ABSTRACT
IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT:
TOWARD AN AGAPEIC ETHIC OF SPIRIT-BAPTISM

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Marquette University, 2023

This dissertation argues that spiritual empowerment, which is a central theological category for Pentecostals, is the power to participate more fully in divine love. In contrast to this vision, this dissertation identifies two tempting articulations of Spirit-baptism that result in insufficient moral visions at the least, and sanctifications of sinful understandings of power at the worst. Various historical examples of Spirit-baptism will be heuristically typologized as the temptation to status or the temptation to a narrowly reductive vision of human flourishing.

Chapter one introduces the two “glittery” temptations of status and material flourishing. Chapter two articulates a minimal vision of Spirit-baptized ethics in order to articulate boundaries for discerning moral action. Building from the notion that the Spirit’s empowerment is for love, it will construct four complementary definitions of spiritual power: The Spirit as power in God, spiritual power in creation, spiritual power in human beings, and the Spirit’s power in mission. With these definitions as boundaries, an elitist or reductive material end of empowerment will be excluded.

Chapter three begins with an exercise in spiritual discernment of petitionary prayer practices. This chapter will discern cases of petitionary prayer theologically and morally to excavate the assumptions of power embedded within various practices. Chapter four will first introduce mystical prayer as a practice which forms the self to recognize and pursue proper forms of power by attuning the self to the transcendent good of communion with God. Second, it will introduce ascetical prayer as an assistant in discernment by stripping the self’s attention to shiny objects by fasting from these desires for the sake of vulnerability to divine desire.

Finally, chapter five will highlight how these practices are insufficient without the further practice of solidarity. Solidarity provides an intersubjective context for loving attention which will ideally redirect persons to participate in God’s vision of a flourishing creation and properly orient human power with divine intention. Spirit-empowerment at Azusa will be interpreted as a potential source for solidarity in contrast to interpretations of Spirit-baptism that tend toward status or material prosperity.