

# Ecumenical Perspectives on Pentecostal Pneumatology<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This contribution responds to the unbearable but undeniable tension between the ecumenical movement and the Pentecostal movement by exploring the doctrinal differences in this regard. More specifically, the aim is to understand the challenges posed to the ecumenical movement by the emphasis on Spirit baptism in Pentecostal pneumatology. It is argued that this raises questions around the relationship between Christ and the Spirit and between the Father and the Spirit for ecumenical theology and Pentecostal theology alike.

**Key words:** Africa, Ecumenical movement, Pentecostalism, Pneumatology, Spirit baptism

## Introduction: Situating the discourse

The Diagnostic Report of the National Planning Commission notes that South Africa remains a deeply divided country so that social cohesion (if not national reconciliation) remains a distant dream. There can be no doubt that race and class are still the main markers of such divisions. However, it is no longer possible to say that there are completely separate “white” and “black” worlds in South Africa, only joined by labour relations. There are clearly other factors involved, including language, culture (if not ethnicity), religion, geography, levels of education, the urban/rural divide, political affiliation (to a party if not a faction within the party), trade union membership, sports codes (if not allegiance to particular teams) and so forth. The question is how this volatile mix should be understood. One way to do so is to focus on employment in order to distinguish between those who are fully employed (and have trade union representatives) or self-employed and those who are semi-employed (as day-labourers) or unemployed and perhaps unemployable given the current shape of the economy, a lack of adequate education and the erosion of the social fabric in impoverished com-

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munities. The employed pay income tax while the unemployable are dependent on a range of social grants. The quality of education itself provides a helpful indicator of such divisions. The question is: To which school did you go and where are your children going to school? The irony is that the poorest schools are all mono-racial while the better schools are at least to some extent racially integrated and offer scholarships to some learners from poorer families.

Christianity in South Africa, likewise, remains deeply divided. Sadly, the same demographic indicators of social division are also the best indicators of what divides Christians. There may be other differences in terms of institutional affiliation, ethos, doctrine and ritual that come into play, but Christianity in South Africa merely reflect the social tensions that characterise the country as whole. Inversely, religious sensitivities may well provide a barometer to understand such divides.

That there is more at stake may be illustrated by the varied responses to a strongly worded statement entitled “The church speaks . . . for such a time as this”, issued by church leaders in the week before the national conference of the African National Congress (ANC) in Mangaung, December 2012. The statement, together with a covering letter, signed by Archbishop Thabo Makgoba on behalf of the Church Leaders Consultation, Bishop Joe Seoka of the SA Council of Churches, Rev Moss Ntla of the Evangelical Alliance of SA (TEASA), and Rev Edwin Arrison of Kairos Southern Africa, was sent to President Jacob Zuma with copies to Helen Zille as the leader of the opposition. In the dismissive responses from Gwede Mantashe and Mathole Motshekga (as reported in the media) it was recommended that these concerns should be best expressed at the National Interfaith Council of South Africa (NICSA), an organisation allegedly initiated by President Jacob Zuma that includes representation from some mainstream, charismatic and African indigenous churches and other religious groups.

As I suggested elsewhere (see Conradie 2013), the question as to which organisation best represents the voice of religious leaders has become highly politicised in terms of their alignment with various factions within the ANC. The ANC has traditionally drawn on the mainline churches represented by the South African Council of Churches for guidance and support. However, the SACC entered into a phase of “critical solidarity” with the government after the transition to democracy and then into a phase of “critical engagement” through the establishment of the SACC’s Parliamentary Liaison Office in 1996. There has clearly been a shift in ANC allegiances to seek religious support and solidarity from a more conservative alliance of Evangelical, neo-Pentecostal, charismatic and African Instituted Churches. One may add that there is a range of new non-denominational forms of Christianity, evident in inner city “store-front churches”, often imported from elsewhere in Africa, that typically offers religious support for an upward social mobility amongst

the (lower) middle classes in urban areas, often through preaching some form of a prosperity gospel. This blends quite well with the emergence of a new black elite on the basis of black economic empowerment.

### **The Pentecostal movement and the ecumenical movement?**

This divide within Christianity in South Africa clearly does not completely coincide with the tension between the ecumenical movement and the Pentecostal movement, but this tension is worth exploring in order to understand what is at stake. One may argue that there are five movements that have characterised the denominational history of Christianity in South Africa, namely 1) the establishment of various so-called mainline churches following Dutch and British imperialism and colonialism; 2) the ongoing quest for identity in such mainline churches to explain the particular “brand” of Christianity to insiders and outsiders, 3) the recognition of the need for ecumenical fellowship on issues of mission, faith and order, life and work, education and worship given such an emphasis on particularity in a context far removed from the origins of such denominationalism; 4) breakaway “protest movements against dry denominationalism” (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013:25) in various waves, most notably in the form of independent and / or Pentecostal churches that do not find such a quest for identity persuasive, and 5) ongoing attempts to bridge the divide between such so-called mainline churches and independent churches (see Conradie & Klaasen 2014:8-14). Such attempts are often regarded as thinly veiled attempts at co-option and therefore meet with resistance from within Pentecostal churches. There were, after all, reasons why such breakaway protest movements occurred in the first place. Indeed, to even speak about ecumenism from a Pentecostal perspective is an “acrimonious task” (see Robeck 2010:287).

Statistically, the 26 member churches of the SACC represent just about 50% of Christians in South Africa. The other half includes large churches such as the Zion Christian Church, other AICs (of which a majority has Pentecostal roots albeit that it is contested whether they are appropriately regarded as Pentecostal – see Kalu 2008:65-83), some older, well-established Pentecostal churches (see Kalu 2008:55-60), new waves of Pentecostal churches emerging since the 1970s (including Rhema and Vineyard churches) and a plethora of others that defy easy classification in any census or opinion poll. Many are stand-alone congregations, albeit that they may form part of new networks. In particular, it is no longer possible to say in urban areas whether churches are independent (in the sense of AICs), Pentecostal or both; evangelical, Pentecostal or both. Either way, it is appropriate to speak of the “Pentecostalisation” of the face of Christianity in Africa (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013:9). Outside of South Africa the denominational history of Christianity

amidst movements for indigenisation, resistance and revival is even more complex and defies easy classification (see Kalu 2008:1-146).

The divide between the ecumenical movement and the Pentecostal movement is by no means a clear-cut one. There are long established Pentecostal churches that are members of the South African Council of Churches (most notably the Apostolic Faith Mission). Some Pentecostal church leaders have been at the forefront of ecumenical engagements with social justice issues. There may be numerous cases of people who are at home in both movements. In a way it is unbearable to speak of two movements connected with an “and”. If the ecumenical movement is not moved by the Spirit and in that sense “Pentecostal”, it would be futile. If the Pentecostal movement is not “ecumenical” in orientation, it would be fostering a divisive spirit. To use an “and” as a logical connector is therefore to articulate a painful underlying problem. That there are tensions is undeniable, although one necessarily has to generalise in order to capture such tensions. To do so is rather bold, not only because it hides the differences within Pentecostal movements and within the ecumenical movement, but because there have been all too few attempts to address such tensions. In this contribution I will seek to sharpen the differences between these two movements even though there is a need for blurring the boundaries since the two movements overlap and should be dimensions of each other. To sharpen such differences is to acknowledge the pain expressed in the “and” that is used in the heading above.

Both movements emerged at roughly the same time, namely the first decade of the 20th century after some antecedents in the previous century. Both movements had distinctly African roots. The need for ecumenical fellowship was prompted by collaboration and conflict in the field of mission in the African context (Amanze 1999). Early Pentecostalism was influenced by a distinctly African spirituality and forms of worship that are deeply rooted in an African “primal” worldview (Anderson 1991, 2004:43, 172). However, the two movements soon developed distinct geographic and demographic profiles, symbolised by the names Edinburgh and Azusa Street. As Anderson (2004:40) observes, the racial integration in the Azusa street meetings was unique at that time in that people from ethnic minorities could discover a sense of dignity denied to them in society at that time: “it was a revolutionary movement where the marginalized and dispossessed could find equality regardless of race, gender or class” (Anderson 2004:45). The ecumenical movement flourished especially in Europe and in the British Commonwealth, while the Pentecostal movement flourished where Christianity became established everywhere else, notably in North America, Africa, Latin America and South East Asia. It has now become an amorphous movement so that many scholars speak of Pentecostals in the plural (see Kärkkäinen 2010:224) while almost all scholars seek to offer some form of typology of branches within the movement (see Anderson 2010).

The tensions between these two movements remain undeniable. It is clearly not only about free style worship versus a set liturgy. How should this divide between the so-called “ecumenicals” and the “evangelicals” then be described? Is it a matter of an intellectualising approach to Christianity (*fides quae creditur*) versus an emphasis on the experiential dimension of the Christian faith (*fides qua creditur*)? Or diverging positions on personal ethics, especially on abortion, homosexuality and patriarchy (see Kalu 2008:147-165)? Or a focus on personal ethics rather than on issues of social, economic and environmental justice from which Pentecostals in the past tended to shy away (Kärkkäinen 2010:235)? Or between mission as “evangelism” and mission as “development” (see Bwalya, Marlin and Peter 2010)? Or between liberalism and fundamentalism? Or between a private personal morality and a public concern over social justice? Or between secular this-worldliness and an interest in the other-worldly “supernatural”?

In this contribution I will explore a different line of inquiry to understand this divide, namely in terms of doctrine (“faith” as in Faith and Order). I am not suggesting that the divide is over doctrine, but that doctrinal reflection may indicate where the tensions lie and perhaps also where bridges between these movements may be constructed. I will suggest that the core issue is related to understanding the relationship between the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit (between the second and the third articles of the Christian confession), but also the relationship between the Father and the Spirit (between the first and the third articles of the Christian confession). This is significant given the self-acknowledged “potential Trinitarian anemia” in Pentecostalism (see Kärkkäinen 2010:227). I will explore this by investigating the most obvious doctrinal feature of the Pentecostal movement, namely its emphasis on the movement of the Holy Spirit. I will focus on what is distinct about a Pentecostal pneumatology. I will draw mostly on Pentecostal scholars and will engage with their work as someone who is more at home in the ecumenical movement than in the Pentecostal movement in the narrower sense of the word (all churches are Pentecostal in the same way that all churches are catholic and apostolic if not by name). My aim is to understand the challenges posed to the ecumenical movement by Pentecostal pneumatology.

### **Pentecostal Pneumatology: Spirit baptism**

There can be little doubt that empowerment through Spirit baptism is a distinctive feature, probably *the* distinctive feature of the Pentecostal movement (see Kärkkäinen 2009:163), also in the African context (Kalu 2008:8) and also amongst “spirit type” AICs (see Anderson 1991:34). The Pentecostal movement expresses at its core an experience of the fullness of the working of the Holy Spirit and the practice of spiritual gifts (Anderson 2004:14, 196). As Frank Macchia (2006:109) ob-

serves, Spirit baptism is “an empowerment for witness as evidenced by heightened participation in extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, especially speaking in tongues”. It is also evidenced in other manifestations of the presence of the Spirit such as healing, prophetic utterances (whether predictive or diagnostic – see Anderson 1991:52-54) and deliverance from evil spirits. As Macchia also notes, this “crown jewel” of Christian experience is sometimes underplayed by Pentecostal authors for the sake of developing a more ecumenical Pneumatology. There are even Pentecostals who are backing away from the importance that this doctrine had historically (Macchia 2009:15). It is quite significant to note with Kärkkäinen (2010:230) that after a Spirit movement that is already a century old no academic Pentecostal pneumatology yet exists (see Yong 2005, 2011, 2012 though). Even then, there is no one Pentecostal pneumatology so that one may well ask: Whose pneumatology? Which Spirit? (Kärkkäinen 2010:232).

In Pentecostal discourse Spirit baptism is primarily understood as an experience of empowerment for Christian service and mission that is distinct from conversion, initiation through water baptism, regeneration and sanctification. This suggests three distinct aspects (if not stages) of the work of the Spirit in believers, namely regeneration, sanctification and empowerment for witness (Macchia 2009:4-5). Spirit baptism is then connected to the third element. By contrast, in reformed and evangelical discourse, Spirit baptism is understood in terms of regeneration. What is signified in water baptism is Spirit baptism, namely regeneration involving a radical change in a person, a passage from death to new life (Macchia 2006:115). In sacramental traditions there is but one baptism, namely in water and Spirit (Eph 4:5). This does allow for a repeated endowment or filling with the Spirit but not for a one-time event subsequent to conversion to Christ. For Macchia, however, Spirit baptism is best understood as a post-conversion experience of charismatic empowerment for witness. Macchia (2006:118) quotes Christoph Blumhardt’s famous comment that one must be converted twice, first from the world to God and then from God to the world. If so, the Pentecostal doctrine of baptism in the Holy Spirit may be seen as a “second” conversion, an awakening of one’s vocation in the world – and a charismatic empowerment for such witness.

This understanding of Spirit baptism would be regarded in other traditions in terms of the specific gifts of the Holy Spirit (as opposed to the general fruits of the Holy Spirit in terms of Christian virtues) that enable one’s ministry within Christian communities and one’s vocation in the world. Anderson (2013:164) speaks of an “inseparable link between Spirit baptism, spiritual gifts and Christocentric missions” as the “central plank of the whole structure of Pentecostalism from its beginnings”. This empowerment for mission, ministry, service and vocation would typically not be described as “baptism” outside a Pentecostal context, but given

some metaphorical extension there seems to be little more than a difference in terminology at stake.

The underlying question is how conversion, sanctification and empowerment for service (vocation) are related. All three may be regarded as the work of the Holy Spirit and therefore as a “blessing”. The difference of opinion, also within Pentecostalism, emerges on the “doctrines” of “consequence” and “subsequence”. The notion of consequence refers to “initial evidence”, namely that speaking in tongues is the consequence or *primary* evidence of Spirit baptism. There may be debate about the “primary” but not on the legitimacy of such evidence as long as this is not made prescriptive (which is the case only in some forms of Pentecostalism). The notion of subsequence indicates that Spirit baptism is a definite and subsequent experience to conversion. It is an external and almost sacramental confirmation of the inner grace received from God’s Spirit (Kärkkäinen 2009:165). This was already maintained in the holiness movement where the term “second blessing” was used to refer to sanctification, if not perfection. If so, Spirit baptism is a third work of grace, namely empowerment for service, that follows some time after conversion and is evidenced primarily by speaking in tongues. Spirit baptism is therefore a distinct experience that follows conversion and sanctification. Some Christians may therefore be “saved” but not yet filled with the Spirit (Anderson 2004:190-192).

Elsewhere the gift of the Spirit (Spirit baptism) is primarily regarded as an experience linked to conversion and not a distinctive subsequent experience that Christians should be encouraged to seek (Anderson 2004:192). This inhibits any grading amongst Christians. However, there can be no problem about subsequent blessings or about empowerment for service in Christian life. Others would question the emphasis on speaking in tongues as the primary evidence (or consequence if not proof) of Spirit baptism. Also amongst Pentecostals (since speaking in tongues is not practiced by all) this is sometimes weakened to “usually” and “not necessarily”. As long as this does not become normative there need not be any ecumenical divergence on this point. It may be normal, but not normative. The real danger, in the Pentecostal and the ecumenical movements alike, is to systematise the movement of the Holy Spirit, to specify its conditions and to prescribe the signs that give evidence to that (see Anderson 2004:195, with reference to John V Taylor).

Only if Spirit baptism becomes an additional step in the order of salvation, a separate aspect of regeneration or another, higher stage of sanctification, would there emerge a point of controversy. This may be the case in ecclesial praxis in both the ecumenical movement and the Pentecostal movement but such differences can be resolved through dialogue. For example, speaking in tongues may be interpreted as the sanctification of human speech through which the unruly tongue is tamed and transformed into a source of telling truth and praising God (Macchia

2006:121). One may also point to the link between sanctification as cleansing and as dedication and consecration for a task. If so, there may be an inward cleansing and outward empowerment for a holy task (Macchia 2006:121). If ministry through the power of the Holy Spirit is associated with the coming reign of God, there may still be differences in terms of discerning the Spirit, but both movements may then be regarded as inspired by God's Spirit to bring comprehensive salvation to the whole world. Through Spirit baptism the church is commissioned to usher in the reign of God in the power to make all things new and is allowed to participate in the final sanctification of creation (Macchia 2006:124).

Given this brief description of the core focus of a Pentecostal pneumatology on Spirit baptism, there should be ample opportunities for dialogue and mutual enrichment between the ecumenical movement and the Pentecostal movement. There are especially two issues that tend to emerge from such dialogue, namely on the relatedness of the Spirit and Christ and of the Father and the Spirit.

#### The Spirit of Christ?

There may well remain serious differences between the ecumenical movement and the Pentecostal movement in discerning the movements of the Spirit. In Trinitarian categories such differences may be understood in terms of the relationship between the work of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. Some in the Pentecostal movement may observe an arid lack of evidence of the transforming movement of the Spirit in the established churches that participate in the ecumenical movement. They would want to ask: "Where is the Spirit?" Or, as James Dunn (2006:26) puts it, "A church that seeks to restrict and control the Spirit, as too dangerous and unpredictable, may be safe, but it has signed its own death warrant. A church that seeks to follow where the Spirit leads will have to expect the unexpected and be prepared to be shaken to its core."

In short and in an attempt to capture very general trends, Pentecostals typically wish to emphasise the relative independence of the Holy Spirit, the freedom of the Spirit to blow where it wants to (see Asamoah-Gyadu 2013:1), to stimulate movements that cannot be controlled by the institutional church. They would question the tendency to control the Spirit through ecclesiastical mechanisms such as the ordained ministry, the sacraments, biblical exegesis and higher theological education. They are concerned that the Spirit is quenched by ecclesial gatekeepers who insist that the Spirit works primarily through Christ, the body of Christ, episcopal representatives of Christ, the disciplined exegesis of the canonical witnesses to Christ, the proclamation of the Word (the Logos related to Christ) and ecclesial control over the sacraments. As Asamoah-Gyadu (2013:65) notes, the leadership of charismatic churches castigate the traditional mission churches as "cold, dead, bookish and moribund institutions that had no sense of the supernatural". He adds



that “The high level of clericalism and the routine process of incorporation into the church through the sacraments of infant baptism, confirmation and communion had created a large body of nominal Christians for whom religious experiences of the born-again type were alien.” Instead, Pentecostals emphasise that the Spirit is not always controlled by the Word – as is evident in ecstatic forms of worship aided by audio-visual means, speaking in tongues, the role of dreams and visions, direct prophetic inspiration, healing ministries, deliverance or exorcism from evil spirits and a fascination with the extraordinary, the miraculous, the “supernatural”. Indeed, the letter of the Word remains empty if the Spirit of the letter is not grasped.

In response, ecumenical theologians from so-called mainline churches may wonder whether claims for the presence of the Spirit in some manifestations of the Pentecostal movement are indeed referring to the Spirit of Christ. They call for a discernment of the spirits, together with a reading of the “signs of the time” through contextual analysis, in order to recognise the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. They may point to the danger that such claims often constitute little more than rival claims to exercise or impose religious authority (see Tanner 2006:97, also Anderson 1991:50) and are open to abusive charismatic leadership (see Herbert 2008), with specific reference to financial gains accumulated by excessively wealthy pastors and the entrenchment of positions of clerical power and authority. They would be concerned about claims to direct spiritual illumination that cannot be tested within ecclesial communities and through ecumenical fellowship. They would worry about forms of exegesis where the spirit is not directed by the letter. They may well harbour resentment over the spiritual legitimation of an upward social mobility, especially in non-Western contexts through the preaching of the prosperity gospel (for a sympathetic yet critical discussion, see Asamoah-Gyadu 2013:79-120, also Kalu 2008:255-263).

More specifically, Christians in mainline churches would be concerned about the kind of power that is associated with the transformative work of the Holy Spirit. If it is indeed the Spirit of Christ who is at work, that power would be based on the strange power of the cross, which is the power of love and therefore of vulnerability and not of success. Love is indeed a transforming power, but not one based on military, political, financial, technological or muscle power (see also Yong 2012). It cannot be captured in the Pentecostal vocabulary of “breakthrough”, victory, glory, and blessings, if not success and prosperity – where the shame, poverty and deprivation of the cross are scarcely evident (see Asamoah-Gyadu 2013:109). Indeed, “The neo-Pentecostal overemphasis, on material prosperity, breakthroughs, power, health, wealth and success as indicators of God’s favours has the potential to undermine the central message of the cross in demonstrating God’s power or glory through weakness” (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013:115). This emphasis on victory

may well lead to a pastoral inability to respond to misfortune and deprivation (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013:103).

Instead, the Holy Spirit is also a gentle dove, a Spirit of humility, patience and meekness, love joy and peace (Anderson 1991:73, 2004:198). As Anderson (2004:198) observes, “Overemphasising the power of the Spirit often leads to bitter disappointment and disillusionment when that power is not evidently and immediately manifested. Pentecostal pneumatology must not only provide power when there is a lack of it, but must also be able to sustain people through life’s tragedies and failures, especially when there is no visible outward success.” Indeed, the power of the cross is a community-forming power, but a power which does not impose itself. As Bernd Oberdorfer (2006:44) adds, “The Spirit does not form a community of triumph without scars, but rather a community of transformation, of forgiveness, of the healing of memories – yet without these narratives of transformation falling into oblivion, leaving space only for the enthusiasm of present experiences of being saved (or of being safe).” One may therefore conclude with Kärkkäinen (2006:59) that “The freedom of the Spirit cannot be set in opposition to the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, any more than that of the Son to the Father.”

In response to such ecumenical concerns, Pentecostals may argue that they are more sensitive to the material and spiritual needs of those who are not predominantly of European descent. In the African context there is a constant drive and a legitimate longing for power outside of oneself to overcome evil when faced with sickness, oppression, poverty, injustice, evil spirits, witchcraft and so forth (see Anderson 1991:63). Secular critics would say that Pentecostalism tends to thrive where modernity and some form of capitalism are embraced amongst a rapidly urbanising population in non-Western contexts. This is evident in the use of audio-visual technology, Western dress codes, and consumerist lifestyles (for a critical discussion of the impact of the use of media on Pentecostalism in Africa, see Kalu 2008:103-122). If so, the ecumenical movement represents “old” money, while the Pentecostal movement represents “new” money, so that the one would tend to envy the other. There may remain real differences on the scope of mission (see Kärkkäinen 2010:237), on social ethics (over the benefits of socialism and of capitalism) and on personal ethics (over homosexuality and abortion). However, such differences would then become relativized. Either way, there remains a common need to test whether claims to discern the movement of the Spirit are indeed referring to the Spirit of the crucified Christ – and not to Protestant or Pentecostal support for the spirit of capitalism (for a discussion see Meyer 2010:114f).

This suggests that further conversation is needed on the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The issue is whether the Spirit is being subordinated to Christ. Does Christ send the Spirit or is Christ the Messianic mani-

festation of the work of the Spirit? The sensitivities in this regard would suggest that the *filioque* controversy not only divides Western Christianity from Eastern Christianity but also the ecumenical movement from the Pentecostal movement. Of course this is oversimplified. Many ecumenical theologians have called for deleting the *filioque* from Western versions of the Nicene Creed, while probably all Pentecostals would acknowledge the intimate relationship between Christ and the Spirit (see e.g. Anderson 1999:36 on spirit-type churches in Africa). Indeed, Pentecostalism entails an experience of the work of the Spirit that is informed by an appreciation of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Evangelical phrases such as being “born-again” and “Jesus saves” are typical of Pentecostal churches (Anderson 2013:147). The Holy Spirit is “among us to exercise the will of God as revealed in Jesus Christ” (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013:13, 14). Kärkkäinen (2009:160, 2010:224) even claims that Christology (the full gospel), not pneumatology, represents the centre of Pentecostal spirituality. The gateway to the experience of the Spirit is the work of Christ. He adds that “Pentecostals, no less than other Christian movements, are not free from the temptation to domesticate the Spirit” (2010:239). Moreover, Pentecostal Christians generally have a very high regard for the authority of Scripture (the Word), presumably also over contemporary revelations (the Spirit). Yet the tensions are undeniable so that this at least sets the agenda for further conversation.

### **Pentecostal Pneumatology: The Spirit commissioned by the Father?**

In my view Trinitarian categories may help us to reflect on another dimension of the tension between the ecumenical movement and the Pentecostal movement. According to the Nicene Creed, the Spirit “proceeds” from the Father. In other words: the Spirit is commissioned by the Father. How, then, is the relationship between the work of the Father and of the Spirit to be understood?

In a discussion of reasons why Pentecostalism flourished over the past 100 years Grant Wacker (2006) mentions the (escapist?) lure of the rewards of an otherworldly religion, the ability to meet material and spiritual needs and to satisfy deeper religious longings. He observes that the genius of the Pentecostal movement lies in its ability to hold two seemingly incompatible impulses in tension, namely to balance the most “eye-popping features of the supernatural” with the most “chest-thumping features of the natural” and to do so without overtly admitting that (Wacker 2006:133, 143). It provides a synthesis of otherworldly spirituality and this-worldly pragmatism. Indeed, it holds together a premodern notion of miracles, the modern use of technology and a postmodern sense of mysticism. Allan Anderson concurs that the growth of Pentecostalism is related to its ability to adapt to and

address people's spiritual and material needs. This is characterised by "A belief in a divine encounter and the involvement or breaking through of the sacred into the mundane, including healing from sickness, deliverance from hostile evil forces, and perhaps above all, a heady and spontaneous spirituality that refuses to separate 'spiritual' from 'physical' or 'sacred' from 'secular'" (Anderson 2013:xiii).

There can be little doubt that this emphasis on the miraculous, on the extraordinary, on the sublime, on the "supernatural", on the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, stands in opposition to cultures where scientific reductionism has become dominant. The emphasis on the inexplicable counters a rationality where the need for explicability is taken for granted (see Anderson 1991:102). Pentecostalism is a resistance movement against such reductionism through a recognition that everything cannot be brought under one's locus of control (see Yong 2011:31). Where a verbal rationality becomes overpowering, speaking in tongues serves as an ecstatic reminder that religion does not fall within one's locus of control. Macchia (2009:10) sees ecumenical significance in speaking in tongues that "calls into question the adequacy of human speech to capture the divine mystery and lodges an implicit protest against any effort to make one language or cultural expression determinative of how the gospel is understood." This suggests an apophatic dimension at the core of a Pentecostal spirituality.

The world of science and technology has brought immense benefits to large sectors of the population in different parts of the world. It has lifted many out of a life of misery. This is clearly embraced in the Pentecostal affirmation of an upward social mobility. Nevertheless, the secular soteriologies based on education and health services do not and cannot address the material, psychological and spiritual needs of many. This is addressed in two forms of ministry that are widely emphasised in the Pentecostal movement, namely miraculous healing and deliverance (exorcism) from demonic possession (see especially Onyinah 2009). The attraction of Pentecostalism is clearly related to these ministries since they address real needs quite directly, namely around sickness and death and the elusive but pervasive influence of evil forces. Religion is thus a source of power that must be effective in solving life's debilitating problems. As Asamoah-Gyadu (2012:126) observes, "The success of Pentecostal / charismatic Christianity in Africa has lain largely in its ability to propagate itself as powerful and efficacious in enabling people to be set free from the dangers and troubles of life." Typically, a Pentecostal soteriology would emphasise that such troubles and dangers can be overcome through the power of the Spirit and based on the resurrection of Christ. Of course, both these ministries have parallels in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, but tend to be underplayed in the ecumenical movement, except in the secularised form of "development" and a critique of ideology.

The question that should be raised from within the wider ecumenical movement is how this emphasis on the “supernatural” is related to the “natural”. How can both reductionist and dualist construals of the world be avoided (see Yong 2011:31)? If Pentecostalism assumes an “interventionist” form of soteriology where God intervenes in ordinary life to perform miracles, how may that be related to the quest to understand divine action in a “non-interventionist” way – that is widely emphasised in science and theology discourse (see, amongst many other contributions, Russell, Murphy & Stoeger 2008)? Yong (2011:77) argues that the Pentecostal emphasis on the supernatural rightly contests the naturalistic paradigm of modernity. However, in doing so Pentecostals appeal to the apostolic witnesses where the emphasis on the miraculous was not aimed at revealing God as more powerful than the laws of nature but to highlight God’s power over the magic of pagan deities.

If the work of the triune Creator includes the establishment of the laws of nature, is the Spirit not acting against the providential care of the Father in temporarily suspending such laws in order to bring about quick miracles of healing and deliverance? If so, does this not introduce an unbearable tension between faith and science, especially given the Pentecostal reluctance to consider the role of the Spirit in relation to science (see Kärkkäinen 2009:167, 2010:234)? Indeed, in California one may well ask: what has Azusa Street to do with MIT (Yong 2011:1)? Is the Spirit supplementing the inadequacies of the work of the Father? Moreover, are the laws of nature not good, reliable and beneficial? Given that such laws cannot be fathomed by the best of science, is there not enough room within such laws to allow for the amazing, the extraordinary, the sublime, if not the miraculous? Scientific reductionism is in any case countered from within disciplines such as quantum theory, chaos theory and evolutionary biology so that far more room may be found for contingency, chance, complexity and freedom. Are these laws not more like the laws of grammar that allow for, indeed enable an incredible and inexhaustible variety of languages and forms of writing that fill whole libraries, even for speaking in tongues in a way that can be interpreted? Is it not possible for the Spirit to play within the rules of the game that the Father outlined? If so, is the emphasis on the supernatural not short-sighted and playing off the work of the Spirit against that of the Father and indeed also of the logic of the Logos? What is meant by the frequent references to an “interventionist” soteriology in the writing of Pentecostal authors (see Asamoah-Gyadu 2013)? Does that require some insertion of energy that cannot be accounted for scientifically? It seems that the (rather modernist) assumption in Pentecostal discourse on miracles is that the laws of nature operate according to a deterministic logic so that the only room for God’s action is to intervene in such laws – which then constitutes a “miracle” (see Yong 2011:114). Indeed, if the laws of nature are not transgressed when free agents bring about events, why would

such violations occur when God acts (Yong 2011:116)? Instead, miracles may be understood as basic divine acts that operate within the regulatory framework that God established in the first place (Yong 2011:127).

The distortion of the relationship between the work of the Father and of the Spirit is best seen in the notion of “transactional giving” where the giver “sows” seed money (by tithing and voluntary gifts) in expectation of reaping a rich harvest. As Asamoah-Gyadu (2012:100) observes, this undermines the sovereignty of God by treating the Father like a customer service point. God is treated as a business partner who has no choice but to acquiesce to the demands of those who have fulfilled their side of the bargain by paying their tithes (2012:99). This in fact represents a return to pagan religion (the Baal cult) where the favour of a rather fickle and capricious deity has to be secured through gifts (bribes), if not indulgences. The Spirit is invoked to ensure the blessings of the Father. The reason why such distortions are able to enter is precisely because the blessings of the Spirit are secured through a quasi-magical formula that may be invoked through Pentecostal rituals. Tithing, more specifically, becomes a magical key for unlocking God’s material wealth (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013:96). The expected blessings lie outside of one’s locus of control and must therefore be secured through miraculous means. However, the deeper reason why such blessings have to be secured and why misfortunes have to be avoided is that the will of the Father seems so arbitrary so that benefits and burdens are randomly distributed. The Spirit does not proceed from the Father; the Father’s hand is turned by the Spirit. Does this not stand in contrast with the exorbitant praise to the Father in Pentecostal worship?

My sense is that African Pentecostalism adopted vocabulary derived from American Pentecostalism where the distinction between the natural and the supernatural is employed to resist modernist reductionism. This is superimposed on the distinction between the visible and the invisible that is common to an (African) primal worldview, Hebraic thinking and patristic theology alike. Accordingly, the visible and the invisible realms are interwoven so that there is a strong sense of the moral and spiritual moorings of life. There is an underlying need for a cosmic sense balance – that is disturbed by pervasive evil forces. This requires some spiritual warfare – a need that is recognised in Pentecostal ministries of healing and deliverance from evil spirits (see Kalu 2008:178, also Yong 2011:172-184). In my view this does require further reflection on the relationship between the material and the spiritual but this may be understood in terms of the distinction between the visible and the invisible rather than the natural and the supernatural. The latter distinction is cosmologically problematic while the former one is entirely legitimate to resist reductionism. In proverbial terms: there may be a need for (Western) medicine to combat malaria if one is bitten by a mosquito. However, this does not address the deeper question, namely why one was bitten by

the mosquito. This requires moral and indeed spiritual reflection on what is invisible to modern medicine. In other words, spirit is not opposed to or unrelated to matter but requires a discernment of the direction in which matter moves. If so, “a” spirit is not a quasi-material if invisible, ghost-like force, but the description of a movement, a sense of direction, a state of affairs, a moral climate.

The resolution of this unnecessary conflict surely lies in the direction of a more resolutely Trinitarian theology, one in which God’s transcendence is acknowledged, in which transformation is based on the power of the cross (and not financial, miraculous or audio-visual power), and where the continuity between the Spirit hovering over the waters in Genesis and the Spirit of Pentecost is explored. As Lyle Dabney (2006) recognises, what is needed is a Pentecostal theology of creation through Word and Spirit. The Spirit is not foreign to the created order. The cosmic dimensions of the Spirit’s work need to be recognised (see Kärkkäinen 2009:168). The problem is the distortion of sin, not nature itself. Protestants would say that there is no need to “elevate” nature towards the supernatural but there is indeed a need to address and overcome the distortions resulting from sin – as Pentecostals would remind all other Christians in a rather dramatic way.

### **Some concluding comments**

To conclude this essay, I wish to offer three further comments (and questions) that should be included on the agenda of a conversation between the ecumenical movement and the Pentecostal movement on pneumatology. I suggest that such an agenda may also be helpful in the South African context given the deep divides between various forms of Christianity as sketched in the introduction above.

Firstly, further reflection is needed on overcoming evil which is traditionally understood as the work of the Spirit. The larger Christian tradition has developed a rich vocabulary in speaking about human sin as pride, greed, violence, missing one’s target (hamartia) and alienation from God. In each case this incurs a sense of guilt and shame that can only be restored through God’s forgiveness. However, human wrongdoing also becomes embedded in human society so that sin is also a power in which humanity is collectively trapped. This is also recognised in the secular equivalent of structural violence, i.e. the way in which domination in the name of difference becomes embedded in social structures, hidden ideologies, forms of hegemony, laws and cultural assumptions. One may identify a tendency in the ecumenical movement to shy away from sin as guilt and to adopt secular categories to speak about sin as power. In the Pentecostal movement there is a similar tendency to emphasise demonic power more than guilt. One may hypothesise that the focus is here on the sustained physical, psychological and spiritual harm that some experience as a result of an unequal distribution of power but also due to the complicity

and acquiescence of those who benefit from that. They become victimised by powers that may well be described and named as demonic. This begs further questions about the relationship between sin and evil. Does accumulated sin lead to evil or is evil the root cause of sin (the Augustinian approach)? If the former, only God's forgiveness would resolve the matter. If the latter, only deliverance from such demonic powers would do.

A related question concerns the possibility of overcoming evil. There is a clear need for victory over evil through the power of the Spirit. The Pentecostal movement may be regarded as a protest movement against submission to evil forces, a call to resist evil and a retrieval of a spirituality of victorious Christian living (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013:109, 116). The message is that the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit secures deliverance from evil and ensures survival in a hostile world (see Anderson 1991:68). However, evil cannot be completely eradicated in this dispensation. Instant solutions to life's vicissitudes are not always readily available either (Anderson 1991:72). Understood theologically, this is not a sign of failure but of God's patience. After all, if evil is to be eradicated, that would mean that all of us in whom evil still lurks would need to be eradicated as well – unless the possibility of moral perfection is not only claimed but demanded. Moreover, as history amply illustrates, the instruments used to eradicate evil may well exacerbate such evil. If so, the slow and persuasive power of the cross is preferable over the quick and demonstrable power of instant miracles.

Secondly, if the Holy Spirit is a power at work in the world to overcome evil, this begs further questions about how the term "spirit" is understood. What kind of thing is a spirit? The answer is of course that a spirit is not a thing that can be described in terms of matter and energy. Yet, the categories that are employed in the ecumenical and Pentecostal movements alike indicate some slippage so that notions of "spirit" are hypostasised in an anthropomorphic, quasi-material and quasi-literal way. Such a spirit often becomes a ghost-like invisible force. There is no need to deny the existential significance of a spirit world, certainly not in African contexts, especially since many (but not all) spirits are feared as a constant threat. The only resolution for being possessed by an evil spirit is exorcism. However, if the Holy Spirit is understood crudely as such a hypostasised force, one may still hold that this spirit is more powerful than any others, but God is then reduced to one force amongst others operating in the world.

The Christian confession holds that God works in and through things in the world (the incarnation of Christ and the inhabitation of the Spirit). How, then, can one talk about the Spirit's victorious presence without reducing the Spirit to something in the world, a secondary cause, a form of matter / energy. The temptation is to speak of the Holy Spirit as a particular force emanating from God who intervenes



in the world from the outside. If so, this would beg questions about matter and energy and how these are causally directed by the Spirit. At worst (as is sometimes the case in Pentecostal discourse), the Spirit becomes a ghost-like thing in the world that intervenes in the laws of nature to perform “supernatural” miracles. If so, the work of the Spirit is at odds with the laws of nature presumably established by the Father. Then, as I suggested above, the Spirit no longer proceeds from the Father, but from an altogether human spirit.

One needs to admit that there is no ecumenical clarity on how the term “spirit” may best be used. There is consensus, perhaps, that a term such as spirituality signals resistance against reductionism, but how “spirit” relates to brain and mind, if not “soul” or personality is not at all clear. In my view “spirit” is best related to quality, information, patterning, description and direction. Spirit may be powerful without being a power. If so, the mere presence of the Spirit implies empowerment (contra Kärkkäinen 2009:163, 2010:228, who poses a contrast between the Pentecostal emphasis on empowerment and the emphasis on presence elsewhere). Such power would apply to personality, charisma, mind, lofty ideals, the spirit of a team, an institution or a nation, or to the Holy Spirit’s mission in the world alike. Discernment is about the direction of the movement and not merely about the power of the mover. It is the qualitative content that makes the difference. The Spirit of love employs the same matter and energy as a spirit of hatred but has a vastly different impact. The same applies to a spirit of consumerism and one of generosity.

Thirdly and finally, this underscores the need for spiritual discernment. This is recognised in the ecumenical movement and the Pentecostal movement alike. Asamoah-Gyadu (2013:181-183) poses a set of five standards or benchmarks to gauge the presence of God’s Spirit in the church, i.e. to establish whether contemporary witnesses of the Spirit are in continuity with the Spirit who worked at Pentecost: 1) transformation into the likeness of Jesus Christ (sanctification), 2) a desire for prayer and renewal (communicating with God through praying in tongues), 3) empowerment for active witness (baptised by the Spirit), 4) manifestations of the charismatic gifts of the Spirit and 5) a pursuit of eternal, kingdom values (instead of exploitation and showmanship).

The first of these speaks about the relatedness of Christ and the Spirit while all the others focus on the transformative impact of the Spirit’s presence. In each case Spirit possession requires discernment since being possessed by the Spirit (evidenced by speaking in tongues) may degenerate into possessing the Spirit as an impersonal power at one’s disposal (see Anderson 1991:70f). If these are to be further developed through conversation between the Pentecostal movement and the ecumenical movements, I suggest that more deeply Trinitarian categories may well be helpful.

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