WHEN PNEUMATOLOGY MEETS DEMONOLOGY: OPTIONS FOR RECONCILING DIVINE OMNIPRESENCE AND DIVINE ABSENCE

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Abstract

The classic divine attribute of omnipresence has been somewhat neglected in contemporary theology. One area that is seldom addressed is the relationship between divine presence, especially with respect to the Holy Spirit, and divine absence, especially with respect to evil spirits (the spirit world being of particular interest to Pentecostal-Charismatic theology). This paper examines the theological conundrum relating to the ubiquity of the Spirit and the presence of evil, and then surveys the biblical portrayals of divine presence and absence. Potential solutions are presented and evaluated for an understanding of omnipresence that is compatible with experiential evil. A model based on the cultic concept of graded holiness is suggested as an aid for conceptualizing divine presence and absence.

Keywords: Omnipresence, evil, demonology, pneumatology.

Classic Western Theology affirms the divine attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. However, the last attribute has been relatively neglected compared with its partners. Definitions range from a "weak" form, "the world is present to God,"[2] to a "strong" form, God is "wholly everywhere," "filling heaven and earth with omnipresent power."[3] The latter has been alluded to recently in pneumatologies,

[1] The author would like to thank the editors, anonymous reviewers, and fellow scholars Ewen Butler and Andrew Gabriel.

[2] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* III.68.3.

[3] Augustine *City of God, VII*.30. Thomas C. Oden states, "God cannot be excluded from any location or object...no atomic particle is so small that God is not fully present to it, and no galaxy so large that God does not circumscribe it"; *The Living God: Systematic Theology,* Vol. 1 (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 67, and Ron Highfield claims "God indwells and contains all things"; *Great is the Lord: Theology for the Praise of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 283. Note that a strong view needs to be distinguished from pantheism (God and world are one) and panentheism (the di-

which stress the universal presence of the Spirit. Yet often the term omnipresence is used, or the concept assumed, without reflection.[4] Omnipresence is seldom discussed with respect to the philosophical problem of evil or the existence of evil spirits, which is perhaps why it has attracted little controversy. If God indwells everything, then it is necessary to explain how holy presence can co-exist with unholy evil. From the perspective of philosophy, this insinuates God as the perpetrator of evil;[5] from the perspective of demonology, it is difficult to imagine evil spirits and God's Spirit cohabiting.[6] Amos Yong is correct in his assertion that discussions of divine presence necessitate discussions of divine absence.[7] The latter is important for both theological and pastoral reasons. Although few would doubt that God is present to comfort the suffering, whether God is present within perpetrators of evil or evil spirits is a more challenging question.

Theological treatments of the divine attributes in general have been criticized for excluding the Holy Spirit,[8] and the doctrines of omnipotence and omniscience have been challenged by the claim that they are closer to Greek philosophy than the Bible.[9] This has partly been

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vine being interpenetrates every part of the universe but is still distinct from the world). Not all scholars are clear on their stance, and some have been accused of endorsing pantheism; William Lane Craig, "Pantheists In Spite Of Themselves? Pannenberg, Clayton, and Shults on Divine Infinity." *American Theological Inquiry* 5, 1 (2012): 3–23.

[4] Although Augustine did ponder the paradox of omnipresence, questioning why he should ask God to come to him if his very existence depends on God being present within him; *Confessions*, I:2,3. As Highfield notes, we "readily confess omnipresence but rarely think seriously about it"; *Great is the Lord,* 282. Amos Funkenstein points out that a precise history of omnipresence has not been written; *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 49.

[5] Philosophies which demythologize evil spirits and monistic views which attribute evil to God do not challenge the doctrine of omnipresence. However, semi-dualistic theologies, which affirm the reality of demons and seek to dissociate God from evil, need to wrestle with the concept of omnipresence.

[6] Demonology is well attested biblically and is an important topic given the rise of Christianity in the Global South.

[7] Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 243.

[8] E.g., Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IVP, 1996), 51.

[9] E.g., Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 65–79. Colin E. Gunton remarks that the Old Testament, which stresses divine

done as an explanation for evil, with the suggestion that omnipotence is divinely limited in order to respect human freedom. Gregory A. Boyd uniquely argues that the autonomy of demons also explains evil in the world; he does not address omnipresence.[10] The few scholars who discuss omnipresence and evil sometimes appear contradictory. For example, Yong asserts the universal presence of the Spirit, yet believes evil is characterized by divine absence.[11] The conundrum is how to reconcile divine omnipresence with divine absence: Is God present in evil spirits? Evil humans? Can God be present without being active? Can humans reject divine presence? If the Spirit gives life, can humans survive without him? Perhaps it is time to re-examine the neglected "omni" of the classic triad. This paper aims to elucidate and address the dilemma of divine omnipresence and evil by examining relevant biblical texts and suggesting possible approaches to reconciling divine presence and absence.

I. Theological dilemmas

Recent pneumatologies assert the ubiquitous presence and activity of the Spirit, especially with respect to creation and theology of religions. However, they do not usually incorporate evil and are sometimes inconsistent. Clark H. Pinnock, for example, argues that the Holy Spirit is universally present and active in creation: everything, "from spiders to galaxies, manifests the power of the Spirit;" "God's breath is every-

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action, was replaced by Greek philosophy, which stresses abstract being, as the basis for the doctrine of God; *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes* (London: SCM, 2002), 2–5, 22–24. F. LeRon Shults believes contemporary theological language has been "imprisoned by particular philosophical and scientific categories that constrain our proclamation"; *Reforming the Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 2. The Bible shows little interest in divine substance and God is not reducible to modern categories (10–11). Furthermore, "hellenistic categories of transcendence and immanence are not equivalent to the Hebrew categories of the hiding and shining of the face of God" (274). Although, as Stephen R. Holmes notes, it is difficult to discern cultural influences on biblical writings; "The Attributes of God," in John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 54–71, 66.

[10] Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1997); *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001).

[11] Compare Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 43–46 with Yong, *Discerning*, 127.

where, reaching out and touching people."[12] The Spirit hovers over the world, beyond the church, providing universal access to God and ubiquitous inspiration.[13] Pinnock does not seem to differentiate between "weak" and "strong" forms of omnipresence or between potential and actual presence. He mentions evil as a consequence of human choice but does not specify how this relates to the ubiquity of the Spirit.[14] Pinnock is confusing in his claims of universal divine presence and his statement that the Spirit is up against those who negate God, "locked in mortal combat" with powers of resistance.[15] If the Spirit is present and involved in all aspects of creation, how can the Spirit simultaneously be against some aspects? Interestingly, Pinnock argues elsewhere for divine kenosis (God's self-limitation of omnipotence) as an explanation for evil.[16] By asserting universal presence but restriction of power, he appears to imply that God can be present without being active.

Jürgen Moltmann has a similar view of omnipresence. He claims that experience of the Spirit is like breathing air; "in the Spirit God himself...surrounds us from every side;" it is life's "vibrating and vitalizing field of energy."[17] Moltmann stresses immanence, interconnectedness, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in all creation.[18] The Spirit can be present in special ways and is sometimes hidden, but is not limited, because he is poured out on all flesh. Moltmann somewhat confusingly also emphasizes the kenosis of the Spirit (wind, light, and fire representing kenosis of personhood).[19] He argues for divine limitation but

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[12] Pinnock, *Flame of Love,* 36–41, 62, 188. Denis Edwards, argues the same; *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit* (New York: Orbis, 2004), 50, 139–42.
[13] Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 185–88, 192–205.
[14] Ibid, 74–5.
[15] Ibid, 62.
[16] Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover.* This is a common argument in open theism; e.g., Clark H. Pinnock, R. Rice, J. Sanders, W. Hasker, and D. Basinger, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994).
[17] Jurgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation.* Trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992),195, 274; idem, *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life.* Trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 55. Moltmann follows Wolfhart Pannenberg's idea of the Spirit as a force field; *Systematic Theology. Vol. 1.* Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991, 1994), 79–101, 370–84.
[18] Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 24, 43–8, 117, 178; idem, *God in Creation.* 2nd ed. Trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), xiv, 13.
[19] Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 12, 51, 61–64.

does not reconcile this with omnipresence. In creating the world, God first creates an empty space from which he withdraws himself (divine kenosis) and restricts his power; he creates nothingness or non-being which he then calls into being; God creates by "letting-be" or "making room."[20] This space from which God has withdrawn, "God-forsaken space," is therefore evil. However, "the forces of chaos—night and sea—thrust themselves into creation, even though they are excluded and confined by God."[21] Although Moltmann does not discuss demonology, he does note that what is true in a negative sense for exorcism is true in a positive way for recognition of the Holy Spirit: spirits of violence and arrogance cannot endure in the face of God.[22] Moltmann appears to imply divine absence (God-forsaken space), at least at creation, yet does not discuss the contradiction with his other assertions of omnipresence.

Pentecostal scholar Amos Yong similarly believes that God is universally present and active through the Spirit, who sustains the religions of the world.[23] He discusses evil in terms of divine absence but does not appear to recognize the contradictions in his assertions. Yong thinks that the pneumatological imagination is well equipped to consider diverse forms of the Spirit's presence and absence, and suggests that "the experience of divine *absence*...is properly termed "demonic."[24] Pneumatological categories should include absence (characterized by destruction, falseness, and evil) as well as presence (truth, goodness, beauty) and activity; "things move continuously either to or away from their divinely instituted reason for being."[25] Curiously, he describes the demonic as "force fields that neutralize the presence of the Holy Spirit and counter his activity even while they originate and perpetuate destruction and evil in the world."[26] Surely no force is stronger than the Holy Spirit. He elsewhere claims that the demonic are nothing if not

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[20] Moltmann follows the Jewish kabbalistic notion of *zimsum,* or the contraction of the divine presence, as well as the idea of God contracting his presence in order to dwell in the temple; *God in Creation*, 86–93, 119; idem, *Science and Wisdom.* 2nd ed. Trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 119–20.

[21] Moltmann, *Science and Wisdom*, 39.

[22] Moltmann, *Source of Life*, 18.

[23] Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 43–46.

[24] Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)* 127, 178–9, 233–49.

[25] Ibid, 178; Beyond the Impasse, 165.

[26] Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s),* 240. Note that Yong uses "demonic" as a noun, which is common practice in contemporary literature.

personally manifest.[27] Yong at least takes evil and the demonic seriously, but appears to assert divine omnipresence and divine absence simultaneously. The conundrum remains unaddressed. Fellow Pentecostal Andrew K. Gabriel, who otherwise asserts omnipresence, also appears contradictory in his claim that discernment is needed because there are evil powers at work distinct from the Holy Spirit; he does not discuss how opposing spiritual entities coexist with the ubiquitous Spirit. He also states that Ananias and Sapphira died as a result of the "withdrawal and absence of the power of the Spirit," thus appearing to suggest, like Pinnock, that the Spirit can be present but not active.[28]

Philosopher William Hasker also proposes divine kenosis in creation, likening it to God sucking in his chest. However, he believes God's universal presence is an essential property; "for creation to be possible, [this] is not strictly speaking the absence of God, but rather restraint in the manifestation of the divine presence."[29] Hasker is creative but is there a significant difference between divine absence and restraint in presence? What exactly does restraint mean? Admittedly the motive behind most pneumatologies is not to understand evil. In their desire to affirm God's care for the world and the extent of his grace, and to emphasize the role of the Spirit, it is possible that some theologians go too far in asserting the ubiquity of divine presence. Nevertheless theological assertions need to be as consistent as possible and compatible with biblical texts, which are examined next.

II. Biblical dilemmas

There are a number of texts which are commonly cited in support of omnipresence, one of the most popular being Psalm 139:7: "Where can I flee from your presence?" This psalm, however, is not primarily a metaphysical statement about omnipresence but a cry from an ardent follower, who declares God's faithfulness and close relationship.[30] In fact

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[27] Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 129, 138.

[28] Andrew K. Gabriel, *The Lord is the Spirit: The Holy Spirit and Divine Attributes* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 192, 203.

[29] William Hasker, *The Triumph of God over Evil: Theodicy for a World of Suffering* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 141–43. He also uses the idea of *zimsum* and follows a view of divine kenosis with respect to omnipotence.

[30] Grace Jantzen points out that this Psalm places more emphasis on God's loving awareness and ability to intervene than on omnipresence; *God's World, God's Body* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984), 96.

one wonders if the writer truly desires to escape the presence of God. As with many issues in theology, the Bible does not present clearly articulated doctrine but images and stories which the scholar is challenged to articulate in theological terms. The Bible employs multiple spatial images to describe divine presence, including heaven, the temple, hovering over, ascending, and descending. Images of divine absence include hiding and separation. Divine presence can be discussed in terms of the dwelling places of God. Divine absence can be framed in terms of separation from God.

1. Divine Dwelling

Old Testament texts present some ambiguity with respect to divine dwelling: God sits and watches from heaven (Pss. 2:4, 33:13, 80:14, 103:19), heaven is his throne and the earth his footstool (Ps. 47:8, Isa. 66:1), he lives on Mount Zion, the holy hill (Pss. 3:4, 15:1, 65:1, 74:2), He inhabits eternity (Isa. 57:15), he lives in the temple, yet neither it nor heaven can contain God (1 Kgs 8:27).[31] Israel worshiped God "in his holy temple" and "in heaven," associating the two (Pss. 11:4, 150:1). A prominent theme in Old Testament theology is the sanctuary/temple/tabernacle as the dwelling place of God (Exod. 40:34, 35, 1 Kgs 8:10–13).[32] In fact, sacred space is determined by the presence of God.[33] Such space is characterized by light, life, holiness, and purity, and can be defiled by sin. The sacred center can be understood as existing in opposition to the profane periphery.[34] Holiness is perhaps better described as graded, rather than binary.[35] Specifically, there is a range

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[31] Biblical references here and throughout are not comprehensive but given as examples only; space constraints prohibit extensive exegesis. Samuel Terrien points out that the tension between divine presence in creation and presence in the temple is never resolved; *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 405. Pannenberg recognizes some of the tension between transcendence and immanence claiming that the doctrine of omnipresence contains elements of both; God most commonly dwells in heaven but is present to creation in various ways, *Systematic Theology* I, 412.

[32] G. K. Beale. *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004).

[33] Saul M. Olyan, *Rites and Rank* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 17–22.

[34] Mircea Eliade. *The Sacred and the Profane.* Trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. 1957, 1959), 10–13, 29–47, 58–9.

[35] Philip P. Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 36, 58–62, 210–15. This idea of order and its

(reflected in the structure of the tabernacle) encompassing very holy (the holy of holies), holy, clean, unclean, and very unclean (outside the camp). The sacred (very holy) is associated with the temple, life, being, order and divine presence, and the profane (very unclean) is associated with the wilderness, death, nothingness, chaos, and, by implication, divine absence. The temple also has cosmic symbolism, functioning as a microcosm of the universe and a connecting point with heaven, sustaining the world and keeping chaos at bay.[36] Because of divine indwelling, sacred space exudes holiness, and purity rituals are required to maintain holiness and provide reparation for sin and pollution.[37]

In the Gospels, divine presence is focused on Jesus Christ who, in his incarnate form, was specifically spatially located. Like the temple, Jesus is associated with light, life, and holiness. John also describes followers of Christ being given the Holy Spirit, and he refers to the indwelling Spirit; God abides in believers through the Spirit (John 15:1–27, 1 John 3:17–24). Following the ascension of Christ, the Spirit is poured out on all flesh (Acts 2:1–13). The Pauline Epistles more explicitly claim that the Holy Spirit dwells in the community of Christ, and in individual believers (Rom. 8:9, 1 Cor. 3:16,17, 2 Cor. 6:16).[38] The divine presence, formerly limited to the temple, now extends throughout creation.[39] However, the Bible does not specify that all things are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but only followers of Christ. The Spirit is the way in which God walks among his people: "the believer's spirit is the place where, by means of God's own Spirit, the human and the divine

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associated concepts, structure, classification and grading, originated with Mary Douglas's seminal work, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966). The nature of sacred space (and holiness) is qualitatively different; there is a barrier between the temple and ordinary reality; Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, 1985), 127.

[36] Levenson, *Sinai and Zion,* 91, 95, 115–28, 133, 170.

[37] This holy space is so powerful that those who come in contact with it can contract holiness (Exod. 29:37, 30:29). Jacob Milgrom points out that God will not dwell in a polluted sanctuary (Lam. 2:7, Ezek. 11:22), hence the importance of purity rituals; *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1991–2001), 258.

[38] Beale, *Temple,* 245–56; Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1994), 541, 689, 843–45.

[39] Beale, *Temple*, 368.

interface in the believer's life."[40] The New Testament, like the Old, also suggests heaven as a place of divine dwelling (Matt. 6:9, Acts 7:48).

Aside from divine dwelling, there are occasions when divine presence is gifted (Judg. 13:25, 1 Sam. 10:6, 16:13, Num. 11:25) or manifests in a special way (Exod. 3:2–6; Job 38:1, Nah. 1:3b). There are assurances of general omnipresence, albeit in differing contexts: God's majesty is present in nature (Ps. 8:3, Isa. 40:12), he fills heaven and earth (Jer. 23:24), his providence affects the righteous and the unrighteous (Matt. 5:45), God is "nearby" (Jer. 23:23) and "not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27), and Christ is present wherever two or three are gathered in his name (Matt. 18:20, 28:16–20). Divine presence is associated with hope and the face/glory of God (Exod. 20:3, Pss. 42:2, 80:3, Ezek. 39:29).[41] And it is well attested that life is gifted by the Holy Spirit (Gen. 2:7, Pss. 33:6, 104:30, 2 Cor. 3:6).[42] An Apocryphal hymn of praise contains a strong declaration of divine presence: God's "immortal Spirit is in all things" (Wis. 12:1). However, texts indicating divine presence need to be considered alongside those which indicate divine absence.

2. Divine Absence and Separation of Evil

In the ancient world, evil and evil spiritual forces were symbolized by darkness, the sea (and its monsters), and disorder. Thus the original act of creation can be interpreted as divine separation of sacred space and limitation of evil. For example, poetic and wisdom literature describe divine rebuke of the seas and establishment of a boundary.[43] Evil is separated from the divine presence. The Exodus story, often conflated with creation, similarly describes the Spirit "blowing" away the "evil" sea and the Egyptians (Exod. 15:8, Ps. 106:9). In a more explicit manner, Jesus accomplishes the same task in his exorcisms. There is a spatial change when demonic beings are sent from his presence into the abyss (Luke 8:31–33). Interestingly, evil spirits ask Jesus "what do we have in com-

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[40] Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 25, 338.

[41] Terrien notes there is no Hebrew word for divine presence, but that "face" is used instead; *Elusive Presence*, 65. See also Shults, *Doctrine of God*, 266–89.

[42] Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 40–43; Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 304.

[43] Job 38:10,11, Pss. 33:7, 104:7–9, Isa. 50:2, Jer. 5:22. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper, 1988).

mon," perhaps indicating their awareness of the incompatibility between holy and unholy spirits (Mark 1:21–7).[44]

There are also verses which attest to the human experience of divine absence, or departure of the divine presence. In response to sin, God withdraws, and waste and desolation ensue (Isa. 34:9–16; Jer. 4:23–28, 9:20). This is evident in the flood story, in which God condemned all except Noah, with consequent intrusion of destructive evil forces (Gen. 6:11–8:12). God admits to abandoning Israel (Isa. 54:7, Hos. 9:12), and the divine presence is described as literally departing from the sanctuary (Ezek. 8:6, 10:18).[45] Psalmists plea that YHWH not desert them (Pss. 22:1, 38:21, 44:23). David's petition is well known: "Do not cast me away from your presence" (Ps. 51:11). Jonah "flees from the presence of the Lord" (Jon. 1:3). Sometimes God sends an evil spirit as punishment; however, God's Spirit leaves first, perhaps indicating incompatibility between divine and demonic spirits (1 Sam. 16:15–16). With few exceptions, God is also absent from Sheol, or the realm of the dead (Lev. 20:27, 1 Sam. 28:3, 2 Kgs 23:24, Ps. 88:3–5).[46] Death was often considered metaphorically, and was associated with divine absence.[47]

In the New Testament death is similarly described as an enemy, and involves separation from God (1 Cor. 15:26, 1 John 3:14).[48] Hell is spatially opposed to heaven, and is a place where evil people are sent (Matt. 5:22, 11:23, Mark 9:43–47). In apocalyptic discourses the wicked are commanded to depart from the divine presence (Matt. 25:41). John's depiction of Jesus as the true vine also contains spatial imagery;

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[44] This idiom has shades of meaning including the idea of lack of commonality; Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 188.

[45] Joel S. Burnett, *Where is God? Divine Absence in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 157. Burnett also notes that many personal names, such as Ichabod, imply divine absence (29).

[46] The exceptions which perhaps prove the rule are Ps. 139:8 and Amos 9:2; Burnett, *Where is God?*, 65–7.

[47] Madigan and Levenson note that the ancient Hebrews did not make a distinction between literal death and a feeling of being dead which accompanies isolation; *Resurrection: The Power of God for Christians and Jews* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2008), 53–4.

[48] G.B. Caird points out that sin separates people from God; death involves a final separation; *Principalities and Powers: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 91.

those who do not abide in him are cut off and thrown into the fire (John 15:1–10). Jesus warns his followers that there is no forgiveness for blasphemy against the Spirit, indicating separation from divine presence (Matt. 12:31, 32).[49] The Epistles also warn against grieving the Spirit (Eph. 4.30, Heb. 10:29, 1 John 5:16). God at times deliberately allows people to follow their own sinful desires (Rom. 1:24–28).

Continuing the theme of separation, there are many biblical passages which refer to human choice, implying that humanity can either embrace divine presence or reject it: "the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it" (Matt. 7:13). People are encouraged to "choose life" (Deut. 30:19) and Jesus states, "whoever is not with me is against me" (Matt. 12:30). Paul presents a similar choice: "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons" (1 Cor. 10:21). Yet there are those who are "alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart" (Eph. 4:18). The antithetical comparisons in the Pauline (righteousness/lawlessness, light/dark, Christ/Beliar, believer/unbeliever, and God/idols; 2 Cor. 6:14–16) and Johannine (light/dark, Christ/antichrist, God/world, children of God/children of the devil, truth/lies, and love/hate; 1 John 1:5–10, 2:8–23, 3:7–10, 4:1–6) literature similarly suggests separation between divine and evil realities. Believers are encouraged to discern good and evil, especially with respect to false prophets and evil spirits (1 Cor. 2:10–16, 1 Pet. 5:8, 1 John 4:1–3). There is no darkness in God; he dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:16, 1 John 1:5). In the new creation, evil is finally and completely separated from the divine presence (there is no darkness, evil, or impurity, Rev. 21:1–22:5).

3. Evaluation

Biblical texts do not provide a clear, uniform picture of divine omnipresence. The Bible affirms general divine omnipresence: God can observe his creation, deeply cares for it, is always nearby, and at times manifests in special ways. However, only one apocryphal verse affirms a "strong" doctrine of omnipresence: that God's Spirit is in "all things." Most verses used to support the doctrine of omnipresence are written by and/or to those who follow the Lord, often in the form of praise. Little

[49] Michael Welker believes this signifies the refusal of God's gift of deliverance, which can only occur through the Spirit of God; *God the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 211–19.

is said regarding omnipresence as it relates to those who reject the grace of God. Most often, divine presence is focused on specific people, namely followers of the Lord, or those chosen by Him for a specific purpose. Divine presence is generally variable and some verses are potentially ambiguous: if divine presence accompanies "two or three" gathered in Jesus' name, does divine absence occur when people are alone, or does absence accompany those not gathered in His name? In addition, there is indication that God is absent from evil portions of the cosmos. He does not reconcile or redeem evil but separates it from his good creation. He does not embrace evil with his presence but sends it far from his presence. Humans can also refuse the presence of God. If life is dependent on the Spirit and the Spirit is ubiquitous, why is there choice? If the divine is universally present, is there ever need to seek or discern the presence of God? The Bible presents a pluralistic patchwork of "strong" omnipresence (although mostly with respect to God's people), "weak" divine presence (similar to providence), and divine absence (only with respect to evil). The conundrum remains.

Part of the problem, mentioned above and generally well-known, is that theology and the Bible use different language and "translation" is complex. For example, the spatial imagery of biblical passages can be difficult to express in metaphysical terms. This perhaps explains why the idea of "presence" is often ill defined, particularly in theological literature. The ideas of omnipresence and the ubiquity of the Spirit rely much on philosophical concepts, but the Bible primarily uses figurative language, especially metaphor. It should be noted that contemporary linguistics emphasizes the conceptual, cognitive, and semantic nature of metaphors.[50] They are not just ornamental but have the power to depict reality. They also allow for ambiguity and mystery, therefore are espe-

[50] The view of metaphor as cognitive was originated by I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936); expanded upon by Max Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), esp. 25–47; and applied to theology by Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language,* Trans. Robert Czerny (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977) and Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford University Press, 1985), among others. The idea of conceptual metaphors was developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) who argue that metaphors are based on conceptual correspondence between ideas. They are largely irreducible and non-translatable, permeate thoughts and actions, and reflect worldviews.

cially applicable to religion.[51] Often multiple metaphors or a metaphorical system (also known as a model) are required to illuminate one concept. Each provides a partial view of reality.

Another problem is that the concepts of space and presence can be difficult to comprehend. This relates to the well-known problem of human finitude in light of divinity. There is likely something fundamentally different about the nature of divine presence that our human understanding cannot fully grasp. Likewise, the physical realm is fundamentally different from the spiritual realm. Indeed, since Einstein, space itself is recognized to be multifaceted and malleable, which is why many physicists refer to space-time instead. Within the spiritual realm, the idea of heaven is difficult to comprehend, and mystical experiences are described as ineffable. It is also possible that the Holy Spirit and evil spirits are fundamentally different in nature and may occupy different "spiritual space." Human presence too is referred to in multiple ways; for example, we talk about being present with someone in thought and spirit. If material space and presence is difficult to understand, how much more spiritual space and divine presence! Nevertheless, even if our conceptions only approximate mysterious divine reality, I believe the idea of divine omnipresence, especially in relationship to evil, is worthy of theological attention.

III. Proposed Solutions

A number of approaches to the above theological and biblical dilemmas are possible. Some have been suggested by others although not always articulated as such; these are often unsatisfactory and/or do not address the issue of evil.

1. Absence as Illusory

Many scholars suggest that God only appears to be absent. Samuel L. Terrien, although he does not focus on evil, argues that God's presence is always hidden, elusive, and fragile; divine absence is an expression of divine mystery.[52] Wolfhart Pannenberg also believes divine absence is

[51] Funkenstein suggests that divine attributes are best understood symbolically rather than philosophically, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*, 49.
[52] Terrien, *Elusive Presence*, 321.

illusory, a result only of human inability to understand God's ways.[53] Terence E. Fretheim, with respect to the departure of God from the temple, claims this does not mean that God is absent but only less intense and therefore perceived as absent.[54] The idea that divine absence is illusory, a result of the observer's limitation, may help explain some instances of divine absence but not all, particularly texts relating to the separation of evil and evil spirits. It also only explains divine absence as it relates to faithful followers of the Lord; there is no indication that divine absence is illusory to those who do not desire divine presence. Fretheim's idea is creative but is there a significant difference between "barely there" and absent? Although I agree that there is an element of mystery attached to theological assertions, I believe it is important to continue to engage the issues.

2. Flesh versus Spirit

Discussions about the Spirit "poured out on all flesh" usually emphasize "all"; maybe "flesh" needs to be emphasized in order to confirm the absence of the divine in evil spirits. The Spirit being poured out on all flesh disqualifies divine presence in atomic particles, galaxies, and evil spirits (and, contra Pinnock, I question whether spiders qualify). Limiting divine presence to "flesh" solves the problem of the incompatibility between the Holy Spirit and demons but does not help with texts that suggest divine absence in humans, or the possibility of humans rejecting the Spirit.

3. Presence without Activity

The idea of God being present but inactive has not been articulated as such, but seems to be implied by Pinnock, Moltmann, Gabriel, and Hasker, discussed above, who assert omnipresence but limitation with respect to omnipotence. This is certainly a valid option and it accords with most biblical texts, especially ones which refer to God letting peo-

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[53] Pannenberg, *ST. 1*, 79–101, 370–84, 410–14. He cites Pss. 42, 79, 94, and Isa. 29:15. Highfield similarly believes God is everywhere but not always open to us. See *Great is the Lord*, 276; Shults is more nuanced in noting that the divine face/glory is present in a qualitatively different manner than finite objects; he concludes that divine presence is essentially mysterious in *Doctrine of God,* 275.

[54] He claims "actual absence is not a divine possibility in the Old Testament," *God and World in the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 25.

ple follow their sin. One could conceive of God acting primarily in a non-coercive manner, attempting to draw people to himself and to encourage righteous behaviour. This idea also fits well with the idea of varying intensifications of presence (see below). However, it requires expansion; it does not address passages which specifically refer to divine absence, or the dilemma of divine presence within evil spirits or evil humans. It also leads to more questions: for example, is inactive presence significantly different from absence? It is perhaps more difficult to understand a God who is always present but refuses to act than a God who is not present within perpetrators of evil.

Furthermore, the concepts of presence and activity are complex. Perhaps, like space-time, presence and activity cannot be completely separated. Even humans, when inactive, are still breathing and thinking. The "air" is always around but often still—there is no "wind." Could this be a metaphor for divine presence without activity? What types of action constitute "activity?" Is it possible to be present without acting even in some minimalist way? Is God's silence an example of presence without activity? These ideas are valuable and need further attention; however, there are other potential approaches.

4. Weak Omnipresence

A general form of omnipresence (the world is present to God, he watches from heaven) has fewer difficulties. There is no claim in this statement that divine presence indwells every human or evil spirits. "Weak" omnipresence fits with biblical portrayals of divine absence as well as separation of evil. This does not mean that God cannot at times gift creation with his presence, or that he is incapable of being omnipresent.[55] However, claims of God being present in every molecule of creation are not required to support the view that God is intimately concerned and involved with his creation. This view can err on the side of being too general, but is nonetheless helpful.

A primary problem, however, is that the Bible attests that the Spirit gives life—if not present within humans, how is life possible? Two factors offer potential solutions. First, general divine presence and activity, or common grace, could be considered sufficient for the sustenance of life. The breath of the Spirit could give life from outside humans, not

[55] This is how Gunton defines omnipresence in *Act and Being,* 153.

necessarily from within. The rain falls on the righteous and unrighteous, therefore even those who reject God can benefit from the oxygen, water, and food provided by creation, without having the specific indwelling divine presence. As Michael Welker notes, the Spirit is not only given to certain people but "benefits their spatial and temporal, proximate, and distant environments."[56] Second, many of the biblical texts can be interpreted metaphorically: life means participation in the divine, not necessarily physical life. Just as death was understood as separation from God, so life is understood as divine union. The first humans did not physically "die" when they ate the forbidden fruit, but were separated from God—metaphorical death. That way physical life can be sustained by common grace, but *true* life requires the indwelling Spirit. The two-tiered reality implicit in this view will be discussed below.

5. "To" but not "Within"

Another way to consider omnipresence, compatible with a "weak" view, is to view the divine as going *to* but not *within* all things. The Revelation image, of Christ standing at the door and knocking, but not entering unless invited, can be helpful in this regard (Rev 3:20). When invited, the Spirit indwells believers, but otherwise patiently knocks. Divine limitations have mostly been discussed with respect to power and the logical necessity of divine restriction in the face of human freedom, although not without considerable controversy.[57] Boyd, for example, argues that God lovingly chooses to restrict his powers because human and spirit beings have genuine free will.[58] There is no reason why divine kenosis cannot apply to presence as well as power. Although the Spirit is able to be present in all things, out of respect for creaturely freedom, He limits his presence. He invites but does not invade (although exceptions are always possible). This view is compatible with a general view of omnipresence, divine providence, and graded reality. In terms of evil,

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[56] Welker, *God the Spirit,* 338.

[57] E.g., Pinnock et al, *The Openness of God*; Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*; Boyd, *Satan.* As Jantzen points out, limitations are not always negative (e.g., limiting weapons), *God's World,* 105.

[58] Boyd, *Satan*, 50–84, 183–5. Edwards states the power of the Spirit is patient and loving; not dominating but freely self-limiting, although he does not discuss evil in *Breath of Life,* 111.

there are biblical images of the divine going to evil and sending it away, not indwelling it: the Spirit "blows away" the sea in creation and the Exodus; Egyptians experience the activity of the Spirit, but not the divine indwelling; Jesus operates through the Spirit in expelling demons. Thus, contra Yong, the Holy Spirit neutralizes evil forces.

6. Variable Divine Presence

Some theologians describe varying intensifications of the Spirit, without always considering divine absence. Thus Pinnock argues the Spirit is "more present" in humans and "more effectively present" to those who know the risen Christ.[59] Gabriel similarly argues that although God is omnipresent, the Spirit's presence changes and intensifies in relation to Jesus and the church.[60] Views of varying intensifications of the Spirit offer some improvement over "strong" views, but can still be inconsistent. As discussed above, does the degree of divine presence ever get so small that it is practically absent?

Welker, in his biblical theology of the Spirit as liberator, is clearer regarding the possibility of divine absence. He believes in varying intensifications of the Spirit, arguing that the "face of God" represents concentrated divine presence.[61] However, the Spirit does not act and operate in each situation in the same way; it blows "where it wills," is subtle and sensitive, and is not an irresistible force. Welker rejects any notion of an abstract ubiquity of the Spirit.[62] He is unique in his suggestion of divine absence: "the Spirit is present in that which is *held together* and *enlivened* by God—but not…in that which is decaying to dust…through falseness and unrighteousness human beings can grieve and banish God's Spirit."[63] Although evil is not a focus of his work,

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[59] Pinnock, *Flame of Love,* 73, 116. Fretheim also believes there are indications of "varying intensifications of the divine presence in the world" in *God and World,* 25.

[60] Gabriel, *The Lord is the Spirit,* 174–8. However, he is somewhat confusing in his insistence, without elaboration, that this is not a literal intensification; he "cannot fully articulate why." His work may benefit from an engagement with metaphor theory.

[61] Welker, *God the Spirit,* 152. Similarly the prophetic endowments and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost demonstrate a "concentrated presence of God in the midst of reality," 155; Jesus is the concrete bearer of Spirit, 183–95.

[62] Welker, "The Holy Spirit," in Webster et al, *Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, 243–4.

[63] *God the Spirit,* 161. Welker contrasts the Holy Spirit, who causes gathering and strengthening of both individual and community, with evil spirits that cause isolation

Welker is better able to accommodate biblical texts which suggest divine absence, as well as experiences of demonization.

7. Separate Realities

Although not articulated as such, Welker and others appear to imply two realities: one Godly, the other evil; one in which the divine being is present, one in which He is absent. A logical next step in the concept of variable divine presence is divine absence. Old Testament scholar Joel Burnett believes divine absence occurs because of cosmic structure and the boundaries of creation.[64] YHWH is not associated with the realm of the dead, which by definition is remote from divine presence.[65] "God's ability to manage and limit the powers of chaos and death lie not in their divine origins but rather in their exclusion from God's realms of activities"; God respects human freedom but guards the "boundaries of divine prerogatives."[66] Burnett implies separate realities; his interpretation allows for better reconciliation between divine presence and absence, and his ideas about space accord with the biblical portrayal of spatial separation of evil.

Karl Barth does not explicitly suggest separate realities but his creative treatment of evil implies such. He holds a strong view of omnipresence, claiming that God both "possesses and He is in Himself space," and "there is no place where God is less present than all others."[67] With respect to evil, Barth uses the term "nothingness" to describe the part of the world which is antithetical to God.[68] This nothingness is sinister and alien; a malignant, perverse being which is equated with darkness, evil, chaos, demons, and Hades. It is all that God did

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and disintegration, 201. Gabriel critiques Welker for failing to recognize that the Spirit is present in different and changing ways; *The Lord is the Spirit,* 174–5. However, Welker is otherwise clear regarding the varying intensifications of divine presence, and simply takes it a small step further in acknowledging divine absence.

[64] Burnett, *Where is God?* 64, 75, 84.

[65] Ibid, 66–67. "Though God has access to death's realm, it lies outside the normative realm of God's presence in the ordered cosmos," 176.

[66] Ibid, 110, 176.

[67] Barth, *Church Dogmatics II/1.* Trans. G. W. Bromiley & R. J. Ehrlich. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 470–2; 467–76.

[68] The German term, *das Nichtige,* implies nihil, null, or non-existence; *Church Dogmatics III/3*, 289.

not will; "that from which God separates Himself."[69] In Barth's view, chaos is not created, but constitutes the periphery of creation. Creation involves "a separation and the demarcation of a frontier in face of the element of chaos."[70] However, Barth's language and argumentation is confusing.[71] It seems that he tries to avoid the issue of divine absence by inventing "nothingness"—because it does not "fully" exist, he can still assert omnipresence. Yet what Barth is really saying is that divine omnipresence is limited to Godly reality; that to which God says "yes." Evil and demons are separated from God and therefore associated with divine absence.[72] Moltmann appears to follow Barth somewhat with his idea of God-forsaken space, discussed above.

In order to reconcile divine presence and divine absence, the Holy Spirit and evil spirits, it may be helpful to conceive of reality as graded (much like temple holiness). Recall that in the Old Testament sacred space was defined by the presence of the divine and kept separate; profane space conversely can be defined by the absence of the divine. True life and absolute reality is experienced by those who choose to be in relationship with the divine, those who are indwelt by the Spirit.[73] Those who oppose God and reject his Spirit are denied divine presence, therefore inhabit a somehow lesser or false reality, although they nevertheless benefit from divine providence. Evil spirits completely lack divine presence and perhaps lack reality, but seek to attain reality by intruding upon Godly reality.[74] This conceptualization helps reconcile texts which suggest human choice and discernment, as well as divine absence within evil spirits. Texts which imply "strong" divine presence can be understood to refer only to divine reality. This model is also

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[69] Ibid, 289, 351–2, 523.

[70] Ibid, 142.

[71] He has received much critique; e.g., Wolf Krotke, *Sin and Nothingness in the Theology of Karl Barth.* 2nd ed. Trans. Philip G. Ziegler and Christina-Maria Brammel (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 2005), 39–51.

[72] Boyd draws on Barth's notion of "nothingness" in describing hell as a separate reality. He suggests that one's notion of hell depends on one's perspective: eternal suffering, i.e., separation from God, to those in hell; annihilation from the view of the new creation; *Satan,* 319–57.

[73] Shults describes divine presence as the "absolute reality from, through and to whom all things are," *Doctrine of God,* 291.

[74] These ideas are developed in Warren, *Cleansing the Cosmos: A Biblical Model for Conceptualizing and Counteracting Evil* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012).

compatible with the ideas of weak omnipresence, variable intensifications of the Spirit, and the Spirit going to but not within people.

IV. Conclusions

Contemporary theologians who discuss omnipresence usually have agendas other than understanding evil. Consequently, they are not always clear with respect to definitions and seldom do they address the issues of divine absence, demons, or hell. Their desire to emphasize the Spirit's universal activity is commendable, but this optimism needs to be tempered by the realism of a post-9/11 world and the experience of demonized persons. Theological assertions of omnipresence need to consider the biblical depictions of divine absence. As mentioned, it is illogical to consider the divine as present within demonic beings, and challenging to consider the divine as present within perpetrators of radical evil. For theological and ministry purposes it is helpful to clarify and elucidate omnipresence, and consider ways in which it can be reconciled with divine absence.

The Bible depicts people as being alienated from God, and evil as being separated from Him. Yet a "strong" version of omnipresence claims that God is present within every facet of creation. As Welker notes, there is no evidence for an abstract ubiquity of the Spirit, or that the divine is irresistible. This study has suggested that it is better theologically and biblically to conceive of omnipresence in a general manner, the Spirit going "to" but not "within" people unless invited, but all creation benefiting from the general presence of the Spirit. The Spirit is poured out on all flesh, but the flesh can refuse the indwelling Spirit. Furthermore, divine presence can be conceived of as graded and variable, with the possibility of divine absence within evil people and definitely in evil spirits.

Given the complexities of the metaphysics of space-time and presence, it is perhaps prudent to discuss divine presence using figurative language, recalling that metaphors and models provide an accurate, if partial, view of reality, and retain a sense of mystery. The graded holiness of the temple and Israel's cultic life can be used as a model for the varying intensifications of the Spirit. Although divine presence is concentrated in the center, the periphery still benefits. The light shines brightest where the divine is strongly present (the church, believers) but

its effects radiate throughout the world (even perhaps in other religions). However, it fades, eventually disappears, and a dark rim of divine absence exists. Holiness exudes from the divine presence, yet Godly reality can still be threatened by evil human and spiritual forces. This model helps explain the varying intensifications of the Spirit but allows for the possibility of divine absence.

This investigation into omnipresence has raised many further questions for theological investigation. It relates to the God-world relationship including the ideas of transcendence and immanence, and the nature of divine action. There is room for exploration of the relationship between presence and action, as well as the science and metaphysics of space and presence. Specific to Pentecostal theology, this study has implications for the doctrine of subsequence and the experience of Spirit baptism, which need further elucidation.

Divine presence and absence is not simply an academic question but has relevance for pastoral care. In particular, someone who is struggling to understand suffering may be relieved to know that maybe God is not present within evil people, although his comforting presence is freely given to all who ask. Another ministry issue is that of demonization, especially among believers. If we consider omnipresence in a "weak" sense, then the possibility of demonic influence is easier to understand. Furthermore, associating divine absence with evil can be helpful for discernment: demonization can be detected not necessarily through "symptoms" but through recognizing the absence of the divine.

We have reason to rejoice that divine presence is available to all who desire it, but we need to be discerning of divine absence and vigilant in working with and through the Spirit to dispel evil. We also have reason to rejoice that, although we may never have a complete understanding of omnipresence, this does not prevent us from experiencing the presence of the Holy Spirit.