

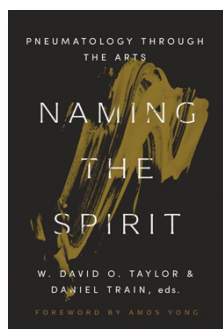
## [Review] *Naming the Spirit: Pneumatology Through the Arts*

W. David O. Taylor and Daniel Train, eds.



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Recently awarded IVP's 2025 Readers' Choice Award in Arts & the Humanities, *Naming the Spirit: Pneumatology Through the Arts* gathers the voices of twenty scholars, including a foreword by Amos Yong, to explore the intersection of pneumatology and the arts. This edited volume by Daniel Train and David Taylor is a rich feast of interdisciplinary studies that emerged from in-person gatherings linked to the Duke Initiatives in Theology and the Arts, led by Jeremy Begbie, to whom the book is dedicated. Most chapters are coauthored, aiming "to pursue doctrinally rigorous engagement of the arts" (3).

The edited volume contributes to the growing field of theology of the arts, especially works focused on the Holy Spirit, such as Chris Green and Steven Félix-Jäger's *The Spirit and the Song: Pneumatological Reflections of Popular Music* and *The Spirit and the Sketch: Pneumatological Reflections on Visual Art*. In this new collection edited by Train and Taylor, seventeen contributors select a biblical name for the Holy Spirit and link a theological study of that name to a specific artistic work or performance. The main conviction at the heart of the book "is that art can become a form of constructive and critical engagement with doctrine, enriching and enlarging our confession in the triune God" (11). This unique volume highlights the expansive work of the Holy Spirit and the distinct functions and contributions of art to the study and experience of theology.

In chapter 1, Steven R. Guthrie provides a framing of the entire book around *Pneuma*, encouraging the artistic postures of watching and listening. In chapter 2, Jonathan A. Anderson draws art history and theology together, exploring the Spirit's work at Pentecost through the visual imagery of Acts 2 and illuminated images of the sixth-century Syriac Rabbula Gospels. Christina Carnes Ananias's chapter presents Olafur Eliasson's 1993 installation, *Beauty*, as an illuminating lens for understanding Basil of Caesarea's treatise *On the Holy Spirit*. Chapter 4, in particular, may be of interest to ethnodoxologists and those studying communal arts, as Erin Shaw and Taylor Worley's study of the "Spirit of Shalom" explores the unique contributions of an Indigenous view of the world (kincentricity) within the contemporary art of Native Americans that points beyond individual peace and toward communal flourishing under God's shalom. In chapter 5, Devon Abts and Joelle A. Hathaway present poet Ross Gay's "A Small Needful Fact" as a "prophetic poem" reframing the life of Eric Garner, an unarmed Black man who gasped "I can't breathe" eleven times as he was choked by a police officer (103). Phil Allen Jr.

and Justin Ariel Bailey describe the work of the Spirit and space through the participatory performance art of BLK HALOS, in which themes of anti-Black racism are engaged through a “habitable and sanctifying space to encounter God’s liberating Spirit” (116-117).

In chapter 7, Chelle Stearns presents French composer Olivier Messiaen’s *Vingt Regards sur l’Enfant-Jésus* as a way to understand and hear the mutuality of the work of the Spirit with and within Mary, offering deeper insights into the Overshadowing Spirit. Chapter 8 features Julian Davis Reid’s artistic and theological reflections on his performance, *Notes of Rest*, which reveal how artistic exploration of music, history, and theology can create generative spaces for “world-denial and world-affirmation to which the Spirit calls us” (148). Continuing reflections on music and theology, Amy Whisenand Krall draws together biblical studies on “spiritual song” with an analysis of the choral work *Hope for Resolution*, which combines European chant melody and South African protest song, arguing for ways communal singing enable enactment and participation in the “bond of peace” (Eph 4:3). In chapter 10, Shannon Steed Sigler examines the hymns of Charles Wesley to explore themes and challenge presumptions of artistic freedom, the creative process, autonomy, and relationship with the Holy Spirit.

In chapter 11, David W. McNutt and Wesley Vander Lugt explore the comforting and disruptive work of the Holy Spirit through the provocations of Terrence Malick’s film *The Tree of Life*. In the final chapter, Jennifer A. Craft and W. David O. Taylor draw on Colin Gunton’s pneumatology to analyze the landscape renovations of the Laity Lodge, revealing how theological and ecological particularities can inform our relationship to and sense of space.

Even with such a vast number of academic disciplines and diverse groups of scholars, this book remains clearly focused on exploring the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the arts. In my view, this work went deep and wide. I appreciated that each chapter mined the depths of rich artistic and theological resources. Additionally, it spanned a wide range of theological traditions, cultural experiences, and artistic practices. As I was reading the book, I found myself engaged and needing to grab my laptop to view an image or video of an installation or to hear a musical work. With such depth and breadth, I’m curious if readers would have benefited from additional background on the various “standpoints” of the authors and artists discussed. Recognizing the different theological traditions and foundational assumptions could foster a greater appreciation of the diversity of doctrinal views and artistic approaches, as well as increased clarity regarding the various methods of theological and artistic analysis.<sup>1</sup>

This edited volume should be required reading for graduate students taking courses or conducting research at the intersection of theology and the arts. Additionally, professors in the humanities and the arts who teach upper-level undergraduate courses may find specific chapters well suited to their course objectives. I could envision learning modules in which students study a particular biblical passage or theologian, alongside seeing or hearing the corresponding piece of art. If performance or installation is within reach, reading a chapter before a field trip may be possible. Although the book’s engagement with global Pentecostalism and Christianity outside North America is limited, ethnodoxologists will

<sup>1</sup> For more on “standpoints” in theological methodology, see Mark J. Cartledge, “Can Theology Be ‘Practical’?: Part II: A Reflection on Renewal Methodology and the Practice of Research,” *Journal of Contemporary Ministry* 3 (2017): 29, accessed March 24, 2026, <https://www.journalofcontemporaryministry.com/index.php/jcm/article/view/98/88>.

benefit from the numerous case studies of theology and the arts in particular cultural contexts for their own research and reflection.

Overall, Taylor and Train, along with all the contributors, have developed a groundbreaking collaborative writing and research process that produces a unique combination of depth and breadth. Additionally, this book makes a significant contribution to the field of pneumatology and exemplifies the generative, vital integration of theology and the arts.