were infused with the understanding that the Spirit is continually active in the world, this movement could be uniquely positioned to influence the political landscape of a society skeptical of old school Christendom yet still open to the “coming kingdom of love” of which Smith speaks. A fresh perspective on common grace that grants more explicit attention to the Spirit’s presence within the existing structure means that believers may work within the established system to redeem it, rather than impose a structure of Christendom by way of force, as in the days of premodern Europe, for example.

Recall that globally, Pentecostalism has made some of its greatest inroads among the marginalized and impoverished.<sup>54</sup> With a history of challenging the ecclesiastical establishment, a Pentecostal theology of common grace might uniquely enable the movement to approach politics from a strongly prophetic standpoint. Yong complements Smith’s public theology by noting that, while Pentecostalism may have branded itself as apolitical in times past, its critique of established structures has actually served as a prophetic type of political action itself.<sup>55</sup> In a 2019 volume co-edited by Yong and Steven Studebaker, Edmund J. Rybarczyk draws on the likes of Kuyper and Edwards to inform a Pentecostal theology of church and culture, explaining:

For its part the Reformed tradition is renowned for embracing the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:28-30). God, per Abraham Kuyper, even gives common grace to facilitate culture-making and the common good. The Reformed tradition recognizes that making culture, or even Christianizing culture (considering the Puritan enterprise), is an important way to be salt and light, and to obey Christ’s commandment to make disciples of the nations. Specifically, because he was amazingly attuned to beauty’s existence—particularly such that beauty is

53 Smith, *Awaiting*, preface.

54 See Cox, *Fire*, for example, as the author includes a respective chapter on the movement’s growth in Latin American, Africa, and the Asian Rim.

55 Yong, *Caesar*, 11.

rooted in the Holy Spirit—Jonathan Edwards may serve as a fitting interlocutor for Pentecostals' aesthetic consideration.<sup>56</sup>

One may already observe past examples of Pentecostals realizing how conducive their own ethos can be to a prophetically oriented theology of church and culture. Yong highlights the opposition of Nicaraguan Pentecostals to the oppressive regime of the Sandinistas, voicing their disapproval of its Communist ideology.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, it might surprise many Canadian and British Pentecostals to learn that in the early twentieth century, adherents of their movement were fierce critics of militarism and nationalism, willing to critique their Empire when few others would.<sup>58</sup> What kind of potential could Pentecostalism hold, then, if it were to take this type of action not simply to oppose existing structures and ideologies but to actively promote Christian values within those existing structures? If the Spirit of God is at work in all spheres of life, it follows that common grace will be present in areas such as finance and education, constant grounds for debate in the political arena. As their brethren have previously spoken out against communist governments, Pentecostals who enjoy the benefits of liberal democracy may do well to speak out in favour of sound fiscal and education policies that benefit the poor and contribute toward a stable economy for all its citizens.<sup>59</sup> Those in politically powerful nations might leverage their political capital to influence foreign policy toward a more compassionate stance regarding those which are impoverished or war-torn.<sup>60</sup> While no government in the present age can ever be fully Christian, common grace already present in the political realm through the working of the Spirit should embolden believers toward redeeming the structure despite its fallen character; a point at which the prophetic voice so characteristic of Pentecostalism could be of even greater value.

### **This is My Father's World: Common Grace, the Spirit and the Sciences**

A professor of mathematics and a pastoral advisor at the University of Oxford, John Lennox makes the charges that "Science—far from making God redundant and

56 Edmund J. Rybarczyk, "Edwards and Aesthetics: A Critical and Constructive Pentecostal Appropriation," in *Pentecostal Theology and Jonathan Edwards*, T&T Clark Systematic Pentecostal and Charismatic Theology Series, eds. Amos Yong and Steven M Studebaker (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 181.

57 Yong, *Caesar*, 12.

58 See Murray W. Dempster, "The Canada—Britain—USA Triad: Canadian Pentecostal Pacifism in WWI and WWII," *Canadian Journal of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity* 4 (2013): 1–26.

59 Steven M. Studebaker, *A Pentecostal Political Theology for American Renewal: Spirit of the Kingdoms, Citizens of the Cities*, Christianity and Renewal-Interdisciplinary Studies (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 254.

60 Studebaker, *Political Theology*, 225–26.

irrelevant, as atheists often affirm—actually confirms his existence.”<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately, in a tragic twist, it has become commonplace within contemporary Christianity to pit science and religion against one another, with the assumption that placing confidence in one precludes real interest in the other. Not only is this a false dilemma, but it also betrays an appallingly weak theology of general revelation.<sup>62</sup> It also fails to consider how the Spirit may be at work in the scientific world, exerting his common grace for the betterment of society in this sphere.<sup>63</sup> Yong’s theological method proves helpful again on this point; in his 2012 monograph on grace, he approaches his subject by claiming that, “starting with the Spirit contributes to a more fully and robustly trinitarian theology which also adjusts our doctrines of creation in an eschatological dimension.”<sup>64</sup> If it is indeed the case that approaching the doctrine of grace with the Spirit as a starting point “adjusts our doctrine of creation,” it is inevitable that a Pentecostal theology of common grace would expect to see the Spirit at work throughout the sciences, and in the work of those who study creation as a vocation.

In contrast to those who would pit science and religion against one another, Smith and Yong present a compelling case for Pentecostal engagement with the sciences, noting that this sphere displays the glory of God in that he is the creator and redeemer of the natural world, and is another example of his common grace.<sup>65</sup> Once again, it is worth bearing in mind Smith’s argument that implicit in

61 John C. Lennox, *Seven Days That Divide the World: The Beginning According to Genesis and Science* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 13.

62 Telford Work, “What Have the Galapagos to Do with Jerusalem? Scientific Knowledge in Theological Context,” in *Science and the Spirit: A Pentecostal Engagement with the Sciences*, eds. James K.A. Smith and Amos Yong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 21–23.

63 See Jason Byassee, *Surprised by Jesus Again: Reading the Bible in Communion with the Saints* (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 2019), 165, for a discussion of how Augustine acknowledged that even unbelievers, merely on the basis of “reason and experience” could know something of the created world. He quotes Augustine as noting that while he could observe some Christians “presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scriptures, talking nonsense on these topics,” the unregenerate could often display a decent grasp of them. Although Byassee’s discussion here is not centred on the idea of common grace, his discussion raises the question of how unbelievers could display more competence in the realm of science than many believers, and whether common grace could be implied in Augustine’s thought here.

64 Amos Yong, *Spirit of Love: A Trinitarian Theology of Grace* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012), preface.

65 For a Q&A with Smith on the topic of Pentecostalism and the Sciences, see Myrna Anderson, “Q&A with Jamie Smith on Pentecostalism,” *Calvin University*, September 17, 2010, <https://calvin.edu/news/archive/q-a-with-jamie-smith-on-pentecostalism>, accessed June 22, 2020. Of his and Yong’s book on Pentecostalism and the Sciences, Smith asserts, “Both science and Pentecostalism are ‘globalizing’ forces, and while one might expect there to be an inherent tension between the two, we try to show otherwise. . . . on the one hand, we wanted to show how and why Pentecostals should engage and pursue science; on the other hand, we also wanted to show that sometimes scientists try to smuggle in assumptions about science that would seem to preclude certain Pentecostal beliefs, such as belief in divine healing or the realities of demons. So the book’s not just about getting Pentecostals to submit to the unquestioned authority of science. We’re also encouraging Pentecostals to think critically about some of the assumptions in the sciences.”



Pentecostal spirituality is the concept that all of creation is “charged with the presence of the Spirit.”<sup>66</sup> Indeed, the Scriptures themselves describe the Spirit of God as present in the very creation of the natural world (Gen 1:1). This indicates, then, that what is learned from its study is not strictly the result of human reason but also of natural revelation. While most orthodox Christians would likely agree on such principles, Smith also asserts that Pentecostalism is uniquely positioned to critique certain biases in the scientific community. Claims that divine revelation, tongues, miracles, or bodily resurrection cannot occur are philosophical claims, borne out of a rationalistic worldview, not empirically demonstrated fact.<sup>67</sup> Such claims cannot be tested; they are, rather, a matter of experience. This raises an interesting point, namely, that Pentecostals are often accused of erring in constructing a worldview on the shaky foundation of experience. Yet, is it not also a mistake to construct a worldview without reference to experience? Science’s failure to discover consistent patterns of miracles does not disprove their existence, but rather suggests they are rare—not unlike in the Scriptures themselves.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, if put to the test, the lack of empirical, scientific explanations for their occurrence may well help confirm the Pentecostal testimony.

Elsewhere Amos Yong notes that the birth of the Pentecostal movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century took place around the same time as the fundamentalist/modernist divide over the role of science occurred.<sup>69</sup> Pentecostals, siding with the fundamentalists, unfortunately, developed a deep suspicion of academia that lingers in the movement to this day. Yet, as Telford Work — contributing to Smith and Yong’s volume on Pentecostalism and the Sciences — suggests, there is a viable path to shake this reputation, as Pentecostal spirituality uniquely helps explain those things for which science cannot account.<sup>70</sup> What medical technology fails to remedy, divine healing may accomplish perfectly. Where naturalistic discourse fails to satisfy the soul, charismatic gifts such as tongues and prophecy signify a deeper connection with reality than a strictly secular worldview could afford. The reason for this is that both science and theology study God’s revelation of himself; they simply do so through different means of revelation. The former studies what God has revealed about himself through his creation, the latter through is written word.<sup>71</sup> Thus, while the Pentecostal openness to that which lies beyond the natural realm may appear opposed to scientific inquiry on the surface, it does not

---

66 Smith, *Thinking*, 40.

67 James K. A. Smith, “Is There Room for Surprise in the Natural World? Naturalism, the Supernatural, and Pentecostal Spirituality,” in Smith and Yong, *Science*, 39.

68 Work, “Galapagos,” 29.

69 Amos Yong, *The Spirit of Creation: Modern Science and Divine Action in the Pentecostal-Charismatic Imagination*. Pentecostal Manifestos (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 2.

70 Work, “Galapagos,” 19.

71 Work, “Galapagos,” 27.

necessarily need to be. On the contrary, when analyzed more carefully, it appears that one beautifully complements the other, one reflecting God's common grace and another his redeeming grace.

In addition, while the "enchanted" Pentecostal worldview may provide a fitting complement to the technological and scientific advances of the past century,<sup>72</sup> the development of a distinctly Pentecostal doctrine of common grace may help believers see such developments themselves as a work of the Spirit.<sup>73</sup> Charging that Pentecostal theology, rightly understood, should inform and strengthen scientific inquiry rather than diminish it, Yong explains:

A Pentecostal pneumatological theology of divine action would understand the work of the Holy Spirit as bringing about the coming reign of God in the present age. It would hence be a language of faith that need not displace scientific explanations, even while such a discourse may potentially inform the presuppositions of scientific research, contribute to the formulation of scientific hypotheses, and shape scientific interpretations.<sup>74</sup>

Recall Calvin's assertion that common grace is expressed through the exercise of abilities that "[a]re not common endowments of nature, but special gifts of God, which He distributes in diverse forms, and, in a definite measure, to men otherwise profane,"<sup>75</sup> and then consider Yong's proposal that the activity of the Spirit might "inform the presuppositions of scientific research, contribute to the formulation of scientific hypotheses." By placing this understanding of the Spirit's work in the sciences in dialogue with Calvin's position that even "profane" individuals may be especially gifted by the common grace of God in a certain area, one now has the framework to construct a Pentecostal theology of common grace that views scientific discoveries and technological advances as a direct result of the Spirit's activity in the world—even in a sphere often derided as overly "secular" by its detractors. Not only would this perspective be a markedly positive shift for Pentecostalism; it may also help Christians from a variety of traditions consider afresh how God may be at work in the scientific disciplines.

---

72 Work, "Galapagos," 27.

73 See Walker, *Wayward*, 43. Walker notes that "Pentecostals have been open to modern technologies, advertising, and management techniques," and thus have had "far more at home with mass media and consumer culture than many of their mainline counterparts." Yet, despite this observation, it is worth noting that there is little in the way of a Pentecostal theology of technology itself.

74 Amos Yong, "How Does God Do What God Does? Pentecostal-Charismatic Perspectives on Divine Action in Dialogue with Modern Science," in Smith and Yong, *Science*, 62.

75 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.4.

## Common Grace, Evangelism, and Cultural Engagement

While Pentecostalism has not historically been strong on cultural engagement, its zeal for mission has been unparalleled since its birth. This is one area where the culturally savvy Calvinist wing of the church has often been criticized, doubtless in part due to its doctrine of election, but also the cessationist pneumatology of many within the tradition.<sup>76</sup> Perhaps the contemporary church—Pentecostals in particular—would do well to draw on the strength of both wings of the church in order to sharpen its effectiveness in global missions. One reason this will be crucial moving forward has been briefly alluded to: the spread of Pentecostalism in traditionally non-Christian areas of the globe. While it may be easy for Western Christians to neglect the public sphere, inculcated with the notion that the religious/private and public spheres must remain separate, the challenge is much more complex outside the boundaries of historic Christendom. Yong is particularly helpful here, reminding believers that global Pentecostalism is not traditional, homogenous, and Americanized, but quite diverse and even pluralistic in a sense.<sup>77</sup> And, as Pentecostals navigate how to evangelize these contexts while simultaneously considering how to reach a new generation in North America and Europe—both with deep Christian roots and a secularizing populace—it would be wise to bear in mind Kuyper’s conviction that “redemption is not limited to the salvation of individual sinners, but extends itself to the redemption of the world.”<sup>78</sup> Pentecostal evangelism would indeed only be empowered by the development and application of a Spirit-filled theology of common grace that expanded the movement’s passion for the salvation of souls to entire societies.

In Singapore, for example, some Pentecostals have recognized great potential for cultural engagement in a cosmopolitan, diverse metropolis with little gospel witness. Though Christians in the region have been labelled as aliens to the culture, the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement’s rapid growth has been noted for its evangelistic zeal—not unlike the New Testament church.<sup>79</sup> Yet, the virtue of tolerance reigns supreme in Singapore, embedded in the culture and credited with sustaining the multi-faith, multi-ethnic harmony.<sup>80</sup> Perhaps in part due to this, evangelicals in the tiny nation have proven hesitant to engage in interfaith dialogue.<sup>81</sup> Could the Pentecostal adaptation of the Reformed doctrine of common

76 See Derrick Mashau, “John Calvin’s Theology of the Charismata: Its Influence on the Reformed Confessions and Its Implications for the Church’s Mission,” *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 36, no. 1 (2008): 86–97.

77 Yong, *Days*, 37.

78 Bratt, *Kuyper*, 488.

79 MayLing Tan-Chow, *Pentecostal Theology for the Twenty-First Century: Engaging with Multi-Faith Singapore*. Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology, and Biblical Studies (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 15–16.

80 Tan-Chow, *Pentecostal Theology*, 13.

81 Tan-Chow, *Pentecostal Theology*, 21.

grace speak to this tension, allowing believers to recognize the virtue in their society, including other religions, while maintaining its zeal for the exclusivity of the gospel? A Pentecostal public theology, in order to be relevant there, must recognize the common grace of God at work in the fields of business, education, economics, and every other sphere of life, all of which may be redeemed for the extension of God's kingdom.

To be sure, Pentecostalism will need to be careful to guard against the dangers of syncretism while looking for signs of common grace in other religious—or even secular—circles. Yong himself notes in his work on a theology of religions, “there is always a fine line between contextualization and syncretism,” yet goes on to argue that “this line needs to be recognized as a dynamic one, to be renegotiated at every turn as Christians encounter religious others.”<sup>82</sup> While Yong may be correct that, at times, this line may indeed need to be “renegotiated,” Pentecostals would do well to be aware of the syncretistic tendencies that have arisen in some segments of their global movement. Wolfgang Vondey, in a 2010 monograph on global Christianity notes that some segments of “Global Pentecostalism” allow for “the ritual, even sacramental, use of glossolalia, prophecies, healing, dreams, and visions, patterned after spiritual practices, on the one hand, and the indigenous, spiritual beliefs and practices that seem to border on syncretism, on the other hand.”<sup>83</sup> Harvey Cox, though not an insider to the movement like Vondey, has also noted the tendency of some Pentecostal communities to integrate traditional religious beliefs into their form of Christianity. “Pentecostals,” he observes, “often succeed in being highly syncretistic while their leaders preach against syncretism.”<sup>84</sup>

Certainly, it must be acknowledged that, in every corner of the globe, Christianity will inevitably reflect its surrounding culture to one degree or another;<sup>85</sup> Pentecostalism will be, and should be, no exception. Thus, the charge of syncretism should never be levelled lightly. That said, it must be kept in mind that, in the Reformed tradition, common grace is not salvific. Thus, even if classical Pentecostals were to grant that the Spirit bestows his common grace by working within clearly syncretistic movements, outside of orthodoxy, they must be careful not to

82 Yong, *Impasse*, 19.

83 Wolfgang Vondey, *Beyond Pentecostalism: The Crisis of Global Christianity and the Renewal of the Theological Agenda*. Pentecostal Manifestos (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 195.

84 See Cox, *Fire*, 246–47.

85 See for example Vince L. Bantu, *A Multitude of All Peoples: Engaging Ancient Christianity's Global Identity*, Missiological Engagements (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020), 219. “All theology,” he charges, “is contextual; it is impossible to interpret the Scriptures or speak about God apart from one's historical-cultural context. Yet the common assumption is that theological and ministerial production emerging from the dominant white culture should be seen as normative, free from the situatedness of cultural specificity.” Thus, when surveying the global Pentecostal movement, Western adherents would do well to bear this in mind before immediately assuming a resemblance to traditional spirituality at any point is necessarily evidence of syncretism.

shift toward affirming the salvation of its adherents. If, at any point, any supposed formulation of common grace adopts the position that the Spirit's work among other religious communities is sufficient for salvation, it is no longer a theology of common grace at all.

This does not mean, however, that the Spirit of God may not already be at work within non-Christian religious circles. Amos Yong speaks to this issue as well in *Beyond the Impasse*, noting that while some segments of the church have demonstrated "undue optimism with regard to common grace," others have displayed "an undue pessimism with regard to theological anthropology."<sup>86</sup> His solution? A more pneumatologically robust theology of religions, committed to recognize where the Spirit of God may already be at work in various non-Christian faith communities, which may provide a model for a Pentecostal understanding of common grace. Indeed, though Yong does not explicitly propose a pneumatologically grounded theology of common grace in this context, it does seem inherent in his proposed theology of religions. This understanding of the Spirit's work in non-Christian religions, he claims,

[o]nly asserts what has long been affirmed by the traditional doctrine of common grace: that human life and experience is dependent only on the prevenient presence and activity of the Spirit of God, and that this should put us on the alerts for possible experiences of the Spirit and alternative specifications of the pneumatological imagination outside of explicitly PC or even Christian contexts.<sup>87</sup>

Yong also discusses this concept in a later work, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, in which he encourages his readers "to discern the Spirit in the world of the religions," looking for evidence of his activity in Islamic, Buddhist, and Hindu contexts where "there may be essential elements . . . that are not contradictory to the fruits of the Spirit and the marks of his kingdom."<sup>88</sup>

On the one hand, it is imperative that the concept of common grace at work in society, particularly among other religious communities, is not articulated in such a way as to be detrimental either to the Pentecostal zeal for mission or the doctrine of Christ's exclusivity. Having said that, given that Pentecostalism—and indeed the evangelical tradition broadly—has traditionally been skeptical of the concept of divine activity in other religions out of a fear of syncretism or doctrinal compromise, a pneumatologically driven doctrine of common grace could greatly help the movement in its missional endeavor. Consider, once again, the traditional

<sup>86</sup> Yong, *Impasse*, 21.

<sup>87</sup> Yong, *Impasse*, 79.

<sup>88</sup> Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 255.

Reformed understanding, and how it may enrich Yong's pneumatological theology of religions (and vice-versa). If Calvin was right that common grace is bestowed on the believer and nonbeliever alike in the form of intellect and artistic ability; if Kuyper's claim about God's sovereignty over every sphere of creation is accurate; and if Edwards was correct in claiming that the "moral and religious" accomplishments even of the sinner is due to the gracious assistance of God; then what Yong advocates is simply a logical conclusion. A Spirit driven theology of common grace would allow Pentecostals to celebrate some achievements of non-Christian religious communities as a work of God, while providing further encouragement toward taking the gospel to such communities with confidence that the Spirit is already at work among them.

In short, while recognizing the truth present in other religions, Pentecostals must not react by immediately affirming the salvation of adherents or uncritically embracing syncretistic tendencies. Yet, it would also be a profound mistake to overlook the truth and beauty present in a community simply because it has not yet accepted the Christian gospel. Rather, they would do well to understand that the virtue in such communities is a direct result of the Spirit's work, and that the same Spirit is also working to open their hearts to receive the good news of Jesus Christ.

## Conclusion

It seems that if the Pentecostal movement, with its evangelistic passion, could adopt the Reformed doctrine of common grace and infuse it with its distinctive pneumatology, the benefits could be remarkable—not just for their own movement but Christendom on the whole. Does anyone doubt that a public theology that emphasizes the dynamic empowerment of the Spirit—not only to reach the broken individual but to speak to the wider culture—would make a dramatic, tangible impact on behalf of the Kingdom of God? These two traditions, while undeniably quite distinct from one another, would do well to learn from one another on this matter: the Reformed from the Pentecostals on the dynamic work of the Spirit and the near obsessive passion for evangelism and mission, and the Pentecostals from the Reformed in engaging, rather than avoiding, thoughtful cultural engagement. Recognizing God's common grace in ones' societal context, could indeed go a long way toward accomplishing this goal.