

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_sbet-01.php

PARTICIPATORY AND PERICHORETIC DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY: A THEOLOGICAL ACCOUNT FOR GROUNDING THE TRUE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE LIFE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH.

ALISTAIR CUTHBERT, PASTOR AT FALKIRK BAPTIST CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

In March 1978, a working group of the Ministry and Mission Committees of the Baptist Union of Great Britain published a report regarding what impact the so-called 'Charismatic Renewal Movement' ('CRM' hereafter) was having on Baptist churches in England and Wales. The report was broad, not particularly in-depth, and made succinct comments on a wide range of issues including diversity, worship, financial giving, and the devaluing of ordinary gifting. Once the national council of the Baptist Union of Great Britain examined the report, they invited baptist theologian Paul Fiddes, who at the time was a tutor of Christian doctrine at Regent's Park College, Oxford, to write a response commentary highlighting the theological and pastoral implications of the report.¹

Fiddes' commentary responded to all the matters raised in the report, focussing primarily on two overlapping areas that became rubrics under which all the issues raised were housed. The first was the nature and practice of spiritual gifts, the definition of which fed into the second rubric, the understanding and culture of spiritual authority and temperament in baptist churches that embraced the CRM. With regard to the comments on the exercise of spiritual gifting, Fiddes noted that biblically, all gifts are acts of the grace of God and therefore there is no place for a hierarchy of gifting nor subjugation of natural gifts to the more supernatural ones. Moreover, in the name of 'body-ministry' the assumption that spiritual giftedness can and should confer ordained ministry is potentially harmful and sets a dangerous pattern that the office of church leadership is predicated on the exercising of gifting, instead of the need for consistent spiritual leadership in a local church.²

¹ The report and Fiddes' response was published together in Paul S. Fiddes, *Charismatic Renewal: A Baptist View* (London: Baptist Publications, 1980).

² Fiddes, *Charismatic*, pp. 9-13, 18-24.

Forty-five years on from that report, written during the zenith of the CRM in the UK, there is an abundance of accounts, both recorded³ and anecdotal,⁴ of spiritual leadership hierarchy that leads to hubris and abuse which *inter alia* has precipitated a movement away from renewal language, nomenclature and charismata foci into what has been termed a 'post-charismatic' milieu governed by emphases on missional and trinitarian theology and praxis.⁵ Therefore, in the rest of this paper I will propose a possible theological corrective to the perpetual abuse happenings within certain streams of the protestant church that have residual CRM elements present. What follows is a theology of the Holy Spirit within a certain Trinitarian account that will, I suggest, preserve the experiential power and love of the Holy Spirit without the often associated hierarchical structures of spiritual submission that can lead to pride and the commoditisation of people. This account will also maintain congruence with the positive aspects the CRM of the past and current realities in much of the church in the global south. In order to do this, the used account will be the 'persons-as-relations' trinitarian theology of the aforementioned Paul Fiddes, one which emphasises the necessary kenotic nature of the triune God and therefore frames all spiritual church leadership in terms of *diakonia* as illustrated by Jesus in John 13.

However, given Fiddes' self-acknowledged status as an outsider of the CRM,⁶ it is important to appraise his account using an interlocutor from

³ For journalistic reporting on recent accusations of abuse see Meagan Gilmore, "At Canadian Megachurch, One Abuse Investigation Spurs Another and Another," accessed December 06, 2023 <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/june/bruxy-cavey-meeting-house-abuse-allegations-investigation.html> For a UK-based accusation see Madeleine Davies, "Pilavachi investigation snowballs as new allegations come to light," accessed December 06, 2023 <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2023/5-may/news/uk/pilavachi-investigation-snowballs-as-new-allegations-come-to-light>. For a historical typical case see Julia Duin, "Charismatic Communities Split by Controversy," *Christianity Today* 35.10 (September 1991): 55-57.

⁴ Anecdotally, among other examples that could be cited, both the church I grew up in and the one I currently serve as pastor have histories of severe hurt and damage by previous pastors who had extra-marital affairs with female members of the churches during the 1980's, the decade when both churches were immersed in the CRM here in the Scotland.

⁵ For a solid and convincing case that in the west we now inhabit a post-charismatic church context see Rob McAlpine, *Post Charismatic?* (Eastbourne: David C. Cook, 2008). His discussion on 'covering and authority' is particularly insightful, McAlpine, *Post*, p. 139-193.

⁶ Paul S. Fiddes, "The Theology of the Charismatic Movement" in *Strange Gifts? A Guide to Charismatic Renewal*, eds. D. Martin and P. Mullen.

within the CRM, and so the British CRM theologian Thomas A. Smail will be used as an appropriate dialogist for Fiddes. Not only was he a contemporary of Fiddes, but he also produced a sizable corpus of theological writing specifically dealing with trinitarian theology as well as the CRM and its corollaries.⁷ Moreover, his *oeuvre* is now recognised as having much saliency for today's charismatic and pentecostal academic theology.⁸ Before delineating Fiddes' account in conversation with Smail, however, it is imperative to set the scene by offering a brief historical précis of the emergent theology of the CRM, which shall be done through the lens of Smail.

CHARISMATIC RENEWAL: A THEOLOGY FOUND?

In 1995 Smail, Andrew Walker and Nigel Wright together wrote and had published *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology*. As the title suggests, the purpose of the text was to explore whether or not the CRM - approximately twenty years old at the time of writing - was situated within a secure theological framework. After each author gave testimony of their experience and indebtedness to the CRM, they offered theological analysis and critique on a range of salient issues within the burgeoning movement: from renewal and the atonement, to styles of worship, all the

(Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), p. 19.

⁷ A more personal and experiential reason to justify choosing Smail needs to be acknowledged as well. Not only was he a Scottish church minister at the time he encountered the CRM but, despite never meeting him, I am somewhat indebted to him for his involvement in the moment of the Rev David Black's baptism in the Holy Spirit in his Bishopbriggs, Glasgow manse in 1965. Black, whose ministry I sat under in Bishopbriggs and later in Lanark during my teenage and twenty-something years in the 1980s and 90s, was a Scottish baptist minister who became one of the central leaders of the Scottish CRM. Given the experiential and phenomenological nature of charismatic Christianity, these personal connections and similarities can be valuable source material for the tapestry of theological formation. For an in-depth account of the life and ministry of David Black after receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit through the prayers of Tom Smail and Douglas McBain, see Alasdair Black, "Pour out Your Spirit: Experiences of the Holy Spirit amongst Scottish Baptists in the Twentieth Century," in *A Distinctive People: A Thematic Study of Aspects of the Witness of Baptists in Scotland in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Brian R. Talbot. (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2014), pp. 151-177.

⁸ Mark J. Cartledge, "Theological Renewal (1975-1963): Listening to an Editor's Agenda for Church and Academy," *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 30 (2008): 83-107.

way to the CRM and demonology.⁹ Of the three authors, each of whom went on to have prolific academic writing careers, it was Smail who had already seriously engaged with CRM theology, especially pneumatology and trinitarian theology, and continued to write on it after 1995.¹⁰

Before 1995, Smail's trilogy on the Holy Spirit established him as a key theologian of the CRM in the UK. In *Reflected Glory* he juxtaposes his personal experience of the Holy Spirit with his theological worldview and produces a theological understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in Christ and Christians. In *The Forgotten Father*, after moving from the Church of Scotland to the Anglican church, he offers a theological critique of the CRM while maintaining the claim that the only hope for the future of the church is to be renewed by the Holy Spirit. Thirdly, in *The Giving Gift* Smail desires to help charismatic Christians get anchored in good trinitarian theology and so he explores the personhood of the Holy Spirit and his place within the Trinity. Moreover, between 1975 and 1983 Smail was the editor of the *Theological Renewal* journal, and it was during this tenure as editor that, according to Cartledge, he wrote numerous editorials and articles, which clearly delineated a vision for a CRM theology, and cemented Smail's position as a key source for future academic theology from a charismatic and pentecostal perspective.

In his *PNEUMA* article, Cartledge claims that Smail successfully explicates a theology of renewal that has a trinitarian structure and christological focus, and therefore can potentially engage with both the academy and the church. Unfortunately, Smail stepped down as editor in 1983 due to his disillusionment that neither the church nor academy was willing to engage with the articulated renewal theology agenda. Indeed, notes Cartledge, such was the gulf that existed between academic theology and living faith in the church, that it was to the detriment of both if the chasm was not bridged, hence the *raison d'être* of *Theological Renewal*.¹¹

Cartledge concludes that notwithstanding the disappointment felt by Smail in 1983, the corpus of theological material produced by the *Theo-*

⁹ Tom Smail, Andrew Walker and Nigel Wright, *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology* (London: SPCK, 1995), pp. 47-130.

¹⁰ His 'trilogy of pneumatology' books written before 1995 are Thomas A. Smail, *Reflected Glory: The Spirit in Christ and Christians* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1975); Thomas A. Smail, *The Forgotten Father* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1980); and Thomas A. Smail, *The Giving Gift: The Holy Spirit in Person* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1994). Then 10 years after the publishing of *Charismatic Renewal*, Tom Smail, *Like Father Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in our Humanity* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2005) was published, as well as other books.

¹¹ Cartledge, "Theological Renewal," pp. 84-86.

logical Renewal journal contains ideas and constructs that could easily be imbibed into today's charismatic and pentecostal academic theology and integrated into church discussions on the *Missio Dei*, especially the role of the Holy Spirit as, to use Taylor's well-used term, the Go-Between God who relates the living Christ to the people of God and vice versa.¹² This is especially the case when we narrow our attention to the previously mentioned pejorative subject matter, that of the abuse of leadership and authority historically associated with the CRM, especially since, as mentioned above, there is no shortage of proof that it continues to this day. As Cartledge notes, Smail prefers to refer to an experience of the Holy Spirit as the 'eventfulness of God' in order to stress the objective work of the Spirit instead of obsessing on the associated feelings and emotions. If the eventfulness of God in the work of the Holy Spirit is embedded within a church's ecclesiology then this will, so Smail argues, go a considerable way towards jettisoning any need to reduce church leadership to legalism, authoritarianism or structures of submission. Instead, spiritual authority within church life will not rest upon a charismatic, institutionalised office but on the action of the kenotic Holy Spirit of God as he seeks to impart various gifts and ministries to those who desire to serve as leaders in order to 'equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.' (Eph 4:12).¹³

One central way to frame the work of the Holy Spirit as the eventfulness of God, claims Smail, is to replace the often central pentecostal model of renewal with the paschal model, which in turn alters focus away from power associated with Pentecost towards the Spirit's role in the cross of Christ and the suffering involved.¹⁴ As Smail asserts, quoting Mother Basileia Schlink, 'all the gifts of the Spirit are marked with the sign of the cross.'¹⁵ Situating all works of the Spirit within a paschal model will ensure that any CRM church does not root itself immutably in Luther's *theologia gloriae* while burying and ignoring *theologia crucis*, and also serve as the ideal antidote against any monarchical triumphalism that can often emerge in church cultures that contain an unspoken belief in the

¹² John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit & The Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press, 1972).

¹³ Cartledge, "Theological Renewal," pp. 91-92.

¹⁴ Tom Smail, Andrew Walker and Nigel Wright, *The Love of Power or the Power of Love: A Careful Assessment of the Problems Within the Charismatic and Word-of-Faith Movements* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1994), pp. 20-26.

¹⁵ Smail, Walker and Wright, *The Love of Power*, p. 35.

superiority of those who have experienced the second stage 'filling of the Spirit'.¹⁶

Indeed, such has been the significant subordination of normal graces and gifting to the more extravagant and manifestation gifts of the Spirit, that there has been the need to create 'safe spaces' in CRM churches that are lead by appropriate charismatic church leaders who are solidly anchored in the Christian tradition. For it is when the exercising of the gifts of the Spirit are cut loose from the moorings of Christian tradition that too often language of power and submission materialise, and a culture of unquestioning obedience can thrive in which any challenging enquiry is rebutted with an erroneously overused biblical injunction, first Chronicles chapter 16, verse 22 that commands 'touch not mine anointed'.¹⁷ However, with all that said, Smail reminds us the same Holy Spirit of the paschal model is still at work and so what is needed is a form of trinitarian renewal imbued with the Holy Spirit as humble intercessor.¹⁸ To aid with that renewal, let us now turn to Fiddes in interlocution with Smail.

'PERSONS-AS-RELATIONS' TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE

Following his engagement with the working group report of the Baptist Union of Great Britain into the CRM, Fiddes picks up and develops his concern that in the 1980s there seems to be a moving away from charisms and spiritual renewal to matters of spiritual authority within the emerging theology of the CRM and this consequently raises questions about what view of the Holy Spirit is being advocated and is there a developing theology of submission to the Holy Spirit?¹⁹ In a book chapter on the theology of the CRM, in which he often engages with Smail's 1975 text *Reflected Glory*, Fiddes notes that there is a strong mood of submission to leadership in the CRM which can lead to anti-intellectualism, political passivity and authoritarianism in church and family.²⁰ One reason for why this is the case, proffers Fiddes, is the popular concept of a God who

¹⁶ Smail, Walker and Wright, *The Love of Power*, pp. 26-33.

¹⁷ Smail, Walker and Wright, *The Love of Power*, p. 91.

¹⁸ Smail, Walker and Wright, *Charismatic Renewal*, pp. 114, 165.

¹⁹ Fiddes, "The Theology of," pp. 19-21.

²⁰ Despite differences in the overall target, there is significant overlap of Fiddes' concerns about a hierarchy of submission with Smail's criticism of 'second blessing theology' of Pentecostalism which creates a league table of both spiritual gifts and those operating in them. Rather, claims Smail, the role of the Holy Spirit, as stated by Paul in 2 Cor 3:18, is to lead us to Christ and transform us into the image of Christ. See Smail, *Reflected Glory*, pp. 11-50.

operates as absolute ruler and dominates creation through his Spirit using a mode of command-control. However, argues Fiddes, any theology of submission to the divine has to be held up against the cross and the incarnation, both of which clearly demonstrate that God 'submits to the conditions of this world, and freely experiences suffering and limitation.'²¹ Indeed, following some affirmative hints that exist within the emerging theology literature of the CRM that the Spirit of God has an unobtrusive and anonymous nature, what needs expounded is a theology of the kenosis of the Spirit - to use H. Wheeler Robinson's term - which accentuates the humility of the Spirit of God and draws on the loving persuasion of the Spirit, not his dominating power.²²

Therefore, to develop and articulate a robust theology of the kenosis of the Holy Spirit - something Smail never does in his writings - it needs to be situated and undergirded by a contemporary doctrine of the Trinity, one which serves as the ideal antidote to any monarchical image of God who solely requires submission.²³ This account is best delineated, argues Fiddes, within a panentheistic framework in which God's triune nature and character is described in terms of personhood, relations, participation and a perichoretic inter-penetration both within God himself and between God and creation. While the early church theologians managed to find language that expressed the oneness and diversity of God, as well as the distinctness of persons in the Trinity and the freedom of both divine and human persons, there is still a need to go further.²⁴

In contrast, however, Smail disagrees with this need to go further and also the insistence that the best corrective to assumed church hierarchies is found only within a panentheistic framework. He thinks that the early Church Fathers are sufficient enough. Following Moltmann, Smail advocates a more eastward move, arriving at the Cappadocian emphasis upon the personhood of the Holy Spirit from which the diversity in the unity of the triune God can be developed. Key to this development is a definition of divine unity as perichoresis, a self-giving love from and for each divine person of such intensity that one hypostasis mediates the immediate presence of the other. The influence of the Cappadocian Fathers creates a better platform from which to develop a definition of the Trinity as

²¹ Fiddes, "The Theology of," p. 37.

²² Fiddes, "The Theology of," pp. 32-38.

²³ Fretheim laments that the western Christian church has relied on monarchical images of dominance and masculine power for too long. Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), xiii-xvi.

²⁴ Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 2000), pp. 13-16.

‘persons *in* relations’ (not persons *as* relations - see below) that could be used to theologically explore other inter-human relationships.²⁵

Notwithstanding Smail’s counter ideas, Fiddes avers that participation in the relations of the Trinity is the way forward since the idea of ‘participation’ treats the triune relationships very seriously,²⁶ and so he promulgates what he claims to be his *unique* contribution to trinitarian theology, which is to define the Trinity as ‘persons-as-relations’,²⁷ a definition that ungirds his panentheistic vision of God.²⁸ Subsequently, his panentheistic doctrine of participating in God using a persons-as-relations trinitarian definition permeates the entire substantial corpus of his work in systematic theology, as well as his theological insights from literature, and baptist and ecumenical ecclesiology.²⁹ In past debates while

²⁵ Smail, *Like Father*, pp. 66-107. From this, and at definite odds with Fiddes, Smail develops this perichoretic understanding of the triune God within functionally distinctive actions of the divine persons: The Father sovereignly initiates; the Son obediently executes; and the Holy Spirit creatively fulfils. Thomas A. Smail, “Tom Smail Meditates on Trinitarian Atonement,” *Stimulus* 15.2 (May 2007): 44.

²⁶ Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 11-13.

²⁷ Paul Fiddes, personal communication with the author, 15 & 16 March 2016. Of course, Fiddes is aware that this language comes from Augustine and Aquinas. His claim of uniqueness lies in taking an extra step beyond ‘subsistent relations’ and using radical language that talks about the “event of relationships,” which is the best language of participation. Paul S. Fiddes, “Participating in the Trinity,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 33.3 (2006): 379-383.

²⁸ Participation in the ‘relations,’ not persons, of the Trinity is arguably the unique, centripetal idea of Fiddes to which all his theology migrates. Paul S. Fiddes, “Creation Out of Love,” in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. J. Polkinghorne. (London: SPCK, 2001), pp. 184-191; Paul S. Fiddes, “The quest for a place which is not-a-place: the hiddenness of God and the presence of God,” in *Silence and the Word: Negative Theology and Incarnation*, eds. O. Davies and D. Turner. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 51-55; Fiddes, “Participating in,” pp. 375-391.

²⁹ A selection of his work in the three areas of research where this is the case includes Paul S. Fiddes, “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”: The Triune Creator in Hymn and Theology,” in *Gathering Disciples. Essays in Honour of Christopher J. Ellis*, eds. Myra Blyth and Andy Goodliff. (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2017), pp. 207-210; Paul S. Fiddes, “Concept, Image and Story in Systematic Theology,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11.1 (2009): 22-23; Paul S. Fiddes, “The Late-Modern Reversal of Spirit and Letter: Derrida, Augustine and Film,” in *The Spirit and the Letter: A Tradition and a Reversal*, eds. Günter Badder and Paul S. Fiddes. (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 124-130; Paul S. Fiddes, “Not Anarchy but Covenant: A Nonconformist Response to Matthew

depicting his persons-as-relations doctrine, Fiddes claims that not only is this the most appropriate language that we have to speak of the persons of the Trinity, but it is also methodologically sound,³⁰ uses the majority of theological sources, and was the approach of the early Church Fathers who defined hypostasis relationally, not objectively.³¹ Moreover, relations language offers the best analogy for God-speech and it also helps us understand Rahner's rule by finding a concept of the divine that expresses

Arnold's view of Religion and Culture," in *Theology and Human Flourishing: Essays in Honor of Timothy J. Gorringer*, eds. Mike Higton, Jeremy Law and Christopher Rowland. (Eugene: Cascade, 2011), pp. 147-155; Paul S. Fiddes, "Attending to the Sublime and the Beautiful: Theological Reflection on Iris Murdoch and Emmanuel Levinas," in *Theology of Beauty*, eds. Alexei Bodrov and Michael Tolstoluzhenko. (Moscow: St Andrew's Press, 2013), pp. 83-85; Paul S. Fiddes, "The Church and Salvation: A Comparison of Orthodox and Baptist Thinking," in *Ecumenism and History: Studies in Honour of John H. Y. Briggs*, ed. Anthony R. Cross. (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002), pp. 143-148; Paul S. Fiddes, "The Church Local and Universal: Catholic and Baptist Perspectives on Koinonia Ecclesiology," in *Revisioning, Renewing, Rediscovering the Triune Center: Essays in Honor of Stanley J. Grenz*, eds. Derek J. Tidball, Brian S. Harris and Jason S. Sexton. (Eugene: Cascade, 2014), pp. 97-108; Paul S. Fiddes, "Koinonia Ecclesiology among Roman Catholics and Baptists: Hermeneutics, Perichoresis and Personhood," *Pages* (The Journal of St. Andrew's Biblical Theological Institute) 18/2 (2014): 250-253, 262-265.

³⁰ McCall is critical of Fiddes' notion of relationality without involving language of persons. It jettisons classic Christology and embraces degree Christology. Thomas H. McCall, "Response to Paul S. Fiddes," in *Two Views on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, ed. Jason Sexton. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), pp. 197-203. Fiddes' rejoinder is that all human language falls short and that our own human experiences of living in relations with others can be seen to reflect and participate in the relations in God. Paul S. Fiddes, "Rejoinder Comments and Clarification," in *Two Views on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, ed. Jason Sexton. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), pp. 205-206. On degree Christology, Fiddes remains ambiguous. See Paul S. Fiddes, review of *Christology in Conflict. The Identity of a Saviour in Rahner and Barth* by Bruce Marshall. *Journal of Theological Studies* 40/2 (1989): 700-703.

³¹ Holmes disagrees, claiming that the Eastern Fathers were committed to divine simplicity more than Fiddes acknowledges and that the concept of 'relations' does not connect to the idea of personhood, as claimed by Fiddes. Stephen R. Holmes, "Response to Paul S. Fiddes," in *Two Views on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, ed. Jason Sexton. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), pp. 188-190. For a sustained defence of his first rebuttal point, see Stephen R. Holmes, *The Holy Trinity: Understanding God's Life* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2012), pp. 97-120.

the relational experience of persons and helps us understand our participation in the triune God.³²

Locating humanity's relational and participatory experiences within the relations of the triune God, means that, according to Fiddes, 'An "event of relationships" is a participatory concept that makes sense only in actual life events. This does not replace revelation with human experience, but locates the self-disclosure of God where God wants to be.'³³ Indeed, using personal language rooted in pastoral experience can significantly aid humanity to understand its relations both with God and with each other. Participative language is not subservient to analogic language proper, but rather an appropriate image for the personalness of God.³⁴

Yet, Smail's understanding of the Trinity as a participatory idea suggests that moving the focus away from the triune persons by defining the Trinity as an event of relationships is a step too far and not needed in order to preserve triune unity in diversity and offer antidote options that oppose any default theology of submission necessarily developing in churches. All believers participate through the Holy Spirit in the relationship between the Father and Son within the context of divine purpose for the whole of creation,³⁵ and this is especially realised participating in the Spirit of God as he creates *koinonia*, vertically with the Father and horizontally with each other. This *koinonia* is nothing less than the participation of human persons in the life of the incarnate Son by which we grow in Christ's image,³⁶ an image of service and kenosis.

Despite Smail's plausible counter-proposal, Fiddes also insists that if we view God as an event of relationships grounded in the language of participation, then this can, enable us to retain the Thomistic language of 'subsistent relations' so long as we raise our gaze to a 'third level of meaning': that God's relations are as ontic and real as that which is either created or uncreated and their ground of existence lies within themselves.³⁷ This understanding is what sets the foundation for a so-called 'radical'

³² Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 34-46, cf. Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oats, 1970), p. 22.

³³ Paul S. Fiddes, "Relational Trinity: Radical Perspective," in *Two Views on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, ed. Jason Sexton. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), p. 185.

³⁴ Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 28-33.

³⁵ Smail, *The Forgotten*, pp. 174-184.

³⁶ Smail, *The Giving Gift*, pp. 182-198.

³⁷ Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 34-46.

trinitarian model,³⁸ one that consists of genuine perichoresis thereby mirroring Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17:21.³⁹

Proffering this social, perichoretic, panentheistic understanding of the Trinity that *actually* places human beings in participation with the relations of the Godhead also has, so argues Fiddes, a number of significant advantages that offer solutions to the above-mentioned problems of authoritarianism, submission, hubris, and abuse connected with the CRM in recent times. To begin, as already briefly mentioned, it strongly counters images of dominance, power and monarchical superiority that have led to subordination and abuse.⁴⁰ The divine dance that emphasises interpenetration and focus on the movements, not the dancers, removes the domination of the Father, which has so often been used to justify oppression.⁴¹ It throws open relational language allowing us to talk about a motherly father or fatherly mother which, without undermining, brings equality to our understanding of the Trinity.⁴² Crucially, this egalitarian dance flattens out authority structures within the church and redefines authority in terms of kenotic, humble service as modelled by Jesus in John 13. Vicious cycles of domination, power-plays and scapegoating cease when we focus on our participation in the Trinity and the completeness of fellowship we have with the triune God.⁴³

Smail, on the other hand, argues conversely that egalitarian trinitarian theology will not deliver us from human authoritarianism and hubris but rather a rediscovery and knowledge of the Father, along with the associated divine authority, is needed to spare us from the spiritual domination and arrogance as sometimes found in the CRM.⁴⁴ Indeed, the best antidote to the tendency to project fallen human fatherhood onto the Father is to view God's fatherhood in connection to his Son, as this will

³⁸ A model that has come in for significant criticism in recent years. Holmes, "Response," 186-190; Paul D. Molnar, "Response to Paul S. Fiddes," in *Two Views on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, ed. Jason Sexton. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), pp. 191-196; McCall, "Response," pp. 197-203.

³⁹ Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 46-56.

⁴⁰ Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 62-71.

⁴¹ While on the surface this comment seems very similar to Moltmann, Fiddes arrives at it via a different route. Moltmann's account relies heavily on the German writer Erik Peterson, and this reliance has in recent times been fairly comprehensively discredited. See Randall Otto, "Moltmann and the Anti-Monothism Movement," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 3.3 (2001): 293-308.

⁴² Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 71-96.

⁴³ Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 96-108.

⁴⁴ Smail, *The Forgotten*, pp. 11-29.

remove any sexism in the picture and prevent any development of a patriarchal, authoritarian image.⁴⁵ Moreover, in contradistinction to Fiddes' emphasis upon relations, Smail presents the Spirit as 'differently personal' to the Father and the Son in that everything the Spirit does points away from himself to the Father and Son thereby reinforcing the functional hierarchy within the Trinity. By maintaining this distinction, especially between the Son and the Spirit, the separation of grace and freedom is perpetuated and this, so argues Smail, goes a long way to prevent two common extremes in the church that lead to a mis-grounding of authority: christological heteronomy and autonomous subjectivism. The former, which is common in evangelicalism, sees Christ as the questioner and the answer imposes upon humans an external imposition that can lead to authoritarianism. The latter places the source of authority in ourselves, not in God. Both displace the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of God and Christ and through whom we gain freedom when the Spirit frees us to confess the Son.⁴⁶

However, in returning to Fiddes, when it comes to hurts and brokenness caused by church leadership hubris and spiritual abuse, *actual* participating in God's relational movements of love radically potentiates the practise of forgiveness and possible reconciliation. Forgiveness is, attests Fiddes, a two-stage journey: a journey of discovery and a journey of endurance and anguish, both of which are journeys into God himself since Christ modelled them in his declaration of forgiveness from the cross (Luke 23:34) and subsequent death.⁴⁷ Forgiveness defined this way seeks to win the offender back into relationship and in the process overcome hostility, anxiety and self-indulgence.⁴⁸

Further, locating the journey of forgiveness and reconciliation in the participatory relations of the triune God means that when we forgive, we are actually partaking in the divine rhythms of the forgiveness of God. Also, notwithstanding the probable criticism by those working in abuse counselling, movements of forgiving which participate in the divine dance of forgiveness enable us, like Jesus, to pronounce and release unconditional forgiveness on people *before* they repent or even when there is no intention to apologise or repent, in order to unlock hatred and hopefully bring them back into full relationship through reconciliation.⁴⁹ If this does not work, suggests Fiddes following Derrida and Ricoeur, then

⁴⁵ Smail, *The Forgotten*, pp. 48-66.

⁴⁶ Smail, *The Giving Gift*, pp. 56-88.

⁴⁷ Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 191-210.

⁴⁸ Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 192-197.

⁴⁹ Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 215-220.

with God's enabling grace, radical forgetting or memory locking will be appropriate.⁵⁰

In terms of a trinitarian pneumatology, Fiddes argues that when articulating divine perichoresis, that divine dance within God himself and between God and creation, the Holy Spirit of God should receive greater recognition than historically has been the case. While acknowledging some ambiguity as to the anonymity and self-effacing nature of the Spirit, it is imperative to see the Spirit as a distinct mover within the triune God whose movement is represented through Old Testament images of fire, water, oil and wings.⁵¹ Juxtaposing East and West Spirit traditions also creates the understanding of the Spirit as a *disturber*, disturbing the relationship and common life between the Father and Son, resulting in life and love constantly being renewed. Pertinently, a creation-ward movement of the Spirit also creates spiritual gifts; gifts that should be fundamentally viewed as coming from the being of God, kenotic in nature, and therefore not to be used as spiritual collateral in order to dominate while subordinating other gifts and persons.⁵²

Smail, of course, agrees with Fiddes' main point of not using spiritual gifts for subordination but reaches this same conclusion via a different route. Instead of viewing the Holy Spirit as a disturber, Smail proposes framing the Spirit as the ultimate life giver who gives life to humans through responsiveness, purposefulness and, most crucially, creativity.⁵³ He is the Spirit of the new thing, the future of renewal and creativity, and his triune distinctiveness lies in perfecting creativity that, as noted above,⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Paul S. Fiddes, "Memory, Forgetting and the Problem of Forgiveness: Reflecting on Volf, Derrida and Ricoeur," in *Forgiving and Forgetting. At the Margins of Soteriology*. Series: *Religion in Philosophy and Theology*, eds. Johannes Zacchuber and Hartmut Von Sass. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), pp. 130-133. Fiddes has embarked upon further original work locating the Mennonite practise of 'restorative justice,' which is currently sometimes used in the British criminal justice system, within the panentheistic movements of participation in the divine. See Paul S. Fiddes, "Restorative Justice and the Theological Dynamic of Forgiveness," *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* (2015): 1-12.

⁵¹ Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 251-264. Elsewhere Fiddes claims that through the same images we understand the relations of eternal generation and movements of self-giving. Fiddes, "The quest for a place," pp. 51-55.

⁵² Fiddes, *Participating in God*, pp. 264-274; Fiddes, "The Theology of," pp. 32-38; Fiddes' focus on the presence of the Spirit in the world and his kenotic reality may have come from Moltmann. Paul S. Fiddes, "A Review of 'God in Creation. An Ecological Doctrine of Creation' by Jürgen Moltmann," *Journal of Theological Studies* 38/1 (1987): 262-265.

⁵³ Smail, *The Giving Gift*, pp. 166-181.

⁵⁴ See above, p. 7 fn.25.

flows from the Father's sovereign, initiating love and the Son's freely obedient love. Human life is genuinely possible 'when it is free to be initiating in the image of the Father, when it is free to be responsive to claims of others in the image of the Son, and when it works on what it inherits with a dynamic creativity that reflects the Holy Spirit.'⁵⁵ This perfecting creativity of the Spirit that disseminates gifts (both *charismata* and *doma*) to christian believers will best protect against any threatening authoritarianism and subordination when situated, as already mentioned,⁵⁶ within the vertical and horizontal koinonia with the Father and each other, since this koinonia is nothing less than participation in the triune God and the centring of relationships which counters any emerging individualistic independence that could give rise to spiritual hierarchy and domination.⁵⁷

CONCLUSION

In this paper what has been proffered is a participatory and perichoretic doctrine of the Trinity which is a suitable to ground what Smail has labelled a 'trinitarian renewal,' a renewal in which the experienced power and love of the Holy Spirit remains integral to the local church's ministry and mission, but without the often-associated realities of submission and authoritarianism. By presenting Fiddes' 'persons-as-relations' account with interlocution from Smail, two slightly variant versions of the doctrine have emerged. For those comfortable with the 'radical' approach of Fiddes which accentuates the panentheistic ontology of God, the kenotic nature of the Holy Spirit (not just the Son), and focusses more upon the relations within the Trinity than the three hypostases, then Fiddes' account should be applied to the theology, life and ministry of the local church. For the healing and life-giving properties of the divine relations will undermine and repair past relational abuses of former CRM pentecostal models while enabling a local church to preserve the presence, power and ministry of the Holy Spirit in and through all pastoral work and mission in its local context.

However, for those like other interlocutors of Fiddes who think that his labelled 'radical' model goes too far and deviates from the tradition,⁵⁸ Smail's variant account could be adopted for church ecclesiology and theology. Without the undergirding of Fiddes' somewhat inimitable commitments, Smail presents a doctrine of the Trinity that consists of a participa-

⁵⁵ Smail, *Like Father*, p. 200.

⁵⁶ See above, p. 10.

⁵⁷ Smail, *The Giving Gift*, pp. 182-198; Smail, *Like Father*, pp. 270-295.

⁵⁸ Holmes, "Response," pp. 186-190; Molnar, "Response," pp. 191-196; McCall, "Response," pp. 197-203.

tion of creation as well as a perichoretic, interpenetrative movements of the persons of the Trinity. Adhering to the functional hierarchy between the three hypostases outlined by Jesus in John chapters 14-16, Smail articulates a model that undermines projection of fallen, human fatherhood onto the Father and replaces pneumatology based on power with a paschal model of the Holy Spirit which is rooted in the suffering of Christ. Both these account accents negate pejorative trinitarian elements that can be used to forge a context and culture of submission and subjugation in church life and ministry.

Overall, that which unites Fiddes and Smail's accounts is greater than that which divides them, for both ultimately explore the Father and the Spirit in relation to the Son. For Fiddes, his trinitarian doctrine's starting point of extrapolation is the kenotic, crucified Christ at the moment of his dereliction cry (Matt 27:46) whereas for Smail it is the obedient Christ into whose image all believers are to grow. The end point of both approaches is believers who are rooted in and in union with Christ, the Son whose nature and character is intrinsically *kenotic* with absolutely no desire to procure equality with God for the sake of self-aggrandisement. To ground all spiritual leadership and expressions of the Holy Spirit in either version would create a church culture and sociology into which hierarchy, submission and domination would be hard pressed to take root and grow.