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Practical Theology and the Holy Spirit

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Abstract

This paper examines the state of pneumatology in practical theology. After a sketch of some possible reasons why the theology of the Holy Spirit is underdeveloped in practical theology and an examination of some exceptions, the paper explores the reasons that pneumatology and practical theology could benefit from a more extensive dialogue between the two. The second half of the paper concludes with the argument that expanding the pneumatological resources available to practical theology is an urgent task, as well as offering an exploratory reading of some biblical passages as a possible example of the value to be gained from this task.

Keywords: pneumatology, practical theology, Holy Spirit, Dostoevsky, suffering

Introduction

Practical theology has a problem. As a discipline, its employment of pneumatology is massively underdeveloped and it has little urge to amend the problem. This is striking because practical theology has a commitment to human experience. Put even more strongly, 'Practical Theology assumes that human experience is an important locus for the work of the Spirit.'¹ For a rarely disputed principle of the discipline, this is paid

remarkably little attention. Mark Cartledge puts it bluntly, 'The majority of books on practical theology simply ignore pneumatology altogether. There is a theistic or Christocentric assumption in the theological discourse rather than a fully explicit Trinitarian framework. This means that pneumatology is largely excluded.'² This is not an idle comment on Cartledge's part; he draws that conclusion after an extensive survey of recent works of practical theology. In this article, I will sketch some possible reasons why pneumatology is so undervalued, then discuss why this is an opportune scholarly moment for practical theology to explore pneumatology. To put some urgency behind that claim, I will have a conversation with Dostoevsky and Rowan Williams about *The Grand Inquisitor*. Any discussion with Dostoevsky inevitably raises more insightful questions than it answers and to close I will follow one of those questions into a discussion with Jürgen Moltmann and Scripture. The final point will be this: practical theology must understand who the Holy Spirit is.

Sketch of the Historical Background

Practical theology shares in the wider theological ambivalence and lack of interest towards pneumatology that characterised theology in the twentieth century. This cuts across denominational and doctrinal lines. This problem has been much discussed in the last twenty years and strides have been made in different camps to overcome the deficiency, but it is axiomatic that pneumatology is coming from behind in modern theology. Some of this was not intentional. Karl Barth, for instance, the most important figure of twentieth century theology, built a towering structure of Christology. Barth saw himself as defending transcendence against the legacy of nineteenth century theology, the human internalization of the divine: 'humanisation had to mean, if not the abolition, at least the incorporation of God into the sphere of sovereign human

¹ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (Norwich: SCM, 2006), p. 6.

² Mark Cartledge, *The Mediation of the Spirit: Interventions in Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), p. 53.

self-awareness, the transformation of the reality that came and was to be perceived from the outside into a reality that was experienced and understood inwardly.³ This attack on what Barth considered false immanence over transcendence, while aimed at Schleiermacher and all his disciples, had a tendency, unfortunately, to inflict collateral damage on all theologies of immanence, so inseparable from the work and identity of the Holy Spirit. To their credit, some of Barth's disciples attempted to remedy the situation.⁴ Barth was himself responding to another tendency that made pneumatology impossible. In his work *Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, Barth explains the effect of naturalism on theology with its sweeping claim that 'the proper study of man is man', which Barth calls 'the conscious or unconscious idea of the whole century in its pursuit of science.'⁵ The landscape of nineteenth century theology thus battered pneumatology on all sides. Either the Holy Spirit was just the 'spirit of man', or a shadow in a vast Christological palace, or a crude superstition. Exiled from the academy, the Spirit took refuge elsewhere.

These tensions are as old as Protestantism itself. Luther himself writes in *Against the Heavenly Prophets* that:

Now when God sends forth the holy Gospel, God deals with us in a twofold manner, first outwardly, then inwardly. Outwardly God deals with us through the oral word of the gospel and through the material signs, that is, baptism and the sacrament of the altar. Inwardly God deals with us through the Holy Spirit, faith, and other gifts. But whatever their measure or order, the external factors should and must precede. The inward experience follows and is effected by the external. God had determined to give the inward to no one except through the outward.⁶

³ Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* trans. Brian Cozens and John Bowden (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 70.

⁴ Cf. Donald G. Bloesch *A Theology of Word & Spirit: Authority & Method in Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992).

⁵ Barth, *Protestant Theology*, p. 27.

⁶ Martin Luther, *The Annotated Luther, Volume 2: Word and Faith*, ed. Kirsi Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), p. 104.

As Simeon Zahl explains,

Luther is saying that in the post-apostolic church the Spirit will never act in a decisive way in a person's life apart from during a sermon or the reception of the sacraments. 'Damascus' experiences, for example, do not happen anymore: God has chosen to speak instead through the Bible alone.⁷

This is all part of Luther's long battle with the 'enthusiasts', a broad category for those who claimed any direct contact with the Holy Spirit. Luther lumped quite disparate opponents into this category including the mystical prophets he was condemning in *Against the Heavenly Prophets* along with the Magisterium of the Catholic Church (the Pope claimed to speak for the Holy Spirit).

In the twentieth century, downplaying pneumatology became a specific project for some scholars. The groundswell of Pentecostal and later charismatic emphasis on the Holy Spirit was perceived as a threat to theology in various camps and precipitated a defensive response. So, for instance, Frederick Dale Bruner helped popularise the concept of the 'the shyness of the Spirit' as a phrase for subordinating pneumatology to Christology: 'The Spirit is mediated to the people of God when pastors, teachers, and people so present Jesus Christ to others that faith is awakened.'⁸ But perhaps more damning still for pneumatology, Bruner says 'those persons are most filled with the Holy Spirit who are least conscious of it', and 'we are not necessarily in the presence of the Holy Spirit when we are in the presence of a great deal of talk about the Holy Spirit.'⁹ Such a theological sentiment had the side-effect of shutting down discussion. Behind Bruner's caution is a sense of cynicism about Spirit language:

I do not believe that God would have given the gift of the Holy Spirit and such rich means for receiving this gift if it would have been bad for the

⁷ Simeon Zahl, 'Reformation Pessimism or Pietist Personalism? The Problem of the Holy Spirit in Evangelical Theology', in *New Perspectives for Evangelical Theology: Engaging with God, Scripture, and the World*, ed. Tom Greggs (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 79–80.

⁸ Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Holy Spirit: Shy Member of the Trinity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), pp. 14, 21.

⁹ Bruner, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 13, 15.

church to have the Holy Spirit. But we have been burned so often [...] Is it really possible, we can legitimately ask, for members of the church to believe that they are filled with the Holy Spirit without their getting a big head and becoming impossible?¹⁰

However, there were scholars like Lindsay Deward, Eduard Schweizer, John Taylor, James D. G. Dunn, and Gordon Fee who overcame this kind of rhetoric to publish and discuss the Holy Spirit, but it is still generally acknowledged that pneumatology is experiencing a renaissance after a long period of neglect.¹¹

A Natural Alliance

This disconnection between practical theology and pneumatology is to be lamented because pneumatology is entering a phase that is particularly in tune with the ethos of practical theology and poised to potentially make significant contributions to its progress. Veli-Matti Karkkainen, writing of the ecumenical turn towards pneumatology, says that:

A distinctive feature of this new search for the Spirit and spiritual life is that rather than looking for generalisations and abstract definitions, as too often has been the case in the past, people are experiencing a hunger for a concrete, lived experience of the life-giving Spirit.¹²

Practical theologians should take note of that sentiment. But, not only can practical theology benefit from pneumatology, the reverse is also true. Practical theology is also poised to reciprocate, what other discipline is so well positioned to explore the hunger

¹⁰ Bruner, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 56.

¹¹ Cf. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Holy Spirit: In Biblical Teaching, through the Centuries, and Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), pp. 345–73 for a discussion of pneumatology in the twentieth century; cf. Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), p. 11 for a discussion of the ‘renaissance’ of pneumatology.

¹² Karkkainen, *Pneumatology*, p. 14.

that Karkkainen is speaking of? This seems a natural alliance. After all, practical theology:

emerges as a response to and recognition of the redemptive actions of God-in-the-world and the human response to and recognition of those actions. It is in taking seriously those responses that Practical Theology finds its vital initial reflect position and an important position within the wider theological enterprise.¹³

The 'wider theological enterprise' of theology is ready for practical theology to use the tools at its disposal to both benefit and learn from the theology of the Holy Spirit.

It is not just the instincts of pneumatology that are shifting to make this a favorable moment for the alliance of pneumatology and practical theology. There are wider trends in theology that urge this course upon those who are watching. Ben Quash writes in his recent influential work *Found Theology*:

The theology advanced in this book understands ongoing history as a gift of the Holy Spirit, to relate us to God in Christ, and it is energetically opposed to models of doctrine that assume for it any sort of ahistorical completeness; that assume it to be a set of securely held propositions from which all necessary implications for Christian belief and practice can then be deduced in any time and place.¹⁴

Quash's intriguing thesis does rely on a strong pneumatology though perhaps he is more focused on the orientation of theology than to pneumatological questions on their own. This orientation of Quash to the present moment of God's activity resonates far and wide with both pneumatology and practical theology. Michael Welker, writing forcefully in his work *God the Spirit* says something similar but more direct, 'God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is also the power and the force by which God intervenes in constantly new ways in the present world and makes Godself knowable to people

¹³ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, p. 11.

¹⁴ Ben Quash, *Found Theology: History, Imagination, and the Holy Spirit* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 1.

living in the present and in the future.¹⁵ John Swinton says much the same thing speaking of practical theology:

The task of practical theology is not simply to reiterate and apply dislocated theological truths, but rather to examine theological understandings in the light of contemporary experience, in order that their meaning within God's redemptive movement in the present can be developed and assessed. Theological truth is thus seen to be emerging and dialectical, having to be carved out within the continuing dialogue between the Christian tradition and the historical existence of church and world.¹⁶

Across disciplines and traditions, the experiential pull of postmodernism is reorienting theology to the moment of encounter with God in the present. This has been building for a long time, of course, but now both practical theology and pneumatology are ready to pursue this question along the same paths and reap the mutual benefits of such a partnership.

This is an area of needed complexification. References to the Holy Spirit in practical theology are often just that, references. Cartledge points out some exceptions and I will engage with their work later in this article but, in general, practical theology falls short in this area. It is axiomatic that practical theology 'seeks critically to complexify and explore situations. To complexify something is to take that which at first glance appears normal and uncomplicated and, through a process of critical reflection at various levels, reveal that it is in fact complex and polyvalent.'¹⁷ Practical theology seems to assume that pneumatology is normal and uncomplicated and passing references will suffice to capture what is necessary for analysis. But that is both bad practice and bad theology.

¹⁵ Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, trans. John Hoffmeyer (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1994), p. 4.

¹⁶ John Swinton, *From Bedlam to Shalom: Towards a Practical Theology of Human Nature, Interpersonal Relationships and Mental Health Care* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), p. 11, quoted in Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), p. 24.

¹⁷ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, p. 13.

Cartledge and Anderson

I want to turn to analysing the contribution of the theology of the Holy Spirit that has already been made to practical theology. Cartledge, after concluding that the Holy Spirit is largely ignored by practical theology, offers his own contribution to bridging the gap between pneumatology and practical theology. His project in *The Mediation of the Spirit* is to show how certain passages of Scripture from Acts that are central to the Pentecostal/charismatic tradition, the background from which Cartledge is operating, as well as the concept of 'experience', are 'elucidated by means of pneumatology' and how this could produce a 'modification of the practical-theological agenda.'¹⁸ As referenced by the title of his work, Cartledge's work centres mainly on the concept of 'mediation'. Cartledge's work on this concept is driven not merely by a perceived lack of discussion of the Holy Spirit in practical theology. Cartledge envisions practical theology as an interconnected web of many disciplines and subject areas. Like a key piece missing, the absence of pneumatology has broad repercussions:

There is a clear problem within academic study of practical theology because of its lack of attention to the relationship between Scripture, experience, and pneumatology. This lack of attention leads to a very clear deficit in practical-theological discourse, and this deficit is detrimental to the development of the discipline. Scripture is used in a limited manner; experience is addressed in a general sense or via specific incidents rather than being placed within spirituality; and pneumatology is largely absent — and where it is discussed, its intersection with Scripture and religious experience is extremely limited.'¹⁹

The underdeveloped view of the Holy Spirit in practical theology thus impoverishes the entire discipline. Cartledge defines 'mediation' as 'the action whereby two distinct

¹⁸ Cartledge, *The Mediation of the Spirit*, p. xii.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 58–59.

elements are brought together by an intermediary or third part'.²⁰ There is a broad sense in which Cartledge sees the Holy Spirit as the key to mediating between various components of practical theology as well as theologically being the intermediary of the 'presence of the triune God such that God is recognised to be present within intermediate aspects of creaturely reality for the purpose of salvation'.²¹ One of Cartledge's main contributions to practical theology is to develop an interconnected theology where the Spirit binds together disparate elements within practical theology as well as the Trinity in the *via salutis*.

Another practical theologian who has an extended discussion of the Holy Spirit is Ray Anderson in his work *The Shape of Practical Theology*. Pneumatology is part of Anderson's situating practical theology within the larger philosophical framework of post-modernity. He is cautious about the relativism introduced by post-modernity but also willing to work within the framework postmodernism provides. Anderson interacts with Don Browning's model of 'practical reason' as a way of offering a model of practical theology 'that fits well within the framework of a postmodern view of reality but at the same time preserves the principle of biblical authority and the relevance of tradition and historical consciousness'.²² Anderson makes some clarifications to Browning's model, he shifts Christology, which Browning considered 'outer envelope' as part of the consciousness of the community in dogma, to the heart of practical theology. He justifies this by pointing to the apostle Paul and clarifying that 'it was the contemporary and present reality of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit that stirred him to theological reflection'.²³ Anderson's engagement with pneumatology is a welcome addition to practical theology though perhaps less distinctive than Cartledge's.

Both Cartledge and Anderson contribute significantly to the rare genre of practical theologians who care about developing a theology of the Holy Spirit for

²⁰ Ibid., p. 64.

²¹ Ibid., p. 65.

²² Anderson, *The Shape*, p. 33.

²³ Ibid., p. 30.

practical theology. What I consider most important about their work is that they demonstrate that pneumatology does have much to say to practical theology and the conversation is mutually enriching. Their work is all the more thorough for their discussions of the Holy Spirit.

I want to shift focus. Practical theology does not currently talk about the Holy Spirit in sustained ways and I have shown through the work of Cartledge and Anderson that such a discussion would be beneficial. However, practical theology has many beneficial horizons to explore. Why pneumatology and not something else? To answer that question, I turn to literature.

Dostoevsky's Cautionary Parable

In Fyodor Dostoevsky's famous excerpt *The Grand Inquisitor* — a chapter in his last and perhaps greatest work, *The Brothers Karamazov* — Dostoevsky has the character Ivan, a young intellectual struggling with the implications of atheism, tell his brother, Alyosha, a parable of religion and philosophy. Alyosha is in training to become a monk and he has watched his brother's journey to atheism with trepidation. Two hundred pages into the novel, the tension between them finally comes to this conversation. Ivan's parable is one of the most well-known passages in all of literature, Dostoevsky's brilliance is on display. But in its complexities, there is more than just an atheistic indictment of theism; *The Grand Inquisitor* is fundamentally a commentary on religious institutions and practices. It is an argument between the intellect and the spirit, an internal struggle within the heart of humanity. A struggle that perhaps mirrors practical theology's own angst between the social sciences and theology. Within the framework of that discussion, Ivan's powerful critique of organised Christianity highlights the failure of theology to understand the Holy Spirit, a fault that is echoed in practical theology. Warnings about the consequences of weak pneumatology are common in contemporary theology, but my hope is that Dostoevsky's parable leads us to take the warning in all seriousness. However, there is a need for caution in discussing *The Grand Inquisitor*. The

parable has too often been taken apart from the novel and distorted as a result. Rowan Williams in his work *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction* warns that the 'Inquisitor narrative [...] should not be abstracted from the rest of [the novel]'.²⁴ With Williams as a guide in paying attention to the literary context, let us explore Dostoevsky's cautionary legend.

Williams' own reading of *The Grand Inquisitor* sets the story up as a literary piece that fundamentally relates to practical theology. Williams comments about Dostoevsky's novels that:

[They] ask us, in effect, whether we can imagine a human community of language and feeling in which, even if we were incapable of fully realising it, we knew what was due to each other; whether we could imagine living in the consciousness of a solidity or depth in each other which no amount of failure, suffering, or desolation could eradicate.²⁵

Dostoevsky's novels ask questions of how fundamental human relationships work. But this is not an exclusive question of anthropology or psychology to Dostoevsky. To ask about human interaction is to ask about human-divine interaction. Anthropology cannot be spoken of apart from theology to Dostoevsky. That is an orientation shared by practical theology. Furthermore, specifically in *The Brothers Karamazov* Dostoevsky is 'not presenting to us a set of inconclusive arguments about "the existence of God", for and against, but a fictional picture of what faith and the lack of it would look like in the political and social world of his day'.²⁶ Dostoevsky may be working with fiction, but he is asking a question familiar to practical theology.

The Grand Inquisitor is set as the climax to Ivan Karamazov's discussion of suffering. Every direction Ivan turns he is dissatisfied with the suffering in the world. He particularly dwells on the suffering of children and relates a few sad incidents of children being mistreated. His point is this: 'If all must suffer to pay for eternal

²⁴ Rowan Williams, *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction* (Waco: Baylor, 2011), p. 29.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

harmony, what have children to do with it? Tell me, please. It's beyond all comprehension why they should suffer and why they should pay for the harmony.'²⁷ But nor is Ivan satisfied with divine vengeance through hell:

What do I care for a hell for oppressors? What good can hell do, since those children have already been tortured? And what becomes of harmony, if there is hell? I want to forgive. I want to embrace. I don't want more suffering. And if the sufferings of children go to swell the sum of suffering which was necessary to pay for truth, then I protest that the truth is not worth such a price.²⁸

Ivan's powerful argument concludes with his famous line: 'It's not God that I don't accept, Alyosha, only I most respectfully return the ticket to Him.'²⁹ Williams describes Ivan's objections this way:

He is afraid that, confronted with the overwhelming evidence for God's supreme justice at the end of time, he, with everyone else, will join in the hymn of praise. But from his present vantage point he can only see this as a betrayal of the actuality of unforgivable cruelty and pain in the world as it is [...] he is protesting at the amputation of some aspect of human awareness and aspiration for the sake of universal harmony — in this case, the outraged and unconsolated awareness of the horrors he describes. Can harmony be built on a foundation of unforgivable atrocity?³⁰

But Alyosha does not accept Ivan's stark portrayal. Alyosha points to Christ: 'But there is a Being and He can forgive everything, all and for all, because He gave His innocent blood for all and everything. You have forgotten Him.'³¹ But Ivan has not forgotten: 'Ah! The One without sin and His blood! No, I have not forgotten Him. On the contrary I've been wondering all the time how it was you did not bring Him in before, for

²⁷ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (New York: Penguin, 1958), p. 276.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

³⁰ Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 32

³¹ Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 278.

usually all arguments on your side put Him in the foreground.’³² It is from this point that Ivan begins his parable. It should be read as a rejection of Alyosha’s point. Alyosha wants to posit the possibility of true harmony on the basis of the incarnation.³³ Will Ivan’s parable refute Alyosha’s point? That is the question as Ivan unfolds his legend.

The Grand Inquisitor begins with Ivan narrating how Jesus returns and appears among the people of Seville during the time of the Inquisition. The people instantly recognise him and flock to him with joy. He performs many miracles including raising a small girl from the dead. The people gladly worship him. All of this is witnessed by the inquisitor, an old man who is the head of the Catholic Inquisition in the area. The old man has Jesus arrested and visits him in prison. They do not have a conversation. The old man forbids Jesus to speak, saying “‘Is it Thou? Thou?’” But receiving no answer, he adds at once, “Don’t answer, be silent. What canst Thou say, indeed? I know too well what Thou wouldst say. And Thou hast no right to add anything to what Thou hadst said of old [...]. Whatsoever Thou revealest anew will encroach on men’s freedom of faith”.³⁴ Alyosha objects that this is preposterous and no one could treat Jesus this way. Ivan points to the Catholic doctrine of revelation through the Magisterium. There is no room for Jesus to be there, so immediate, so confrontationally present in the moment.

Ivan resumes the Inquisitor’s monologue and makes this shattering accusation against Jesus:

Instead of taking possession of men’s freedom, Thou didst increase it, and burdened the spiritual kingdom of mankind with its suffering forever. Thou didst desire man’s free love, that he should follow thee freely, enticed and taken captive by Thee. In place of the rigid ancient law, man must hereafter with free heart decide for himself what is good and what is evil, having only Thy image before him as his guide. But didst Thou not know he would at last reject even Thy image and Thy truth, if he is weighed down with the fearful burden of free choice? They will cry aloud

³² Ibid.

³³ Williams, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 32–33.

³⁴ Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, pp. 283, 284.

at last that the truth is not in Thee, for they could not have been left in greater confusion and suffering than Thou hast caused, laying upon them so many cares and unanswerable problems.’³⁵

According to the Inquisitor, Jesus left humanity alone with the terrible and eternal weight of freedom of choice with only ‘Thy image’ to guide them. This has caused chaos and confusion. This is not the way to lead humanity. The Inquisitor claims that Jesus was warned this would lead to chaos:

The wise and dread Spirit, the spirit of self-destruction and non-existence [...] the great spirit talked with Thee in the wilderness, and we are told in the books that he tempted Thee [...] And could anything truer be said than what he revealed to Thee in three questions which Thou didst reject.³⁶

From those three questions the Inquisitor exposita a different path, a trifold wisdom from Satan, a way of salvation for humanity supposedly far more effective than Jesus’ own course of action. He claims: ‘We have corrected Thy work and have founded it upon *miracle, mystery, and authority*. And men rejoiced that they were again led like sheep, and that the terrible gift that had brought them such suffering, was, at last, lifted from their hearts.’³⁷ Such is the accusation of the Inquisitor. According to Williams:

What is being underlined by Ivan is precisely that Christ does not share the suffering of the human condition, and that his indifference to the actual constraints felt by the finite and weak mortals is the heart of the trouble [...] So Ivan’s narrative is deliberately designed to undermine Alyosha’s appeal to incarnation.³⁸

Jesus’ earthly life merely highlights the countless years of his absence to the Inquisitor and, in the absence of Jesus, alternate means had to be devised to save humanity. To the

³⁵ Ibid., p. 290.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 284.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 292; emphasis my own.

³⁸ Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 32.

Inquisitor, there is a spirit willing to help, but not the Holy Spirit. The Inquisitor understands nothing of the Holy Spirit and his ignorance is the deep chasm behind which his theology and drastic betrayal of Christ have been formed.

This is a piercing critique of institutional Christianity through the voice of the Inquisitor. In the novel, Alyosha is taken aback by its ferocity and intellectual rigor and seems to despair of his brother's spiritual future. However, Alyosha has the last word. In Ivan's parable, after the Inquisitor finishes his scathing indictment of Jesus. Jesus merely gives the corrupt old man a kiss of peace. The Inquisitor is shaken and lets Jesus go instead of executing him. However, the old man does not change his mind about his practical theology of how the church should be run. When Alyosha and Ivan end their conversation and part ways, Alyosha gives Ivan that same kiss of peace. Ivan is delighted at the plagiarism, but the reader is left wondering what it all means. Williams argues that Alyosha's actions overturns Ivan's parable: 'If Alyosha can show Ivan such a transformed humanity, Ivan's case fails: Christ is indeed truly human, and his humanity is manifest in the effects of his life and work upon human beings now.'³⁹ In other words, if Christ can be incarnationally present in Alyosha's actions to Ivan then Ivan's argument of Christ is severely weakened.

What does this mean for practical theology? The Inquisitor has a well-developed practical theology of his own. He forbids Christ from speaking because everything that is necessary has already been said. The Inquisitor has no understanding of Jesus' mediated presence in the life of the church in the present. This is why the Inquisitor thinks it is so necessary to take away the freedom of the people. The Inquisitor does not acknowledge — and its absence is glaringly obvious — both Jesus' promise to 'give you another Counsellor to be with you forever' and that 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom'.⁴⁰ These are the exact two things the Inquisitor resents: Jesus' absence and the freedom Jesus gives those who follow him. The glaring absence of the Spirit in the Inquisitor's theology is highlighted by Dostoevsky through the Inquisitor's turn to

³⁹ Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 33.

⁴⁰ John 14.16; 2 Cor. 3.17 (unless otherwise noted, all translations are in the Holman Christian Standard Bible).

the other spirit, Satan, whom the Inquisitor openly credits with telling the truth about humanity and how to rule humanity. Therefore, the Inquisitor argues that the Inquisition was necessary as an institution, to take away the people's freedom in the absence of Jesus. The Inquisitor believes that humanity is left alone to wrestle with the 'cares and unanswerable problems' with only 'Thy image' to guide them. This is the root of his despair and his conceit. Alyosha has a practical theology as well, one that views his powerful symbolic act as a mediated action of Christ. Thus, the sobering question for practical theology is whether practical theology will have the theological resources to give the kiss of peace to a bitter world. Will practical theology follow Alyosha or the Inquisitor?

This is of course a theoretical discussion. Dostoevsky's work is fiction, but his critique is no less important. Dostoevsky's work is brilliant and deeply meaningful for theology as Rowan Williams points out. It might be easy to brush aside Dostoevsky's characters of Ivan and the Inquisitor, but there is something subtle and insightful in what Dostoevsky is getting at. If nothing else, Dostoevsky understands the temptations of power within the church. The Inquisitor falls to that temptation. Practical theology as a discipline ponders the same kinds of questions of power, leadership, structure, organisation, and praxis that the Inquisitor is considering. Practical theology should take the temptation of the Inquisitor's Spirit-less way of doing theology seriously.

The Suffering of the Spirit

The discussion of Dostoevsky's character Ivan posed a serious question about suffering. The suffering of this world, especially the suffering of children works on him and he posits his grand parable as a rejection of Alyosha's incarnational response. Ivan is not willing to accept the incarnation as an answer to the problem of suffering. Put aside for a moment the cogency of Ivan's response, and consider only its weight. There is a seriousness, an earnestness, to Ivan's 'returning of the ticket'. A seriousness that practical theology should not ignore. The incarnation may be a satisfying answer, just as

Alyosha points out that *The Grand Inquisitor* is really in praise of Jesus and not the reverse, but Dostoevsky's brilliance should be to push us on to greater thought and not to be satisfied.⁴¹ It is in such a spirit that I offer the following exploratory reading of certain key scriptural concepts. My reading of these texts builds on concepts of the Spirit's identity and work in Jürgen Moltmann's *The Spirit of Life*, but I take a somewhat different direction. The point is to explore the avenue of the suffering of the Holy Spirit for answering Ivan's argument. This should be of interest to practical theology because it probes the experiential relationship between God and humanity.

The place to begin is to see the Holy Spirit and Jesus as collaborating to make both creation and salvation possible. Not for nothing did Irenaeus call the Son and the Holy Spirit 'the hands of the Father'.⁴² I am not positing a view of the Trinity that collapses distinctions and makes all work communal. Jesus dies on the cross and the Father does not for instance. But there is a particular kind of cooperation between the Holy Spirit and Jesus that is integral to theological understanding of soteriology. This principle applies to one of the most important aspects of Jesus' Messianic mission. The New Testament portrays Jesus as the 'man of suffering' of Isaiah 53 who takes the weight of evil upon himself. In the sombre imagery of Isaiah 53, 'He Himself bore our sicknesses, and He carried our pains [...] He was pierced because of our transgressions, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on Him.' Jesus suffering at the crucifixion is invoked in passages like 1 Pet. 4.12-14 where Peter proclaims, 'rejoice as you share in the sufferings of the Messiah'. Less acknowledged is the Holy Spirit's share in that suffering, the theme I will follow up.

I posit two separate senses in which the Holy Spirit suffers in relation to humanity. There is the general sense in which the Holy Spirit is 'the One who gives life', words from John 6.63, enshrined in the creed. The second is a more specific sense in which the Holy Spirit suffers as part of the particular experience of Christians. These two senses are a reflection of the general work of the Holy Spirit and the specific work related to Christians. Scripture and tradition both indicate a role for the Holy Spirit in

⁴¹ Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, p. 296.

⁴² Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.6.

both a universal relationship to creation and in a particular relationship to Christians. I embrace the reality of that division without attempting to fade the one into the other.

Of course, I am assuming that the Holy Spirit can suffer, that the Holy Spirit shares the characteristics of the capacity for grief. To make that presumption is to interact with a larger debate over the suffering of God. The twentieth century saw many theologians reject the ancient premise that God is impassible, though the doctrine still has many defenders. Moltmann was among those who rejected divine impassibility and rejected it wholeheartedly. Moltmann famously said, 'Were God incapable of suffering in any respect, and therefore in an absolute sense, then he would also be incapable of love'.⁴³ For Moltmann, the cross is the ultimate moment that shatters any plausible divine impassibility. Moltmann explores this topic in his work *The Crucified God* where he makes it clear how central the suffering of God is to his view of redemption and the identity of God. However, in *The Crucified God* Moltmann is exploring the suffering of Jesus, but I think that Moltmann's theology of the Holy Spirit in *The Spirit of Life*, his major work on the Holy Spirit, points to the possibility and the meaningfulness of the suffering of the Spirit. Moltmann does not significantly explore this himself, but I am interested in taking his thoughts further.

An addendum to this question of the Spirit suffering is that imagining the Spirit suffering may be difficult. The many physical metaphors and images for the Spirit in the biblical canon perhaps contribute to a depersonalising trend, if not in doctrine, at least in practice. The Holy Spirit is the truly radical other. Even the names of the other members of the Trinity ('Father' and 'Son') allow us to grasp and understand them better in ways that prove challenging with the Holy Spirit. That should not daunt practical theology into ignoring the Holy Spirit. If anything, the commitment of practical theology to hear the marginalised and disenfranchised, the ostracised 'other', should draw us to the Holy Spirit.

⁴³ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1974), p. 230. For a survey of the current debate and a response to Moltmann's view of divine suffering, cf. James F. Keating and Thomas Joseph White (eds), *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).

Moltmann emphasises that the Holy Spirit sustains the life of creation. This is developed in Genesis, of course, when the Spirit hovers over the waters and facilitates, along with the Word, the creation of the world. This creative role is celebrated in the Psalms long before John attributes life-giving to the Spirit. Psalm 104.29–30 says:

When You hide Your face,
they are terrified;
when You take away their breath,
they die and return to the dust.
When You send Your Spirit,
they are created,
and You renew the face of the earth.

This is not deistic imagery of a divine deposit of life that eventually wears out. It is imagery of the Spirit *maintaining* the life of the world. As Moltmann says, 'The creative power of God is communicated to the beings he has created in such a way that in talking about the *ruach* we are talking about the energy of their life too.'⁴⁴ The same imagery is in Job 33.4; 34.14. Genesis 6 affirms something similar with its passage about the growing evil of humanity and judgement of God for that evil, 'And the Lord said, "My Spirit will not remain with mankind forever, because they are corrupt. Their days will be 120 years"'.⁴⁵ Somewhat enigmatic, but the most straightforward interpretation is that the Spirit sustains life in a particular and intimate way and the withdrawal of the Spirit is the withdrawal of that life. Perhaps Ezekiel 37 is the most triumphant moment in this understanding of who the Spirit is. Ezekiel prophesies to the dry bones and wind enters the bones and they live. God promises 'I will put My Spirit in you, and you will live'.⁴⁵ In these passages, the Holy Spirit sustains the life of humanity.

As the creed makes clear, this life-giving power is an element of the Spirit's nature. Just as the Spirit acted at creation to give life, so the Spirit intervened to enable the incarnation and so Mary was promised 'the Holy Spirit will come upon you' and

⁴⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), p. 42.

⁴⁵ Ezek. 37.14.

again when Jesus explained to Nicodemus that someone must be born, created anew, in the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God.⁴⁶ Finally, Rom. 8.11 promises the eschatological act of creation when 'He who raised Christ from the dead will also bring your mortal bodies to life through His Spirit who lives in you'. There is no life without the Spirit. 1 Corinthians 15 makes a similar point when describing the resurrection which is made possible by the 'life-giving Spirit'.⁴⁷ This is such a central point of who the Spirit is that the primary distinction of Romans 8 is the death from the flesh sharply contrasted with the life of the Spirit.

For Moltmann, this life-giving aspect to the Spirit's nature is the basis for 'a universal affirmation', the subtitle to his major work on the Holy Spirit. It means that:

We then perceive the finite in the infinite, the temporal in the eternal, and the evanescent in what endures. We carry experiences of the world into the experience of God. 'Reverence for life' is absorbed into reverence for God, and the veneration of nature becomes part of the adoration of God. We sense that in everything God is waiting for us.⁴⁸

Moltmann's emphasis on the Spirit as the life-giver is a welcome note, emphasising the Spirit's sustaining care and concern for the created order. However, Moltmann struggles to delineate evil in the midst of his 'universal affirmation'. But Moltmann's ecological turn is not the direction I want to explore. I want to ask a different question.

What does this life-giving cost the Holy Spirit? The superhero comics so popular with our age enable an interesting thought experiment that comes at this question obliquely. With his sensitive hearing, Superman, for instance, can hear crime being committed at vast distances. He then intervenes to prevent it. In the United States in 2018, there were 1,206,836 violent crimes according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, an encouraging percentage decrease from 2017.⁴⁹ If this number were

⁴⁶ Luke 1.35; John 3.5.

⁴⁷ 1 Cor. 15.45.

⁴⁸ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, p. 36.

averaged out over the year, that would mean roughly 3300 violent crimes every day. That translates to about two or three murders, assaults, and rapes every minute in the United States. Those, of course, are only the reported statistics. Violent crimes like rape are notoriously underreported. In the last ten minutes that I have been writing this paragraph, twenty to thirty people were possibly beaten, murdered, or raped. That is just one nation for one year. If we expanded our statistics internationally, we would be talking about the number of violent crimes *every second*. I appreciate superhero stories. They sometimes aspire to be thoughtful commentary on our culture and times, but perhaps they are also hopelessly naive. Could Superman withstand the psychological trauma of hearing these crimes? He could not hope to stop them all. He would have to be an unwilling witness to the systemic horror of human beings brutally mistreating each other every minute of every day. At least Superman has the Fortress of Solitude where he withdraws from the troubles of the world. If the Spirit withdraws, we all cease to exist.

This is not just a problem of God's omniscience, God's distant ability to know everything that is happening or will happen. The Holy Spirit does not just know these things take place; he is an intimate witness to each and every brutal act. The gift of life is not deistic deposit, it is something that the Holy Spirit constantly sustains. Thus, the Holy Spirit experiences these crimes with a shocking immediacy. It is the life that the Holy Spirit has given and sustains that is being abused and violated in the victims of these crimes and it is the life that the Holy Spirit has given and sustains that is also being used by the perpetrators. The Holy Spirit must see every crime from all its horrible angles. And all the time, it is the greatest gift of the Spirit, the most beautiful gift that came from the nature of the 'life-giver' that is both misused and destroyed. Each of these acts of crime drag the Holy Spirit into the brutality of human depravity.

I do not know what this must cost the Holy Spirit. Perhaps, this is an area for practical theology to explore. Not only might pneumatology help explain human

⁴⁹ Federal Bureau of Investigation, 'FBI Releases 2018 Crime Statistics', 30 September 2019, <<https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-releases-2018-crime-statistics>>, accessed 9 June 2020.

experience better, but this suffering also calls practical theology into exploring the experiences of the Holy Spirit. If practical theology is truly about the divine-human interaction, then perhaps it is time to start asking about the *divine* part of that divine-human interaction.

What about the cross? That moment where Jesus takes all that suffering and death onto himself? In some ways, I would argue that what Isaiah 53 is telling us is that Jesus takes the same suffering that the Holy Spirit has experienced and deals with it in that moment of agony and death. What the Holy Spirit has slowly watched, the cruel agony of the ages, is compressed into those horrible hours on the cross and exhausted in Jesus' sacrifice. But it is important to remember that the Spirit is also there for Jesus' experience on the cross. As the Spirit has descended on Jesus and marked him out, led Jesus into the wilderness, guided Jesus through the ups and downs of ministry, so the Spirit has led Jesus to that day of intense pain. When the end comes, Jesus declares 'Father, into Your hands I entrust My spirit'.⁵⁰ For Moltmann, the Spirit was with Jesus to the end and this is crucial for the resurrection:

If the Spirit is God's empathy, this means that the eternal Spirit is also involved, in profoundest and identifying suffering. It is precisely his suffering with the Son to the point of death on the cross which makes the rebirth of Christ from the Spirit inwardly possible. The Spirit participates in the dying of the Son in order to give him new 'life from the dead.' Because he accompanies Christ to his end, he can make this end the new beginning.⁵¹

Thus, the Spirit has both endured with incredible patience the long suffering of human history and the sharp moment when the full weight of the terror and death humans unleash on each other is compressed onto 'the man of sorrows'. In some sense, the Holy Spirit has endured this suffering twice.

⁵⁰ Luke 23.46.

⁵¹ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, p. 68.

But this is not the end of the Spirit's suffering. While the Spirit sustains the world, the Spirit is also the *Holy Spirit*. God's redemptive plan to redeem and sanctify humanity through covenants also involves the Holy Spirit. This begins in the Old Testament. Isaiah 63.7-64.11, one of the great scriptural laments for the state of Israel sometime following the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, retells the history of Israel in pneumatological terms. It speaks of the adoption of the people by God, the divine redemption of the people because of God's 'love and compassion'.⁵² It speaks of 'the days of Moses' and asks 'Where is He who put His Holy Spirit among the flock?' and describes how 'the Spirit of the Lord gave them rest'.⁵³ This retelling of the Exodus-Conquest narrative with the emphasis on the Holy Spirit reaches its most poignant moment when the prophet declares 'But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit. So He became their enemy and fought against them.'⁵⁴ The rebellion here is left ambiguous, perhaps to symbolize the entire fraught relationship between God and Israel that led up to the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile. Stephen's denunciation in Acts 7.51 carries the same sort of weight: 'You stiff necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are always resisting the Holy Spirit; as your ancestors did, so do you.' This suffering does not always translate into an adversarial relationship between the Holy Spirit and Israel. Moltmann, when discussing the Spirit's presence with Israel as the *Shekinah*, says 'Israel's shame is God's shame too, Israel's exile is God's exile, Israel's sufferings are God's suffering'.⁵⁵

We have already seen how the Spirit suffered with Jesus. The New Testament extends this to those who follow Jesus. In fact, some key passages tie the suffering of Christians to the suffering of both Jesus and the Spirit:

Dear friends, don't be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you as if something unusual were happening to you. Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of the Messiah, so that you may also

⁵² Isa. 63.9.

⁵³ Isa. 63.11, 14.

⁵⁴ Isa. 63.10.

⁵⁵ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, pp. 47, 49.

rejoice with great joy at the revelation of His glory. If you are ridiculed for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. (1 Pet. 4.12-14)

Similarly in Rom. 8.18-30 those who are 'heirs of God and coheirs with Christ' must 'suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him'.⁵⁶ Paul goes on saying that 'creation was subjected to futility' and this results in 'the sufferings of this present time'. This leads into Paul's 'groaning' passage. The creation groans, those 'who have the Spirit as the firstfruits' groan, and the Spirit joins in to intercede for us in the midst of this suffering with 'unspoken groanings'.⁵⁷ Paul has suffered and he knows those whom he is writing to have suffered, but he can celebrate that these sufferings which are shared with Christ and in which the Spirit joins with groaning 'are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us'.⁵⁸ And finally, there is the definitive warning of Eph. 4.30: 'And don't grieve God's Holy Spirit. You were sealed by Him for the day of redemption.'

These connections of suffering, the Spirit, and the followers of Jesus do not all predicate the same reason for the connection. In 1 Peter and some of Romans, the source of suffering, both human and divine, is sharing innocently in similar persecution to Jesus. In Ephesians 4 and Paul's Romans passage about futility it is the evil of sin that causes suffering. Futility is defined as the way in which gentiles 'became callous and gave themselves over to promiscuity for the practice of every kind of impurity with a desire for more and more'.⁵⁹ In an extended passage of moral admonition, Paul warns against the same kind of behaviour. The point is that in a similar way to the Spirit's suffering as the life-giver, dragged into destructive human depravity in violation of the Spirit's own nature, the Spirit is also dragged into the violation of holiness. Elsewhere Paul compares this violation to the impurity in the Temple in the Old Testament. 1 Corinthians 6.19 says, 'Don't you know that your body is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit

⁵⁶ Rom. 8.17.

⁵⁷ Rom. 8.22, 23, 26.

⁵⁸ Rom. 8.18.

⁵⁹ Eph. 4.19.

who is in you, whom you have from God?’ This draws parallels between personal sin in the New Testament church and the idolatrous desecration of the Temple in the Old Testament. With that parallel, an entire tradition of lament and sorrow over sin on both Israel and God’s part is brought into view. The connection between the Spirit and the suffering of Christians is thus multifaceted.

I have explored this line of thought to answer Ivan Karamazov. Part of the emotional and moral core of Ivan’s complaint is that even the incarnation cannot justify the offer of forgiveness that God extends and the promise of eventual harmony that stands behind the offer of forgiveness. The Inquisitor made it clear. Jesus has been gone. The management of the church has been left to an elite who have chosen a different path. God has abandoned humanity. It was true before Jesus came and the incarnation was only a brief interruption to the alienation. How can God offer forgiveness to what he has not witnessed or been a part of? If the Inquisitor’s accusation is true, then it is a grievous one, not lightly tossed aside even by the incarnation. And yet, the Inquisitor has ignored, much like modern theology for most of the twentieth century and contemporary practical theology, the Holy Spirit. The Inquisitor’s accusation is radically untrue. God has been present. God has gone through the worst of it in a supremely personal way. The Holy Spirit has endured the continual violation of both the gifts of life and holiness. This is both universal and particular. All humanity has violated the gift of life from the Spirit, Israel violated the holiness of the Temple, and Christians frequently violate the holiness of their own bodies.

Rowan Williams asked us to consider what Dostoevsky was saying as ‘a fictional picture of what faith and the lack of it would look like in the political and social world of his day’.⁶⁰ Dostoevsky was perhaps painting his picture with broad sweeping strokes and yet *The Grand Inquisitor* is no less revealing for that. A practical theology devoid of the Holy Spirit is primed for error. But the cost is so much higher than even that statement implies. I have spoken of the suffering of the Holy Spirit. This brings into sharp relief the willingness of the Spirit to continue to give to humanity, to extend the

⁶⁰ Williams, *Dostoevsky*, p. 4.

most beautiful gifts to those who often abuse them. Just as the suffering of Christ paves the way for practical theology to orient itself in a world full of suffering, the suffering of the Spirit offers practical theology a deep insight into 'the complex dynamics of the human encounter with God'.⁶¹ Practical theology should take this suffering seriously and echo Dostoevsky and ask our own version of the question of his novels. What does faith look like in the political and social world of our day when we know the Holy Spirit is enduring the pain of this life alongside us?

I have set out to show two things in this article. Practical theology does not have a developed pneumatology. This is not necessarily practical theology's fault as the underdeveloped pneumatology is a negative inheritance from the wider theology in the twentieth century. Secondly, I presented some arguments why practical theology should develop pneumatology. The relationship would be mutually enriching as Mark Cartledge and Ray Anderson have already demonstrated, especially Cartledge with his interest in 'mediation' and 'experience'. This is not just an intriguing possible area of expansion for practical theology, but as I argued from Dostoevsky's warning in *The Grand Inquisitor*, an absolute necessity for practical theology to address. Finally, I offered my examination of the suffering of the Spirit as a further example of how practical theology may be enriched by pursuing the question of who the Holy Spirit is. Some specific further questions to consider are the nature of how Christians experience the Spirit and what this experience means both for Christian life and for the Spirit.

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⁶¹ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, p. 4.