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Colin E. Gunton and Public Theologians: Toward a Trinitarian Public Theology

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I Public Theology

In the history of public theology—a category of theology that seeks to bring theological truths to bear on public arenas—the Holy Spirit's role in creation has been underexplored. If the Holy Spirit is the agent of transformation in creation, why have so many theologians neglected the Spirit's activity in the context of public theology? One of the causes of such neglect derives from a long-held belief in dualism. As a result, generally speaking, theologians have neglected the eschatological aspect of the Spirit's work over creation, and instead have devoted most of their attention to the immanent/spiritual aspect of the Spirit's work.

Hence, a theology is needed that recaptures the eschatological aspect of the Spirit's work over creation. Colin E. Gunton's pneumatology which is trinitarianly formulated and eschatologically conceived brings a fresh approach to public theology. It moves us toward a full-bodied, holistic and trinitarian public theology that takes into

account the triune God. Ultimately, it enables us to see the world through the lens of the eschatological Spirit's work and to look beyond traditional modes of Christian cultural engagement that have been counterproductive.

A pneumatology which is firmly grounded in a trinitarian theology is necessary to further develop public theology. It is only within this framework that we can understand the divine intention of redemption toward the creation and have a holistic understanding of the mission of the triune God for the created world. In so doing, we will be able to discern how we should engage with culture as a participant in the divine redemption.

In what follows, I will present a brief summary of Gunton's pneumatology and then discuss three prominent U.S. public theologians and thinkers to discern whether pneumatology plays any significant role in their public theology. In turn, I examine how Gunton's robust pneumatology provides the necessary resources to address the defi-

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ciency in public theology owing to the absence of an adequate theology of the eschatological Spirit. Finally, I discuss criteria for discerning the Spirit's work in relation to public theology.

II Gunton's Pneumatology

Basil of Caesarea is perhaps the most significant theological influence in relation to Gunton's pneumatology. Gunton states, 'It is Basil who makes, I think, the most important point.'¹ Basil's stance on the work of the Spirit is clearly eschatological: 'The original cause of all things that are made, the Father ... the creative cause, the Son ... the perfecting cause, the Spirit.'² Moreover, Basil's attribution of the work (*ad extra*) of the three persons is trinitarianly formulated.

Gunton's appreciation of Basil, therefore, is the basis for his eschatological Spirit who perfects the creation at the end. However, behind the eschatological Spirit, there is a trinitarian God whose being consists of three persons in communion which forms the centre of both Basil's and Gunton's theology. Gunton contends, 'To say that the Spirit is the perfecting cause of creation is to make the Spirit the eschatological person of the Trinity: the one who directs the creatures to where the creator wishes them to go, to their destiny as creatures.'³ More succinctly, 'the Spirit is God being

eschatological'.⁴

Hence, for Gunton, the eschatological Spirit is a *person*, not *substance*, whose mission is to perfect the created world in accordance with Christ. And it is not a *modalistic* God, but rather the *trinitarian* God whose being consists of three persons who 'receive and give each other what they are.'⁵ Indeed, the work of the Spirit is inseparable from that of the Father and the Son. The Son and the Spirit are, Gunton contends, the 'two hands' of the Father. They are distinct, yet inseparable. If Jesus is 'the basis of God's movement out into the creation to bring that which is not God into covenant relation with him', the Spirit is the one who brings perfection to the world based on what Christ has achieved on the cross.⁶

Gunton further elaborates, 'The Son is the *content* of God's redemptive movement into the world, [while] the Spirit is its *form*, and that form is its freedom.'⁷ The divine love is manifested in the Son and through the Spirit to show God's relentless love for the world. Yet, the manner of the manifestation is different.

Gunton continues, 'The Spirit is God's eschatological transcendence,

1 Colin E Gunton, *Father, Son & Holy Spirit: Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (London, New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 81.

2 Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit* XV 36 and 38.

3 Gunton, *Father, Son & Holy Spirit*, 81.

4 Gunton, *Father, Son & Holy Spirit*, 76.

5 Colin E Gunton, 'The Spirit as the Lord: Christianity, Modernity and Freedom', in *Different Gospels*, ed. Andrew Walker (London: Hodder and Stoughton for the C. S. Lewis Centre, 1988), 83.

6 Colin E Gunton, *Theology through the Theologians: Selected Essays 1972-1995* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 127.

7 Gunton, 'The Spirit in the Trinity', in *The Forgotten Trinity: 3. A Selection of Papers Presented to the BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today*, ed. Alastair I.C. Heron, 130; italics in original.

his futurity, as it is sometimes expressed. He is God present to the world as its liberating order, bringing it to the destiny determined by the Father, made actual, realized, in the Son.⁸ The Spirit is the eschatological Spirit whose goal is to bring the world to its intended end.

As noted, Gunton defines the work of the Spirit as 'perfecting'. From this definition, we can identify two primary implications. The first is the dynamic nature of creation: the transformation/perfection of the world. If the Spirit is the eschatological Spirit who perfects, the creation is the object of such perfection. Indeed, the Spirit is the agent of the age to come.

Nonetheless, in the history of theology, the Spirit's work has been construed primarily as immanent rather than transcendent.⁹ For example, it is common to stress the immanent aspects of the Spirit such as strengthening believers and guiding them to follow Christ.¹⁰ Indeed, the Spirit is often seen as a 'substantial force' that we possess within us rather than a person who acts as an agent of the age to come.

Consequently, cosmic and social dimensions of the Spirit's eschatological work are overlooked.¹¹ Gunton contends, 'The Spirit is better identified in terms of transcendence than of immanence. The Spirit may be active within

the world, but he does not become identical with any part of the world.'¹²

It is therefore the Spirit who transforms/perfects the entire creation. This transformation does not indicate a return to the protological state of the creation, but rather 'redirection' or movement towards the completion of the creation. Gunton refers to this as a

'return' ... but of a process by which that which was in the beginning is not so much restored to a former integrity as returned perfected to the Father through the Son and by the Spirit—an eschatological rather than protological return.¹³

The second implication, which relates to the first, is that if the Spirit is the eschatological Spirit who brings the transformation of the world, our reconciliation with God through the Spirit is the means of effecting such transformation. Gunton contends that reconciliation is 'the Father's determination to bring all things into *relation* to himself through Christ'.¹⁴

To be sure, relation is an important concept because it entails rightness with God. If our relation with God is skewed, we cannot remain right with God. Gunton thus defines sin as a 'false relation to God'.¹⁵ It is 'the disruption or distortion of the relation of personal beings with the personal crea-

8 Gunton, 'The Spirit in the Trinity,' 130.

9 Gunton provides an extensive discussion on how the Spirit's work has been understood as immanent contrary to its true nature in history in *Theology through the Theologians*, 105-108.

10 Lk 12:12; Jn 14:26; 16:8-11; etc.

11 Gen 1:2, 2:7; Ex 35:30-31; Ezek 37:9, 12; Lk 1:2; Rom 8:21; etc.

12 Gunton, *Theology through the Theologians*, 108.

13 Gunton, *Theology through the Theologians*, 127.

14 Gunton, *Theology through the Theologians*, 120.

15 Colin E Gunton, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Malden, MA.: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 139.

tor God'.¹⁶

The Spirit opens the hearts of human beings and invites us to restore our relation with God. Restoring our relation with God, which is reconciliation, enables us to become what we are created to be. Accordingly, our relation with each other, along with the created world, is restored as well. This is the means of the transformation of God's whole creation.

Furthermore, this reconciliation takes place in the church—the community of the last days. Gunton observes, 'According to the New Testament, human community becomes concrete in the church, whose calling is to be the medium and realization of communion'.¹⁷ The purpose of the church is therefore to be the catalyst of reconciliation for the world, while the church herself is to be shaped into a perfect communion, having been reconciled with God, others and the created world.

III Public Theologians and Colin E. Gunton

In this section I will examine public theologians and thinkers in the United States context. I have selected three prominent public theologians and thinkers whose work has had significant influence in public theology in the United States. Following this, I will

evaluate Colin Gunton's contribution to public theology. My intention is to use these three theologians and thinkers as foils in evaluating whether pneumatology plays any significant role in their public theology.

1. H. Richard Niebuhr

In *Christ and Culture*, Niebuhr constructs his famous five typologies in order to answer the question: What is the relationship that reflects our faithfulness and loyalty to Christ in dealing with the world if Christ directs Christians to the world?

The Christ against culture paradigm perceives culture as sinful and non-redemptive. This is an extreme type since adherents completely reject culture and seek to build a new society that is not corrupted by culture. The opposite pole of this extreme is the Christ of culture type. Contrary to Christ against culture, this type accepts culture. Although adherents are loyal to Christ, they 'seem equally at home in the community of culture'.¹⁸

Niebuhr argues that despite their differences, these two types are in fact similar to each other. For example, they are unitarian instead of trinitarian in their theology: 'Jesus Christ being essentially God for the former [Christ against] and the Almighty Father the single God of the latter [Christ of]'.¹⁹

Further, these two types are one worldly instead of two worldly. For Christ against culture, this world is thought to be corrupted beyond re-

¹⁶ Gunton, *The Christian Faith*, 59. For Gunton, the divine justice is by nature transformational and relational, rather than penal and individualistic (Gunton, *Christian Faith*, 76).

¹⁷ Colin E Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 217.

¹⁸ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 2001), 83.

¹⁹ Niebuhr, 'Introduction', in *Christ and Culture*, 49.

demption. Therefore, its focus is on the world to come. Similarly, with Christ of culture, it is melioristic and does not 'abandon the idea of another world but makes it an extension of the best parts of this aeon'.²⁰

In between these two extremities, Niebuhr identifies the remaining three types: Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox, and Christ as the transformer of culture. For these, the main issue is not whether to reject or accept culture. Rather, it is how to embrace this world and the next at the same time—how to live a responsible life in the world while remaining faithful to Christ.

A further contrast is that these types are not unitarian. Niebuhr states that they are 'if not trinitarian, at least bi-nitarian'.²¹ Unlike the extreme types, they distinguish three persons of the Trinity and their respective missions. Further, they understand reality to be two-worldly, rather than one-worldly, and they acknowledge the usefulness of culture. The divine values and imperatives can be appreciated both in Christ (Bible, church) and nature (reason, culture). Nonetheless, sin infects culture. Despite God's creating, governing and redeeming work, nothing escapes the effects of sin.

Christ above culture incorporates elements of Christ of culture, while maintaining the lordship of Christ over the created world. The world was created through Christ and is upheld by him. Hence, Christ and the world cannot be opposed to each other. Indeed,

'both faith and knowledge proceed from the same divine source'.²² Nonetheless, adherents do not perceive Christ as the Christ of culture. A discontinuity exists between the imperatives of nature and those of the gospel. The distinction must be maintained although culture is ultimately under the sovereignty of God.

Christ and culture in paradox is characterized by tension between God's righteousness and human righteousness. Like Christ against culture, this type sees culture as corrupted. But unlike Christ against culture, it accepts the reality that humanity is surrounded by culture and believes that it is impossible to avoid it.

Christ the transformer of culture argues for the transformation of humanity as well as the created world. Like Christ and culture in paradox, advocates believe that sin has corrupted the entire created world and that we are in need of God's forgiveness and mercy. Yet, this corrupted world is still under God's sovereign rule. Therefore, Christians must participate in God's creating and redeeming work.

Niebuhr offers several points of theological support for this typology. The first is creation. Christians must participate in the Son's creating and redeeming work. Niebuhr states, 'The Word that became flesh and dwelt among us, the Son who does the work of the Father in the world of creation, has entered into a human culture that has never been without his ordering action.'²³

20 Niebuhr, 'Introduction', in *Christ and Culture*, 47.

21 Niebuhr, 'Introduction', in *Christ and Culture*, 49.

22 Douglas F. Ottati, 'Christ and Culture', *American Presbyterian* 66 (1988): 323.

23 Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 193.

The second is the 'nature of man's fall from his created goodness'.²⁴ The fall has corrupted God's creation, but it did not corrupt the creation to the extent of requiring a replacement. 'Man's good nature has become corrupted; it is not bad, as something that ought not to exist, but warped, twisted and misdirected'.²⁵ Likewise, culture is 'corrupted order rather than order for corruption'.²⁶ Hence, culture needs to be transformed in order to restore its goodness even if this means a rebirth through transformation.

The third theological support is a view of history. In light of the two points described above, Niebuhr argues that it becomes clear that history is not merely a series of human events. It is rather a 'dynamic interaction between God and man'.²⁷ Niebuhr observes that on this view the triune God works together to create, forgive and redeem the world in order to bring transformation.

It is noted that humankind is to participate in this divine work. In such a dynamic interaction between God and man, 'the eschatological future has become for him an eschatological present'.²⁸ Hence, Christ is the transformer of culture.

2. D. A. Carson

In *Christ & Culture Revisited*, D. A. Carson presents a treatment of Niebuhr's five typologies seen through the eyes of a biblical theologian. In this volume,

Carson reshapes the typologies and offers several suggestions.

For one, Carson criticizes Niebuhr's handling of scripture. Carson determines that Niebuhr's problem originates in how he perceives the biblical canon. He states, 'Niebuhr's view, a view that is still quite common in some academic circles, is that the Bible in general, and the New Testament in particular, provides us with a number of discrete paradigms'.²⁹ Naturally, this view discourages us from reading the Bible in a holistic manner.

Niebuhr's reading violates the 'canon's "rule" [which] lies in the totality of the canon's instruction'.³⁰ Hence, Niebuhr's handling of scripture comes across as piecemeal. Carson argues that we need to listen to all the voices of the canon and integrate them systematically. To do so involves the following 'non-negotiables'.

In addition to close exegesis of a wide range of biblical texts, we need to think through how they fit into the great turning points of redemptive history, into the massive movement from creation to the new heaven and the new earth, with critical stops along the way for the fall, the call of Abraham, the rise and fall and rise again of Israel, the resurrection, the gift of the Spirit and the birth of the church.

Furthermore, we cannot ignore great theological structures, including the Trinitarian nature of the Godhead, all that the cross achieves, and the unavoidable implications of New Testament eschatology with its underlying

²⁴ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 193.

²⁵ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 194.

²⁶ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 194.

²⁷ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 194.

²⁸ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 195.

²⁹ D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2008), 40-41.

³⁰ Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 41.

combination of inaugurated and future eschatology.³¹

Carson contends that it is not enough to examine a wide range of biblical texts and see what each one says. We also need to listen to the voices in relation to the grand biblical and theological scheme of creation, fall, redemption and consummation. In short, it is imperative to understand the relation between Christ and culture within the *flow* of the divine drama.³² Carson is also concerned that whatever models we conceive should be grounded in Scripture.

If for any reason we continue to think of different models of the relation between Christ and culture, we must insist that they are not *alternative* models that we may choose to accept or reject. Rather, we shall ask in what sense they are grounded in the Scriptures and ponder their interrelations *within* the Scriptures, and how and when they should be emphasized under different circumstances exemplified *in* the Scriptures.³³

Thinking about the relation between Christ and culture is thus not a matter of preference of one paradigm over another, but of discerning a holistically biblical pattern. Moreover, 'As empirically useful as certain grids may be, thoughtful Christians need to adopt an extra degree of hesitation about canon-

izing any of them.'³⁴ Further, Niebuhr's discrete paradigms do not accurately reflect the rich and complex nature of Scripture.

Eschatologically speaking, we are living in a time of tension. Jesus inaugurated the kingdom of God. Yet, this kingdom will not be consummated until his second coming. Hence, it is not either 'Christ against culture' or 'Christ transforming culture', but should be both. Carson therefore argues that Christians must live as a 'people in tension'.³⁵

He writes, 'On the one hand, we belong to the broader culture in which we find ourselves; on the other, we belong to the culture of the consummated kingdom of God, which has dawned among us.'³⁶ This tension exists in the Christian life, and we are not free to ignore or reject it. Rather, Christians must embrace the tension and seek the welfare of the city while we wait for the final consummation of the creation.

3. James Davison Hunter

In *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*, James Davison Hunter seeks to find a new way for Christians to engage with the twenty-first century world. Hunter supports his claims using sociological and historical evidence and contends that the traditional ways of Christian engagement are based on flawed social theory and therefore ineffective in achieving their goals. Hunter makes two significant arguments based on sociological

31 Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 226.

32 The non-negotiables of biblical theology that Carson suggests should act as the framework for all approaches to Christ and culture. Indeed, some differences in approach may result from how one understands the big picture of the divine drama.

33 Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 62; italics original.

34 Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 224.

35 Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 64.

36 Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 64.

evidence.

First, he contends that the traditional means of engagement encourage Christians to evangelize in order to bring change to society. This basic principle derives from a belief that the more Christians there are in society, the stronger the Christian influence will be because

cultures are shaped from the cumulative values and beliefs that reside in the hearts and minds of ordinary people. The means and ends of world-changing ... are to change the hearts and minds of enough people that the social order will finally come to reflect the values and beliefs that they hold.³⁷

Yet, Hunter contends that this is a misconception since none of the evidence of history and sociology supports such a theory. On the contrary, changes in society often take place when people in positions of power work together for a common purpose through networks of the elite.

Second, our traditional methods of cultural engagement are no longer adequate for the cultural changes that our modern society has experienced. Two such changes resulting from modern pluralism are 'difference' and 'dissolution'. Hunter argues that the prevalence of 'difference' does not foster religious belief that is strong and coherent because of the lack of surrounding cultural structures to reinforce such beliefs. 'Dissolution', on the

other hand, creates scepticism about basic features of reality. Furthermore, 'They [difference and dissolution] present conditions advantageous for the development of nihilism—genial and otherwise.'³⁸

Hunter therefore argues for a new approach. He proposes a 'theology of faithful presence' that Christians should embrace in order to be the light and salt of the world. He states,

A theology of faithful presence begins with an acknowledgement of God's faithful presence to us and that his call upon us is that we be faithfully present to him in return. This is the foundation, the logic, the paradigm.³⁹

Faithful presence calls us to be present to others whether they are inside or outside the community; this requires sacrificial love. Further, faithful presence requires us to be faithful to our vocational tasks, in which we are to strive for excellenc. Through these tasks, Christians honour God.

But this new approach should not be taken as a means to manifest or utilize one's power to influence. God invites humanity who is made in his image to participate in world-making since 'world-making is an expression of our divine nature'.⁴⁰ Yet, Hunter qualifies that

it is also important to underscore that while the activity of culture-

³⁷ James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 274.

³⁸ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 211. Hunter defines nihilism as 'autonomous desire and unfettered will legitimated by the ideology and practice of choice'. Hunter, *To Change the World*, 211.

³⁹ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 243.

⁴⁰ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 232.

making has validity before God, this work is not, strictly speaking, redemptive or salvific in character. Where Christians participate in the work of world-building they are not, in any precise sense of the phrase, 'building the kingdom of God'.⁴¹

Hunter argues that the concept of 'building the kingdom of God' is indeed a dangerous idea. It invokes the idea of 'taking over' or 'conquering' which leads to a type of Constantinian engagement. He contends, 'The ideal is to shift to a *post*-Constantinian engagement, which means a way of engaging the world that neither seeks domination nor defines identity and witness over against domination.'⁴² Christians are not here to dominate or take over the culture. But, our engagement with the culture should proclaim the coming of the kingdom and be the foretaste of what is to come. Hunter states,

If there are benevolent consequences of our engagement with the world ... it is precisely because it is not rooted in a desire to change the world for the better but rather because it is an expression of desire to honor the creator of all goodness, beauty, and truth, a manifestation of our loving obedience to God, and a fulfillment of God's command to love our neighbor.⁴³

The primary goal of Christian cultural engagement, contrary to what Christians have traditionally believed, is not to bring change to the world. Rather, Hunter argues that the world

cannot be changed:

Will engaging the world in the way discussed here change the world? This I believe is the wrong question. The question is wrong in part because it is based on the dubious assumption that the world, and thus history, can be controlled and managed.⁴⁴

Instead, the purpose of participating in world-making is ultimately to honour God, the Creator, for his goodness and to fulfil our duty to love our neighbours as God commands us.

IV The Promise of Gunton's Pneumatology

Despite the richness of the public theologies offered by the theologians and thinkers examined above, none of them pays much, if any, attention to pneumatology. As a result, their understanding of the work of the Spirit in public theology lacks depth. For the most part, the Spirit seems to be viewed merely as an extension of Christ. When Christ is mentioned, the Spirit appears to be implicitly included.

Consequently, the Spirit's relation to the Father and the Son is not taken into account in relation to the transformation of the creation. Indeed, it is not only pneumatology that is noticeably missing from the theories discussed above, but also God's trinitarian nature.

This presents a lacuna in contemporary approaches to public theology and reveals the need for a robust pneumatology in this theological endeavour. When pneumatology is overlooked,

⁴¹ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 233.

⁴² Hunter, *To Change the World*, 280.

⁴³ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 234; italics and emphasis original.

⁴⁴ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 285.

there is a tendency to perceive God in a unitarian or binitarian manner, creating a serious deficiency in one's theology. Colin Gunton rightly argues, 'Because God is triune, we must respond to him in a particular way, or rather set of ways, corresponding to the richness of his being.'⁴⁵ To fail to perceive God trinitarianly means that we begin on the wrong foot.

Gunton continues, 'In turn, that means that everything looks—and, indeed, is—different in the light of the Trinity.'⁴⁶ Thus, we must approach God trinitarianly. Gunton's pneumatology provides a firmer foundation for public theological inquiry and helps settle several important questions whose answers must guide our hermeneutics: Who is God, what is he doing with the world, and how is he guiding the world to its ultimate end?

1. Trinitarian thinking

Trinitarian thinking is indispensable to 'undo the old bifurcation between the cultural mandate and the great commission'.⁴⁷ These issues have been approached apart from considering the Trinity so that the two commandments are not perceived within the divine intention of creation and redemption. As a result, the complementary nature of the two commandments is overlooked. We are not forced to choose one or the other, but the two go hand-in-hand in

order to achieve the ultimate plan of God for the world.

One perceives the tendency to bifurcate these commandments, for example, in the case of D. A. Carson. His understanding of the creation story seems thin because he does not view it through the lens of God's triune nature and work. Indeed, Carson rather quickly dismisses the cultural mandate as 'peculiar responsibilities toward the rest of the created order' that we have as God's image bearers, without any elaboration.⁴⁸ Yet, he emphasizes the importance of a trinitarian theology of the Godhead in public theology, even including it as one of the non-negotiables of biblical theology.

This is where Gunton's robust pneumatology can be helpful. Gunton argues that a weak pneumatology has plagued western theology since the time of Augustine. There is a tendency in western theology to perceive the Spirit as the 'bond of love' that unites the Father and the Son. Hence, the 'bond of love' is hardly perceived as a person, contrary to the nature of the triune God.

Yet, as Gunton argues, the Scripture attests that the Spirit is the *eschatological* Spirit. If one overlooks the work and person of the Spirit, one's theology is deprived of the third aspect of the creation story: the Spirit's perfecting work. Indeed, when one surveys Carson's non-negotiables of biblical theology, it seems clear that the Spirit's relation to the Father and the Son is not taken into account.⁴⁹ Hence, a holistic

⁴⁵ Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 2nd ed. (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 4.

⁴⁶ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 4-5.

⁴⁷ James K. A. Smith, 'Thinking Biblically about Culture', *Perspectives* 24 (2009): 23.

⁴⁸ Carson, *Christ & Culture Revisited*, 46. Also, see Smith, 'Thinking Biblically', 22.

⁴⁹ This point appears more prominently in Carson's criticism of Vincent Bacote's cosmic

trinitarian thinking is missing. But seen through a trinitarian lens, the distinct work of each person of the Trinity becomes clear.

The Father, who is the fountainhead of the three persons, reaches out to the world through his two hands, the Son and the Spirit, as Gunton frequently observes. On the one hand, the Son, who is the mediator of creation and redemption, works incarnationally by identifying himself with the world through becoming human and instituting a new beginning for fallen humanity. On the other, the Spirit works both transcendentally and immanently in perfecting and transforming the creation (humanity and the created world) to bring all things into relation to the Father through the Son. Yet, their respective work should be understood as unified although each person's is distinct. They are united in one goal, namely, to transform the whole creation.

Hence, the old bifurcation of the cultural mandate and the great commission can be eliminated by viewing both in light of the unified work of the three persons of the Trinity. In my view, it is not enough to read the Bible canonically, we must also read it trinitarianly. When we read the Bible trinitarianly, it helps us to see who the triune God is and how he is working in order to bring ultimate redemption to the world. Gunton's trinitarian theology, especially his robust pneumatology, enables us to shift our eyes to the triune Creator.

pneumatology. He questions how 'these complementary roles of the Spirit are properly related to each other (the Spirit's role in creation and the Spirit's role in redemption).' Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 215.

2. The nature of transformation by the Spirit

Gunton's pneumatology leads us to conclude that the nature of culture is redemptive.⁵⁰ It is not only humanity that will be redeemed, but also the created world because the creation will be 'brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God' (Rom 8:21). Since culture is a significant aspect of the created world, the Spirit uses it in his work of perfection and transformation; thus, culture is redemptive.

As noted above, Hunter contends that culture-making is not salvific or redemptive in character. Culture cannot be changed by mere human effort. Instead, we should honour God by being faithful witnesses rather than attempting to change the world. Perhaps the main difference between Gunton and Hunter is not primarily whether culture is redemptive, although they diverge on this point, but how to understand transformation. Hunter argues,

Within the dialectic between affirmation and antithesis, faithful presence means a constructive resistance that seeks new patterns of social organization that challenge, undermine, and otherwise diminish oppression, injustice, enmity and corruption.⁵¹

This statement hints that, after all, Hunter expects some type of transformation to occur as a result of faithful presence. As one might discern from the preceding discussion, Hunter promotes the more peaceful and non-

⁵⁰ In stating that culture is redemptive, I do not mean in the sense of effecting salvation, but in the sense of being indispensable for human flourishing.

⁵¹ Hunter, *To Change the World*, 247.

violent approach toward cultural engagement that is aligned with the Anabaptist tradition. But, if one can accept that transformation arises from faithful witness and pacifism rather than triumphalism, it is possible that Hunter would find common ground with Gunton.

Further, if the Spirit is the agent of transformation, should not the nature of the transformation reflect the purpose of the divine mission? Gunton contends that the Son and the Spirit are agents of the Father's love. If so, whatever the Spirit perfects and transforms derives from the Father's love. In divine love, the triune God reaches out to the creation through his two hands, the Son and the Spirit. This, I believe, frames the background for the nature of transformation by the Spirit.

Indeed, Gunton argues that the purpose of the Spirit's work is reconciliation, not domination. If so, there is no place in cultural engagement for violence or oppression. The triune God does not transform the created world so that he can dominate or overpower those who oppose him. The world is already under his reign. But, he transforms the created world to bring about reconciliation, harmony and unity between God and humanity, between human beings, and between humanity and creation.

3. A Contemporary example

Furthermore, although humanity is asked to participate in the divine transformation, we do not work apart from the Spirit who is the agent of transformation. On the contrary, we are to be directed by the Spirit. Thus, humanity has no ultimate power or ability to

change the world, or even to perceive how to change the world aright. Unfortunately, many Christians fail to grasp this point and misconceive their role in the transformation of the world.

It is the Spirit who transforms the world, and as Gunton argues, he transforms it by reconciling humanity with God, with each other and with the world. If so, humanity cannot change the world apart from the eschatological Spirit. The Spirit must first bring us to God. Only in the context of reconciliation does transformation of the world become possible.

One recent contemporary example of this, I believe, is the church shooting which took place at the Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, on the evening of 17 June 2015. The young gunman, Dylan Roof, killed nine people during a prayer service. Later, he was indicted on thirty-three federal hate crimes charges.

As much as such a heinous crime shocked the nation, what followed the killing astonished the country even more: The victims' families, appearing in front of Roof in court, forgave him for killing nine black attenders of the meeting. David Brooks of the *New York Times* called this extraordinary act an example of living faith and the one uplifting part of this horrific crime.

In the following days and weeks calls were made to remove the Confederate flag from the South Carolina state capitol—the same flag Roof had posed with in a widely circulated photo. On 22 June, the governor of South Carolina, Nikki Haley, also called for the removal of the Confederate flag, which eventually came down on 10 July 2015. Many other efforts to remove Confed-

erate flags have followed in various states, including Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee.

I believe that this was a moment when the Spirit worked among people to move toward reconciliation. The victims' families' extraordinary courage to forgive Roof and the humbleness they demonstrated at the court—even apologizing for their slowness to forgive him—are signs of their obedience to the Spirit's lead in reconciliation. At the same time, the nation's hearts and minds were opened by their testimony, pointing to the grace and love of God.

Surely the Spirit was at work in these events, bringing about transformation and reconciliation. Events such as this remind us that we must forsake triumphalism and seek peace and love instead. Further, we must rely on the Spirit to lead us to the right path. It is not human power or ingenuity that changes the world, but our faithfulness to the Lord that brings godly change.

V Criteria for Discerning the Spirit's Work

It is generally agreed that it is difficult to discern the work of the Spirit due to his elusive nature. Yet, this does not mean that the Spirit's eschatological work is completely hidden from us. Amos Yong rightly argues,

Christian discernment ... is intricately tied to moral discernment as well as to the development of the human faculties of perception, understanding, and judgment in their broad senses. Growth in love and knowledge is inseparable from the acquisition of deep moral and perceptual insight, and all contribute

to the continuing increase in the capacity of the Christian to accomplish moral and spiritual discernment.⁵²

Thus, Christian discernment is a 'skill that is developed over time'.⁵³ One of the challenges of discerning the Spirit's work is acquiring the requisite sensitivity and wisdom. Yong contends that although discernment is one of the spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:10), it takes time to develop. An essential aspect of nurturing our skills of discernment is to immerse ourselves in Scripture and Christian living.

Hence, discernment is not a supernatural ability that is instantly acquired, but rather a skill that is developed over time. If so, it is plausible to formulate criteria for discerning the Spirit's work. The criteria that I list in this section are by no means exhaustive. But, it is my hope that they move us forward in our attempt to discern the Spirit's work in culture in relation to public theology.

1. Positive criteria

The first criterion is Scripturalness. Discerning the Spirit's eschatological work requires testing by the Scripture. For example, when we encounter a social phenomenon that may look like the Spirit's work, it must be examined in the light of God's revelation. Nonetheless, Yong cautiously adds that 'such norms have to be sensitively applied to the concrete world of things'.⁵⁴

It is one thing to apply biblical norms to current affairs, it is another

⁵² Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 145.

⁵³ Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 146.

⁵⁴ Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 159.

to discern whether such norms are applied appropriately. Yong continues, "Life in the Spirit" ... requires reading both Scripture *and* the world accurately in order to ensure the appropriate applicability of scriptural norms to the world.⁵⁵ Christendom might have turned out differently had more caution been taken in applying biblical norms to the world appropriately.

The second criterion is Trinitarianess. As Gunton has shown, it is imperative to perceive the eschatological work of the Spirit in light of the Trinity. The Spirit does not work alone. On the contrary, he works in accordance with the Son and the Father. Yet, the Spirit is given his own distinct mission in relation to the Son and the Father.

Therefore, in discernment, this balance (distinction in unity) must be maintained. It is not enough to discern the actions of the Spirit alone. Rather, we must discern whether a putative action of the Spirit is compatible with the work of the Father and the Son within the scheme of divine redemption.

The third criterion is communion-enabling. This criterion is derived from the nature and character of the third person of the Trinity. If the Spirit brings redemption to the world by creating an eschatological community, the actions of the Spirit must be characterized by communion. In other words, when we see reconciliation, love, and peace, it is plausible to argue that we are witnessing the Spirit at work (though the totality of the circumstances has to be taken into account, of course).

Michael Welker argues,

One can readily see with one's own

eyes that love is the most complete of the forms of expression and communication in accordance with the Spirit. For in a differentiated way, love corresponds to the promised Spirit of righteousness and of peace.⁵⁶

A fourth criterion is other-person-centeredness expressed in love. When the eschatological Spirit is at work, people act for the benefit of others. The Spirit makes it possible for us to freely put others ahead of our own interests for the sake of the community.⁵⁷ Indeed, even an everyday thing like a father reconciling with his son or a mother with her daughter may be a sign of the work of the eschatological Spirit. Human love is fostered in our most basic relationships, such as family. If so, a reconciliation that takes place at home may go a long way in furthering the eschatological work of the Spirit.

Welker argues that love is 'in a way unmatched by any other power granted to human beings' because it is a

master in inventing exceptions that provide deliverance and promote life. Because love not only immerses itself in the beloved person, but also exercises a beneficial influence, both directly and indirectly, on that person's environment, love is continually building up new forms of life, both individual and communal.⁵⁸

Indeed, says Welker, 'With its free

⁵⁵ Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 159; italics in original.

⁵⁶ Michael Welker, *God the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 250.

⁵⁷ Welker describes this as 'free self-withdrawal for the benefits of others'. See Welker, *God the Spirit*, 252.

⁵⁸ Welker, *God the Spirit*, 250.

self-withdrawal, love is contagious.⁵⁹

One can appreciate Welker's comments in relation to public theology. The Spirit manifests the divine love by transforming the world through reconciliation, Gunton contends. Hence, any actions of the Spirit should not contradict his nature. Yet, we often quickly dismiss the efficacy of love. We are more attracted to something powerful and heroic.

But, the love that Christ exemplified on the cross is meek and humble. And if this is the love that the Spirit is testifying to in order to bring people to God, we should take a careful look at how we can promote God's love for the transformation of the created world. Indeed, all of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22) may be good criteria for discerning the work of the eschatological Spirit.

2. Negative criteria

One potential pitfall of discerning the Spirit's work is confusing it with demonic activity. Yong argues that discernment includes 'distinguishing between the divine, the human, and demonic'.⁶⁰ Hence, there is always the possibility that what we are witnessing may be the result of demonic forces. Yong suggests that 'evidence of demonic influence or infiltration consists in a thing's radical departure from its purposes and functions, thus affecting its relationships in a destructive manner'.⁶¹ Satan is cunning, and a master of deception. He disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14)

and can cause great destruction in the name of good.

In this light, we may also formulate negative criteria which suggest activities that are not of the Spirit but contrary to the Spirit's nature. For example, anything that does not produce the fruit of the Spirit is not the work of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). Attitudes or actions that display hatred, jealousy, rage, selfish ambition, and the like are the works of the flesh (and perhaps the demonic) rather than the work of the Spirit (Gal 5:19-21).

Our flesh thirsts for power, domination, and tyranny and seeks self-importance rather than humility and edification. Indeed, when we neglect to 'balance truth-telling with listening, justice with peace', the Spirit will not be among us 'because the Spirit is the Spirit of truth (Jn 16:12-13) and also the Spirit of love (Rom 5:5)'.⁶²

Further, the 'spirit' that denies the Father and the Son is not the Spirit of God (1 Jn 4:1-3). Yong argues, 'We discern the Spirit by discerning the Christ, but then also discern the Christ by the Spirit'.⁶³ Although elements of humility, justice, peace, and other moral goods may characterize certain social movements or activities, if these also explicitly deny core scriptural truths, they are not the work of the Spirit, but may be the work of the Enemy in disguise. As Jesus said, we must be alert

⁶² Kirsteen Kim, 'Case Study: How Will We Know when the Holy Spirit Comes? The Question of Discernment', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 33 (2009): 96.

⁶³ Yong, 'The Holy Spirit and the World Religions: On the Christian Discernment of Spirit(s) "after" Buddhism', *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 24 (2004): 203.

⁵⁹ Welker, *God the Spirit*, 250.

⁶⁰ Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 157.

⁶¹ Yong, *Beyond the Impasses*, 158.

for false prophets who come to us in sheep's clothing (Mt 7:15).

The process of discerning the Holy Spirit's work will necessarily involve balancing all of the preceding criteria, rather than taking one or two in isolation. For example, although the Nazi party created a community—the 'people's community' (*Volkgemeinschaft*) based on national unity—this community was motivated by racial denigration and thus not a result of the work of the Spirit. In any particular case under examination, both positive and negative criteria (e.g., community creating vs. debasing) must be taken into account in determining whether the Spirit is working.

In sum, we must rely on the triune God and Scripture for spiritual discernment. Prayers that seek wisdom for spiritual discernment are necessary, while love and obedience prepare our hearts to be sensitive to the Spirit's direction.

VI Conclusion

In this article, we have examined Colin Gunton's contribution to public theology and how it enables us to move forward in developing a trinitarian public theology. Gunton's robust pneumatology provides the resources necessary to move toward a more comprehensive, holistic and trinitarian public theology. By recapturing the work of the eschatological Spirit over the creation, Gunton enables us to explore the relation between the trinitarian God and the created world.

Gunton's pneumatology clearly delineates the Spirit as the agent of transformation in relation to the Father and the Son. In so doing, he succeeds in giving the eschatological Spirit a per-

sonal identity while maintaining unity among the three persons. As a result, Gunton's pneumatology helps us to identify the modes of the Spirit's work in the world.

This represents a fresh approach to public theology. To my knowledge, no public theologian has approached public theology from the standpoint of the nature and particularity of the Spirit's work in the creation. We have not been viewing the world through the eyes of the Spirit, nor wisely discerning how the Spirit may be working among us to transform the world. As a result, our attempts to discern the Spirit's work have been largely arbitrary.

Similarly, this fresh approach enables us to look beyond traditional modes of Christian cultural engagement that have been counterproductive. Drawing on trinitarian resources, Gunton identifies the Spirit as the divine love who transforms the world by reconciliation. If so, anything that is contrary to reconciliation or does not promote harmony and love may be a sign that the Spirit's work is not present.

Gunton's pneumatology shows that the transformation of the world happens when we reconcile with God, others and the creation. This means that the sphere of transformation by the Spirit is human relationships. This, in my opinion, significantly widens the approaches that Christians can take for cultural engagement, and may enable us to discern the Spirit's work in places we never expected it.

Gunton's contribution to public theology should not be overlooked because his pneumatology provides the resources needed to further pursue a trinitarian public theology.