

SPEAKING IN SCIENTIFIC TONGUES: WHICH SPIRIT/S, WHAT INTERPRETATIONS?

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At the beginning of his response, LeRon Shults suggests that my *The Spirit of Creation: Modern Science and Divine Action in the Pentecostal-Charismatic Imagination*, Pentecostal Manifestos 4 (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), traverses domains where “even angels...might ‘fear to tread’.” This is certainly not from any sense of my being extraordinarily courageous – after all, I don’t even like to watch scary movies with my teenage daughters! Shults is also right to observe, however, that I am trying to make sense of my pentecostal tradition in a scientific world, and others on this panel, especially Thomas Oord, recognize that this will be important not only for pentecostals but also for those working at the theology and science interface. In

¹ Thanks to Robert John Russell and Melissa Moritz for hosting and organizing this panel at the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences in Berkeley on 17 November 2011. I am also grateful to my good friends, Thomas Oord, Craig Boyd, and LeRon Shults, not only for their responses to the panel and in this venue, but also for our annual conversations and envisioning together. I appreciate Moritz’s response to the book also. My doctoral student Brandon Kertson attended the session and agreed to write up an introduction to the event – for which I am also grateful. Last but not least, thanks to Michael Wilkinson and Peter Althouse for space in their journal for these responses and my rejoinder.

what follows, I will begin by engaging with Shults's questions and suggestions, as doing so will also provide me with opportunity to interact with Joshua Moritz's and Craig Boyd's responses.

I have two sets of clarifying remarks to make in response to Shults before asking him a counter-question. First, Shults wants to know what I mean by matter, material, and materialism because he is unclear about what disembodied agency looks like in my proposal. I take responsibility for this obfuscation – it's not easy to describe what I am seeing as a pentecostal theologian doing pioneering work at the theology and science interface, not to mention that even as a pentecostal I am less full of the Spirit than I should be so that I have difficulty getting the "correct interpretation" of the pentecostal tongues that I sometimes speak. He especially wonders if my references to out of body experiences are meant to support a view of disembodied agency that undercuts of the emergence theoretical framework I have adopted. This also is Moritz's primary concern: that there is a breakdown between the emergence of mind from body/brain and what I am positing as the emergence of disembodied spirits from embodied minds. Let me try to explain further what I am thinking about through two examples to see if it appeases both Shults and Moritz.

First, at the individual level, upon death, it is not uncommon that relatives or close friends have dreams, visions, or other perceptions of their deceased loved one. I do not think we need to merely subjectivize such experiences, as if they were merely projections of mourning minds (even if that may be true in some instances). Instead, I view this as remnants of

the fields of force generated by living creatures that have emerged from out of but are now irreducible to their embodied parts and have the capacity to be sustained, to some degree, even after the demise of their the bodily functions. In due course, however, these interactions fade away – which suggests that irreducibility does not mean the infinite capacity to be self-sustaining, a point to which I will return momentarily.

Second, at a corporate level, nations declare wars and then also agree to truces. However, the realities of war persist long after peace treaties are signed, both in memories (which are present realities, even if of past events) and in the very real effects and consequences of wars. The fields of force (the spiritual aspects of nations) generated by nations, in other words, are much stronger than those generated merely at the individual level. My way of putting it is to say that the national “spirits” oftentimes persist long after even the nations themselves have dissolved and ceased to exist in any definable manner. Hence we can still talk about the “spirit” of Nazi Germany, although strong counterforces have arisen in the last sixty years to resist and ameliorate its demonic effect.

My point, however, is this: because spiritual beings are emergent from their underlying material substrates, they can exist in a disembodied sense only for as long as their force generating powers persist. The principalities and powers of Nazi Germany remained engaged much longer than that of my grandmother. The difference is that Christian faith confesses in the eschatological long run that my grandmother’s body will be resurrected. That doctrinal commitment complements the emergence thesis that apart from em-

bodiment in some respect, emergent levels of complexity cannot be infinitely self-perpetuating.

The second set of clarifications I want to address is Shults's related question about disembodied intentional agency. Now, however, I work in reverse order, beginning with corporate spiritual realities. In what sense can we say that national declaration of war reflects the intentional spiritual agencies? Only to the degree that we understand how groups of minds effect corporate intentions. My point is that if we do not wish to reduce personal human mentality to brain activities, then there is no reason to reduce the "decisions" or "actions" of nations (or any other corporate entity) to the decisions or actions of their parts.

What about the intentional agency of my grandmother's "disembodied" spirit as it interacted with my mother? Here, is where I think we can see continuity and discontinuity between living and dead human persons. Living persons exercise top down causality through their embodied presences in the world. Dead persons, however, exist only in a "spiritual" manner as sets of fields of force that have emerged from a complex life but will limp along with decreasing intensity unless or until the resurrection of the body. As such, dead persons may be able to exercise a degree of intentional agency, but only through ongoing interaction with living persons. So, for instance, my mother perceived, not too long after my grandmother passed away, that my grandmother had some unfinished business that needed attention, and that it was up to my mother to take it upon herself to attend to these matters. A reductionist model would simply say that my mother was imagining things. I see no reason with-

in an emergentist frame of reference to deny that the emergent spirit of my grandmother was able, during this brief period of time after her death, to remain interactive with the world, in particular engaging with other kindred “spirits” who were sensitive to the legacy and influence of her field of force.

So now I would like to ask about Shults’s theory of spiritual beings explicated in light of what he calls “theogonic (god-bearing) mechanisms of anthropomorphic promiscuity and sociographic prudery,” about which I may have little qualms at their levels of explanation. But in the bigger scheme of things and at the personal level within which we both exist, what does Shults mean by exorcising spirits “(so to speak) both methodologically and materially”? His parenthetical remarks – “so to speak” – suggest that he is not being reductionistic about such exorcisms, but in that case, what is left after his exorcisms? Alternatively, he is simply using “exorcism” metaphorically, in which case, his is a thorough program of demythologization and reductionism.

My main point about a spirit-filled cosmology is this: if we do not wish to reduce human mental and spiritual capacity to brain and body activity, then why do so either with corporate realities or insist that such emergent personal realities cease to function upon death? Shults rightly notes that I do not seek a causal joint (that can be measured in terms of efficient causality) for divine action, and so he wonders how I think I can scientifically (i.e., quantitatively) measure other kinds of spirits in my pluralistic cosmos. Here is the difference between the activity of the divine Spirit (which causality I postulate in teleological and escha-

tological terms) and creaturely spirits, whether of human persons or their institutions. The latter are not self-sustaining and can and do exert efficient causal forces, and if so, such are, potentially, open to empirical detection. (As a side note, I believe that in staking out my position in this way, I am also parting ways with Oord, although for different reasons since he thinks, against Shults and I, that divine action also can be empirically measured scientifically; those interested can see our respective chapters in a new book edited by Matthew T. Lee and I, titled, *The Science and Theology of Godly Love* [Northern Illinois University Press, 2012].)

Moritz believes that information theory can come to the rescue where emergence leaves us floundering with regard to a spirit-filled cosmos. I am very sympathetic to this suggestion, and it may be that in future work I will return to take up his assist in a more sustained manner. I do think that at some level, the role of information is key and it just needs to be unpacked. However, I don't think that the way forward is to replace emergence theory with information theory – although I'm not sure this is what Moritz is suggesting. Rather, they can be complementary. Information on its own is merely abstract – raising the perennial philosophical conundrum about the reality of mathematical truths. I think mathematical truths are abstractions, although I have not spent years on the philosophical disputes about this matter to be assured about my intuitions in this case. But if I am right, then such abstractions can nevertheless be realized in the world's many things, and we'll still need some kind of emergence theory to account for how the many things

have emerged from pure possibility. (Here my Peirce-an triadic ontology shows its features: mathematical Thirdness is instantiated in brute Secondness that derive from Firstness.)

I should pause here to register two caveats. First, the recent work of others, including E. Janet Warren, *Cleansing the Cosmos: A Biblical Model for Conceptualizing and Counteracting Evil* (Pickwick Publications, 2012), suggests that chaos theoretical models and linguistic rhetorical and metaphorical approaches may helpfully shed additional light particularly on the demonic aspects of human experience. If so, then the combination of information and chaos theories may also work in complementary fashion to illuminate what are otherwise scientifically obscure, even non-existent. Second, thesis 5 of my speculative cosmology (pp. 213-17 of my book) gives the misleading impression that personal manifestations of angelic beings appear first in the evolutionary scheme of things. I should have ordered the typology to begin with celestial, then proceed to terrestrial, personal, social, and ecclesial expressions. I also ought have clarified that this is not meant to be an exhaustive classification. There appear to be at least partially animal-like “heavenly creatures” in Ezekiel 1 for instance, and there is no reason why other created things do not have inner spiritual aspects or dimensions as well. My speculative point is that different types of angelic realities have preceded and also continue to emerge subsequent to the personal ones that relate to human creatures, but that in each instance these spiritual entities are constituted by, but yet irreducible to, their material elements.

This leads us to Boyd's observations. His response reminds me of a paper written by Sally Shelton in one of my doctoral seminars in 2008 titled, "What Hath Amos to Do with Thomas? Divergences and Convergences between the Theological Methodologies of Renewal Scholar Amos Yong and Renowned Scholastic Thomas Aquinas" (heretofore unpublished, to my knowledge). It is ironic to be mentioned in the same breath as the angelic doctor if Shults is right that my work treads where angels fear to tread, but I am flattered nonetheless. I do think that the "consonances" (Boyd's word) are more than coincidental since others have also observed such between my teleological account of divine action and Thomas's neo-Aristotelian argument from design. My heart is strangely warmed when I read from Boyd, who knows more about Thomas today than I ever will, even in eternity, that for Thomas, "that the most important of the [theistic] arguments is the argument from final causality," and that "teleology plays the central metaphysical role as creatures 'return' to God from whence they came." Peircean scholars like Menno Hulswit – *From Cause to Causation: A Peircean Perspective* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2002) – are also beginning to explore other links between Thomas and Peirce, including matters related to that all-important notion of final causes that plays such an important role in my work. In conversation with Norris Clarke, the contemporary Jesuit and one of the most respected Thomist philosophers, Boyd calls attention to the "potencies" embedded within the created order that God "collaborates" with in order to bring about God's ultimate purposes. I am grateful to Boyd for interpreting Thomistic tongues for pentecos-

tals like me and I hope that there is enough of the Spirit of truth in the spaces wherein we meet so that further light can be shed as renewal theologians continue the dialogue with the legacy of Thomas. If I might be so bold as to venture this comparative assessment as a prelude to the invitation for our contemporary common task: what Thomas did for his time in updating medieval theology in light of Aristotelian philosophical and scientific knowledge invites us – from the ecumenical and theology-science communities – to re-theologize in light of the relational, holistic, and scientific cosmology of our twenty-first century.

In closing, then, I am hopeful that the theoretical sketch I have provided in my books and in this response can motivate others to also take up the research questions now opened up with the pentecostal entry to the theology and science discussion. This exchange, as well as others – e.g., other responses especially to *The Spirit of Science: A Pentecostal Engagement with the Science* edited by myself and James K. A. Smith (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), with my rejoinder published in the *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research* 20 (2011) [<http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyber20.html>], other responses to my *The Spirit of Creation*, plus my rejoinder, forthcoming in *Australasian Pentecostal Studies*, and a book I am co-editing with Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen and Kirsteen Kim, *Interdisciplinary and Religio-Cultural Discourses on a Spirit-Filled World: Loosing the Spirits* (forthcoming with Palgrave Macmillan) – are no more than the beginnings of what I anticipate will be a long conversation. The issues heretofore discussed in no way exhaust what needs to be engaged in the pen-

tecostal encounter with science. As Oord indicated in his response, there is much work to be done. In particular, he is concerned about pentecostals attaining a sufficient level of both theological and scientific literacy in order to make a contribution to these discussions. I also am praying that more answer the Spirit's call to till in this particular section of the Lord's vineyard. We are also especially in need of biblical scholars, as Oord notes, who can address the hermeneutical and biblical interpretive issues as well. We are at the very beginning of a long-term discussion and there is much work to be done all the way around.