



Gabriel, Andrew K.

The Lord is the Spirit: The Holy Spirit and Divine Attributes

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

The Reformation left us with a bunch of Latin mottos but what that gets bandied about quite a bit is *semper reformanda*, which means “always reforming.” This can undoubtedly be a good thing as it always leaves open the room for correction and growth. *Semper reformanda* has led a lot of contemporary theologians and philosophers of religion to question and revise long cherished beliefs. Take for example the process theology of the late-19th to early 20th centuries, or the more recent open theism, which built upon many of the concepts of process theology; both challenge what has come to be called classical theism, notably as it relates to certain attributes of God, such as omnipotence, omniscience, immutability, or impassibility.

The Lord is the Spirit is Andrew K. Gabriel’s (Assistant Professor of Theology at Horizon College and Seminary) attempt at reforming the classical doctrine of God from a pneumatological perspective. The first half of the book is concerned with identifying classical theism, highlighting some of the modern responses to it, and situating a robust pneumatology within Trinitarian theology. The second half of the book attempts, unsuccessfully in my opinion, to present the Spirit as passible, changing, and something that seems like omnipotent but maybe not.

Gabriel doesn’t seem to appreciate any distinction between the apathetic gods of the Greeks and the impassible God of the Scriptures. He insists on reading anthropopathic passages literally while writing off anthropomorphic passages because “God is not a physical being” (127). But this

begs the question in assuming what must be proven. On the basis of anthropomorphic languages why should we not conclude that God is a physical being (Mormons have drawn this very conclusion!)? There is an uneasy hermeneutical inconsistency here.

Gabriel continues with facile arguments in favor of the Spirit's mutability such as suggesting that "the very idea of 'Spirit' implies movement" (155-56). So what if it does? How does that equate to change? And his appeal to the Spirit being present at different times and in different ways, a phenomenon with which I am very familiar as a Pentecostal, will fail to convince many. Immutability, classically conceived, concerns the character of God, a point that Gabriel seemingly doesn't appreciate or attempt to argue against, in fact, he affirms it (181-82)!

The final chapter is strange in that Gabriel affirms divine omnipotence but wants to reconceive what this means pneumatologically. After arguing that both Reformed and Pentecostal perspectives on the Spirit's unilateral power are not normative, Gabriel goes on to suggest that the fact that creatures have freedom is a testament to the Spirit's kenosis, a "divine self-limitation of the exercise of divine power" (190). But this is a suspect view of kenosis; one that basically conceives of omnipotence as fatalism/hard determinism and posits self-limitation in lieu of its absence. But even if we accept Gabriel's premise, this is still evidence of the Spirit's omnipotence, is it not?

In the end I can appreciate Gabriel's attempt at adhering to that trusty Reformation motto; but there's a flip side to the *semper reformanda* coin and it comes in the form of a modern saying: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." I remain unconvinced that the classical theists were wrong to begin with and the attempts to show that they were in this volume have failed to elicit a change of opinion. Having said that; those involved in the debates over classical theism will do well to consult this volume as another in an ever-growing body of literature arguing against it; and Gabriel has the distinction of being a Pentecostal writing about the Spirit (imagine that!).